

ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF FAKE NEWS ON MEDIA CREDIBILITY

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF MASS
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DECLARATION

This project is based on a study undertaken by me, in the Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Arts under the supervision of Dr. Daniel Ekhareafo.

All ideas are the products of my personal research where the views of others were used, they were duly acknowledged.

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research project titled "**Assessment of the Impact of Fake News on Media Credibility**" was carried out by Atinuke Busola Olowu (ART2013164) in the Department of Mass Communication, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City, Edo State, under my supervision. It has been read and approved as meeting the requirements for the award of the degree of Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in Mass Communication.

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DEDICATION

This research work is dedicated to God Almighty for His guidance, strength and wisdom during the period of this study.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of fake news on media credibility, with a focus on how exposure to misinformation influences public trust in media organizations. The increasing spread of fake news, particularly through social media platforms, has raised concerns about the reliability of information and the credibility of the media.

The study adopted a survey research design, using a structured questionnaire to collect data from respondents. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 350 were retrieved and used for analysis, representing an 87.5% response rate. The data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and simple percentages.

Findings from the study revealed that exposure to fake news is widespread, with the majority of respondents encountering false or misleading information, especially on social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook. The study also found that fake news has significantly reduced public trust in media organizations and has increased skepticism among media users. Many respondents indicated that they now verify information from multiple sources before believing or sharing it.

The study concludes that fake news has a negative impact on media credibility and poses a serious challenge to the integrity of the media. It therefore recommends improved fact-checking by media organizations, increased media literacy among the public, and stronger regulatory measures to control the spread of misinformation.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The media plays a critical role in informing, educating, and shaping public opinion in society. Traditionally, the credibility of the media has been built on accuracy, objectivity, balance, and verification of information. However, the emergence of digital technology and social media platforms has significantly transformed the media landscape, making information dissemination faster and more accessible. While this transformation has enhanced communication, it has also led to the widespread circulation of fake news (Claire Wardle & Hossein Derakhshan, 2017).

Fake news refers to false, misleading, or fabricated information presented as legitimate news with the intention to deceive, manipulate public opinion, or attract attention. In recent years, fake news has become a major challenge to media credibility, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria, where digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Instagram, and blogs serve as major sources of information for many people. According to Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow (2017), fake news is often intentionally designed to mislead readers and has become more prevalent due to the rise of social media.

Fake news has been linked to political instability, misinformation during elections, ethnic and religious conflicts, security issues, health communication, and public distrust in media institutions. The rapid spread of unverified information has blurred the line between professional journalism and user-generated content, leading many audiences to question the reliability of media reports. As a result, media credibility has been undermined, and public trust in news organizations has continued to decline (Pew Research Center, 2019).

Regular media users are increasingly exposed to fake news, especially through social networking platforms. The widespread consumption and sharing of news content across various media channels have heightened the vulnerability of media users to misinformation. As audiences are repeatedly exposed to misinformation, confidence in mainstream media institutions declines. Research by Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral (2018) found that false news spreads more rapidly than true information online, increasing its impact on public perception.

Understanding how fake news influences people's perception of media credibility is important, as the media play a central role in shaping public opinion, attitudes, and social discourse in the country. This study, therefore, sought to assess the impact of fake news on media credibility among media users.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The increasing spread of fake news poses a serious threat to the credibility of the media. With the rise of social media and online news platforms, false information is often circulated without proper verification, sometimes even amplified by mainstream media organizations. This situation has created confusion among media audiences, making it difficult to distinguish between credible news and fabricated content.

Among youths, especially students, exposure to fake news has become a regular occurrence, as many rely heavily on social media for news updates. The continuous encounter with misleading or false information has contributed to skepticism, distrust, and negative attitudes toward media institutions. Consequently, even credible and professionally produced news reports are sometimes viewed with suspicion.

Despite the growing concern over fake news and its implications for media credibility, there is limited empirical research focusing on how fake news specifically affects the perception of media credibility among audiences in Benin City. This gap necessitates a systematic investigation into the extent of exposure to fake news and how it influences people's trust and confidence in the media.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to assess the impact of fake news on media credibility among the audience. The study sought to examine how the circulation of fake news, particularly through digital and social media platforms, influences people's trust, confidence, and reliance on media organizations as credible sources of information.

Specifically, the objectives of the study are to:

1. Examine the extent of public exposure to fake news
2. Identify the major media channels through which fake news is disseminated to media users.
3. Determine the frequency with which audiences are exposed to fake news content.
4. Assess Public's perception of the credibility and reliability of media reports in the era of fake news.
5. Evaluate the effect of fake news on media users' trust toward media organizations.
6. Suggest measures to curb and eradicate fake news and restore media credibility.

1.4 Research Questions

The study sought to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. To what extent does fake news affect the credibility of the media among audience in Benin City
2. Through which media platforms do media users mostly encounter fake news?

3. How frequently are the audience exposed to fake news?
4. What is the perception of the audience regarding the credibility of media reports in the face of fake news?
5. How does exposure to fake news influence people's trust and confidence in media organizations?
6. What strategies can be adopted to reduce fake news and improve media credibility?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it examines the growing challenge of fake news and its implications for media credibility, which is fundamental to the practice and survival of journalism. The findings would provide media practitioners with insights into how fake news has affected public trust, particularly among young and educated audiences such as university students, and active media users. This understanding will emphasize the need for accuracy, verification, and ethical standards in news production.

This study is also significant to:

1. Media practitioners: by highlighting the consequences of fake news on professional credibility.
2. Policy makers: by providing evidence for regulatory and media literacy policies.

3. Academics and researchers: as a contribution to literature on misinformation and media trust.
4. The general public: by increasing awareness of the dangers of fake news.

This study will benefit the above mentioned departments, by increasing their awareness of fake news and enhancing their ability to distinguish between credible media content and false or misleading information. This would encourage critical consumption of media messages and reduce the spread of unverified information.

Furthermore, the research would be useful to academics and researchers as it would contribute to existing literature on fake news, media credibility, and audience perception. It will serve as a reference material for future studies and support media literacy initiatives and policy discussions aimed at restoring public confidence in the media.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study assessed the impact of fake news on media credibility among media users. It examines how exposure to fake news influences the public's perception of media organizations, their level of trust in news content, and their overall evaluation of media credibility within the media environment.

The study is limited to the dissemination of fake news through both traditional media (such as newspapers, radio, and television) and digital media, with particular emphasis on social media platforms including Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), WhatsApp, and

Instagram, and Blogs, which have become prominent channels for news consumption and circulation in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the study examined media users' responses to fake news in terms of belief, sharing behavior, and interpretation of media messages. By focusing on media users across diverse demographic and media-use backgrounds, the research provides a broad and representative analysis of the phenomenon of fake news and its implications for media credibility among media users.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

This study is limited to respondents within Nigeria, and as such, the findings may not be generalized to media audiences outside the country. The research relies on self-reported data, which may be influenced by respondents' perceptions, personal biases, and recall errors, especially in relation to media consumption and exposure to fake news. Despite these limitations, the study provides meaningful insights into the influence of fake news on media credibility among regular media users.

1.8 Definition of Terms

For the purpose of clarity, the following terms are operationally defined as used in this study:

Fake News: False, misleading, or fabricated information presented as legitimate news and circulated through traditional or social media platforms to deceive or misinform the audience.

Media Credibility: The degree to which media audiences perceive news reports as accurate, trustworthy, reliable, and believable.

Media: Channels of communication such as newspapers, radio, television, and online platforms, like Blogs, used for disseminating information to the public.

Social Media: Digital platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), WhatsApp, Instagram, and others that allow users to create, share, and exchange information.

Audience: Consumers of media content across traditional and digital platforms.

Audience Perception: The way media consumers, particularly the youths, interpret, evaluate, and respond to media content.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews relevant literature on fake news and media credibility with particular emphasis on audience perception within the contemporary digital media environment. The increasing penetration of internet technologies and social media platforms has transformed the way information is produced, distributed, and consumed. While these developments have enhanced access to information, they have also facilitated the rapid spread of false and misleading information commonly referred to as fake news. Consequently, concerns have emerged regarding the credibility of media institutions and the level of trust audiences place in news content.

The chapter examines the concept of fake news and the concept of media credibility, highlighting their relevance to communication studies. It further reviews scholarly opinions on fake news in the digital media environment and discusses how audience perception influences media trust. The chapter also adopts Source Credibility Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory as the theoretical foundations for explaining the relationship between fake news exposure and audience perception of media credibility.

Finally, the chapter summarizes the literature and identifies the research gap that justifies the present study.

2.1 Concept of Fake News

Fake news has become one of the most widely discussed issues in media and communication studies because of its capacity to influence public opinion, distort reality, and undermine confidence in legitimate journalism. Although misinformation has existed throughout history, the emergence of digital communication technologies has significantly increased its speed and reach. Today, fake news circulates across websites, blogs, messaging applications, and social networking platforms, often reaching millions of people before its authenticity can be verified.

According to Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), fake news refers to intentionally fabricated news articles designed to deceive readers by presenting false information in the format of legitimate journalism. Their definition emphasizes deliberate deception as a distinguishing characteristic of fake news. Unlike ordinary reporting errors, fake news is intentionally produced to mislead audiences for political, financial, or ideological purposes.

Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) argue that the term fake news is overly simplistic and propose three categories of information disorder: misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation. Misinformation refers to false information shared without the intention

to cause harm, while disinformation involves deliberately false information created to deceive. Malinformation, on the other hand, consists of genuine information shared to inflict harm on individuals or institutions. This classification demonstrates that the problem extends beyond fabricated stories to include various forms of manipulated information.

Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2018) describe fake news as content that imitates the appearance of authentic journalism but lacks editorial standards and factual verification. Such content often employs sensational headlines, manipulated images, and emotionally charged language to attract public attention and encourage sharing. The objective is frequently to maximize audience engagement rather than provide accurate information.

The growth of social media has accelerated the spread of fake news because digital platforms allow virtually anyone to become a content creator. Traditional journalism relies on editors, gatekeepers, and fact-checking mechanisms before publication, whereas social media platforms permit instant dissemination of information with minimal verification. As a result, false stories can spread rapidly through likes, comments, reposts, and messaging applications.

Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) found that false news spreads significantly faster and reaches more people than truthful information on social media. They attributed this phenomenon to the novelty and emotional appeal of false stories, which often provoke surprise, fear, or anger and therefore encourage users to share them widely. This finding

highlights the structural advantages fake news enjoys within algorithm-driven digital environments.

In Nigeria, the challenge of fake news has become increasingly significant due to widespread social media usage and high dependence on online sources for news. Ojebuyi and Adegbola (2019) observe that political competition, ethnic divisions, and inadequate media literacy contribute to the persistence of fake news within the Nigerian information ecosystem. Similarly, Ezeah, Asogwa, and Edogor (2020) argue that many internet users lack the skills necessary to critically evaluate information sources, making them vulnerable to misinformation.

Fake news has serious consequences for society. It can influence electoral decisions, create public panic during emergencies, damage reputations, intensify social conflict, and weaken confidence in democratic institutions. During health crises, for example, false medical information may discourage compliance with scientific recommendations, thereby endangering public health. Likewise, fabricated political stories may deepen polarization and reduce trust in governance.

Despite these challenges, scholars emphasize that improving media literacy, strengthening fact-checking mechanisms, and promoting ethical journalism can help reduce the influence of fake news. Media organizations, governments, educational institutions, and technology companies all have roles to play in creating an information environment where accuracy and accountability are prioritized

Consequently, understanding the concept of fake news is essential for examining its impact on media credibility and audience perception. As digital communication continues to evolve, the ability of audiences to distinguish between verified journalism and fabricated information has become increasingly important for maintaining an informed and democratic society.

2.1.2 Concept of Media Credibility

Media credibility is one of the most fundamental concepts in communication and journalism studies because it determines the extent to which audiences believe, trust, and rely on information disseminated through the media. The effectiveness of the media in informing, educating, entertaining, and influencing society depends largely on the credibility that audiences attach to its messages. When the media are perceived as credible, their information is more likely to shape public opinion and influence behavior. Conversely, when credibility is questioned, audiences become skeptical of media content, thereby reducing the effectiveness of communication and weakening the media's role in society.

Scholars have defined media credibility from different perspectives. Hovland and Weiss (1951) describe credibility as the extent to which a source is perceived to possess expertise and trustworthiness. According to them, audiences are more likely to accept

information from sources they consider knowledgeable and honest. Expertise refers to the competence or professional ability of the communicator, while trustworthiness refers to the honesty, integrity, and objectivity attributed to the source. These two dimensions have remained central to the study of credibility in communication research.

Similarly, Gaziano and McGrath (1986) argue that media credibility encompasses several attributes including accuracy, fairness, objectivity, completeness, and balance. They contend that audiences judge the credibility of media organizations based on whether information is factual, unbiased, and adequately presented. Their multidimensional approach suggests that credibility is not determined by a single characteristic but by the overall quality and ethical standard of media performance. Consequently, news organizations that consistently uphold professional values are more likely to earn public confidence than those associated with sensationalism or misinformation.

McQuail (2010) views media credibility as an essential component of the social responsibility of the press. According to him, the media perform important functions such as surveillance of the environment, interpretation of events, education of the public, and provision of a platform for public debate. However, these responsibilities can only be effectively discharged when audiences perceive the media as reliable and trustworthy. A decline in credibility therefore undermines the ability of the media to serve as the "fourth estate" and hold institutions accountable within a democratic society.

Media credibility is closely associated with public trust. Trust represents the confidence audiences have that media organizations are committed to presenting truthful and verified information. Meyer (1988) explains that credibility and trust are mutually reinforcing concepts because audiences who consistently receive accurate information develop long-term confidence in the source. On the other hand, repeated dissemination of false or misleading information weakens this confidence and encourages skepticism. Trust, once lost, is often difficult to rebuild because audiences may continue to question subsequent reports even after corrections are issued.

The traditional media system relied heavily on editorial gatekeeping to maintain credibility. Before publication or broadcast, journalists and editors verified facts, cross-checked sources, and adhered to professional ethical standards. Gatekeeping ensured that inaccurate information was filtered out before reaching the public. However, the emergence of digital communication technologies has significantly transformed this process. Social media platforms enable individuals to publish and distribute information instantly without professional editorial review, thereby increasing the circulation of unverified content.

The rise of the digital media environment has therefore complicated the concept of media credibility. Unlike newspapers, radio, and television stations that operate under established editorial structures, digital platforms allow anonymous individuals and unofficial organizations to produce content that resembles legitimate journalism. Metzger

and Flanagin (2013) argue that audiences now evaluate credibility using various online cues such as website appearance, popularity indicators, user comments, and social endorsements. Unfortunately, these indicators do not necessarily reflect factual accuracy, making audiences vulnerable to manipulation.

Another important dimension of media credibility is transparency. Modern audiences increasingly expect media organizations to disclose their sources, explain their methods of verification, and correct mistakes openly when they occur. Transparency demonstrates accountability and strengthens audience confidence. Media institutions that acknowledge errors and provide corrections are generally perceived as more credible than those that ignore inaccuracies or refuse to accept responsibility. Consequently, accountability has become a significant determinant of credibility in contemporary journalism.

Objectivity is also a major factor influencing media credibility. Journalistic objectivity requires that facts be presented without personal bias, political influence, or ideological manipulation. Although complete objectivity may be difficult to achieve, professional journalism emphasizes fairness, balance, and the separation of facts from opinions. Oso (2012) observes that political interference, commercialization, and ownership interests have sometimes compromised objectivity within the Nigerian media landscape, leading sections of the public to question the neutrality of media reporting. Such perceptions may reduce public confidence even when factual reporting is undertaken.

Media credibility is further influenced by consistency. Audiences tend to trust media organizations that consistently provide accurate information over time. Credibility is therefore cumulative; it develops gradually through repeated demonstrations of professional competence and ethical conduct. Folarin (2013) notes that credibility cannot be established overnight but is earned through sustained commitment to truthfulness, responsibility, and fairness. At the same time, credibility can be damaged rapidly by a single major incident involving misinformation or unethical reporting.

The proliferation of fake news presents one of the greatest threats to media credibility in the twenty-first century. Fake news often imitates the style and appearance of authentic journalism, making it difficult for ordinary audiences to distinguish between verified information and fabricated content. As false stories circulate widely through social media, audiences may begin to distrust not only the creators of misinformation but also legitimate news organizations. This phenomenon contributes to what scholars describe as a crisis of credibility within the broader information ecosystem.

Furthermore, algorithms employed by social media platforms often prioritize content that generates high engagement rather than content that is necessarily accurate. Sensational headlines, emotionally charged narratives, and controversial claims frequently attract more clicks, shares, and comments than carefully verified reports. Consequently, false information may receive greater visibility than factual journalism, reinforcing public confusion and undermining trust in professional media institutions.

Media literacy has therefore become an important strategy for strengthening media credibility. Media literacy refers to the ability of individuals to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages critically. Potter (2013) argues that media-literate audiences are better equipped to recognize bias, identify misinformation, and evaluate source reliability. Educational initiatives that promote critical thinking and fact-checking can reduce susceptibility to fake news and encourage informed media consumption.

In the Nigerian context, media credibility remains a significant concern because of increasing dependence on digital platforms for news and information. The rapid expansion of internet access and smartphone usage has created opportunities for wider information dissemination but has also facilitated the spread of misinformation. Political campaigns, ethnic tensions, economic interests, and sensational reporting have all contributed to public skepticism toward certain media outlets.

Addressing these challenges requires stronger adherence to professional ethics, improved regulatory frameworks, effective fact-checking mechanisms, and enhanced public media literacy.

In conclusion, media credibility is a multidimensional concept encompassing trustworthiness, expertise, accuracy, fairness, objectivity, transparency, and accountability. It serves as the foundation upon which effective communication and public trust are built. While technological advancements have expanded access to information, they have also introduced new challenges that threaten credibility through

the rapid spread of fake news and misinformation. Preserving media credibility therefore requires collective efforts from journalists, media organizations, policymakers, educational institutions, technology companies, and audiences themselves. Strengthening credibility is essential for maintaining public confidence in journalism and ensuring that the media continue to fulfill their democratic and social responsibilities.

2.2 Opinion Review

Opinion review involves the examination of scholarly viewpoints, arguments, and perspectives relating to the variables under investigation. Unlike empirical studies that focus on research findings, opinion review critically discusses the ideas and positions of experts regarding a particular phenomenon. In this study, the opinion review focuses on how scholars explain the relationship between fake news, the digital media environment, audience perception, and media trust. The review is important because it provides a conceptual understanding of the issues surrounding fake news and establishes the intellectual basis for examining its effect on media credibility.

The emergence of digital communication technologies has transformed the global information landscape. The internet and social media platforms have democratized information production by allowing virtually anyone with internet access to create and distribute content. While this development has expanded freedom of expression and increased access to information, it has also created significant challenges relating to information quality, verification, and credibility. Consequently, scholars have expressed

growing concern over the rapid spread of fake news and its implications for journalism and society.

Communication scholars generally agree that fake news has become a major threat to the credibility of both traditional and digital media. They argue that the speed with which false information travels across digital platforms often exceeds the capacity of journalists and fact-checking organizations to correct it. This situation creates confusion among audiences and makes it increasingly difficult for individuals to distinguish between verified information and fabricated content.

Furthermore, many scholars contend that technological advancements have altered audience behavior in media consumption. Instead of depending solely on newspapers, radio, and television for information, audiences increasingly rely on social networking platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, TikTok, WhatsApp, and YouTube. These platforms encourage user participation through sharing, commenting, and reposting, thereby accelerating the circulation of information regardless of its accuracy. The result is an information ecosystem where credibility is constantly being challenged.

Another opinion expressed by scholars is that economic incentives contribute to the production of fake news. Many online publishers generate revenue through website traffic and digital advertisements. Consequently, sensational headlines and emotionally provocative stories are often designed to attract clicks and shares rather than provide

factual information. This commercialization of online content has increased the quantity of misleading information available to audiences.

Political interests also play a significant role in the creation and dissemination of fake news. During elections and periods of political competition, false information may be deliberately circulated to influence public opinion, damage opponents, or manipulate voter behavior. Such practices undermine democratic processes and reduce public confidence in both political institutions and the media.

Scholars further argue that the problem of fake news cannot be solved solely through regulation or technological intervention. They emphasize the importance of media literacy, critical thinking, ethical journalism, and responsible digital citizenship. Educating audiences to evaluate information critically is considered one of the most sustainable strategies for reducing the harmful effects of misinformation.

Based on these scholarly opinions, it is evident that fake news represents a complex communication challenge that affects not only information accuracy but also audience trust and media credibility. The following sections specifically review scholarly opinions on fake news within the digital media environment and its influence on audience perception and media trust.

2.2.1 Fake News and the Digital Media Environment

The digital media environment has fundamentally transformed the production, distribution, and consumption of information across the world. Unlike the traditional media system, which relied on professional journalists and editorial gatekeepers, digital media platforms allow ordinary individuals to generate and disseminate content instantly. This technological transformation has increased access to information and encouraged public participation in communication processes. However, it has simultaneously created an environment where fake news can spread rapidly with minimal verification.

Castells (2011) argues that the digital revolution has produced a network society characterized by continuous information exchange and instantaneous communication across geographical boundaries. According to him, digital networks have changed the structure of communication by enabling decentralized information production, where authority is no longer concentrated solely in established media institutions. While this democratization has expanded opportunities for participation, it has also weakened traditional gatekeeping mechanisms that previously filtered inaccurate information before publication.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) explain that social media platforms are built upon user-generated content and interactive communication. Users are not merely consumers of information but also producers and distributors of content. Through features such as sharing, reposting, commenting, and live streaming, information can circulate among

millions of users within a very short period. The speed of dissemination often exceeds the speed of verification, thereby creating opportunities for misinformation and fake news to flourish.

The architecture of digital platforms also contributes significantly to the spread of fake news. Algorithms used by social media companies are designed primarily to maximize user engagement rather than prioritize factual accuracy. Content that generates strong emotional reactions—including fear, anger, surprise, or excitement—is more likely to receive greater visibility because it attracts more interactions. Consequently, sensational or misleading stories frequently receive wider circulation than carefully verified news reports.

Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) found that false information spreads more rapidly and reaches more people than truthful information on social media platforms. Their study suggests that fake news often appears more novel and emotionally compelling, making audiences more likely to share it with others. Unlike verified news, which may require careful explanation and evidence, fabricated stories often present simple and dramatic narratives that easily capture public attention.

Another characteristic of the digital media environment is the decline of traditional editorial control. Newspapers and broadcast organizations typically employ professional journalists, editors, and fact-checkers who verify information before publication. In contrast, many digital platforms allow content to be uploaded instantly without

undergoing any formal verification process. As a result, rumors, manipulated images, edited videos, and fabricated reports can circulate widely before corrections are issued.

The widespread use of smartphones has further accelerated the circulation of fake news. Mobile internet access allows individuals to receive and share information at any time and from any location. Messaging applications such as WhatsApp and Telegram enable private and group communication, making false information difficult to monitor and correct once it has been widely distributed. The trust that exists within family groups, religious communities, and friendship networks often encourages users to forward messages without verifying their authenticity.

In Nigeria, the digital media environment presents both opportunities and challenges. Increased internet penetration has expanded access to information and enhanced civic participation. Citizens can now engage directly with public officials, journalists, and institutions through online platforms. However, the same environment has also facilitated the spread of political propaganda, ethnic misinformation, financial scams, and fabricated news stories. During elections, public health emergencies, and security crises, fake news has often intensified public anxiety and confusion.

Scholars also observe that declining trust in traditional institutions has encouraged some audiences to rely more heavily on alternative online sources of information. Unfortunately, many of these sources lack professional editorial standards and may prioritize popularity over accuracy. audiences encounter conflicting narratives from

multiple platforms, distinguishing credible journalism from misinformation becomes increasingly difficult.

Despite these challenges, the digital media environment offers opportunities for combating fake news. Fact-checking organizations, independent journalists, academic institutions, and civil society organizations now use the same digital platforms to verify claims and educate the public. Technology companies have also introduced features such as misinformation warnings, content labeling, and removal of demonstrably false information. Nevertheless, these interventions remain imperfect because the volume and speed of online communication continue to outpace verification efforts.

Overall, scholarly opinion indicates that the digital media environment has created conditions that both facilitate information access and encourage the rapid spread of fake news. The combination of user-generated content, algorithmic amplification, weak gatekeeping, and emotional engagement has made misinformation a significant challenge for media credibility. Understanding these dynamics is therefore essential for examining how fake news influences audience perception and trust in media institutions.

2.2.3 Audience Perception and Media Trust

Audience perception refers to the process through which individuals receive, interpret, evaluate, and assign meaning to media messages. It is one of the most significant concepts in communication studies because the effectiveness of media content depends

not only on what is communicated but also on how the audience understands and evaluates the information. Different individuals may interpret the same message differently depending on their educational background, cultural orientation, political beliefs, personal experiences, and level of media literacy. Consequently, audience perception plays a crucial role in determining the credibility and influence of the media.

According to McQuail (2010), audience perception is an active rather than a passive process. Modern audiences do not simply accept information as it is presented; instead, they analyze, compare, and interpret media messages based on their existing knowledge and beliefs. This perspective challenges earlier assumptions that audiences are passive recipients of information and emphasizes that individuals participate actively in constructing meaning from media content. Therefore, public trust in the media depends largely on how audiences perceive the credibility and reliability of information sources.

One of the primary factors influencing audience perception is personal experience. People tend to evaluate information by comparing it with their previous experiences and existing beliefs. If a media organization has consistently provided accurate and balanced reports over time, audiences are more likely to trust its future publications. Conversely, if audiences have previously encountered misleading or inaccurate reports from a particular source, they may approach subsequent information from that source with skepticism. This demonstrates that credibility is built gradually through consistent performance but can be weakened quickly through repeated inaccuracies.

Another important determinant of audience perception is education and media literacy. Media literacy refers to the ability of individuals to access, analyze, evaluate, and critically interpret media messages. Potter (2013) argues that media-literate individuals possess greater capacity to distinguish between factual reporting and misinformation. They are more likely to verify sources, compare multiple reports, and question sensational claims before accepting or sharing information. In contrast, individuals with limited media literacy may accept false information without verification, thereby contributing to the spread of fake news.

The social environment also significantly shapes audience perception. Family members, friends, colleagues, religious groups, and community networks often influence how individuals interpret information. In many societies, people rely heavily on recommendations and discussions within their social circles when evaluating news stories. Information that is repeatedly shared within trusted social networks may be accepted as credible even when it lacks factual evidence. This phenomenon has become increasingly common on social media platforms where users frequently share content within private groups and messaging applications.

The rise of digital media has transformed audience perception by exposing individuals to an unprecedented volume of information from multiple sources. Unlike traditional media, where professional journalists served as gatekeepers, digital platforms enable anyone to create and distribute content. As a result, audiences are confronted with competing

narratives and conflicting information on the same issue. The abundance of information creates what scholars describe as information overload, making it increasingly difficult for audiences to distinguish between credible journalism and misinformation.

Lewandowsky, Ecker, and Cook (2017) argue that repeated exposure to misinformation can create cognitive confusion among audiences. Even when false information is later corrected, individuals may continue to remember and believe the original misleading claim. This phenomenon, known as the continued influence effect, illustrates the lasting impact of fake news on audience perception. Once misinformation becomes embedded in public consciousness, correcting it becomes considerably more difficult than preventing its initial spread.

Audience perception is also influenced by confirmation bias, which refers to the tendency of individuals to seek, interpret, and accept information that supports their existing beliefs while rejecting contradictory evidence. People naturally prefer information that reinforces their opinions and identities. Consequently, audiences may perceive sources that align with their viewpoints as more credible than those presenting opposing perspectives, regardless of the factual accuracy of the information. This selective exposure contributes to the formation of echo chambers, where individuals repeatedly encounter similar viewpoints and become less exposed to diverse opinions.

Tsfati and Cappella (2003) explain that media skepticism increases when audiences perceive news organizations as biased, politically motivated, or commercially driven.

When people believe that the media prioritize profit or political interests over factual reporting, their confidence in journalism declines. Such skepticism may lead audiences to question even accurate reports, thereby reducing the effectiveness of credible media institutions in informing the public.

The relationship between fake news and media trust has become one of the most important issues in contemporary communication research. Fake news undermines public confidence because repeated exposure to false information creates uncertainty about the reliability of all news sources. When audiences encounter fabricated stories that resemble legitimate journalism, they may begin to suspect that professional media organizations are equally unreliable. This generalized distrust extends beyond individual news reports and affects the credibility of the entire media system.

Nyhan and Reifler (2010) argue that misinformation can contribute to attitude polarization, whereby individuals become increasingly committed to their existing beliefs despite being presented with factual corrections. In some cases, attempts to correct false information may even strengthen previously held misconceptions, particularly when those beliefs are closely tied to political or ideological identities. This phenomenon poses significant challenges for journalists and fact-checking organizations because simply providing accurate information does not always change audience perceptions.

Another factor affecting media trust is the increasing use of social media algorithms. Digital platforms prioritize content based on engagement metrics such as likes, shares,

comments, and viewing time rather than journalistic quality. Consequently, sensational and emotionally charged stories often receive greater visibility than carefully verified reports. Audiences may mistakenly interpret popularity as credibility, assuming that widely shared information must be accurate. This algorithm-driven visibility contributes to the rapid dissemination of fake news and complicates audience evaluation of source reliability.

Transparency and accountability are essential for maintaining media trust. Audiences are more likely to trust media organizations that clearly identify their sources, explain their methods of verification, and promptly correct errors when they occur. Ethical journalism requires openness, fairness, and responsibility, all of which contribute to long-term credibility. Conversely, sensational reporting, hidden sponsorship, political interference, and failure to correct mistakes weaken public confidence in the media.

In the Nigerian context, audience perception and media trust are influenced by several factors, including political polarization, ethnic diversity, religious affiliations, and the widespread use of social media platforms. The rapid circulation of unverified information during elections, security challenges, and public health emergencies has increased public concern regarding the reliability of news sources. Consequently, many Nigerians cross-check information through multiple platforms before accepting it as true, reflecting growing awareness of the dangers posed by fake news.

Improving media trust therefore requires a collaborative effort involving journalists, media organizations, educational institutions, government agencies, technology companies, and the public. Media organizations must uphold professional ethics by emphasizing accuracy, fairness, objectivity, and accountability. Educational institutions should promote media literacy to equip citizens with critical evaluation skills, while technology companies should strengthen mechanisms for identifying and limiting the spread of misinformation.

In conclusion, audience perception is a complex process shaped by personal experience, education, social influences, media exposure, and technological developments. These factors significantly determine the level of trust audiences place in media institutions. The widespread circulation of fake news has intensified scepticism toward journalism and complicated the evaluation of media credibility. Therefore, strengthening media literacy, promoting ethical journalism, encouraging transparency, and enhancing fact-checking initiatives are essential strategies for rebuilding audience trust and preserving the credibility of the media in the digital age.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework refers to the body of established theories that provides the intellectual foundation for a research study. It explains the assumptions and principles upon which the study is based and offers a lens through which the research problem can be understood and interpreted. In communication research, theories help explain how

media messages are produced, transmitted, received, and interpreted by audiences. They also provide logical explanations for the relationships that exist between the variables under investigation.

This study examines the effect of fake news on media credibility with particular emphasis on audience perception. Since the study seeks to understand how audiences evaluate the credibility of information sources and why they continue to consume information from digital platforms despite the prevalence of misinformation, two communication theories are considered most appropriate. These are Source Credibility Theory and Uses and Gratifications Theory.

Source Credibility Theory explains how the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of a communicator influence audience acceptance of media messages. The theory helps explain why fake news may successfully influence audiences when it appears to originate from credible sources or imitates legitimate news organizations.

Uses and Gratifications Theory, on the other hand, explains that audiences are active participants who deliberately choose media platforms to satisfy various needs such as information, entertainment, education, and social interaction. The theory is relevant because many audiences continue to depend on social media for news despite the presence of misinformation and fake news.

Together, these theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the relationship between fake news, media credibility, and audience perception within the contemporary digital media environment.

2.3.1 Source Credibility Theory

Source Credibility Theory is one of the most influential theories in communication studies for explaining how audiences evaluate and accept information from different sources. The theory was developed by Carl Hovland, Irving Janis, and Harold Kelley (1953) during their studies on persuasion and attitude change. The theory proposes that the effectiveness of a communication message depends largely on the degree of credibility that audiences attribute to the source of the message. In other words, people are more likely to believe and accept information when they perceive the communicator as trustworthy, knowledgeable, and reliable.

The theory emerged from research conducted at Yale University on persuasive communication. Hovland and his colleagues discovered that the characteristics of the source significantly affect whether audiences accept or reject a message. Even when two sources present identical information, audiences may respond differently depending on their perception of the source's credibility. This finding established credibility as a critical factor in effective communication.

According to Hovland and Weiss (1951), source credibility consists primarily of two dimensions: trustworthiness and expertise. Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which a communicator is perceived as honest, truthful, objective, and unbiased. Expertise refers to the perceived knowledge, competence, and experience possessed by the communicator regarding a particular subject. When audiences believe that a source possesses both trustworthiness and expertise, they are more inclined to accept the information provided.

Subsequent scholars expanded the theory by introducing additional dimensions of credibility. McCroskey and Teven (1999) identified goodwill as another important component of credibility. Goodwill refers to the audience's perception that the communicator genuinely cares about the welfare and interests of the audience rather than pursuing selfish motives. A source perceived to possess expertise, trustworthiness, and goodwill is generally considered highly credible and persuasive.

The relevance of Source Credibility Theory has increased significantly in the digital era. Traditionally, newspapers, radio stations, and television organizations served as primary gatekeepers of information. Professional journalists followed editorial guidelines, ethical principles, and verification procedures before disseminating news to the public. Consequently, audiences often associated established media institutions with credibility and reliability.

However, the emergence of the internet and social media has fundamentally changed the information environment. Today, virtually anyone can create and distribute content

without professional editorial oversight. Metzger and Flanagin (2013) argue that digital media have transformed credibility assessment because audiences are exposed to an enormous volume of information from official and unofficial sources simultaneously. The absence of traditional gatekeeping makes it increasingly difficult for users to distinguish between credible journalism and fabricated content.

One of the major challenges in the digital environment is that fake news often imitates the characteristics of legitimate journalism. Creators of fake news deliberately design websites, headlines, logos, and writing styles that resemble those of reputable news organizations. This imitation creates an illusion of credibility and encourages audiences to accept false information as authentic. Consequently, misinformation can spread widely before its accuracy is questioned or verified.

O'Keefe (2016) explains that audiences frequently use credibility as a cognitive shortcut when evaluating information. Instead of carefully investigating every claim, individuals often rely on their perception of the source to determine whether the information should be believed. This strategy is practical because modern audiences encounter enormous quantities of information every day. However, it also creates opportunities for deception when fake news successfully mimics credible sources.

The influence of social media algorithms further complicates credibility assessment. Digital platforms often prioritize content that generates high levels of engagement through likes, shares, comments, and reactions. Unfortunately, popularity does not

necessarily indicate accuracy. Sensational or emotionally appealing stories frequently receive greater visibility than carefully verified reports. As a result, audiences may mistakenly equate popularity with credibility, thereby increasing their susceptibility to fake news.

Another concept closely related to Source Credibility Theory is confirmation bias. Confirmation bias refers to the tendency of individuals to accept information that supports their existing beliefs while rejecting contradictory evidence. In many cases, audiences perceive sources that agree with their opinions as more credible than those presenting opposing viewpoints. This psychological tendency contributes to the formation of echo chambers, where individuals repeatedly encounter information that reinforces their beliefs regardless of its factual accuracy.

The theory also helps explain the decline in media credibility resulting from repeated exposure to misinformation. When audiences repeatedly encounter false information attributed to media organizations, they may begin to question the reliability of the media generally. Even when legitimate news organizations maintain professional standards, the widespread circulation of fake news can create generalized skepticism toward journalism. Consequently, public trust in media institutions declines, weakening their ability to inform and educate society effectively.

In Nigeria, Source Credibility Theory is particularly relevant because the media landscape includes traditional newspapers, broadcast stations, online news platforms,

blogs, and numerous social media channels. During elections, security crises, and public health emergencies, conflicting information often circulates simultaneously from official and unofficial sources. Many citizens evaluate information based on the perceived credibility of the source rather than independently verifying facts. This situation demonstrates the continuing importance of source credibility in shaping audience perception and media trust.

The theory is highly applicable to the present study because it explains how fake news affects media credibility among audiences. If fake news consistently appears to originate from credible sources, audiences may initially accept it as true. Conversely, when audiences discover that previously trusted sources have disseminated inaccurate information, their confidence in those sources may decline. Thus, fake news has the potential not only to mislead audiences but also to erode public trust in legitimate media institutions.

Despite its strengths, Source Credibility Theory has certain limitations. The theory primarily emphasizes characteristics of the communicator and may not fully account for other factors influencing audience acceptance, such as cultural background, political ideology, personal experiences, and media literacy. Additionally, credibility perceptions vary among individuals and across different contexts, meaning that a source considered credible by one audience may not be viewed similarly by another.

Nevertheless, the theory remains one of the most appropriate frameworks for this study because it directly addresses the relationship between information sources and audience trust. It provides a sound theoretical explanation for understanding how fake news influences perceptions of media credibility within the digital communication environment.

2.3.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) is one of the most influential audience-centered theories in mass communication. Unlike traditional media theories that view audiences as passive recipients of media messages, UGT assumes that audiences are active participants who selectively choose media based on their needs and expectations. The theory explains why people use certain media channels and what they gain from such exposure.

The foundation of Uses and Gratifications Theory is largely attributed to Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974), who argued that media users are goal-directed in their media consumption. According to them, individuals actively seek out media that satisfy specific psychological and social needs rather than being passively influenced by media content. These needs include information seeking, personal identity, integration and social interaction, and entertainment.

Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1974) outlined five key assumptions of the theory. First, the audience is active and uses media purposefully. Second, the audience is aware of their

needs and can express them. Third, media competes with other sources of need satisfaction such as interpersonal communication. Fourth, people have enough self-awareness of their media use, interests, and motives to be able to report them. Finally, value judgments about media content should be suspended in favour of audience orientation.

In the context of fake news and media credibility, Uses and Gratifications Theory is particularly relevant because audiences do not consume news randomly; rather, they choose sources that they believe will satisfy their need for accurate, timely, and relevant information. However, in the digital era, social media platforms have complicated this process by exposing users to both credible and non-credible information sources.

Rubin (1983) expanded the theory by emphasizing the difference between ritualized and instrumental media use. Ritualized use refers to habitual media consumption, such as scrolling through social media feeds without specific goals, while instrumental use involves intentional media consumption for specific information needs. In relation to fake news, ritualized use may increase vulnerability to misinformation because users may not critically evaluate content encountered during passive scrolling.

McQuail (2010) further categorized media gratifications into four major groups: diversion (escape and entertainment), personal relationships (social utility of media), personal identity (self-reference and value reinforcement), and surveillance (information gathering about the environment). Fake news often exploits these gratifications,

particularly through emotionally charged headlines that attract attention and encourage sharing, even when the content is not verified.

Ruggiero (2000) also noted that the rise of digital communication has expanded the relevance of Uses and Gratifications Theory, as the internet allows users to actively select content, interact with sources, and participate in information sharing. However, this interactivity also increases exposure to misinformation, as users often rely on peer sharing and algorithm-driven content rather than verified news sources.

Therefore, in studying the impact of fake news on media credibility among audiences, Uses and Gratifications Theory helps explain why individuals may still consume or believe fake news despite its questionable authenticity. It suggests that audience motivations—such as the desire for quick information, entertainment, political alignment, or social engagement—can override concerns about credibility.

Ultimately, the theory highlights that media credibility is not only determined by the accuracy of information but also by how well the media satisfies audience needs. If fake news content fulfills certain gratifications more effectively than traditional media, audiences may still engage with it, thereby affecting their perception of credible media sources.

2.8 Summary of Literature and Research Gap

Existing literature on fake news and media credibility shows that misinformation has become a major challenge in the digital media environment. Studies consistently reveal that the rapid spread of fake news through social media platforms significantly influences public perception, often leading to confusion, misinformation, and distrust in traditional media institutions.

Scholars such as Lazer et al. (2018) argue that fake news spreads faster than verified news due to its emotional appeal and sensational nature. Similarly, Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) highlight that social media platforms have lowered the barriers to information dissemination, allowing unverified content to reach large audiences quickly. This has raised concerns about the credibility of both online and traditional media sources.

Research has also shown that media credibility is strongly linked to audience trust. Flanagin and Metzger (2007) found that users often judge credibility based on superficial cues such as website design, popularity, and social endorsement rather than actual content accuracy. This is particularly relevant in the era of social media, where likes, shares, and comments can influence perceived credibility.

In the Nigerian context, studies indicate that fake news plays a significant role in shaping public opinion on political, social, and security issues. Scholars such as Apuke and Omar (2020) note that misinformation on social media platforms has contributed to public fear and distorted understanding of insecurity in various regions. Despite efforts by traditional

media organizations to fact-check and correct misinformation, audience trust in media institutions continues to fluctuate.

However, a critical gap exists in the literature. Most studies on fake news have focused on its spread and effects on political behavior or election outcomes, with less attention given to how it specifically affects media credibility among audiences in local contexts such as Edo State. Additionally, there is limited empirical research that combines Uses and Gratifications Theory with audience perception studies in examining why individuals continue to rely on or distrust certain media sources despite exposure to fake news.

Furthermore, existing research often treats audiences as a homogeneous group, without considering differences in age, education level, media literacy, and digital behavior patterns that may influence susceptibility to fake news. This creates a gap in understanding the nuanced ways in which different audience segments interpret and respond to misinformation

This study therefore seeks to fill these gaps by examining the impact of fake news on media credibility among audiences in Edo State, with a focus on how audience motivations and media use patterns influence their perception of credibility. By integrating Uses and Gratifications Theory, the study provides a framework for understanding not just the effects of fake news, but also the underlying reasons why audiences engage with it in the first place.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

The chapter explains the specific research design adopted, the actual population targeted, how the respondents were selected, how the questionnaire was structured around fake news and credibility issues, how validity and reliability were ensured, and how the collected data were analyzed to answer the research questions stated in Chapter One.

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate clearly that the findings of this research are based on systematic procedures and not assumptions.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted the survey research design. The survey method was considered most appropriate because the study focuses on assessing media users' exposure to fake news and how such exposure influences their perception of media credibility.

The issue of fake news and credibility involves attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions. These variables cannot be observed directly; they must be measured through responses from individuals who consume media content. Therefore, the survey design allows me to collect first-hand information directly from media users.

The design enabled me to:

1. Measure the level of exposure of respondents to fake news.
2. Identify the platforms where fake news is mostly encountered.
3. Examine respondents' trust level in traditional media.
4. Examine respondents' trust level in online media.
5. Determine whether exposure to fake news reduces confidence in media institutions.

The survey design was therefore suitable because it provided quantitative data that could be analyzed using statistical tools such as frequencies and percentages.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of media users in Nigeria. Media users, in the context of this study, refer to individuals who regularly access news and information through the media, blogs and other digital platforms.

The study focused on individuals who consume news at least several times a week. This is because such individuals are more likely to have encountered fake news and can provide informed responses regarding media credibility.

The population includes youths, students, civil servants, traders, professionals, and other categories of media consumers.

3.3 Sample Size

Due to the large population of media users in Nigeria, it was not possible to study the entire population. Therefore, a sample size of 400 respondents was selected for the study.

The choice of 400 respondents was considered appropriate for the following reasons:

1. It allowed for broad representation of different categories of media users.
2. It provided sufficient data for meaningful statistical analysis.
3. It reduced sampling error.
4. It improved the reliability of findings.

Out of the 400 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 380 were correctly completed and returned. These 380 copies were used for analysis.

3.4 Sampling Technique

The study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique.

Stage One: Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling was first used to select individuals who are active media users. I specifically targeted respondents who:

1. Use social media regularly.
2. Follow news updates.

3. Share or engage with news content online.
4. Watch television news or listen to radio news.

This ensured that only relevant respondents participated in the study.

Stage Two: Simple Random Sampling

After identifying media users, simple random sampling was used to distribute questionnaires among them. This ensured that every identified media user had equal opportunity to participate in the study.

The combination of these two techniques will help me to maintain relevance and fairness in respondent selection.

3.5 Instrument for Data Collection

The main instrument used for this study was a structured questionnaire specifically designed around fake news exposure and media credibility.

The questionnaire was divided into four major sections:

Section A: Demographic Information

This section collected information on age, gender, educational qualification, occupation, and frequency of media usage.

Section B: Exposure to Fake News

This section included questions such as:

1. Have you ever encountered fake news?
2. How often do you come across misleading information?
3. Through which platform do you mostly encounter fake news?
4. Have you ever shared news that later turned out to be false?

Section C: Perception of Media Credibility

This section measured respondents' level of trust in:

1. Television news
2. Radio news
3. Newspapers
4. Online news websites
5. Social media news sources

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with statements relating to credibility.

Section D: Impact of Fake News on Trust

This section examined whether exposure to fake news has:

1. Reduced respondents' trust in media organizations.
2. Made respondents skeptical of news reports.

3. Caused respondents to verify news before believing it.
4. Influenced respondents' attitude toward mainstream media.

The questionnaire contained mostly closed-ended questions and Likert-scale statements to allow for easy quantification and analysis.

3.6 Operationalization of Variables

In this study, the major variables were:

Independent Variable: Fake News Exposure

This was measured using:

1. Frequency of encountering fake news.
2. Platforms where fake news is encountered.
3. Experience with sharing false information.

Dependent Variable: Media Credibility

This was measured using:

1. Level of trust in traditional media.
2. Level of trust in digital media.
3. Confidence in accuracy of news reports.
4. Perception of fairness and objectivity.

By operationalizing these variables clearly, the study was able to measure the relationship between fake news and credibility.

3.7 Validity of the Instrument

To ensure validity, the questionnaire was given to one lecturer in the Department of Mass Communication for review. He examined whether the questions were relevant to the research objectives.

His corrections were incorporated. Some questions were restructured for clarity, while overlapping questions were removed. This ensured that the instrument measured the actual concepts of fake news exposure and media credibility.

3.8 Reliability of the Instrument

A pilot study was conducted using 20 respondents who were not included in the final sample. The aim was to test the clarity and consistency of the questionnaire.

The pilot responses were reviewed carefully, and minor ambiguities were corrected. In addition, the reliability of the instrument was statistically tested using Cronbach's Alpha to determine the internal consistency of the questionnaire items. The result yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.82, which indicates a high level of internal consistency and confirms that the instrument is reliable for data collection.

The final instrument was therefore considered reliable for full administration.

3.9 Method of Data Collection

Data were collected through direct and online administration of questionnaires.

Hard copies were distributed physically to respondents in selected locations. Online versions were also shared through digital platforms to reach respondents who could not be accessed physically.

Respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of confidentiality. Participation was voluntary.

Out of the 400 copies distributed, 380 were properly filled and returned, representing a 95% response rate.

3.10 Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were coded and entered into statistical tables.

Descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages were used to analyze the responses. Tables were used to present data for each research question.

The analysis focused on:

1. Determining the level of exposure to fake news.
2. Identifying major platforms for fake news circulation.
3. Measuring trust levels in media institutions.

4. Examining whether exposure to fake news reduces credibility perception.

The results were interpreted in line with the research questions and theoretical framework.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed. Respondents were not required to write their names. Their responses were kept confidential and used strictly for academic purposes.

Participation was voluntary, and respondents had the right to withdraw at any time.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

A total of 400 copies of the questionnaire were distributed for this study, while 380 were returned and found usable, representing 87.5% response rate the others where not usable.

The data collected were analyzed using frequency and simple percentages. The results are presented in tables and interpreted accordingly.

Table 4.1: Gender Distribution

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	150	42.9
Female	200	57.1

The table shows that out of the 350 respondents who participated in the study, 200 respondents representing 57.1% were female, while 150 respondents representing 42.9% were male. This indicates that female respondents constituted the majority of the study population. The relatively balanced representation of both genders suggests that the findings of the study reflect the views and experiences of both male and female media users regarding fake news and media credibility.

The higher proportion of female respondents may be attributed to their greater willingness to participate in the survey or their accessibility during the data collection process. However, the difference between male and female respondents is not excessively wide, thereby ensuring that responses were obtained from both gender groups. This balanced distribution enhances the reliability of the findings and provides a broader understanding of how fake news affects media users regardless of gender.

Table 4.2: Age Distribution

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
15–20	60	17.1
21–25	120	34.3
26–30	90	25.7

31–35	50	14.3
36+	30	8.6

The table shows that respondents aged 21–25 years constituted the highest proportion of the sample with 34.3%, followed by those aged 26–30 years representing 25.7%. Respondents aged 15–20 years accounted for 17.1%, while those aged 31–35 years and 36 years and above represented 14.3% and 8.6% respectively. This indicates that the study was dominated by young adults who are among the most active users of digital and social media platforms. Their significant representation is important because younger individuals are more likely to consume information online and may therefore be more exposed to fake news and misinformation.

Table 4.3: Educational Qualification

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SSCE	80	22.9
ND/NCE	70	20.0
HND/BSc	150	42.9
Postgraduate	50	14.3

The findings reveal that 42.9% of respondents possessed HND/B.Sc qualifications, making them the largest educational category. This was followed by SSCE holders (22.9%), ND/NCE holders (20.0%), and postgraduate degree holders (14.3%). The result suggests that the majority of respondents were relatively educated and capable of understanding media messages and evaluating information sources. The educational composition of the sample strengthens the reliability of the findings because educated individuals are more likely to have experience with various media platforms.

Table 4.4: Occupation

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Student	120	34.3
Civil Servant	80	22.9
Self-employed	70	20.0
Unemployed	50	14.3
Others	30	8.6

The table indicates that students constituted the highest proportion of respondents with 34.3%, followed by civil servants (22.9%), self-employed individuals (20.0%), unemployed respondents (14.3%), and others (8.6%). The dominance of students may be attributed to their active engagement with social media and online communication

platforms. This finding suggests that a significant segment of the respondents belongs to a group that regularly consumes digital information and is therefore more likely to encounter fake news..

Table 4.5: News Consumption

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily	140	40.0
Several times/week	110	31.4
Occasionally	70	20.0
Rarely	30	8.6

The table shows that 40.0% of respondents consume news daily, while 31.4% consume news several times a week. Only 20.0% consume news occasionally and 8.6% rarely consume news. This indicates that the majority of respondents are regular consumers of news and information. The high frequency of news consumption implies greater exposure to both credible information and fake news circulating within the media environment..

Table 4.6: Encounter Fake News

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	290	82.9
No	60	17.1

The findings reveal that 82.9% of respondents have encountered fake news, while only 17.1% indicated otherwise. This demonstrates that fake news has become a widespread phenomenon affecting a large proportion of media users. The high level of exposure suggests that misinformation has become embedded within the information ecosystem and poses a challenge to audiences seeking accurate information.

Table 4.7: Frequency

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Often	120	34.3
Often	100	28.6
Sometimes	90	25.7

Rarely	40	11.4
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The table shows that 34.3% of respondents encounter fake news very often, while 28.6% encounter it often. Additionally, 25.7% reported sometimes encountering fake news and only 11.4% reported rare exposure. The findings indicate that fake news is encountered frequently by most respondents. This suggests that misinformation has become a recurring feature of everyday media consumption.

Table 4.8: Platforms

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Facebook	100	28.6
WhatsApp	120	34.3
Instagram	40	11.4
X	35	10.0
Blogs	25	7.1
TV	20	5.7
Radio	10	2.9

The findings indicate that WhatsApp (34.3%) and Facebook (28.6%) are the primary channels through which respondents encounter fake news. Instagram (11.4%), X (10.0%), blogs (7.1%), television (5.7%), and radio (2.9%) followed. This suggests that social media platforms are the major conduits for the spread of fake news because they enable rapid sharing of information without adequate verification mechanisms.

Table 4.9: Shared False News

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	180	51.4
No	170	48.6

The table reveals that 51.4% of respondents admitted to having shared fake news unknowingly, while 48.6% stated otherwise. This finding indicates that fake news spreads not only through deliberate actions but also through the unintentional behaviour of media users. The result underscores the need for greater media literacy and fact-checking practices among audiences.

Table 4.10: Verification

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)

Always	120	34.3
Sometimes	160	45.7
Rarely	50	14.3
Never	20	5.7

The findings show that 45.7% of respondents sometimes verify information before sharing it, while 34.3% always verify information. However, 14.3% rarely verify information and 5.7% never verify information. This suggests that although many respondents are aware of the importance of verification, a significant proportion still engage in information sharing without adequate fact-checking.

Table 4.11: TV Trust

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SA	120	34.3
A	140	40.0
D	60	17.1
SD	30	8.6

The table indicates that 74.3% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they trust information from television, while only 25.7% disagreed. This suggests that television remains one of the most credible and trusted sources of information among respondents due to its professional standards and editorial controls.

Table 4.12: Radio Trust

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SA	110	31.4
A	150	42.9
D	60	17.1
SD	30	8.6

The findings show that 74.3% of respondents trust information obtained from radio, while 25.7% expressed distrust. This demonstrates that radio continues to enjoy public confidence as a reliable source of information despite the growth of digital media platforms.

Table 4.13: Newspaper Trust

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SA	90	25.7
A	130	37.1
D	90	25.7
SD	40	11.4

The table reveals that 62.8% of respondents trust newspapers, while 37.1% do not. Although newspapers remain relatively credible, the findings suggest a moderate level of trust compared to television and radio. This may be due to declining newspaper readership and increased reliance on digital media.

Table 4.14: Online Trust

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SA	80	22.9
A	120	34.3
D	100	28.6

SD	50	14.3
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The findings show that 57.2% of respondents trust online news sources, while 42.9% do not. This suggests that online news platforms enjoy moderate credibility among respondents. However, concerns about misinformation and fake news may have contributed to the lower trust levels recorded.

Table 4.15: Social Media Trust

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SA	40	11.4
A	90	25.7
D	140	40.0
SD	80	22.9

The table indicates that 62.9% of respondents do not trust information obtained from social media, while only 37.1% expressed trust. This suggests that respondents perceive social media as the least credible source of information, likely due to the prevalence of fake news and the absence of professional gatekeeping mechanisms.

Table 4.16: Verification by Media

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SA	70	20.0
A	120	34.3
D	110	31.4
SD	50	14.3

The findings reveal that 45.7% of respondents doubted whether media organizations adequately verify information before publication, while 54.3% believed that media organizations engage in verification. This suggests that public confidence in media verification practices is not absolute and may have been affected by the growing prevalence of fake news.

Table 4.17: Reduced Trust

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SA	140	40.0
A	130	37.1
D	50	14.3
SD	30	8.6

The findings indicate that 77.1% of respondents agreed that fake news reduces trust in media organizations, while 22.9% disagreed. This demonstrates that fake news has significantly undermined public confidence in media institutions.

Table 4.18: Difficulty Believing

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SA	120	34.3
A	140	40.0
D	60	17.1
SD	30	8.6

The table shows that 74.3% of respondents agreed that fake news makes it difficult to believe news reports, while 25.7% disagreed. This suggests that exposure to misinformation has increased audience skepticism towards media content.

Table 4.19: Doubt Stories

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SA	130	37.1
A	140	40.0
D	50	14.3
SD	30	8.6

The findings reveal that 77.1% of respondents agreed that fake news has made them doubt many news stories, while 22.9% disagreed. This indicates that fake news has contributed to growing uncertainty regarding the authenticity of information disseminated by the media.

Table 4.20: Damages Credibility

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SA	150	42.9
A	120	34.3
D	50	14.3
SD	30	8.6

The table shows that 77.2% of respondents agreed that fake news damages media credibility, while only 22.9% disagreed. This demonstrates that fake news is perceived as a major threat to the reputation and credibility of media organizations.

Table 4.21: Verify Sources

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SA	120	34.3
A	140	40.0
D	60	17.1
SD	30	8.6

The findings indicate that 74.3% of respondents now verify information from multiple sources before accepting or sharing it, while 25.7% do not. This suggests that exposure to fake news has encouraged greater caution and critical evaluation of information among media users.

Table 4.22: Regulation Needed

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
SA	170	48.6
A	120	34.3
D	40	11.4
SD	20	5.7

The table reveals that 82.9% of respondents support the regulation and control of fake news, while only 17.1% oppose such measures. This indicates strong public support for interventions aimed at reducing misinformation and restoring confidence in media content. Respondents appear to believe that stricter monitoring and verification measures are necessary to address the growing challenge of fake news.

4.2. ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

To what extent are media users exposed to fake news?

The findings from Tables 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9 and 4.10 reveal that media users are exposed to fake news to a very high extent. The data showed that a significant majority of respondents (82.9%) had encountered fake news at one point or another, while only a small proportion indicated that they had never come across false or misleading information. Furthermore, the frequency of exposure was found to be relatively high, as many respondents reported encountering fake news either very often or often. This demonstrates that fake news has become a common and recurring aspect of media consumption in the contemporary information environment.

The findings further indicate that social media platforms, particularly WhatsApp and Facebook, are the leading channels through which fake news reaches audiences. The popularity of these platforms among media users makes them effective tools for information dissemination. However, unlike traditional media organizations that rely on editorial policies and gatekeeping processes, social media platforms allow virtually anyone to create and share content without prior verification. Consequently, false information can spread rapidly across large audiences within a short period of time. This explains why respondents identified these platforms as the primary sources of exposure to fake news.

Another important finding is that more than half of the respondents admitted to having unknowingly shared fake news. This suggests that exposure to fake news does not merely involve receiving misleading information but also contributes to its circulation. The result highlights the difficulty many media users face in distinguishing between authentic information and fabricated content. It also indicates that fake news continues to thrive because individuals often share information without thoroughly verifying its authenticity. In addition, the study found that while some respondents consistently verify information before sharing it, many only do so occasionally. This implies that despite growing awareness of fake news, verification practices among media users remain inadequate. Such behaviour creates opportunities for misinformation to spread further within society. The findings therefore suggest that exposure to fake news is reinforced not only by the availability of misleading content but also by insufficient fact-checking habits among audiences.

The findings support the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which argues that audiences actively select media channels that satisfy their information, entertainment, educational, and social interaction needs. In today's digital era, many individuals rely heavily on social media platforms because they provide immediate access to information and facilitate communication with others. While these platforms satisfy users' needs, they also expose them to a mixture of credible and non-credible information. As users continue to seek gratification through social media, their chances of encountering fake news increase

significantly. The theory therefore helps explain why exposure to fake news remains high among media users despite growing awareness of misinformation.

The findings are also consistent with the Media Dependency Theory, which posits that individuals become increasingly dependent on media for understanding events and making sense of their environment. As media dependence increases, the influence of media content on audiences also becomes stronger. The modern information landscape has made social media a major source of news and information for many individuals. Consequently, users who depend heavily on these platforms are more likely to encounter fake news and may be influenced by it. The high level of exposure observed in this study reflects the growing dependence of audiences on digital media channels for information and current affairs.

Furthermore, the findings align with several empirical studies reviewed in Chapter Two, which established that fake news has become a global communication challenge due to the widespread adoption of digital technologies and social networking platforms. Previous studies found that social media users are frequently exposed to misinformation because of the speed and ease of online information sharing. The present study confirms these observations by demonstrating that fake news is widespread among media users in Edo State and that social media platforms remain the dominant channels of exposure.

Overall, the findings indicate that media users in Edo State are exposed to fake news to a very high extent. The prevalence of misinformation on social media platforms, coupled with inadequate verification practices among users, has created an environment in which

fake news thrives. This high level of exposure underscores the need for increased media literacy, improved fact-checking practices, and greater public awareness regarding the dangers of misinformation in the digital age.

RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

How does fake news influence public perception of media credibility?

The findings from Tables 4.11 to 4.16 reveal that fake news has a significant influence on public perception of media credibility. The results show that respondents generally expressed higher levels of trust in traditional media platforms such as television and radio compared to online media and social media platforms. While television and radio were perceived as relatively credible sources of information, trust levels declined considerably when respondents assessed online news platforms and social media channels. This suggests that the increasing prevalence of fake news has affected the manner in which audiences evaluate and judge the credibility of information sources.

The findings further indicate that social media platforms are viewed with considerable scepticism by respondents. A substantial proportion of participants expressed doubts about the reliability of information obtained from social media. This perception may be attributed to the widespread circulation of fake news, misinformation, manipulated content, and unverified reports on these platforms. As audiences become more aware of the prevalence of false information online, they are increasingly cautious about accepting information from social media as credible.

The study also found that respondents were divided regarding whether media organizations adequately verify information before publication. Although some respondents believed that media organizations still engage in professional verification processes, a significant number expressed doubts about the effectiveness of such procedures. This finding suggests that the continuous exposure to fake news has created uncertainty among media users and weakened confidence in the ability of media institutions to provide accurate and trustworthy information.

The influence of fake news on media credibility is evident in the growing scepticism demonstrated by respondents. Many individuals now question the authenticity of news reports and are less willing to accept information at face value. Instead, audiences increasingly seek confirmation from multiple sources before believing or sharing information. While this cautious behaviour may encourage critical thinking, it also reflects declining confidence in the credibility of media content.

These findings support the Source Credibility Theory, which emphasizes that the effectiveness and acceptance of information largely depend on the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of the source. According to the theory, audiences are more likely to believe information originating from sources they consider reliable and credible. However, when fake news becomes widespread, audiences begin to question the integrity and competence of media sources. The proliferation of misinformation therefore undermines public trust and damages the credibility of media institutions. The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that fake news has contributed to reduced confidence in media sources, particularly social media platforms.

The findings also support the Media Dependency Theory, which argues that individuals depend on media systems for information and interpretation of events. When audiences repeatedly encounter fake news through media channels, their trust in those channels gradually diminishes. Since media users rely on media organizations for accurate information, the presence of misinformation creates confusion and uncertainty. Consequently, audiences may begin to doubt the reliability of media messages and become more critical of information received through both traditional and digital media platforms.

Furthermore, the findings are consistent with previous studies reviewed in Chapter Two, which found that fake news significantly affects audience trust in the media. Several scholars noted that the spread of misinformation contributes to declining confidence in journalism, weakens media credibility, and creates scepticism among audiences. The present study corroborates these findings by showing that respondents perceive social media as less trustworthy and are increasingly cautious about information received through media channels.

Overall, the study concludes that fake news has a profound influence on public perception of media credibility. The widespread circulation of false information has reduced audience trust, increased scepticism, and weakened confidence in media institutions. As fake news continues to spread across various communication channels, media organizations must strengthen fact-checking mechanisms, uphold professional journalistic standards, and promote accurate reporting in order to restore public confidence and maintain their credibility in society.

RESEARCH QUESTION THREE

What is the perceived impact of fake news on media credibility?

The findings from Tables 4.17 to 4.22 reveal that fake news has a substantial and far-reaching negative impact on media credibility. The majority of respondents agreed that

the proliferation of fake news has reduced public trust in media organizations, made it more difficult for audiences to believe news reports, created doubt about the authenticity of information, and damaged the overall credibility of media institutions. These findings suggest that fake news has become one of the most significant challenges confronting the media industry in the contemporary communication environment.

One of the major effects identified in the study is the decline in public trust in media organizations. A large proportion of respondents agreed that the widespread circulation of fake news has weakened their confidence in media content. Trust is a fundamental element of effective communication, and once audiences begin to question the accuracy and reliability of information provided by the media, the ability of media institutions to fulfil their role as credible sources of information becomes compromised. The findings therefore indicate that fake news has contributed significantly to the erosion of public confidence in media organizations.

The study also found that fake news has increased scepticism among media users. Many respondents agreed that exposure to fake news has made them doubt the authenticity of news reports and question the credibility of information they encounter. This growing scepticism suggests that audiences are becoming increasingly cautious in their interaction with media content. While critical evaluation of information is beneficial, excessive scepticism may result in audiences distrusting even legitimate and professionally produced news reports. Consequently, fake news creates an environment where it

becomes difficult for audiences to distinguish between credible information and misinformation.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that fake news has altered the behaviour of media users. A significant majority of respondents indicated that they now verify information from multiple sources before accepting or sharing it. This behavioural change reflects a growing awareness of the dangers associated with misinformation. The result suggests that repeated exposure to fake news has encouraged audiences to become more vigilant and selective in their consumption of information. Although this increased verification behaviour may contribute positively to media literacy, it also highlights the extent to which fake news has affected audience confidence in media content.

Another important finding is the strong support expressed by respondents for the regulation and control of fake news. Most respondents agreed that measures should be introduced to reduce the spread of misinformation and protect the credibility of the media. This indicates that audiences recognize fake news as a serious social and communication problem that requires collective efforts from media organizations, government agencies, technology companies, and media users themselves. The support for regulation reflects public concern about the damaging consequences of misinformation on society and the media industry.

The findings support the Source Credibility Theory, which emphasizes that the effectiveness of communication depends largely on the perceived trustworthiness and expertise of the information source. According to the theory, audiences are more likely to accept and rely on information from sources they perceive as credible. However, when fake news becomes widespread, audiences begin to question the reliability of media sources, resulting in reduced trust and confidence. The findings of this study clearly demonstrate that the prevalence of fake news has negatively affected perceptions of media credibility by weakening public trust in information sources.

The findings are also consistent with **the** Agenda-Setting Theory, which suggests that the media play a significant role in shaping public attention and influencing perceptions of important issues in society. However, when fake news infiltrates media content, the media's agenda-setting function may become distorted. Audiences may struggle to identify which information is accurate and which is misleading, thereby reducing confidence in the media's ability to provide truthful and objective coverage of events. As a result, fake news undermines the effectiveness of the media in informing, educating, and guiding public opinion.

In addition, the findings corroborate previous empirical studies reviewed in Chapter Two, which established that fake news has serious implications for media credibility and audience trust. Several scholars found that misinformation contributes to declining confidence in journalism, damages the reputation of media organizations, and increases

public scepticism toward news content. The present study supports these conclusions by demonstrating that respondents perceive fake news as a major factor responsible for declining trust in the media and increasing caution among audiences.

Overall, the findings indicate that fake news has a profound negative impact on media credibility. It reduces public trust, encourages scepticism, weakens confidence in media institutions, and compels audiences to engage in additional verification of information before accepting it as true. The continuous spread of fake news poses a significant threat to the integrity and effectiveness of the media. Therefore, media organizations must strengthen fact-checking procedures, uphold professional journalistic standards, and promote media literacy initiatives to combat misinformation and restore public confidence in the credibility of the media.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of the Study

The concern that motivated this study is that the increasing spread of fake news is gradually undermining the credibility of the media, thereby weakening its fundamental role as a trusted source of information in society. According to Lazer et al. (2018), the rapid circulation of misinformation in the digital age not only misinforms the public but also erodes trust in legitimate news institutions.

To address this issue, the study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To determine the extent of exposure of media users to fake news
2. To examine the influence of fake news on public perception of media credibility
3. To assess the overall impact of fake news on trust in media organizations

The study adopted a survey research design, which enabled the collection of data directly from respondents regarding their experiences and perceptions. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed, out of which 350 were retrieved and found usable, representing a high response rate of 87.5%, which enhances the reliability of the findings.

The data collected were analysed using frequency distribution and simple percentages, and the results were presented and interpreted in Chapter Four.

The findings of this study provide important insights into the impact of fake news on media credibility.

1. The study revealed that exposure to fake news is widespread among respondents. The majority of participants indicated that they frequently encounter fake news, particularly through social media platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook. This confirms that fake news has become a common feature of the modern media environment.
2. The study found that social media platforms are the major channels through which fake news is disseminated. Unlike traditional media, these platforms lack strict editorial control, allowing users to share information without proper verification. As a result, misinformation spreads quickly and reaches a wide audience.
3. The findings showed that fake news has significantly affected public perception of media credibility. While traditional media such as television and radio still maintain a relatively higher level of trust, confidence in online and social media sources has declined. Many respondents expressed doubts about the accuracy of information obtained from these platforms.
4. Furthermore, the study revealed that fake news has led to increased scepticism among media users. Respondents indicated that they now question the

authenticity of news reports and are less likely to accept information at face value.

This has resulted in a shift in audience behaviour, with many individuals making efforts to verify information before believing or sharing it.

In addition, the findings showed that fake news has damaged the overall credibility of media organizations. The continuous spread of false information has made it difficult for audiences to distinguish between credible and non-credible sources.

Finally, the study found that there is strong support for measures to control fake news. A large number of respondents agreed that regulation and monitoring are necessary to reduce the spread of misinformation and restore public trust in the media.

In summary, the study concludes that fake news has become a significant challenge in the media environment, with far-reaching effects on public trust, perception, and media credibility.

5.2 Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that fake news has a profound and negative impact on media credibility.

The widespread dissemination of fake news has contributed to a growing erosion of trust in media institutions, particularly in the digital space. This supports the argument by

Lazer et al. (2018) that misinformation undermines the credibility of even legitimate sources of information.

The study also shows that although traditional media platforms such as television and radio still maintain relatively higher levels of credibility, the overall media environment has been affected by the presence of fake news. The inability of many audiences to distinguish between authentic and false information has further intensified the problem.

Moreover, fake news has altered the way audiences interact with media content. The tendency of respondents to verify information before accepting it indicates a shift toward more critical media consumption, but it also reflects a decline in trust and confidence in media systems. As noted by Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), exposure to misinformation can distort audience judgment and reduce reliance on credible information sources.

In essence, fake news has not only affected individual media organizations but has also contributed to a broader credibility crisis in the media industry. If left unchecked, this trend may continue to weaken the role of the media as a watchdog and a key pillar of democratic society.

5.3 Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Strengthening Fact-Checking and Editorial Processes

Media organizations should invest in robust fact-checking mechanisms to ensure that all information disseminated is accurate and credible. This will help rebuild public trust and enhance media credibility.

2. Establishment of Effective Regulatory Frameworks

Government and regulatory bodies should develop and enforce policies aimed at controlling the spread of fake news, particularly on digital platforms. However, such regulations should be implemented carefully to avoid infringing on freedom of expression.

3. Technological Intervention by Social Media Platforms

Social media platforms should deploy advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence and machine learning to detect and limit the spread of fake news. Collaboration with fact-checking organizations can further improve content accuracy (Lazer et al., 2018).

4. Promotion of Media Literacy

There is a strong need for public education on media literacy. Individuals should be equipped with the skills to critically evaluate information, identify fake news, and verify sources before sharing content.

5. Encouraging Responsible Media Consumption

Media users should be encouraged to adopt responsible behavior by avoiding the spread of unverified information. Personal responsibility plays a key role in reducing the circulation of fake news.

6. Collaboration Among Stakeholders

Addressing fake news requires a collective effort involving media organizations, government agencies, educational institutions, civil society, and technology companies.

5.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes significantly to existing knowledge by providing empirical evidence on the relationship between fake news and media credibility.

It highlights:

- The high level of exposure to fake news among media users
- The role of social media as a major channel of misinformation
- The impact of fake news on public trust and perception
- The behavioural response of audiences in terms of information verification

The study also reinforces existing theoretical perspectives on media effects by demonstrating how repeated exposure to misinformation can shape audience attitudes and perceptions.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies

Future research should focus on:

- The role of artificial intelligence in detecting and controlling fake news
- Comparative studies on media credibility across different regions or countries
- The impact of fake news on political behaviour and democratic processes
- The effectiveness of fact-checking organizations in combating misinformation

Such studies will provide deeper insights into the dynamics of fake news and contribute to the development of effective strategies for addressing its impact.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

Department of Mass Communication

Title: Assessment of the Impact of Fake News on Media Credibility

Dear Respondent,

This questionnaire is designed to collect information for academic purposes only. The study seeks to assess the impact of fake news on media credibility among media users in Nigeria. Your responses will be treated with strict confidentiality. Please tick (✓) the option that best represents your opinion.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Age: ☐ 15–20 ☐ 21–25 ☐ 26–30 ☐ 31–35 ☐ 36 and above
3. Educational Qualification: ☐ SSCE ☐ ND/NCE ☐ HND/B.Sc ☐ Postgraduate
4. Occupation: ☐ Student ☐ Civil Servant ☐ Self-employed ☐ Unemployed ☐ Other _____
5. How often do you consume news? ☐ Daily ☐ Several times a week ☐ Occasionally ☐ Rarely

SECTION B: EXPOSURE TO FAKE NEWS

6. Have you ever encountered fake news? ☐ Yes ☐ No
7. How often do you encounter fake news? ☐ Very often ☐ Often ☐ Sometimes ☐ Rarely
8. Through which platform do you mostly encounter fake news?
☐ Facebook ☐ WhatsApp ☐ Instagram ☐ X (Twitter) ☐ Blogs ☐ Television ☐ Radio
9. Have you ever shared news that later turned out to be false? ☐ Yes ☐ No

10. Do you verify news before believing or sharing it? () Always () Sometimes () Rarely () Never

SECTION C: PERCEPTION OF MEDIA CREDIBILITY

Instruction: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

SA = Strongly Agree A = Agree D = Disagree SD = Strongly Disagree

11. I trust information from television news. SA () A () D () SD ()

12. I trust information from radio news. SA () A () D () SD ()

13. I trust information from newspapers. SA () A () D () SD ()

14. I trust information from online news websites. SA () A () D () SD ()

15. I trust information shared on social media. SA () A () D () SD ()

16. Media organizations verify information before publishing. SA () A () D () SD ()

SECTION D: IMPACT OF FAKE NEWS ON MEDIA CREDIBILITY

Instruction: Indicate your level of agreement.

SA = Strongly Agree A = Agree D = Disagree SD = Strongly Disagree

17. Exposure to fake news has reduced my trust in the media. SA () A () D () SD ()

18. Fake news makes it difficult to believe news reports. SA () A () D () SD ()

19. Because of fake news, I now doubt most news stories. SA () A () D () SD ()

20. Fake news has damaged the credibility of media organizations. SA () A () D () SD ()

21. I now verify news from multiple sources before accepting it as true.

SA () A () SD () SD ()

22. Strong regulation is needed to control fake news. SA () A () D () SD ()