

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the Study

In today's society, information spreads quickly through various channels, including social media, television, and print media. However, not all information is adopted or believed by the public. Opinion leaders, individuals who are highly regarded for their knowledge and influence, play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and guiding the acceptance of information, (Agba, 2011).

Rogers and Cartano (2022) define an opinion leader as an individual who is highly influential within a certain social group and who plays a key role in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of others. These individuals are more knowledgeable about specific topics and are regarded as credible sources of information. According to the authors, opinion leaders bridge the gap between mass media and the general public by filtering, interpreting, and passing on information in a way that aligns with societal norms and values. Similarly, Weimann (2024) describes opinion leaders as individuals who exert influence over others due to their expertise, social status, or personal

connections. Unlike ordinary individuals, opinion leaders are more exposed to new ideas, actively seek information, and engage in discussions that help shape public opinion. Weimann argues that opinion leaders play a major role in the diffusion of innovation by promoting or discouraging the adoption of new trends, technologies, and policies.

According to Noelle-Neumann (1974) in Asemah (2017) opinion leaders exist in different sectors such as politics, health, technology, and entertainment. In politics, for instance, influential figures like journalists, activists, and politicians shape public opinion by interpreting policies and events, providing analysis, and framing issues in ways that align with their perspectives. These individuals act as intermediaries between policymakers and the public. They influence electoral decisions, policy debates and play a crucial role in amplifying dominant perspectives while shaping public discourse. Bennett & Manheim (2006) point out that the the rise of digital media has further amplified the role of opinion leaders. Social media influencers, bloggers, and content creators are now considered powerful voices in shaping opinions. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube enable opinion leaders to reach a large audience, making their influence even more significant. Research shows that people are more likely to trust and adopt information shared by individuals they perceive as knowledgeable and credible.

Metzger and Flanagin (2015) holds that trust is a fundamental element in the process of information adoption, as individuals are more likely to accept and act upon information from sources they perceive as credible. As the author explains, credibility which is shaped by factors such as expertise, authenticity, and consistency plays a role in how people assess and adopt information, particularly in digital environments. Expertise refers to the opinion leader's depth of knowledge, while authenticity reflects their perceived sincerity and alignment with audience expectations. Consistency, on the other hand, ensures that the opinion leader's messages remain stable and reliable over time, reinforcing trust. For example, an experienced Influencer like Aproko Doctor on X (formerly twitter) with a history of accurate medical advice is more likely to influence medical decisions than an anonymous social media commentator. As misinformation becomes more prevalent, the role of trusted opinion leaders in guiding public perception remains essential in various domains, including politics, health, and finance.

That aside, cultural and societal factors can affect the impact of opinion leaders. In some cultures, traditional leaders or elders serve as key opinion leaders, while in others, celebrities and media personalities hold major influence. The effectiveness of an opinion leader depends on how well they resonate with their audience and the values they uphold.

The World Health Organisation (2021) highlights that while opinion leaders play an important role in spreading information, there are growing concerns about misinformation. Some opinion leaders, whether knowingly or unknowingly, share false or misleading details, which can have serious effects on public understanding and decision-making. This was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when different leaders gave conflicting views about vaccines and safety measures. As a result, many people became confused and hesitant about following health guidelines, leading to delays in vaccinations and the spread of false beliefs.

This shows that even trusted figures can contribute to misinformation, making it crucial for the public to verify facts and rely on credible sources when making important choices about their health and well-being.

Given the increasing reliance on opinion leaders for information, it is essential to assess their influence on information adoption critically. Understanding their role can help in developing strategies to ensure accurate and responsible communication. This study aims to assess the Influence of Opinion Leaders on Information Adoption

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Opinion leaders play an important role in shaping public opinion and decision-making, but there is growing concern about their role in spreading false information. Many people trust these figures without checking if the information they share is true.

This raises the question of how much influence opinion leaders really have and whether their impact is always positive. The challenge is knowing which opinion leaders are reliable and how much their views affect public behaviour. Furthermore, social media has also created a new group of opinion leaders whose trustworthiness is often hard to judge. Unlike traditional experts, social media influencers may not have formal knowledge or training but still have a big impact on their followers. This makes it important to understand what makes an opinion leader effective and the risks that come with their influence on the way people accept and act on information. Hence this study examines the Influence of Opinion Leaders on Information Adoption.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study were to:

1. To examine the role of opinion leaders in influencing information adoption.
2. To identify the factors that contribute to the credibility and trustworthiness of opinion leaders.
3. To assess the impact of traditional and digital opinion leaders on public decision-making.
4. To recommend strategies for ensuring responsible communication by opinion leaders.

1.4. Research Questions

1. What are the roles of opinion leaders in influencing information adoption?
2. What are the factors that contribute to the credibility and trustworthiness of opinion leaders?
3. What is the impact of traditional and digital opinion leaders on public decision-making?
4. What strategies can be recommend to ensure responsible communication by opinion leaders?

1.5. Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will contribute to the understanding of the role opinion leaders play in shaping public perception and decision-making among university students. It will provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and media practitioners on the impact of opinion leadership in an academic setting. Additionally, the study will help students develop critical thinking skills by identifying credible opinion leaders and evaluating information sources effectively.

Futhermore, this research will assist social media platforms and content creators in understanding how students engage with digital opinion leaders. It will also inform strategies for combating misinformation and promoting responsible

communication. The study's findings will be useful for future research on opinion leadership and its influence on information adoption in higher education institutions.

1.6. Scope of the Study

This study focuses on the influence of opinion leaders on information adoption among students of the University of Benin (Uniben). Uniben was chosen as the focus of this study due to its diverse student population, representing various backgrounds, academic disciplines, and social influences. The university provides an ideal setting to examine the role of opinion leaders, as students are frequently exposed to different sources of information, including traditional media, social media, and peer influence. Additionally, Uniben has an active student body that engages in political discussions, technological advancements, and social issues, making it a suitable environment to analyze information adoption patterns.

1.7. Operational Definition of Terms

- I. Assessment: In this study, assessment refers to the process of evaluating or examining the level of influence opinion leaders have on the way UNIBEN students accept and act upon information.
- II. Opinion Leaders: These are individuals including experts, social media influencers, or community figures, who shape students' beliefs and decisions

by sharing information, insights, or recommendations that others trust and follow.

III. Information Adoption: This refers to the process by which UNIBEN students accept, trust, and use information based on the credibility of the source, particularly opinion leaders.

IV. Role: In this context, role refers to the function or impact opinion leaders have in influencing the way UNIBEN students receive, interpret, and act upon information.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter focuses on the concepts, related studies, past researches and theories closely associated with the present study. It is carried out using the following subheadings:

- I Concept of Opinion Leaders
- II An Overview of Information Adoption
- III How opinion leaders influence Information Adoption and decision-making
- IV Role of Opinion Leaders in the Digital Age
- V The Effect of Opinion Leaders on Information Adoption
- VI Empirical Review
- VII Theoretical Framework

2.1. Concept of Opinion Leaders

Opinion leaders are individuals who influence others' attitudes and behaviours due to their knowledge, credibility, and communication skills. According to Lyons and Henderson (2020), opinion leaders are trusted figures within certain communities who help interpret and spread information, most especially in areas where they have expertise. Their role is important in this digital age, as people rely on them for guidance in various domains, including politics, health, and consumer behaviour.

Similarly, Casero-Ripollés (2021) defines opinion leaders as influential individuals who mediate between mass communication and public discourse. In the era of social media, he notes that opinion leaders are no longer limited to traditional figures like journalists and politicians but now include digital influencers who shape opinions through online platforms. These leaders impact information adoption by making content more relatable and accessible to their audience.

Khamis, Ang, & Welling (2017) point out that a key characteristic of opinion leaders is expertise. They possess extensive knowledge in a particular field, which makes their opinions more credible. For instance, a technology expert reviewing new gadgets or a climate scientist discussing global warming holds more weight than an uninformed individual. This expertise allows them to provide informed information that guide public decision-making. Another defining trait is credibility. Opinion leaders must be perceived as trustworthy to maintain influence. According to Enke and Borchers (2019), credibility is built through consistency, accuracy, and ethical communication. If an opinion leader is found to spread misinformation, their influence diminishes. In contrast, those who consistently provide reliable information strengthen their authority over time.

Accessibility is also a key factor. Unlike institutions or large organisations, opinion leaders are often more approachable, engaging directly with their audience. This accessibility is evident in the rise of social media influencers, who interact with

followers through comments, live sessions, and personal stories, making them more relatable and trusted, (Hudders, De Jans, & De Veirman, 2021). A good example of such influencers is the likes of Peller on TikTok, who can sway followers to carry out a particular course of actions with just an appeal or instruction. Keller and Fay (2016) note that opinion leaders can be classified into formal and informal leaders.

1. **Formal Opinion Leaders:** Formal opinion leaders are individuals who hold official positions of authority in society, such as government officials, business executives, professors, and religious leaders. Their influence is based on their expertise, professional roles, and institutional power, making them credible sources of information. A health minister's statements on disease outbreaks or a university professor's analysis of economic trends carry weight because they are backed by experience and research. These leaders communicate through structured channels like government briefings, academic conferences, and media interviews. Due to their recognised status, formal opinion leaders have a direct impact on policymaking, public discourse, and decision-making at both local and global levels.
2. **Informal Opinion Leaders:** Informal opinion leaders, on the other hand, do not hold official positions but gain influence through personal interactions, expertise, and social presence. They include bloggers, YouTube reviewers, social media influencers, and community activists who shape public opinions

through engaging and relatable content. Unlike formal leaders, their credibility is built on personal experience, authenticity, and consistent interaction with their audience. For instance, a fitness influencer recommending a workout routine may be trusted more by young audiences than a government health agency because of their approachable and practical communication style. Informal opinion leaders are especially powerful in the digital age, where social media allows them to reach large audiences and influence trends in areas such as fashion, technology, and entertainment.

2.2. An Overview of Information Adoption

According to Cheung and Thadani (2018) Information adoption is the process by which individuals accept and use information from various sources to shape their decisions, beliefs, and behaviours. This concept is well studied in communication, psychology, and consumer behaviour. Information adoption occurs when people perceive information as credible, useful, and relevant to their needs. It plays a crucial role in areas such as health communication, marketing, and public awareness campaigns, where individuals rely on expert opinions or peer recommendations before making decisions.

Metzger & Flanagin (2020) state that the process of information adoption is influenced by several factors, including the credibility of the source. People are more

likely to adopt information from sources they trust, such as experts, reputable media outlets, or influential individuals. If the source lacks credibility or has a history of spreading misinformation, individuals may reject or question the information provided.

This is why opinion leaders, both formal and informal, play a key role in shaping information adoption, as they are often viewed as reliable sources. Zhao et al (2021) explain that social influence also plays a major role in information adoption. When individuals see that a large number of people are accepting and using certain information, they are more likely to follow suit. This is common in digital platforms where viral trends, customer reviews, and public discussions impact how people perceive and accept information. Social proof, in the form of likes, shares, and comments, can influence whether an individual believes and adopts certain information.

Another factor affecting information adoption is the perceived usefulness of the information. As described by Davis (1989), in the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), individuals are more likely to adopt information if they believe it will benefit them in some way. For example, in the health sector, people are more likely to follow medical advice from doctors if they see clear benefits to their well-being. Similarly, in technology adoption, consumers are more likely to trust product reviews if they highlight practical advantages. Cognitive processing is another important element in the adoption of information. Petty and Cacioppo (1986), in the Elaboration Likelihood

Model (ELM), people process information through two routes: the central route and the peripheral route. In the central route, individuals critically analyse information before accepting it, while in the peripheral route, they rely on surface cues like the popularity of the source or emotional appeal. This means that some people adopt information based on deep understanding, while others do so based on quick judgments.

Nickerson (2021) highlight that Information adoption is also influenced by personal biases and existing beliefs. People tend to accept information that aligns with their pre-existing views and reject information that contradicts them. This phenomenon which is also known as confirmation bias, explains why individuals may ignore credible evidence if it does not support their opinions. In political communication, supporters of a certain party may only accept news that favours their candidates while dismissing opposing viewpoints.

Notably, the rise of digital media has further shaped the way information is adopted. With the internet and social media, individuals have access to a vast amount of information, making it harder to distinguish between credible and misleading sources. As a result, fact-checking, media literacy, and the role of opinion leaders have become essential in guiding people toward reliable information. Influencers, journalists, and experts who provide accurate and well-researched content contribute

to positive information adoption, while misinformation spreaders create confusion and distrust, (Tandoc et al., 2018).

2.3. How opinion leaders influence Information Adoption and Decision-making

Cheung & Thadani (2018) state that opinion leaders play a significant role in shaping how people adopt information and make decisions. They are individuals who are knowledgeable in specific fields and have the ability to influence others through their expertise, credibility, and communication skills. People rely on them to understand complex issues, evaluate different options, and make informed choices. Opinion leaders help bridge the gap between raw information and public understanding in politics, health, technology and entertainment.

As maintained by Metzger and Flanagin (2020) the main way opinion leaders influence information adoption is through their credibility and expertise. People tend to trust information when it comes from a knowledgeable and experienced source. A medical doctor explaining the benefits of a vaccine is more likely to convince the public than an ordinary person without medical knowledge. Similarly, in technology, a well-known tech reviewer can influence consumer decisions on which gadgets to buy. When information is seen as reliable and coming from a trusted figure, people are more willing to adopt it.

Zhao et al (2021) argue that opinion leaders also simplify complex information, making it easier for the public to understand. Many topics, such as government policies, financial investments, or scientific discoveries, can be difficult for the average person to grasp. Opinion leaders break down these subjects into simpler terms, helping people process information and make informed decisions. Another way opinion leaders shape decision-making is through social influence and persuasion. People often look to them for guidance on what to believe and how to act, most especially when faced with uncertainty (Petty & Cacioppo, 2016). In elections, for example, political analysts and activists can influence voter choices by endorsing candidates and explaining their policies. In fashion, celebrities and influencers promote clothing styles that quickly become popular trends. Opinion leaders help shape public preferences and behaviours by persuading their audience.

Social proof is another factor that strengthens the influence of opinion leaders. When many people adopt a certain piece of information or follow an opinion leader's advice, others are likely to do the same. This is common on social media, where the number of likes, shares, and comments on a post can make information seem more credible and important. Opinion leaders also influence decision-making by framing issues in a particular way. The way information is presented can shape how people perceive it. A news anchor discussing a government policy in a positive light may make the public more supportive of it, while a negative presentation could create

opposition. Similarly, business leaders can frame economic issues in a way that influences public confidence in the economy, (Tandoc et al., 2018).

Nickerson (2021) aver that trust and personal connection also play a key role in information adoption. Many informal opinion leaders, such as social media influencers, bloggers, and YouTubers, build close relationships with their audience by sharing personal experiences and engaging with followers. People are more likely to adopt information and follow advice from someone they feel connected to and can relate with. For example, a fitness influencer sharing their weight loss journey can encourage others to adopt similar health habits. Finally, opinion leaders help counter misinformation and guide responsible decision-making. In an age of fake news and misinformation, trusted figures play an important role in fact-checking and providing accurate information. Scientists, journalists, and experts correct false claims and help the public make informed decisions based on facts, (Metzger & Flanagin, 2020). For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, health experts used social media and news platforms to combat myths about the virus and promote safety measures.

2.4. Role of Opinion Leaders in the Digital Age

The role of opinion leaders has evolved in the digital age, with the internet providing new platforms for influencing public opinion. Unlike traditional media, where influence was largely controlled by journalists, academics, and politicians,

digital platforms have democratized access to information, allowing individuals to establish credibility and authority in various fields. Social media, blogs, podcasts, and video-sharing platforms have enabled both experts and everyday individuals to shape public discourse, reaching audiences across geographical boundaries, (Abdullah & Lim, 2022).

Chan & Leung (2021) point out that a key role of opinion leaders in the digital age is that they help spread information quickly and efficiently. Through social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, they disseminate news and knowledge to millions of users in real time. This rapid spread of information can be beneficial during emergencies, political events, and health crises, where reliable and timely updates are essential. Nguyen & Lee (2020) explain that another significant role of opinion leaders in the digital age is shaping public discussions and trends. Digital influencers drive conversations by highlighting important social, political, and economic issues. Hashtags and viral posts can draw attention to matters that may have otherwise been ignored by mainstream media. For example, movements such as #MeToo and #EndSARS gained global attention due to the efforts of digital opinion leaders who mobilized support and engagement through online platforms.

Huang and Zhang (2021) state that opinion leaders also play a crucial role in consumer decision-making. With the rise of influencer marketing, businesses now rely on social media personalities to promote their products and services. Consumers tend to trust

peer recommendations more than traditional advertisements, making digital influencers key players in shaping purchasing decisions. YouTube tech reviewers, Instagram fashion bloggers, and TikTok beauty influencers influence consumer choices by providing recommendations and reviews.

Okoro & Anazodo (2022) outlined the following as basic roles of opinion leaders in the age of digitisation:

1. **Facilitate Engagement:** Opinion leaders in the digital space facilitate direct engagement and interaction with audiences. Unlike traditional media, where information flows in one direction, digital platforms allow for two-way communication. Audiences can comment, ask questions, and share opinions, creating a sense of community and trust.
2. **Combating Misinformation:** Another essential function of digital opinion leaders is combating misinformation and promoting fact-checking. The internet has become a breeding ground for fake news and conspiracy theories, making the role of credible opinion leaders more crucial than ever. Journalists, scientists, and educators use platforms such as LinkedIn and Twitter to correct misinformation and provide verified information. This was evident during global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, where misinformation about vaccines was countered by health experts.

3. **Political Participation and Activism:** Digital opinion leaders influence political participation and activism. Through blogs, podcasts, and social media posts, they encourage civic engagement and mobilize support for causes. Also, online activism has played a vital role in global movements, where digital influencers act as catalysts for change by educating their followers and urging them to take action. Political analysts and commentators also use online platforms to explain complex policies and provide insights into governance issues.
4. **Education and Skill Development:** Opinion leaders in the digital space contribute to education and skill development. Through online courses, tutorials, and informational content, they help people acquire new skills and knowledge (Brown & Walker, 2021). Platforms like YouTube, Coursera, and LinkedIn Learning host experts who provide free and paid educational resources, making learning more accessible to a global audience. For example, digital marketing experts offer free courses on social media strategy, helping businesses and individuals improve their online presence.

2.4.1 The Effect of Opinion Leaders on Information Adoption

Opinion leaders play a significant role in shaping how people receive, interpret, and adopt information. They influence public perception, decision-making, and the spread of knowledge in different fields, including politics, health, and social issues

(Strömbäck, 2008). In Nigeria, opinion leaders such as media personalities, religious figures, academics, and social media influencers have become key sources of information for many citizens. McQuail (2010) explains that in a country where television, radio, newspapers, and digital platforms are widely used, opinion leaders help people make sense of complex issues by providing analysis, recommendations, and interpretations. However, while their influence can be positive, it also brings challenges such as misinformation, bias, and manipulation.

Thompson (2021) points out that opinion leaders make information more accessible through digital platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp. These platforms allow them to engage directly with their followers, share insights, and clarify issues without relying on traditional media. As a result, communication has become more interactive, enabling the public to ask questions, express concerns, and seek guidance. However, the spread of information through social media also increases the risk of misinformation and false narratives. Many people struggle to verify the accuracy of the information they receive, leading to confusion and, in some cases, the adoption of misleading ideas. As a result of this, individuals and fact-checking organisations strive to counter false information and ensure that people receive accurate and credible content.

Another key effect of opinion leaders on information adoption is their ability to shape public trust and perception. In Nigeria, some opinion leaders have strong

personal or political affiliations, which can affect the way they present information. As Olayinka (2020) notes, some media personalities and social influencers promote narratives that align with their interests, sometimes exaggerating or distorting facts to gain attention or support a particular agenda. This makes it difficult for people to distinguish between objective analysis and biased opinions. As a result, individuals have to be critical of the information they consume and consider multiple sources before adopting certain viewpoints.

Furthermore, opinion leaders influence how quickly information spreads and how the public reacts to it. In the past, people relied mainly on official reports and traditional news outlets for information. Today, a single statement from a well-known influencer can go viral within minutes, shaping discussions and public attitudes almost instantly (Adeyemi, 2022). This has made information adoption more dynamic, but it also increases the pressure on public figures and institutions to manage narratives effectively. When misinformation spreads, it can quickly affect public opinion, making crisis communication and fact-checking essential in the digital age. While opinion leaders have helped bridge the gap between information and the public, their influence must be handled responsibly to ensure that the information people adopt is reliable and beneficial.

2.5. Empirical Review

Abdullah and Lim (2022) conducted a study titled *The Role of Digital Influencers in Shaping Public Opinion*. The study aimed to examine how digital opinion leaders influence information adoption and consumer behavior. Using a survey method with 500 respondents from various age groups, the study found that social media influencers significantly shape audience perceptions, particularly in product marketing and political discussions. The findings revealed that credibility, expertise, and relatability were the key factors driving audience trust. The study concluded that digital opinion leaders have a profound impact on decision-making, but it recommended that audiences be more critical of information sources to avoid misinformation. The objectives of this study and the work of Abdullah and Lim (2022) converge on the central idea that opinion leaders play a role in shaping public perceptions and influencing information adoption. Both highlight the importance of credibility, expertise, and trustworthiness in determining how audiences respond to these leaders. However, a key divergence lies in scope: while Abdullah and Lim (2022) focus mainly on digital opinion leaders and their influence on consumer behavior and political discussions, the present objectives extend beyond digital spaces by also incorporating traditional opinion leaders and emphasizing strategies for promoting responsible communication. Thus, this study builds on the existing work by

broadening the context and providing practical recommendations to ensure ethical influence.

Huang and Zhang (2021), carried out a study titled the Impact of Influencer Marketing on Consumer Behavior. The study sought to investigate the trustworthiness of opinion leaders and its effect on purchasing decisions. The study employed a mixed-method approach, combining content analysis of influencer posts with in-depth interviews of 50 regular social media users. The results indicated that opinion leaders with expertise in specific fields (such as technology or health) were perceived as more credible than general influencers. It was also found that authenticity and transparency, such as disclosure of sponsorships, played a critical role in audience trust. The study concluded that businesses should carefully select opinion leaders who align with their brand values to maximize consumer engagement. The study by Huang and Zhang (2021) aligns closely with the present objectives, particularly in examining the credibility and trustworthiness of opinion leaders and their influence on audience decision-making. Both emphasize that expertise and authenticity are central to building trust, while also acknowledging the role of transparency in sustaining credibility. However, while Huang and Zhang (2021) focus on influencer marketing and its effect on consumer purchasing behavior, the present study goes further by exploring both traditional and digital opinion leaders and their broader impact on public decision-making. Additionally, this study seeks not only to assess influence but

also to recommend strategies for ensuring responsible communication, thereby extending the conversation beyond marketing into more general societal and ethical dimensions.

Nguyen and Lee (2020) explored *The Power of Digital Movements: How Social Media Opinion Leaders Drive Activism*. The study aimed to assess the role of digital and traditional opinion leaders in shaping public decisions, particularly in social movements. Using a case study approach, the research analyzed the impact of social media campaigns like #MeToo and #EndSARS. The findings showed that digital opinion leaders played a more immediate and widespread role in mobilizing people than traditional media figures. However, the study highlighted that misinformation spread quickly in digital activism, leading to potential public misinterpretation. The researchers concluded that while digital opinion leaders play a key role in public decision-making, there is a need for regulation to prevent the spread of misleading information. The study by Nguyen and Lee (2020) shares a strong convergence with the present objectives in its assessment of both traditional and digital opinion leaders in shaping public decision-making. Like the current study, it emphasizes the influential power of opinion leaders in guiding societal outcomes, particularly in the context of activism and social change. A major point of alignment is the recognition of digital opinion leaders as more immediate and far-reaching in their impact compared to traditional leaders. However, a divergence exists in focus: while

Nguyen and Lee (2020) analyze activism-driven movements such as #MeToo and #EndSARS, the present study extends to influence and places emphasis on developing strategies for responsible communication. This broadens the discussion from case-specific activism to a more general framework of opinion leadership and its ethical implications.

These studies provide valuable knowledge into how opinion leaders influence information adoption, credibility, and decision-making. However, gaps remain. While Abdullah and Lim (2022) explored the impact of digital opinion leaders, they did not compare their influence with traditional opinion leaders. Huang and Zhang (2021) focused primarily on marketing and consumer trust, leaving a gap in understanding how opinion leaders shape public discourse. Nguyen and Lee (2020) addressed activism but did not provide recommendations on responsible communication practices. The current study aims to fill these gaps by examining both digital and traditional opinion leaders, identifying key credibility factors, assessing their role in decision-making, and proposing strategies for responsible communication.

2.6. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Two Step Flow Theory and Source Credibility theory as its theoretical Framework

2.6.1. Two Step Flow Theory

The Two-Step Flow Theory, proposed by Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet in 1948 explains how information spreads through society. The theory suggests that mass media does not directly influence the public. Instead, information flows in two steps: first, media messages reach opinion leaders, who actively consume and interpret the information; second, these opinion leaders pass the information to the general public, shaping their opinions and decisions. This process highlights the role of opinion leaders as intermediaries between media and the audience.

The theory is based on key tenets that make it relevant to the study of opinion leaders and information adoption. One major tenet is selective exposure, which means people are more likely to trust information from sources they already respect. Another is interpersonal influence, which states that personal interactions with opinion leaders shape an individual's perception of information. The third tenet is credibility, where opinion leaders gain trust because of their expertise, experience, or personal connection to their audience. These principles explain why some individuals are more persuasive in influencing others' decisions.

This theory is appropriate for the study because it explains how people adopt information based on the influence of opinion leaders rather than relying solely on direct media exposure. In today's digital world, individuals look up to social media

influencers, bloggers, and experts to interpret news, product reviews, and even political matters. Since opinion leaders are seen as trusted sources, people are more likely to accept and act on the information they provide, reinforcing the core ideas of the Two-Step Flow Theory. Furthermore, the theory is relevant because it highlights the importance of credibility and trust in information adoption. With the rise of digital platforms, people encounter vast amounts of information daily, much of which can be misleading. This makes opinion leaders essential in filtering, verifying, and interpreting information before passing it to their followers. Whether in politics, health, or business, individuals rely on these trusted figures to make informed decisions.

In conclusion, the Two-Step Flow Theory effectively explains the influence of opinion leaders on information adoption. It shows that media alone is not the primary driver of public opinion; instead, people are influenced by those they trust and follow. The theory's focus on interpersonal influence and credibility makes it highly relevant in studying both traditional and digital opinion leaders. By applying this framework, researchers can better understand how opinion leaders shape public perceptions and decision-making in today's media-driven society.

2.6.2. Source Credibility Theory

The Source Credibility Theory was propounded by Hovland and Weiss in 1951. The Source Credibility Theory explains how the perceived trustworthiness and

expertise of a communicator influence the acceptance of information by an audience. According to this theory, people are more likely to adopt information when they perceive the source as credible, knowledgeable, and reliable. The theory was developed by Carl Hovland and Walter Weiss in their study on persuasive communication, where they found that messages from highly credible sources are more persuasive than those from less credible sources.

TENETS OF THE THEORY INCLUDES:

1. Expertise: The audience is more likely to trust information from someone who has knowledge or experience in a particular field.
2. Trustworthiness: The degree to which an audience perceives the source as honest and unbiased affects how they adopt information.
3. Attractiveness and Relatability: Sometimes, people are more influenced by communicators they find relatable, likable, or similar to themselves.

The Source Credibility Theory is highly relevant to this study because it explains why people adopt information based on the credibility of opinion leaders. In the digital age, students at UNIBEN are exposed to information from multiple sources, but they do not trust all of them equally. This theory helps analyze how the credibility of opinion leaders—whether professors, social media influencers, or community figures—affects information adoption among students. The study aims to identify

factors that contribute to the credibility and trustworthiness of opinion leaders, making the Source Credibility Theory a perfect fit. It helps explain why students trust some opinion leaders over others and how this trust influences their decision-making. Additionally, the theory aligns with the study's objective of assessing the impact of both traditional and digital opinion leaders on public decision-making. Finally, the Source Credibility Theory provides a strong framework for understanding how opinion leaders shape information adoption and decision-making. It highlights the importance of expertise, trustworthiness, and relatability in determining whether people accept or reject information. This makes it highly relevant to the study of opinion leaders' influence on students at UNIBEN.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

This study adopts a survey research design, which is a quantitative method commonly used in studies involving people. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2004), surveys are often used to gather data from a sample of individuals. In line with this, the study employs a survey approach, with questionnaires as the main tool for data collection. Survey research is appropriate for this study because it is cost-effective and efficient, especially when dealing with a large number of respondents. This approach helps in understanding students' views on the use of photography in national development.

3.2. Population of the Study

The target population for this study consists of 77,000 students from the University of Benin (UNIBEN). This figure was obtained from the University Help Desk for the 2024/2025 academic session.

3.3 Sample Size

The sample size for the study was determined using Taro Yamane's formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n = sample size

N= population

e = sampling error (0.05%)²

1 = constant

Therefore n =

$$n = \frac{77,000}{1 + 77,000 (0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{77,000}{193.5}$$

$$n = 398$$

The population for this study is therefore 398

3.4 Sampling Technique

The study adopted a multi-stage sampling technique to select participants. This method was suitable as it involved a three-step process using simple random and purposive sampling techniques. In the first stage, four faculties— Arts,

communication and media studies, Environmental Science, and Education—were purposively selected from the 26 faculties and institutes in the university. Second stage was to purposively select, four departments—Mass Communication, Theatre Arts, Early Childhood Education, and Fine & Applied Arts. This departments were selected because of easy accessibility to information.

Lastly, random sampling was used to select respondents from these departments. This method involved selecting every third student from a list of students after randomly picking a starting point. This approach ensured that the sample was representative and fairly distributed.

3.5. Instrument for Data Collection

The data for this study was collected using a questionnaire, which was divided into two sections: demographic and psychographic. The demographic section gathered personal information about respondents, while the psychographic section focused on answering the research questions. A bipolar Likert scale was used to ensure clarity and precision in responses. Respondents were required to answer either "Yes or No" or rate statements using options such as "Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree." Questions 1 to 3 covered demographic details, questions 4 to 8 addressed the first research question, questions 9 to 12 focused on the second research question, and questions 13 to 15 were designed to answer the third research question.

3.6. Validity of the Instrument

To ensure the questionnaire was valid, it was reviewed by a supervisor with expertise in the subject. The supervisor assessed whether the questions were relevant and appropriate for collecting the required data. Based on feedback, necessary adjustments were made to improve the questionnaire's effectiveness.

3.7. Reliability of the Instrument

A pilot study was conducted to test the reliability of the questionnaire. Thirty questionnaires were distributed to a group of participants, and the results showed a reliability score of 0.8. This confirmed that the questionnaire was a dependable tool for collecting data.

3.8 Method of Data Collection

The data was collected through face-to-face distribution of questionnaires. The researcher personally handed out the questionnaires to respondents, who then filled them out based on their knowledge and opinions on the research topic.

3.9 Method of Data Analysis

The collected data was analysed using the simple percentage method. This quantitative approach allowed for the organisation and interpretation of data in a clear

and systematic way. The percentage method was used to measure the frequency of responses, helping to identify trends and patterns in the data.

$$\frac{\text{Total Number of Respondents}}{\text{Total Number of Responses}} \times 100$$

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Preamble

This chapter shows the information gathered from the questionnaires shared during the fieldwork. A total of 398 copies of questionnaire were handed out, and 390 were properly filled and returned, giving a response rate of 98%. Therefore, the study was based on the responses from 390 people.

4.2 Data presentation and analysis

SECTION A

This section covers the demography of respondents in the study

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by Gender

Variables	No of respondents	Percentage
Male	179	46%
Female	211	54%
Total	390	100%

Source: field survey 2025

Table 1 shows the gender distribution of the respondents. From the respondents who took part in the study, 211 were female representing a higher proportion of 54%.

Although more female participated in the research, the data also revealed a fair balance of ratio 27:23 (female 27, male 23).

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by Age

Variables	No of respondents	Percentage
15 -25	245	63%
26 -30	145	37%
31 -35	0	0%
36 and above	0	0%
Total	390	100%

Source: field survey 2025

Table 2 indicates that majority of the participants (63%), were between the ages of 15 and 25. This shows that all the participants were young adults with a strong concentration in the 15 to 25 age bracket. It implies that the study reflects the perspectives and experiences of youths within this age group.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by Department

Variables	No of respondents	Percentage
Mass Communication	164	42%
Theatre Art	101	26%
Fine Art	66	17%
Early Childhood Education	59	15%
Total	390	100%

Source: field survey 2025

Table 3 reveals that 164 (42%) respondents were from the department of Mass Communication making it the most represented group. This implies that students from Mass Communication formed the largest portion of the sample, while Early Childhood Education had the fewest participants.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents by Level

Variables	No of respondents	Percentage
100	63	16%
200	109	28%
300	81	21%
400	137	35%
Total	390	100%

Source: field survey 2025

Table 4 indicates that the highest percentage (35%) of respondents in the study were in 400 level. This implies that final-year students made up the largest group in the study, making them a reliable source for providing sufficient data for the research.

SECTION B:

This section covers questions that provided data concerning the study from the respondents.

Table 5: Opinion leaders play a significant role in shaping my opinions on important topics.

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	135	35%
Agree	120	31%
Neutral	42	11%
Disagree	60	15%
Strongly Disagree	33	8%
Total	390	100%

Source: field survey 2025

Table 5 shows that a combined 66% of the respondents affirmed that opinion leaders influence their thoughts on important issues. This shows that a majority of the respondents acknowledge the influence of opinion leaders in forming their perspectives.

Table 6: I trust information more when it comes from an opinion leader rather than mainstream media

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
Strongly agree	78	20%
Agree	79	20%
Neutral	12	3%
Disagree	100	26%
Strongly Disagree	121	31%
Total	390	100%

Source: field survey 2025

Table 6 presents the respondents' level of trust in information from opinion leaders compared to mainstream media. A larger portion strongly disagreed (31%) with the statement. The implication of this is that while some individuals trust opinion leaders, the majority still place more confidence in mainstream media.

Table 7: Opinion leaders influence my decisions when I am unsure about certain information.

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	96	25%
Agree	194	50%
Neutral	58	15%
Disagree	22	5%
Strongly Disagree	19	5%
Total	390	100%

Source: field survey 2025

Table 7 illustrates that a large percentage (50%) agreed that opinion leaders influence their' decisions when they are uncertain about certain information. This imply that majority of the respondents rely on opinion leaders for guidance when they are unsure about information.

Table 8: I usually verify information from media sources through opinion leaders before accepting it

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	56	14%
Agree	164	42%
Neutral	49	13%
Disagree	80	20%
Strongly Disagree	41	11%
Total	390	100%

Source: field survey 2025

Table 8 examines whether respondents usually verify media information through opinion leaders before accepting it. Out of the total respondents, 164 (42%) agreed, indicating that a fair number of individuals rely on opinion leaders to confirm media content. This shows that although many respondents check media information with opinion leaders, a notable portion still prefers to rely on other sources and their own judgment.

Table 9: An opinion leader’s honesty and transparency determine whether I believe their information

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	143	37%
Agree	156	40%
Neutral	75	19%
Disagree	16	4%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	390	100%

Source: field survey 2025

Table 9 shows that a combined 77% of the respondents acknowledged that honesty and transparency of an opinion leader affect their trust in the information shared. This indicates that most participants place a high value on an opinion leader’s honesty and openness when deciding whether to believe the information they provide.

Table 10: The number of followers an opinion leader has influences my trust in their opinions

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
Strongly agree	211	54%
Agree	106	27%
Neutral	23	6%
Disagree	28	7%
Strongly Disagree	22	6%
Total	390	100%

Source: field survey 2025

Table 10 indicates that a greater percentage of the respondents (54%) strongly agreed that the number of followers an opinion leader has affects respondents' trust in their opinions. This implies that for many respondents, popularity is measured by the number of followers an opinion leader has and it is a major factor in determining their credibility.

Table 11: Personal experiences shared by opinion leaders make them more credible

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
Strongly agree	139	36%
Agree	167	43%
Neutral	24	6%
Disagree	38	10%
Strongly Disagree	22	5%
Total	390	100%

Source: field survey 2025

Table 11 highlights the respondents' views on whether personal experiences shared by opinion leaders enhance their credibility. A combined majority of the participants (79%) agreed with the statement. The implication of this is that most respondents believe that when opinion leaders share personal stories and experiences, it increases their trustworthiness and makes their messages more relatable and believable.

Table 12: Opinion leaders who provide evidence or sources for their claims are more trustworthy

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
Strongly agree	142	36%
Agree	215	55%
Neutral	33	9%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	390	100%

Source: Field survey 2025

Table 12 indicates that the participants believe that (55%) opinion leaders who provide evidence or sources for their claims are seen as more trustworthy. This indicates that most respondents place high value on credibility supported by evidence, showing that transparency and fact-based communication significantly influence trust in opinion leaders.

Table 13: I rely more on social media influencers, bloggers than traditional opinion leaders like journalists and politicians

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
Strongly Agree	28	7%
Agree	69	18%
Neutral	42	11%
Disagree	146	37%
Strongly Disagree	105	27%
Total	390	100%

Source: field survey 2025

Table 13 explores whether respondents rely more on social media influencers and bloggers than on traditional opinion leaders such as journalists and politicians. Out of the 390 respondents, a significant number (37%) with the statement. This indicates that majority of the respondents still place more trust in traditional opinion leaders over social media personalities.

Table 14: Traditional opinion leaders have a stronger influence on my decisions than digital opinion leaders.

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
-----------------	------------------------------	-------------------

Strongly agree	60	6%
Agree	79	20%
Neutral	121	31%
Disagree	88	23%
Strongly Disagree	42	10%
Total	390	100%

Source: field survey 2025

Table 14 indicates that a higher percentage (31%) were neutral on whether traditional opinion leaders have a greater influence on respondents' decisions compared to digital opinion leaders. This implies that while some respondents still value traditional opinion leaders, many are undecided about which group has more impact on their decision-making.

Table 15: Traditional opinion leaders such as academics or professionals influence my understanding of complex issues

Variable	Number of Respondents	Percentage
----------	-----------------------	------------

Strongly Agree	105	27%
Agree	151	39%
Neutral	32	8%
Disagree	62	16%
Strongly Disagree	40	10%
Total	390	100%

Source: Field Survey 2025

Table 15 reveals the respondents' opinions on whether traditional opinion leaders, such as academics or professionals, influence their understanding of complex issues. A combined majority (66%) agreed that many respondents recognise the value of expert insights. This indicate that a significant number of respondents appreciate the input of traditional experts in making sense of difficult topics.

Table 16: I consider recommendations from digital opinion leaders before making important decisions

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
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Strongly Agree	88	23%
Agree	201	51%
Neutral	36	10%
Disagree	33	9%
Strongly Disagree	32	8%
Total	390	100%

Source: field survey 2025

Table 16 indicates that a majority of the respondents (51%) agreed that they consider recommendations from digital opinion leaders before making important decisions. The implication of this is that more than two-thirds of the respondents rely on advice and suggestions from digital influencers when making important choices.

Table 17: Opinion leaders should verify information before sharing it with their audience.

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
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Strongly Agree	187	48%
Agree	203	52%
Neutral	0	0%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	390	100%

Source: field survey 2025

The analysis of Table 17 shows a unanimous agreement (100%) among respondents that opinion leaders should verify information before sharing it with their audience. This complete consensus highlights the public's strong expectation for opinion leaders to uphold accuracy and credibility in their communication.

Table 18: Fact-checking should be a mandatory practice for opinion leaders

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
----------	-----------------------	------------

Strongly Agree	232	59%
Agree	158	41%
Neutral	0	0%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	390	100%

Source: field survey 2025

The data presented in Table 18 reveals that all 390 respondents (100%) believe fact-checking should be a mandatory practice for opinion leaders, with 59% strongly agreeing and 41% agreeing. This shows that audiences place a high value on truthfulness and expect opinion leaders to adopt fact-checking as a standard practice.

Table 19: Opinion leaders should disclose sponsorships or affiliations when giving recommendations.

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
----------	-----------------------	------------

Strongly Agree	132	34%
Agree	225	58%
Neutral	33	8%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	390	100%

Source: field survey 2025

Table 19 shows that a large majority of the respondents (58%) believe opinion leaders should disclose any sponsorships or affiliations when making recommendations. The data indicates strong public support for openness and honesty in opinion leadership, as disclosure helps maintain credibility and prevents conflicts of interest that may mislead audiences.

Table 20: Ethical guidelines should be established to regulate the influence of opinion leaders.

Variable	Number of respondents	Percentage
-----------------	------------------------------	-------------------

Strongly Agree	135	35%
Agree	189	48%
Neutral	66	17%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	390	100%

Source: field survey 2025

Table 20 indicates that a significant majority of the respondents support the establishment of ethical guidelines to regulate the influence of opinion leaders, with 48% agreeing. This shows that there is a clear public demand for accountability and ethical standards in the practices of opinion leaders.

4.3. Discussion of Findings

Research question one: What are the roles of opinion leaders in influencing information adoption?

Tables 5, 6, 7, and 8 were used to address the research questions concerning the roles of opinion leaders in influencing information adoption. The findings reveal that audiences relate to opinion leaders when forming opinions, verifying media content, and making decisions in uncertain situations. It also shows that among the respondents,

there is perceived influence, trustworthiness, and fact-checking roles of opinion leaders in shaping audience responses to information.

From Table 5, it is evident that a significant portion of the respondents (35%) strongly agreed and 31% agreed that opinion leaders play a major role in shaping their opinions on important topics. This combined 66% shows that opinion leaders are recognised as influential figures in the thought processes of a majority of the audience. However, 15% disagreed and 8% strongly disagreed, showing that a minority may resist such influence or form their views independently. In contrast, Table 6 reveals a more divided view on trust. While 20% strongly agreed and another 20% agreed that they trust information more when it comes from opinion leaders than from mainstream media, a larger percentage disagreed (26%) and strongly disagreed (31%). This indicates that although opinion leaders hold some level of trust among the audience, mainstream media is still seen as a more reliable source for many.

Table 7 further shows the influence of opinion leaders in moments of uncertainty. A total of 75% of respondents (50% agreed and 25% strongly agreed) said they turn to opinion leaders when unsure about certain information. This high percentage reflects the reliance on trusted voices to provide clarity or validation, particularly in a media landscape often riddled with conflicting narratives. On the other hand, Table 8 shows that 42% of respondents agreed and 14% strongly agreed that they usually verify information from media sources through opinion leaders before accepting it. However,

a notable 20% disagreed and 11% strongly disagreed, while 13% remained neutral. This indicates that while many people do seek opinion leaders for validation, a considerable portion still values independent judgment or other verification methods. These findings align with studies like those of Katz and Lazarsfeld's (1955) two-step flow theory, which emphasise that people often rely on intermediaries (opinion leaders) for information interpretation. However, the data also shows that the trustworthiness of opinion leaders is not absolute, as seen in Table 6, reinforcing the idea that influence does not always equate to trust.

Research Question two: What are the factors that contribute to the credibility and trustworthiness of opinion leaders?

Tables 9, 10, 11, and 12 were used to explore the factors that influence audience trust in opinion leaders. These findings provide information into how characteristics such as honesty, popularity, personal storytelling, and the use of evidence shape audience perception of credibility and trustworthiness. From Table 9, it is evident that a majority of respondents believe honesty and transparency are key to trusting an opinion leader's message. A combined 77% (37% strongly agree, 40% agree) affirmed this, with only 4% disagreeing and 19% remaining neutral. This shows the importance of integrity in building public trust and indicates that audiences are more likely to believe information shared by individuals they perceive as open and truthful. In Table

10, the number of followers an opinion leader has was shown to significantly affect audience trust, with 54% strongly agreeing and 27% agreeing. This combined 81% indicates that perceived popularity acts as a marker of credibility for many respondents. Table 11 further reveals that the sharing of personal experiences by opinion leaders increases their perceived credibility. A total of 79% of respondents (36% strongly agree, 43% agree) supported this view, indicating that audiences value relatability and authenticity. When opinion leaders draw from their personal lives, it makes their content more engaging and believable. Similarly, Table 12 highlights that providing evidence or sources for claims significantly boosts trust. A striking 91% (36% strongly agree and 55% agree) supported this, while no respondent disagreed or strongly disagreed. This shows a strong preference for transparency and fact-based communication, showing that audiences want opinion leaders to back their statements with verifiable proof.

Together, these findings reinforce arguments made by scholars like Hovland and Weiss (2011) who noted that the believability of a message depends largely on the communicator's perceived expertise and trustworthiness. The emphasis on evidence, honesty, and relatability further supports the idea that emotional and factual appeals must work hand-in-hand to build lasting influence.

Research Question Three: What is the impact of traditional and digital opinion leaders on public decision-making?

Tables 13, 14, 15, and 16 were used to address research questions relating to the impact of traditional and digital opinion leaders on public decision-making. The findings show the relationship between traditional and digital opinion leaders in terms of trust, influence, and decision-making. From Table 13, the data shows that a significant portion of respondents (37% disagreed and 27% strongly disagreed) do not rely more on social media influencers and bloggers than on traditional opinion leaders such as journalists and politicians. Only a small group (7% strongly agreed and 18% agreed) reported relying more on digital influencers. This shows that traditional opinion leaders still hold more trust and relevance among the majority of respondents. Table 14 supports this perspective to some extent but also reflects uncertainty. While 20% agreed and 16% strongly agreed that traditional opinion leaders have a stronger influence on their decisions, a larger portion (31%) remained neutral, indicating that many respondents are unsure about which group holds more influence in their personal decision-making. This neutrality shows an ongoing shift or blending of influence between traditional and digital figures.

However, Table 15 reveals that traditional opinion leaders most especially academics and professionals, still play an important role in shaping respondents' understanding of complex issues. A combined 66% of participants (27% strongly agreed and 39% agreed) confirmed this, which highlights the enduring respect for expert opinion in areas that require deeper knowledge or critical thinking. At the same time, Table 16

shows that digital opinion leaders are also influential in decision-making. A notable 74% of respondents (23% strongly agreed and 51% agreed) stated they consider the recommendations of digital influencers when making important choices. This reflects the increasing role of online personalities in everyday life, especially among audiences who consume most of their content on social media platforms.

These findings reflect a hybrid model of influence, where both traditional and digital opinion leaders coexist. The results align with Jenkins (2006), who explain that audiences now navigate across multiple information sources and influencer types. While trust in traditional figures like academics remains strong, the growing consideration given to digital opinion leaders shows that influence today is multifaceted and context-dependent.

Research Question 4: What strategies can be recommend to ensure responsible communication by opinion leaders?

Tables 17, 18, 19, and 20 were used to examine the ethical expectations placed on opinion leaders in the digital era. These findings show that the respondents agreed that there is a need for accuracy, transparency, and regulatory frameworks to guide opinion leadership, most especially as audiences become more discerning in their consumption of information. In Table 17, the data reveals a unanimous agreement (100% of respondents) that opinion leaders must verify information before sharing it. This

consensus shows a growing awareness of the dangers of misinformation and indicates the audience's expectation that opinion leaders serve as responsible gatekeepers of truth. Table 18 reinforces this sentiment with similarly unanimous results: all respondents agreed that fact-checking should be a mandatory practice for opinion leaders. These two tables together highlight the central importance of credibility and accuracy in the role of opinion leadership, especially in a digital environment where information can spread rapidly and unchecked.

Table 19 adds another layer by focusing on transparency. Here, 92% of respondents (34% strongly agreed and 58% agreed) believe that opinion leaders should disclose any sponsorships or affiliations when giving recommendations. This shows that audiences are not only concerned with what is being said but also with why it is being said, pointing to a desire for honesty about potential biases or commercial motivations. Meanwhile, Table 20 shows strong support (83% combined agreement) for the establishment of ethical guidelines to regulate the conduct of opinion leaders. This reflects the public's call for more structured accountability systems and suggests that voluntary ethics may no longer be sufficient in managing the growing influence of opinion leaders in public discourse. Together, these findings portray a well-informed and proactive audience that demands higher ethical standards from those who shape opinions online. The results align with normative theories of the press and communication ethics (Christians et al., 2009), which advocate for truth, transparency,

and accountability in public communication. Thus, opinion leaders are not just expected to inform, they are expected to do so with integrity and responsibility, ensuring their influence contributes positively to societal discourse.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Summary

This chapter presents a summary of the study, which aimed to assess the Influence of Opinion Leaders on Information Adoption. The study was built on four objectives which were to:

1. To examine the role of opinion leaders in influencing information adoption.
2. To identify the factors that contribute to the credibility and trustworthiness of opinion leaders.
3. To assess the impact of traditional and digital opinion leaders on public decision-making.
4. To recommend strategies for ensuring responsible communication by opinion leaders.

It was grounded in the Two Step Flow Theory and Source Credibility theory as it's theoretical Framework. In terms of the methodology, a survey research design was adopted and 398 copies of questionnaire were distributed to students of the University of Benin. From the questionnaire distributed, only 390 were retrieved and used for data analysis. The following were the key findings:

5. Majority of respondents (66%) rely on opinion leaders when making decisions on current issues, showing their strong influence. However, 64% indicated that

they do not depend on social media influencers and bloggers as much as they do on traditional opinion leaders.

6. Concerning the factors that contribute to the credibility and trustworthiness of opinion leaders, 77% of respondents agreed that honesty and transparency are essential, while they also emphasized that providing evidence and credible sources significantly boosts trust. These findings confirm that ethical communication practices remain central to opinion leaders' credibility.
7. The respondents agreed that traditional leaders such as academics play an important role in clarifying complex issues, while only 57% disagreed that they trust information from opinion leaders more than mainstream media. This suggests that while opinion leaders are influential, mainstream media continues to hold authority in public decision-making.
8. With regard to strategies for ensuring responsible communication, all respondents (100%) agreed that opinion leaders must verify information before dissemination, while 92% stressed that affiliations and sponsorships should be disclosed. They also supported the establishment of ethical guidelines, underscoring the public's call for accountability and transparency.

5.2. Conclusion

This study concludes that both traditional and digital opinion leaders are relevant in today's media environment, but their roles are evolving. Trust in traditional figures remains strong for credible and complex information, while digital influencers play a growing role in shaping everyday decisions. Importantly, audiences expect high ethical standards, including transparency and accountability, from all opinion leaders. The convergence of media platforms has resulted in a more discerning audience that values both credibility and authenticity in public communication.

5.3. Recommendations

The following recommendations were given based on the findings:

1. Both traditional and digital opinion leaders should be guided by clear ethical standards to ensure responsible public communication.
2. Opinion leaders must disclose affiliations, sponsorships, or biases to strengthen public trust and accountability.
3. Opinion leaders should adopt fact-checking practices before sharing opinions to reduce the spread of misinformation.
4. Educating the public on how to critically assess the credibility of opinion leaders will empower them to make informed choices.

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APPENDIX

Department of Mass Communication

Faculty of Arts

University of Benin,

Benin City, Nigeria.

Dear respondent,

REQUEST FOR COMPLETION OF ITEMS IN QUESTIONNAIRE

I am a Final year student of the above named department/ institution. I am conducting a research on, "An Assessment of the Influence of Opinion Leaders on Information Adoption". This research is in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of a Bachelor of Arts degree in Mass communication. You have been carefully selected for this study to provide reliable data. This study is strictly guided by research ethics which protects the anonymity of its respondents. All information you provide would be use for only academic purpose.

Thank you for your understanding and cooperation.

Yours faithfully,

Odoko Elooghene Omamomo,
Researcher.

Instruction: Please kindly tick (✓) the appropriate option below

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC

1. Sex (a) Male (b) Female
2. Age group (a) 15 - 25 (b) 26-30 (c) 31-35 (d) 36 and above.
3. Department (a) Mass Communication (b) Theatre Arts (c) Fine Arts (d) Early Childhood Education, (e) Education, Fine & Applied Arts
4. Level: (a) 100 (b) 200 (c) 300 (d) 400

SECTION B: PSYCHOGRAPHIC SECTION

5. Opinion leaders play a significant role in shaping my opinions on important topics. (a) strongly agree (b) agree (b) neutral (d) disagree (e) strongly disagree
6. I trust information more when it comes from an opinion leader rather than mainstream media. (a) strongly agree (b) agree (b) neutral (d) disagree (e) strongly disagree
7. Opinion leaders influence my decisions when I am unsure about certain information. (a) strongly agree (b) agree (b) neutral (d) disagree (e) strongly disagree
8. I usually verify information from media sources through opinion leaders before accepting it. (a) strongly agree (b) agree (b) neutral (d) disagree (e) strongly disagree

9. An opinion leader's honesty and transparency determine whether I believe their information. (a) strongly agree (b) agree (b) neutral (d) disagree (e) strongly disagree
10. The number of followers an opinion leader has influences my trust in their opinions. (a) strongly agree (b) agree (b) neutral (d) disagree (e) strongly disagree
11. Personal experiences shared by opinion leaders make them more credible. (a) strongly agree (b) agree (b) neutral (d) disagree (e) strongly disagree
12. Opinion leaders who provide evidence or sources for their claims are more trustworthy. (a) strongly agree (b) agree (b) neutral (d) disagree (e) strongly disagree
13. I rely more on social media influencers, bloggers than traditional opinion leaders like journalists and politicians (a) strongly agree (b) agree (b) neutral (d) disagree (e) strongly disagree
14. Traditional opinion leaders have a stronger influence on my decisions than digital opinion leaders. (a) strongly agree (b) agree (b) neutral (d) disagree (e) strongly disagree
15. Traditional opinion leaders such as academics or professionals influence my understanding of complex issues. (a) strongly agree (b) agree (b) neutral (d) disagree (e) strongly disagree

16. I consider recommendations from digital opinion leaders before making important decisions. (a) strongly agree (b) agree (b) neutral (d) disagree (e) strongly disagree
17. Opinion leaders should verify information before sharing it with their audience. (a) strongly agree (b) agree (b) neutral (d) disagree (e) strongly disagree
18. Fact-checking should be a mandatory practice for opinion leaders. (a) strongly agree (b) agree (b) neutral (d) disagree (e) strongly disagree
19. Opinion leaders should disclose sponsorships or affiliations when giving recommendations. (a) strongly agree (b) agree (b) neutral (d) disagree (e) strongly disagree
20. Ethical guidelines should be established to regulate the influence of opinion leaders. (a) strongly agree (b) agree (b) neutral (d) disagree (e) strongly disagree