**CHAPTER ONE**

**1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

In today’s information-driven world, the media plays a vital role in shaping public opinion and disseminating facts. However, the rise of fake news (a type of misinformation that is deliberately spread to deceive) has emerged as a significant threat to credible journalism and audience trust. According to Domenico (2022), social media have revolutionised the way individuals communicate and get in touch with each other. Fake news has become especially prevalent with the widespread use of social media platforms where unverified contents are rapidly shared. Worryingly, fake news articles have a lasting impact on a person even after it has been discovered to be false (Polage, 2012). People create fake news to disarray and confuse small-minded people (Gondwe 2024). This phenomenon has led to growing skepticism towards traditional media sources and has influenced how individuals, particularly youths, perceive and consume news. There is a clear danger, therefore, that people will be unfairly evaluated because of misleading information shared on social media (Eggleston, et al 2022). According to Folayan & Banjo (2024), Fake news is not a new phenomenon (as it has been recorded in the communication literature as ‘misinformation’ (when such false reports were not intentional) and ‘disinformation (when such reports are deliberate). Edwards et al (2021) posited that addressing the challenge of misinformation involves action from audiences, platforms and organisations of all kinds, but the slow pace of regulatory and educational change and the varied approaches – from regulation to co-regulation and self-regulation means that the effectiveness of many current interventions is unclear. The incidence of fake news in world media has come to prominence in recent times (Folayan & Banjo, 2024).

According to Mare (2013), the rise of social media changed the entire scenario, for it was when people in society started seeing themselves as being part of the media and contributing not only to the consumption but the creation of content. The implication is that these people are likely to consume fake news because it comes from a source that does not categorize them (Gondwe, 2023). This makes the introduction of media literacy imperative to uphold the core of journalism as against information disorder.

The main sources of fake news in Nigeria are non-professional journalists and the high rate of fake news has largely been due to the skilful framing by their disseminators, lack of time and skill to fact-check fake news by the audience and lack of effective enforcement of best journalism practices (Folayan, et al 2024). University students, who represent a large segment of the digitally active population, are frequent users of online platforms for news and information. In Nigeria, and particularly in Kwara State University (KWASU), students rely on a variety of sources for news, including social media, blogs and traditional outlets like newspapers and television. The infiltration of fake news into these sources may distort students’ understanding of events and erode trust in credible media. The consequences are far-reaching, ranging from misinformation about public health and politics to the decline of critical thinking and responsible citizenship.

This study therefore explores how the spread of fake news influences the trust that students place in media sources and how it affects their general perception and engagement with news content.

**1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The growing prevalence of fake news has posed a significant challenge to the credibility of media institutions. With many students of Kwara State University relying on social media for news, the boundary between factual reporting and misinformation becomes blurred. As fake news continues to spread across platforms, it threatens to undermine trust in legitimate news sources. This constant bombardment of mixed information creates what researchers term a "climate of cynicism and confusion," where students become less likely to believe accurate reporting even when presented with verifiable facts and evidence. This creates confusion, misinformation and in some cases, apathy toward news consumption.

This study therefore tends to investigate how this phenomenon affects students’ trust in media and what factors contribute to the spread and acceptance of fake news among the student population at KWASU.

**1.3 OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY**

This study seeks to address the following objectives:

1. To examine how exposure to fake news influence media source trust and audience trust among Kwara State University students.

2. To explore news consumption habits and source preferences among students at Kwara State University.

3. To examine how demographics such as age, gender, academic level and field of study influence susceptibility to misinformation.

4. To evaluate students’ current methods for verifying information and rebuild trust in credible information sources.

**1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

This study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. How does exposure to fake news influence media source trust and audience trust among Kwara State University students?

2. What are the primary sources of news and information consumption among Kwara State University students?

3. What demographic and academic factors influence students' susceptibility to fake news and subsequent trust erosion?

4. What strategies do Kwara State University students currently employ to verify information credibility?

**1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

This study is significant as it provides valuable insights to the understanding of how fake news affects media trust among the youth, especially within academic settings. The findings will be valuable to media practitioners, educators and policymakers by providing insights into students’ media habits and the impact of misinformation.

It examines how fake news impacts students’ critical thinking, trust in media and information evaluation skills, offering universities a basis to develop targeted media literacy programs. For media practitioners, the research highlights how students assess credibility, helping rebuild trust in ethical journalism. Policymakers can use the findings to inform strategies on media regulation, digital literacy and platform accountability, recognizing the influence of student trust on Nigeria’s democratic future. Additionally, by focusing on Kwara State University students, the study fills a gap in misinformation research, ultimately supporting students in the development of more effective, evidence-based interventions to combat fake news within academic settings.

**1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This study focuses specifically on undergraduate students at Kwara State University, Malete. Its thematic scope encompasses fake news consumption through various digital platforms, including social media sites (Facebook, Twitter/X, Instagram, WhatsApp), news websites, blogs and messaging applications. It examines their exposure to fake news, the platforms where they most encounter it and how it influences their trust in media. This research is limited to students’ perceptions and behaviors within the 2024/2025 academic session and does not cover other institutions or non-student populations.

**1.7 DEFINITION OF TERMS**

**Fake news:** This refers to a false or misleading information that is intentionally created to deceive people. It often uses dramatic headlines, emotional language and edited images to grab attention and trick readers into believing it's real news, even though it's not. It looks like real journalism but is meant to spread confusion or push certain beliefs.

**Media Source Trust:** This means how much people believe and rely on a specific news source. If a news outlet is seen as honest and accurate, people are more likely to trust the information it gives.

**Audience Trust:** This is the overall trust people have in the media. It shows how willing they are to believe, share or act on news they receive from different sources.

**Traditional Media:** These are older news platforms like newspapers, radio and TV. They now also have websites, but they still follow traditional rules for reporting news carefully and responsibly.

**Digital-Only Media:** These are news platforms that exist only online such as websites or social media pages. They don’t have printed newspapers or radio/TV broadcasts.

Information Verification: This is the process of checking if news is true. People do this by comparing it with other reliable sources, using fact-checking websites or looking for evidence before believing or sharing it.

**Trust Erosion:** This happens when people slowly lose trust in the media. It can be caused by seeing too many false reports, mixed messages or bias in the news.

**Misinformation:** This is any wrong or false information, whether it was shared by mistake or on purpose. It includes both lies and things people pass along without checking first.

**Media Literacy:** Media literacy is the skill to understand and think critically about media. It helps people spot biased or misleading content and create or share information in smart and responsible ways.