

LEVEL OF AWARENESS OF FAKE NEWS AMONGST UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: A CASE STUDY AT UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY

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DECLARATION

I, Nanyunja Erinah Gloria, hereby declare that this dissertation is my original work and has not been submitted for any academic purposes to any institution. For any assistance I received in this paper is fully acknowledged.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Erinah', with a stylized, flowing script.

Nanyunja Erinah Gloria S23B90/031

APPROVAL

I also certify that this dissertation was prepared by me and approved for submission specifically for the partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Bachelors Arts in Journalism and Mass Communication at Uganda Christian University.



MR. FRANK OBONYO

Date: 9th April 2026

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family who have made this achievement possible through their financial and emotional support throughout my academic journey. To my supervisor, Mr. Frank Obonyo, thank you for your guidance, support and encouragement.

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ABSTRACT

Digital communication's rapid growth has led to the spread of misinformation, and therefore fake news is getting more and more serious in the academic world. University students, who are mostly depending on the internet for academic, social, and personal information, are the ones who are mostly misled by the content. This research examines the level of awareness of fake news among students of Uganda Christian University (UCU), with a special interest in how knowledgeable students are about the issue, how often they come across fake news, how they respond to it, and the main sources of content they get their information from. A descriptive research design is used in the study employing qualitative methods to provide a thorough understanding of the issue. The data was gathered using structured questionnaires and interviews administered to a representative sample of UCU students from various faculties and different years of study. The initial analysis indicates that a considerable number of students are aware of the fake news concept in general but still have difficulty recognizing credible sources, especially on social media. The results also indicate that students are actually often confronted with fake news, the major sources being WhatsApp, X/Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok. As for the responses, some students share the information and later try to find out if it is true, often because they think it is urgent, or due to peer pressure. The research also points out that social media is the main exposure source, followed by online blogs. This research is a significant addition to the present knowledgeable digital literacy and misinformation area of interest as it points out the existing gaps in the students' verification abilities and awareness levels. The outcome of the investigation underlines the very necessity of the digital literacy programs in the whole university which is going to be directed towards providing the students with the critical evaluation skills that are needed for the proper handling of the online information.

CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.0. Introduction

The rise of digital media technologies has transformed how people access and share information. With the growth of social media and online platforms, this convenience has given rise to a growing challenge of fake news. Fake news is fabricated information presented as factual news, typically intended to mislead readers and promote sharing. Some stories may have an ounce of truth but lack any contextualizing details with no intent to deceive. This is known as misinformation. However, with disinformation, other stories will have the intent of misleading the readers deliberately leaving out details and presenting one point of view.

The impact of fake news extends beyond individual perception but it begins there, in that while the damage caused is collective, its roots lie in the perception of individuals. The prevalent reliance on online social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, X and TikTok is particularly evident among young adults especially university students who use the internet for various purposes. This increases the risk of encountering fake news at all time.

Echo chambers, being among the major drive of the spread of fake news limits exposure to diverse news sources and perspectives on social media where fake news as well run in-between. This can make it hard for these students to critically asses the accuracy of the information as it is already aligning in their existing beliefs.

This can be clearly observed during the COVID-19 pandemic when young adults in Nigeria relied on social media for information. Chikezei, (2025) noted that the notion that COVID-19 was planned by world powers in that wine, garlic, pepper, regular sex, chloroquine and men shaving

their beards maybe effective at treating the virus. They also believed that African genes and hot temperatures in regions of Africa render African people immune to the virus.

Most research focuses on effects and causes of fake news but not the extent to which students encounter/believe it. Without such data, efforts to design effective media literacy programs remain incomplete. It is therefore essential to have a deeper insight into fake news awareness, how students respond and information trust on social media platforms.

1.1 Problem statement

The dependency on social media platforms has led to an extreme rise of fake news especially amongst university students. The varying levels of awareness of fake news amongst university students and limited knowledge makes it difficult for them to identify false content. They therefore easily accept and believe which in turn comes with sharing the information thus amplifying its spread.

Consumption of fake news negatively affects their decision making which influences their opinions especially on important issues like health, politics and social matters. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, students who believed in fake news about vaccines and preventive measures risked their health and contributed to broader public health challenges.

Exposure to fake news without awareness and knowledge on how to fact check undermines trust in credible news sources which makes it hard for the students to distinguish between credible and false information thus consuming whatever the algorithm brings.

Social media is used to share excessive amounts of information daily which increases the risk of consumption and sharing of fake news. This study aims at understanding the level of awareness of fake news especially among students at UCU, the primary sources of the fake news and how they respond to them. It seeks to identify how much aware the students are and offering practical solutions to reducing the spread of fake news.

Therefore, this study sought to understand the level of awareness of fake news amongst university students at Uganda Christian University, how they respond to fake news.

1.2.OBJECTIVES

1.2.1. General objective

To investigate the level of awareness of fake news amongst students at UCU.

1.2.2. Specific objectives

To assess the level of awareness of fake news amongst students at UCU.

To determine the frequency at which students at UCU are exposed to fake news.

To identify the primary sources of through which students at UCU encounter fake news.

To examine the strategies university students at UCU use to verify authenticity of information before sharing.

1.3.Research question

What is the level of awareness of fake news amongst university students at UCU?

How frequently are university students at UCU exposed to fake news?

What are the primary sources through which students at UCU encounter fake news?

What strategies do university students at UCU use to verify authenticity of information before sharing?

1.4. Significance of the study

This study is significant because it provides valuable insights on the level of awareness of fake news amongst university students, showing how informed they are, if they can identify and how they respond to fake news in this digital era. Here are some key points highlighting why this study is important.

Critical evaluation of online resources:

Social media is characterized by information overload with no gatekeeper to verify accuracy. This study will help students to make a critical evaluation before consuming and sharing information. They will therefore have the ability to assess the credibility of online news and make informed judgements.

Easy identification of fake news:

This study highlights different media practices that will support in the easy detection of fake news for example, students will be able to assess the reliability of the source, analysing linguistic and visual features.

Media literacy programs to enhance students' critical thinking:

By examining how students analyze, verify and interpret media content, the study emphasizes the need for media literacy that empowers students at UCU to think independently and question

information sources. This will promote responsible media consumption and informed participation in the society.

Easy identification of the primary sources of fake news.

A number of students at UCU consume every information that appears online without questioning its source or authenticity. The study aims at helping students know the importance of identifying credible sources, their purpose and reliability. This will support responsible sharing of information and academic integrity.

Reduces unintentional spread of fake news.

In today's digital era, students are exposed to a vast, unfiltered amount of information. They then tend to share any information they come across without verifying its authenticity. The study will emphasize the importance of embracing various skills that will combat fake news thus reducing the sharing and spread of fake news.

The study highlights the need for development and enlightenment of strategies that will reduce on fake news. In this case, the students' ability to distinguish between credible and false information will be strengthened thus fostering a responsible use of digital media.

1.5.SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.5.1. Geographical scope

This study seeks to investigate the level of awareness of fake news amongst university students at Uganda Christian University Mukono campus. It aims at understanding what fake news means to them, where they usually get their news, whether they can distinguish real from fake news or just believe whatever they consume and how frequently they are exposed to fake news.

The study ultimately focuses on undergraduate students from different faculties as they will represent the group that consume all types of information without filter. It therefore restricts examining staff members and students from other universities as this will give a focus and a centered area for the research.

The university students are the focus of the study as they are the demographic that is highly active on all the digital platforms. They tend to rely on social media for news and academic purposes. They are therefore at a higher risk of sharing fake news as their ability to distinguish truth from fake affects their credibility of public information in the society.

1.5.2. Content scope

The analysis of this study is intended to inform the different solutions like media literacy, fact checking skills and tools that will help students in detecting fake news and reduce on unintended sharing. This will foster an informed audience that critically evaluates all the information and their sources before consuming and sharing news.

1.5.3. Time scope

The times scope if this study is from a period of September 2025 – December 2025. This period also aligns with the university's semester schedule, making it suitable for reaching a representative sample of students across different faculties and year levels.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORATICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0. Introduction

Diffusion of innovations theory explains the passage of a new concept through stages of adoption by people participating in or using the idea. According to Studocu it is a framework that explains how new ideas/technology are spread and are adopted by individuals/groups over time.

2.1. History

It was first proposed by Everett Rogers in 1962 and has since been widely used in various fields. Everett Rogers published the book 'Diffusion of Innovations' which laid the foundation of the modern diffusion theory. He synthesized existing research and proposed the diffusion process. He identified five stages of the innovation-decision process; knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation.

Over the years, researchers have expanded and refined the diffusion of innovation theory. They have introduced additional concepts and models to enhance its explanatory power. Rogers' work focused on individual adoption decisions but subsequent research incorporated social networks, communication channels and contextual factors into the theory. The theory has then been used in various fields.

Overall, the historical development of the diffusion of innovation theory has been characterized by continuous refinement and expansions. Researchers have built upon earlier work and applied the theory to different context, making it a valuable framework for understanding the spread of innovations.

2.2. Assumptions of the theory

The theory assumes the innovations are generally positive and should be adopted by all groups. In relation to the study, it assumes that the information (including fake news) spreads through social media platforms and is adopted by different groups in a manner similar to innovations.

Diffusion of innovations theory assumes a linear progression through the stages of adoption. In relation to the study, exposure to news content/information (including fake news) follows a staged process from the exposure of content to consumption and a shaped perception to sharing of that information similar to innovations adoption.

It assumes that individuals are responsible for their ability or inability to embrace innovation. In relation to the study, individuals are responsible for their engagement with the news content including fake news and their consumption, sharing or rejection of such information depends on their personal judgement and critical evaluation.

2.3. Relation of the theory to the study

The diffusion theory proposed by Everett Rogers is a framework that explains how new ideas and technologies spread and are adopted by individuals/groups overtime. In relation to the study, fake news as an innovation spread through a social system via various communication channels for example social media platforms.

The theory explains the process of the adoption of the innovation in different five staged including knowledge where it is the viewed as the first step in the diffusion of innovation. In this case, the adopter is first exposed to the innovation and has limited information to make a decision of either adopting to the idea or not. This is relevant to the study as it shows how students first become aware of the fake news before consuming or sharing it.

Persuasion comes in as the second stage of adoption in the diffusion of innovation. In this stage, the adopter is open to the idea for purchase and is actively seeking out information concerning the innovation to make an opinion about the idea. Similarly to the study, the students who have been exposed to the concept of fake news begin to formulate attitudes and opinions about the information that they have received online.

The third stage of the theory is decision and here the adopter must make a decision after weighing the pros and cons of the innovation to either reject or accept the idea. In relation to the study, the students in this case, make a decision to either adopt or reject any information that they receive online whether it is fake or not. However, this study is examining how best these students make a proper evaluation before consuming whatever they find on social media platforms.

Implementation as the fourth stage in diffusion of innovations theory, the adopter after making a decision chooses to use the innovation in practice. Relating to the study, the students take actions according to what they have consumed which in this case is fake news.

Lastly, the confirmation stage has adopters making reinforcements of their decisions after they have already adopted the innovation. They can be convinced that the innovation works perfectly well for them to continue using it or to just abandon it if it never worked well for them. In the case of this study, if the students continue receiving information that is in line with what they had already consumed (fake news), their decision to continue acting on that information is reinforced.

The diffusion of innovation theory explains the different categories of adopters that participate in using the new idea. These include, the innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards. Clay Halton shows how innovators and early adopters, are open to the possibility of the risks that come with trying out new ideas yet laggards fall in the category of people that lag behind

when it comes to adoption of innovations. Similarly to the study, the theory explains why some students become aware of fake news faster than others.

Communication channels in the diffusion of innovations determine how fast the innovation/idea is spread and shared in the community. The theory in relation to the study explains how social media platforms for example TikTok, X and Facebook spread false information and the algorithm of the news content increase the consumption and spread of fake news amongst students.

The speed of adoption varies according to the different adopters as explained by Clay Halton. The study shows that students' access to fake news on the social media platforms also varies depending on a number of factors.

3.0. LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE STUDY

The extensive use of digital media today has come with excessive information flow with different multiple sources and many of them unauthorized giving a leverage to the constant spread of fake news especially to university students. This is because they highly depend on social media platforms for information and academic purposes increasing their vulnerability to exposure to false information which in turn shapes their perception. This literature review assesses the current research on the level of awareness of fake news amongst university students showing how well students recognize, respond and their sources to fake news.

Duong and Tran's research says that there is a high reliance on the social media platforms for example WhatsApp, X, Facebook and especially TikTok amongst university students. These turn out to be the primary sources through which students encounter fake news. TikTok's unique format allows for the rapid dissemination of content, including news and information making it an ideal platform for information gathering and consumption. (Su, 2023). However, this convenience comes with the spread of harmful fake news due to its low barrier to entry.

According to (Maxime Kops et al., 2025), young people often expressed high confidence in their judgments, however, they struggle to detect false information and thus respond passively often ignoring rather than countering false information. Despite the fact that their level of awareness varies, due to information overload, it is difficult for them to distinguish right from fake. This means that self-reported awareness does. The advancing technology is at some point being exploited for the spread of fake news.

Research made by (Fielden et al., 2018) shows that social media is one of the factors that proliferate the spread of fake news with many anonymous online pages. The rapid pace of dissemination of

unverified content leaves little room for critical assessment of its credibility by the university students. The overload online unfortunately doesn't allow rigorous fact checking.

Furthermore, the research reveals some of the factors that hinder these students to critically assess every information online despite their varying level of awareness of fake news. (Alonso-Lopez et al., 2021) says that unlike traditional news outlets, social media platforms especially TikTok often lack context and citations needed to verify claims making it hard for users to distinguish credible information yet it is becoming a more and more popular crucial platform for acquiring political information and news amongst the young demographic (Newman et al., 2021).

Often, students use tactics that are useful but not always accurate. University students typically rely on their own knowledge to reduce effort when checking for false information. They rarely carry out a thorough fact-checking procedure. This tendency to overlook thoroughness could expose students to fake news that already aligns with their existing beliefs or knowledge.

Research indicates that students' reactions to content are influenced by its emotional tone. Students are more likely to believe or share emotionally engaging content, even when its accuracy is questionable, according to research from Harbin Engineering University. Additionally, students' perceptions of credibility are influenced by social engagement metrics like likes, shares, and comments, according to Avram et al. (2020). High engagement on these platforms and their content may lead students to accept or spread false information without critically evaluating the information.

Students' capacity to critically assess information is limited by the absence of media literacy training. According to Orhan (2023), incorporating media literacy instruction into university curricula greatly improves students' resistance to false information.

This literature review indicates that university students find themselves in a contradictory situation about fake news in that they are aware of the matter but show different levels of detection and verification actions. They are aware of the impact of fake news on social media and acknowledge it as an important issue, but at the same time, their ability to tell fake news from real news is not that good, which exposed the division between knowledge and performance.

The role of social media in how the students face and comprehend the fake news is an aspect mentioned by the literature as well. Duong and Tran (2024) in their qualitative research about the university student TikTok users, found out that students are aware of the misinformation that is being spread on the platform. Nonetheless, trust in the TikTok content is often determined by the factors such as creator's credibility, engagement metrics, and familiarity, which means that entertaining or highly engaging content may be considered as trustworthy even if it is not factually correct. This reflects a major weakness on visual and quick-paced platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and WhatsApp widely used by African university students where misinformation can spread tremendously because the content is short, convincing, and social endorsed. In case of Uganda with WhatsApp being the most preferred among students, the similar role of peer influence and group-based messaging in the fake news susceptibility may be expected.

The studies have confirmed that university students from all over the world are very much affected by fake news but are usually too confident in their ability to recognize it yet their perceived skills still lack and are not effective. The most important factors in detecting fake news are still the skills of critical thinking and media literacy, whereas social media platforms—particularly those which are mostly visual or viral pose additional challenges and influence the students' awareness and susceptibility. Even though there are valuable insights across different cultural contexts, one aspect remains that there are still considerable research gaps in the case of African and more so Ugandan

universities. Conducting institution-specific research at UCU to fill these gaps will not only promote the academic understanding of fake news awareness but will also provide a direction for the effective interventions that are meant to develop and strengthen students' critical engagement with digital content.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

4.0. Introduction

This chapter introduces the methods used to collect data about the level of awareness of fake news amongst university students at Uganda Christian University. It presents and describes the methodology used, research design, area of study, population, sampling procedures and data collection.

In this study, the descriptive qualitative method was used to gather information about the topic of study. The various methods of data collection that were used include oral interviews and survey questionnaires. This was conducted using students at Uganda Christian University to analyse their knowledge of fake news, their sources and how they verify the authenticity of the information before consumption and sharing.

Most of the students gave their response through questionnaires and others were interviewed orally about the topic of study. The questions were open ended questions to allow the respondents to give an in-depth response about the topic. This helped in collecting in-depth data that was used to analyze the students' awareness of fake news, where they get the news and how they respond to it.

Literature reviews were used to collect secondary information majorly from the written documents and articles that gave an insight and an understanding of the students' awareness of fake news.

The study's objectives were as well complemented by the literature review through the provision of background knowledge and supporting evidence related to the topic of study.

4.1. Research design

This study was conducted through the use of qualitative methodology to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic with students, digital media and fake news as the major subjects used in the study. The method was used because it employed non-numerical data, in-depth and in-person interviews to get a deeper insight and experiences related to the study. The qualitative method was used to investigate the research questions that gave responses to the problem that has not been thoroughly examined. Ultimately, through this method there was an understanding of the students' awareness of fake news, the sources that provide information online and how these students respond to every kind of news they come across on different social media platforms. The methodology was therefore applicable to the study.

4.2. Area of study.

The area of this study was Uganda Christian University, Mukono campus, Plot 67-173, Bishop Tucker Road Mukono.

4.3. Population

The study's population focused on university students specifically at Uganda Christian University as a representative case study. The students at Uganda Christian University were chosen because they are highly active on digital media where fake news is mostly detected. They rely so much on social media for news and academic purposes. They therefore have the highest percentage of consuming fake news online. Another reason is that students' ability to distinguish truth from fake affects their credibility of public information which is why this study is very important as knowing their awareness level and their response to fake news is crucial in combating fake news.

4.4. Target population.

The study's conduction consisted of 15 participants from the Journalism undergraduate students at UCU. These respondents fit the study's target population as they more likely to encounter fake news since they consume, produce, and analyze news as part of their academic work.

4.5. Sampling Procedure.

For the sampling procedure, the purposive sampling was used to choose respondents for the study. According to the Cambridge University Press (2024), purposive sampling refers to the population sampling process in which a researcher selects research participants based on their presence in a population of interest, characteristics, experiences and other criteria. The sample selected is used as study subjects to represent a group or population that is the target of the study.

University students were considered suitable for this sampling technique for several reasons which include;

These students are active consumers of the digital content where fake news highly circulates. Their exposure to fake news is quite high as they depend on social media platforms for information and academic purposes. This makes them ideal participants for assessing their level of awareness of whatever they consume online.

Their ability to distinguish truth from falsehood affects their credibility of public information. This gives leverage for being analysed for their awareness of how they respond to fake news on digital media.

They align with the study's objectives. The objective being understanding the university students' level of awareness of fake news, selecting participants who are currently studying ensures that the sample directly fits the target population.

4.6. Data collection.

The data collection involved the use of qualitative approach where individuals were given survey questionnaires and interviewed orally. This approach ensured collection of in-depth, descriptive and detailed information of the students' awareness of fake news.

These methods especially oral interviews enabled participants to freely express their thoughts without limitation. The survey questions on the other hand included open ended questions that were given to a wide sample of university students at UCU.

The collection of data was collected within the study periods and only those students that are enrolled at Uganda Christian University. Most of these interviews were scheduled depending on the participants scheduled time.

4.7. Ethical considerations.

The data collection followed an ethical consideration where the participants were informed about what the study is and the purpose of the study. There was therefore no information that was taken from the respondents without their consent. It was as well made clear that the study was strictly for academic purposes and nothing else.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF DATA AND FINDINGS

5.0. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the data that was collected from our respondents specifically the journalism students of Uganda Christian University to understand the level of awareness of fake news amongst university students. The information collected was based the following four research questions of the study:

1. What is the level of awareness of fake news amongst university students at UCU?
2. How frequently are university students at UCU exposed to fake news?
3. What are the primary sources through which students at UCU encounter fake news?
4. What strategies do university students at UCU use to verify authenticity of information before sharing?

The study employed a qualitative research design where students were given open ended questions to answer in order to understand their level of awareness of fake news. The different themes emerged from this collection that presented the students' understanding of fake news.

Below are the themes that emerged from the collection of this data.

5.1. Understanding of fake news.

The data collected showed that students have a shared understanding of fake news as false and misleading information that is disseminated through online media platforms intending to deceive the public.

- Question 1: What does 'fake news' mean to you?

Student 1: Fake news is fabricated information that meant to distort or deceive the public.

Student 2: Fake news means information that is false.

Student 3: False information disseminated on the media.

Student 4: This is wrong information that is meant to disrupt public perception of different ideologies.

5.2. Student perceptions of fake news impact

The students showed a perceived seriousness of fake news as an issue since it is able affect how they interpret information they come across online.

- Question 2: In your opinion, how serious is the problem of fake news amongst university students?

Student 1: It is very serious since most of the news at the university comes from social media.

Student 2: Fake news is a vital topic because it can affect how university students perceive or interpret information. Through fake news, students can miss lectures and as well as accept information that is valid.

Student 3: There is a high spread of false news mainly because of the rise in the use of social media.

5.3. Recognition of fake news online.

A number of students admitted that they often recognize information that is not right in case they find it online. Others on the other hand did not show a consistent recognition of fake news.

5.4. Social media as the main drive of fake news.

The students said that most of the information they find comes from social media platforms with TikTok, WhatsApp and X as the mostly mentioned social media platforms that disseminate fake news at a very high speed. However, TikTok came out as the dominating platform for fake news for all topics. For example, politics, entertainment and health.

- Question 3: Which platforms or sources do you most often encounter fake news on?

Student 1: TikTok, X

Student 2: WhatsApp, X

Student 3: TikTok, WhatsApp

Student 4: TikTok

Student 5: X, TikTok

5.5. Ability to identify and verify fake news.

Students showed a consistency in how they identify and verify fake news in that as others have confidence that they can verify with specific tools, others are still uncertain when it comes to identifying and verifying fake news. Many said they ask around if they are unsure of the information and others mentioned that they cross check with other verified and credible sources.

- Question 4: What steps do you take to verify information when you are unsure whether it is true or not?

Student 1: I ask people around me

Student 2: I check for the same story on other verified media house accounts

Student 3: I identify the source, check for authenticity and finally cross check with other credible sources.

Student 4: I ask around and make research on credible apps like google.

- Question 5: Are there any specific tools you rely on to verify information?

Student 1: No

Student 2: Pim eye and Tin eye

Students 3: No, I don't have any specific tools

Students 4: Fact checking websites, image verification, general research.

5.6. Need for media literacy.

Many students emphasized the need for media literacy in universities to help students with understanding the right way to verify information before sharing it. Others said that Universities should intervene and equip students with fact checking tools because fake news is a serious issue now.

- Question 6: What strategies or solutions would help students at UCU verify information more effectively before sharing it?

Student 1: They should make extensive research on the news and ensure credibility of the source.

Student 2: Media literacy lessons, lessons on fake news and how to fact check.

Student 3: Establishment of fact checking tools to help combat against fake news at UCU.

Student 4: Teaching them how to use fact checking tools

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.0. Introduction

This chapter discusses in detail what is presented in chapter four in relation to the literature review and the theoretical framework (diffusion of innovation theory). The data is discussed based on the themes that emerged from the responses of the students understanding their level of awareness of fake news and how they respond to it.

6.1. Discussion of the results on the theme based on the research question one: Level of awareness of fake news amongst university students.

As discussed in chapter one, this study is focused on understanding the level of awareness of fake news amongst university students at UCU and how they respond to it. The research based on the survey carried out on these students revealed that students have an understanding or knowledge on what fake news is and almost all of them have a shared explanation of how each of them understand fake news. As explained in the existing literature review and the research made on the study, the students' explanation of what fake news is aligns with the literature review which as well defines fake news as false information presented as factual news with an intention of distorting public discourse. This shows that students are actually aware of what fake news is but their awareness doesn't guarantee effective identification and verification of fake news.

Many noted that they fairly understand fake news which supports earlier research which argues that while young people may conceptually understand fake news, they often struggle with distinguishing credible information from misinformation in real-world digital environments.

According to the diffusion of innovations theory, amongst the processes of adoption of the innovation include knowledge. In this case, awareness of fake news represents the knowledge stage where individuals get to know of the innovation before consuming it. Students are aware and recognize fake news as a problem/concern.

6.2. Discussion of the results on the theme based on the research question: Frequency of exposure to fake news amongst university students.

The findings of the study show that students are frequently exposed to fake news mainly through social media platforms. Amongst the students that responded to the survey, many admitted that they are often exposed and recognize fake news. The reason for this high exposure according to the literature is because students are dependent on social media platforms which holds a good multitude of fake news which shapes their perception and attitude. Others noted that they sometimes receive forwarded messages that is false and misleading. This frequent exposure shows why students perceive fake news as a serious concern as it affects their academics, perception and attitude.

6.3. Discussion of the results on the theme based on the research question: Primary sources through which students encounter fake news.

Students reported that social media platforms turn out to be the primary drive for fake news. The extensive use of digital media today has come with excessive information flow with different multiple sources and many of them unauthorized giving a leverage to the constant spread of fake news especially to university students. The students highly depend on multiple platforms for information and news. These include; TikTok, X and WhatsApp. The findings revealed that these three platforms are the primary sources of fake news with TikTok emerging as the most dominant

platforms followed by WhatsApp and X. This aligns with the existing literature review that talks of TikTok's unique format of disseminating content including news and information. TikTok having a low barrier entry of information gives leverage for fake news to spread. It is also highly visual and its algorithm allows more of engagement than accuracy. Students reported encountering fake news on a wide range of topics including politics, entertainment, and health.

According to the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, one can consider social media channels as communication means that facilitate the spread of innovations which may be both accurate and false. The way that TikTok functions is amusing to the users which shows that it is highly compatible with students' way of living, thus making it a very efficient diffusion channel. However, its features in turn, allows for the fast spread of fake news that is usually hard to verify.

6.4. Discussion of the results on the theme based on the research question: Strategies used by the students to verify information.

The findings of the study show that as much as students recognize fake news as a pressing issue, they quite inconsistent when it comes to verifying the accuracy of the information. Some of the students are confident in their fact checking skills, however, they lack the required and necessary skills that constitute verifications. They at many occasions struggle with detecting false information thus making it difficult for them to distinguish fake from right. The information overload is by far the biggest reason as to why these students fail to detect false information.

From the students' responses, the most common practices they practically use include; cross-checking information with verified media outlets, conducting general online searches and asking their peers. However, the pretext of inquiring from their peers if the information is right can also put them at risk of continuous consumption of fake news because these peers are as well ignorant

at some point in that aspect. Other students noted that they employ the use of fact checking tools like pin eye. They though fail to consistently use them the right way and so remain uncertain of the authenticity of the information.

Amongst the themes that emerged from the findings of the study included the need for media literacy. Students were asked the necessary solution that will help them strengthen their verification skills and teach them the need for critical thinking and evaluation. Many of them proposed the introduction of media literacy lessons, training on fake news identification, and institutional provision of fact-checking tools. These findings emphasize the research that suggests the need for critical thinking and evaluation amongst university students which will help them verify and detect fake news.

These findings support the Diffusion of Innovation Theory which explains how students at university become aware of fake news and how they conduct verification activities. Most of the students are at the knowledge and persuasion stages, as they identify fake news as an issue but have not gone through the process of verification in a consistent manner. The absence of institutional support and the fact that students rely on their peer groups to verify information puts them at a risk of consuming fake news. The theory explains why mere awareness is not enough thus encouraging promoting media literacy innovations.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

7.0. Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusion and recommendations of the study based on the findings discussed in chapters four and five. The study sought to examine the level of awareness of fake news among journalism students at Uganda Christian University (UCU), the frequency of their exposure to fake news, the primary sources through which they encounter fake news, and the strategies they use to verify information before sharing it. The chapter also provides recommendations that will help in combatting fake news generally but mostly amongst university students.

7.1. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the level of awareness of fake news amongst university students and how they respond to it. It was following the research problem and research questions mainly focusing on their level of awareness and their response to fake news.

From the findings, journalism students of Uganda Christian University have a general awareness and can even conceptually understand what fake news is. The majority of students explained fake news as fabricated or misleading information that is spread to deceive the public, which is compatible with the definitions derived from the academic studies cited in the literature. This, therefore, suggests that students are at the knowledge stage of the Diffusion of Innovation Theory, which recognizes that awareness of a problem.

The study, however, shows that knowing about the problem does not really lead to the correct identification and checking of fake news. Students acknowledge that fake news is a major problem,

especially because it affects their studies and their social lives, but a large number of them are unable to distinguish trustworthy from misleading news. This finding aligns with the research that claims that young people may have a theoretical understanding of misinformation but they do not have the necessary skills to verify it practically.

Regarding the verification strategies, the study reports that students use inconsistent methods, like asking peers. Some of the students mentioned the use of fact-checking tools, but most of them don't have the necessary skills, confidence, or consistency to use these tools effectively.

This study concludes with revealing the need to adopt media literacy programs amongst university students to help them identify the fake news, effectively use the fact checking tools and also critically think and evaluate the news and information before consuming and sharing.

7.2. Recommendations

From the study, the following recommendations emerged that will be used to help in combating fake news.

This study recommends the need to integrate media literacy programs into the academic curriculum to help students understand the effective way of verifying fake news.

The institutions should ensure that students are taught how to use fact-checking tools in an effective way and given the various ways of checking whether the information is correct other than relying on their peers for the right information.

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