

INFLUENCE OF FAKE NEWS ON ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF NIGERIAN STUDENTS: A STUDY OF LEGACY UNIVERSITY, OKIJA, NIGERIA

ONUEGBU, OKECHUKWU CHRISTOPHER, Ph.D

Department of Journalism and Media Studies,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
08061506936
oo.onuegbu@unizik.edu.ng

ANUNIKE, OGONNA WILSON, Ph.D

Department of Mass Communication
Federal Polytechnic, Oko.
ogoanunike@gmail.com

&

ABODUNRIN, KEMI, Ph.D

Department of Mass Communication,
Edo State University Iyamho
abodunrin.kemi@edouniversity.edu.ng

Corresponding author: oo.onuegbu@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

The study was aimed at ascertaining the influence of fake news on academic performance of Nigerian students with a focus on students of Legacy University, Okija, Anambra State, Nigeria. It was hinged on cultivation theory with five study objectives which are to: assess the level of exposure of Legacy University Okija students to fake news on social media platforms, identify the social media platforms Legacy University Okija students mostly encounter fake news; determine the influence of fake news on the academic performance of students of Legacy University, Okija; examine how fake news influences the academic performance of students of Legacy University, Okija, and ascertain the media literacy among Legacy University Okija students in identifying and verifying fake news. It tested one hypothesis to establish relationships between exposure to fake news and academic performance of the students. The study adopted descriptive survey design and administered structured questionnaire on 260 respondents chosen based on Krejcie & Morgan (1970) sample size recommendation. The study found that exposure to

fake news affects students academically. It was also found that fake news could influence the students CGPA due to academic anxiety and other factors. It was concluded that exposure to fake news had a significant relationship to students' academic performance and this could lead to low CGPA. The study hereby among other things, media literacy training and restraining among the students for easy detection and dismissing of fake news.

Keywords: Academic performance, CGPA, Fake news, Social media influence, Legacy University, Nigeria

Introduction

The term "fake news" which gained global attention in the 2016 United States presidential election, entails fabricated, false, untrue or deliberately presented misleading information in the mass media whether the new or mainstream media. But situating it under the academic context for the purpose of this study, fake news is false, misleading, untrue and unverified information disseminated mostly on social media by the students. This includes information about school activities such as lecture, examination, continuous assessments, among other thing that can easily affect the students' academic performance. Academic performance is generally referred to as the outcome of education or extent in which a student has achieved or attained educational goal (Narad & Abdullah, 2016).

In Nigeria, it could be measured through scores obtained by students by attending class or lecture, participating in examinations, and continuous assessments (CA) such as test, group or practical work, leading to a Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA). Also, classification of grading system adopted by institutions could amounts to a student graduating with a First Class, Second Class (Upper or Lower) or even Pass. However, there are several factors contributing to academic performance of Nigerian university students. This includes individual or personal effort (like study habits, intelligence, time management or motivation), institutional factors (quality of teaching or teaching methodology, learning resources and class size), and environmental factors (peer group influence, socio-economic background,

exposure and consumption of social media) (Mgbedo et al., 2024; Onodugo, 2025). This study considers academic performance in terms of students' self-reported CGPA range, class attendance, assignment completion, examination and perceived changes in academic productivity associated with fake news consumption at Legacy University, Okija, Anambra State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Fake news has grown to become a major challenge around the world, and Nigeria is never an exception. It affects all sectors. Unfortunately, there is a dearth of empirical studies that specifically examine its influence on the academic performance of university students, particularly within the context of private universities such as Legacy University, Okija. Most existing studies on fake news in Nigeria have focused on its political, health and social implications, among others with relatively little attention paid to its educational consequences. This creates a significant knowledge gap that this study seeks to fill. It is against this background that this study investigates the extent to which fake news affects the academic performance of Legacy University students, with a view to understanding the scope of the problem and proffering practical recommendations for mitigating its adverse effects on the academic pursuits of Nigerian students.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

1. To assess the level of exposure of Legacy University Okija students to fake news on social media platforms.
2. To identify the social media platforms Legacy University Okija students mostly encounter fake news.
3. To determine the influence of fake news on the academic performance of students of Legacy University, Okija
4. To examine how fake news influences the academic performance of students of Legacy University, Okija
5. To ascertain the media literacy among Legacy University Okija students in identifying and verifying fake news.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the level of exposure of Legacy University Okija students to fake news on social media platforms?
2. What are the major social media platforms through which Legacy University Okija students encounter fake news?
3. What is the influence of fake news on the academic performance of students of Legacy University, Okija?
4. How does fake news influences the academic performance of students of Legacy University, Okija?
5. What is the level of media literacy among Legacy University Okija students in identifying and verifying fake news?

Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between exposure to fake news and academic performance of students at Legacy University, Okija.

Literature Review

Fake news is often regarded as false, untrue or unverified information published or disseminated as if they are true. Scholars like Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), Broda & Strömbäck (2022) and Divyshikha, Samotra and Singh (2025) viewed it in three dimensions namely, misinformation (false information created with no intention to cause harm), disinformation (false information created or shared with intention to cause harm) and malinformation (true information deliberately shared to cause harm). Donald Trump had used it during the 2016 US Presidential poll to dismiss several information that was either negative to him or never aligned to his political ideology. However, several studies have shown that fake news is actually in existence and affects public trust, mental health, and others (Gordon, 2020). In Nigeria, fake news is on the rise especially on social media where there is absence of gatekeeping. This is largely caused by some factors such as low cost and ease of content creation and dissemination, increased access to smartphone and Internet among the professionals and unprofessional, click-

bait driven by economic incentives, politics and interest groups, and socio-psychological factors, confirmation/information bias, and weak regulatory and legal frameworks.

Fake news effects on students' academic performance

In Nigerian education sector where virtual class or learning is gradually taking over, fake news could affect students' academic performances due to their over reliance on social media and other new media platforms for socialisation, research and academic activities. Empirical evidence has equally shown that many students exposed to social media are not only influenced by them but also encounter and got affected by fake news. Similarly, exposure to fake news usually get students distracted or destabilised from their studies, thereby causing confusion, less focused or less attention within and among them (Kumar & Pandey, 2023; Plaza, 2023; Schwab & Pearce, 2025). For example, when students receive wrong information or pranks about examination dates or area of concentration supposedly released by their course lecturer during examination, they could fail or perform. Also, deliberately misinterpreting, publishing or distorting school rules, assignment deadlines and lecture timetable could affect students learning habits.

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supposedly released by their course lecturer during examination, they could fail or perform. Also, deliberately misinterpreting, publishing or distorting school rules, assignment deadlines and lecture timetable could influence students negatively in their academic pursuit.

At Legacy University, Okija, the study focus, fake news effect is been noticed among the students. The university operates a functional website like other Nigerian privately and publicly owned universities. Information about the institution is readily available on this website across its social media accounts on Facebook, LinkedIn, TikTok, Instagram and WhatsApp. The university's students equally belong to various departmental and special interest WhatsApp groups where they socialise, read news, research and disseminate information about scheduled lectures, continuous assessments and examination. Sometimes in August 2025, some 300-level students in one of the departments failed to attend a class scheduled on Monday due to a counter post on their WhatsApp group chat that the day's lecture was cancelled due to sit-at-home allegedly declared by a secessionist group. As a result, the lecturer conducted a continuous assessment test and awarded marks on those present. In February 2026 also, some 200-level students of the institution were deceived into writing their feature story group assignment using viral fake rape story of a TikToker. This affected their marks for their assignment when the lecturer received the report. Also, a fake report that a certain lecturer resigned from the university in June 2026 caused a partially mourning among the students, as well as made the affected lecturer to receive about 20 missed calls from them.

Empirical review

In a study by Chukwuma and Nwosu (2021), it was found that social media has influence on students' academic performance with up 76% of the respondents admitting a relationship between excessive social media use and their CGPA in South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Okoro and Emmanuel (2021) also found that time spent on verifying or discussing viral untrue stories could affect students' studies habit or time. Furthermore, Eze and

Chukwu (2022) found that misinformation has psychological impact on Nigerian undergraduates' students. Apuke and Omar (2020) reported that 88% of social media users in Nigeria share unverified information in the process of socialising, which could affect their lives. Relatively, Duffy, Tandoc and Ling (2020) reported that people share fake news because of anger and anxiety.

In Adeyemi and Balogun (2022), it was found that students from both private and public universities in Nigeria are exposed to and consume fake news but students in private universities have higher levels of media literacy. But a study by Kumar and Pandey (2023) reported that majority of students (83.8%) have ability to identify fake news, dismiss it and even block the offending websites sometimes. Oyero and Oyesomi (2019) further reported that Nigerian youth consume fake news mostly through WhatsApp and Facebook due to poor knowledge of fact checking. Hence, Ojebuyi and Salawu (2020) reported that students with improved media literacy easily detect and dismiss fake news just as Pennycook and Rand (2019) found that social media users who are critical thinkers and analytical could easily detect and discard fake news.

Theoretical Framework

This study was situated under Cultivation Theory which was propounded by George Gerbner in the 1960s and expanded by Larry Gross in 1970s. The theory argues that the mass media, especially television has a long-term effect or impact on the audience (Vinney, 2026). It explained that those exposed to violent or peaceful media contents could easily become influenced by them and turnout to behave in a similar manner (Study.com). Cultivation theory is very important in this study because of the study objectives. That is, students most exposed to fake news while viewing or reading on social media and other media channels could become victims or fall prey in line with the media contents. In order words, fake news due to its ability to mimic real news, could affect students' perception of lives thereby influencing their study habits, response to academic activities, among others,

thereby making them to perform poorly.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted at Legacy University, Okija, a private university located in Okija, Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. It was licensed by the NUC in 2016 and currently runs various undergraduate and postgraduate programmes across 22 departments and two key faculties. This includes the Faculty of Arts, Management and Social Sciences; and Faculty of Computing, Allied health, Natural and Applied Sciences. This study adopted descriptive survey research design for simple and systematic collection of data from the sample. The study population was 800 according to information obtained from the University's Registrar for the 2025/2026 academic session. Therefore, 260 respondents were chosen from the study sample size using Krejcie & Morgan (1970) sample size calculator under 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error.

For sample technique, the study adopted a multi-stage sampling comprising stratified and simple random sampling. Stratified sampling was used to divide the study population into strata in line with the faculties, while simple random allows all the respondents equal opportunity of been selected. The instrument for data collection adopted a structured questionnaire comprising a multi-choice items and a four-point Likert-type scale such as Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) and Always (A), Often (O), Rarely (R) and Never (N). The questionnaire was validated using content and face validity by consulting 2 communication experts from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the study's instrument was established through a test-retest method after which the result was subjected to Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient which came out with a coefficient value of 0.70, indicating acceptance. The researchers employed the services of four research assistants' easy distribution and collection of the data. The findings were presented using simple table, Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (STD).

Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	108	42%
Female	152	58%
Age		
16-20 years	96	37%
21-25	138	53%
26 years and above	26	10%
Level of study		
100 level	58	22%
200 level	64	25%
300 level	70	27%
400 level	48	18%
500 level	20	8%
Faculties		
Faculty of Arts, Management and Social Sciences	130	50%
Faculty of Computing, Allied health, Natural and Applied Sciences	130	50%

Table shows that most of the respondents are female students, with a very good number of them (53%) aged 21 to 25 years. Also, the data indicated that both of the faculties were well represented.

Table 2: Level of exposure to fake news

Statement	A	O	R	N	M	STD	Decision
How often do you encounter posts on social media about current events that you later found out to be completely false or inaccurate?	129	72	23	34	3.13	1.07	Agree
How frequently does your main social media feed (e.g., TikTok, X, Instagram, WhatsApp) display unverified news stories or rumours?	99	89	51	21	3.03	0.84	Agree
How often do you receive shared links, broadcast messages or videos containing sensationalised news that lacks a credible source?	170	62	15	13	3.45	0.78	Strongly Agree
How often have you received false or fake reports about your lecturers or academic activities (e.g. lectures timetable, examination or CA tips, etc.)?	62	81	73	44	2.80	0.97	Agree

Grand Mean= 3.10

Table 2 shows that the respondents are exposed to fake news through their social media accounts. The grand mean score indicates a strong agreement to the statements measuring the frequency of their exposure.

Table 3: Social media platforms students encounter fake news

Platform	Frequency	Percentage (%)
WhatsApp	260	100%
Facebook	210	81%
Instagram	190	73%
TikTok	230	89%
Twitter/X	150	58%
YouTube	205	79%
Telegram	90	35%

Field Data, 2026

Table shows that the respondents encounter fake news mostly through their WhatsApp, followed by TikTok and Facebook. This indicates that the respondents are not only active social media users and deeply exposed.

Table 4: Influence of fake news on the academic performance of students

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	M	STD	Decision
I have missed or scored poorly in my test or exam because of distractions caused by fake news encountered on social media.	98	101	45	16	3.08	0.89	Agree
I have submitted assignments or class group work containing inaccurate information obtained from unverified social media posts.	121	66	46	27	3.08	1.03	Agree
The hours I usually spend tracking and arguing about trending fake news stories had directly reduced the total time I allocated to reading my textbooks or lecture notes	85	90	54	31	2.88	1.00	Agree
I believed that relying to fake news contributed to my low or poor CGPA last semester/session.	42	106	86	26	2.63	0.87	Agree

Grand Mean = 2.92

The Grand mean (2.92) in Table 4 shows that fake news influences the respondents academically. There is also an agreement on how fake news influences the respondents CGPA outcome.

Table 5: How fake news influences students' academic performance

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	M	SD	Decision
Fake news reports about campus events (like sudden fee increments, favourite lecturer's or project supervisor's resignation, etc.) had made me lost focus while attending lectures.	85	111	56	8	3.05	0.81	Agree
Seeing or reading false reports about CA, exam schedules or sudden changes in course requirements on social media had caused me academic anxiety.	67	78	101	14	2.76	0.90	Agree
Fake news shared in our departmental or class social media groups had disrupted our group study sessions and academic discussions.	90	47	62	61	2.64	1.18	Agree

Grand Mean= 2.82

The data in table 5 shows that the respondents are in total agreement on how fake news influences their academic activities. The data also indicates that fake news could influences examination outcomes, continuous assessments, among others.

Table 6: Level of Media Literacy among Respondents

Statement	SA	A	D	SD	M	SD	Decision
I know how to check the source, publication date, and author of a social media post to determine if the news is real or fake.	34	21	89	116	1.90	1.09	Disagree
I usually search on mainstream media (Vanguard, Punch, etc.) website to confirm or dismiss every fake news update I encountered on social media.	2	82	133	43	2.17	0.70	Disagree
I usually contact my HoD, lecturers or registry's office to confirm every controversial or false report I encountered about my studies/school.	121	58	66	15	3.10	0.97	Agree
I rely on my official university website, social media channels or notice boards rather than students' social media groups to avoid being deceived by campus-related fake news.	12	60	87	101	1.93	0.89	Disagree
I do not usually forward, share, reshare or broadcast information I cannot verify about my school or academic activities to others.	39	98	88	35	2.54	0.90	Agree

Grand Mean= 2.33

Table 6 shows that Legacy University student's literacy level was low with Grand Mean of 2.33. The data also indicates that the respondents do not make adequate use of official channels to checkmate fake news.

Table 7: Relationship between Fake News Exposure and Academic Performance

Variables	N	R	Df	p-value	Remark
Fake news exposure vs Academic performance	260	-0.386	258	0.000	Significant
Field Data, 2026					

Table 7, Pearson Product Moment Correlation result for ($r = -0.386$) indicates a moderate, negative and statistically significant relationship between exposure to fake news and academic performance ($p < 0.05$). The result shows that as students' exposure to fake news increases, their self-reported academic performance tends to decrease, providing empirical support for the influence of fake news on the academic performance of Legacy University students.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal that Legacy University students are always exposed to fake news as contained in table 3. This supports the argument of Cultivation Theory and studies by Adeyemi and Balogun (2022). This indicates that most students active on social media could encounter fake news always.

The study finding also showed that Legacy University students are mostly exposed to fake news through WhatsApp, TikTok and Facebook as revealed by table 3. This indicates that students using these platforms and others should be guided to avoid being negatively affected by them. This is not different from Oyero and Oyesomi (2019) and Ibrahim and Yusuf (2021) findings.

The study also found that fake news affects the students academically as contains in Table 4 where respondents agree that it had made them to miss continuous assessment test, and examination, leading to a possible low

CGPA. Table 7 further confirmed this as the study hypothesis confirmed that there is a significant relationship between exposure to fake news and academic performance. This indicates that fake news could actually have negative influence on university students. The findings align with the relevant literature, including Eze and Chukwu (2022) and Chukwuma and Nwosu (2021).

The study findings also confirmed that the respondents are in agreement on how fake news affects their academic performance as listed in table 5. These include disruption of groups works, including lack of focus and academic anxiety. This indicates that Nigerian students desirous of graduating in flying colours should equally strive to overcome fake news. This is not entirely different from extant literature cited in the study, including cultivation theory that ruled out exposure to media contents could have positive or negative impact on the audience.

The study findings also showed that legacy university students lacked basic media literacy or knowledge of fact checking which could enable them to counter fake news. This authentic the suggestions by Ojebuyi and Salawu (2020) that media literacy training is required to improve the students' capacity to detect misinformation.

Conclusion

The study on influence of fake news on academic performance of Nigerian students with a focus on Legacy University, Okija, Anambra State showed that fake news has significant influence on the students academic performance. The study therefore concluded that students are not just exposed to fake news but could have low academic grades or CGPA if they fail to acquire media literacy.

Recommendations

Based on the study findings, it is hereby recommended that students exposed to social media should always be at alert so as to easily detect when fake news pop up on their timeline or got shared by colleagues and friends.

The study also recommends that students using WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and other social media platforms should not also believe whatever information they encounter through them with verification. Therefore, students should be aware that some reports or news trending on social media platforms are not real.

The study also recommends that students should be weary of negative influence of fake news and strive towards preventing its impact on their academic activities. This should make them to be vigilant so as to graduate in good grades as planned or aspired.

It is also recommended that students should ensure that administrators of their social media groups are tested and trusted, and grounded in the knowledge of fact-checking. This will enable them to easily discover, verify and delete fake reports to as soon as they are been shared to avoid contaminating the minds of others.

The study therefore recommends training and retraining of Nigerian universities students on what fake news and what it is not. This includes knowledge of how to detect it, dismiss it and be free from its adverse effects. It also called for students to build trust on the school management, including lecturers, Head of Departments, Course representatives and others for accuracy, peaceful coexistence and general well being.

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