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**SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH**

**ASSESSING PUBLIC TRUST IN THE MEDIA IN GHANA**

**BY**

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## DECLARATION AND CERTIFICATION

I, Boadum Irene Pomaah hereby declare that this project work is my original research and no part has been presented for a degree in this state or any other.

.....

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.....

DATE

## **SUPERVISORS DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this project supervised by me is in accordance with the guidelines on the supervision of dissertation laid down by the Ghana Institute of Journalism.

.....

.....

DR. RICHARD BOATENG

DATE

SUPERVISOR

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this project to God Almighty my creator, my strong pillar, my source of inspiration, wisdom, knowledge and understanding. He has been the source of my strength throughout this program and on His wings only have I soared. I also dedicate this work to my Mum, Agnes Asantewaa who has encouraged me all the way and whose encouragement has made sure that I give it all it takes to finish that which I have started. To my dearest friend Redeemer Buatsi, I really appreciate him for his immense support and time throughout this project.

My love for you all can never be quantified. God bless you.

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## ABSTRACT

Trust has become an important and defining variable in the media. This is because the media depends on audiences trust in them for survival. The public heavily depend on the media for information, education, and entertainment. But what keeps them coming back for more? Is it the media's excellent programming or it is because the audience trust to deliver quality and unadulterated content?

In this paper, we explore the controversial topic and try to examine what keeps the media-audience relationship running. Some say credibility is the same as trust, but other scholars disagree. We discover an interesting twist. The introduction of online mediated platforms has brought with it complex issues especially the rise and spread of fake news, a major challenge that is denting the image of the media and affecting their trust. In this growing resentment, the survival of the media will be determined by how much the public trust them to deliver their mandate. Journalist can build some level of credibility for themselves that may result in the overall trust of the media outlet and media in general. But that may not be enough. The Media must be able to redefine its mandates and who is really qualified to serve the public in the capacity of media work in the media economy although difficult. The paper discusses these issues and tries to push the limits of the discussion to assess the extent to which trust can be the defining factor in the success or failure of the media.

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This paper seeks to examine the level of trust the public still have in the Ghanaian media and whether this trust results in future media use or not. The discussion is considered based on the current growing dissatisfaction in the work of the media in the country. The paper will be based on prior research in trust in the media, and the results will be based on an analysis of the discussions and arguments that will be advanced.

At the end of the paper, it is the expectation of the researcher to validate the claims and counter claims of whether the public still trust the media or not and whether their continuous use of the media is based on this trust or other factors.

The first section of the paper presents the concept of trust in the media, research problem, questions, and objectives. The other parts of the discussion centre on past research from scholars in the area whilst the last part offers the methodology and a discussion of the major arguments advanced.

### **1.2 Background of the Study**

Trust is considered an important basis for social order and the maintenance of harmonious social relationships so that human beings can function properly either individually or as a group (Lewis & Weigert, 1985). Trust also enables people to make predictions and/or plan rationally about possible future events depending on the degree of trust they have in individual(s), institutions, political systems, or any other aspect of a society (Barber, 1983; Zucker, 1986)

Trust is the confidence people have in their expectations of what other people will do based on their previous interactions (Gefen, 2000). Since the 1990s, the concept of trust has led to growing interest especially in the field of social sciences (Earle & Cvetkovich, 1995; Giddens, 1990; Hardin, 2002).

Sociologists theorized that trust is future oriented. “A decision to trust involves assessing to what extent a party can be expected to fulfil a certain expectation in the future” (Vanacker & Belmas, 2009)

There has been a growing concern about the work of the media in various countries. Especially true for the concept of public trust in the media are growing dissatisfaction among US citizens about the work of the media. For example, according to a survey by the Pew Research Centre for the People and the Press (2002), 47% of respondents believed that news media in general are politically biased in their reporting. Conservative critics argue that journalists tend to be liberal Democrats, which biases their reporting (Corry, 1996; Goldberg, 2001; Lichter, Rothman, & Lichter). Critics from the left argue the opposite.

It is not only in the united states that the debate about trust has been heated. Recent studies in Ghana suggest that there is a growing public mistrust of the media. For example, a research by the Afrabarometer in 2018 found that popular support for a free media has dropped sharply with majority of respondents in that study holding the view that government should have the right to prevent media from publishing things that it considered harmful to society. This finding is in sharp contradiction of the constitutional provisions of the constitution of Ghana which guarantees media freedom and prevents media censorship (Chapter 12,1992 constitution of Ghana).

This study is consistent with prior research in the united states which found that citizens strongly support state intervention in the media and the content they put out. Domke and colleagues (Domke et al., 1999; Watts et al., 1999) argue that repeating accusations of bias by conservative politicians and critics have successfully convinced consumers and even some journalists to believe in a media bias that is not supported by scientific study. Although Domke et al finding did not establish an empirical evidence to support the assertion by politicians of

media bias, Alterman 2003 found that citizens generally feel that the media is merely a representation of power.

In their eyes, the news media are merely “agents of power” that promote and maintain the conservative status quo (Alterman, 2003; Altschull, 1995, 1996; Bagdikian, 2004; J. Cohen, 1990; J. Cohen & Solomon, 1993)

In the light of these concerns over media operations and their effects on the public, scholars are increasingly becoming interested in finding a correlation between media credibility and public support.

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

According to Okocha & Gupta (2017), media institutions construct content in the form of messages and interpret them within the context of those messages. That is to say that one of the primary roles of the media is in content creation. Additionally, Moehler & Singh 2011 also suggest that the private media are charged with a large number of diverse goals, including promoting tolerance and reconciliation; providing an arena for inclusive discussion; educating citizens about their civic rights and responsibilities; mobilizing the public to become engaged in politics; monitoring government and exposing malfeasance; informing the public about government performance; and informing policy makers about citizen interests and policy outcomes.

However, Okocha & Gupta (2017) point out that audiences in modern times are active participants in the meaning making process which agrees with the uses and gratification theory which suggest that audiences are active and actively seek out information which satisfies their personal needs (Blumler & McQuail 1969). They also laid emphasis on the fact that the public's perception is based on the information they use through selection and filtering.

Indeed, it is true that a journalistic function of the media is to provide information on each aspect of all issues. In addition, Okocha & Gupta (2017) indicate that the media also functions as a socialization agent, transferring specific cultures among people. This is supported by Sadaf 2011, when he argued that media constructs social reality for different groups of people.

On notable finding of previous studies reveal that the media was long ago, a trusted source of information for the public. Today, all the barriers that have made the media reliable have been broken (Okocha & Gupta 2017). Mistrust in the media can lead to inattention and nonconsumption (Gaziano, 1988; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Kiouisis, 2001). Interestingly, many studies on media credibility focus on cross-media comparison. Carter and Greenberg (1965) argue that television news is perceived as more believable than newspapers, whereas Kiouisis (2001) reports that consumers consider newspapers to be more credible than online and television news. Johnson and Kaye (1998) suggest that online media are perceived to be more credible than their traditional counterparts.

Trust in the media might be based on a person's belief in the professionalism of journalistic practice (Liebes, 2000). Media professionals often argue that without audiences' trust, they may be less committed to the journalistic norms. The more they feel trusted, the stronger the identification of journalists with professional norms relating to trust, such as remaining neutral, getting the facts right, and telling both sides of the story (Newport & Saad, 1998; Tsfati, 2004). With that being said, trust in the media not only acts as a lubricant that enhances the interactions with the users, it also helps maintain professionalism in journalists.

There is ample evidence to suggest that Americans at large no longer trust, if they ever did trust, the American media (Cooper, 2008). Tsfati and Capella (2005) finds that media users, especially young people, do not necessarily trust the news that they consume. For instance, while 18-29-year-olds express more trust in newspapers than older Americans, they read national newspapers the least (Cook & Gronke, 2001). In a study commissioned by Newsweek

magazine (Nicholson, 1998), 76% of Americans surveyed said the news media had gone too far in the direction of entertainment and away from traditional reporting. Overall, 53% of respondents said they believed “only some” or “very little” of what they see, hear or read in the news media

Prior research, such as those of Lee (2010) found that political ideology and partisanship, trust in government and fellow citizens and ones view of the economy influence the degree to which audience members trust the media.

Similarly Dickson & Topping (2001) agree that media responsibility instead of the innate bias of audience as proposed by Lee 2010 and the bias of politicians as argued by Domke et al.(1999) and Watts et al 1999).This means that while all these scholars agree that there the media seems to be losing the public trust, they are divided on the cause of the loss of that trust.

Questions of what criteria people use to form opinions about news credibility has erupted (Kiouisis 2001).Kohring and Matthes 2007 have sought to establish some of the variables that audiences use in deciding whether to trust media or not when they pointed out some criteria such as source credibility and channel credibility.

From the discussions, we can see that although many of these scholars have attempted to establish public trust and media use, there is limited literature on the subject in Ghana. That is not the only focus of this research. Lee 2010 in his studies found that individual political bias affects their trust in the media. Similar studies have also revealed that the publics political affiliation also affects the way they view the media.

However, there is a knowledge gap in literature on the concept of public trust in the Ghanaian media hence this paper seeks to fill that gap by examining whether the public still hold their trust in the media or not.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

There has been growing discussions among scholars and media practitioners on the growing phenomenon of falling public trust in the media across the world. Particularly disturbing are polls confirming this trend in the united states, with recent studies such as the Afrobarometer 2018 suggesting that the Ghanaian public have strong support for media censorship as against constitutional provisions guaranteeing freedom of the press.

In the light of this controversy, this study seeks raises the following critical questions.

- what is the level of public trust in the media in Ghana?
- What factors account for the public's trust or mistrust of the media?
- What is the impact of public's trust or mistrust of the media on future media use?
- To what extent does trust determine how the public view the media in general?

## **1.5 Research Objectives**

The researcher seeks to uncover the following objectives after the study

- To assess the level of public trust in the media in Ghana
- Examine the factors the account for trust or mistrust of the media in Ghana
- To establish the impact of public trust or mistrust on media use
- To examine the extent to which trust determines how the public view the media in

Ghana

## **1.6 Significance of the Research**

In the light of the growing concerns about the publics lack of trust in the media across the world, this research will be important in the following ways.

- It will serve as a source of new knowledge in the field of academia on the topic of public trust in the media

- It will serve as a foundation on which future studies can be conducted
- This study will also be relevant to stakeholders in the media industry and media instructors on the state of media in Ghana
- This study will also be relevant as a guiding document on which media can build their content and restructure some of their already existing practices

### **1.7 Scope of the Research**

This study will consider the concept of public trust in the media, with emphasis on the students of the Ghana institute of journalism, university of Ghana and the university of professional studies.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter of the paper is dedicated to appraising existing research on the subject for this study, thus, public trust in the media. By so doing, this section will summarise and analyse literature on the media and public trust, drawing from works done from different jurisdictions. This will be done thematically, using the following subthemes; media and public trust, factors that account for trust or mistrust in the media, and impact of public trust or mistrust in the media. In addition, the Modified Measurement Model Trust in News Media and Conceptual Model of Trust in journalism would be used for the theoretical understanding of public trust of the media.

#### **2.2 Review of Related Literature**

This sub section of the study presents a review of related and relevant literature with regards to the topic under study. This is necessary to provide a more defined direction for the study and also serve as a guide upon which new data would be collected to understand public trust in the Ghanaian media.

##### **2.2.1 Media and Public trust**

Trust plays a vital role in almost every human interaction, not only in media-recipient relationships but it is an important basis for social order and a foundation for social cohesion and also, it is a prerequisite for a functioning society (Kohring and Matthes 2007; Jakob 2010). Within the media landscape, trust plays a very important role, as the public resort to it for daily information and to know happenings around the world. Due to the heavy reliance of the public on the media to provide timely and accurate information which enables the citizenry to function

within every democratic dispensation, the media cannot afford to provide untruth. As remarked by Liu and Bates (2014) that perceptions of trust are not only important from a marketing perspective, but also form a vital component of audiences' aesthetic criticism of news and news sources. As such, peddling falsehood in the media will lead to adverse consequences, notably, lack of trust in the citizenry, reputational damage in the journalists of such media organisation and the media itself. Meanwhile, in the last decade or more, the media landscape has witnessed fundamental transformation, due in part to intervened content which can now be distributed and accessed through numerous media technologies and gadgets cross-media consumption on daily basis. With the increasing pace of technological advancement in communication and media technology, the traditional mass media; newspaper, radio and TV, are now being supplemented, if not rivalled by information disseminated through new media, predominantly, social media. The established media scene, globally, comprising both private as well as public service media is now being confronted with competition from 'amateur' media sources, particularly, citizen media and journalism (Deuze 2006; Bakardjieva 2011).

Accentuating this observation, the American Press Institute (APA, 2016) noted that, although for more than a generation, research has tried to identify the qualities that lead people to trust news, the work has concluded that in general people want journalism to be fair, balanced, accurate, and complete. It furthers that, it has been however unclear, what these broad factors mean or how news organizations can achieve them. More so, it has become more challenging as the traditional conceptions of trust which were formulated before the advent of the Internet and did not account for all the ways that consumers today encounter news and publishers can deliver it (APA, 2016). Additionally, Fernández-Planells (2015) also explained that, debate over consumer trust in traditional media has intensified due to the appearance of networked social movements, particularly considering media coverage of the protests, the emergence of

alternative media and social media as information sources. Against this background and the enormous variety of sources at the disposal of the media audiences, they tend to employ their own ways and schemes of evaluation when establishing trust in the media (Fernández-Planells, 2015).

### **2.2.2 Factors that account for Trust or Mistrust in the Media**

Scholars seem to agree that there still exists the lack of ideally derived, reliable, and validated instrument for the measurement of trust in news media. The American Press Institute (2016) also posit that, for more than a generation, research has tried to identify the qualities that lead people to trust news. The work has concluded that in general people want journalism to be fair, balanced, accurate, and complete. It can be unclear, however, what these broad factors mean or how news organizations can achieve them. Even more challenging, these traditional conceptions of trust were formulated before the advent of the Internet and did not account for all the ways that consumers today encounter news and publishers can deliver it. A Media Insight Project by APA (2016) has showed that trust and reliability in news can be broken down into specific factors that publishers can put into action and consumers can recognize. The specific factors that lead people to trust and rely on a news source also vary by topic, including, how much consumers value a specific component related to trust depends, for instance, on whether they are seeking news about politics or traffic and weather, let alone lifestyle. On some topics, consumers rate in-depth reporting and expert sources more highly. In others, ease of use is of higher value. For others, being entertained is more important and within the social media circle, consumers are fairly sceptical of content and want cues of trustworthiness such as clear identification of the original reporting source (APA, 2016).

Also, Strömbäck, Tsfati, Boomgaarden, Damstra and Lindholm (2020), has also acknowledged that, in recent times, several attempts have been made at developing and validating a multidimensional scale for the measurement of media trust. Strömbäck et al (2020) reckon that, the start of this attempt began with Kohring and Matthes (2007) who they expanded the notion that all trust relationships involve a certain degree of uncertainty, where one social actor needs another social actor but cannot be sure how that second actor, be it an individual, organization or an institution will behave in the future. Meanwhile, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014) assume that the most important function of news media is to select and convey the kind of information people need to understand politics and society. So, as news reporting by necessity is selective, Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014) also argue that selectivity should be the basis for analyses of news media trust, thereby, making people take certain risk when they put their trust in the news media. This is because, journalists selectively choose some information over other information Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014). To this end, when trusting news media, people also trust in specific selections' (Kohring and Matthes, 2007). More specifically, Kohring and Matthes (2007) posit that trust in news media consists of four separate dimensions: trust in the selectivity of topics, trust in the selectivity of facts, trust in the accuracy of depictions, and trust in journalistic assessment. The above expositions denote that, public trust in the media functions just as the media uses certain thresholds in selecting stories to present to the public as news. Similarly, the public also scrutinises various news items using a number of considerations, notable among them is Kohring and Matthes' (2007) four trust dimensions.

At the broadest conceptual level, there is significant consensus that news media trust refers to the relationship between citizens (the trustors) and the news media (the trustees) where citizens, however tacit or habitual, in situations of uncertainty expect that interactions with the news media will lead to gains rather than losses (Kohring and Matthes, 2007; Ladd, 2012; Yale et

al., 2015; Prochazka and Schweiger, 2019). Again, Trust evaluations are correlated with certain characteristics of the media source (such as, the type of news channel and political position), the content (including, style and negativity), the respondents themselves (for example, sex, social status, interpersonal trust, political ideology, and trust in institutions), or macro-level indicators such as culture (e.g., post materialism), general economic and political performance of societies (Tsfati and Ariely, 2014), media competition, and political polarization (Ladd, 2011).

Another measure linked to trust of public trust in the media is misinformation, disinformation and mal-information, which is generally termed, fake news. According to Ognyanova, Lazer, Robertson, and Wilson (2020), misinformation in action: fake news exposure is linked to lower trust in media, higher trust in government when one's side (political party) is in power. By examining this possibility, Ognyanova, Lazer, Robertson, and Wilson (2020) through a longitudinal survey, together with records of online behaviour found that online misinformation was linked to lower trust in mainstream media across party lines. This could be explained in the exposition by Pavlíčková, Nyre and Jurisic (2013) who noted that media comprise the main source of information about politics and the public realm, assisting with the building of citizen's identities. People's trust in media is therefore a fundamental premise of political representation and a functioning democracy. Moreover, Ognyanova, Lazer, Robertson, and Wilson (2020) observed that fake news exposure was associated with a decline in mainstream media trust among individuals in the United States.

Upon examining that relationship more closely, Ognyanova, Lazer, Robertson, and Wilson (2020) found that fake news consumption was linked to lower political trust, but only for strong liberals. On the other hand, for moderates and conservatives, fake news consumption predicted

higher trust in political institutions (Ognyanova, Lazer, Robertson, and Wilson, 2020). In a Pew Research Center study, Gramlich (2020) noted that, Americans were sharply divided along partisan lines when it comes to the media outlets they turn to and trust for their political and election-related news. The study particularly observed that, more Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents trust than distrust most of the 30 outlets used for the study, but the reverse is true among Republicans and GOP inclined individuals. Again, while Democrats' trust in many of these outlets had remained stable or in some cases increased since 2014, Republicans had become more alienated from some of them, widening an already substantial partisan gap. The implication is that party supporters tend to have trust the media when their party is in power, while the converse is also true, where opposition party supporters tend to have low trust in the media.

However, the (APA, 2016) has noted that in the digital age, several new factors have largely remained unexamined; such as the intrusiveness of advertisements, navigability, load times, and having the latest details also are critical in determining whether consumers consider a publisher competent and worthy of trust (APA, 2016).

### **2.2.3 The impact of Public Trust or Mistrust in the Media**

Guess et al (2020) has expressed that the consumption of fake news makes people more likely to adopt various political misperceptions that can affect their subsequent behaviour, including voting decisions (Weeks and Garrett, 2014). Ognyanova, Lazer, Robertson, and Wilson (2020) extensively examined the impact of public trust through their study, which underscored that a major concern about fake news is that it could damage the public trust in democratic institutions. Ognyanova, Lazer, Robertson, and Wilson (2020) found that fake news exposure was associated with a decline in mainstream media trust. The implication is that fake news tend to

discredit the press directly by accusing them of bias, complicity, and incompetence or indirectly by contradicting a range of claims made by mainstream media. Adding to this, Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, and Nielsen (2018) also argue that in recent years, mainstream news organizations have experienced a considerable decline in public confidence. The consequences of this lack of trust are especially apparent in times of crisis and uncertainty when citizens are most in need of credible sources providing current and reliable information. To the extent that fake news can undermine the public's confidence in mainstream media, it may not only leave its consumers misinformed, but also make them more vulnerable when disaster strikes. Furthermore, (Hopmann, Shehata, and Stromback, 2015; Ladd, 2012) are of the view that the content of false news stories can influence our confidence in the media. Cynical coverage and tabloid-style focus on scandal can erode citizen trust in news organizations (Hopmann, Shehata, and Stromback, 2015; Ladd, 2012). (Hopmann, Shehata, and Stromback, 2015; Ladd, 2012) explain that, such occurrence are characteristics typical of many fake news stories as their producers aim to increase audience engagement through sensational and divisive content.

Ognyanova, Lazer, Robertson, and Wilson (2020) also pointed out in their study that the impact of fake news on political trust has important consequences for democracy. Affirming this, Hooghe (2018) stated that, public confidence in political institutions affects civic and electoral behaviour, with distrustful citizens more likely to sit out an election or vote for a populist candidate. While in some cases concerns about poor government may lead to citizen mobilization, high levels of cynicism and mistrust can cause people to withdraw from participating in politics (Hooghe, 2018). More so, other research suggests that negative or biased reporting can reduce political trust and increase cynicism and apathy (Kleinnijenhuis, van Hoof, and Oegema, 2006). In the view of Ognyanova, Lazer, Robertson, and Wilson (2020), similar considerations may apply in the case of fake news. Thus, politically motivated

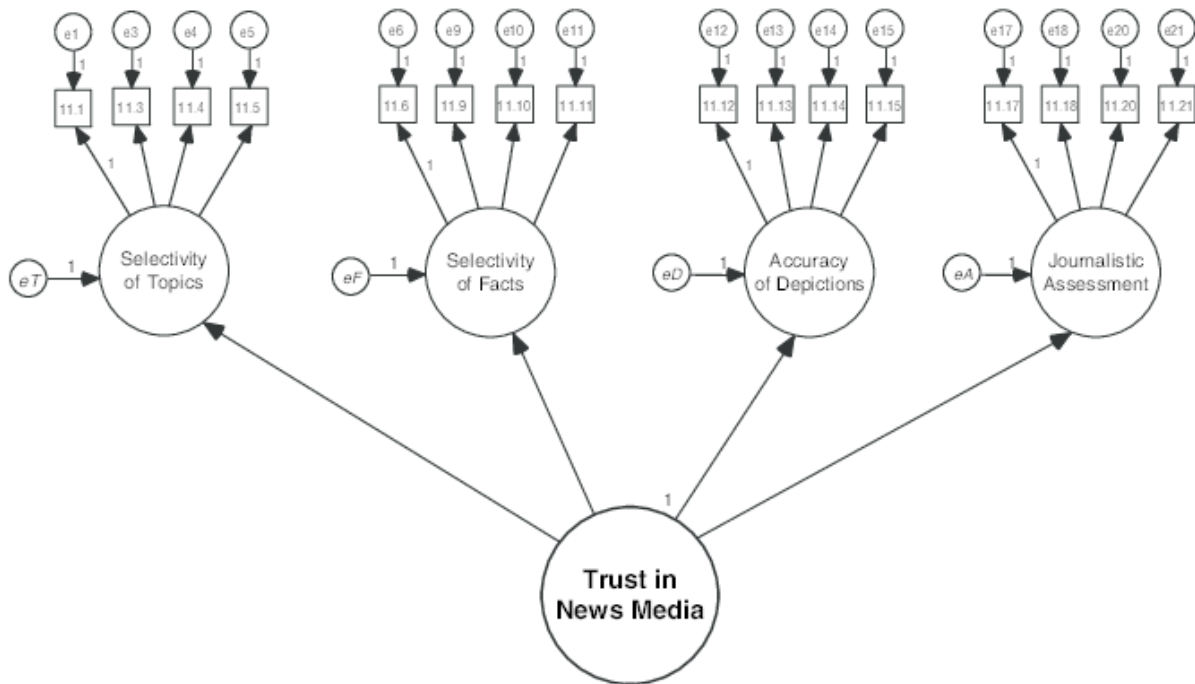
fringe groups and foreign actors are said to spread misinformation mimicking the format of journalism specifically for the purpose of destabilizing democratic institutions (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017).

In the same manner, financially motivated fake news outlets produce sensational content often aiming to generate more views by appealing to partisan bias, triggering negative emotions, and fuelling political arguments (Ognyanova, Lazer, Robertson, and Wilson, 2020). Ognyanova, Lazer, Robertson, and Wilson (2020) also observed that, while a citizen decline in political trust can be harmful, an unwarranted increase in public confidence based on false stories would be similarly problematic. Again, lower trust in the media damages the media's ability to inform the public: any news report has a greater chance of being disbelieved and Americans may instead believe alternative or social media sources to the contrary (Hunter, 2018). The media's ability to act as a fact-checker, a whistle-blower, and a platform to hold politicians and other public figures accountable are all severely limited by a great level of distrust (Hunter, 2018).

### **2.3 Theoretical Framework**

According to Tsfaty (2003) from the perspective of communication research, trust can be considered a crucial variable for media effects, as it informs how individuals perceive and evaluate news media. Tsfaty (2003) has also observed that communication scholars usually prefer the term credibility instead of trust with respect to media and public trust. This argument is supported by Kohring and Matthes (2007) who explain that in the field of communication, research concerning trust in news media has emerged almost entirely under the label of media credibility. Owing to this explicit theories of trust have not been considered as significant in this area (Tsfaty, 2003). This study would therefore, employ the Trust in the media model and the Conceptual Model of Trust in journalism as its theoretical underpinning.

### 2.3.1 Trust in the media model



**Figure 1: Trust in the media model**

Kohring and Matthes (2007) contend that, the dimensions that individuals apply in evaluating the trustworthiness or credibility of news media bear great theoretical and practical relevance, thereby, developing the four-dimension trust in the media model. The model of trust in news media assumes that news media are continually aware of whether events of one specialized part of differentiated society may potentially evoke consequences in other areas of the society. Kohring and Matthes (2007) argue that when people put their trust in news media, they take a certain risk. This is because journalists selectively choose some information over other information. Therefore, when trusting news media, people trust in specific selections (Kohring and Matthes, 2007). The is therefore hinged on four dimensions, when recipients come to trust in news media. The four dimensions for assessment of public trust in the news media is based on the following four dimensions: “trust in the selectivity of topics,” “trust in the selectivity of facts,” “trust in the accuracy of depictions,” and “trust in journalistic assessment” (Kohring, 2004b). The first dimension of trust is associated with the selection of reported topics. The recipients trust that the news media will focus on those topics and events that are relevant to

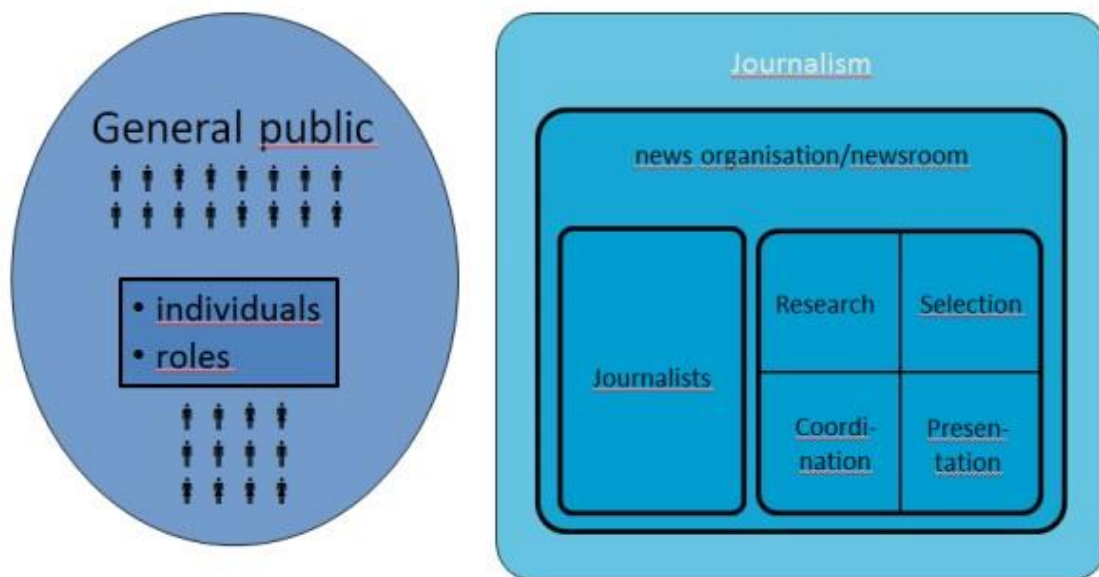
them. Next is trust in the selectivity of facts, a dimension which is dimension concerned with the selection of facts or background information pertaining to a topic that has already been selected. It is the way in which an event is contextualized that is relevant to this dimension. For trust in the accuracy of depictions, Kohring and Matthes (2007) elucidate that it deals with trust in verifiable and approvable accuracy of depicted facts. Adding that, although observations are highly selective and their classification into “right” or “wrong” is not objectively assignable, a number of observations allow a standardized classification into “right” and “wrong” and are therefore verifiable (Kohring and Matthes, 2007). Lastly, trust in journalistic assessment; where the selection of an event or information already represents an evaluation. Additionally, there are explicitly emphasized assessments, especially in commentary structure which provide advice as well as assessments of and appeals for action (Kohring and Matthes, 2007).

### **2.3.2 A Conceptual Model of Trust in journalism**

Trust in journalism has to consider three parts: an audience or public as trustor, journalism as trustee and the trust relationship between the two. Trust is understood as a process between two parties, in our case between audience and journalism. Based on the underlying precondition that recipients and journalism are willing to sustain their relationship, special preconditions on both sides are necessary to support the process of trust. In addition, both sides expect advantages for the future. Trust relations do not start from zero. For centuries and decades, journalism has managed to prove it can be trusted as disseminator of factual, current and relevant information about relevant topics and events in society. Throughout various stages of individual socialisation individuals have learned that they can rely on media content composed by journalists. Nevertheless, trust is a fragile good dependent on certain antecedents on both sides. Changes of such preconditions have the potential to increase or decrease trust. Hence, trust in journalism can be constructed as both a virtuous and a vicious circle. Trust can increase and

decrease. So can distrust. Trust and distrust do not form opposite sides of a scale. As part of a dialectical relationship they are interconnected like two sides of a coin. Public trust, conceptualised as the generalisation of individual recipients' trust is directed at journalistic content and at a particular news organisation. The overall assumption that journalism can be trusted to deliver reliable information about relevant subjects and events is supplemented by trust in a specific paper, TV program considered trustworthy and it is complemented by trust in the respective news content.

Therefore, trust has to be studied on at least three levels: trust in journalism as a system, trust in journalistic organisations like newspapers, or editorial offices and trust in journalistic content as the product of journalistic research, selection, coordination and presentation. Trust in journalism comprises trust in the professionalism of journalistic working routines, the professional performance of the news organisation and of the system of journalism. Trust in journalism is the result of an on-going process. Through its operations news organisations have to maintain and develop further trust in order to keep up the relationship with their audiences. Research devoted to trust in journalism has to consider the various elements involved in the process. A conceptual model of research has to take into account the internal structure of journalism and the numerous preconditions on the trustors and the trustees side.



**Figure 2: A Conceptual Model of Trust in journalism**

## 2.4 Conclusion

It has become substantially evident from the reviewed literature that there is a global phenomenon of declining trust in the media, despite the relevance of the media in providing information to the public on happenings around them. Indeed, the essence of the media in a well-functioning democracy and its role as watchdog continues to be upheld by scholars as critical in every dispensation. For that matter, providing credible and trustworthy information at all times by the media to the public is non-negotiable. Meanwhile, as the media continue to witness advancements, particularly, technological improvement leading to tremendous changes in the gathering and dissemination of information to the public, so is it bedevilled with challenges, notably, trust issues from the public. This observation made in the reviewed is succinctly noted by literature Strömbäck et al (2020) who expressed that, it is clear that the transformation into high-choice media environments has brought with it a host of new and exacerbated challenges threatening to undermine news media trust, regardless of whether it is

already on decline or thus far has been more stable. This challenge is further complicated with the advent of new media platforms with its accompanying fast and real-time information deliver, including, churning out of fake news which worsens the trust reposed particularly in the traditional media. Moreover, from the literature reviewed, it has been realised that, across countries and media environments, there have been the influx of partisan non-mainstream media that compete for news with traditional news media. Additionally, many of such non-mainstream media often are actively engaged in attempts to undermine trust in traditional news media by spewing misinformation, mal-information and disinformation to the public, a phenomenon that, to an increasing extent, is supported by politicians who also themselves perform attacks on news media and accuse them of producing ‘fake news.’ As remarked by Hopkins and Sides (2015), that, where political polarization and more or less authoritarian political populism (Aalberg et al., 2017; Moffitt, 2016; Norris and Inglehart, 2019) is on the rise, it becomes even harder for traditional news media to stay above the fray and be seen as credible when claiming to provide news that is truthful and objective or neutral in intent (if not necessarily in consequences) and thus deserves to be trusted more than information from partisan actors.

As recognised from the past literature reviewed, it has become difficult to provide specific indices for the measurement of public trust in the media, to the extent that, it has affected the development of theories to underscore public trust in the media. A salient point worth noting is that, despite growing interest in research in public trust in the media, many studies in this area tend to focus on the occurrence in the United States and few European countries, leaving much to be desired in Africa, especially, Ghana. More so, studies in public trust in the media also focus in the statistical decline, thus, the rate of decline over time, which leaves gaps for research in the underlying factors for trust or mistrust in the media.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the research method and design which will be used for this study. It also provides an outline of the population, sampling process, data collection instruments, data analysis plan and data presentation plan. Issues of ethical concerns are also addressed.

#### **3.2 Research Design**

Tull and Hawkins (1984) explain that a research method offers a guideline or specification of procedures for collecting and analysing the data necessary to help identify a problem or to help solve the problem at hand. Both qualitative and quantitative methods will be used for this study. According to Opoku-Amankwa (2009), research investigations that are primarily seeking non-numerical forms of data are called qualitative method of research.

Researchers who use a naturalistic approach to investigate people's feelings and beliefs, opinions, or ways of life, find qualitative data in variety of sources and are interested in appreciating the 'meanings' attached to them. In this study, both qualitative and quantitative research methods will be used because the view of the public as well as media workers will be considered in the data collection process in order to integrate their views.

On the other hand, quantitative research is the type of design that uses mathematical representations to analyse data. Creswell (1994) explained quantitative research as the phenomena of collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based method. According to Atieno (2009) and cited by Ochieng (2009) many researchers view quantitative research design as the best approach to scientific research because it offers precise measurement and analysis. In quantitative research design the researcher will count and classify and build

statistical models to then explain what is observed. This method was selected due to its flexibility in both collecting and analysing data.

The mixed method is considered due to the quality of information we will derive from adopting this method. The qualitative data will help us get an impression of the number of people who support a particular view, in order to determine their level of trust whilst qualitative data will help explain reasons behind trust or mistrust in the media. It will also help to get more insights into the problem.

### **3.3 Study Population**

Population is the total number of subjects, people, concepts, or phenomena the researcher is interested in studying or researching about. The population of the proposed respondents of the study are university students from three selected universities namely GIJ, UNIVERSITY OF GHANA AND UNIVERSITY OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES. University students are considered for this study because research (S.Lee 2011) has shown university students are major users of the media. Hence, it will be easier for their views to be considered as representative of the public.

Again, these three universities are considered due to their proximity to the researcher considering the time bound nature of the research.

The population of the Ghana institute of journalism according to the 2019 admissions data is approximately 5000 students. The University of Ghana has a population of 37940 students according to the enrolment and graduation statistics whilst the population of the university of professional studies is 14000 students.

### **3.4 Sampling process**

In this study, non-probability sampling will be used for qualitative purposes because the study seeks to explore certain relevant and accessible artifacts for more in-depth analysis of the variables. A probability sampling technique, which is the simple random sampling will be used for sampling respondents for the survey or quantitative design. Sampling is the process of selecting a number of individuals for a study in such a way that the individuals selected represent the large group from which they were selected.

The purpose of the sampling is to secure a representative group which will enable the researcher to gain information about a population. Rubin, Rubin and Piele (2005) explain that non-Probability sampling allows to explore certain relevant and accessible artifacts for more in-depth analysis. Nonprobability sampling does not allow to generalize to other groups or situations, but it is valuable for studying particular groups of people. According to Opoku-Amankwa (2009), purposive sampling is an intentionally selecting respondents or elements for a study based on certain characteristics or qualities to meet the needs and requirements of a study. Ten media houses will be sampled to take part in this study.

For the survey, the sample to be considered is 900 students, 300 students from each university. This number is considered due to the generalisability the findings of this study and due to the resource nature of the study for which reason a larger number of respondents is impossible to use.

The simple random sampling method will be adopted for purposes of recruiting respondents for this study. Students from the three universities will be sampled randomly. This means that all students, no matter their level or course will stand an equal chance of being selected to participate in this study.

### **3.5 Data Collection Instrument**

In this study, data will be collected using in-depth interview which will enable the researchers to address the objectives of this study. Opoku-Amankwa (2009) defines interview as useful tool for finding out individual opinions, ideas, values, and beliefs. According to Boyce and Neale (2006), in-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation.

For instance, selected respondents can be asked about their thoughts, opinions, perceptions, experiences and expectations about an issue or event which is of research interest. Data for this study will be collected through in-depth interview with journalists. In addition, survey questionnaires will be used to get responses from the public in order to examine their level of trust in the media as well as sample their views on the factors that influence their trust levels.

A questionnaire is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions for the purpose of gathering information from respondents. Questionnaires can be thought of as a kind of written interview. They can be carried out face to face, by telephone, computer, or post.

Questionnaires provide a relatively cheap, quick, and efficient way of obtaining large amounts of information from a large sample of people.

Data can be collected relatively quickly because the researcher would not need to be present when the questionnaires were completed. This is useful for large populations when interviews would be impractical.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

Data collected in this research will be analysed using descriptive techniques as well as mathematical representations. For quantitative data collected, graphs, tables and charts will be

used to present and analyse them. Numerical representations of data will be presented, so that the data can be quantified and generalised on the population.

Qualitative interviews will be analysed using words describe responses. Inspirations or inductions will be made from responses and the results will be presented in the form of a report that can be read.

### **3.7 Ethical Consideration**

Consents of media houses and the public will be sought through a written letter before collecting data for this study. Personal details of the respondents will not be included in the interview to assure anonymity. They will also be assured of confidentiality that this study will strictly be for academic purpose. A copy of the findings of this study will be given to each of the selected media outlets to serve as evidence of the academic use of the information they provided.

### **3.8 Summary of Chapter**

This chapter has discussed the research method that will be used for this study and how data Will be collected. It also outlined how data for this study will be analysed as well as how it will Presented. Also, issues of ethical consideration were addressed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.1 Introduction

This part of the paper presents a conclusion of the concepts and, discussion advanced in chapter two of this paper. The discussions here are based on the arguments and counter arguments as well as propositions in the literature sampled in this study.

We also present recommendations for future studies based on inspirations from the discussions and the findings that will be relevantly considered by future researchers.

Kohring and Matthes (2007) and Jacob (2010) argue that the media plays a very important role the lives of citizens by creating and fostering interactions that lead to lasting relationships. According to them, the media is pivotal in creating human interactions between media and their recipients.

Fernandez-Plannells (2015) make the point that there is a heavy reliance on the media that makes trust a very important element in retaining audiences or those that rely on the media for information, for education and for entertainment.

In the first place, we discovered from the analysis that there is a general agreement between media and media publics that news trust is a mutual relationship that keeps the media running. Essentially, news trust refers to the relationship between citizens and the news media where media users, in this case, citizens, expect that interactions with the media will lead to positive gains instead of losses. (Kohring and Matthes, 2007; Ladd, 2012; Yale et al., 2015; Prochazka and Schweiger, 2019). This means that the mutual agreement between media and the public hinge on the fact that there must be continual gains for the public. The media can do this by meeting the needs of the public by way of information and, education and entertainment to keep audience interested in whatever they are doing.

Trust is built and maintained, and this means that the media must engage in activities that will enhance their public ratings based on the level of trusts they have in them through their programming.

We find from the discussion that trust evaluations are correlated with certain characteristics of the media source (such as, the type of news channel and political position), the content (including, style and negativity), the respondents themselves (for example, sex, social status, interpersonal trust, political ideology, and trust in institutions), or macro-level indicators such as culture (e.g., post materialism), general economic and political performance of societies (Tsfati and Ariely, 2014), media competition, and political polarization (Ladd, 2011).

What this suggests to us is that trust is personalised by audiences, based on some physiological or biological characteristics. Trust may also be built on the social status of the individuals in relation to how the media has been able to appeal to a section the public as well as the type of association the people have built. This also means that trust is not automatically built based on the credibility of the media in question, but can be based on the political, social, or economic ideology of the media. Thus, a lowly rated or untrusted media outlet by majority of the people could be held in high esteem y a section of the public based on their associated political or economic ideology.

Media competition and polarization is closely associated with this view, as we have discovered that the political or economic ideology of media houses can determine their overall trust level among their audiences.

Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, and Nielsen (2018) also argue that in recent years, mainstream news organizations have experienced a considerable decline in public confidence. This may be a result of continuous misinformation or a lack of critical journalism that has dominated the media scene for time now.

The discussion has been centred on traditional media. But there have been growing discussions on the role of online media and their contribution to the general dis or mistrust in the media in recent times. This is due to the growing dominance or popularity of online news platforms that engage on the collection and distribution of news on daily basis.

Ognyanova, Lazer, Robertson, and Wilson (2020) through a longitudinal survey, together with records of online behaviour found that online misinformation was linked to lower trust in mainstream media across party lines. Online news platforms have been accused of spreading fake news, a phenomenon that promotes mistrust and lowers the credibility of media in general. Not only has there been general resentment of online news activities or sources, there have been a trickling effect on media in general so that, no matter the source of the news, people have become more sceptical about the authenticity of the information.

Observing this situation, Ognyanova, Lazer, Robertson, and Wilson (2020) have observed that, while a citizen decline in political trust can be harmful, an unwarranted increase in public confidence based on false stories would be similarly problematic. The growing dissatisfaction in the work of the media could be seen the declining number of subscriptions for newspapers for example. People generally are not ready to pay for news like they used to because they do not completely trust the news.

This view may be based on the suggestion by Kohring and Matthes on what trust really is. According to them, trust is like an investment that people are making, thus, when people put their trust into the media, they are taking a risk, and they expect a certain positive result in the future and not a loss. In other words, when people trust the media, they do not want their trust to be taken for granted. Taken for granted in this case may be in the form of fake news sharing, low ratings, or public disaffection in the media.

## **4.2 Factors the Account for Trust in the Media**

The American Press Association has identified some factors that account for trust in the media. These factors according to them determine the level of trust people have in the media based on these determinants.

In the first place, they identify the source of news stories as an important determinant of trust. Source could be in the form of source of news, which is the primary source where the news emanated or the media source of the news. Sources is very important because it determines whether the news is trustworthy, or whether the media should be taken seriously. This means that the source of news carried by media organizations must be carefully reviewed to ascertain their credibility from the primary source to prevent the fake news syndrome. Also, aggregators of news stories must be sure to cite the sources of their news stories, preferably from credible sources that have some level of ratings in among the audience.

moreover, this point also lays emphasis on the need of sources of news stories to in media reportage so that independent audiences can verify whatever information that is contained in the news report or media product.

Secondly, we find from the discussion that journalistic assessments among the audience also play a very important role in the level of trust audience have in the media. This is reflective in the level of ratings and professionalism of a media personnel or journalist in the media house. Trusted media journalists are able to attract audiences to the media house, thereby increasing the likelihood that they appear trusted and credible due to the journalist working there. Journalistic assessments that result in high ratings can lead to more trust in the media as journalist are the lead or front liners in the media, and their works are generally regarded and rated among the audience.

Furthermore, the point is made of the ideology of the media, as we have seen from the discussions in the previous paragraphs of this paper. Audience engage in different levels of

association and want to associate themselves with things that reflect their existing ideology as well as ideologies that carry special attributions. Political ideologies or economic ideologies are some of the identical associations that are easily used to define whether there is trust or not among a section of the public.

Other determinants of trust in the media that do not have any bearing on the work they do is the social status definition. This reflects in associations by a select group of people who feel a particular media is purposely targeted at them and reflects their social identity. Thus, no matter what the media does, they may not be able to appeal to all sections of society and may not have the level of appraisal from the public as expected.

If media cannot reflect all ideologies, it can never have the full ratings or trust from the public based on the discussions we have advanced. However, we cannot underestimate the power of trust based on the division among audiences on their rating criteria. Media may not be able to reflect all ideologies nor appeal to all sections of the audience, but they can do their work truthfully, unbiased and follow best practices. They do not have the full trust of the public, but they will be highly regarded among the right-thinking members of the public as important contributors to the development of society.

### **4.3 Conclusion**

Media trust is very important for the continues relevance and work of the media in society. The media are key partners in nation building and societal development. They play very important roles as education agents, informants as well as entertainers. They are able to do this because of the level of trust the public have in them to deliver unbiased content. However, when this trust is broken, it can pose a serious threat to the general accommodation of the media. If the public lose trust inn the media, they cannot rely on it to inform and educate them. There may even be doubt about whether the media can give them unadulterated entertainment.

The media must seriously begin to reconsider their current place within the public domain. They must begin to question the relevance of their roles and how they deliver their products. Equally important, they must consider the calibre of workers they put on their frontlines as journalists, as that can play a very pivotal role in generating trust in their media.

The media cannot satisfy everyone, neither can they reflect all ideologies in society. But they can do their work in truth, fairly and in a balanced way that does not go contrary to journalistic standards. Whenever in doubt, media should be able to fall on their principles and ethics that guide their work to ensure that they are following best practices devoid of personal sentiments, sensationalism and click promotions.

Media should also pay attention to the infiltration of the media landscape by unprofessionals who engage in journalism that seems like the work of media. Bloggers for example have become problems, deepened by the availability of the internet. If possible, the media must be able to find a way of distinguishing professional publishers and journalists from unprofessional practitioners who only joined the field because of the unrestricted nature of the landscape.

#### **4.4 Recommendations for Future Studies**

This paper has discussed the importance of trust in the work of media. Importantly, we have found that trust determines how seriously the audience take the media. Trust determines the listenership or attention from audience, the most important financial booster for media.

Future studies can consider the following as recommendations.

Firstly, future researchers should examine the correlation between media use and trust of media content and not merely trust in media. This is because, trusted media may be spreading false or fake news, but does that mean the audience will believe that news simply because they trust the media in question?

Future studies should work on developing a framework that can be used to assess trust, as it is sometimes difficult to measure trust in general. While doing this, researchers can focus on specific determinants of trust, paying attention to how that influences overall trust in media in general.

Is there a difference between trust and credibility? Future researchers should try and draw the line between trust and credibility and how these can affect media use. There seems to be a thin line between credibility and trust, and which influences audiences on their media choice and media use.

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