



An Empirical Study on Growth of Fake News and its Impact on Media Trust and Credibility of Authentic News

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Abstract

The proliferation of fake news in the digital age has raised concerns about its negative consequences on the information system. With the rise of multiple media platforms worldwide, distinguishing between genuine and false information has become increasingly challenging. The accessibility of internet-enabled smartphones and social media platforms has led to a decline in traditional gatekeepers of information, making it easier for individuals to become publishers and broadcasters, facilitating the spread of fake news across platforms. This study aims to investigate the spread of fake news and its impact on media credibility. By examining the relationship between media trust and fake news, the research seeks to determine whether people's perceptions of media have been affected. Through the collection of primary data, the study assesses whether trust in media has declined over time and explores which sources people consider reputable and the criteria that influence their trust in news and information.

Keywords: Fake News; Media Trust; Credibility of Authentic News; Misinformation, Social Media

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Introduction

The advent of the digital age and the widespread accessibility of the internet have revolutionized information dissemination across the globe. With the emergence of various media platforms and social networking sites, the flow of information has surged exponentially, transcending geographical boundaries and traditional media gatekeepers. However, amid this information explosion, a growing concern has arisen over the propagation of fake news – intentionally fabricated or misleading information presented as legitimate news. The blurring lines between news, information, and opinions, coupled with the ease of sharing content, have created a fertile ground for the rapid spread of fake news, undermining media trust and challenging the credibility of authentic news sources.

Historical Context:

The roots of misinformation and propaganda can be traced back to ancient times, but the modern manifestation of fake news has been significantly influenced by the rise of digital media. The internet's democratizing potential enabled individuals to create and share content without traditional editorial oversight. Initially, this was perceived as empowering citizens with a greater voice, but it also exposed vulnerabilities in the information ecosystem, leading

to the rapid dissemination of falsehoods. The political and social implications of fake news became evident during significant events such as elections, where malicious actors exploited information channels to manipulate public opinion.

Technological Advancements:

The proliferation of internet-enabled smartphones and the increasing availability of affordable technology have contributed to the dissemination of fake news on a global scale. The widespread adoption of social media platforms amplified the reach of false narratives, as they became conduits for sharing information rapidly with vast audiences. The viral nature of these platforms allowed fake news to transcend echo chambers, creating a ripple effect that influenced public perception and behavior.

Impact on Media Credibility:

The prevalence of fake news has had profound consequences for media organizations' credibility. As misinformation spreads indiscriminately across online channels, traditional media outlets have faced challenges in distinguishing themselves as reliable sources of information. The erosion of trust in mainstream media has been exacerbated by the labeling of legitimate journalism as "fake news" by some public figures, further undermining the media's credibility and fostering a climate of skepticism.

Societal Implications:

The impact of fake news extends beyond media credibility to affect broader societal dynamics. The dissemination of misinformation has contributed to increased polarization and divisiveness among communities, with individuals gravitating towards echo chambers that reinforce their preexisting beliefs. This "filter bubble" phenomenon limits exposure to diverse perspectives, hindering constructive dialogue and democratic discourse.

Psychological Factors:

Understanding the spread of fake news requires an exploration of human psychology and cognitive biases. Confirmation bias, echo chambers, and the illusory truth effect play critical roles in the perpetuation of misinformation. Cognitive shortcuts and emotional appeals exploited by fake news purveyors often bypass critical thinking processes, leading individuals to accept false information as truth.

Role of Social Media:

Social media platforms, initially hailed as agents of positive social change, have faced scrutiny for their role in facilitating the spread of fake news. Algorithmic amplification and content personalization have inadvertently contributed to the formation of information bubbles, creating fertile ground for the viral dissemination of misleading information. The business model of engagement-driven platforms has also raised concerns about their incentives to prioritize sensational content over accuracy.

Media Literacy and Education:

To counter the detrimental effects of fake news, efforts to promote media literacy and critical thinking have gained prominence. Educating individuals about information verification, fact-checking, and source evaluation is crucial in equipping them with the tools to navigate the complex media landscape and differentiate between credible information and misinformation.

Combating Fake News:

Addressing the issue of fake news requires a multi-faceted approach involving collaboration between media organizations, technology companies, governments, and civil society. Fact-checking initiatives, transparency in news reporting, and adherence to ethical journalistic practices are essential steps to restore media trust and combat misinformation.

Thus, the growth of fake news in the digital age poses significant challenges to the information system, media credibility, and societal cohesion. Understanding the underlying factors contributing to its spread and formulating strategies to combat this menace are imperative for safeguarding the integrity of information and upholding the tenets of responsible journalism. Emphasizing media literacy and promoting critical thinking will empower individuals to make informed choices, bolstering resilience against the manipulation of information in the digital era. Only through collective efforts and a commitment to truth and accuracy can society safeguard itself from the adverse consequences of fake news.

What is Fake News?

Fake news, also known as misinformation or disinformation, refers to false or misleading information presented as genuine news, often disseminated through digital channels, including social media, websites, and online news platforms. This phenomenon has gained significant attention in the contemporary information landscape, where rapid advancements in technology and communication have transformed the way information is created, shared, and consumed. The distinguishing feature of fake news is its intention to deceive or mislead audiences, creating a distortion of reality and blurring the lines between truth and falsehood.

One of the key characteristics of fake news is its sensational nature. Fake news stories are designed to elicit strong emotional responses from readers, exploiting their curiosity, fear, anger, or empathy. This emotional engagement is a deliberate strategy to capture attention and encourage the viral spread of the content. Additionally, fake news often lacks credible sources or relies on dubious or anonymous ones, making it challenging for audiences to verify the authenticity of the information presented. The lack of verifiable sources is often an intentional ploy by creators of fake news to shield themselves from accountability and fact-checking.

Furthermore, fake news frequently targets specific demographics or ideological groups, tailoring content to align with their existing beliefs or biases. By reinforcing preexisting opinions, fake news fosters an echo chamber effect, wherein individuals are exposed to a limited range of perspectives, hindering open dialogue and critical thinking. This selective

exposure contributes to the polarization of society, as people become increasingly entrenched in their viewpoints.

The speed at which information travels through digital networks is another critical aspect of fake news. With the prevalence of social media platforms and instant messaging services, false information can spread globally within minutes. The viral nature of fake news is fueled by clickbait headlines, eye-catching visuals, and emotionally charged language, encouraging users to share the content without verifying its accuracy.

Moreover, fake news often intersects with rumors, conspiracy theories, and misleading statistics. It can take the form of fabricated stories, edited images, or misattributed quotes, blurring the line between credible journalism and disinformation. By masquerading as genuine news, fake news undermines public trust in mainstream media outlets, causing confusion about the reliability of news sources.

The motivations behind the creation and dissemination of fake news are diverse and can range from financial gain through click-through advertising revenue to political manipulation and agenda-setting. State actors, political groups, and malicious entities may use fake news to influence public opinion, sway elections, or provoke social unrest.

In response to the growing prevalence of fake news, fact-checking organizations and media literacy initiatives have emerged to combat the spread of misinformation. Critical evaluation skills, source verification, and an understanding of media biases are becoming increasingly vital for individuals navigating the information landscape.

Thus, fake news embodies false or misleading information presented as genuine news with the deliberate intent to deceive or mislead audiences. Its sensational nature, lack of credible sources, targeting of specific demographics, and rapid dissemination through digital networks contribute to its impact on public perception and trust in media. As technology continues to evolve, addressing the challenges posed by fake news remains crucial to fostering an informed and resilient society capable of distinguishing fact from fiction in the digital age.

Motivation behind spreading Fake News

The motivations behind the spreading of fake news are diverse and can stem from various actors, ranging from individuals seeking personal gains to organized entities pursuing specific agendas. Understanding these motivations is crucial in comprehending the complexity of the fake news phenomenon and devising effective strategies to combat its detrimental effects on society.

Financial Incentives: One of the primary motivations for spreading fake news is financial gain. Individuals or groups may create sensational or clickbait content to drive traffic to their websites or social media platforms, thereby increasing advertising revenue. This "click economy" incentivizes the creation of attention-grabbing headlines and content that may not necessarily be factually accurate but is designed to generate high engagement and ad clicks.

Political Manipulation: Fake news has become a powerful tool for political manipulation and disinformation campaigns. State actors, political parties, or interest groups may disseminate false information to influence public opinion, sway elections, or discredit opponents. By exploiting societal divisions and amplifying existing biases, these entities seek to create confusion and sow seeds of discord to advance their political goals.

Ideological Warfare: Ideologically motivated individuals or organizations may propagate fake news to promote specific worldviews, conspiracy theories, or extremist ideologies. The intention is to foster a sense of belonging among like-minded individuals and radicalize them by presenting distorted or fabricated information that supports their beliefs while demonizing opposing perspectives.

Malignant Activism: Certain individuals or groups may engage in spreading fake news as a form of activism aimed at challenging mainstream narratives or institutions. They might believe that traditional media organizations are biased or unreliable, leading them to disseminate alternative, and often unsubstantiated, narratives as a way to subvert the status quo.

Personal Grudges and Revenge: Fake news can also emerge as a means of settling personal scores or seeking revenge against individuals, organizations, or communities. In such cases, the motivation behind spreading false information may be driven by a desire to damage reputations, create unrest, or cause harm to others.

Trolling and Prank Culture: Some instances of fake news can be attributed to online trolling or prank culture, where individuals seek to garner attention or amusement by disseminating false or outrageous stories. Such motivations may not have significant political or ideological implications but contribute to the overall noise and misinformation in the digital sphere.

Media Manipulation and Attention-Seeking: In a highly competitive media landscape, some individuals or groups may resort to spreading fake news to garner media attention, amplify their voices, or manipulate the news cycle. Fake news, when picked up by mainstream media, can have cascading effects on public perception and agenda-setting.

Psychological Gratification: Spreading fake news may provide some individuals with a sense of power or accomplishment. The ability to deceive others and witness the ensuing reactions can be psychologically gratifying for certain personalities.

Hence the motivations behind spreading fake news are multifaceted, encompassing financial gain, political manipulation, ideological agendas, personal grudges, and attention-seeking. The digital era's vast and interconnected information ecosystem provides a conducive environment for these motivations to thrive, necessitating concerted efforts from various stakeholders to combat the spread of fake news and promote media literacy and critical thinking among the public.

Fake News and its Proliferation in the Digital Age

In the digital age, the proliferation of fake news has become a pressing concern, significantly impacting the information landscape and public discourse. The rapid advancements in technology and the widespread adoption of the internet have facilitated the creation, dissemination, and amplification of false or misleading information. Fake news, characterized by its intentional intent to deceive or misinform, can take various forms, including fabricated stories, manipulated images, misleading headlines, and misrepresented facts.

One of the primary drivers behind the proliferation of fake news in the digital age is the ease of content creation and dissemination. With the rise of social media platforms, blogging sites, and user-generated content, virtually anyone can become a content producer or publisher. This democratization of information-sharing, while empowering in many ways, has also opened the floodgates for the spread of misinformation. Without the traditional editorial oversight present in established media outlets, fake news can circulate unchecked, rapidly reaching vast audiences.

The viral nature of social media has amplified the spread of fake news exponentially. Algorithmic content curation and personalization on platforms contribute to the formation of echo chambers, where individuals are exposed to information that aligns with their preexisting beliefs and values. This selective exposure can reinforce confirmation biases and hinder critical evaluation of information. As fake news resonates with certain ideological or emotional narratives, it becomes more likely to be shared within echo chambers, leading to its rapid dissemination and the creation of information bubbles.

Furthermore, the business model of social media platforms, which relies on user engagement and advertising revenue, inadvertently incentivizes the spread of sensational and attention-grabbing content, regardless of its accuracy. Clickbait headlines and emotionally charged content tend to generate higher engagement, making them more likely to appear in users' feeds. This dynamic creates a fertile ground for the dissemination of fake news, as creators tailor content to evoke strong emotional responses and garner more clicks and shares.

The lack of media literacy and critical thinking skills among users also contributes to the propagation of fake news. With the vast amount of information available online, individuals may struggle to discern credible sources from unreliable ones. The ability to verify information and fact-check claims becomes increasingly important in navigating the digital information ecosystem. Without these skills, users may unwittingly contribute to the spread of misinformation by sharing fake news without proper scrutiny.

Fake news is not limited to any specific region or demographic; its global reach is facilitated by the interconnectedness of the internet. It can have severe consequences, from influencing public opinion and political decisions to inciting social unrest and even causing harm to individuals or communities. Addressing the issue of fake news requires a multi-pronged approach, involving media literacy education, technological interventions, fact-checking initiatives, and responsible content moderation by social media platforms.

The Impact of Fake News on Society

The impact of fake news on society is far-reaching and multifaceted, affecting various aspects of public life, information consumption, and democratic processes. As the dissemination of false or misleading information increases in the digital age, its consequences have become a pressing concern, undermining public trust, polarizing communities, and posing significant challenges to the functioning of democratic societies.

One of the most significant impacts of fake news is its erosion of public trust in media and information sources. The proliferation of false information raises doubts about the reliability and credibility of mainstream media outlets and established journalistic practices. As the line between authentic journalism and fake news blurs, people may become skeptical of all sources of information, leading to a "post-truth" environment where subjective opinions and emotions supersede verifiable facts.

Fake news also exacerbates societal polarization and divisiveness. The selective exposure to information within echo chambers reinforces preexisting beliefs and biases, creating a fragmented information landscape. Individuals are exposed to increasingly divergent worldviews, hindering constructive dialogue and understanding among communities with differing perspectives. This fragmentation can contribute to a breakdown of social cohesion and exacerbate social tensions.

Moreover, the spread of fake news can have severe implications for democratic processes. Misinformation campaigns, fueled by fake news, can influence public opinion and sway elections. When false information is used to manipulate voter behavior, it undermines the foundation of democratic decision-making, raising concerns about the legitimacy of election outcomes. Fake news can also erode trust in democratic institutions and delegitimize the role of the media as the watchdogs of democracy.

The impact of fake news is not limited to politics; it extends to public health, public safety, and global issues. Misinformation related to health matters, such as false claims about vaccines or unproven medical treatments, can lead to life-threatening consequences. Similarly, the spread of fake news about emergencies or disasters can impede response efforts, hindering public safety and relief operations.

Fake news can also have adverse effects on economic systems and businesses. Misleading information about companies or industries can cause stock market fluctuations and investor panic. Businesses and brands may suffer reputational damage due to false rumors or negative narratives propagated through fake news.

Furthermore, fake news can contribute to the amplification of conspiracy theories and extremist ideologies. Individuals exposed to false information may be more susceptible to radicalization or engagement in harmful actions. The viral spread of fake news can lead to the formation of online communities that perpetuate harmful beliefs and potentially incite violence.

Addressing the impact of fake news requires a collective effort from various stakeholders, including media organizations, technology platforms, governments, and civil society. Media literacy programs are crucial to equip individuals with critical thinking skills to navigate the information landscape and discern credible sources from misinformation. Social media platforms must enhance content moderation and fact-checking mechanisms to prevent the rapid spread of fake news. Additionally, responsible journalism practices, transparent reporting, and adherence to ethical guidelines can help restore public trust in media.

Media Trust and Credibility in the Age of Fake News

In the age of fake news, media trust and credibility have become increasingly fragile, posing significant challenges to the traditional role of media as reliable purveyors of information. The rampant spread of misinformation and disinformation has led to a growing skepticism among the public, questioning the authenticity of news sources and the veracity of reported information.

One of the main reasons for the decline in media trust is the blurred lines between reputable news organizations and unreliable sources in the digital age. With the democratization of information dissemination through social media and online platforms, anyone can publish content without proper editorial oversight. As a result, fake news and sensationalized stories often receive equal prominence alongside credible journalism, making it difficult for audiences to distinguish between accurate reporting and misleading information.

The fast-paced nature of digital news cycles has also contributed to a decline in media trust. The pressure to break stories quickly and compete for clicks and views can sometimes compromise journalistic standards. In the rush to publish breaking news, errors may occur, leading to misinformation that erodes public confidence in media organizations.

Moreover, the rise of echo chambers on social media exacerbates the problem of media trust. Users tend to follow and engage with content that aligns with their preexisting beliefs and values, reinforcing confirmation bias. As a result, individuals are more likely to distrust news outlets that challenge their worldview, leading to increased polarization and a lack of consensus on factual information.

The dissemination of fake news by public figures and political leaders further undermines media trust. When prominent figures label credible reporting as "fake news" to dismiss unfavorable coverage, it fosters a climate of mistrust and confusion among the public. This deliberate discrediting of legitimate journalism damages the credibility of the media as a whole, creating an atmosphere of suspicion even towards well-established news organizations.

The impact of declining media trust extends beyond individuals' perception of news outlets. It can have severe consequences for democracy and the functioning of an informed society. A lack of trust in media makes it difficult for citizens to make informed decisions, contribute to

public discourse, and hold leaders accountable. This erosion of trust can also lead to a rise in disengagement from civic and political processes, weakening democratic institutions.

Rebuilding media trust and credibility in the age of fake news requires collective efforts from journalists, media organizations, technology platforms, and the public. Fact-checking initiatives and transparent corrections for errors are essential to demonstrate a commitment to accuracy and accountability. Media literacy programs are necessary to equip individuals with critical thinking skills, empowering them to navigate the complex information landscape effectively.

Media organizations must prioritize ethical reporting practices and adhere to journalistic principles to regain public trust. Emphasizing transparency in sourcing, reporting methods, and editorial decision-making can foster credibility among audiences. Moreover, collaboration between technology platforms and media outlets is crucial to curb the spread of fake news and enhance content moderation algorithms to prioritize reliable information.

Ultimately, restoring media trust and credibility requires a collective societal effort. The public's active engagement in media literacy and responsible information consumption is instrumental in countering the influence of fake news and bolstering confidence in reputable journalism. By promoting ethical reporting, transparent practices, and responsible use of digital media, societies can work towards building a robust information ecosystem that upholds the tenets of truth, accuracy, and integrity.

Review of Literature

The concept of "Fake News" proves to be insufficient in encapsulating the multifaceted issue of disinformation, as stated by HLEG (2018). The term encompasses practices that extend far beyond traditional "Fake News," encompassing activities like the use of automated accounts for organized trolling, networks of fake followers, manipulated videos, targeted advertising, and content that may not be entirely false but still misleading. Additionally, the term "disinformation" is often employed to describe any deliberately false, inaccurate, or misleading information disseminated with the intent to harm the public or achieve financial gains.

In their article titled "Spreadable Spectacle in Digital Culture: Civic Expression, Misinformation, and the Role of Media Literacies in the Post-Fact Society," Mihailidis, P., and Viotty, S. (2017) discuss the phenomenon of Fake News, describing it as hoax-based stories that propagate gossip, rumors, and misinformation. The authors highlight the ongoing debate surrounding how journalists and news organizations present factual information in the age of digital technologies.

In their article "Defining 'Fake News': A typology of academic definitions," published in *Digital Journalism*, Tandoc, E., Lim, Z., and Ling, R. (2018) present a comprehensive overview of different types of Fake News. Their study categorizes Fake News into six distinct categories, including propaganda, news satire, parody, fabrication, and manipulation.

The research titled "Community Intelligence and Social Media Services: A rumor theoretic study of tweets during social crises" by Onok Oh, Raghavrao, and Agrawal Manish delves into the realm of social media platforms and community intelligence during social crises. The study analyzes the spread of vital information and rumors on social media during such situations. Key factors like anxiety, ambiguity in information, personal participation, and social links are investigated as primary contributors to the problem. The study utilizes logistic regression to analyze data from various social crises, including the Mumbai assault, the Toyota case, and the Starbucks café shooting. Results indicate that the ambiguity of the source significantly impacts the spread of rumors, while ambiguity of content plays a lesser role.

In their article titled "Europe Combats a New Foe of Political Stability: Fake News," published in the New York Times in 2017, Scott, M., and Eddy, M. discuss how mainstream political outlets extensively report on Fake News and how global political institutions seek ways to combat this phenomenon.

Wardle, C. (2017) defines Fake News as falsified news stories created either for profit or for political purposes in his article titled "Fake News: It's Complex."

Sydell, L., in a study published in 2016 under the heading "We Discovered a Fake-News Maker in the Exurbs of a Major City. This is What We Picked Up From It," reveals the operations of a United States-based firm known as Disinfomedia, responsible for multiple Fake News websites, including NationalReport.net, USAToday.co, and WashingtonPost.com. The proprietor of this organization claims to employ individuals between the ages of 20 and 25 years.

A research study conducted by Gordon Hull, Heather Richter Lipford, and Celine Latulipe (2021) titled "Contextual Gaps: Privacy Problems on Facebook" explored the concept of contextual integrity as a framework to understand the privacy implications of current social media developments. The study also considered weblogs, a relatively new but rapidly growing phenomenon, due to the increased sharing of ideas online through them. Findings revealed that social media users tend to construct their identities by emphasizing their interactions with others, exposing them to risks such as stalking, re-identification in other contexts, and identity theft. Moreover, concerns were raised about problems caused by third-party applications, often concealed from users, necessitating improvements in program design and user interface, along with increased education for users.

In the context of US election campaigns, websites like the one mentioned in Townsend's article (2016) titled "Meet the Romanian Trump Fan behind a Big Fake News Site" published sensational Fake News to profit from advertising revenue. Additionally, the website endingthefed.com, operated by a 24-year-old individual, emerged as a recent source of Fake News, producing four of the ten most shared Fake News stories about the US election on Facebook.

The term "Fake News" has gained notoriety, particularly after the 2016 US presidential elections, characterized by a significant amount of misinformation and false News, as

discussed in Albright's paper (2016) titled "The #Election 2016 Micro-Propaganda Machine." Albright elaborates on how the phrase "Fake News" became a buzzword during the 2016 US presidential elections.

In his book "Broadcast Hysteria: Orson Welles's Battle of the Worlds and the Era of Fake News," A.B. Schwartz (2021) highlights how during the radio play episode, Welles portrayed an extraterrestrial invasion that many listeners mistakenly perceived as real. Consequently, several people fled into the streets in fear, believing the fictional narrative to be true. Subsequently, numerous news stories followed, describing a destructive extraterrestrial invasion spreading across the United States and the world.

The term "Fake News" is defined as "a type of propaganda or yellow and misleading journalism that consists of deliberate misinformation, spread via traditional media outlets (their print or online editions) or online social media," as stated in Leonhardt, D., and Thompson, S. A.'s (2017) article "Trump's Lies," published in the "New York Times."

Addressing the concept of "Fake News" as not a recent creation, Allcott, H., and Gentzkow, M. (2022) discuss the topic in their article titled "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election." The term "Fake News" has become prevalent in modern discourse, particularly in media coverage, with articles that appear to be news reports but are based on false stories. Researchers classify such articles as Fake News when they include false information that can be independently verified. Researchers identify two primary reasons for the spread of Fake News. The first being monetary gain, as viral news articles on social media generate significant advertising revenue when users click on the source website. The second reason is ideological, with certain publications disseminating Fake News to advance specific political ideologies and propagate propaganda through the use of false facts and data.

Corner, J. (2017) explores the questions of contingency and precariousness concerning the widely accepted "truth" in cultural studies and sociological strands in his research on "Fake News, post-truth, and media-political transition." His study raises questions about the reliability and fragility of what society deems as "truth."

Objective of the Study

1. This study's primary goal is to understand better the phenomenon of Fake News and how it affects the media's credibility.
2. To establish a connection between the dissemination of Fake News and the use of social media platforms.
3. To evaluate the dynamic ecology of Fake News that has called the credibility of real News into doubt
4. To investigate how this phenomenon of Fake News has influenced people and given them a reason to distrust the credibility of the information sources that are now accessible.

Research Methodology

The researcher employs various criteria and randomly selects members from a population to ensure equal probability of inclusion in the sample group.

On the other hand, members of a nonprobability sample are selected randomly, without following any established procedure. This approach may introduce bias and might not adequately represent the entire population. Depending on the research purpose and available resources, the most suitable design for mass media research can be chosen.

There are two main methods of data collection through sampling: probability sampling and non-probability sampling. A sample design refers to the strategy used by a researcher to gather specific information from a particular population, known as the "population under study." The sample design outlines the procedure for data collection from the population, creating a subset that shares the characteristics of the larger group.

In the questionnaire technique, a sampling design is employed to assess the population's characteristics with statistical accuracy. This approach helps answer questions about people's opinions, agreement or disagreement with certain ideas, frequency of specific activities, and more. The questions provide straightforward comparisons and offer results that can be generalized to the entire population.

The sampling procedure is a critical factor when designing a sample. Nowadays, a mixed technique is often used, involving stratified sampling followed by random sampling of the different strata. This approach aims to enhance the representativeness of the sample and improve the accuracy of the findings.

Data Analysis & Interpretation

A. Distribution of the Age of the Participants

Age Group	Response from Respondents	Percentage
18-25	97	38.8%
26-35	81	32.4%
36-45	32	12.8%
46-55	29	11.6%
55 or above	11	4.4%
Total	250	100%

Interpretation:

It is clear from the data shown in the table that the majority of respondents, i.e., 38.8% belong to the age group between 18-25 years, followed by the 26-35 years group, which are 32.4%, 36-45 years age group which is 12.8%, 46-55 years age group which is 11.6% are above 55 years are just 4.4%.

B. Distribution of Gender among the Participants

Gender	Response of Respondents	Percentage
Male	129	51.6%
Female	119	47.6%
Others	2	0.8%
Total	250	100%

From this detailed analysis made for this study, it is seen that male slightly dominates with 51.6% than female respondents, which are 47.6%. 0.8 respondent belongs to other gender.

C. Marital Status of the Respondents

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	144	57.6%
Unmarried	91	36.4%
Other	15	6.00%
Total	250	100.0%

Source: SPSS Output.

Above table depicts the descriptive statistics table providing information about the marital status of respondents. The total number of respondents is 250, out of which 57.6% are married and 36.4% are unmarried. Other 6% of total respondents are either divorced or deserted.

D. Education Levels of the Respondents

Education	Frequency	Percentage
Below Metric	2	0.8
Metric	4	1.6
12 th	23	9.2
Graduation	88	35.2
Post-Graduation	106	42.4
PhD	27	10.8
Total	250	100.0%

Source: SPSS Output.

The survey result throws light on the education level of respondents. It can be observed that the majority of 106 respondents are Post Graduates, and 88 respondents are Graduates. While 27 respondents completed their Ph.D., 23, 4 and 2 respondents studied up to the secondary level, metric and below metric.

Profession of the Respondents

Profession	Frequency	Percentage
Government Employee	33	13.2%
Self Employed	63	25.2%
Businessman	58	23.2%
Professional	41	16.4%
Any other	55	22.0%
Total	250	100.0%

Source: SPSS Output.

It is evident from survey result that 13.2% of respondents are government employees and 25.2% of respondents are self-employed. However, 23.2% of respondents are businessmen, and 16.4% are professionals. The remaining 22.0% of respondents are involved in some other profession.

E. Income Levels of the Respondents

Income	Frequency	Percentage
Below 1 Lakh	4	1.6%
1 Lakh - 1.5 Lakhs	9	3.6%
1.5 Lakhs - 2.5 Lakhs	30	12.0%
2.5 Lakhs - 5 Lakhs	91	36.4%
5 Lakhs - 10 Lakhs	66	26.4%
More than 10 Lakhs	50	20.0%
Total	250	100.0%

Source: SPSS Output.

The survey result exhibits the frequency distribution table giving information about the income of respondents. The table shows that 36.4% of respondents have INR 2.5 to 5 lakhs yearly income. Whereas the yearly income of 26.4% of respondents is INR 5 lakhs to 10 lakhs, and 12.0% of respondents' income is INR 1.5 to 2.5 lakhs per year. While the income of 20% of respondents is more than INR 10 lakhs per year, and 3.6% of respondents have INR 1 to 1.5 lakhs per year income. Only 1.6% of respondents' income is below INR one lakh annually.

F. Participant's Primary Source to get updated about News

Participant's Primary Source to get updated about News	Response from Respondents	Percentage
Social Media Platforms	105	42.0%
Online News Portal	63	25.2%
Newspapers & Magazines	31	12.4%
TV & Radio	37	14.8%
Other Platforms	14	5.6%
Total	250	100%

Interpretation

It is clear from the data shown in the table that the majority, 42% of respondents, are using Social Media Platforms to get updated about News, followed by 25.2% who use Online News Portal, 14.8% who use TV & Radio, 12.4% use Newspapers & Magazines, and remaining 5.6% who use other platform to get updated with News.

G. Time spent on news consumption by the participants

Time spent on news consumption by the participants	Response from Respondents	Percentage
Less than 1 hour	108	43.2%
1-2 hours	54	21.6%
2-3 hours	47	18.8%
3-5 hours	29	11.6%
More than 5 times	11	4.4%
Never	1	0.4%
Total	250	100%

Interpretation:

It is clear from the data shown in the table that the majority, 43.2% of respondents, spend less than 1 hours on watching News from different sources, while 21.6% of respondents spent 1-2 hours, 18.8% spent 2-3 hours, 4.4% spent more than 5 hours. Only 1 respondent (0.4%) never watch any news source.

H. Most Trustworthy Source to get updated about News

Most Trustworthy Source to get updated about News	Response from Respondents	Percentage
Social Media Platforms	28	11.2%
Online News Portal	67	26.8%
Newspapers & Magazines	106	42.4%
TV & Radio	39	15.6%
Other Platforms	10	4.0%
Total	250	100%

Interpretation

It is clear from the data shown in the table that the majority, 42.4 % of respondents, are found Newspapers & Magazines as most trustworthy source to get updated about News, followed by 26.8% who trust Online News Portal, 15.6% who trust TV & Radio, 11.2% trust on Social Media Platforms, and remaining 4% who trust other platform to get updated about News.

I. Participant's found Medium that is most likely to spread Fake News

Medium that is most likely to spread Fake News	Response from Respondents	Percentage
Social Media Platforms	149	59.6%
Online News Portal	40	16.0%
Newspapers & Magazines	12	4.8%
TV & Radio	44	17.6%
Other Platforms	5	2.0%
Total	250	100%

Interpretation

It is clear from the data shown in the table that the majority, 59.6% of respondents, found that Social Media Platforms are the main source to spread the Fake News, followed by 17.6% who think Fake News spread through TV & Radio, 16% who think its Online News Portal, 4.8% thinks Newspapers & Magazines are the major sources of spreading the Fake News. The remaining 2% of respondents think a few other platforms are the main source of spreading the Fake News.

J. Mediums that crosscheck the fact before Publishing the News

Trustworthy Mediums that crosscheck the fact before Publishing the News	Response from Respondents	Percentage
Social Media Platforms	23	9.2%
Online News Portal	57	22.8%
Newspapers & Magazines	106	42.4%
TV & Radio	53	21.2%
Other Platforms	11	4.4%
Total	250	100%

Interpretation

It is clear from the data shown in the table that the majority, 42.4 % of respondents, are found Newspapers & Magazines as most trustworthy source that crosscheck the fact before publishing the News, followed by 22.8% who trust Online News Portal, 21.2% who trust TV & Radio, 9.2% trust on Social Media Platforms, and remaining 4.4% who trust other platforms as a most trustworthy source that crosschecks the fact before publishing the News.

K. Do you think the problem of Fake news was always there in our society

The problem of Fake News was always there in our society	Response from Respondents	Cumulative Number of Respondents
Strongly Disagree	16	16
Disagree	20	36
Neutral	72	108
Agree	44	152
Strongly Agree	98	250
Total	250	250
Middle Point	$250/2=125$	Category of Middle Point - Agree
Difference	$125-108=$	17
Calculated Fraction	$17/44=$	0.38
Median	$3.5+0.38$	3.88

Interpretation:

The majority of people who took part in the survey are of the opinion that there has always been a presence of Fake News in society. The idea that our culture has always been riddled with instances of Fake News is supported by the opinions of 56.8% of people who either “agree” or “strongly agree” with the statement. This suggests that they do not consider Fake News a recent phenomenon and that it has never been so widespread or difficult to spot.

The Likert scale was used to evaluate the responses to these questions. While responding to Likert questions, “respondents specify their level of agreement or disagreement on a symmetric agree-disagree scale for a series of statements. Thus, the range captures the intensity of their feelings for a given item. The scale has 5 rating points. The options are Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree nor Disagree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree”.

The table above shows that the median point of this analysis comes at 3.88, which has fallen into the agreed category. Therefore, it can be deduced that the trend among participants was mostly positive toward general agreement.

L. Your trust in media declined over the past few years?

Your trust in media has declined over the past few years	Response from Respondents	Cumulative Number of Respondents
Strongly Disagree	12	12
Disagree	16	28
Neutral	52	80
Agree	100	180
Strongly Agree	70	250
Total	250	250
Middle Point	$250/2=125$	Category of Middle Point – Agree
Difference	$125-80=$	45

Calculated Fraction	$45/100=$	0.45
Median	$3.5+0.45$	3.95

Interpretation:

About 68% of individuals who participated in the survey claimed that their level of trust in the media has significantly decreased over the last few years due to the myriad of reasons they cited in response to other questions. As a direct consequence, Fake News is often cited as one of the primary reasons for the decline in trust that has occurred in recent years. Although the rest of the 11.2% did not experience a decline in trust, 20.8% of the respondents were indifferent.

The table above shows that the median point of this analysis comes at 3.95, which has fallen into the agreed category. Therefore, it can be deduced that the trend among participants was mostly positive toward general agreement.

M. Fake News has made you more doubtful/careful about the News that you receive

Fake News has made you more doubtful/careful about the News that you receive	Response from Respondents	Cumulative Number of Respondents
Strongly Disagree	14	14
Disagree	22	36
Neutral	52	88
Agree	72	160
Strongly Agree	90	250
Total	250	250
Middle Point	$250/2=125$	Category of Middle Point - Agree
Difference	$125-88=$	37
Calculated Fraction	$37/72=$	0.51
Median	$3.5+0.51$	4.01

Interpretation:

64.8% of the overall respondents thought that their level of scepticism about reputable sources of information had increased due to the prevalence of Fake News. 14.4% of the respondents were adamantly against it. This is a strong indication of Fake News's influence on people's ability to trust sources, particularly reliable sources of News and information. A total of 20.8% of respondents did not have an opinion on the influence of Fake News or trusting news sources.

The table above shows that the median point of this analysis comes at 4.01, which has fallen into the agreed category. Therefore, it can be deduced that the trend among participants was mostly positive toward general agreement.

N. Social media platforms have more chances of spreading Fake News

Social media platforms have more chances of spreading Fake News	Response from Respondents	Cumulative Number of Respondents
Strongly Disagree	12	12
Disagree	18	30
Neutral	48	78
Agree	98	176
Strongly Agree	74	250
Total	250	250
Middle Point	$250/2=125$	Category of Middle Point - Agree
Difference	$125-78=$	47
Calculated Fraction	$47/98=$	0.48
Median	$3.5+0.48$	3.98

Interpretation:

This table illustrates that 68.8% of respondents agreed with the statement that social media platforms facilitate the proliferation of Fake News. That clearly indicates how people feel about social media platforms and how they have contributed to the problem of giving gasoline to the already rising issue of Fake News. Because the data was obtained during COVID-19, many Fake News stories about COVID-19 rapidly circulated throughout social media and among the general public.

The data shown in the table that can be seen above reveals that the median point of this study is 3.98, which shows it is within the category of agree.

Conclusion

In the present era, information has become an invaluable resource, driving our society and democracy. Ideally, access to accurate information empowers individuals to make informed decisions and strengthens democratic principles. However, the prevalence of false information, commonly known as Fake News, has led to severe repercussions, impacting public health, political stability, press freedom, and more.

The current infodemic is a global concern, with misinformation spreading rapidly through various media platforms. This phenomenon has resulted in grave consequences, from loss of life due to health misinformation during the pandemic to the manipulation of public opinions and even government overthrows. Despite its significance, few media academics have

explored the profound influence of Fake News and information disorder on the core tenets and values of journalism.

Regrettably, the rise of social media has compromised the integrity of professional journalism. False narratives are crafted and propagated globally, posing a threat to democracy and limiting people's ability to make informed choices freely. Social media platforms play a pivotal role in disseminating misinformation, lacking gatekeepers, fact-checking mechanisms, editors, and publishers, making it easier for false information to spread unchecked.

Interestingly, despite acknowledging the unreliability of social media as a source of news and information, many individuals still rely on these platforms for their primary source of information. This paradox highlights the complex interplay between conscious and unconscious cognitive behaviors, as individuals seek validation of their preconceived notions and beliefs.

Moreover, the abundance of Fake News on social media platforms has significantly eroded people's trust in traditional media outlets. Parody, propaganda, misleading content, imposters, fabrications, false context, and content have flourished, undermining the credibility of credible news sources.

Addressing the issue of Fake News and information disorder requires a multifaceted approach, involving media literacy education, responsible platform management, and critical thinking among information consumers. Rebuilding trust in credible news sources and raising awareness about the dangers of misinformation are crucial steps in safeguarding the democratic fabric of our society.

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