

MAPPING CONSUMERS' ENGAGEMENT WITH FAKE NEWS: A STUDY OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

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Abstract

Despite the fact that fake news is not a recent phenomenon, in recent years, the topic of fake news and its influence has gained significance and prominence. The spread of fake news has caused confusion and mayhem in the public domain. The advent of digitalization and technological revolution has created an ecosystem in which fake news can proliferate and spread quickly. Because of their unregulated freedom, social media sites are vulnerable to bullying, propaganda, and, as a result, fake news. In recent years, social media has emerged as a major player in influencing civic debate in a democratic setting. Social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp and others provide a forum for the production and immediate sharing of fake news. This paper aims to explore the social media platform that bears a major chunk of fake news and draws further and more important conclusions about the ways users detect and interact with fake news on social media platforms. This paper also investigates the interplay of active consumption of news and virtual behaviour on social media. The study employed the survey method in analysing the users and consumers role to determine the dissemination and consumption of fake news on social media.

Keywords: Fake News, Social Media Platforms, Media Literacy, Active consumption, Technological Determinism, Public Sphere

Introduction

News is everywhere in everyday life, whether it is automatically absorbed through traditional news sources like television or radio, or consciously sought out through more participatory channels like the internet. Previously, news was mainly transmitted on television and reported in print form in

newspapers; however, with the invention of the internet, multimedia and social media have become the norm. Social networking has become a pervasive medium for news in the modern era and the most recent to make information more public.

But this portrays only one side of the global debate. The depressing fact is that the unlimited freedom on social media has led to the proliferation of unpleasant events that have challenged consumers' confidence, fake news has become a global issue. The dissemination of fake news on social media has caused global outrage. In comparison to traditional and conventional media sources, social media sites provide unrestricted access. Since social media sites offer a free forum for people to share their thoughts and views, no regulations that limit users' rights can be enforced in effect.

As a result, eliminating fake news from social media is almost unrealistic, as the flow of material, or content, cannot be completely regulated. The sheer volume of false news has the potential to have highly damaging consequences on both people and culture. In the summer of 2018, rumours about a kidnapping gang working in India's western state of Maharashtra started to spread on WhatsApp groups. After hearing the rumours, a lynch mob killed five migrant workers accused of being kidnappers when they landed in a village in the state's Dhule district. This wasn't an unusual occurrence. In 2018, at least 17 murders in India were related to child abduction rumours circulated through viral WhatsApp messages. Rumours of livestock dealers and organ harvesters led to brutal assaults on unarmed civilians.

These hoaxes or false news purposely or inadvertently misinform or mislead consumers. These articles are mostly made to manufacture opinions, advance a certain political ideology, confuse people, and they can be a lucrative business for web publishers, hence making money out of click-baiting people. Fake news has a higher rate of 'like' and 'clicks' and 'share' on and across various social media platforms, therefore fabricating a nexus of digital folklores of hoaxes. The lack of a strong distinction between true and false news for internet users further undermines source legitimacy. This has now become one of the serious challenges to the current democratic regime, as well as a hot subject among debaters.

One example of how fake news is generated and changes opinions is the 26th January 2021 tweet of Rajdeep Sardesai, a senior news anchor and consulting editor of India Today, claiming, "One person, 45-year-old Navneet, was killed allegedly in police firing at ITO. Farmers tell me: the 'sacrifice' will not go in vain,". Many social media users also shared the video with the same claim.

Rajdeep Sardesai, after the police released the video, retracted his statement on his earlier tweet. In a later tweet, he responded to the video and claimed that the tractor flipped whilst attempting to bust through police barricades, and that the 'farm protestors' charges do not stand. Several political leaders had requested that Rajdeep be charged with spreading false facts.

Yet another demonstration of circulation of fake news was witnessed in Sourav Ganguly's case: Photos of BCCI President Sourav Ganguly were digitally morphed to say that he is entering politics. A reverse image search by The Logical Indian fact checking team turned up an image of Saurav Ganguly in a similar pose, but with the backdrop of a poster of Cycle Agarbatti. The original image was posted on Pinterest to promote Cycle Rhythm Agarbatti, endorsed by Sourav Ganguly. This is the finest epitome of a fact checking website debunking the false claim. Between January and June 2020, five Indian fact-checking websites refuted reports. Categorically speaking, they were on Coronavirus outbreak, February's Delhi riots, Citizenship Amendment Act and Claims about the Muslim minority. The statements about coronavirus dominated the 1,447 fact-checks on five Indian portals, accounting for 58 percent of them. This was mostly on bogus cures and remedies, lockout rumours, and conspiracy theories over the virus's origins.

While there is no single term for false news, what makes it an issue is that it allows for nuanced understanding of the word, making analysis and policy initiatives challenging. The head of Parliamentary Standing Committee on Communications and Information Technology, Shashi Tharoor, noted that the contributors of content were not just the owners of websites but also individual subscribers on whom exercising control was posing a huge challenge. The committee noted that news fact check must be done through non-government news agencies such as 'AltNews', 'Check4spam', 'SMHoaxslayer' etc. The committee further suggested that the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) develop some legal provisions and appreciated the establishment of fact check units in 17 regional offices of the Press Information Bureau (PIB). Further, the provisions in the Information Technology Rules 2011, penalise persons spreading fake news (Indian Express, 2021). However, both social media and consumers have a role to play in sharing this kind of news fare. Individual and community users are taking steps to combat the dissemination of fake news on social media. This study focuses on these individuals and their behaviour in order to create a more robust system for consumers to recognise and combat fake news.

With the advent of monitoring and flagging platforms, social media companies such as Google and Facebook have announced new laws to curb fake

news (CBS News, 2016). In India, WhatsApp, owned by Facebook introduced a feature that restricted news forwarding to a maximum of five chats in 2018. However, WhatsApp claimed that it has no power over the information being posted because it is encrypted from beginning to end but made major product improvements and partnered with civil society allies, relevant government agencies, and other technology channels to help counter the negative effects of disinformation (Reuters, 2018).

While these are encouraging developments, digital media literacy and the ability to accurately evaluate information are critical skills for anyone who uses the internet. The overwhelming volume of information available online, as well as the emergence of fake political news, reinforces the value of critical thought. As a consequence, it is important to investigate users' acts of authentication in identifying and countering false news on social media. The tools and approaches they use to acknowledge a fake post, and how they engage with it, can be used to gather valuable knowledge about how consumers might behave online to curtail fake news on social media. According to a survey, there were about 15,000 new WhatsApp users in December 2020 who wanted to check claims (Saxena, 2021). Once they became pleased with the evidence, they returned with further instances of disinformation from their communities and networks. In this way, fact-seekers should continue to grow.

This research aims to explore the platform's user's desire to interact with news in the era of internet, the social media platform responsible for dissemination of fake news and then the objective steps that they seek to identify news as fake or true, backed by a survey. This will also facilitate exploration if they curb its circulation. In addition to the aforementioned questions, the research would also help to know how much media literate is our audience and whether they consume news actively or passively. It would explore the authentication acts and the users' interactions with false news.

Review of Literature

This section reviews recent literature references relevant to understanding the interplay of variables and provides a variety of current facts showing the pervasive dissemination of false news. The distinction between the term fake news, false news and misinformation are highlighted here for clarity. Fake news, or fabricated information that is obviously false, has become a major concern in the context of Internet-based media. Several scholars have defined fake news in different ways. The distinction between the term fake news, false news and misinformation are highlighted here for clarity. Fake news, or fabricated information that is obviously false, has become a major concern in the context of Internet-based media. Several scholars have defined fake news

in different ways.

Southwell, Thorson and Sheble (2017) underline conceptual differences between misinformation and disinformation, and examine in detail the grounding of truth necessary for defining misinformation. Lazer et al. (2018) remind us of the significance of process and intent when conceptualizing fake news, while Jack (2017) further sorts out the conceptual differences and similarities among a cluster of concepts related with problematic information, ranging from disinformation to propaganda.

Tandoc, Lim and Ling (2018) also analyze how the term fake news has been used by scholars, and developed a categorization based on facticity and intention to deceive. They placed different kinds of online content on these two dimensions. To further understand with an example of propaganda, which scores high on both, whereas fabrication is low on facticity but high on deceptive intention. Such classification of different types of fake news is a useful starting point in enhancing our understanding of the phenomenon. However, there can be more such distinguishing characteristics and dimensions, especially those that can be incorporated in automated detection algorithms.

Facticity is useful for fact-checking news stories, but cannot be relied on in the case of breaking news about emergent events where no previous information is available. The intent to deceive may probably be inferred by knowing the pedigree of the news source, but can be difficult to establish in a dispositive manner. Thus, for machine learning purposes, we need a more comprehensive definition that can not only distinguish between a variety of fake news but also lend itself to operationalization at a very granular level for machine detection.

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“Fake or Not Fake? Perceptions of Undergraduates on (Dis)Information and Critical Thinking” (Melro and Pereira, 2019) shows how young people interact with news, their experiences of misinformation, and their views on the importance of critical thought in their public and political lives. This research leads to a greater interpretation of young people’s news and misinformation practices and attitudes. The findings indicate that, while most students report minimal objective examination of facts, they do share concerns about misinformation in their lives, meaning a range of acts to counteract the dissemination of false news. Furthermore, the results stress the value of news and media literacy in a post-fact society. Additionally, they characterise misinformation as a concern for culture, and as a result, they believe it must be solved without jeopardising free speech.

“Who falls for fake news? The roles of receptivity, over claiming, familiarity, and analytic thinking” (Pennycook and Rand, 2019) investigates the psychological profile of individuals who fall prey to fake news by surveying 1606 participants from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk. The study indicates that confidence in false news is affected by a general propensity to overestimate the legitimacy of poor statements. This phenomenon, which we call reflexive open-mindedness, may be partially responsible for the pervasive proliferation of epistemically questionable views. As a result, individuals who believe in false news are often more susceptible to pseudo-profound nonsense, more likely to exaggerate their intelligence, and rank lower on the CRT (a test of analytic thinking). The findings indicate that there is hope for education or training aimed at moving people from reflexive open-mindedness to reflective open-mindedness to boost individuals’ proclivity to fall for fake news and other nonsense.

'Fake News and Cyber Propaganda: A study of manipulation and abuses on Social Media' (Goswami, 2018) examines a case analysis of the extensive and far-reaching impact of fake news as a medium of cyber propaganda. The paper's objective is to understand the effect of fake news while manipulating and abusing the benefits of social media sites, determine the intentions behind propagating fake news and assess the counter measures taken to prevent flow of fake news. The study chose three cases namely, Twitter account hacking of Associated Press, Fake news of Syrian President Assad's death and Kiran Bedi's tweet with a fake video to qualitatively gauge the nature of fake news and their impact from three different perspectives. The study culminates with inferences stating that fake news is designed with the ability to go viral, consisting of unverified facts, sensationalism and pulling emotional attention. It also observed that the majority of fake news are politically motivated and vigilance is crucial to curb the spread of false information.

"Deception Detection for News: Three Types of Fakes" (Rubin, et al, 2015) discusses three types of fake news, each in addition to real serious reporting, and weighs their advantages and drawbacks as a corpus for text analytics and predictive modelling. It is based on the likelihood that a given news story is purposefully dishonest is predicted using an interpretation of previously seen factual and deceptive reporting.

What is fake news?

Lazer et al. defined fake news to be fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent. Fake news outlets, in turn, lack the news media's editorial norms and processes for ensuring the accuracy and credibility of information. Fake news overlaps with other information disorders, such as misinformation (false or misleading information) and disinformation (false information that is deliberately spread to deceive people).

While there is no single meaning of fake news, what makes it a challenge is that it provides for subjective understanding of the term, making research and policy initiatives challenging. Fake news consists of articles, news, and hoaxes designed to intentionally misinform or mislead viewers, or to further a political agenda. In today's world, numerous media outlets spread false news. Fake news is not governed by any journalistic standards or procedures which ensures some knowledge quality and credibility, but overlaps with different forms of misinformation.

Claire Wardle, the Director of Research for the Tow Centre for Digital Journalism in New York (2017, p. 20), emphasises the significance of discriminat-

ing between real and false messages. In an effort to define misinformation and false news, Wardle (2017) identifies seven types of “information disorders”. They are (a) satire or parody, no intention to cause harm and is only to fool; (b) misleading content, used to frame an issue or an individual; (c) imposter content, when genuine sources are impersonated; (d) fabricated contents, when false contents are designed to deceive and do harm; (e) false connection, when headlines, visuals and captions do not support the content; (f) false context, when genuine content is presented with false contextual information; (g) manipulated content, when information is manipulated to deceive.

Fake news has also been used extensively in the manipulation of images or videos to create a deceptive narrative. With the advent of digital photos and powerful image manipulation software, the manipulation of images has become a common occurrence. Simple adjustments can change the colour combination and saturation, and even delete or add minor elements. More-invasive and drastic changes can include removing or inserting a person into an image.

There exist immense and in-depth studies on fake news, each within different and differed ideological, political and cultural change. But what is more important is to curb the proliferation of fake news. With the emergence of unpleasant events that have questioned users’ interest in the press, especially across social media, ‘fake news’ has become a global concern. The lack of regulatory enforcement or rules that could either curb false news or make perpetrators responsible for their actions has only exacerbated the situation. Conscious consumers have repeatedly addressed the question of reviewing and amending current legislation to resolve the problems of fake news spread, but attempts from both politicians and civic society have not been sufficient to address this gap within the overwhelming digital space.

The study divides the challenge of detecting false news into three categories based on the category of fake: a) extreme fabrications (discovered in mass or participant newspapers, yellow press, or tabloids); b) large-scale hoaxes; and c) satirical fakes (news satire, parody, game shows).

Theoretical Framework

The first move in understanding how media consumers engage with news, messages, and sources is through the Uses and Gratification theory of media studies. Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973) synthesized that UGT’s approach was focused on “the social and psychological origins of needs, which generate expectations of the mass media or other sources, which lead to differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), re-

sulting in need gratifications and some other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones". In other words, whether a medium is used by an audience is dictated by its utility in presenting information and is affected by the audiences' motivations. Without being readily swayed, media activity represents past preferences and hobbies. It is supposed that audience members are not passive media users. Rather, the audience retains control over their cultural use and actively participates in understanding and incorporating media with their own lives. Given the study's purpose, it is especially important to state that the UGT is regarded as an umbrella mechanism to quantify the active role that people play when detecting fake news on social media. The approach gains added relevance as the current study seeks to address this position that most of the consumers employ their actions of authentication and are not distinctively categorized as passive audience.

Jurgen Habermas' (1962) study on the public sphere has also influenced this analysis. Jurgen Habermas claims, "We call events and occasions 'public' when they are open to all, in contrast to closed or exclusive affairs" (online, n.p). This 'public sphere' is a "realm of our social life in which some issues percolate and public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens" (ibid). Habermas contends that, under such circumstances, the media function to promote public dialogue. With the rise of the Internet, there has been a revival of researchers extending public sphere theory to Internet technology. The paradigm under which social media operates has a significant impact on how content on social media influences its audience. It is mainly concerned with the number of clicks, which act as a vector in the dissemination of targeted advertising capable of manipulating and shaping public discourse. This model allows for the development of a forum, cleaning one's propaganda in a quiet way that the viewer doesn't notice. Because of the audiences' power, false news spreads even faster than truthful information. Instead of fostering a balanced public domain, social media is regularly accused of manipulating public discourse, unfairly engineering people's actions, and disrupting the political process (Marda & Milan, 2018). The public sphere connects public life and civil society. It is the space of culture that all people have equal rights to join in and debate issues of general concern in order to shape public opinion (Habermas, Lennox and Lennox, 1964). The evolution of social media and its growing position as a medium for its users to voice their views has ensured unlimited freedom. Social media gathers knowledge and viewpoints from all of its audiences, regardless of class – bourgeois or proletarian – and thus offers a neutral forum to debate any issue of mutual concern. Since it satisfies the simple prerequisites of having a venue, although digitally, for participants' free expression, it virtually becomes a public domain. Technological determinism is yet another media studies theo-

ry that has formed the foundation for the study. Technological determinism is the idea that technology has the ability to drive human interaction and create social change. Term coined by Thorstein Veblen in the 1920s, believed that technology is the agent of social change and moulds the society and changes our behaviours and interactions. Marshall McLuhan states that we are living in a new age of technology that has never been experienced before. McLuhan (1964) was convinced that the lifestyles people live rely heavily on the way they process information. Each communication invention throughout history changed the way people thought about themselves and the world around them. Neil Postman (1984) warns that each media technology carries an inherent ideology that it thrusts upon its users. The mediated world has replaced traditional print values with cyber virtues such as speed, emotional involvement and immediate gratification and that we must assess the effect of technologies on our lives before we adopt them. Social media has led to immediate spread of news across societies and communities. The increase in interaction among users has in turn shaped the generation and dissemination of fake news as well around which users form their opinion on varied issues. While traditional forms of media were hardly doubted, the advent of social media platforms has reduced the argument of passivity in the audience. Consumers now actively interact with the content that they encounter on social media and investigate the claims made through the means.

In view of the above literature the study hypothesised that in the accelerated era of digitalization, in addition to conventional outlets of media, a major bulk of news is absorbed via social media platforms. As an extension to the earlier consideration, the evolving social media often serves as a hub for false and fake news.

Objectives

The research paper has dual objectives pertaining to fake news and its consumption on social media: First, it is imperative to examine the source primarily responsible for the circulation of fake news. Second, to analyse consumers' behaviour towards fake news to know how actively they engage and interact with fake news encounter on social media platforms.

Justification for the study

In the modern age, the unrestricted independence granted by social media channels to its consumers has acted as a catalyst in the spread of fake news. This research paper is driven by the aim to know how consumers restrict the genesis and dissemination of fake news, proliferated via social media. Studying the aforementioned phenomenon makes it a relevant examination in recent times.

Limitations of the study

Since the sample size of respondents is limited, the results do not represent the behaviour of the larger population with respect to false news spread on social media. Because of the extraordinary lockdown condition triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey could only be completed digitally, and hence the researcher's coverage was restricted by the scope of his contacts. Since the respondents are disproportionately from cities, the results must be generalised in light of this reality. This has impacted the opportunity to receive feedback from media houses. The survey was circulated out to and filled by educated, media-literate, and engaged news users which could have possible bearing on the results. The results may have also been motivated by the scarcity of secondary data and the use of only primary data. The quantitative analysis of the paper should have been balanced and assisted more effectively by qualitative analysis.

Methodology

Here is a brief description about the process of this study, including details about the technique used to gather responses from the participants to make the results of this report, summarised below, easier to understand.

For this study, a quantitative approach was employed to gauge how social media users cum news consumers come across and interact with fake news. An online survey of 141 participants was conducted in the form of google forms. The respondents, chosen using probability sampling procedure, belonged to a deliberated target population, reflective of urban, north Indian demographic, involved in public discourses, highly engaged in news consumption and using social media for that reason. A liberal range of age group was preferred specifically in the age group of 18 to 65 years, majorly to catch a wider perspective for finer evaluations. A questionnaire was designed and administered to the respondents. In the era of social media that circulates the majority of fake news, how much informed does one think it is? The survey aimed to gather news consumption patterns, their ability to identify accuracy/genuineness of the news story and the techniques and methods employed by them to curb its spread. Based on the theoretical framework and review of literature, the survey was designed with close ended questions which were straightforward in nature and effortlessly comprehended by the participants.

The responses were recorded to the objective questions (close ended questions) provided by the researcher which were mandatory to be answered. Just 34 of the respondents responded to the two open-ended questions that were needed to analyse statistical results in a qualitative manner and also supported the respondents' choices in objective questions. The questionnaire was

supplemented with a modest description about the survey and its purpose to enlighten the users about the aim of the study and help in filling out the form organically. The categories of questions differed and included multiple choice questions with just one choice allowed and multiple-choice questions with more than one choice allowed. On average, the questionnaire took a few minutes for submission and was made easily available to the respondents, shared through social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram.

The availability of various responses allowed for a comparative analysis. This research paper contained both descriptive and comparative analysis. The data obtained for this analysis was analysed. The data from the questionnaire responses of the respondents was critically and statistically observed, and several maps were generated based on the responses. A review assessment and explanation of findings were conducted using Google responses, and the findings are projected here below.

Data Interpretation and Analysis

Having examined the methods used to gather responses from the respondents, it is pertinent to move to the analytical analysis and interpret the data collected in order to answer the study's key questions: how many users refer to social media for news consumption and how do they identify and interact with fake news encountered on social media platforms. This following section describes the data collected from the target group's responses. In reality, this segment contains user choices that were used to address the objective of this study and produce conclusions and data. The data derived from the objective questions is presented below, and their understanding is explored as part of the interpretation.

The sample respondents belonged to a varied age group and the figure 1 below depicts the age groups of the respondents.

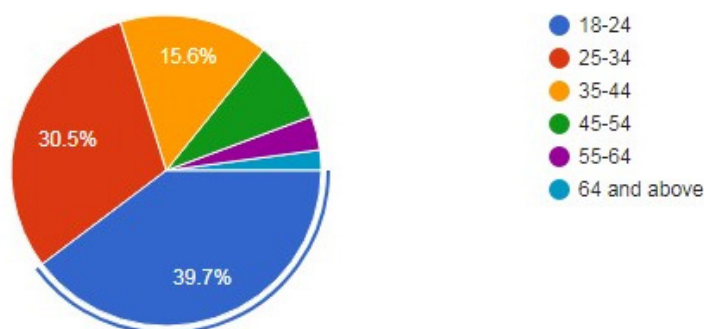


Figure 1: Age group of respondents

The majority of respondents, 39.7 percent, were between the ages of 18 and 24, closely followed with 30.5 percent being between the ages of 25 and 34. Participants aged 45 and up who responded to the questionnaire were insignificant.

The respondents were asked to indicate the sources of news. Among the sources of news all mainstream media and social media platforms were listed to opt for news consumption.

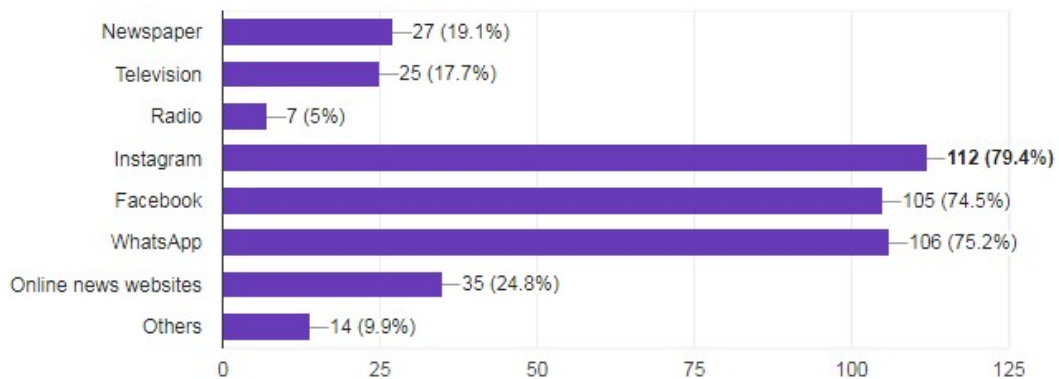


Figure 2: Sources of news and news consumption

The graph above depicts the medium most favoured by respondents for news consumption. According to the data, 112 of the 141 respondents opted to ingest news from Instagram (79.4 percent). Users also tend to consume news from Facebook (74.5 percent) and WhatsApp (75.2 percent). The bar graph also shows that 19.1 percent of people get their news from newspapers, 17.7 percent from television, and just 5 percent switch to radio to get their news. According to the figures, in the era of the internet, people are using social

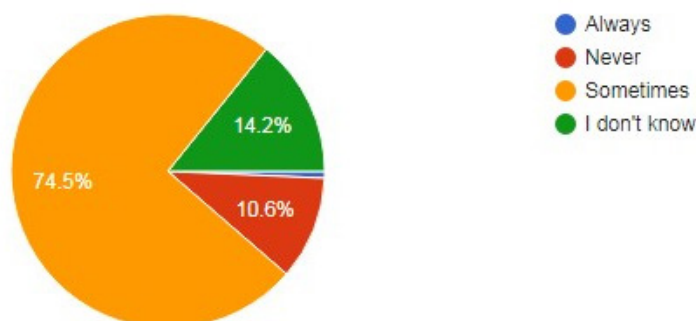


Figure 3: Frequency of becoming a victim of a fake story

The above-mentioned query was asked from the participants to understand how often they fall victim to fake news reports they find on social media platforms. The majority of respondents, 74.5 percent, admit to falling for false news on occasion, while 10.6 percent say they are never a victim of fake news stories and 14.2 percent are unsure if they believe in it or not. Just a small number of those surveyed trust in the fake news stories they encounter on social media platforms.

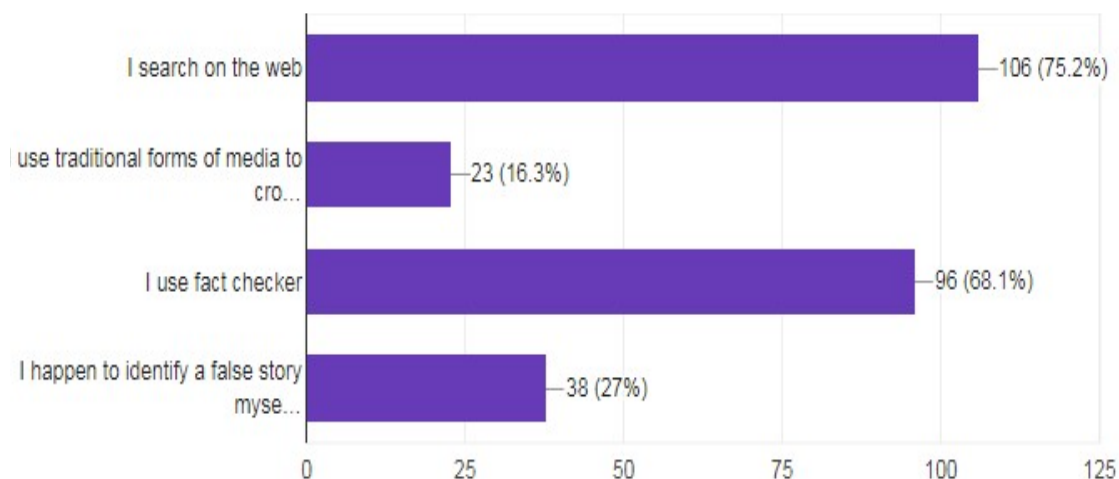


Figure 4: Methods adopted to identify a fake news story on social media

This objective is pertinent for the research paper as it asks the respondents about the ways through which they identify and detect a story as fake which is required to further analyse how they curb its dissemination. 106 out of 141 participants reported that when they read news on social media, they browse the internet for all related information in order to determine if the story provided is accurate or not. More specifically, 75.2 percent of participants said that they do their own web analysis to affirm the authenticity of the news they read on social media. 68.1 percent of the users tend to seek fact checkers, mostly along with their search on the web to figure out a story as fake or not. 27 percent happen to identify a fake story themselves and only 16.3 percent use traditional forms like television or newspapers to identify false stories.

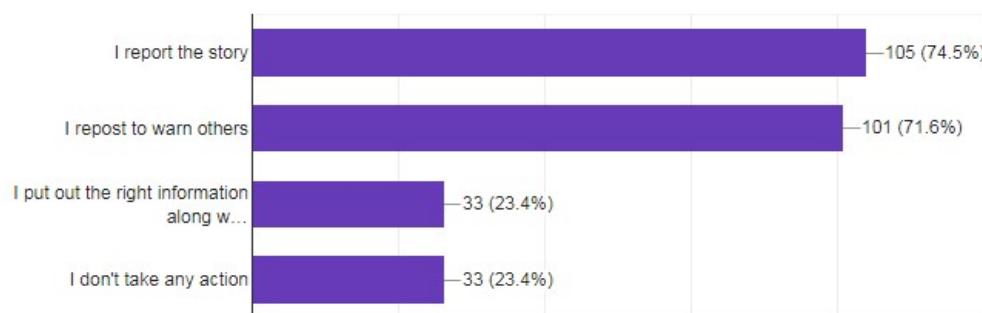


Figure 5: Responses after identifying a fake story

Participants were asked to choose from the given options stating the possible interactions one could have with false information circulated on social media channels after they suggested which resources they used to classify fake news on social media. 74.5 percent of the respondents chose reporting the fake news story, closely followed by 71.6 percent choosing to repost false stories to inform and alert others about the same. 23.4 percent put out the fake story with the right information and the percent of respondents do not take action against fake news existing on social media platforms and thus have a very negligible role in curbing the dissemination of false stories floating on social media.

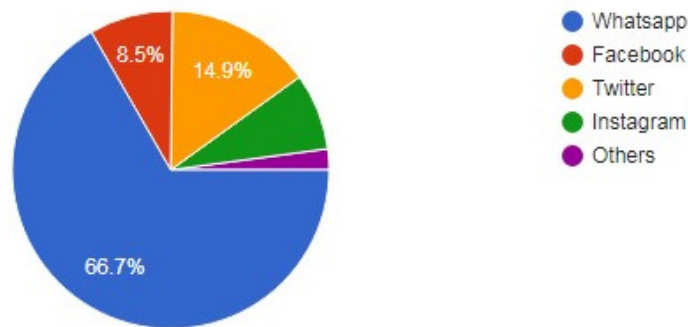


Figure 6: Identification of the social media platform which posts majority of fake news stories

On being asked about the social media platform that provides the most convenient environment for proliferation and easy sharing of fake news among the users, most of the votes were banked by WhatsApp. Majority of the respondents (66.7 percent) identified WhatsApp as the bearer of the majority of fake news circulated across platforms. About 14.9 percent opted for Twitter and 8.5 percent saw Facebook as fertile habitat for fake news stories. Instagram and others are nowhere near compared to WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter as indicated in the figure 6

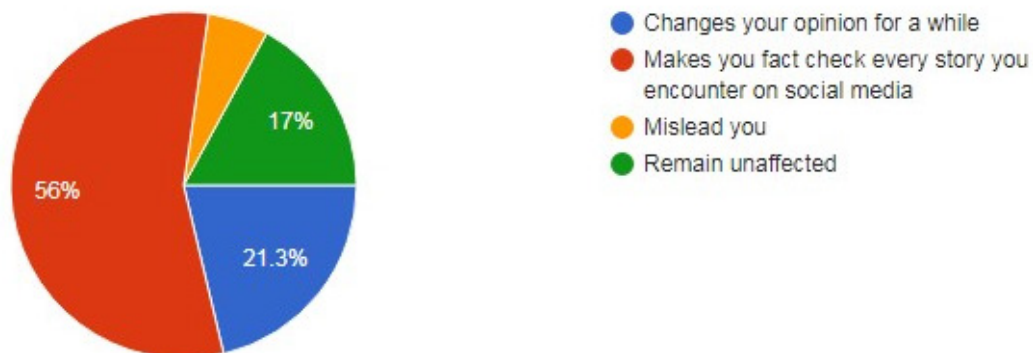


Figure 7: Kinds of impact of a fake story on the respondents

After interrogating about the ways of detecting and curbing fake news, it became imperative to know the impact of fake news on people to gauge the possible effects of fake news on the respondents. ‘Makes you fact check every news story you encounter on social media’ scored 56 percent, the highest of all mentioned in the survey. While 21.3 percent felt that fake news does change their opinion for a while, and only 17 percent were found to be unaffected by the false news flowing through various social media channels. The pie chart also helped indicate that an insignificant percent of respondents had the tendency to be misled by fake news stories.

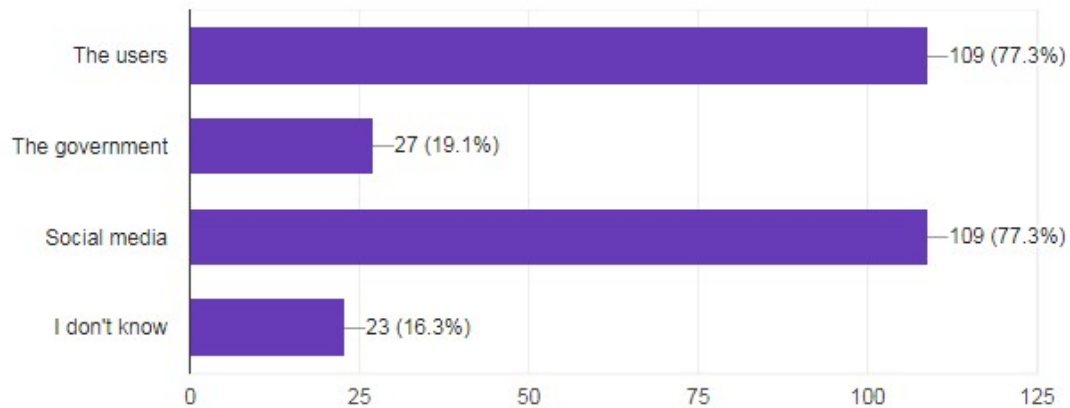


Figure 8:

Fixing responsibility for curbing the spread of fake news on social media

Now, when it is critical to combat the dissemination of fake news on social media, by the same token there is a scope for raising the issue of who should be held accountable. Majority of the respondents (77.3 percent) voted in favour of the users themselves and the social media platforms for curbing the spread of fake news. Only 19.1 percent of respondents held the government responsible for fighting the widespread circulation of fake news and 16.3 percent had no clue who should be responsible for the same.

Conclusion

Fake news is a growing part of the media world and a regular feature in our news cycle, pointing to the key culprit, social networking platforms that provide resources for quickly creating and disseminating fake news. The rapid dissemination of misleading content via social media platforms has made the issue of spread of fake news even more crucial. Given the difficulty of discriminating between accurate news and falsified information presented with the intent to confuse the reader, it is becoming particularly necessary to consider how social media users identify and check the news they believe to be inaccurate. And even before examining this, it is important to be informed about the platforms that news consumers prefer in contemporary times.

The findings suggest that participants prefer social media platforms, where they spend a major chunk of their routine over conventional types of media to receive news on a regular basis, resulting in coming across a vast volume of fake news going about on social media platforms. The respondents commented on the definition of fake news as information that is inaccurate or misleading and is portrayed as facts or news. It is often used to damage a person's or entity's credibility or to make money. Some also answered by giving examples like morphed images, satire or intentional generation of misleading information portrayed as facts. This implies that the respondents are well aware of what fake news is and acquire a certain amount of media literacy. This would help them further identify a news story as fake or not.

When respondents were asked about the source that helps in the spread of fake news, the highly indicated social media platform was WhatsApp. This answers the first objective explaining the primary sources of spreading fake news as a social media platform, that is WhatsApp.

The study's results suggest that as consumers take a more active position in searching out relevant and accurate data to substantiate and satisfy the news they read on social media, they end up with better news and are better informed, this could be addressed as active news consumers. According to the findings of this report, consumers should be rational while consuming news as it should be an involved operation and an active process. Users' contributions to the battle of dissemination of fake news are essential. Well-informed and educated respondents have shown that it is important to report or inform others about the fake news and prevent them from falling prey to such false news.

While the participants agreed that they sometimes surrender to fake news, yet follow strategies to identify a news story and its accuracy by searching on the web, using fact checkers. Furthermore, people feel their responsibility of alerting others about the same. These are the traits of well-informed and media literate respondents of the survey. The abundance of fake news on social media channels has made the consumers question the credibility of it so much that most of them realize the need to fact check every story they encounter on social media as they get wary. But also, the impact of fact news on consumers seems to change opinions of readers even if it is for a short while. The study suggests that the media consumers are active and not passive thereby substantiating the Uses and Gratifications theory postulated by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch (1973).

The results of the survey have also stressed that it is the users' primary duty

to recognise and combat the dissemination of fake news on social media, along with emphasis on the role of social media outlets for countering the spread of fake news. The results also indicated that Jurgen Habermas' theory of the public sphere has been substantiated with extending public sphere theory to Internet technology. The paradigm under which social media operates has a significant impact on how content on social media influences its audience. The follow up question that asked the respondents about their decision of making users and social media platforms responsible was backed by the reason that government intervention and rules could disturb the entire concept of social media platforms of providing unlimited freedom of speech and expression. So, if users and social media channels curb the spread of fake news, there would be no requirement for government's control over the same. This theory suggests that people are mindful of their responsibility as news consumers and trust in the audience's ability to discourage the dissemination of false news. In certain ways, people feel that they are more accountable than the government for combating the dissemination of false news. Thus, a media literate, well-educated and cynical public can be the antidote to the dissemination of fake news by creating a modern online media community where misinformation, false reality, and fake news have no place.

Suggestions for further research

This study examines how audiences engage with fake news but does not look at how fake news is created. The paper only addresses the consumption of fake news on social media, not its creation. Thus, a further analysis into fake news can be conducted along the lines of its creation, production and development. It also focuses on fake news distributed through social media rather than conventional media too as a weakness, which may be a strong and critical subject for further study. Only a partial overview of the impact of fake news was considered, which could be extended into a whole new analysis on the impact of fake news on a larger audience. To supplement the quantitative, a researcher may also use various case studies for qualitative analysis.

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