Fake News and Public Perception of Social Media News

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the impact of misinformation on public opinion regarding stories and information on social media, focusing on factors that influence users' perception and engagement. The primary emphasis is on explaining the impact of deception in shaping media outlets' credibility and how deception constructs narratives within society. The study employed the *Theory of Rumor Transmission* and the *Technological Determinism Theory*, which explain news diffusion patterns in the online environment and the influence of technology on communication practices. A qualitative research design was adopted. Findings revealed that the consumption of fake news is strongly linked to increased mistrust of traditional media, leading individuals to seek alternative, largely unverified sources. Additionally, the propagation of misinformation is autocatalytic in echo chambers, contributing to heightened polarization of individuals' views. The study concludes that preventing issues arising from fake news is crucial to fostering an educated citizenry. In light of these findings, it is recommended that social media platforms implement strict fact-checking mechanisms, integrate media literacy into school curricula, and establish governance frameworks that hold platforms accountable for the dissemination of disinformation while safeguarding freedom of speech.

Keywords: fake news, public perception, misinformation, social media, media literacy

INTRODUCTION

Social media has emerged as a crucial medium for the spread of information in a time when digital communication is pervasive. The way people receive news has drastically changed as a result of these platforms' rapid development (Afana et al., 2021; Dantas et al., 2022; Ge, 2019). A wide range of social media platforms that allow people to distribute content at unprecedented speeds are increasingly competing with traditional media outlets. It is impossible to overestimate the influence social media has on public opinion and on raising awareness of current affairs. The effects of these shifts have been studied by academics, who have highlighted how social media promotes both accurate and false information (Pew

Research Centre, 2021). There is an urgent need to examine how *fake news* affects public views and trust in news sources as awareness of the impact of social media narratives on public opinion grows.

The growing issue of *fake news*, which has contaminated social media ecosystems and compromised the accuracy of information, is a crucial component of this discussion. Although the term *fake news* is commonly used to refer to news that is purposefully inaccurate or misleading, it can also refer to satire, propaganda, and disinformation (Field-Fote, 2019; Lazer et al., 2018; Mosseri, 2016). Researchers have outlined the processes by which *fake news* spreads on social media, frequently emphasizing the role played by algorithms that priorities sensationalism over truth, thereby polarizing public opinion (Soroush et al., 2018; Vosoughi et al., 2018). Given that many users may not possess the media literacy skills required to distinguish trustworthy sources from questionable ones, this development raises concerns about users' capacity for discernment. It becomes imperative to examine the factors that influence people's opinions on news they encounter on social media, particularly to understand how these opinions shape broader societal narratives.

Fake news and public perception are related in ways that extend beyond simple consumption; they also affect how communities interact with institutions and with each other. According to research, audiences exposed to false news are more likely to have a negative opinion of traditional media channels, which often prompts them to seek alternative but potentially biased sources of information (Friggeri, 2019). This practice has far-reaching consequences since it encourages participation in echo chambers, where pre-existing opinions are reinforced rather than challenged. In addition to impeding informed public discourse, this fosters an environment that erodes democratic principles such as free speech and collective decision-making (Lewandowsky, 2017). Therefore, it is crucial to conduct a thorough analysis of user behavior, the information environment, and the sociopolitical context in which this communication takes place to comprehend how *fake news* contributes to changing public perception.

An interdisciplinary approach incorporating elements of political science, psychology, and communication studies is necessary to investigate this issue. Researchers have started to explore several strategies to counteract the impact of *fake news* on social media, with some suggesting that consumers should be empowered through enhanced media literacy and critical thinking training (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017). Others call for a re-examination of the rules governing user interaction and content monitoring on social media platforms (Ghosh & Scott, 2020). Developing a sophisticated understanding of how users navigate the massive quantity of information available online is crucial as the digital news landscape continues to evolve. Research findings may help the public become more informed, enabling active participation in democratic processes and critical engagement with the media they consume. In order to identify solutions that promote a more robust information environment supporting an informed citizenry, this study intends to clarify how *fake news* affects how the public perceives news on social media.

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With a large portion of the world's population depending on social media as their primary information source, the spread of these platforms has completely transformed how news is absorbed and shared. However, this change has also created numerous challenges, particularly concerning the dissemination of false information. The spread of misleading content on social media platforms has become a serious issue, causing financial losses and reputational damage for individuals and organizations. Although social media companies have taken various measures to slow the dissemination of *fake news*, the issue persists, and its effects on public perceptions of social media news remain contested. The main problem is that social media sites, which were initially created to enable the free circulation of information, have become havens for false and misleading content. This trend raises critical questions about how social media shapes public opinion and the potential consequences of *fake news* on social stability and cohesion.

Given the importance of social media in contemporary communication, it is essential to investigate how *fake news* influences public perceptions of social media news in order to identify practical solutions that can mitigate the problem and foster a more knowledgeable and critical public. Recent research indicates that the spread of false information on social media can have a variety of negative effects, including a decline in public confidence in institutions, a resurgence of social divisions, and manipulation of public opinion (Benkler et al., 2018; Vosoughi et al., 2018).

Prior studies reach different conclusions about the scale and effects of misinformation on social media. Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) show that false news spreads "farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly" than truth—largely driven by human novelty-seeking—yet diffusion-level evidence does not explain how exposure reshapes perceived credibility, trust in news sources, or reliance on social platforms in everyday contexts. In contrast, Guess, Nyhan, and Reifler (2020) find that visits to untrustworthy sites are concentrated among a small subset of users and comprise a minor share of overall information diets, complicating claims of pervasive exposure. However, their account stops short of modelling the psychological mechanisms (e.g., attention to accuracy) and downstream outcomes (institutional trust, sharing intentions) through which *fake news* may alter public perceptions.

With an emphasis on identifying practical solutions to this urgent issue, this study aims to contribute to the expanding body of research on false news and its effects on public perceptions of news on social media. Theoretically, the project reconciles diffusion-centric and exposure-centric literatures by linking who sees what with what they come to believe and share; practically, it yields actionable guidance for platforms, educators, and policymakers— informing targeted literacy interventions, accuracy prompts, and transparency policies to bolster public discernment without suppressing legitimate speech.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how *fake news* influences public perceptions of news encountered on social media. The research was conducted in Jakarta, Indonesia, one of the country's digital communication hubs with high social media penetration rates. The population of this study consisted of active social media users in Jakarta. From this population, a sample of 20 participants was selected using purposive sampling to

ensure that informants represented a diversity of age groups, education levels, and social media usage intensity. In addition, a *snowball sampling* technique was applied to reach additional informants with specific experiences in encountering or sharing *fake news*.

Data collection techniques included in-depth semi-structured interviews with users, focus group discussions (*FGDs*), and observation of user interactions on popular platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Complementary secondary data sources consisted of scholarly articles, books, policy reports, and online news relevant to *fake news* and digital media behavior.

For data analysis, the study applied Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which involves three stages: (1) data reduction—selecting and organizing relevant data; (2) data display—arranging findings into thematic categories; and (3) conclusion drawing and verification—identifying key patterns and validating them through triangulation. Triangulation was conducted across multiple sources (interviews, *FGDs*, and documents) to enhance validity and reliability.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Understanding Fake News: The Nigerian Perspective

On the 28th anniversary of the World Wide Web's creation, Sir Tim Berners-Lee stated that the impact of fake news is becoming more and more worrisome and that search engines and social media platforms should be encouraged to keep up their efforts to combat the threat. "It's too easy for misinformation to spread on the web," Berners-Lee wrote in an open letter that was released on March 12, 2017, the day the internet turned 28. He went on to say that algorithms "choose what to show us based on our data that they are constantly harvesting." As a result, these websites display content that they believe people would click on, which means that false information, or "fake news," that is startling, alarming, or intended to play on our prejudices, can spread like wildfire. The online newspaper is, in a sense, the largest victim of this disinformation that circulates online.

The phenomenon of fake news is widespread. Pope Francis endorsed Donald Trump's presidential campaign in July 2016, according to the now-defunct website wtoe5news.com, which referred to itself as "a fantasy news website" and said that the majority of its pieces were "satire or pure fantasy." Facebook users shared the story over a million times. Additionally, there was the fake article with the caption, "FBI agent suspected in Hillary email leaks found dead in apparent murder-suicide," from the now-defunct website denverguardian.com.

One historical example of fake news is the 1835 "Great Moon Hoax," in which the New York Sun published a number of pieces claiming that life had been discovered on the moon (Allcot & Gentzkow, 2017, p. 6). The 2006 "Flemish Secession Hoax" is a more modern example, where a Belgian public television station claimed that the Flemish parliament had declared independence from Belgium. Many viewers mistakenly believed this to be true. A combination of partially truthful and openly fake stories has long been trafficked in by supermarket tabloids like the Weekly World News and the National Enquirer. There have been cases of fake news in Nigeria, some of which were noted in the study's context. However, there are further instances of untrue stories becoming well-known in Nigerian society.

Kolawole (2017) states, "Have you heard the latest? While the rest of us are busy purchasing goods at prices higher than N500/$1 on the black market, the Central Bank of Nigeria has been selling the elusive dollar to some end users for 61 kobo/US$1. Now, I can tell that what you just read is a great piece of fake news without having to do any research. Simon Kolawole, the founder of The Cable, acknowledged on the third anniversary of the publication's founding that the online newspaper's biggest error was a fabricated May 2015 report claiming Nobel laureate Professor Wole Soyinka had made hateful comments against the Igbo in the US. "We found that it was the reporter's interpretation at the event and not the actual words of Professor Soyinka," Kolawole stated. We were all embarrassed, and regrettably, some people lost faith in our accounts following the incident. (April 29, 2017; The Cable) This suggests that there is a connection between readers' perceptions of an online newspaper and its subsequent dissemination of false information.

Meanwhile, as Kperogi (2017) disclosed, fake news is thought to originate from government sources in Nigeria as well. The president also has a covert hate and propaganda factory called the Buhari Media Centre (BMC), which employs almost 40 paid propagandists whose job it is to smear, demonise, and troll government critics with thousands of phone, offensive social media handles. The Buhari administration is an absolute propagandocracy, which is a government run by purposefully false and manipulative information. In addition to creating propagandistic social media memes (typically with names that sound like they belong in southern Nigeria) that seem to be from regular Buhari admirers, they also overflow news websites' comment areas with fictitious usernames and purposefully misleading material. The BMC pays about 40 propagandists-in-residence N250,000 a month. The impact on the reading public's impression of popular online publications is only conceivable given the products of these propagandists and other fake news producers reaching the public domain.

Fake News Dissemination on Social Media

In the past, traditional media dominated the media space and served the public's needs for entertainment, education, and information. People can now communicate and share ideas regardless of where they are because of information and communication technology, which has completely transformed the media and communication sector. Social media's introduction has greatly improved communication and interaction, which is a positive development for the media sector. Social media platforms are powered by the internet, and social media cannot operate without it. Social media are online communities that facilitate communication, interaction, and idea sharing. Nigeria have a high rate of internet penetration, and the country's telecom providers are raising the calibre of internet services they provide.

According to Uzuegbunam (2020), Mark Zuckerberg visited Nigeria from August to September 2016 for a development initiative about the internet. According to Kaplan and Haenlin (2010) and Nwabueze (2014), social media refers to web-based tools that convert and broadcast media monologues into social media conversations. According to the definition, social media enables social association and participation with a large number of users.

A global community with several players, social media facilitates the rapid dissemination of knowledge from one individual to another. It makes it simple for anyone to participate and

voice their thoughts on a range of topics. It is renowned for its low cost, ease of use, and minimal restrictions on information sharing. Because anyone can produce information on the platform, much of which is not genuine, it might be considered the breeding ground for hate speech, malicious intent, and fake news. The deliberate dissemination of misleading information through news stories and articles to damage a brand is known as fake news. It is news stories that are purposefully and verifiably inaccurate to deceive readers, according to Gentzkow (2017). This illustrates how news stories that are published to be untrue can be considered fake news. The phrase "fake news" has evolved to refer to the dissemination of misleading information (Cooke, 2017).

Social media platforms have emerged as important information sources in the present era, and individuals hardly ever use conventional media to verify information anymore. Social media is indeed the source of some information that appears in traditional media. The temptation to use social media to find news is nearly addictive. By posting on social media and publishing fake news articles, people are willing to fuel this addiction, primarily to increase web traffic. Without giving it much thought, a lot of people who use social media are eager to trust what they see or hear. Given that social media users are unlikely to verify the information they receive, it has become extremely straightforward for those who take advantage of this deficiency to disseminate fake news on these platforms. People made money for themselves by taking advantage of this heavy traffic flow. They spread the word from one social media platform to another because the audience is so persuasive.

Fake news has been spreading more widely on social media sites. Because there are so many stories on social media platforms these days, it can be challenging to tell the difference between fake and true news. Fake news is defined as "a type of online disinformation, with totally or partially false content, created intentionally to deceive and/or manipulate a specific audience, through a format that imitates a news or report (acquiring credibility), through false information that may or may not be associated with real events, with an opportunistic structure (title, image, content) to attract the readers' attention and to persuade them to believe in falsehood, to obtain more clicks and shares across social media platforms" (Joan & Baptista, 2020). According to the description given above, fake news also includes deceptive headlines, deceptive content, or any incorrect information that purposefully misleads the public. According to Thorsten, Lena, Svenja, and Tim (2019), there are various types of fake news, such as careless, purposeful, created, and misleading false news.

News that is not intended to mislead people by giving incorrect facts to arouse emotions is referred to as misleading fake news. The purpose of fake news is to confuse and frighten people by presenting untrue information. Giving people misleading information on purpose in an effort to mislead them is known as intentional fake news. The deliberate omission of facts from news articles or stories is known as negligent false news. Additionally, Muigai (2019) identified several satires or parodies: not meant to be harmful, yet capable of deceiving. False connection: when the content isn't supported by the headlines, images, or captions, Inaccurate information used to frame a problem or a person is known as misleading material. False context: when accurate content is disseminated alongside inaccurate context, when authentic

sources are "impersonated" with fictitious, fake sources, this is known as impostor material. When real information or images are altered to trick, like in the case of a "doctored" photograph, this is known as "manipulated content." News content that has been fabricated is completely untrue and intended to mislead and cause harm.

Compared to true news, fake news can spread more quickly (Langin, 2018). It has a larger readership and more coverage (Vousoughi, 2018). Numerous technologies and gadgets are used by fake news to draw viewers. On social media, attention-grabbing headlines and captions are employed to draw in viewers. Exaggerated headlines are frequently used in social media pieces to promote bogus news. Because so many people are using social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and others, the proliferation of these channels has made it easier for fake news to proliferate. The creators, users, disseminators, and broadcasters are all part of the fake news cycle. Fake news creators use predictions, views, and false storylines to create articles that misinform, influence opinions, propagate propaganda, instigate hatred, change perceptions, etc. (Muigai, 2019).

Role of the Nigerian Audience in the Dissemination of Fake News

Given that 113.3 million Nigerians use the internet as of 2019 (Statista, 2019), a significant portion of this population uses social media, making up a large portion of Nigeria's active internet users. This is due to the easy access to electronic devices and reasonably priced internet connections, as well as the fact that some Nigerians have multiple accounts on social media platforms. As a result, it can be said that Nigerians have a well-established presence on social media, which facilitates the rapid proliferation of information, which is exploited by propagandists and individuals with various agendas to spread false information. Fake news is widely disseminated on social media. A vital environment has been produced by the new information age, with a large amount of information that is unverifiable and a large portion that is dependable. It was found that the majority of Nigerians do not always verify the source of information before accepting and disseminating it (Ogbette, 2019).

Such information may occasionally turn out to be false. The deluge of information available online may be the cause of this (BBC, 2019). Every day, the typical Nigerian social media user is exposed to a large amount of information. Due to other obligations, this user has little to no time to verify all of the information he receives. As a result, the user is likely to disseminate material that he believes to be significant without enough verification. He spreads the false information to friends and family out of concern and protection for them. They then share it with friends and family, who keep the cycle going until everyone knows about it. Additionally, there are instructions in the mail that may be a little coercive. These guidelines outline the advantages of sharing the messages and the repercussions of not doing so. This incites the typical user to aid in the dissemination of false information. Some people react instantly to the urgency of some of these messages and take whatever action is suggested. Audiences must share the message they have received with others in their vicinity.

Fake news spreads more quickly when it comes to popular social issues that have not yet been addressed by the proper authorities. Fake news that highlights the issue's briefness, a

public figure's statement on the subject, or a suggested remedy can spread quickly since people are eager to learn about such issues and see them resolved.

Demography Analysis of Audience Participation in the Dissemination of Fake News

In order to solve the issues associated with fake news, it is important to look at the types of people who participate in its spread. Even if there are other reasons that are promoting the production and spread of fake news, it is important for scholars to examine the role that each of these aspects plays. In an attempt to address the problem, this will allow the appropriate organizations or regulatory bodies to concentrate their attention on the most pertinent aspects. Numerous writers have investigated how age, gender, income, and educational attainment contribute to the spread of political fake news on the internet in the United States. Findings indicate that older people are more prone than younger people to spread political fake news, even while men are more inclined to do so (Woodcook, 2019). Those over 65 share almost seven times as many articles from the fake news domain than younger people, according to a different study by Guess, Nagler, and Tucker (2019) that looks at the impact of misinformation and false news in political campaigns.

The degree of literacy is one of the urgent social problems that appears to encourage this behavior. Given Nigeria's high illiteracy rate, more Nigerians are probably going to disseminate false information. The nation's educational system, particularly the public sector, is shaky. As a result, citizens become less critical thinkers and lack the skills necessary to disprove false information. Therefore, the dissemination of fake news would only continue and probably expand, posing a threat to democracy, if Nigeria's illiteracy rate continues without an overhaul of the educational system (Lee, 2019). However, Goyanes and Lavin's (2018) findings, which show that the majority of men and older persons spread political fake news, point to additional dangers. Younger people's urgent need for self-actualization in the areas of finance, career, education, and family may be the cause of this, as it leaves them with little time to consider other facets of society, such as politics, culture, and history. However, the same cannot be true for elderly individuals who have dedicated their lives to self-actualization and now seek equal opportunities for their children and the younger generation. As a result, they are curious about the issues that keep society functioning, such as politics and government. Older adults are particularly vulnerable to the antics of those who propagate fake news because of their unwavering curiosity.

In addition to wanting to feel that they have a role in improving the situation, elderly people want to be informed about political developments. Therefore, whether or not it is fake news, they probably share it with other elderly people who share their views to help shape the political landscape of the community. Women's general makeup also contributes to their interest in soft news, such as sports, entertainment, travel, healthcare, and culture (Getz and Page, 2016). However, men are more drawn to heavy news, such as politics. One could argue that rather than discussing soft and hard news, women are more interested in lifestyle. As a result, men make up the majority of those engaged in politics and are more active in the political sphere, whether orally or in other ways. Because social media is a place where fake news is

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also disseminated, these males encounter bogus news and so contribute to its propagation. Accordingly, "it is essential to detect fake news in its early stages to effectively avoid further risks and damages" (Zhao et al., 2018).

Problems of Propagation of Fake News in Nigeria

According to Thompson River University (2019), fake news is a form of hoax or the purposeful dissemination of false information to mislead in order to benefit politically or financially. The intentional production and dissemination of inaccurate or distorted internet content to mislead and deceive viewers is also referred to as fake news (Sullivan, 2019). Therefore, any news that misleads, misinforms, or deceives people might be considered fake news. Conversely, national security refers to a nation's capacity to defend its people, environment, and economy.

The need to preserve the state's existence through the application of political, diplomatic, economic, and power projection is known as national security. News can now be published in innovative ways without using professionals, thanks to the rise of new media. News may now go around the world in a matter of seconds thanks to new media, which has greatly accelerated the dissemination of information. Fake news is more likely to spread when there are an infinite number of photos, videos, views, and hours of footage posted online. Users of new media are overwhelmed by the volume of information available. Accordingly, the Nigerian federal government initiated a nationwide campaign to curb the distribution of false information on new media platforms (Emameh, Nelson & Oguntola, 2018). To stop fake news from spreading, other fact-checking methods have also been implemented. However, the rate at which fake news is spreading on new media is concerning and is presenting Nigeria with significant national security issues. Nigerians are undoubtedly impacted by the spread of fake news on new media in a variety of ways. Some of these methods include:

a. Breeds Tension: According to Pate, Gambo, and Ibrahim (2019), tension is rife throughout Nigeria. Following several security threats the country faces, including "multiple conflicts, systemic and widespread corruption, debilitating poverty, weak institutions, threats of secession as well as perceived marginalization, anger, hatred, and economic challenges," they reached this conclusion (Pate et al, 2019, p.21).

b. Boosts Religious and Ethnic Crises: According to Obarisiagbon and Akintoye (2019), the main sources of security problems in Nigeria are ethnic and religious disputes. In Nigeria, the most common religious conflicts between Christians and Muslims are undermining the entire security system. The spread of fake news on new media makes matters worse. Certain news stories pose a major threat to national security because they can cause turmoil, religious strife, and interethnic conflict when they are released. For example, in January 2020, ThisDay, a well-known Nigerian publication, reported that Bishop Oyedepo of Winners' Chapel's visa was denied by the US Embassy in Nigeria and that the Bishop had exhibited outbursts. It appears that the news was false because the US Embassy refuted it in a newspaper. In a tweet, the US embassy asked people to help dispel the false information about the general overseer of the Living Faith Church, according to Erezi

(2020) of the Guardian newspaper. Nwaubani (2020) contends that this kind of fake news has the potential to cause anarchy in Nigeria, where religious leaders are seen as celebrities.

c. Encourages sentiments of chaos and insecurity: Udeh and Okoroafor (2013) described insecurity as a sense of unease and danger. It is a condition in which property and lives cannot be protected. Contrariwise, chaos is any state of disarray, any amorphous or confusing mixture, or any aggregation. It is true that the spread of fake news on new media has created a sense of unrest and uneasiness. In response, Chukwere & Onyebukwa (2018) noted that terrorist organizations use social media platforms like Facebook to disseminate their propaganda, which makes users of these platforms feel uneasy and chaotic.

d. Causes Violence: False news reports have the potential to cause violence. The spread of false information has the potential to cause unprecedented levels of violence, endangering Nigeria's peace and unity. In a multicultural nation like Nigeria, fake news may incite violence, foster mistrust, and drive division.

Discussion

The Theory of Technological Determinism and the Theory of Rumour Transmission were used in this investigation. According to H. Taylor Buckner's 1965 Theory of Rumour Propagation, a rumour's dynamics of propagation take precedence over its veracity. This hypothesis explains the unusual way that information spreads in new media environments, claiming that rumours can spread whether or not they are true, mostly because they are not verified at the time of sharing (Buckner, 1965). The critical set, the uncritical set, and the transmission set are the three different orientations into which Buckner divides users of new media. People in the critical set are equipped with critical thinking skills that enable them to separate reality from fiction, using strategies like fact-checking to sort through the complexity of news articles.

On the other hand, those who exhibit the uncritical set are incapable of determining whether the information they come across is accurate, which leads to their passive acceptance of misleading stories. People in the transmission set provide information without claiming to be able to proofread or critically evaluate it, which frequently results in the spread of lies (Buckner, 1965). The hypothesis may oversimplify the psychological aspects of information processing and sharing, even though it accurately identifies the diverse user groups that aid in the spread of fake news. There is a need for a more nuanced approach when applying Buckner's framework to modern digital environments, particularly in the context of WhatsApp, where privacy and group dynamics may play crucial roles in rumour transmission. Current social media dynamics indicate that factors like emotional resonance or socio-political motivations significantly influence how misinformation spreads.

According to Marshall McLuhan's theory of technological determinism, communication technology in particular has a significant influence on cultural norms and societal structures (Griffin & Nwabueze, 2014). This theory is applicable to comprehend how digital developments, such social media platforms, alter the ways in which news is disseminated. As technology advances, it changes the structure of social interactions in addition to improving

communication abilities. With the ascent of the internet and social media, individuals experience unprecedented access to information, often moving away from traditional media pathways, which typically involve more gatekeeping (Griffin & Nwabueze, 2014).

Though the theory clearly explains how technological advancements influence society's behaviours, its deterministic undertones frequently overlook the active roles that users play in technology manipulation. Social media is a two-edged sword that allows false information to spread quickly while also giving people the ability to refute such myths. The theory's ramifications for the current investigation centre on how technology may both disseminate and combat misleading information. Social media's growing integration with public opinion and news consumption calls for a critical analysis of the technological changes that have been witnessed. Therefore, understanding the intricacy of how both real information and fake news move via digital platforms requires acknowledging the participatory agency of people within these frameworks.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the public's perception of social media news is significantly impacted by *fake news*, underscoring the importance of critically consuming and disseminating information in the digital age. To address this challenge, it is recommended that social media platforms collaborate with reputable organizations and priorities the implementation of fact-checking tools. Additionally, media literacy programmes should be incorporated into school curricula to equip individuals with critical thinking skills and the ability to differentiate between authentic and false information. Finally, while ensuring that the right to free speech is upheld, regulatory frameworks should be established to hold social media companies accountable for the dissemination of *fake news*.

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