

To Examine Misinformation, Disinformation And Malinformation Responsible For Information Disorder In The Society– A Pilot Study

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Abstract:

The change in information consumption behavior made common people vulnerable and exposed to “misinformation, disinformation and malinformation responsible for information disorder in the society”. This was served with 132 respondents in the district of Ahmadabad in Gujarat in India with the parameters of spreading of fake news, ways of checking the fake news, verification of authenticity, awareness about it, sharing the fake news, purpose to harm, stringent laws by government with the help of questionnaire and researcher conclude that abundance of information or news all across platforms accessible from anytime, anywhere allow humans to access not only accurate and factual news but also expose to vulnerability of being fed with deliberate false, half-truth political narratives or hateful way to mislead which are considered to be detrimental for a healthy democracy. The responses shows that a large number of population is already aware of fake news and consequences of spreading fake news if not curbed which is a good sign for a healthy democracy, but a sizable population also opines the need a stringent law by the government.

Keywords: Fake news, media, media literacy, misinformation, disinformation, malinformation

INTRODUCTION:

The information dissemination and consumption processes have undergone a huge change with the advancement of technologies and invention of social media platforms. Common citizens became not only content consumers disseminated by established media houses but also content producers by creating their own content and forming their own opinions to influence others. This change in information consumption behavior made common people vulnerable and exposed to “misinformation, disinformation and malinformation responsible for information disorder in the society”. According to dictionary.com, “**Misinformation** ^[1] is false information that is spread, regardless of intent to mislead.” The spread of misinformation happens often in our everyday lives. We human beings—news flash—are not perfect. We can all make mistakes. We all forget things. We mishear or don’t remember facts. Humans inform or share information watched on TV or came across on social media that, many-a-times, are not true representation of facts. If wrong information is spread unknowingly, then it is, technically, spreading misinformation.

On the other hand, according to dictionary.com, “**Disinformation** means “false information, as about a country’s military strength or plans, disseminated by a government or intelligence agency in a hostile act of tactical political subversion.” It is also used more generally to mean “deliberately misleading or biased information; manipulated narrative or facts; propaganda.” So, disinformation ^[2] is misinformation that is knowingly (intentionally) spread. Our first definition of this word gives one major reason why a person or group might want to spread wrong information, but there are many other nefarious motivations lurking behind the creation of disinformation.

Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2017) defined **malinformation** as, "information that is based on reality, used to inflict harm on a person, organization or country."^[3]

Editors of *Fighting Misinformation Digital Media Literacy* (2019)^[4] opined, “People spend much of their time interacting with media, but that does not mean that people have the critical skills to analyze and understand it. One well-known study from Stanford University in 2016 demonstrated that youth are easily fooled by misinformation, especially when it comes through social media channels. This weakness is not found only in youth, however. Research from New

York University found that people over 65 shared seven times as much misinformation on Facebook as their younger counterparts” (p.11).

Thanks to advances in digital technology, the common people have tools and the potential to reach millions in an instant. The new architecture of technology makes people visible and accessible, allowing them to develop and build their own communities. The transition from traditional media to New Age or digital media is so rapid that it transcends traditional gatekeeping theories of mass communication to preserve the sanctity of information.

Tufekci (2017) ^[5] described, “Everybody wanted to give a new meaning of truth which gave birth to fake news. There is a new, radically different mode of information and attention flow: the chaotic world of the digitally networked public sphere (or spheres) where ordinary citizens or activists can generate ideas, document and spread news of events, and respond to mass media.” (p. 29).

Thus, it can be summarized that sharing misinformation, half-truth and hate speeches are creating turbulence in our society and posing serious threats to the democracy of our country.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Zimdars, M., & McLeod, K. (2020) ^[6], defined three components of information disorder as “misinformation as false information shared by someone who believes it to be true. Disinformation, by contrast, is false information shared with knowledge of its falsity and thus intention to deceive or otherwise do harm. It is a deliberate, intentional lie. We also defined a third category, malinformation, which is information based in reality that is shared to do harm to a person, organization, or country. This term can refer to instances where private information is made public (e.g., revenge porn) or genuine imagery is reshared in the wrong context. Finally, we chose information disorder as an umbrella term encompassing all forms of disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation.” (p. 77).

Ivanović (2014)^[7] said, “The goal of media literacy is to give young people theoretical knowledge about mass communication media, their cultural, social and political implications; to account possible misuses, to enable them to read and analyze messages the media gives them, but also to create their own. Young people need to learn how to participate in media life society. Participating in various aspects of media culture comprises the ability of understanding and a critical relationship towards messages and meanings which lie at their basis. They need to be thought how to use the media as an instrument of social change, to master criteria for selecting, and evaluate information the media is placing; and also to familiarize themselves with alternative forms of media culture. Media literacy originated as an answer to media culture” (p. 440).

Smith (2015)^[8] while writing how media illiteracy can be harmful, opined, “Media literacy is a great skill to have when consuming television, movies, music, and advertising, but it is crucial when political communication is involved. Analysis of political coverage factors in everything we’ve discussed so far — the use of visuals, context (or lack thereof), money sources, and an awareness of how sensationalism is used. Media illiteracy in the political arena can actually threaten our democracy” (p. 107).

Potter (2013)^[9] very appropriately defined the term media literacy. The author said, “Media literacy is a set of perspectives that we actively use to expose ourselves to the mass media to process and interpret the meaning of the messages we encounter. We build our perspectives from knowledge structures. To build our knowledge structures, we need tools, raw material, and willingness. The tools are our skills. The raw material is information from the media and from the real world. The willingness comes from our personal locus” (p. 71). Describing advantages of developing a higher degree of media literacy, the author continued, “There are primarily three advantages to developing a higher degree of media literacy. First, with increases in media literacy, your appetite for a wider variety of media messages will grow. Second, with increases in media literacy, you learn more about how to program your own mental codes. And third, with increases in media literacy, you are able to exercise more control over the media” (p. 78). The author further said, “The media literacy perspective encourages you to be more adventurous and explore a wider range of messages. When you do so, you will likely find many of those messages are not interesting or useful to you; however, you will also likely find a few types of messages that are highly useful, and these surprises will expand your exposure repertoire” (p.79).

Defining media literacy, Baran (2004)^[10], said, “The ability to effectively and efficiently comprehend and utilize mass communication”. According to the author, “The media literacy perspective encourages you to be more adventurous and explore a wider range of messages. When you do so, you will likely find many of those messages are not interesting or useful to you; however, you will also likely find a few types of messages that are highly useful, and these surprises will expand your exposure repertoire” (p. 401).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

1. To understand exposure to fake news and awareness of fake news
2. To judge reactions of population on fake news

3. To derive conclusion

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY:

Null Hypothesis:

There is no association between the opinion 'Fake news is published in media to promote specific agenda' and its demographic factors.

Alternative Hypothesis:

There is strong association between the opinion 'Fake news is published in media to promote specific agenda' and its demographic factors.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Study Design:

The pilot study carried out using simple random sampling technique to study the reaction of the population on the same questionnaire shown to different population to obtain their reactions to generate data to derive a conclusion.

Sampling Technique:

Simple random sampling technique is used for this pilot study

Data Collection:

Primary data collected through the questionnaire using simple random sampling method while books, journals, previous research papers, literature, news articles, website content, social media platforms, YouTube channels have also been considered for source of secondary data collection.

Research Area: District Ahmadabad in the state of Gujarat, India

Sample Size: To collect primary data, the questionnaire was shared with 132 respondents which were selected through population size of 200 respondents at 95% confidence interval and 5% 'Error of Margin' from sample size.

DATA ANALYSIS:

For data analysis, researcher used technique of measuring association with measure of the relative (strength) Cramer's V Coefficient value of an association between two variables. The coefficient ranges from 0 to 1 (perfect association). 0 as poor association and 1 as perfect association.

Interpretation:

From the below table no 1, it has been observed that the gender and awareness of fake news Cramer's V Coefficient value = 0.15 which is quite low hence there is no association between 'Awareness of Fake News and Gender'. Cramer's V Coefficient value = 0.125 which is quite low hence there is no association between 'Awareness of Fake News and Age'. Cramer's V Coefficient value = 0.24 which is quite low. This indicates, there is no association between 'Awareness of Fake News and Income'.

Awareness that people are reading or consuming fake news depends on their profession. Moreover, Cramer's V Coefficient value = 0.334. This indicates, there is a moderate association between awareness of fake news and profession. The Cramer's V Coefficient value = 0.278. This indicates, there is a weak association between awareness of fake news and profession. Cramer's V Coefficient value = 0.03 which is very low. Hence it is seen that there is no association between the opinion of 'Fake news is published in media to promote specific agenda' and gender.

The Cramer's V Coefficient value = 0.18 which is quite low. There is no association between the opinion 'Fake news is published in media to promote specific agenda' and age. Cramer's V Coefficient value = 0.217 which is quite low. There is very weak association between the opinion 'Fake news is published in media to promote specific agenda' and income which is not significant.

The opinion of people 'Fake news is published in media to promote specific agenda' does not depend on their profession Cramer's V Coefficient value = 0.281. This indicates, there is a weak association between the opinion 'Fake news is published in media to promote specific agenda' and profession which is not significant. Cramer's V Coefficient value = 0.156 which is quite low. This indicates, there is no association between the opinion 'Fake news is published in media to promote specific agenda' and profession.

Table no 1: Demographic Distribution of Awareness of Fake News

Demographic Distribution of Awareness of Fake News								
Parameters	Scale	Scale		Total	Awareness of fake news		Specific Agenda	
		No	Yes		Cramer's V Coefficient value	Decision	Cramer's V Coefficient value	Decision
Gender	Male	29	37	66	0.15	Not significant	0.03	Not significant
	Female	30	36	66				
Age Group	18-25	11	16	27	0.125	Not significant	0.18	Not significant
	26-35	18	28	46				
	36-45	22	20	42				
	46-60	7	7	14				
	60 and above	1	2	3				
Income	Rs 0 - Rs 10,000	29	24	53	0.24	Not significant	0.217	Not significant
	Rs 10,001 - Rs 25,000	4	10	14				
	Rs 25001 - Rs 50,000	7	16	23				
	Rs 50,001 - Rs 75,000	7	5	12				
	Rs 75,000 - Rs 1,00,000	6	7	13				
	Rs 1,00,001 and above	6	11	17				
	Pooled	9	4	13				
Profession	Professional	16	27	43	0.278	Not significant	0.156	Not significant
	Self-employed	4	11	15				
	Service	24	17	41				
	Student	6	14	20				

(Source: Primary Data)

Table no 2: Distribution of respondents about fake news checking

Fake news Checking		Number of votes	Percentage
Ways to check fake news	I cross-check fact using Search Engines (e.g., google.com)	108	81.82
	I refer government data and authentic source	61	46.21
	I use fact checking tools (e.g. Google Fact Check)	56	42.42
	I ask knowledgeable person or domain expert	55	41.67
	I ask member of my family	23	17.42
	I ask my friends	23	17.42
	Others	3	2.27
Verification of authenticity	I rely on the person who shared it	36	27.27
	I rely on the social media account from where I have received it	29	21.97
	I rely on the TV News channel	49	37.12
	I rely on the Newspaper / Magazine	65	49.24
	I rely on the political party spokesperson	1	0.76
	Others	36	27.27

(Source: Primary Data)

Interpretation:

The fake news checking distribution interprets that the most used search engine is Google.com with 81.82% people used to check fact using Google.com. The 46.61% people prefer the government data and authentic sources to check fake news. The 42.42% people uses google fact check to check fake news. And remaining people take other sources to identify the fake news.

The verification of authenticity interprets that the 49.24% people choose newspaper or magazine. As many as 37.12% people use to check authenticity from TV News channels and 27.27% people use other resources to check the verification of authenticity.

Table no 3: Percentage Distribution of Fake News

Distribution of Fake News						
Parameter	Scale	Frequency	Percent	Confidence level of significance		Decision
				lower	Upper	
Fake news	No	13	9.80%	0.837	0.947	83 % to 94%
	Yes	119	90.20%			
Awareness of fake news	No	59	44.70%	0.464	0.64	46% to 64%
	Yes	73	55.30%			
Authenticity of fake news	No, I don't verify authenticity	3	2.30%	0.05	0.065	5% to 7%
	Sometimes, I verify authenticity	57	43.20%	0.346	0.521	35% to 52%
	Always, I verify authenticity	72	54.50%	0.457	0.632	46% to 63%
Forward Fake News	No, I don't forward fake news	119	90.20%	0.837	0.947	84% to 95%
	Sometimes, I forward fake news	13	9.80%	0.053	0.163	5% to 16%
Purpose of fake news to harm	I don't know	18	13.60%	0.793	0.917	79% to 92%
	Yes	114	86.40%			
Stringent Laws	No	2	1.50%	0.479	0.654	48% to 65%
	Yes	75	56.80%			
	Laws are already there, Government should implement existing laws	49	37.10%			
	I don't know	6	4.50%			
Monitoring by Government	No	50	37.90%	0.434	0.61	43% to 61%
	Yes	69	52.30%			
	I don't know	13	9.80%			

(Source: Primary Data)

Interpretation:

The 83% to 94% person know about the fake news and it is significant. 46% to 64% people are aware about the fake news. Around 46% to 63% of people always verify authenticity of fake news and around 5% to 7% of people never verify authenticity whereas 35% to 52% verify authenticity sometimes. 84% to 95% of people have never forward fake news whereas around 5% to 16% of people have forward fake news sometimes. 79% to 92% of people feel fake news are being spread to cause harm, harass or hate. 48% to 65% of people are of the opinion that stringent laws are required to curb creation and spreading of fake news while 43% to 61% of people are of the opinion that social media content should be regulated by Government.

CONCLUSION:

Abundance of information or news all across platforms accessible from anytime, anywhere allows humans to access not only accurate and factual news but also expose to vulnerability of being fed with deliberate false political narratives or hateful way to mislead. But, the survey data shows that there is no association between the opinion fake news is published in media to promote specific agenda and its demographic factors.

The fake news checking distribution interprets that the ways of fact checking of fake news, the most used web application is Google.com. 81.82% people used to check fact using Google.com to be satisfied before sharing the received content on their own network. The 46.61% people prefer the government data and authentic source to check fact of shared content. The verification of authenticity interprets that the 49.24% people prefer newspaper or magazine to check facts. As many as 37.12% of population prefer to use television new channels to check authenticity while 27.27 people use other resources to check the verification of authenticity of facts (table no 2).

When researcher calculated on percentage of distribution of fake news as per table no 3, it was concluded that the 83% to 94% person know about the fake news and it is significant. The responses show that a large number of population is already aware of fake news and consequences of spreading fake news if not curbed which is a good sign for a healthy democracy. 79% to 92% of people feel fake news are being spread to cause harm, harass or hate. 48% to 65% of people are of the opinion that stringent laws are required to curb creation and spreading of fake news. 43% to 61% of people are of the opinion that social media content should be regulated by Government. Thus, it can be concluded that the changes in information consumption behavior made common people vulnerable and exposed to “misinformation, disinformation and malinformation responsible for information disorder in the society”.

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