

Combating Fake News through Digital Media Literacy: Study on Digital Media Users of Bhopal City of India

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Abstract

Dissemination of fake news with fast pace through various digital media platforms is growing concern among policymakers, journalists, educators and digital media users worldwide. Some scholars believe that glaring example of U.S. presidential election of 2016 depicts, that Trump's victory was a weak political decision made by the American voters under the influence of fake news which confused American voters. Some are concerned that Trump's extravagantly untruthful assertions on digital media platforms also initiated a serious discussion on 'post-truth era'. Trump's victory was also a result of fake news impact. Researchers observed that Pakistan deliberately uses fake news in a propaganda war against India. Several morphed photos and fake videos started floating on social media after dilution of Article 370 and 35A in Jammu and Kashmir. On one hand, several cases of mob lynching were identified in India due to dissemination of fake news while on the other hand several mob lynching cases were also found fake. Fake news has created a lot of confusion. Researchers selected this topic for their research as fake news has been identified as a new challenge and threat to society. Aim of the study was to find out how Indian digital media users identify fake news and level of cyber wellness among them to use digital media platforms efficiently. Data was obtained through a close-ended questionnaire from n=109 respondents using descriptive research design. Data has been organized and analyzed on SPSS using percentage and frequency distribution. Result of this study shows that fake news not only pose threat to trust in society but has also decreased trustworthiness on media. Even though social media has been identified as the main source of fake news dissemination still a majority of respondents use social media as a tool for getting information. Majority of respondents agreed that digital media literacy is direly needed to combat fake news.

Keywords: Fake News, Social Media, Digital Media Literacy, Digital Media, Mob Lynching, Misinformation and Disinformation.

Introduction

Fake news has become prominent these days and social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter provide fertile ground to disseminate false information with high speed and magnitude. Fake news is also known as junk news, pseudo-news or hoax news and can be categorized as misinformation and disinformation. As per Dictionary.com fake news refers as “false news stories often of a sensational nature which are created to be widely distributed to generate revenue or discredit a public figure, political movement, company” (“fake news”, n.d.). Authors (David Lanis, 2018). Define fake news as “news that does mischief with the truth”. Fake news is either false or misleading. If false news is unknowingly disseminated it’s called misinformation but when misleading information is knowingly propagated that is more dangerous disinformation. According to Thomas Fiedler dean of the Boston University College of Communication fake news is “false information packaged to deceive the public into thinking it was produced by professionals with respect for truth” (Rimer, 2017). According to a new research study of the Pew Research Center Study, Americans rate fake news as a larger problem than racism, climate change, or terrorism (Graham, 2019). “Fake news has become more than a label for false and misleading information, disguised and disseminated as news. It has become an emotional, weaponised term used to undermine and discredit journalism”(Posetti, 2018). It is a kind of disinformation war against ethical journalism. Manipulation and fabrication of content, morphing pictures, altering videos, troll armies, hate speeches are base of fake news which has weaponised information on an unprecedented scale in 21st Century. According to media literacy expert, Martina Chapman fake news has three elements, “mistrust, misinformation and manipulation” (webwise, n.d.). Fake news stories are either created to influence people’s views, propagate or discredit any political agenda, to disseminate sensational clickbait stories to gain more and more advertisements. A common man cannot easily identify fake news as these stories deceive people by looking like trusted websites, or using similar names and web addresses like authentic news portals.

Fake news is not a new phenomenon. Deception through media has always existed since the invention of the printing press. In sixteenth and seventeenth century also, printers cranked out pamphlets or news books with stories of monstrous beasts or unusual events through fantastical reports to gain readership. On the name of British astronomer John Herschel, New York Sun’s Editor Richard Adams Locke printed series of fantastical reports which shot up Sun’s circulation from eight thousand to nineteen thousand copies, overtook the Times of London and became world’s bestselling daily newspaper (Standage, 2017). This example shows that hoax stories were used as commercial strategy earlier as well and the internet has made fake news again a profitable business. “In 1890s rival newspaper publishers, Joseph Pulitzer and William Hearst competed over the audience through sensational and rumour reporting which played a role in leading the USA into the Spanish- American war of 1898” (Cits, n.d.). Fake news has given birth to tabloid papers and yellow journalism.

Internet and social media apps have become new tools for propagating fake news with higher speed and magnitude enabling them to spread like wildfire and the issue of fake news has become more challenging in the digital age. Repercussions of fake news on society can be seen as rumours on WhatsApp forcing mob for brutally lynching innocent people. In India WhatsApp rumour of child, kidnapping has taken lives of more than thirty people across ten states (Mohanti, 2019). Dissemination of rumours and false news is creating distrust in society. Keeping an eye on sources of information floated in the web world is impossible as numbers of information are disseminated by a network of bots. World economic forum's global risk report of 2013 warned that "misinformation could spark digital wildfires in our hyper-connected world" (Charlton, 2019). Though there are fewer fake news sources than verified news sources with social media their reach is more pronounced. Massive online misinformation and disinformation are becoming pervasive on various digital platforms which get viral within a few hours, is a serious issue whole world is struggling with. Looking into the seriousness of this issue, the World Economic Forum has listed fake news as one of the main threats to our society. Though fake news is not new to us as rumours and false stories exists from a long time because of human nature of exaggerating things but it was frequent headlines in the US 2016 election (Burkhardt, 2017).

As far as fake news is concerned our neighbour Pakistan is no less in creating propaganda stories through social media for India. As per few scholars, Pakistan has a separate wing of ISPR known as Inter-Services Public Relations whose main objective is to create erroneous and fabricated stories against India and create fake narrative against India.

As fake news has become a serious threat to society as it causes distrust among people and also raises a question mark on the trustworthiness of media so the question arises how to combat fake news. Fake news cannot be stopped but with the help of digital media literacy, we can become a critical consumer and producer of digital media content. Authors stipulate that consumption; production and dissemination of digital media content have to be done in a responsible manner" (Malita & Grosseck, 2018). Digital media literacy can help the audience to develop the ability to handle fake news in a better way with a critical approach.

Aim

Aim of this study is to find out awareness level of digital media literacy among digital media users to identify and combat fake news.

Objectives

- To find out the level of digital media awareness among digital media users
- To analyze the attitude of digital media users towards identifying fake news
- To identify digital media users' attitude towards the seriousness of fake news

Review of literature

In a study conducted by Ohio University authors (M. Laeeq Khan, 2019) stipulated that cross-checking information is not a tough task but people are not habitual of cross verifying information before sharing it on social media. They also found that role of information literacy is often taken for granted.

Fabricated, distorted and deceptive information called fake news with high speed and magnitude is misleading people in the digital era. With web 2.0 and social media revolution, anyone can publish and share any kind of content at no cost. Speed of information circulation has replaced accuracy; people are bombarded with information and to sort real information from a fake one is quite challenging. Motivation to produce fake news can range from the political to personal and financial benefits. Active and responsible citizenship is dependent on one's ability to navigate a mediated world. In the digital age critically approach towards information we consume is direly needed. The author has developed PAUSE model (probe source, authenticate details, use fact-checking tools, substantiate claims and evaluate style) to verify online information before consuming and sharing it with others (Darvin, 2018).

Pakistan's Minister for Maritime Affairs, Ali Header Jaidi, tweeted fake news on Tweeter about Atrocity's in Kashmir Valley following the repeal of Article 370 of Kashmir. As by time fact check it was a manipulated video in which two of the videos merged, one from 2017 and one from 2018. This tweet was retweeted over 4800 times and liked over 6000 times (Check, 2019). Just after the abrogation of article 370 from Jammu and Kashmir in august 2019 there a flood of fake news on various social media platforms like tweeter and Facebook their several morphed videos popped up reaching millions of views. Many these fake videos were posted from a responsible citizen of Pakistan including Journalists and Ministers. Due to this wildfire of fake news tweeter has to suspend over two hundred account. Many fact-checkers found that most videos disseminated by fake news settlers who were showing these videos as a protest from Kashmir valley people against abrogation of article 370 and 35 A were fake and old videos (AFP, 2019). This shows that Pakistan deliberately uses fake news in propaganda against India. This enhances possibilities of war between two nations and such kind of fake news instigates communal riots as well.

An independent study on WhatsApp disinformation associated with mob violence in India conducted in 2018 by the London School of Economics and Political Science shows that there have been increasing cases of multiplied violence and lynching due to misinformation circulated on WhatsApp in India. Targeted persons were from minority groups according to this study. Such people are often blamed for cow slaughter, cow dealing, child lifting and harvesting of human organs. It caused people to die, suffer injury and trauma (Shakuntala Banaji, 2018).

In a study on understanding fake news author tried to analyze reasons for disseminating fake news and found that following ‘Ps’ are major reasons for spreading fake news: Poor journalism, parody, provoke, passion, partisanship, profit, political influence, power and propaganda (Muigai, 2019). This study indicates that there are various reasons for the dissemination of fake news which we as a media content consumer has to analyze, use filters before consuming any information.

As a new form of media is more participatory and audience engaging, people tend to glue on these new media platforms for a longer period, especially for entertainment purpose. Authors (Meghan McGlinn, 2019) in their study found that American youngsters are more technology addict in comparison with other age groups of media consumers and they spend ten to eleven hours in front of a screen that too like a passive consumer which encourage fake news peddlers to disseminate false news in forms of sensational and entertaining stories. Authors also highlighted that as per recent Dartmouth study one out of four Americans visited a fake news site during US presidential election 2016.

In a study based on extensive literature review authors (Egelhofer, & Lecheler, 2019) analyzed that political propaganda under fake news has been less studied. They described fake news as two-dimensional phenomenon’s, one as fake news genre and other as fake news label. Fake news genre is defined as deliberately creating pseudo-journalistic disinformation while fake news label is described as a political instrument to delegitimize news media. Fake news can be disseminated deliberately which is known as disinformation or unintentionally which can be defined as misinformation. While both of the information shares inaccurate content but they can be distinguished by their intent. (Egelhofer, 2019) In a study on ‘The current state of fake news: challenges and opportunities’ authors stated that fake news detection has become a central discussion issue not only in news sector but also in society at large as false information circulate on digital media platforms very quickly so the veracity of digital content has to be checked rigorously permanently for filtering such content. (Álvaro Figueiraa, 2017). In a study on fake news in Indian perspective, authors observed that though the whole world is struggling with the challenge of fake news in a country like India it has turned deadly because misinformation and disinformation reach to people in various forms like audio, video clips, memes, messages, photographs. (Amila Banerjee, 2018). In the age of digital era journey from information to facilities can be decided from home with the help of the internet and computer. On one hand, with the help of new media technologies development of media has touched new heights on the other hand blogging, vlogging and social media opened up new dimensions of exchange of ideas. Facebook has made a special place amongst youngsters very fast which is not used only for interaction with family and friends but also for gaining information (Patel, Study the Diverse Nature of News Presentation on Facebook and its Impact on Youth, 2019)

In a study on ‘Politics of fake news: How WhatsApp became a potent propaganda tool in India’ author (Farooq, 2018) stated that political propaganda is peddled through WhatsApp in

the form of fake news in India. In his study author also highlighted what makes WhatsApp a powerful application in the Indian context and where existing law gets fail to trace the origin of fake news. As per last official report of WhatsApp statistics of 2017, WhatsApp is being used by 1.5 billion monthly users of 180 countries around the world and 200 million monthly active users of this App is in India only(Iqbal, 2020). This data shows the popularity of WhatsApp in India along with other countries. One can share audio, video, picture and text with anyone using WhatsApp through his cell phone number. Any technology which is fast, simple, convenient, reliable and useful is easily adopted by a person that is the reason WhatsApp gained popularity in India. Reason Indian are getting affected by fake news is, technology is reaching to even most marginalized communities of India. People in remote areas in India do not have basic amenities but they won cell phone and lower price of internet data connect them to the digital world but they are not very familiar with this world. As most of them are not media literate they become a victim of fake news. The massive spread of fake news with fast pace has threatened not only media organizations and society at large but it has also shaken pillars of democracies by influencing elections, US presidential election of 2016 is one of the examples of it. Authors (Chengcheng Shao, 2018) stipulated that social bots play a key role in spreading fake news. Automated accounts on social media platforms tend to influence digital media users by making content viral. Researchers suggested that curbing social bots may be an effective strategy for mitigating the spread of online misinformation as well as disinformation. Digital dependency for information increase chances of being the victim of fake news in the form of false propaganda, fabricated news, click-bate headlines, parody etc. Fake news has become a much-hyped term in “post-truth” era after the US presidential campaign and election of 2016. It is also blamed for fueling propaganda, hate speeches, communal riots and violence, mob lynching and increasing communal disharmony. Even educated people can easily become a victim of fake news majorly for identifying false information is difficult in the digital era and not developing information verification attitude as well.(McGonagle, 2017). A study conducted on fake news by BBC found that people do not verify videos shared by family, friends and relatives as they consider them as trusted sources. We have to develop the attitude of fact-checking of online information especially floated on social media before consuming and forwarding it to others. Media and digital literacy are the best way towards countering fake news.

As information is accessible to anyone, anywhere via digital media technologies today, it is more challenging to evaluate the quality and authenticity of the information in the digital era. The proliferation of fake news affects teens both at the individual and broader societal level. A study conducted on young people’s ability to assess messages and bias in information on the Internet by Stanford history education group in 2016 concluded that “democracy can be threatened by the ease at which disinformation about civic issues is allowed to spread and flourish”(Spratt & Agosto, 2017). Power of fake news to mislead and misinform people has been made evident around the world which made it the prominent talk of the world these days. Though technological assistance can identify fake news they are in their infancy and

people to need to develop a fact-checking attitude. We have to be a critical consumer of information we consume. Fake news has many new social media outlets now where it can appear and spread quickly by human and nonhuman actors (bots). As per the analysis of author “in the last decade use of the Internet to manipulate, manage, and mislead has had a massive upswing” (Burkhardt, 2017)

A research study of authors (Mo Jones Jang, 2019) reveals that only information literacy, not other literacy (media, news and digital literacy) significantly increases the likelihood of identifying fake news stories. Information literacy teaches people to interpret media messages and provide them with a vision to analyse the motto of media content producer. Research studies on a social network show that rumours spreading is increasingly accelerated among uneducated digital media users as compared to educated digital media consumer (Afassinou, 2014). Media forms an integral part of the framework in any society. It plays an important role in the dissemination of information, imparting education and creating awareness among the masses. Harold Innis observed that when society is introduced with a new medium; it experiences a change in the flow and the format of information. The phenomenon of change in medium results in a shift in the power centre. The integrity of the source, the medium and the information so the spread is instrumental for the formation of public opinion. Media forms an integral part of superstructure in any society since time immortal. Its prime function is to inform, to educate, and to create awareness. An important function of the media is to keep up surveillance of all the happenings in the world and provide information to the human society. The media has the responsibility of providing news and covering a wide variety of issues which are of some service to society. Media helps to maintain social order by providing instructions on what has to be done in times of crisis, thereby reducing confusion among the masses. People’s attitudes towards political issues, events, public policy, etc. are influenced to an extent by how the media frames and presents the issue in their discussions and presentations (Patel, An Analysis of Impact of Personal Communication Technology on Public Policy Making Process In India, 2017)The researcher emphasized the important role played by media in his research but in present times social media has badly affected the credibility and image of media. Fake news is the new virus engulfing the roots of Journalism and media. The researcher in his research threw light on the diverse nature on news presentation on Facebook and its impact on youth and wrote that Increasing science and technological development have influenced every area of human life. In the age of Internet and computer, the journey from information to facilities can be decided from home. Where the development of media has touched new heights, blogging and social media opened up new dimensions of exchange of ideas. At such times, Facebook as a well-known social media site is presently in front of us. Which has made a special place among the youth very fast? Facebook is not only used for various types of news and exchange of views; it can also be called a reflection of social change in the contemporary context. Facebook is no longer just a means of entertainment but has also become a source of receiving news among the youth. (Patel, Study the Diverse Nature of News Presentation on Facebook and its Impact on Youth,

2019) The researcher in the COVID times also emphasized on the menace of fake news and wrote that in the times of suffering and devastation of COVID-19 where the World is fighting against the deadly virus of COVID-19 and everyone is destitute for survival. Another virus that is spreading more fear in these times is the virus of fake news and misinformation. Humanity is standing at the threshold of bereavement and torment and misinformation is adding on to the distress of human in this hour of grief and anxiety. The news culture of present times where every social media platform, channel, newspaper and each media respectively want to update the World with the latest trends and happening about coronavirus in the respective parts of the country is also becoming the platform for dissemination of disinformation and fake news.(Himani Binjola, 2020). The human race is deliberated as the superlative conception of the almighty which is believed to have the highest acumen and astuteness. Humans only believe in those instincts which he wants to believe, in short when any information is shared with them, they process the information and especially such information which fits it into their beliefs and perception. Such information is trusted by them without confirming the authenticity of the information and they continue believing. This is where fake news takes the opportunity and advantage of our preconceptions and prejudices. Now say if some message doesn't go along with our personal belief so we immediately reject the information, particularly when we have to take some serious measures on the same, it is based on selective perception theory. The biggest question that arises in these difficult times is that why does fake news superfluities and misinformation spreads like wildfire? Does it bring our attention to one fact that people have become miserably credulous and in this hour of anxiety and distress are becoming receptive to misinformation and fake news?

According to some researchers, any misinformation which is sensational and eye-catching in nature is much appreciated by the audience and grabs the attention of the people (Himani Binjola, 2020). Garlic can cure disease, Pakistan's Prime Minister is diagnosed with coronavirus, Ronaldo is diagnosed with Covid-19, Corona is a result of bio-weapon experiment all such fake news has hit all the social platforms very hard and people have surfed this news with huge in numbers. Sometimes we share this news for fun and without authenticating the source of news we share it with hundreds and thousands of people and then those also share and, in this way, we increase and contribute in the vicious circle of fake news. The fake news scenario in case of COVID-19 started with bat soup stories, then celebrity getting diagnosed with Covid-19 and then all such fake news and misinformation is continuing across social media platforms. More tormenting fake news is the cure for Covid-19, which is still not there but fake news such as chloroquine could be the possible drug for the cure of Covid-19, another one that my friend who is in Wuhan has made this audio message for information and cure from coronavirus and all such audios are getting circulated on WhatsApp numbers without confirming the source and genuineness of the news.(Himani Binjola, 2020)

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Inoculation theory of McGuire, 1964. The theory suggests that prior exposure helps the audience against future attacks. In the context of fake news by offering digital media & information literacy and skills to resist or critically interpret fake news or hoax stories we can enable individual to be “inoculated” against any harmful influence of fake news.

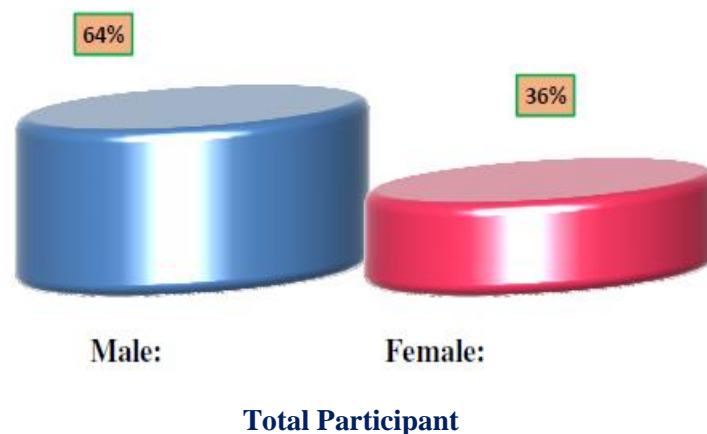
Methods and Material

This study falls under a descriptive research design. Authors opted survey method to collect data from target respondents through close-ended questionnaires. Planned sample framework was 120 and the response rate was (n=109). Data has been collected from respondents of Nehru Nagar, Rachna Nagar, Maharana Pratap Nagar (popularly known as MP Nagar) and Taty Topo Nagar (TT Nagar) of Bhopal City of Madhya Pradesh based on convenience. Data of this study has been analyzed on frequency distribution and percentage basis on SPSS.

Results

Demographic details of this study show that

Out of 109 respondents, fifty-nine per cent of respondents were male and forty-one per cent of respondents were female. Majority of the digital media users (fifty-eight per cent) were between the age group of 20 to 25 years followed by twenty-three per cent respondents between the age group of 26 to 30 years. Fifteen per cent of respondents were between the ages of 31 to 35 years, and only four per cent of respondents were between the ages of 36 to 40 years. No respondent was more than forty years. Forty-six per cent of respondents were college students, thirty-five per cent of respondents were in a job, twelve per cent were from business class while only seven per cent respondents were in another profession. Sixty-four per cent of respondents were male and thirty-six per cent were female.



Demographic representation					
Gender	Male: 64%			Female: 36%	
Age Group	20-25 years	26-30 years	31-35 years	36-40 years	More than 40 years
	59%	23%	15%	4%	0%
Profession	College students	Job	Business	Other Profession	
	46%	35%	12%	7%	

Findings of the study

Forty-nine per cent digital media user’s daily digital media diet is between 5 to 7 hours followed by thirty-seven per cent respondents who consume digital media platforms for 2 to 4 hours daily, while twenty-four per cent respondents use digital media for less than an hour in a day.

More than half of the respondents (sixty-eight per cent) use digital media platform for entertainment and fun purpose followed by twenty-two per cent respondents who use it for interaction with family and friends, six per cent for education purpose and only four per cent for business purpose.

Majority of respondents (fifty-three per cent) rated their web searching skills good, thirty-four per cent rated so-so while thirteen per cent of respondents rated their web searching skill very bad.

More than half of the respondents (seventy-nine per cent) enjoy using digital devices a lot followed by twenty-one per cent respondents who enjoy using digital devices to some extent but not even a single respondent stated that he/she does not like digital devices.

On the question of whether respondents are aware of various kinds of digital devices, sixty-six per cent respondents said no while thirty-four per cent answered yes.

Eighty-five per cent digital media users feel that they are behind their fellow in using digital media technologies, only fifteen per cent of respondents said ‘no’.

Seventy-four per cent respondents trust social media platforms for gaining any kind of information up to hundred per cent for most of the time, thirteen per cent users rely on the social media platform to some extent while thirteen per cent digital media consumers do not trust on information floated on social media at all.

Fifty-nine per cent respondents use social media as the main source for gaining information, nineteen per cent respondents watch a news channel, eighteen per cent respondents use news portals for getting any kind of information and only for four per cent respondents’ newspaper is as the main source of information.

Majority of respondents (sixty-nine per cent) do not cross verify information received from social media at all, nineteen per cent respondents sometimes cross-check information received from social media while twelve per cent respondents most of the time cross-verify social media information.

Majority of respondents (seventy-three per cent) most of the times share information with others without fact-checking, ten per cent respondents sometimes, eight per cent respondent rarely share any information without fact-checking only nine per cent respondents never share any information with other without fact-checking.

Most of the respondents (seventy-nine per cent) said they cannot say whether they have information verification attitude or not, twelve per cent respondents said no and only nine per cent respondents responded that they have information verification attitude.

More than half of the respondents (fifty-nine per cent) said they have been the victim of fake news, twenty-eight per cent respondents said they are not sure about it and thirteen per cent said they have never been the victim of any fake news.

Ninety-five per cent of respondents agreed with the statement that ‘fake news is a serious problem of the country’. Only five per cent of respondents disagreed with this statement.

Most of the respondents (sixty-eight per cent) agreed with the statement that ‘dissemination of fake news has degraded trustworthiness of media’, seventeen per cent respondents said no while fifteen per cent respondents were not sure about it.

Eighty-six per cent of respondents said that fake news is creating distrust in society; nine per cent of respondents said they are not sure only five per cent of respondents disagreed with the statement.

Ninety-three per cent respondents said that we are not digitally literate to face digital challenges; seven per cent respondents were not sure about it.

Almost every respondent (ninety-seven per cent) agreed with the statement that ‘we need digital media and information literacy to combat fake news’, three per cent respondents were not sure about it.

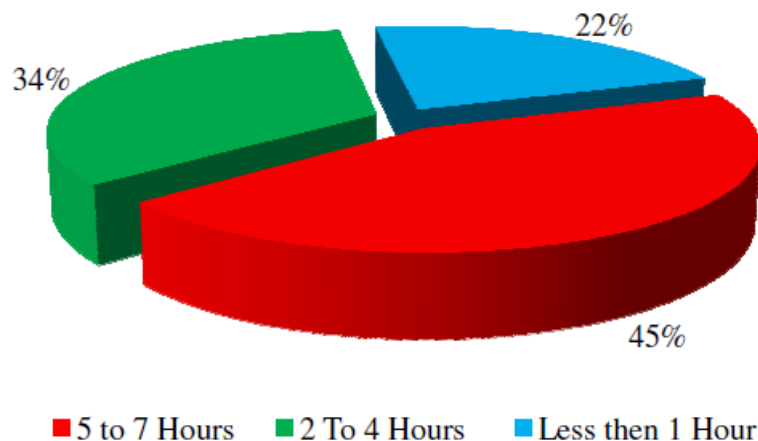


Chart 1. Digital Media Diet

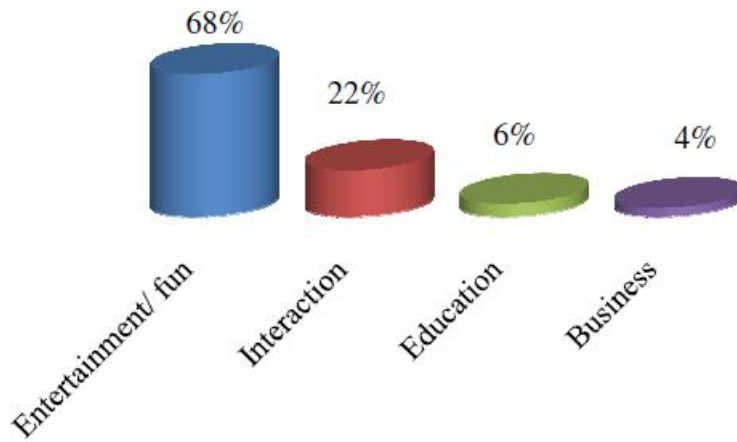


Chart 2.Purpose of digital media usage

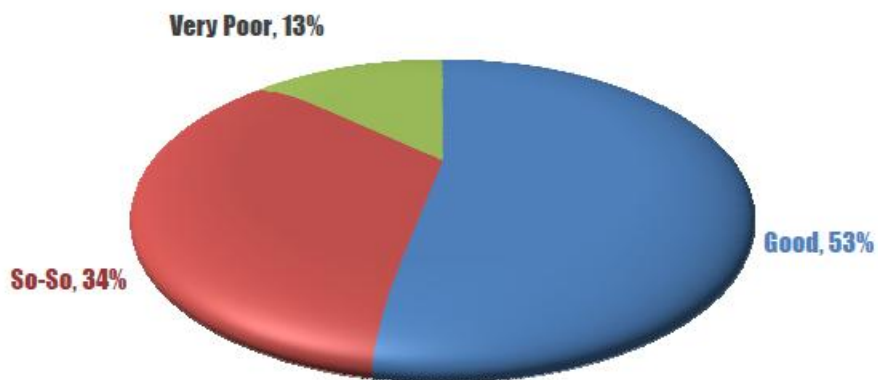


Chart 3.Level of web searching skills

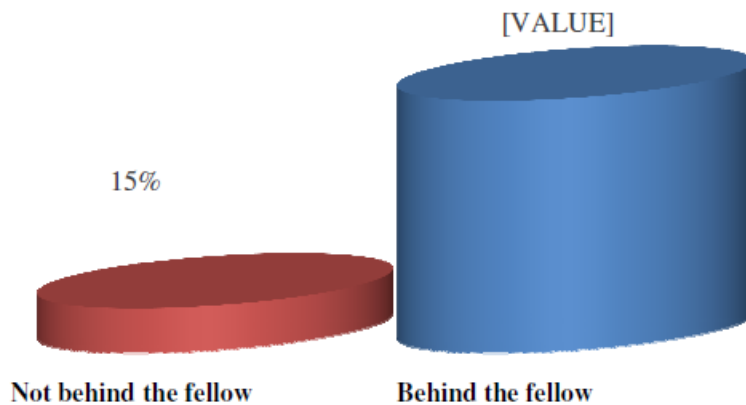


Chart 4.Feeling of less digital competency as compare to fellow

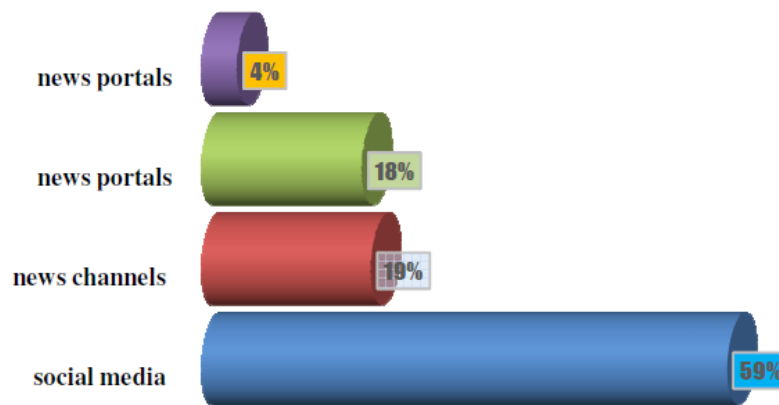


Chart 5. Main source of information

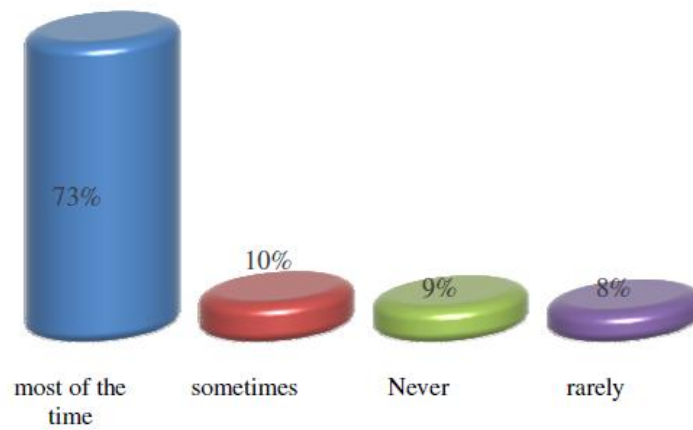


Chart 6. Frequency of information sharing without cross verification

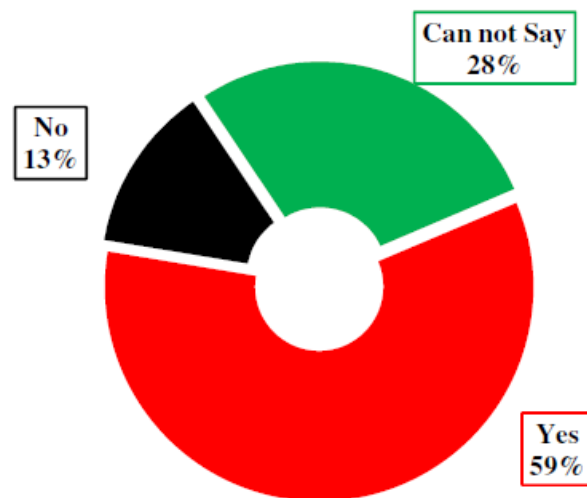


Chart 7. Ever been victim of fake news

Discussion

Fake news is a burning issue not only of our nation but of the world. Developing and the underdeveloped nation has to worry a lot regarding digital challenges as cyber wellness among us as compared to a developed nation is quite low. In United State of America NGOs like National association for media literacy education (NAMLE), Media Literacy Now, Centre for media literacy are working very actively along with governing bodies of US to make people media literate. Media and information literacy legislation has been passed in more than ten states of the US. European Union is also very active in European countries and several types of research have been conducted on media and information literacy but in Developing Nations like India Media Literacy is a new concept. It is an irony that people living in remote areas of India are deprived of even basic civic amenities but they can afford somehow Smartphones and due to internet data packages on the affordable price they are connected to the digital world. Technologies have reached to marginalized communities of India but not the digital media etiquettes and media literacy that is why these people are prone to fake news and they are on target of fake news peddlers and social bots. In prior studies, fake news can be divided into misinformation and disinformation. Misinformation can be defined as false information disseminated unwillingly, without intention while disinformation can be described as false information disseminated willingly with intention. One has to keep eye on intention of the information as well, being floated on various media platforms. There are various reasons for the dissemination of the fake news i.e., poor journalism, parody, provoke, passion, partisanship, profit, political influence, power and propaganda. For understanding the gimmick of fake news, it is imperative to become media literate. There is a lack of awareness regarding media literacy among stakeholders like educationist, policymakers, youngsters and parents in India. Researchers of this study found very few researcher papers on combating fake news through digital media literacy with an Indian perspective. Like prior researches results of this study also indicates that people need to develop fact verifying attitude before reacting on any of the social media information or sharing that information with others. This study also highlights that fake news is not only creating distrust among people but has raised a question mark on the trustworthiness of media as there are so many fake web portals and people are not skilled enough to identify fake news. News organizations have to focus on, on-ground reporting rather than following “trends” on social media platforms for saving their image from fake news virus. It also poses challenges like mob violence and lynching, communal stress and social divide in society. We have to understand that any information which is hammering us is not from a credible source and we also need to apprehend our responsibility that any such misinformation should not manipulate us. This way we will defend us from misinformation and we will only be exposed to less fake news in the first phase. The need of the hour is that we all remain vigilant and only trust information when we are sure of the credibility of the source. Our vigilant attitude will curb spreading misinformation and fake news. We have to develop information verification attitude before believing as well as forwarding any information to others.

Researchers also observed that Pakistan has been deliberately propagating fake news in forms of morphed videos, hate speeches instigating citizens of India as a tool of the propaganda war against India.

Recommendation

Researchers feel that digital media literacy awareness is needed at war footing step to combat digital challenges including fake news. Digital media literacy campaign has to be launched and promoted like ‘Swachhha Bharat Mission’ and ‘Polio Eradication Mission’. Celebrities, opinion leaders, religious leaders, policymakers, media educators and digital media consumers all need to be sensitized towards the seriousness of digital challenges and role of digital media literacy to create awareness on the ground level. Folk media and community media can play a major role in this initiative. We have no choice except to fight against digital challenges and digital media literacy can inoculate people against this fight.

Conclusion

We are going through a transition period where digitally mediated communication is taking place rapidly. Most of the people especially youngsters of India use digital media platforms not only for entertainment purpose but also for interacting on the personal and professional front as well as for seeking information. This study concludes that youngsters who are digital media users are over-consuming digital media diet. Now a day’s mostly Indian youth is using social media for information that might be one of the reasons fake news peddlers and propagandist are targeting social media on priority basis for propagating fake news and false propaganda. This study emphasizes that majority of respondents neither cross verify information gained from social media for self-consumption nor practice fact-checking before forwarding it to. Study shows that Indian youngsters are mostly unaware of information verification attitude. More than half of the respondents became a victim of fake news and stipulated that fake news is a serious problem of the nation. This study highlights that a big majority of respondents were in favour of dire need of digital media literacy to combat fake news.

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