Exploring Strategies Used by University Students of Karachi to Combat Online Misinformation and Fake News

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ABSTRACT

The issue of false news and its impact has gained significant attention in recent years. With advancements in technology, the rapid dissemination of false information has become increasingly prevalent. Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have become breeding grounds for the creation and spread of misinformation. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct research that delves into the workings of social media, the production and dissemination of false information through these platforms, and the role of users in these processes. The objective of this research is to shed light on how people in Pakistan tackle the challenge of false news on social media. It addresses the crucial aspects of users' interactions with news in the digital age and the importance of user cooperation in combating misinformation. The data for this study was obtained from participants who are members of the False News Identifier Facebook group. This group is an online community based in Karachi, Pakistan, where individuals share their expertise and ideas to collaboratively identify false news and prevent its dissemination. In conclusion, this research highlights the pressing issue of false news in the digital era and focuses specifically on the efforts made by individuals in Pakistan to combat the spread of misinformation on social media. By investigating their strategies and programmes, this study aims to contribute valuable insights to the field of false news research and shed light on the role of user interactions and cooperation in addressing this problem. The study relies on data collected from participants of the False News Identifier Facebook group, which serves as a platform for collaborative efforts in identifying and countering false news.

Keywords: *Fake News, Misinformation, Digital Media*

INTRODUCTION

Given social media's significance in spreading false news regarding current political and social

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issues, it's crucial to study how audiences engage with misinformation on social networking sites (SNS). Social media spreads fake political and social news quickly (Mehrdad and Anna, 2017). These scams mislead audiences. online publishers may benefit from these tales that aim to persuade, confuse, or promote a political agenda (Brennen, 2017). Since fake news items use names and web addresses like real news agencies, they may fool consumers. Accidental false news might confuse and mislead (Corner, 2017). Many individuals get their political and social news from social media (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017), yet it may be hard to discern whether reports are true. Fake news and hoaxes have increased due to information overload and digital illiteracy. Social media and its users may propagate these tales (Spohr, 2017). Some social media users are fighting bogus news. This study examines these organizations and their behaviours to provide a more thorough framework for identifying and combating false news.

Google and Facebook introduced reporting and flagging capabilities to combat false news. The BBC and Channel 4 have fact-checking webpages. These are wonderful improvements, but digital media literacy and critical thinking are crucial for internet users (Mihailidis and Viotty, 2017). Critical thinking is needed due to internet information and bogus political news (Burkhardt, 2017). Thus, social media users' verification efforts to recognise and combat bogus news must be examined. Their techniques

Identifying a phoney article and how people react to it might help combat social media fake news. This study examines how Pakistani internet users recognise bogus news and authenticate data. This survey focused on Fake News Identifier Facebook members. This Facebook group was selected because its members battle social media misinformation. The False News Identifier and its members also regularly identify false news on Pakistani social media and provide their results to significant media publications. Pakistani publications have utilised false news identifier results to identify false news stories. Thus, the techniques and tools these Pakistani users employ to resist bogus stories should be examined, as they reveal how individuals engage with fake news regarding contemporary political and social concerns and how they fight it.

This study collects quantitative data on social media acts that might help more people get trustworthy and verifiable information about current social and political issues and adapt to the digital era. This study examines how Pakistani social media users engage with false news and how they fight it, providing information that may be utilised to create a broad plan to combat it. This study's major research question (RQ) is how the False News Identifier Facebook group detects and combats false news on social media. Two sub-research questions were created to concentrate and simplify this RQ. First, 'What particular authentication activities do the members of the bogus News Identifier Facebook group conduct to detect bogus news on social media?' The second question is, "How does the Fake News Identifier Facebook group handle fake news after finding it on social media?" The second and third RQs provide quantitative data to address the study's first key RQ. Specifically, the initial goal was to gather answers about users' authentication tools and processes. Investigating how Pakistani consumers notice bogus news might reveal these processes. After recognising a bogus tale, Pakistani social media users' answers were gathered to better understand how they stopped it. Combining these comments (regarding tools and processes to restrict false news and efforts to stop its spread) revealed the False News Identifier Facebook group's entire approach.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda-setting theory refers to the "capacity (of the news media) to influence the relative

importance of issues on the public agenda." The study of agenda-setting explains how the media attempts to influence audiences and establish a hierarchy of news importance.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

Online Survey

The survey describes how Fake News Identifier Facebook group was surveyed. This study's conclusions may be easier to grasp if the data's acquisition and ethical issues are explained. This paper also details the study sample that the RQs above focus on. This research's framework, the Fake News Identifier members, is equally important.

Online Questionnaires

The Fake News Identifier Facebook group was surveyed online for this research. 100 randomly selected group members completed the survey, and their replies were examined to answer this study's RQs. The group's administration approved a questionnaire-based online survey. After officials approved it, the organization released a link to the online questionnaire. To educate users about the study's goals and data collection, the organization uploaded a description of the survey, its objectives, and its questionnaire. The first 100 Fake News Identifier Facebook group members who completed the poll were immediately admitted.

Survey Monkey was used to create a nine-question closed-answer questionnaire for this investigation. The first two questions were on age and gender, while the next six were regarding the study. The last question allowed people to comment on the research and contribute any further suggestions. Every question included a drop-down menu of responses and an "other" option allowing users to contribute their own answers. This study's restrictions dictated a sample of 100 group members. For practical reasons, one researcher could investigate this number of responses in the time available. To reduce bias, the surveys were anonymous, and users were selected randomly. Since users may have used numerous strategies and tools to recognise and combat false news, participants were able to choose multiple responses. Thus, Pakistani users' numerous comments gave more solid and precise answers, adequate to identify common trends in the battle against social media false news. As indicated above, 68% of this study's participants were male and 32% were women. This research has 37% of participants aged 35–44 and 32% aged 25–34. 14% were 18–24, 15% were 45–54, and 2% were 55–64. It's important to note that this group's demographic data—such as gender and age breakdowns—is not publicly available. The Fake News Identifier Facebook group is closed, and the admins did not offer any information about the individual. Since there was no data on the online community's overpopulation, this study used just the online research data.

Collins (2010) states that questionnaires are a common data collection strategy. They are inexpensive, easy to deliver, and require no previous arrangement, assuring anonymity and preventing shame for the responder. The questionnaire was designed to gather data from numerous anonymous respondents from around Pakistan. Thus, it was chosen for online user response collection and analysis. Questionnaires are standard (Bourke et al. 2016). Questionnaires enable researchers to ask all respondents the same questions in the same sequence and conveniently tabulate and compare the results. Standardisation minimises prejudice and facilitates impartial response collection. That was another benefit of employing a questionnaire to collect answers from the false news identifyr group and analyse them to better understand how consumers detect and combat false news on social media.

According to Collins (2010, p. 130), closed inquiries are best for gathering facts. This research needed consistent replies from Pakistani users to better understand their internet habits.

This research used a questionnaire to collect primary data, which limited flexibility. This study strategy considered questionnaire drawbacks. Questionnaires do not enable follow-up inquiries (Bourke et al. 2016). To allow participants to freely express themselves, the questionnaire included the "other" option. Their replies were evaluated, but there was no way to clarify. Surveys don't promote more responses either. Collins (2010, p. 130) adds that closed questions should always contain an "other" category since not all viable solutions were included in the list of options. This study's questionnaire included the "other" option because of this idea. Questionnaires have another drawback: responders may have important research-related information that the question setter missed (Bourke et al. 2016). Thus, the ninth question allows users to openly share their ideas or reservations regarding the research or case study.

THE FINDINGS

This research found that the False News Identifier Facebook group used many approaches to detect and combat false news (Figure 1). This survey found that most people who read news online hunt for related resources to verify the information. In particular, 82% of respondents said they check social media news online. Users like this method, even if it takes time to investigate appropriate websites and other internet sources. Another effective way to spot false news on social media is to research the media outlet and journalists. 79% of survey participants stated this. This research found that source background matters to participants. To determine whether social media news is fraudulent, consumers research the medium and author. Many social media users use another technique to spot bogus news. 63% of people browse comments underneath posts to locate credible sources or individuals. Users have filed warnings about bogus news. Thus, this study's participants noted that scanning the comments underneath social media posts might help people identify bogus news.

This research shows that social media users prioritise the poster's identity when identifying bogus news. 38% of social media users look up the individual who shared a story to learn more about them. 26% also utilise their own networks to get answers. They may question other users or online friends about a story or explore Facebook groups like the Fake News Identifer group for useful information. Only 2% of users in this research utilised fact-checking software to verify web stories. This study's participants prefer to perform their own investigation rather than utilise free software applications to recognise bogus news.

This study's participants were asked to describe their interactions with misleading information after identifying false news on social media (Figure 2). Users were first invited to contribute data about their interactions with a phony narrative shared on social media by other users or trolls, then by media outlets. This research found that people mostly remark and report bogus stories created by other users or trolls, such as deceptive photos with wrong statistics. To be more exact, 59.79% of people remark underneath the post that this is a bogus narrative, and 58.76% label the post as untrustworthy. After discovering a hoax, some people take action. 38.14% of people reported the post or user when they found fraudulent or misleading information. Users knowingly distribute bogus news. 15.46% of research participants re-shared a bogus tale to warn others not to read it. 10% of users indicated they disregard fraudulent posts after identifying them. However, some people

choose to behave differently. 8% of users immediately contact the bogus story's creator to erase it

THE MOST POPULAR METHODS
This graphic illustrates how the greek users fake news
on social media

Source: https://www.semanticscholar.org/

Users' reactions to media outlets' fraudulent stories on social media show how they fight fake news. Users engage similarly with media-produced and user-generated bogus tales. No matter the producer, people challenge bogus news with identical methods. In fact, 64.95% of people commented on media outlets' false news posts by claiming they were phoney. 59.79% of people flagged the post as untrustworthy, and 34.02% reported the post, media, or individual that posted the fraudulent article. 17.53% of participants in this research chose to re-share the post with the bogus tale to warn other users not to read it, similar to user-generated fake stories. 6.19% of users immediately contact the media that generated the phoney report and urge them to erase it, and 6% ignore it.

This research shows that individuals utilize a variety of strategies to detect and combat bogus news on social media, believing it may influence audience perceptions (Figure 3). Users' replies might help create a plan to recognize and combat bogus news. Users usually check a story's source and reliability online before taking action to block its spread on social media. This research found that consumers prefer to detect bogus news rather than trust fact-checking websites. Users also report or re-share bogus stories to alert other users, regardless of the source. This research found that users and social media platforms are accountable for countering bogus news on social media. Participants also want an independent authority to monitor and combat false news. Finally, consumers think bogus news increases xenophobia, misleads, and mistrusts the media and news.

Analysis of the findings

This research shows how Pakistani social media users detect and stop bogus news. This research examines the False News Identifier Facebook group and its methods for combating false news. After evaluating Pakistani users' comments, this research's common themes may be utilised to create a broad plan to combat false news. According to Michailidis and Viotty (2017), demands for individuals to participate as fact-checkers typically require them to read, which is becoming less probable as digital media permeates everyday information. Davis (2016) suggests that users read news like fact-checkers by paying attention to the domain and URL, reading the About Us section, looking at the quotes in the story and who said them, checking the comments, and doing reverse image searching.

This research shows that the Fake News Identifier Facebook group uses some of these verification criteria. Pakistanis serve as fact-checkers by doing their own investigation when they suspect bogus news. Instead of employing fact-checkers, they undertake their own online research. Pakistani users verify the source's trustworthiness, following Davis' advice to check the URL and About Us pages. This study's participants value researching a media source, website, or social media user's background. Pakistani users said checking comments underneath an article helps clarify. Combining these behaviours, one may argue that Pakistani users follow Davis' suggestions and utilise their expertise and experience to fight bogus news.

According to the UGT, Pakistani users are engaged and goal-oriented (Leung and Wei, 2000). The UGT holds that audiences use media for specific gratification and actively seek out media that meets their needs and improves knowledge, social interaction, and diversity (Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2010). The Fake News Identifier Facebook group noticed this tactic. According to their comments, people actively utilise media like the Internet and social media to get factual information. They also utilise the same medium to actively fight false news, communicate their discoveries, and increase knowledge and social diversity. To check a story's authenticity, they seek it online. Instead of passively reading internet messages, individuals were critical and researched, utilising numerous channels. According to UGT, individuals are self-aware enough of their media usage, interests, and motives to provide researchers with an accurate picture (Papacharissi and Mendelson, 2010). Pakistani people are aware of their media consumption and how they may utilise it to get insights and check messages and sources.

Pakistanis follow a multi-step authentication procedure. Members of the Fake News Identifier authenticate using sources, message signals, and their own implicit sense of authenticity. Pakistani consumers evaluate bogus news based on experience, expertise, and intuition. As they said, they perform independent investigations to verify a message or source. Pakistani consumers say this is vital. Thus, two primary types of authentication are false news exchanges and personal experiences. Pakistani consumers used these two patterns to recognise and stop bogus news on social media during authentication.

Pakistani social media users research bogus news items and sources. Pakistani users seek out media outlets' backgrounds and journalists' identities, a source authentication procedure, according to their replies. By reading false news comments, they find credible sources and users. Since consumers mostly want source or message information, this is part of source authentication. This research found that social media users authenticate bogus news messages. Pakistani people often browse the Internet for useful information. Users directly engage with bogus news by verifying its trustworthiness. Pakistani consumers' second pattern—personal experience—is likewise similar.

Personal experience: Pakistanis evaluate bogus news based on their knowledge and experience. They also mix their own expertise and intuition with their Internet investigations to locate accurate information. Their background influences their judgement when authenticating a source and message. Pakistani users also ask friends and family about bogus news, which may impact their knowledge.

CONCLUSION

Fake news has become a prevalent part of the media landscape, and its presence has only

been amplified by advancements in technology (Tandoc et al., 2017). Whether it's unintentional misinformation, satirical articles, or purposefully deceptive news, false information has become ingrained in our daily news consumption (Albright, 2016; Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Social media platforms have provided the means to rapidly create and spread fake news, raising concerns and calls for action to combat its dissemination on the internet and social media.

The swift dissemination of information through social media platforms, which includes both verified and unverified content from professional and non-professional sources, has accelerated the spread of false news (Tandoc et al., 2017). The challenge lies in the difficulty consumers face in discerning genuine news from fabricated information aimed at misleading them. Therefore, understanding how social media users authenticate information they suspect to be false is crucial.

The research findings emphasise the importance of consumer participation in the news consumption process. The individuals involved in the Fake News Identifier Facebook group employ their unique techniques, in collaboration with other group members and their online networks, to authenticate information circulating on the internet and provide accurate findings. The research demonstrates that when consumers take an active role in seeking out multiple sources and data, they not only improve the quality of the news they consume but also contribute to the development of a healthier news ecosystem.

The research also highlights the significant contributions made by users in the fight against the dissemination of inaccurate information online, as media outlets can utilise their findings. Members of the Fake News Identifier group not only identify false news and alert others, but they also collaborate with journalists to expose deceptive stories through articles. Their verification actions hold substantial value as they debunk false narratives being spread on social media.

Additionally, the research reveals that there are individuals who actively consume news, recognise the growing prevalence of false news, and are committed to combating its spread. The extent to which individuals go to verify a news report is influenced by their motivations for consuming news. People's reasons for reading news can vary, including social integration, surveillance, mood management, and cognitive needs (Tsfati & Cappella, 2005). Individuals may continue to consume news from sources they do not fully trust if those sources fulfil these needs. Exploring the circumstances under which individuals authenticate a story and when they are willing to consume, share, or use information without validation presents an intriguing avenue for future research.

Expanding the investigation beyond Pakistan and examining how individuals in different countries authenticate narratives disseminated online, their validation processes, and their ability to recognise and halt the spread of false news would provide valuable insights. Cross-country comparisons could contribute to the development of more effective strategies. Further research could include focus groups and case studies to observe users' authentication practises in action. Building upon the existing study in Pakistan would enrich our understanding of the authentication phenomenon.

In conclusion, fake news poses a significant challenge in today's media landscape. Understanding the strategies employed by social media users to authenticate information and their role in combating the spread of false news is crucial. Active consumer participation and collaboration in the verification process contribute to a healthier news ecosystem. Future research should delve into the circumstances and motivations that influence individuals' authentication practises and explore

authentication processes in different countries to inform the development of effective solutions.

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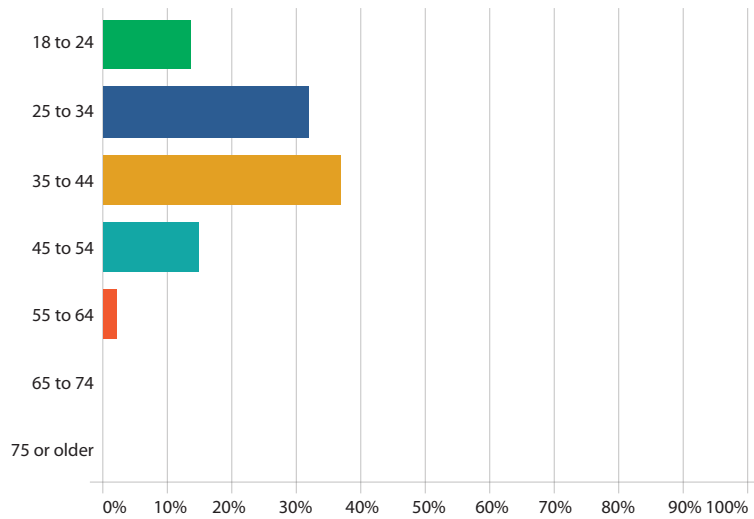
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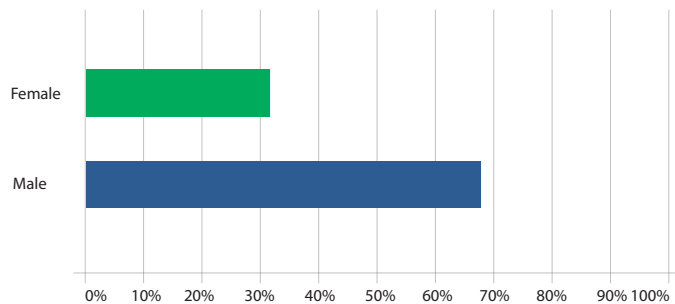
APPENDIX

Q1

What is your age?

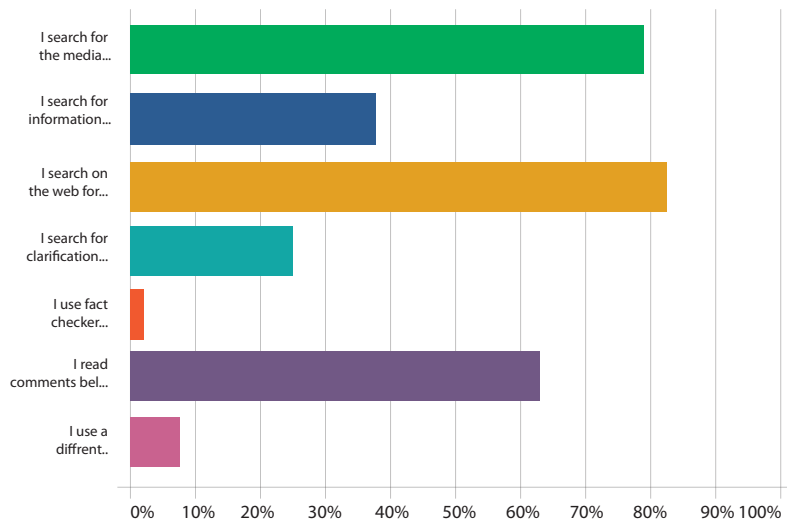Answered: 100   Skipped: 0

Q2

What is your gender?

Answered: 100   Skipped: 0

Q3

What tools do you use to identify a fake story on social media? (please select all applicable answers)
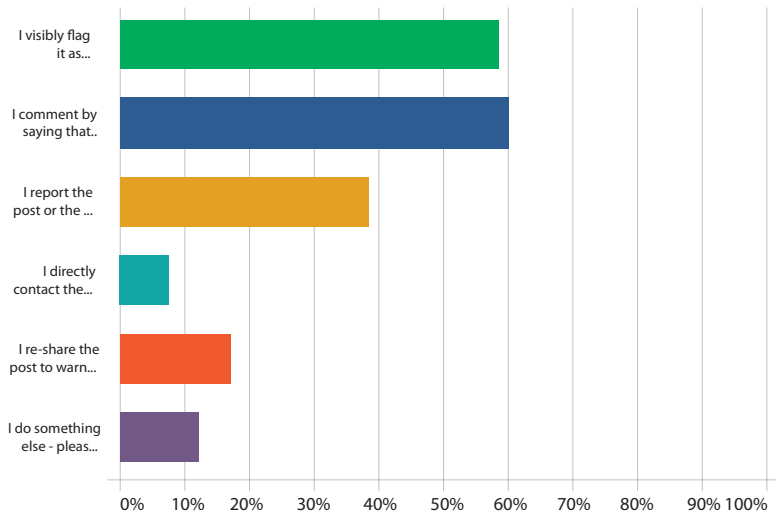
Answered: 100   Skipped: 0

Q4

How do you interact with a fake story which is generated by other users or trolls? (please select all applicable answers)
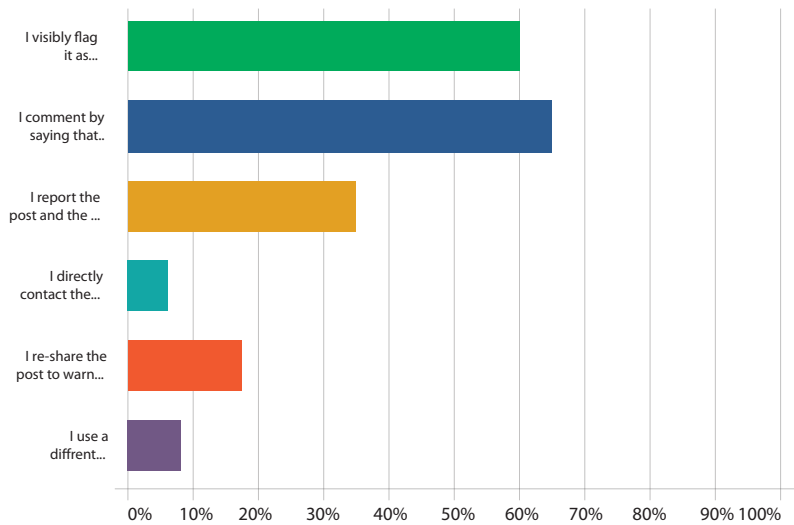
Answered: 97   Skipped: 3

Q5

How do you react when you detect a fake story which is generated by media outlets and it is distributed on social media? (please select all applicable answers)
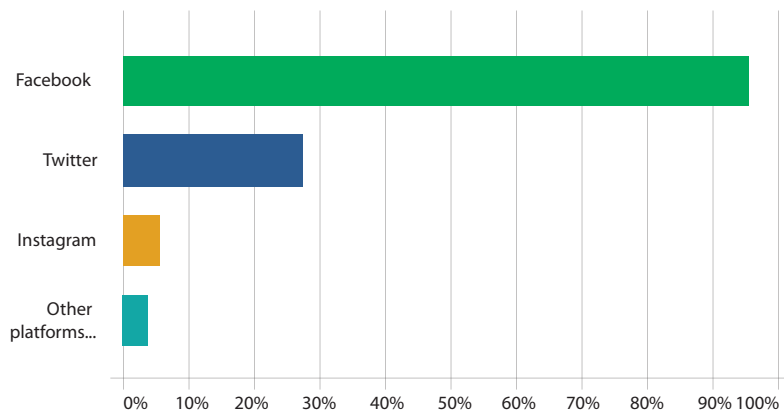
Answered: 97   Skipped: 3

Q6

Based on your experience which social media platform offers a more fertile environment for the spread of a fake story? (please select all applicable answers

Answered: 100   Skipped: 0

Q8

Who should be responsible for identifying and curbing fake news on social media?
(please select all applicable answers)

Answered: 100   Skipped: 0