

Fake news: A Threat to the Credibility of Media-Ecosystem

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Abstract: Fake news is not a recent phenomenon. Hoax news, fabricated, misleading, manipulated content was always in circulation. However, it's a new medium, i.e. new media, social networking sites, smartphones, which drastically magnified their reach and initiated a crisis of credibility. Claire Wardle disagrees with the use of 'fake news' and said it's mis- and dis-information in the information ecosystem and categorizes it in seven types. PolitiFact named fake news its 2016 "Lie of the Year." For the year 2016, Oxford dictionaries declared the term "post-truth" as it's international word of the year and explains that 'objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than emotional appeals and personal belief.' This paper attempts to explore various aspects of fake news and how much it is affecting the Indian media-ecosystem. Survey and interview methods are employed to delve deep into this topic. Surveys and interviews were conducted among media professionals and media students.

Keywords: **Fake news, New media, SNS, Facebook, Post-truth**

Introduction

The concept of fake news or misinformation is not new, several researchers and scholars have studied its impact, mechanism, and root cause. The role of media in the democratic system is widely discussed and researched among media practitioners and researchers. The major factor behind this is that the media can influence the thinking pattern of the masses. (Bennett, 2006). In his study on 'News as Reality TV: Election Coverage and the Democratization of Truth,' he has also explained the concept of news reality frame; which is that scenario where news reality frame blurs the connection between the new reality and its original surrounding context. So somewhere in his study, he was discussing how media can change the whole narrative associated with news. Media is supposed to bridge the gap between masses and authorities and they do this by acting as a watchdog to the authorities and their policies. Media have the right to criticize any governmental policy action or reaction in the public interest and this criticism is considered as the face of real and true journalism. However, there are several theories which discuss the concept of media content and power of media in creating public opinions, most of them are interpreting media with different perspectives like they are interpreting the impact of media content on the audience from their perspective as discussed by Gerbner in his cultivation theory or from the perspective of media professionals as discussed by Chomsky and Herman in Manufacturing Consent, but we are still looking for a theory which is talking about the ethical aspect of media and how one should define this. Now, we have accepted the fact that media is an industry, like any other industry and this acceptance gave several new ways to present a story to the audience and even also put some extra pressure on media to provide information as early as they can. Media, Democracy and Politics is a well-discussed issue (Gecer 2018), in his research Media, Politics and Democracy: A Critical Perspective he said that in a democratic system media and politics are coexisting they are mutually benefitted with the ally, as media professional needs politicians

for their stories and politicians require them to send their messages to the masses. Specifically, in underdeveloped countries, it is more a monetary kind of relation between the media and the politicians and this is creating this whole nexus more complex. (Romano, 2013). Traditional media did work under these circumstances for so long and with the advent of social media or new media, researchers were thinking that this might bring some change, as we know that new media is a medium of mass communication which uses digital technologies to communicate and with the digitalization of news content, online journalism, and social media also participating equally in the information dissemination process. This whole scenario gave rise to social media campaigns and citizen journalism. As an audience, most of us never witnessed news first hand nor do we know how the whole process of collecting information to processing it and then sending it to the audience works. What we actually know about any issue is the stored data or information provided by someone to us. That, our decision-making stems not from individual rationality but from shared group-level narratives (Sloman & Fernbach, 2017). Humans are biased information-seekers: we prefer to receive information that confirms our existing views. These properties combine to make people asymmetric updaters about political issues (Sunstein et al., 2016).

Fake news is not completely false information rather it's a combination of biased and misleading information gradually. In other words, fake news is fabricated information that looks like news but created to change or create public opinion. With the advent of technology and specifically with the emergence of social media this fake news dissemination culture is creating a huge impact on public opinion and their perception.

Post-truth was declared as word of the year of 2016 by oxford dictionary. While defining this word the officials explained that post-truth is relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief. Oxford Dictionaries' president Casper Grathwohl explained it that the rise of social media as a new source of news and information-based media is primarily responsible for the growing distrust of facts offered by the establishment (NBC NEWS.COM). Even according to research conducted by Pew Research Centre on the 2016 presidential election it was found that 23% of the respondents shared a fabricated news story either by knowingly or unknowingly. So how can we define what is fake news? Prior to 2014, this word was not familiar to the news ecosystem rather it was only part of those satire based TV shows where they Mimic and create parody to any existing event. (Stroud, 2019). So Fake News or Fake content are those which are untrue but presented as true. ((Lyons, 2017). Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow (2016) in their paper explained that the concept of fake news is not new, this phenomenon is having its historical roots and they gave an example of great moon hoax of 1835 in which the New York Sun published a series of articles about the discovery of life on the moon. A more recent example is the 2006 "Flemish Secession Hoax," in which a Belgian public television station reported that the Flemish parliament had declared independence from Belgium, a report that a large number of viewers misunderstood as true. In 2017, Collins dictionary declared 'fake news' as word of the year. They defined fake news as "false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting." Helen Newstead, Collins' head of language content, in her statement, said that "Fake news, either as a statement of fact or as an accusation, has been inescapable this year, contributing

to the undermining of society's trust in news reporting." (The Hindu, 2017). Danah Boyd explained that this present scenario is like we are at war more precisely at an information war and we should be worried about this increasing culture of spreading misleading information, but we are more concerned about the impact of these systematic disinformation campaigns on masses. (The Hindu, 2017)

Salena Zito (2016) in an article in The Atlantic, writes that Trump supporters were 'taking him seriously, not literally' (while the press was taking him literally, not seriously). Recently, frustrated Trump spokeswoman Kellyanne Conway said to an interviewer: "Why is everything taken at face value? You always want to go by what's come out of his mouth rather than look at what's in his heart" (Blake, 2017). José Antonio Zarzalejos (2017) explained that Post-truth is not synonymous with lying; moreover, it is that scenario that can manipulate or create public opinion, and the facts this type of news contains are less factual and more emotional and based on personal belief.

Maren B. Hunsberger 2017 in his research on Fake News and Trust: How Do Audiences Respond to Science News in a 'Post-Fact' World? Explained that we cannot easily explain the relationship of the audience with media as it is based on trust and credibility. Later in his research, he concluded that lack of scientific temperament and excessive flow of these misinformation and fake news is creating mistrust among the masses and they are losing their credibility within the media. In this present research, researchers are explaining the concept of fake news within the Media, is there any ecosystem and how they are fighting against this new enemy of media credibility. This research is also attempting to understand the available methods of fake news and the cognitive approach of media professionals and upcoming media professionals regarding this culture of fake news.

Theoretical Framework

The framework of this present research is based on Agenda-setting theory proposed by Macomb and Shaw, though they have given this theory based on their study on 1968 presidential election but one can find the traces of it back in 1922 also when Walter Lipmann expressed his concerned about the power of media and said that media can influence the image of certain messages which can lead to public opinion (Lippmann 1922). In this present research, researchers are trying to understand the relationship between attitude and behavior of policymakers and agenda-setting and how these two are connected to this phenomenon of fake news.

Objectives: These are the major objectives of this research paper:

For Survey:

- To examine the understanding of media professionals about fake news.
- To investigate the understanding of media students about fake news.
- To compare the understanding of media professionals and media students about fake news.

For Interviews:

- To examine the methods to identify fake news.

Research Methodology

This research paper used a survey method to explore and compare the understanding of media professionals and media students about fake news. Two separate questionnaires were prepared to fulfill the objectives, where some questions were common for both the groups. Questionnaire for Media professionals contains some additional questions to understand that how media ecosystem treats fake news. 45 Media professionals and 60 Media students from Delhi-NCR were included in the survey. Google forms were used to collect responses. Moreover, the same group of media professionals and media students were asked some open-ended question to analyze how they identify a message is fake. Therefore, the interview method attempts to explore the issue in-depth.

The common questions asked from the students and the media-persons were taken as two different data sets and the mean values of their responses were compared to each other to find out if any significant difference existed in their perceptions towards the various aspects related to fake news. The data was predominantly on a 5-point scale, i.e. ordinal but for the purpose of calculation, it was assumed to be scaled. The data needs to fulfill certain conditions and the conditions clubbed with the objectives of the study allow the ordinal data to be considered as scale and mean value calculated for them (Sauro, 2016). Then a two-sample T-test was conducted to compare means using SPSS. The T-test came after conducting F-test to find out if variance assumed to be in the two data sets is equal or not. It was then followed by the T-test and the results are placed above. Spearman test was applied to find a correlation between Preference of sources of fake news (such as TV, Radio, Newspaper, Magazine, New Media, Social Media) and Agenda for Fake News (such as political, religious, smokescreen, ideological, election).

Answers collected from the Interviews were analyzed qualitatively and the points emerged from there discussed as a part of fake news and media ecosystem and various ways to identify fake news.

Sample size for survey and interview:

45 Media Professionals and 60 Media Students

Data Analysis and Interpretation***Discussion for the responses collected through Survey (Comparative)***

The common questions asked from the students (60) and the media-professionals (45) were taken as two different data sets and the mean values of their responses were compared to each other to find out if any significant difference existed in their perceptions towards the various aspects related to fake news. The data was predominantly on a 5-point scale i.e. ordinal but for the purpose of calculation, it was assumed to be scale. The data needs to fulfill certain

conditions and the conditions clubbed with the objectives of the study allow the ordinal data to be considered as scale and mean value calculated for them (Sauro, 2016).

Table 1: Independent Samples Test

Sl. No.	Independent Samples Test	t-test for Equality of Means		
		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
1.	Do you think media is important for a democratic system?	1.907	60.423	0.061
2.	Do you think media has an impact on masses?	0.834	103	0.406
3.	Do you think fake news is completely lie information?	-0.939	103	0.350
4.	Do you think fake news is a recent phenomenon?	0.950	103	0.344
5.	Do you think fake news is created to change or create public opinion?	0.480	103	0.632
6.	Do you think media organizations disseminate fake news	-1.574	83.336	0.119
7.	Do you think media organizations actively attempt to expose fake news	-0.296	103	0.768
8.	Do you think fake news is a sign of weak media	-1.508	103	0.135
9.	Do you think fake news has an impact on the masses	-2.623	102	0.010
10.	Do you think media professionals are aware about fake news	-2.254	103	0.026
11.	Do you think that people know how to cross-check to find a fake news	-4.038	103	0.000
12.	Do you think that social activists actively attempt to expose fake news	7.897	103	0.000

The two sample T-test was conducted to compare means using SPSS. The results recorded are shown above. Prior to T-test, we conducted F-test to find out if variance assumed to be in the two data sets is equal or not. It was then followed by the T-test and the results are placed above.

In all the questions, Null and Alternate hypothesis assumed were:

Null Hypothesis

H0: $\mu_s - \mu_m = 0$; μ_s = the mean score of the perception of the students and μ_m = the mean score of the perception of the media-persons

Alternate Hypothesis

H1: $\mu_s - \mu_m \neq 0$; μ_s = the mean score of the perception of the students and μ_m = the mean score of the perception of the media-persons

Let's discuss the results of the test in context to the responses obtained from the questionnaire:

1. For the first question, "is media is important for a democratic system," 95.23% respondents (59 students and 41 media professional) either agree or strongly agree that media is important for a democratic system. As per table 1, since P value (0.061) here is >0.05 , the null hypothesis is accepted.
2. For the second question, "does media has an impact on masses," 97.1% respondents (59 students and 43 media professional) either agree or strongly agree that media do have an impact on masses. As per table 1, since P value (0.406) here is >0.05 , the null hypothesis is accepted.
3. For the third question, "can we say that fake news completely lies information," 62.9% of respondents (34 students and 32 media professionals) either agree or strongly agree that fake news is completely lie information. As per table 1, since P value (0.350) here is >0.05 , the null hypothesis is accepted.
4. For the fourth question, "is fake news a recent phenomenon," 38.1% of respondents (25 students and 15 media professional) either agree or strongly agree; while 40.1% respondents (23 students and 20 media professional) either disagree or strongly disagree that fake news a recent phenomenon. As per table 1, since P value (0.344) here is >0.05 , the null hypothesis is accepted.
5. For the fifth question, "is fake news created to change or create public opinion," 82.86% of respondents (49 students and 38 media professional) either agree or strongly agree that fake news created to change or create public opinion. As per table 1, since P value (0.632) here is >0.05 , the null hypothesis is accepted.
6. For the sixth question, "do media organizations disseminate fake news," 42.85% respondents (35 students and 10 media professional) said they cannot say surely about it, while 36.19% respondents (14 students and 24 media professional) either agree or strongly agree that media organizations disseminate fake news. As per table 1, since P value (0.119) here is >0.05 , the null hypothesis is accepted. An interesting thing came out of the responses from media professionals, where 53.33% of respondents either agree or strongly agree that media organizations disseminate fake news; while only 23.33% of students responded in favor of this option.
7. For the seventh question, "do media organizations actively attempt to expose fake news," 43.81% respondents (28 students and 18 media professional) said they cannot say surely about it, while 32.38% respondents (18 students and 16 media professional) either agree or strongly agree that media organizations actively attempt to expose fake news. As per table 1, since P value (0.768) here is >0.05 , the null hypothesis is accepted.
8. For the eighth question, "do you think fake news is a sign of weak media," 75.23% of respondents (42 students and 37 media professionals) either agree or strongly agree that fake news is a sign of weak media. As per table 1, since P value (0.135) here is >0.05 , the null hypothesis is accepted.

9. For the ninth question, "do you think fake news has an impact on the masses," 91.43% respondents (52 students and 44 media professional) either agree or strongly agree that fake news has an impact on the masses. As per table 1, since P value (0.010) here is <0.05 , the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted.

10. For the tenth question, "do you think media professionals are aware of fake news," 82.86% of respondents (45 students and 42 media professionals) either agree or strongly agree that media professionals are aware of fake news. As per table 1, since P value (0.026) here is <0.05 , the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted.

11. For the eleventh question, "do you think that people know how to cross-check to find fake news," 56.19% respondents (27 students and 32 media professional) either disagree or strongly disagree people know how to cross-check to find a fake news; however, 29.52% respondents (22 students and 9 media professional) answered that they are not sure whether people know how to cross-check to find a fake news. As per table 1, since P value (0.000) here is <0.05 , the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted.

This indicates that though, in totality, they agree that people do not know how to crosscheck the fact or fake news, however, there is a significant difference in opinion between both the groups. Among students, the dominant opinion emerged as they are not sure about it, while among media professionals it emerged that people do not know how to cross-check the fact or fake news.

12. For the twelfth question, "do you think that social activists actively attempt to expose fake news," 46.67% respondents (28 students and 21 media professional) either agree or strongly agree, while 47.62% respondents (28 students and 22 media professional) said they cannot say surely about it. As per table 1, since P value (0.000) here is <0.05 , the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis is accepted.

This indicates that though, in totality, a significant number of respondents agree that social activists actively attempt to expose fake news, however, the number of respondents who were not sure about it was also slightly more than those who agree. This also shows that there is a significant difference in opinion among both groups.

The p-value of the response for most of the questions was greater than the critical value thus allowing the acceptance of the null hypothesis which means that the media students and the media professionals think alike. However, in 5 questions, the difference is significant.

Also the question regarding the impact of fake news on masses, the question of media professionals being aware of the fake news, and people's ability to cross-check the fake news saw a significant difference in the perceptions. Means both, the students and the media-person have relative contradicting views over the question mentioned.

There is also a significant difference in the perception of the two groups regarding the role of social activists in actively attempting to expose the fake news.

Discussion for the responses collected through Survey

13. Apart from table 1, for the sixth question of the questionnaire, when respondents were asked which medium according to them is the main source of fake news, 41.6% (25 students) and 45% (27 media professionals) answered it as Social Media. Second preference is the first source of fake news, 25% (15 students) and 28.88% (13 media professionals) answered it as New Media. We can clearly see that both groups have similar responses in first and second preferences.

14. Apart from table 1, for the seventh question of the questionnaire, when respondents (media professionals) were asked that which formats of fake news is highly used, the priority order was: (i) Manipulated, (ii) False content and Misleading content, (iii) fabricated, (iv) false connection, (v) Imposter, (vi) satire/parody

15. Apart from table 1, for the eighth question of the questionnaire, when respondents were asked which agenda is fulfilled by fake news, the priority order was: (i) Political, (ii) Religious, (iii) Ideological and Elections, (iv) Smoke-screen. Top two priority orders were very clear from the responses.

Table 2: Correlations Table (between Preferences of sources of fake news and Agenda of Fake News preference)

Correlations Table						
	Agenda of Fake News Preference: Political	Agenda of Fake News Preference: Smokescre en	Agenda of Fake News Preference: ideological	Agenda of Fake News Preference: religious	Agenda of Fake News Preferenc e: elections	Agenda of Fake News Preference : others
Preference of sources of fake news: TV	.382 **	.337 **	.316 **	.288 **	.242 *	.216 *
Preference of sources of fake news: Newspaper	-.299 **	0.169	-0.032	-0.095	-0.125	0.082
Preference of sources of fake news: Radio	-.357 **	0.183	-0.062	-.210 *	-0.174	0.054
Preference of sources of fake news: Magazine	-.234 *	.227 *	0.059	-0.081	-0.079	0.046
Preference of sources of fake news: New Media	.551 **	.549 **	.489 **	.636 **	.568 **	.330 **
Preference of sources of fake news: Social Media	.635 **	.307 **	.396 **	.570 **	.584 **	.309 **
Preference of sources of fake news: Other	.234 *	.388 **	.285 **	.330 **	.301 **	.434 **

The table above shows the correlation results of media preferences for fake news tested against the perceived agenda sought. Since the preferences were taken in rank order form making it ordinal in nature, Spearman rank-order correlation was used to compute the statistical results.

The objective of applying this test was to find out how the preference attributed to a medium related to the different agenda set by the media. The list of the agenda was prepared using the information acquired during the stage of the review of literature.

The interpretations of the correlation results are as mentioned below:

1. The TV as the source of fake news is believed to be for primarily political agenda setting followed by smokescreen and ideological agenda setting. This indicates that the students and the media professionals most likely think that TV serves the fake news for setting the political agenda for the masses to get consumed into. The smokescreen function is next in the line wherein TV not only sets the agenda but also diverts the attention from issues that TV doesn't want you to pay attention to.
2. The newspaper as the source of fake news is believed to be for smokescreen purpose. The correlation is however very weak. There is general perception regarding newspaper medium that it helps in diverting the attention. The weak correlation coefficient however indicates weak perception but also somewhat indicates that people believe newspapers to be indulging less in spreading fake news.
3. The radio as the source of fake news is believed to be primarily for the smokescreen creation with the correlation again being weak. The perception towards radio is similar to that of the newspaper which indicates a similar weak perception towards radio. Related literature suggests that radio and newspapers have witnessed declining interest. The declining interests in the medium and the correlation coefficient justify the observations. Also, it indicates, as mentioned in the case of newspaper, people believe radio to be indulging very less in the spreading of the fake news.
4. The magazine as the source of fake news is believed to be primarily for the smokescreen creation. The perception of the students and media professionals regarding magazine is also the same as newspaper and radio. It is used more to divert attention by attributing more significance and relevance to issues of lesser interest.
5. The new media as the source of fake news is believed to be primarily for the religious agenda followed by election-related agenda, political and then smokescreen. The students and the professionals believe that the new media spreads fake news primarily for fulfilling the religious agenda of the state powers. With the spread of the new media and with the advent of the convergence in media technology, bigotry and communalizing the issues have been more rampant than before. The correlational statistics indicate the same.
6. The social media as the source of fake news is believed to be primarily for the political agenda followed by election-related agenda and then religious agenda. This finding along with the recent increase of social media by the political parties adds to the reliability of the results.

7. The other media as the source of fake news is believed to be mainly for the agenda other than the ones mentioned followed by smokescreen agenda-setting by the other media.

Discussion for the responses collected through Interview (Media Students)

Both the groups, i.e., media students and media professionals, among which the survey was conducted, were asked a set of five open-ended questions. The summary of the answers is given below:

In response to the question asked to the respondents (29 media students) that "if they remember any incident when they saw/read fake news and believed in it," most of them believed in fake news at one or another point of time. These incidents were related to issues, like CAA, Protest in JNU, Bus service from Mumbai for migrant workers, Muslim protests, and even the ending of the world too. Some of them were not sure about the fact that whether they had ever believed in such stories. By analyzing responses to this question, researchers can say that events associated with the political issues or political angles are most likely to get viewers/readers' attention and they tend to believe in fake news.

In response to the question, "If they think that media professionals disseminate fake news? If yes, then they have been asked to provide examples of such incident(s)," however, the answer of the respondents (23 media students) was quite scattered. Approx. 56% of them straight away declined that media professionals do have or can have their role in disseminating fake news. However, almost 44% of the respondents did agree that media professional do have their role in this and they had supported their answer with examples like news channels were showing Lockdown is going to be imposed on Delhi after Delhi riots, a TV channel was telecasting number of Corona Patients in Arunachal Pradesh and was establishing its association to Tablighi Jamat which was not true and channel authorities apologized for the same. They had also shared the news stories related to Ram Mandir's judgment and the outbreak of fake news related to Muslim protests after that.

When respondents (30 media students) were asked that "do they think fake news proves itself effective to change or create public opinion," respondents clearly answered that fake news is effective in changing public opinion or creating a new narrative because the masses have a tendency of not verifying the information coming from big media houses. They also shared that with the help of pictures and text, this process becomes faster. Some of them also mentioned that the use of social media is quite involving/extensive in it. Some of them answered that this sort of information generally plays with the emotions and thought process of common people and can instigate hate messages. The respondents even think that illiteracy is also one of the key factors.

When the respondents (30 media students) were asked to tell "the root cause of fake news and how to cope up with this," they said that the root cause of this may be a lack of scientific temperament, illiteracy and lack of willpower to cross-check and verify the news. Some of them also said that smoke screening is also one of the reasons, but the root cause is to gain

power and to have public opinion in their favor. Some respondents also talked about the nexus of political parties and media and they said that IT cells of the political parties are the new form of opinion leaders who are controlling minds of people as per their own wish and direction.

The last question was about "any other insights on Fake news, media, masses, and exposure of fake news." The respondents (17 media students) focused on two major things: fake news is dangerous and it is disturbing for the social harmony, which might lead to destroying democratic values; and, we as common people must imbibe this habit of cross-checking every information no matter from where we are receiving it and they also emphasized on imparting education and scientific temperament.

Key points that emerged from the answers are:

- (i) People often encounter with fake news. Fake news grabs the attention of the people and they tend to believe in fake news
- (ii) Majority of the media students do not agree that media professionals do have or can have their role in disseminating fake news.
- (iii) Fake news is effective in changing public opinion or creating a new narrative because the masses have a tendency to not verifying information and illiteracy is also one of the key contributing factors.
- (iv) Among the root causes of fake news includes lack of scientific temperament, illiteracy, and lack of willpower to cross-check and verify the news, nexus of political parties and media, IT cells of the political parties serving as a new form of opinion leaders.
- (v) Habit of cross-checking every information and imparting education and scientific temperament are critical to counter with fake news.

Discussion for the responses collected through Interview (Media Professional)

Media professionals were also asked a set of five open-ended questions. The summary of the answers is given below:

In response to the question that "If they think that media organizations disseminate fake news and fake news serves interests of media organizations, and why do they think so," The answer (38 media professionals) to this question was surprising because most of the media professionals admitted to the fact that media is responsible for disseminating fake news, though some of them (approx. 27%) denied this as well. Those who suggested that media has their role in the dissemination of fake news said that there are several reasons for this, i.e., power game, TRP, lack of time to cross-check news due to pressure for breaking a news earlier than their competitors, and polarization for public opinion. Few of them also said that media houses have their own agendas and they know that viewers do not have a tendency to crosscheck the news information so they can present whatever they wish.

In response (37 media professionals) to the question that "If they think that media professionals are aware of fake news and know-how to cross-check to find fake news," in

response to this question media professional said that majority of their fraternity is not well trained to crosscheck or verified fake news. However, only 16.21% agreed that all media professionals know how to cross-check an information. And methods of fact-checking, suggested by the media professionals include: Google and Facebook conduct workshops for journalists regarding fact-checking; reverse image search; investigative method; checking with official sources, Government sources, Police and the particular Authority concerned with a news; cross-checking with multiple sources; portals dedicated to exposing fake news and fact-checking; ground reports; check the sources and evidences, etc. They have also shared that journalists should be trained to cross-check any information and exposing fake news.

They were also asked to "comment that how do they think fake news proves itself effective to change or create public opinion," media professionals (33 media professionals) clearly answered that fake news is responsible for changing public opinion or can disseminate polarized information which can lead to propaganda and with this they achieve their set agendas. They also said that the main reason behind this is illiteracy and lack of verifying information. Some of them answered that this sort of information generally plays with the emotions and thought process of common people and can instigate hate messages.

Respondents were asked about "the root cause of fake news and how to cope up with this," they said (33 media professionals) that the root cause of fake news is social media primarily and use of IT cells for political gains. They have also shared that media and political parties' nexus is equally responsible for it. Some of them also emphasized on the fact that sensational information gets more TRP so to summarized it they said that these are the main factors responsible for fake news: 1. Political gain; 2. Election results; 3. Polarization; 4. Ideological shift; 5. To seek mass attention; 6. Publicity etc.

Respondents (25 media professionals) were also asked to "share any other insights on Fake news, media, masses, and exposure of fake news," they said that fake news is the reality of the present time and we need to develop a mechanism to deal with it. Various suggestions were given, such as Media Literacy Programs should be introduced right from middle school level to create awareness among students about fake news; people should also put their efforts in verifying the information; though media houses do not disseminate fake news, however, they should apologize if they mistakenly broadcast any fake news; media houses should focus on ground reporting for collecting news; so that chance of receiving misleading information can be avoided.

Key points that emerged from the answers are:

- (i) Media has their role and/or agenda in the dissemination of fake news said that there are several reasons for this, i.e., power game, TRP, lack of time to cross-check news due to pressure for breaking a news earlier than their competitors, and polarization for public opinion.
- (ii) Methods of fact-checking: Google and Facebook conduct workshops for journalists regarding fact-checking; reverse image search; investigative method; checking with official sources, Government sources, Police and the particular Authority concerned with a news;

cross-checking with multiple sources; portals dedicated to exposing fake news and fact-checking; ground reports; check the sources and evidences, etc. Journalists should be trained to crosscheck any information and exposing fake news.

(iii) Fake news is responsible for changing public opinion or can disseminate polarized information which can lead to propaganda.

(iv) Social media, nexus between media and political parties, and the use of IT cell for political gains primarily contribute to spreading fake news.

(v) Media Literacy Programs should be introduced right from the middle school level to create awareness among students about fake news; people should also put their efforts in verifying the information; media houses should apologize if they mistakenly broadcast any fake news and they should focus on ground reporting for collecting news.

Conclusion

Media is very crucial for a democratic system and has an impact on the masses. Fake news is fabricated information that looks like news but created to change or create public opinion, however concept of fake news is not new. Fake news can be in the form of satire or parody; misleading content, imposter and fabricated content, and can have false connection/context, false/manipulated content, etc. People often encounter with fake news. It grabs the attention of the people and they tend to believe in it, therefore it is very effective in changing public opinion or creating a new narrative. Masses have a tendency of not verifying information and illiteracy is also one of the key contributing factors. Social Media and New Media are considered as two main sources of fake news.

Fake news is a sign of weak and/or weakening media. People, mostly, do not know how to cross-check the fact or fake news and hence the role of media and media professionals is important in spreading awareness about it. Social activists and journalists often try to expose fake news; however, more efforts are required to have gain confidence for their efforts. The study shows that fake news serves for political agenda, smokescreen, and ideological agenda setting. It is also believed that fake news is used for the religious agenda, election-related agenda.

Media has their role and/or agenda in the dissemination of fake news and there are several reasons for this, i.e., power game, TRP, lack of time to cross-check news due to pressure for breaking a news earlier than their competitors, and polarization for public opinion. Among the root causes of fake news includes lack of scientific temperament, illiteracy, and lack of will power to crosscheck and verify the news. It is believed that nexus of political parties and media, IT cells of the political parties serving as a new form of opinion leaders.

Interviews suggested various methods/tools of fact-checking: Google and Facebook conduct workshops for journalists regarding fact-checking; reverse image search; investigative method; checking with official sources, Government sources, Police and the particular Authority concerned with a news; cross-checking with multiple sources; portals dedicated to

exposing fake news and fact-checking; ground reports; check the sources and pieces of evidence, etc.

The study also shows that journalists should be trained to crosscheck any information and exposing fake news. Media Literacy Programs should be introduced right from the middle school level to create awareness among students about fake news; people should also put their efforts in verifying the information; media houses should apologize if they mistakenly broadcast any fake news and they should focus on ground reporting for collecting news.

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