

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF SOURCE CREDIBILITY IN THE CASE OF FAKE NEWS PHENOMENON ON FACEBOOK

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The astounding progress in communication, although crucial for many modern day advancements, has also posed certain challenges that we struggle to overcome today. The fake news trend, which is one such challenge, has taken complete control over the digital world to such an extent that we have come to accept it as a norm of our daily information consumption. Despite the normalization, fake news, which is intentionally fabricated information, deceptive content, or grossly distorted actual news reports, has in the recent past been the source of panic, trauma, violence and hatred. One of the factors that facilitate the rapid and easy spread of fake news in today's world is the advent of social media. Facebook among many is one of the most popular social media platforms with over two billion active users. The uncharted freedom of expression on Facebook perpetuates the easy spread of fake news. While many studies explore the means of spreading fake news on Facebook, there seems to be little research on the user-psychology behind accepting fake news on Facebook. The Yale theory on persuasion proposes that human beings accept and believe in information when they perceive the source to be credible. Source credibility, on the other hand, is dependent on the trustworthiness, expertise, likability and attractiveness of the source. This perspective, although applicable in real life situations, is not an accurate representation of the online behaviour of Facebook users. This study attempts to develop a conceptual framework to explain the user acceptance of fake news on Facebook; to explain, predict and understand the phenomenon while challenging the existing body of research. For this purpose, mainly qualitative methods were used. Initially, important research findings related to the research topic were obtained. An extensive analysis was then conducted on the existing literature on persuasive processes, online user behaviour and source credibility. Following a systematic in-depth study, a comprehensive conceptual model was proposed to explain the user psychology behind accepting fake news on Facebook. The conceptual model proposed by this study consists of three determinants: demographic factors, group identity and selective attention. It is proposed that certain demographic factors such as age, gender, level of education and place of residence could affect the user vulnerability to accept fake news. Secondly, sharing the same group membership as the source can also make users readily accept the information without questioning its credibility. This study, therefore, is an attempt to reevaluate the existing research on persuasive processes, focusing on the fake news phenomenon in the context of Facebook, and it proposes demographic factors, group identity and selective attention as the potential determinants of user acceptance of fake news on Facebook.

Keywords: Fake News Trend, Facebook, Source Credibility