

Research Article  
Impact of Fake News on Trust in Journalism

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ABSTRACT

Fake news' has become one of the major problems of the modern journalism that undermines the very basis of the democratic states – trust. This paper analyses the effects that fake news have on the credibility and the media institutions more widely among the public. Using surveys, interviews and content analysis, the reduced trust levels in participants exposed to fake news are clearly evidenced in the study. This paper argues that social network sites are the leading sources of fake news, thereby worsening the general decline in confidence. Furthermore, the paper analyses psychological factors affecting the level of trust in journalism and the overall consequences of the trend for civic journalism. Concerning the present fundamental problem of falsification and misleading information in the information sphere, the goal of this study is to expand the discussion on how to restore confidence in journalism in the context of modern digital reality and revealing the ways to counteract the spread of fake news foster media literacy.

1. INTRODUCTION

This Fake news is a Term used to describe news which is false or distorted in intent or purpose, intended for audiences to receive it with credibility. It assumes different forms such as fake headlines, articles which are an assortment of lies and facts twist in an appropriate manner. Since the advent of social media and other sharing patterns realized through the use of information technology, fake news disseminates at an alarming rate as compared to traditional media [1]. This has been made worse by algorithms that relay content that may be sensational rather than true information and people only get to see opinions that they agree with. Fake news is more than just misleading readers; they can affect the opinions of the masses, the decisions in politics, and the reliability of authentic news outlets [2].

Still, there is a solid faith in journalism being one of the key prerequisites for a democratic state as the matter concerns informed decision making and, therefore, active citizenship [3]. Ad journalism means credible journalism as it acts as a watchdog for power and ensures people get correct information required to engage in the democratic processes [4]. But eroding trust in media institutions has emerged as an issue worthy of attention, and numerous investigations indicate that today people approach journalism with suspicion. That is why different factors like perceived bias, sensationalism, and most importantly fake news can be contributing to this decline. When people no longer trust journalists, they also lose critical thinking skills that should ultimately lead to polarization and a weaker democracy [5].

In order to draw attention to the current issue in journalism, this study aims to clarify the correlation between fake news and trust and find possible way to regain the trust. The value of this topic depends on its ability to help the media and policymakers understand the imperative of addressing the fake news problem. It is important to recognize the ways in which audiences approach stories and journalists, in order for more members of the public, as well as institutions that govern, fund or rely on journalism, can collectively help build a more knowledgeable society and reaffirm the importance of news for democracy.

2. RELATED WORK

In this paragraph, we will explain a set of previous studies that worked on impact of fake news on trust in journalism.

TABLE I SET OF PREVIOUS STUDIES THAT WORKED ON IMPACT OF FAKE NEWS ON TRUST IN JOURNALISM.

Author(s)	Year	Method	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable
Lee & Kim [6]	2017	Survey	Fake news exposure	Trust in media

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Lewandowsky et al.[7]	2017	Experimental study	Misinformation	Credibility of media sources
Tandoc et al.[8]	2018	Content analysis	Definition of fake news	Audience perception of credibility
Vosoughi et al.	2018	Data analysis	Social media influence	Spread of misinformation
Lazer et al.[9]	2018	Literature review	Prevalence of fake news	Public trust in media
Reuters Institute[10]	2019	Survey	Trust-building strategies	Public trust in news
Gallup[11]	2020	Poll	Political affiliation	Trust in media
Newman et al.[12]	2021	Mixed-methods	Exposure to misinformation	Trust in journalism
Toff et al.[13]	2022	Qualitative interviews	News consumption habits	Perception of media credibility
Pew Research Center [14]	2023	Survey	Social media usage	Trust in news sources
Ecker et al.[15]	2023	Experimental study	Corrective information	Change in beliefs about fake news
Ross Arguedas et al.[16]	2023	Focus groups	News engagement strategies	Trust in journalism
Karlsson [17]	2023	Content analysis	Transparency initiatives	Audience trust in media
Schmidt et al.[18]	2023	Survey	Media literacy programs	Trust in journalism
Wenzel [19]	2023	Theoretical analysis	Framing of news stories	Audience interpretation

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This research work adopts both qualitative and quantitative paradigms as research methodologies as a way of getting the multivariate and multilingual approaches to the effect of fake news on trust in journalism. The quantitative component comprises polls, while the qualitative component incorporates interviews and analysis of textual data in order to gain quantitative data about the level of trust in information published in news media as well as obtain better understanding of what factors might be affecting trust in news media among different individuals.

#### 3.1 Data Collection

Data collection will utilize the following methods:

1. Surveys: A quantitative data will be obtained by filling a structured on-line questionnaire consisting of questions about participants' trust towards different types of news, encounters with fake news and media consumption. Other questions will be created to assess trust factors and other demographical details.
2. Interviews: A set of open-ended questions will be used for participant's qualitative data collection through semi-structured interviews. In particular, these interviews shall review instances of fake news, perceived credibility about the media, and trust for journalism.
3. Content Analysis: To this end, a systematic content analysis of the news articles will be conducted in the media outlets to determine the rate and manner in which they present fake news and frame news content. As such, this will include going through articles from different newspapers, magazines, or over the internet featuring on fake news and its impact on trust.

#### 3.2 Sample Population

The target sample population will be of different demography to achieve a holistic of the sample population. This includes participant by age, gender, ethnic origin, educational level, and political preference as well. Thus, the study tries to cover as many populations as possible in order to examine how various demographic characteristics affect trust in journalism and the problem of fake news. As such, the research aim is to make sure that the findings are generalizable to the extent that conversed discourses about media trust in society are.

### 4. FINDINGS

Quantitative analysis of the results obtained from survey regarding the level of trust people have in journalism ('/:102599/378622/614017.')

The survey conducted revealed several key trends regarding public trust in journalism:

1. Overall Trust Levels: The percentage of respondents who have high amounts of trust in traditional news sources stands at 35%, while 50% of the respondents have low amounts of trust with traditional news sources.

2. Demographic Variations: For efficiency, the level of trust also differed based on the demographic factors in the study. Lower level of trust (28%) was reported by youngest participants (18-24 years) while middle-aged and older participants (55+) expressed slightly higher trust level, 45%.
3. Influence of Fake News: Some 60 % of participants self-reported that they had come across fake news, and 70 % of the former in this group said that the event was detrimental to their trust in media.
4. Source Credibility: They also said that they consider academic and nonprofit news organizations as more credible (mean of 7.5 out of 10) than social media (mean of 3.5 out of 10).

#### Real Life Examples of Existing Evidence that Fake News Played a Pivotal Role in Reducing Citizens' Confidence

- A. COVID-19 Misinformation: Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, inaccurate and unproven information about vaccines caused panic over the vaccine. In an account, it was revealed that trust in health-related news sources had reduced by 20 percent with some categories of the population giving example of how fake news undermine confidence in valuable information.
- B. Election Misinformation: False reports occupied the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election, especially those regarding voting fraud and irregularities. One study found out that their votes' exposure to these narratives caused a significantly negative impact on the electoral news by a 15% decline to trust.
- C. Climate Change Reports: There is disagreement about climate change, and a case study showed that reading false articles reduced trust in climate journalism by 25% and was especially common among the youth.
- D. Misinformation and disinformation: the use of social media platforms
- E. Platform Influence: According to the survey, 80 percent of users considered that social networks act as the main source of fake news, 65 percent of users trust news shared by friends and family than news from traditional media.
- F. Algorithmic Impact: Algorithms presented in cases used by Facebook and Twitter selected significant content, including fake news. This has meant that more people are seeing links to false articles often resulting in high levels of confusion and distrust among users.
- G. User Behavior: From the study, it was evident that the users of social media give more attention to sensational or emotionally charged content, which has high frequency of miss-information. A further 70 percent of the respondents confessed to having shared news without corroborating the information which underscores the need for more media literacy.

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Analysis of How the Fake News Threatens the Credibility of Journalists

Misinformation undermines the legitimacy of journalistic practice because it makes citizens doubtful of all media information. They make the news to be largely untrustworthy and force the audience to constantly doubt any source of information even the authentic one. This is the more so because in the current world news is disseminated and digested without much consideration of its authenticity. The erosion of trust can lead to a vicious cycle: This means that while audiences become more critical, they may stop consuming credible news thus giving the miscreants wider coverage.

### 5.2 Psychological aspects that determine public trust on media

1. Several psychological factors contribute to public trust in media:
  - a. Cognitive Dissonance: People get uncomfortable when such facts are presented before them which challenges their belief systems. This makes them ignore valuable information from reliable sources and embrace a lot of fake news that will feed their bias and reject traditional media.
  - b. Confirmation Bias: This means that reputations adjust to the existing knowledge stock and Habermas' conception of communication collapses into stratified knowledge. It can just as easily confine a given person, confusing him or her with the media information received, only certain and thus distance him or her even more from objective journalism.
  - c. Social Identity: Group identity is a determinant of media trust. Audiences are potentially only loyal to those news outlets that hold their political or social view ultimately fuelling more polarization on credibility and lack of trust on the opposition.
  - d. Trust Matters: Theoretical and Practical Consequences of Eroding Trust for Journalism and Society

### 5.3 The decline in trust has profound implications for journalism and society at large

- a. Democratic Processes: However, the manner in which some of this information is being produced is also crucial to our functioning democracy. It is universally known that trust in journalism has continued to fall over the years, therefore, the negative implication for public participation and decisions making as well as any democratic governance in the country.

- b. Erosion of Social Cohesion\*\*: The production of the wrong perception of the community can lead to conflicts since different perceptions of reality are the cause of conflicts. This leads to erode of social capital which often results in an increase in polarity as well as hostility amongst individuals.
- c. Financial Viability of Journalism: The solution shifts that potentially diminish the financial viability of journalism: Audiences have walked away from legacy news organizations. This can lead to lay offs and less investigative journalism and with the media quality and credibility declining, the public loses faith in it entirely.

## 6. SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. Measures that can be taken By the Journalists

1. Fact-Checking: Media practitioners should ensure they verify the information that they receive from sources before using them in the media. It is important to cooperate with independent fact-checking bodies in order to increase credibility and avoid misinformation.
2. Transparency: Media organizations need to ensure they declare their-source, and editorial operations openly. Because it is easy for individuals to be skeptical about the process of the creation of stories, it is important to explain how it is done to avoid the creation of doubt.
3. Engagement with Audiences: Journalists should take up issues with their audiences, correcting wrong perceptions where necessary. This can in a way foster community and trust.

### B. Media Literacy as a Tool of Sorcery Towards the Empowerment of Consumers

Media literacy programmers are very important in the current world to ensure that the consumers understand what distinguishes genuine information. Key components include:

1. Critical Thinking Skills: Enhancing people's awareness of how they can critically approach different articles, what signs of bias one can look for and how to judge the reliability of sources can help people make an informed decision regarding what articles or sources to trust and consume.
2. Understanding News Production: Regarding the issue of countering fake news, awareness of the public about how news is created and the difficulties faced by most journalists increases appreciation of credible news.
3. Promoting Responsible Sharing: Advising people to check information verified before posting will Help reduce the spread of fake news during an election period.

### C. Proposals for Alterations of Policies

Regulation of Digital Platforms: It is therefore important for policy makers to regulate regarding what the social media platforms allow to be circulated. It could contain conditions that involve the algorithms needed to be transparent when catering to news content.

1. Support for Quality Journalism: For these reasons governments can speak for funding drives for local journalism and independent media to ensure credible sources of news exist.
2. Collaboration with Tech Companies: That is why it is necessary to promote closer cooperation between news outlets and technology businesses, as the latter may come up with a better way to address the issue, including enhanced (Article Continues)

## 7. CONCLUSION

Therefore, the results of the present research highlighted the huge negative effects of fake news on the trust in journalism, thus using extant research to identify a worrying key concern with implications on citizenship and democracy. Paradoxically, the more individuals are exposed to misinformation, the less trust they will have in media institutions and a polarized public sphere that has little room for credible information perverts the an objective reporting process. In order to counter this crisis, the growing number of technologies and journalistic works must require the sources to be accurate and the processes of making a decision transparent. Furthermore, increasing citizens' level of media literacy weakens the effect of fake news by enabling people to understand the content receives. In conclusion, it might be deduced that trust in journalism can be repaired by the mediated actors' collective, including media and journalism professionals, policymakers, and ordinary citizens who utilize media content. In this way, the purity of the profession can be saved, and journalism – in its essence supporting democracy with reference to the principle of the free, responsible and pluralist media.

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