

IS FAKE NEWS SPREADING MORE RAPIDLY THAN COVID-19 IN INDIA? A Representative Study of People's Perspective on Controlling the Spread of Fake News on Social Media

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ABSTRACT

Fake news is not a new phenomenon. With the mushrooming of smartphone users and the easy access to the internet, fake news is spreading at very high speed from people to people. Why do people flagrantly believe fake news? Why don't people fact-check before sharing information with others? etc., are still some of the questions unanswered. The panic created by fake news during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak is also not less. Hence, this study aims to focus on understanding people's perspectives on controlling the spread of fake news on social media. The respective study is based on quantitative data analysis of the responses of 300 social media users across India, collected online in April 2020 during nationwide lockdown. The study arrived at a conclusion stating that self-regulation may not deliver a proper effect on controlling the spread of fake news. But, organising effective campaigns to build social media literacy can be one of the potential measures that can be implemented in order to control the spread of fake news over social media platforms. The respondents of the study also agree to bring-in a national policy and a national regulatory body to control the spread of fake news over social media platforms. Hence, this particular study can support Government of India to make decisions to roll out regulatory measures to control the spread of fake news through social media, which is still on the red tape.

Keywords: Fake news, Social media, National policy, Self-regulation, Regulatory body.

INTRODUCTION

The spread of the Corona Virus Disease (Covid-19) across the globe has already left the world in a grim situation. The petrifying part is that the number of people affected by the Covid-19 as well as the spread of this deadly virus to different countries is increasing day by day. Different nations across the world have taken several measures to tackle the spread of the virus. Covid-19, which is said to have originated from Wuhan city, China, in 2019, has been in the news for months.

A humongous number of fake news stories are being shared through different social media platforms during the wake of this pandemic. The current study is based on the spread of fake news amidst the unroll of novel coronavirus throughout the world. As the world is exposed to a completely new pandemic, for which even vaccines are not yet discovered and symptoms or the behavior of the virus is not yet confirmed, this study contains new and interesting information

concerning the attitudes of the people on the fast-spreading fake news during the time of Covid-19 and the role played by social media platforms on the same. The spread of fake news at a much higher pace than the real news shows that controlling measures or legal actions in India for spreading fake news are not much adequate. Thus, this study also aims to understand any possible measures to control the spread of fake news in social media platforms in India. Hence it becomes important to study people's perspectives on controlling the spread of fake news on social media.

According to the Collins Dictionary, fake news is false, often provoking, information disseminated under the form of news reporting. Fake news is forged information that imitates news contents in form but not in organizational purpose (Lazer, et al., 2018). Fake news lap over other major information disorders such as misinformation and disinformation (Lazer, et al., 2018). The term

fake news was popularised during the 2016 US elections (Egelhofer, et al., 2020). Spreading fake news is not a new form of propaganda building. Accurate beliefs lead to the formation of many adaptive or modified behaviors. One supporter of mistaken convictions is misinformation, including fake news, which comprises created news stories that are introduced as being from authentic sources and elevated mostly via web-based networking sites to trick people in general for the ideological or monetary benefit (Lazer, et al., 2018). Actually, even an earlier exposure stimulates later trust in fake news, even when features are challenged by fact-checkers or are conflicting with the reader's political dogma (Pennycook, Cannon, & Rand, 2018).

Amidst the growth in high speed internet in India, the number of first time users of the internet are also increasing drastically (Kalorth, N., & Verma, M., 2018), irrespective of age. The new users definitely are overloaded with information available online in the form of varied digital contents. While misinformation is dissemination of fake data trusting it is true, disinformation, which is more riskier, is the dissemination of fake news deliberately (Kalorth, N., & Verma, M., 2018). The massive growth of fake news and its disintegration of democracy, justice, and public trust has essentially expanded the interest for accurate fake news detection. The present-day headways in this area have proposed new techniques that aim to detect fake news by analysing how it is spread on social media networks (Zhou, X., & Zafarani, R., 2018).

Using social media for consuming news is like using a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it is cost-effective and fast, but on the other hand, the information that we are consuming may be fake ones (Shu, et al., 2017). Due to the cheap availability and easy access, social media platforms are mostly used to propagate fake information. And, the rapid spread of fake news has the potential to impart a negative effect on the individual and the whole society (Shu, et al., 2017). Thus, people's perspectives on controlling the spread of fake news is an important area to be studied. The findings of this study will be different and novel as the study is dealing with the spread of fake news amidst the unfurl of Covid-19 in India. The study aims at bringing in possible

measures to curb the spread of fake news. Through analysing the people's perspectives, the current study is expected to arrive at a set of findings which will be able to state effective measures to control the spread of fake news in India.

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

History overflows with different instances of bending reality for material augmentation, famously called lying, or flexing reality for political gain, named purposeful publicity. Fake news is commonly thought to be as old as journalism itself, and legitimate media associations have only from time to time assumed a job of "gatekeeper" for reliable data (Banerjee, A. N., & Haque, M. N., 2018). Accounts from history show that the use of fake news has been prevalent from the BCs (Weir, 2009). With the invention of the printing press in 1439, the publications became widespread. Even from the initial days, fake news has tended to provoke, arouse passions, and is also biased in nature.

It is also to be noted that it has often aroused violence. The Nazi propaganda machine relied on one of the famous false stories of the Jewish practice of drinking blood from children which in the fifteenth century had led to systematic persecution against Jews. Soon after Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press, fake news stories also began to travel from one place to another. And, with the lack of technology during those times, it was a herculean task to distinguish between real news and fake news. Readers in search of real news had to pay close observation. Leaked secret government reports were considered as authentic sources in the 16th century. But, before long, the fake copies of the real ones started to be available in the market. During the 17th century, in order to tackle the spread of fake news, historians started to verify news by publishing their sources of information as verifiable footnotes (The Long and Brutal History of Fake News, n.d). The following years witnessed an exponential growth in terms of printing and on par with this, the spread of fake news also was on a hike.

Fake news was created based on the stories of the existence of witches and sea monsters and they went to the extent of disseminating claims that argue the reason for natural

disasters are sinners, and, no matter what, the fake stories kept on influencing people. The spread of fake news during the time of an emergency as well as during elections is high compared to other times (Hunt, Agarwal, Aziz, & Zhuang, 2020; Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M., 2017). Disseminating fake news can cause serious impacts on society. The technological advancements in a smartphone with internet connectivity are also playing its part in the spread of fake news (Alianto, H., & Chandra, Y. U., 2017).

It is to be noted that in India and other ten emerging economies such as Venezuela, Lebanon, South Africa, Columbia, Kenya, Mexico, Philippines, Vietnam, Jordan, and Tunisia, smartphone and social media use are heavily intertwined. According to a study, while a median of 91% of the people in the above-mentioned countries use both smartphones and social media, a median of 81% of the people using social media own or share a smartphone (Silver, L., & Huang, C., 2019).

Today, smartphones are an inevitable part of human lives' (Miakotko, 2017). Smartphones are evolving at a very high pace and with their technological advancements, smartphones let its users to be connected to the world always, mostly by providing instant communication (Durak, 2018). According to Andone et al (2016), the highest phone usage was seen among teenagers who are between 12 years and 17 years. They also state in their study that Females use phones more than males. For fake news to spread, it requires three important ingredients such as the tools and services for manipulation, relevant social media networks, and motivation for action. Tools and services to spread fake news are abundantly available in social media networks. When social media networks act as a tool to spread fake news propaganda, the speed in which fake news spread is very high. The motivation for spreading fake news always comes with the question-'why'. Often, it's for monetary gain via advertising, whereas, in some other cases the gain varies from criminal to political. Keeping the motive apart, the real success of fake news depends on the reach it got, as well as the effect it imparted on the target audience which can make an overall change in the real world (Goswami, 2018).

We are living in a networked society where anyone can write and post anything on social media platforms. The idea of gatekeeping in social media is still bizarre. As it seems like censorship is quite impossible in social media handles, we are living in an era of free speech for all. But, the number of information that we come across may be true and may not be true. Believing everything that we see over the internet can catalyse the process of being a misinformed society. With billions of daily users, social media platforms prove to play a vital role in the dissemination of news, opinions, comments and even personal updates.

Users can find up-to-date information on any topic of interest in social media platforms. Even when there are benefits of social media, the unmoderated use of these platforms can make mishaps as well. When fake information is spread on social media networks, it can result in umpteen numbers of misinformed audiences. According to the statistics, during the past decade, there has been a tremendous hike in the amount of false news spread during crisis events, such as natural disasters and terrorist attacks. This misinformation proves to be very dangerous during these grim situations (Hunt, Agarwal, Aziz, & Zhuang, 2020). Consequently, with the ubiquity of the number of social media outlets such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc., the amount of information exchanged or the misinformation is rising every second.

A misinformed society is a real threat to democracy and it is the responsibility of everyone to share information over the internet with more culpability. Forwarding every piece of information without proper fact-checking can land the entire society in a bigger threat. Age of the users is a significant factor while talking about spreading fake news. According to Guess et al., (2019), Americans who are above 60 years of age share fake news the most and the media literacy among the same group is very less. As stated earlier, the term 'fake news' is not of a recent origin, but the medium used to share and further make it viral is comparatively new. Fake news stories are not anymore a threat only for western countries, but, the threat of fake news can be seen almost

everywhere including India, which is considered as a third world country.

Nowadays creating and disseminating fake news is widely popular and that can affect the public in a negative way. With the easy availability of cheap mobile data, data usage has increased tremendously. About three out of five social media users in India believe that the usage of social media has made it easier to manipulate people with fake news. It is to be noted that Indian users spent two and a half hours on social media and also the Indian and Chinese users' patterns of using social media have converged (Krishnan, 2019).

When the world is fighting a bleak situation like the roll out of Covid-19, the spread of fake news related to that can induce panic in society. This can lead to ineffectiveness in implementing control measures imposed by different governments. Fake news stories that even propose the medications for Covid-19, such as drinking cow-urine can kill the virus, has not only made the Indian society misinformed but also, the decline in the common sense of Indians has become a topic of debate across the globe. Even though the governments have made the point clear that no cures are found to tackle the pandemic, the demand for products including home testing kits has increased all over the web. Online opportunists are working hard to take advantage of the public's anguish, they are selling medicines claiming that it can cure Covid-19 through social media platforms, e-commerce marketplaces, as well as the dark web (Heilweil, R., 2020).

According to news reports, the Government of India was planning to bring regulations on social media platforms by January 2020 (Ians, 2019). But, some of the experts say that the government should not bring-in any regulation over social media, as it is the clear violation of freedom of expression of the individuals (Indian social media users may lose their anonymity soon, 2020). In fact, India's National Policy to control the social media usage is still on the red tape, even when the country is facing an umpteen number of problems due to the uncontrollable creation and dissemination of fake news, that can disrupt the entire smooth functioning of the nation. Hence, this study which focuses on the need and importance of bringing out some

possible controlling measures such as framing laws, developing media literacy, promoting self-regulation, adopting technological tools for filtering, etc., to curb the spread of fake news stories over social media platforms in India is relevant to be conducted. The findings of the respective study will be novel because the Covid-19 is a very recent pandemic outbreak and the fake news is still inducing certain effects on its audience.

Theoretical Framework

Fake news isn't novel (Banerjee, A. N., & Haque, M. N., 2018). A plethora of theories on psychology as well as perceptions of people sharing fake news are present today. Social Identity theory was proposed by Tajfel Turner and it is considered to be one of the greatest contributions of Turner (McLeod, 2019). Tajfel Turner, et al. (1979) states that social identity is a person's self-concept derived from membership in a relevant social group. That is, groups to which individuals belong were an important source of self-esteem and pride for them (McLeod, 2019).

According to Social identity theory and Normative influence theory, people consume and share news that is 'socially safe' to be shared, in order to gain social acceptance, which is a must for an individual's self-esteem and identity. Thus, it can be said that very often people might be sharing news without proper fact checking to show the society that I am a well-informed person and I know everything. On the other hand, according to Prospect theory, people make decisions based on the relative loss and gains compared to their current states. The gain can be of social acceptance too, and while combining the Social Identity Theory and Prospect Theory, it can be assumed that, in order to maintain or gain social acceptance, people might share information without proper fact checking. The rise in partisan social media groups also can act on this. Rather than giving objective and unaltered versions of news, these partisan media groups filter information according to the values and traditions of ingroup biases.

This leads to believing what the consumers like rather than believing what is true (Leonard, 2018). These information from partisan media outlets will be further shared even if it is a fake information. The theory of media literacy on the other hand, according to

W. James Potter (2014) is a cognitive approach which broadly explains how an individual absorbs information amidst the information explosion in a media-saturated society and how people construct faulty meanings from those pieces of information. According to Uses and Gratification theory, people use media for fulfilling their own needs. Hence, often, during the times of emergency, people might share fake news to fulfill their own psychological pleasure by inducing panic in the society or by thinking of the targeted results to be achieved through sharing fake information. An example for this is the 2016 US Presidential election in which fake news was used as a tool to create public votes (Shirsat, 2018). That is, the election campaigners used social media as one of the tools to propagate fake news for their own gratification.

According to Two-step flow theory, information that is shared with the opinion leaders in a community, which is further shared by them with the less active users or the opinion followers, can create an impact in the thought process of an entire society (Elkin, 1957). It can be said that the politicians use this model for their propaganda building during the times of election. The 2016 US Presidential election and the hike in fake news is a good example for this. Trump's victory in the 2016 US Presidential election is an example for effectively utilising Magic Bullet Theory too, even though it is considered to be out-fashioned with reality (Fayoyin, 2016). According to popular narrative, people voted for Trump because they believed in fake news and conspiracy theories against Hillary Clinton that were spread on social media platforms like Facebook (Marwick, 2018). Hence, it can be said that the passive consumers of social media will believe anything and everything that they get through social networking sites and they may further forward it.

The following objectives are set for the current study after carefully analysing the relevant literature in the area.

1. To study the attitude of the people in spreading fake news during the wake of Covid-19 in India.
2. To analyse the role of social media in spreading fake news amidst the outbreak

of Covid-19 among Indian social media users.

3. To explore any possible measures to control the spread of fake news in social media platforms in India.

Research Questions

The objectives set for the study and the available literature on the topic have led to framing the following research questions:

RQ1: Do the variables such as Age, Gender, Education, Location, and Occupation have any significant association with Social media usage, Fake news, and Opinion on taking possible measures to regulate social media platforms?

RQ2: Are the Variables like Social media usage, Fake news, and Opinion on having regulation for Social media platforms interrelated?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main objective of this study is to explore any possible measures such as framing laws, developing media literacy, promoting self-regulation, adopting technological tools for filtering, etc. for social media platforms to control the spread of fake news. In the respective study which uses a quantitative research technique, factors such as Social media usage, Fake news, and opinions to take possible measures to control social media will be analysed.

Apart from these, demographic variables such as Age, Gender, Education, Location, and Occupation also will be analysed. The sample size of the respective study is 300 social media users across India, selected through a snowball sampling procedure. An online survey was conducted in April 2020, to collect perspectives from the selected individuals. The questionnaire for the survey will consist of 33 questions dealing with all the selected variables. The survey was conducted among individuals of age interval between less than 20 and above 34 years. The views of each individual have been considered as one unit. The web of relationships between these variables will be analysed using statistical tools after the completion of data collection.

DATA ANALYSIS

According to statistical tests, the researcher has arrived at certain findings. The tables

given below are the results of the statistical analysis of the selected variables:

Table 1: Anova Test Results, Age vs. DV

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Smartphone_Usage	Between Groups	346.998	4	86.749	13.453	0
	Within Groups	1902.239	295	6.448		
	Total	2249.237	299			
Fake_News	Between Groups	805.821	4	201.455	21.808	0
	Within Groups	2725.125	295	9.238		
	Total	3530.947	299			
Opinion_on_controlling_measures	Between Groups	711.822	4	177.955	21.505	0
	Within Groups	2441.095	295	8.275		
	Total	3152.917	299			

Table 2: Descriptives, Age vs. DV

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Smartphone_Usage	Less than 20 years	56	18.3	2.996	0.4
	20 - 24 years	81	15.84	2.93	0.326
	25 - 29 years	76	17.61	2.373	0.272
	30 to 34 years	47	16.34	1.845	0.269
	Above 34 years	40	15.33	1.913	0.303
Fake_News	Less than 20 years	56	38.27	3.256	0.435
	20 - 24 years	81	34.51	3.461	0.385
	25 - 29 years	76	37.74	2.391	0.274
	30 to 34 years	47	38.09	2.962	0.432
	Above 34 years	40	38.75	3.002	0.475
Opinion_on_controlling_measures	Less than 20 years	56	24.95	3.193	0.427
	20 - 24 years	81	27.58	3.464	0.385
	25 - 29 years	76	27.87	2.457	0.282
	30 to 34 years	47	27.89	2.258	0.329
	Above 34 years	40	30.38	2.446	0.387

Anova test results indicate that the Age is having a statistically significant relationship between Smartphone usage, Fake news, and Opinion on having controlling measures over social media. The average Smartphone usage among people belonging to Less than 20 years age group is found to be more (mean = 18.3) than other age groups. Also, the tendency to spread fake news was seen mostly among the people who are Above 34 years of age (mean = 38.75) and also the average of the same group of people belonging to Above 34 years of age (mean = 30.38) says more to have controlling measures to curb the spread of fake news.

T-Test results indicate that there is a significant relationship only with the variable gender and fake news. And there is no

statistically-significant relationship between the variables gender and smartphone usage and also no significant relationship was found between Gender and Opinion on having controlling measures over social media. However the averages for the Smartphone usage, fake news and Opinion on having regulation differed for these two genders. The average Smartphone usage among male (mean = 17.05) is found more than females. Whereas, females are sharing more fake news (mean = 38.13) compared to male.

The average Opinion on having controlling measures to curb the spread of fake news is found more among females (mean = 27.67) while compared to male.

Table 3: T-Test Results, Gender vs. DV

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Smartphone_Usage	Equal variances assumed	13.545	0	1.881	298	0.061
	Equal variances not assumed			1.881	287.901	0.061
Fake_News	Equal variances assumed	8.45	0.004	-5.107	298	0
	Equal variances not assumed			-5.107	287.696	0
Opinion_on_controlling_measures	Equal variances assumed	0.123	0.726	-0.444	298	0.657
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.444	282.255	0.657

Table 4: Group Statistics, Gender vs. DV

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Smartphone_Usage	Male	150	17.05	2.976	0.243
	Female	150	16.46	2.462	0.201
Fake_News	Male	150	36.18	2.972	0.243
	Female	150	38.13	3.6	0.294
Opinion_on_controlling_measures	Male	150	27.5	3.615	0.295
	Female	150	27.67	2.842	0.232

Table 5: Anova Test Results, Education vs. DV

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Smartphone_Usage	Between Groups	54.304	3	18.101	2.441	0.064
	Within Groups	2194.933	296	7.415		
	Total	2249.237	299			
Fake_News	Between Groups	1183.566	3	394.522	49.748	0
	Within Groups	2347.38	296	7.93		
	Total	3530.947	299			
Opinion_on_controlling_measures	Between Groups	216.91	3	72.303	7.289	0
	Within Groups	2936.007	296	9.919		
	Total	3152.917	299			

Table 6: Descriptives, Education vs. DV

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Smartphone_Usage	Class 10 or below	64	16.5	1.968	0.246
	Plus-2	73	17.47	2.346	0.275
	Under graduation	81	16.73	3.24	0.36
	Post graduation or above	82	16.35	2.971	0.328
Fake_News	Class 10 or below	64	39.34	1.81	0.226
	Plus-2	73	39.27	2.594	0.304
	Under graduation	81	35.64	3.211	0.357
	Post graduation or above	82	35.05	3.205	0.354
Opinion_on_controlling_measures	Class 10 or below	64	28.89	2.31	0.289
	Plus-2	73	26.38	2.119	0.248
	Under graduation	81	27.73	3.644	0.405
	Post graduation or above	82	27.49	3.872	0.428

Anova test results indicate that there is a statistically-significant relationship only between the variables Educational qualification with Fake news spread and Opinion on having controlling measures over social media platforms and there is no statistical relationship between Educational qualification and Smartphone usage. The averages of smartphone usage, fake news spread and opinion on having control over social media differs among people having

different Educational qualifications. The average of smartphone usage is found more among Plus two (mean = 17.47). And people with an educational qualification of class 10 or below tend to spread more fake news (mean = 17.05) than plus two, UG and PG or above. Also people with an educational qualification of class 10 or below (mean = 28.89) agree more to have controlling measures in order to control the spread of fake news.

Table 7: Anova Test Results, Location vs. DV

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Smartphone_Usage	Between Groups	177.204	3	59.068	8.438	0
	Within Groups	2072.033	296	7		
	Total	2249.237	299			
Fake_News	Between Groups	566.124	3	188.708	18.84	0
	Within Groups	2964.823	296	10.016		
	Total	3530.947	299			
Opinion_on_controlling_measures	Between Groups	230.781	3	76.927	7.792	0
	Within Groups	2922.136	296	9.872		
	Total	3152.917	299			

Table 8: Descriptives, Location vs. DV

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Smartphone_Usage	Rural	67	15.63	3.384	0.413
	Town	75	16.48	2.527	0.292
	City	86	16.99	2.095	0.226
	Metro	72	17.82	2.575	0.303
Fake_News	Rural	67	35.39	3.908	0.477
	Town	75	36.24	3.594	0.415
	City	86	37.71	2.844	0.307
	Metro	72	39.08	2.101	0.248
Opinion_on_controlling_measures	Rural	67	28.04	3.607	0.441
	Town	75	27.4	3.949	0.456
	City	86	28.53	2.37	0.256
	Metro	72	26.21	2.466	0.291

Anova test results indicate that there is a statistically-significant relationship between the independent variable Location and dependent variables like Smartphone usage, Fake news spread and Opinion on having control over social media. People residing in Metro tend to use more smartphones (mean = 17.82) while comparing to the people in town, city and rural areas.

The average of the spread of fake news is also found to be more among people residing in Metro (mean = 39.08) than other localities. People living in the city agree more (mean = 28.53) to have control over social media in order to curb the spread of fake news.

Anova test results indicate that there is a statistically-significant relationship only between the variables Occupation with Fake news and Opinion on having control over

social media and no statistical relationship is found between the variables Occupation and Smartphone usage. However the averages of smartphone usage, spread of fake news and having control over social media differs for people belonging to different occupations. Smartphone usage is found to be more among the employed (mean = 17.03) while comparing to homemakers, students and unemployed.

The average of the spread of fake news is found more among Homemakers (mean = 39.73) than the employed, unemployed and students. On the other hand the average of the unemployed people agree more (mean = 29.63) to have control over social media to curb the spread of fake news over social media platforms.

Table 9: Anova Test Results, Occupation vs. DV

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Smartphone_ Usage	Between Groups	38.564	3	12.855	1.721	0.163
	Within Groups	2210.673	296	7.468		
	Total	2249.237	299			
Fake_News	Between Groups	657.961	3	219.32	22.596	0
	Within Groups	2872.986	296	9.706		
	Total	3530.947	299			
Opinion_on_controlling_measures	Between Groups	472.569	3	157.523	17.396	0
	Within Groups	2680.348	296	9.055		
	Total	3152.917	299			

Table 10: Descriptives, Occupation vs. DV

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Smartphone_ Usage	Student	135	16.98	3.201	0.275
	Unemployed	52	16.29	1.786	0.248
	Employed	72	17.03	2.964	0.349
	Homemaker	41	16.15	1.131	0.177
Fake_News	Student	135	36.05	3.748	0.323
	Unemployed	52	39.02	2.024	0.281
	Employed	72	36.4	3.138	0.37
	Homemaker	41	39.73	1.432	0.224
Opinion_on_controlling_measures	Student	135	26.32	3.424	0.295
	Unemployed	52	29.63	2.458	0.341
	Employed	72	28.24	3.169	0.373
	Homemaker	41	28	1.483	0.232

Table 11: Pearson's Correlation Test Result: Dependent Variables vs. Dependent Variables

		SP Usage	FN	OoR
SP Usage	Pearson Correlation	1	.372**	-.207**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0	0
FN	Pearson Correlation	.372**	1	0.061
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0		0.288
OoCM	Pearson Correlation	-.207**	0.061	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0.288	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation test on the other hand shows statistically significant relationship among Smartphone usage and spread of fake news as well as opinion on having a national policy. When Smartphone usage and fake news showed a positive correlation Smartphone usage and opinion on having a national policy showed a negative correlation. That is, with an increase in the usage of smartphones, more fake news will be spread over the social media and the ones who use the smartphones most are against having any control over social media to curb the spread of fake news in social media.

DISCUSSION

By analysis of the result, the study arrived at several interesting findings.

Smartphone Usage:

Smartphones have become one of the inevitable parts in the lives of the people (Miakotko, 2017). The usage pattern differed with differences in age, gender, education, occupation as well as location. While the present study arrived at a finding similar to the conclusions of Andone et al., (2016) regarding the smartphone usage and the age of the users, a contradiction was seen in smartphone usage and the gender of the users. That is, similar to the findings of Andone et al., (2016), in the present study also it was found that smartphones are mostly used by teenagers who are less than 20 years of age. According to Andone et al., (2016), females used smartphones more. But, in the present study it was found that the average smartphone usage of males is slightly higher than that of females. In conformity with the results of the present study, it is to be noted that the average of smartphone usage is more among the ones with a Plus-2 educational qualification. The use of smartphones depended on the location of the users as well. While the study results state that the ones who hail from metro settings used the smartphones the most, the ones from rural settings used smartphones the least. In compliance with the study, it can be seen that the smartphones are mostly used by the employed people or the ones who have a regular income, and it is least used by homemakers.

Spreading Fake News:

According to Guess et al., (2019), Americans who are above 60 years of age share fake news

the most and the media literacy among the same group is very less. In the present study it was found that Indian's who are above 34 years of age tend to spread fake news the most. This can be due to lack of media literacy among Indians and the delayed technological advancements in India. It is interesting to note that the ones who are above 34 years of age think it is lawful to share fake news and they also think it is normal to create and share fake news during emergency situations like Covid-19.

The young block of the country who are less than 20 years of age strongly believes that it is the responsibility of an individual to fact check an information prior to sharing it further and the above 34 years group believes the same the least. The respective study result confirms that the females spread fake news more than that of males in India. The study results also state that the ones with an education of class 10 or below tend to spread fake news the most. It is also to be noted that the fake news rolls out the most in metros and is spread the most by homemakers. All these shows the lack of social media literacy among Indians. According to the Magic Bullet theory, which Fayoyin (2016) suggests as out-dated with reality, passive consumers of the media messages will believe anything and everything that they get through social networking sites and they may further forward it. Hence, it is important to build the media literacy of Indian social media users.

Opinion on Controlling Measures: While analysing the results of the present study, it is interesting to note that the above 34 years age group believes the most that it is better to control social media platforms in India in order to curb the spread of fake news. Whereas, the young block, the social media users below the age of 20 years, are very much critical of the same. It is also to be noted that the females believe the most that it is time to control the social media platforms in India.

Hence, it can be said that even though the above 34 years aged users and the female users tend to spread the fake news the most over social media, the same groups urge to bring in certain controlling measures on social media platforms. While the ones with an education of class 10 or below vote for implementing controlling measures, the users belonging to the city setting believe the same

the most. The study result put forward another interesting finding, which is, the unemployed section of the country says the most that it is better to have some sort of control over social media to stop the spread of fake news. The study which focused on understanding any possible measures to control the spread of fake news in social media platforms in India, comes up with a set of measures that can be implemented in India.

While the study results points out that the self-regulation will be not an effective way to control the spread of fake news, organising effective campaigns among the social media users, having in-built filters in social media platforms to identify fake news, having regulations on social media through a national policy and framing a statutory body controlled by the government of India to regulate the social media contents are the key measures that can be implemented. It can be said that it is the time for Indian government to strengthen its thought of rolling-out social media regulations, for the collective good of the Indian society.

CONCLUSION

In times of crisis, misinformation abounds. A misinformed society can make chaos around the globe. With the increase in smartphone usage and cheap internet access, in the time of Covid-19 as well the number of fake news being made and further shared is snowballing in a very high velocity. The fake news stories are flooding social media platforms in each second. People who create fake news pretend to be doctors, statisticians and experts, whereas, the ones who share those are pushing the society into a furthermore grim situation. The present study is focused on understanding the kinds of solutions that can be implemented so as to control the widespread of fake news over social media. The study has come out with a number of interesting findings. The ones who use smartphones more tend to spread more fake news and the same group of people do hold the views that are against forming a national policy or having a national regulatory body to curb the spread of fake news in India. The present study could also reinforce the Social Identity theory, which says, people may be sharing the news information that they get from different social media networks, which

may be fake, so as to maintain their social acceptance in the society.

The study results indicated that the Indian's lack social media literacy and that can be one of the potential reasons behind sharing anything and everything that they come across in social media platforms without a proper fact checking. According to the lion's share of respondents, it is more or less impossible to distinguish between real news and fake news. The theory of media literacy explains how people absorb information amidst the information explosion in a media-saturated society and how they construct faulty meanings from those pieces of information. According to the respective study, most of the people say that Indians lack media literacy. Hence, effective campaigns or programs from the side of the Government or social media platforms are essential to build a society who are media literate.

Most of the respondents believe that it is common to have a flood of fake news during the times of emergency and a whopping majority of the respondents say that fake news creates unnecessary panic in the society. The sharing of fake news during the times of emergency can be linked to the uses and gratification theory. That is, vested interests may be sharing fake news for their own gratification. It is also interesting to note that some of the people believe that spreading fake news is a lawful activity and majority of the respondents have shared some fake news related to Covid-19 knowingly or unknowingly. A further interesting finding is that even when the people believe that it is the responsibility of an individual to fact-check an information before further sharing, the majority of the respondents didn't do a proper fact-checking.

When the respondents say self-regulation is not a good idea, organising effective campaigns to build social media literacy is one of the measures that can be implemented in order to control the spread of fake news over social media platforms. The study arrived at a conclusion stating that it is time to bring in a national policy to control the spread of fake news over social media platforms. And, the respondents also opined that there should be stringent actions including huge fines and jail terms against the ones who spread fake news.

An important finding of the study is that it is time for India to have a National Regulatory Body to frame legal implications defining the after effects of propagating fake news.

Hence, it can be assumed that it is necessary for the Government of India to think about a National Regulatory Body for controlling social media, like Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) which regulates the telecom sector or Press Council of India which regulates the press. The different social media platforms also can bring-in in-built filters in the respective platforms to stop sharing fake news. Thus, the findings of this study generate managerial implications for the social media corporates and the government of India to think accordingly to control the social media platforms in India.

This present study may be observed with certain limitations. India, a country with the second highest population in the world, has a huge size of active social media users. However, the responses of a sample size of 300 individuals were collected through snowball sampling for the current study. Hence, if the future studies are conducted with a reasonable sample size, more meaningful conclusions may be drawn. Examining more demographic groups and analysing more perceptions and attitudes of the social media users may be done by the future researchers on the topic of current research. With the current pace in technological advancements in every sector, the speed of new social media advancements is also likely to increase. Thus, so far, theoretical backing for social media usage is still lacking. Hence, it is very much important to ground new theories that deal with social media usage in utmost urgency.

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