OPEN ACCESS

Crossref DOI Prefix 10.46523
Crossref

# Keeping it Real: The Role of Social Media in Combating Fake News

*Arpita Singh*

**UGC NET Qualified (Mass Communication and Journalism), Azamgarh, Uttar Pradesh**

**E-mail:** arptasingh9@gmail.com

## ABSTRACT

The sudden shift from traditional media to social media culture in the technologically evolving era has provided easy access to information in diverse mediums. Alongside this, the emergence of social media has also provided various platforms for quick exchange of information and easy access to any news update. However, the advent of social media has created a paradoxical situation, with the bulk of fake news mixed with real stories online. This research paper focuses on various types of fake news through a literature review approach including manipulation, parody, satire, advertising, propaganda, fabrication, etc. The backdrop of the research paper involves some instances of the COVID-19 pandemic to authenticate it further. The significance and role of a few prominent social media platforms including X (formerly known as Twitter) and Facebook in combating the spread of fake news has also been highlighted in the research paper. It also showcases how these social media platforms took major initiatives to combat the circulation of fake news. During the pandemic, how Facebook partnered with some professional agencies to disseminate correct information. Meanwhile, X (Twitter) managed internal algorithmic pushing mechanisms and hashtags to cease the spread of fake news.

## INTRODUCTION

The emergence of social media in recent years has completely transformed how we access and share information. The social media culture has brought in various mediums to communicate and

gather information. However, the two-edged sword effect of social media looks apparent as it has created a vast pool of information in the ecosystem leading to the circulation of misinformation and fake news. This large pool of misinformation and fake news transmitted through social media platforms threatens users' privacy and affects them negatively. In the social media-driven era, people often fall prey to misinformation as through large social media networks and algorithmic use of data and monitoring social media behaviour of people, transmitters nowadays directly push promotional content to the users on the online platform, and the chances of spread of such content further is quite obvious. Users promote such content further through social media posts, images, videos, and other means which lead to the re-dissemination of misinformation. This is how social media platforms turn out to be a tool for spreading fake news and misinformation among online peers. The adverse effect of such online activity and the circulation of fake news is that it can distort the trust of social media users. This research paper through literature review examines the types of misinformation and the role of social media to stop the circulation of misinformation and combat the spread of fake news.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

- To examine the role of social media in combating the circulation of fake news.
- To understand how social media can regulate the spread of fake news.
- To understand social media user's responsibility in combating the spread of fake news

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- Tandoc, E. C., Wei, L. Z. & Ling, R. (2017) in their research 'Defining "Fake News" A typology of scholarly definitions' stated the methods of manipulating fake news can be described through six terms including satire, parody, fabrication, manipulation, advertising and propaganda.

- Wardle, C. (2017) through an article titled "Fake news. It's complicated" 'First Draft' described, "To understand the misinformation ecosystem, a breakdown of the types of fake content, content creators motivations and how it's being disseminated."

- Ödmark, S. & Nicolaï, J. (2024) in research titled "Between Headlines and Punchlines: Journalistic Role Performance in Western News Satire" elaborated on the meaning, origin of news satire, and how it has changed into various formats nowadays.

- Elliot, R. (2024) in an article in Britannica defined satire and elaborated it an artistic form, in which individual vices or follies to censure through irony, parody, or other methods, to inspire social reform.

## WHAT IS FAKE NEWS?

The term "Fake News" was often used in the earlier period to describe misleading and sensational news articles. The intent behind disseminating fake news is to harm the reputation of a person or entity. However, the term fake news doesn't have any fixed definition. It can be broadly defined as news articles that are false, fabricated, or contain no verifiable facts, sources, or quotes. Fake news which is sometimes also referred to as false news, is generally created with the motive to misguide or deceive readers or viewers. It is kind of a hoax to misinform readers.

However, one needs to understand that misinformation is inaccurate information that is inadvertently spread but the aim is not to deceive. Meanwhile, disinformation can be called false information intentionally spread to influence public opinion or build perception. Fake news is quite a complex problem, which is far bigger than its narrow definition. Fake news exists within a larger ecosystem of misinformation- and disinformation.

Fake news is not mere news anymore, it is a form of information ecosystem, propaganda, political influence, parody, etc. To understand the types of fake news, one needs to analyse how such news is manipulated and circulated. As per Edson et al, the technique of manipulating information can

be understood through the following six terms: parody, satire, propaganda, manipulation, fabrication, and advertising.

**TYPES OF FAKE NEWS**

**News Satire:** News satire is defined as the use of artistic form and exaggeration in the news, mainly literary and dramatic, with an intent to inspire social reform. Like regular news programs, news satire is usually presented in the form of a TV news broadcast. However, the main difference between a regular news program and a satirical news program is that the latter is quite entertaining. News satire plays an important part when it comes to impact the discussion on any socially important issues. Although, news satire is presented entertainingly the core of the news satire is based on reality.

**News Parody:** News parody is a creative form of news intended to imitate the subject through ironic imitation etc. It aims to engage audiences through satirical imitation or humour. News parody differs from news satire as the stories described in it are fictional. As per literary scholar Professor Simon Dentith, parody is "any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice". According to literary theorist Linda Hutcheon, "parody ... is imitation, not always at the expense of the parodied text."

**News Fabrication:** News fabrication is usually complete false information that can be harmful. It is usually disinformation created which has no connection to truth. It aims to deceive and harm the readers or viewers. Fabricated news can quickly become misinformation. Social media is the most commonly used platform for widespread news fabrication which often confuses readers between real news and fake news. In the online real-time system, usually, bots make a network of fake news and with the use of algorithms usage of audience who are more prone to click on such news. The online pushing pattern creates a delusion to the online readers that several people are reading fake news, so it might be real and they also fall prey to such fake news.

**Advertising:** It differs from other forms of fake news as at its core it is focused on financial benefits. Usually, advertising agencies create propaganda-based fake news and then provide it to the TV news media. Such propaganda-based advertising videos or other forms of media are then run alongside the real news to get the attention of the audience and convince them to believe it to be true. This often mislead the audience.

**Propaganda:** This is a form of fake news that is usually used by political parties to build public perception and influence people. Political parties use various social media tools such as fabricating the news and posting on social media by adjusting the algorithmic push mechanism. It is mainly done to gain the credibility and trust of the audience for political benefits.

## ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media plays a significant role in the exchange of information. A sudden shift has occurred in the way we communicate and access information. The medium of information dissemination has changed from newspaper and broadcasting to online, and now to social media. Although communication and information access have become easy it has also increased the proliferation of fake news. So, we need to discuss how social media can play an important role in combating fake news.

## FAKE NEWS SURGE DURING COVID-19

The major challenge of misinformation or fake news was witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Due to severe restrictions and bans on people from moving out, the only source of communication and to gather any minute information was social media. During the pandemic, some miscreants misused the social media platform to spread rumours, misinformation, and fake news related to COVID-19. For instance, various strange remedies were shared on social media to cure COVID-19, which were extremely harmful.

OPEN ACCESS

Crossref DOI Prefix 10.46523
Crossref

## SOCIAL MEDIA ROLE IN COMBATING FAKE NEWS

During the widespread of fake news on social media during COVID-19, major social media platforms took some initiatives to combat the spread of fake news. Following the same measure, Facebook used an automated technique to remove several such statements identified as harmful to COVID-19. Facebook also partnered with UNICEF and World Health Organisations to provide relevant and authentic information to users. On the other hand, to combat the spread of fake news on social media, X (Twitter) adjusted the algorithmic pushing mechanism. It also removed auto-recommendation of information related to COVID-19 shared from the unofficial and unverified handle. It provided a few prominent hashtags and warning messages below tweets that contained harmful and misleading messages. These platforms played a significant role in combating the spread of misleading information and fake news during severe pandemic situations.

## CONCLUSION

The emergence of social media has provided efficient communication platforms for the fast-paced transmission of information and has built a large pool of information ecosystems. Social Media has also increased users' active participation and interaction on the online platform. Users' reactions to any social media post in the form of likes, comments, and re-tweets can sometimes authenticate and validate the existing fake news. So, along with the social media platforms, it becomes the users' responsibility as well to fact-check any information before validating or promoting it on social media and censoring the spread of fake news. Awareness for Digital Literacy needs to be increased and social media users need to be provided with tools to identify fake news and misinformation promoted on the social media platforms. Social media platforms should also follow the existing censorship meant to combat the fake news spread.

OPEN ACCESS

Crossref DOI Prefix 10.46523
Crossref

# REFERENCES

Tandoc, E. C., Wei, L. Z. & Ling, R. (2021, August). Defining "Fake News", Digital Journalism. Retrieved August 1, 2024, from https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143

Wardle, C. (2017, February). Fake news. It's complicated. Retrieved August 2, 2024, from https://firstdraftnews.org/articles/fake-news-complicated/

Ödmark, S. & Nicolaï, J. (2024, January). Between Headlines and Punchlines: Journalistic Role Performance in Western News Satire. Retrieved July 5, 2024, from https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2024.2311308

Elliot, R. (2024, August). Satire. Retrieved August 25, 2024, from https://www.britannica.com/art/satire