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## Exposure of fake news to the Indian social media users

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**Abstract.** In the modern world, people are too techno-friendly and dependent on technology using the Internet for every work. The same goes for the news. People are shifting from traditional mass media to digital news platforms and getting news through websites, news portals, social media, etc. If you are dependent on the Internet for every kind of information, then you will face false information on the Internet. False or fake news is defined as any information that does not have any credible and reliable source behind it or any misleading information that is likely to mislead the public. The aim behind fake news transmission is to damage a person's or entity's reputation or advertising revenue. If you want not to fall into the fake news you should know about fake news detection and media literacy. The main purpose of the study is to check the exposure of fake news awareness and fake news detection methods among social media users. In the current scenario, this is much necessary to know that social media users have the advisable knowledge of fake news detection and media literacy because people easily fall into the rumors. Mob lynching is one of the biggest rumors on the Indian Internet. In this research, the survey method and questionnaire for data collection were used. The questionnaire was distributed randomly over different social media platforms and emails to the intended respondents. The findings obtained reveal that most fake or false news in India is transmitted through WhatsApp, but social media users have adequate knowledge of fake news and media literacy.

**Keywords:** misinformation, media literacy, India, WhatsApp

**Author's contribution.** *Bandana Pandey* – research concept and program, data analysis, project administration, writing – original draft. *Guarav Kumar* – analysis of materials, writing the text. *Leila O. Algavi* – analysis of materials, text editing. *Manish Kumar, Vishal Sharma* – collection, processing and verification of materials.

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## Воздействие фальшивых новостей на индийских пользователей социальных сетей

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**Аннотация.** Рассматриваются актуальные проблемы распространения фейковых новостей среди индийских пользователей социальных сетей. В исследовании фейковые новости определяются как любая информация, не имеющая достоверного и надежного источника, или любые недостоверные сведения, способные ввести общественность в заблуждение. Подразумевается, что фейковые новости распространяются для нанесения ущерба репутации человеку или организации (компании, социальному институту), получения дохода от рекламы, увеличения популярности и т. д. Цель исследования – выявление степени осведомленности индийских пользователей социальных сетей о самом факте существования фейковых новостей, а также возможных методах их обнаружения и нейтрализации, определение наиболее популярных каналов распространения недостоверной информации. Для сбора данных использовался метод опроса и анкетирование. Анкета распространялась через различные социальные платформы и по электронной почте среди предполагаемых респондентов – пользователей соцсетей. Полученные результаты показали, что большинство фейковых новостей в Индии передается через WhatsApp, но пользователи социальных сетей обладают достаточными знаниями, чтобы обнаруживать и обезвреживать их.

**Ключевые слова:** дезинформация, медиаграмотность, Индия, WhatsApp

**Вклад авторов.** Б. Пандей – концепция и программа исследования, анализ полученных данных, администрирование проекта, подготовка исходного текста. Г. Кумар – анализ материалов, написание текста. Л.О. Алгави – анализ материалов, редактирование текста. М. Кумар, В. Шарма – сбор, обработка и проверка материалов.

**Заявление о конфликте интересов.** Авторы заявляют об отсутствии конфликта интересов.

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### Introduction

Communication is an important part of human action, such as trading, traveling, communication, etc. And in the time of globalization, every country depends on communication technologies for information. So, the whole world has changed due to the Internet. The Internet gives the world various opportunities for connecting to global society.

The main subject of this study is fake news, the biggest problem in every country, and fighting to stop the transmission of fake news. From the Indian perspective, there are various examples of fake news transmission as mob lynching. A few years ago, there were rumors on social media platforms that unknown people kidnapped the children in the villages and killed them. Under this issue, many states of India caught these types of people and beat them publicly, and some people died. The main reason to believe that rumor is digital and media illiteracy. People should be aware of fake news detection methods and media literacy to stop such crimes.

Social media sites are the general cause of fake news transmission. There are various social media, and millions of users visit these platforms for many reasons. Facebook, Twitter, and Whatsapp are the biggest social media platforms where fake news goes viral rapidly because millions of users share this information (Meel, Vishwakarma, 2020). According to data released by Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad in India today, YouTube has more than 448 million subscribers in India, followed by WhatsApp with over 530 m. users. There are roughly 410 m. of Facebook users, 210 m. of Instagram users, and 15 m. of Twitter users. It might also be because Indian users recently switched from Twitter to the Koo app, the national version of Twitter.<sup>1</sup> The data shows that WhatsApp is one of the top-ranking social media used in India. It is an internationally available cross-platform social media, where you can share information and reach users easily. Facebook and Twitter also are the largest social networks where news goes viral quickly. Hence most fake news peddlers transmit false or fake information on these types of social media (Duffy, Tandoc, 2020). So, we are discussing in this article only the news or information getting through social media platforms. The main aim of social media is to connect to society, but people also get information, sometimes deleterious, on those platforms. Most of the time, social media users fabricate false information on these sites to create public hype.

By accessing information through social media, there is a big chance to come up with fake news. Everyone can share any information on social media platforms, true or false, as there is no gatekeeping on these sites. This type of information sharing is known as citizen journalism. Every single social media user believes that he is a journalist. Some of them take advantage of this freedom and spread fake news. They transmit false information and facts that can sometimes ruin people's reputations. Thus, it is necessary to make people aware of media literacy and fake news.

False reports or incorrect information circulated in the form of articles, pictures, or videos that are presented as “actual news” with the intention of swaying people's beliefs are referred to as fake news. Social media users and covert social bots that comment on, republish, and retweet such news items are the main sources of fake news dissemination.<sup>2</sup> It usually aims to earn money through adver-

<sup>1</sup> Chakravarti, A. (2021, February 25). Government reveals stats on social media users, WhatsApp leads while YouTube beats Facebook, Instagram. *India Today*. Retrieved July 27, 2022, from <https://www.indiatoday.in/technology/news/story/government-reveals-stats-on-social-media-users-whatsapp-leads-while-youtube-beats-facebook-instagram-1773021-2021-02-25>

<sup>2</sup> IONOS Digital Guide. (2021, July 20). *What is fake news? Definition, types, and how to detect them*. Retrieved July 27, 2022, from <https://www.ionos.com/digitalguide/online-marketing/social-media/what-is-fake-news/>

tising or to harm someone's or an organization's reputation. The phrase, which does not have a clear definition, has been used more loosely to refer to any false information, including inadvertent and unconscious mechanisms, as well as news that is averse to the perspective of high-profile individuals. Few studies describe the different types of fake news. Information can be two types of Misinformation and Disinformation. Claire Wardle defines various types of fake news satire, Parody, Manipulation, Fabrication, Propaganda, Hoax, Rumors, Unscientific claims, etc.<sup>3</sup>

A framework for accessing, analysing, and creating communications in a range of media, including print, video, and the Internet, is provided by media literacy. With the help of media literacy, people can better grasp how the media affects society and develop the critical thinking and self-expression abilities required of democratic citizens. Media literacy, therefore, is about helping students become competent, critical, and literate in all media forms so that they control the interpretation of what they see or hear rather than letting the interpretation control them. To become media literate is not to memorize facts or statistics about the media, but rather to learn to raise the right questions about what you are watching, reading, or listening to. Without this fundamental ability, an individual cannot have full dignity as a human person or exercise citizenship in a democratic society where to be a citizen is to both understand and contribute to the debates of the time.<sup>4</sup>

Why are we talking about media literacy and fake news? Since the beginning of COVID-19 in the world, lots of messages and links circulated on these social media sites. As for last year's news on social media sites, we can easily see the abundance of false information, links, news, unscientific claims much more content spreading on these social media sites (Apuke, Omar, 2021). People were sharing messages like how to protect you from COVID-19. At the start of COVID-19, messages transmitted on social media sites like that smoking is good for COVID-19, so people who smoke would never be hit by COVID-19 virus. This type of message was circulating on WhatsApp and Facebook. Another message was a suggestion to intake garlic, which also protects against COVID-19. These unscientific claims circulated on Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, and people have been affected by this information. That was due to a lack of knowledge, information, or media literacy. Without any verification of these messages, people were using these things, not knowing it was fake information spreading on these social media platforms. If people were aware of fake news and media literacy, they would never fall for false information. Hence, we are conducting this study on fake news awareness on social media sites.

Now a couple of words about Echo Chambers. An echo chamber is a circumstance where someone only hears information or viewpoints that mirror and support their own. Echo chambers can stifle critical thinking and distort a person's perspective, making it harder for them to consider alternative points of view and engage in complex discussions. Confirmation bias, or the propensity to favor in-

<sup>3</sup> Wardle, C. (2017, February 16). *Fake news. It's complicated*. Resource Centre on Media Freedom in Europe. Retrieved July 27, 2022, from <https://www.rcmediafreedom.eu/Publications/Reports/Fake-news.-It-s-complicated>

<sup>4</sup> Center for Media Literacy. (2021). *What is media literacy? A definition... and more*. Retrieved July 27, 2021, from <https://www.medialit.org/reading-room/what-media-literacy-definitionand-more>

formation that supports preexisting ideas, contributes to their growth.<sup>5</sup> According to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, when beliefs are amplified or reinforced through communication and repetition within a closed system that is shielded from rebuttal, this situation is referred to as an “echo chamber” (Hornby, 2010). Social media platforms are the places where information is overloaded among the users, which creates information echo chambers. Social media increase the consumption of news, which affects a person's belief system. More exposure to a particular story changes our perspective and lets us believe the same in which manner it is persisted (Terren, Borge-Bravo, 2021).

### Materials and research methods

The study is based theoretically on several previous research. First, it is “*Fake news – A Pandemic within a Pandemic*”. In the article, Priyanka Mishra identified the various types of fake news transmitted during the pandemic. She pointed out, “there is no single solution to curb this menace of fake news which has even been given a new name by the WHO as ‘Infodemic’ – an abundance of information which contains both verified and unverified news stories.” P. Mishra argued that misinformation flows highly impact society, and officials don’t have any framework to stop these types of information. In the future, we must take some actions and create a framework for fake news detection. It is possible merely with the help of various partnerships at the local levels as well global levels (Mishra, 2021).

The second is “*Does Media Literacy Help Identification of Fake News? Information Literacy Helps, but Other Literacies Don’t*”. In this study, based on an online survey, the researcher concludes that people with more information literacy more significantly identify fake news. It is depended on how well individuals navigate the digital world and get information from valid and authentic sources. It is very difficult to recognize fake news in the online world, if people are well-skilled and knowledgeable of digital literacy, and media literacy, and equipped with their skills can easily detect fake news (Jones-Jang et al., 2021).

The third is “*Social Media Fake News in India*”. This study finds several themes, but health-related misinformation, such as fake information about medical facilities, and lockdown rumors, were topped on social media sites in India. This study shows that most of the content is contained in text, video, and photo formats and finds that the number of social media users increased by 75% during the pandemic. Basically, during the pandemic, negative fake news was circulated on social media sites and mostly contained visual content (Al-Zaman, 2021).

The fourth is “*Combating fake News through Digital Media Literacy: Study on Digital Media Users of Bhopal City of India*”. This study revealed that in India most youngsters use social media not only for entertainment purposes but also for connecting to professionals in their field, and nowadays, digital media users consume too much digital media content. Most social media users are youth and consume information through social media without verifying and cross-checking, which might be the reason fake news paddlers target the youth for false infor-

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<sup>5</sup> GCFGlobal. (2022). *Digital media literacy: What is an echo chamber?* Retrieved July 27, 2022, from <https://edu.gcfglobal.org/en/digital-media-literacy/what-is-an-echo-chamber/1>

mation. This study also shows that Indian youth are mostly unaware of these types of traps which is why they easily fall for fake news paddlers. Hence, social media users need to know digital media literacy and fact-checking (Pathak, Patel, 2020).

And finally, the fifth is “*Fake News, Alternative Facts, and Disinformation: The Importance of Teaching Media Literacy to Law Students*”, which is concerned with media literacy education. This study suggests that some media literacy models could easily be applied to train law students and educate them about media literacy. University should add some media literacy courses and credit-based exams among law students, it will also help to understand media literacy (Dell, 2018).

Now, a proper research method is very necessary for the study. According to the need of the study, the researchers selected the appropriate research method. In this study, researchers used the survey method for collecting data from the pre-defined groups of respondents. The predefined group of this study belongs to social media users of various social media sites. In this study, researchers do not consider any age group because of all age groups people use social media sites. Every research needs good planning and execution for data collection. For this study researcher selected the questionnaire as a tool for data collection.

The questionnaire was prepared through the Google form for data collection and these Google forms were randomly distributed over social media platforms and emails to the intended persons. In this study, researchers used the Simple random sampling method to select the social media users. Questionnaires were distributed among 100 respondents, which were distributed on various social media platforms. These questionnaires were distributed over Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter, platforms among social media platforms.

Through Google forms, researchers collect the primary data for study and used secondary data from various sources like reports, books, research papers, etc. After collecting the data through the Google form, the researchers prepare all the graphs manually on MS Excel to use the data from Google Sheets.

The aim of this study is to know the awareness level of fake news among social media users.

The objectives of the study are:

1. To check the awareness level of fake news among the social media users.
2. To know how social media users detect or verify fake news.

### **Discussion and data analysis**

The data of this study were collected through Google forms. Google forms were distributed on various social media sites. After receiving the data through Google sheets, we prepared the graphs with the help of MS Excel.

**Demographic variables.** The questionnaire was distributed among the 100 respondents who received the entire filled questionnaire. Out of 100 respondents, male respondents are 69 and female respondents are 31. It means a majority of the respondents are male for this study. The bar graph shows the number of respondents in terms of males and female (Figure 1).

The bar graphs represent the professions of the respondents, which is part of this research paper (Figure 2). Out of the total respondents, 47 are students means they are in college going doing their graduation and master's, 18 respondents are

employed, 10 respondents are self-employed, 9 respondents are scholars of various subjects, and left respondents belong to other categories. A majority of respondents are students.

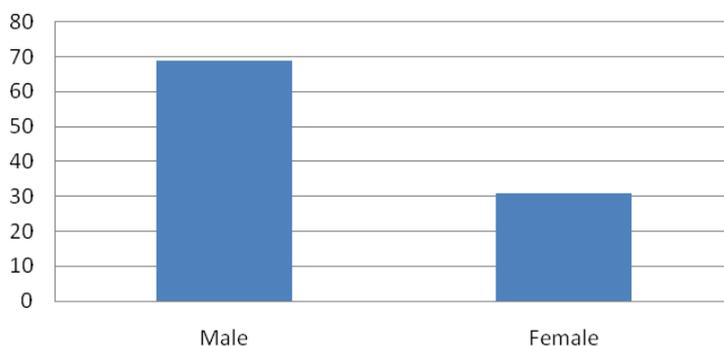


Figure 1. Gender, number of respondents

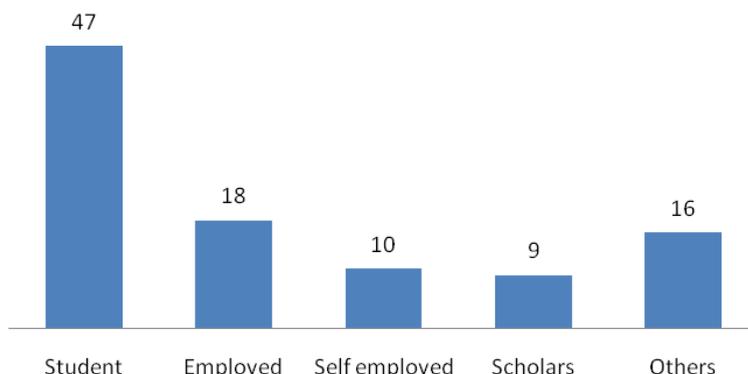
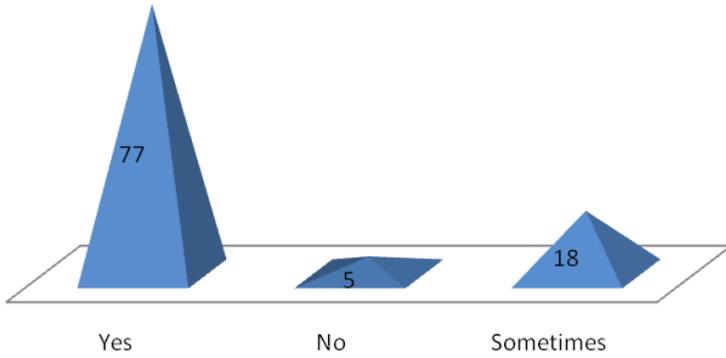


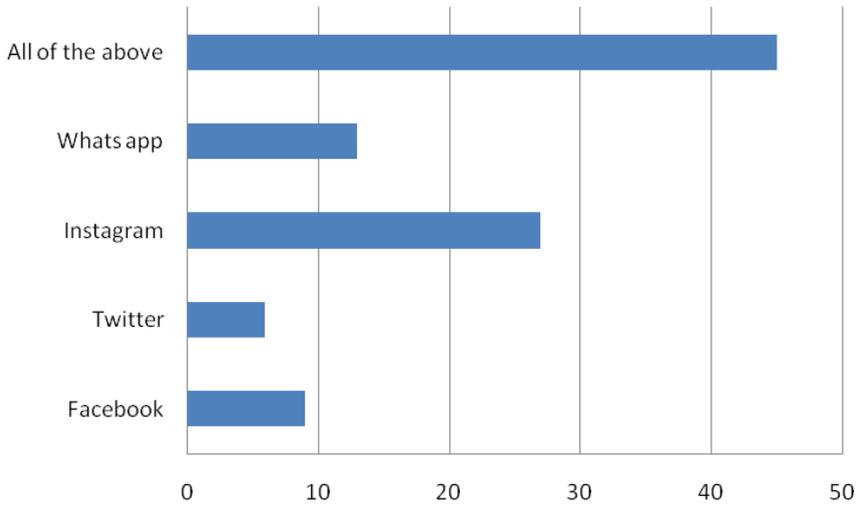
Figure 2. Profession, number of respondents

**Users of social media sites.** Figure 3 shows the representation of how many respondents used social media sites. The data shows that a maximum number of respondents use social media sites. Out of the total respondents, 77 respondents mark the yes option meaning they used social media sites, while 5 respondents mark the option as no, meaning they do not use social media sites, and 18 respondents use social media sites sometimes. According to the above, out of the total respondents, 77% of respondents used social media sites, and only 5% of respondents do not use social media sites.

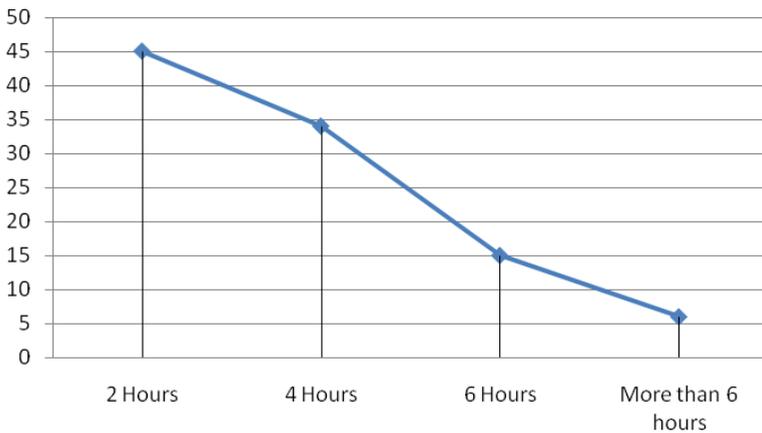
**Social media platform used by the respondents.** Figure 4 shows that which social media platforms respondents used most. Out of the total respondents, 45% of respondents mark the option “All the above”, that means they used various social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp. While 9% of respondents mark option only Facebook, 27% of respondents mark option Instagram while 13% of respondents mark option WhatsApp, and 6% of respondents mark option Twitter. According to the data of the bar graph, most of the respondents used all the social media platforms, and a maximum number of the respondents used Instagram.



**Figure 3.** Social media use, number of respondents



**Figure 4.** Media platforms used, % of respondents

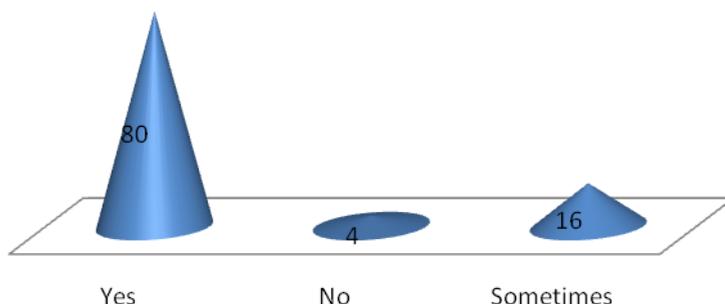


**Figure 5.** Use of social media sites per day, % of respondents

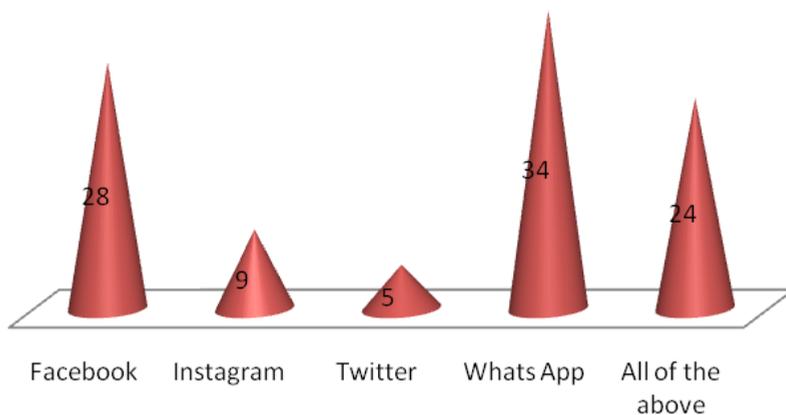
***Time to used social media platforms by the respondents.*** Figure 5 represents how many hours respondents used social media sites per day. Out of the to-

tal respondents, 45% of respondents mark option “2 hours”, which means they use social media platforms only 2 hours a day. While 34% of respondents mark the option “4 hours”, 15% of respondents mark “6 hours”, and 6% of respondents mark the option “more than 6 hours” per day. Though the average time respondents use social media sites is only two hours a day. It means out of 24 hours respondents gave very less part for the social media sites. It shows that users are not addicted to social media platforms.

***Fake news faced by the respondents on these social media sites.*** Figure 6 shows how many respondents faced fake news on social media sites. Out of the total respondents 80% respondents mark option “Yes”, which means they encountered fake news on social media sites, and 4% respondent mark option for “No”, which means they did not encounter fake news on the social media platforms, while 16% encountered fake news sometimes on the social media platforms. According to data, a majority of the respondents, 80%, met fake news on various social media platforms.



**Figure 6.** Faced fake news on social media sites, % of respondents

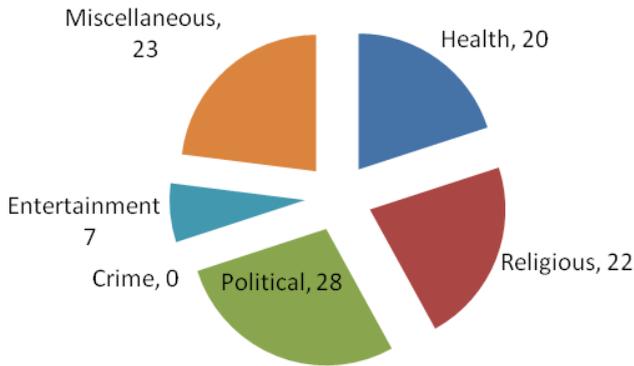


**Figure 7.** Platforms, where respondents faced fake news on, % of respondents

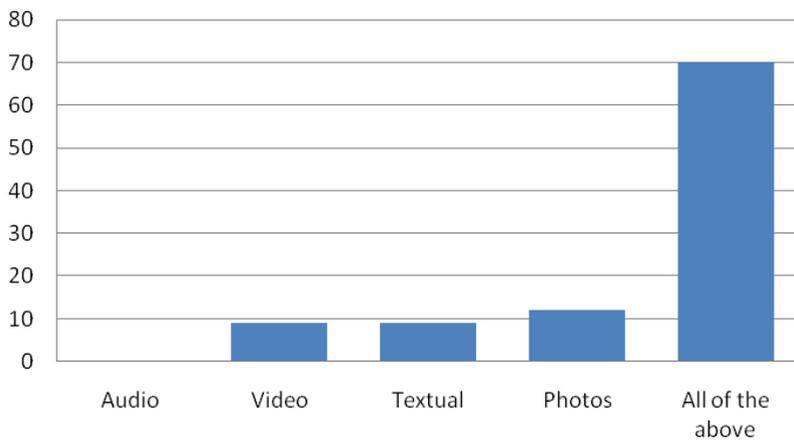
***On which social media platforms do you get more fake news.*** Figure 7 describes which platforms respondents faced fake news on. Out of the total respondents, 28% of respondents mark option Facebook, 9% of respondents mark option Instagram, and 5% of respondents go with option Twitter. Out of the total respondents, 34% of respondents mark option WhatsApp, which means respondents

received most fake news on WhatsApp, while 24% of respondents mark the option “All the above”, which means most of the respondents encountered fake on all the platforms – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp. This data reveals data most fake news circulated over WhatsApp.

**Types of fake news stories faced by the respondents.** Figure 8 shows which types of fake news respondents faced on social media sites. Out of the total respondents, 28% respondents mark political news related content circulated in the form of fake news over the various social media platforms than 22% of respondents mark health-related content circulated in the form of fake news on social media platforms, and 22% also think that religious news is also circulated as fake news on these platforms. Respondents also mark other issues like Crime; Entertainment and Miscellaneous which also circulated in the form of fake news on these social media platforms. According to this data, most politics-related news circulated in the form of fake news over various social media platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook. These platforms are popular among fake news paddlers.



**Figure 8.** Types of fake news, % of respondents



**Figure 9.** Types of fake news content form, % of respondents

**Types of fake news content you get on these social media sites.** Figure 9 shows that types of fake news content form circulated over social media sites.

Out of the total respondents, 70% of respondents go with “All the above option”, which means respondents get fake news content in the form of audio, video, text, and photos. The least majority goes with option audio, video, text, and photos. 12% of respondents marked photos that they believe the mostly fake news paddler disseminates fake news in the form of photos over the various social media platforms, while 9% of respondents go with the video and textual option. They also believe that most fake news paddlers spread fake news in the form of text messages and video on social media platforms. But most of the respondents think that most fake news paddlers used text, video, audio, and photos for fake news dissemination over social media platforms.

**Knowledge of fake news verification.** Figure 10 shows how many respondents know how to verify fake news. Out of the total respondents, 79% of respondents goes with the option “yes” that they know how to verify fake news, 3% of respondents do not know about fake news verification, while 18% of respondents go the option sometimes that they can verify fake news, sometimes they do not know proper methods of fake news verification. According to the data in the Table, most of the respondents have proper knowledge and skills in fake news verification methods of the fake news.

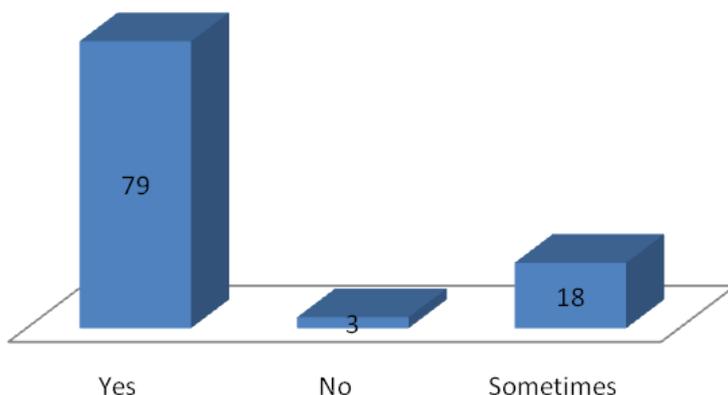


Figure 10. Knowledge of fake news verification, % of respondents

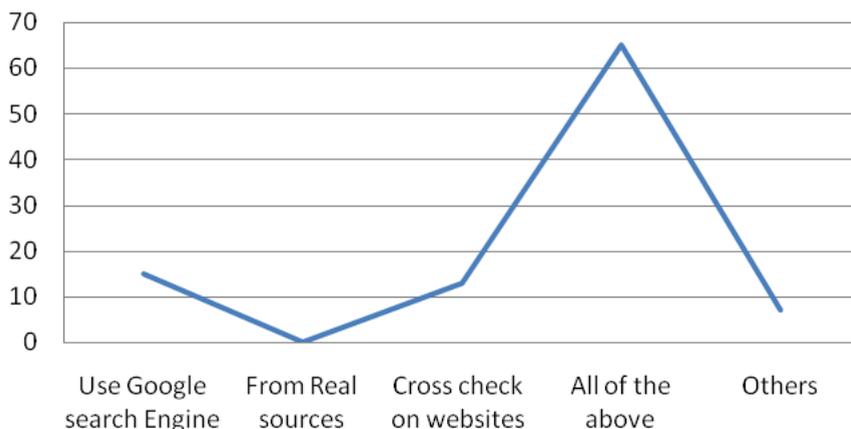


Figure 11. Means of verification of fake news stories, % of respondents

**Verification of fake news stories.** Figure 11 shows how respondents verify fake news stories on social media platforms. Out of the total respondents, 15% of respondents use the Google search engine for verification, while 13% of respondents cross-check fake news on websites, and 7% of respondents go with other methods of fact-checking rather than the given option in the questionnaire. Though, 65% of respondents used all these methods for fact-checking and verification of fake news stories on various social media platforms. This study reveals that respondents use mixed methods of fake news verification.

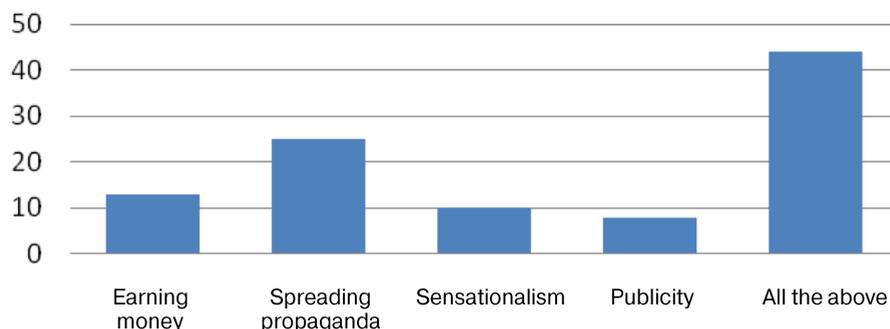
**Preventing measures to decline the transmission of a fake news story.** In the Table, the researchers mentioned the various prevention methods of fake news received through the data of the questionnaire respondents who shared numerous methods for preventing fake news on social media platforms. These prevention methods can help various social media users protect themselves from the trap of fake news content.

**Prevention methods**

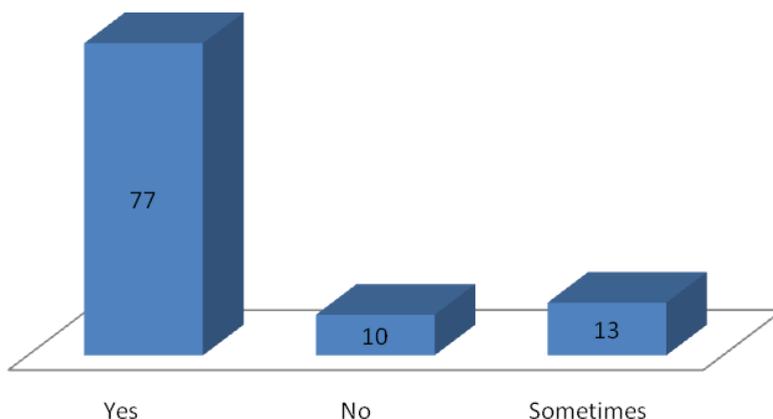
Track and verify the source before transmission	Should not follow the fake accounts
Use Google for cross check	If any news come on your mobile first check
Alert the audience and their audience that the news item they shared is false	the news that the news is true or false after verification suggest it to others
Cross check and verification from reliable sources before sharing	Getting news from reputed sources, go directly to the credible websites, Google it, recognize
Controlled by government	option from fact checking
Every post should be checked for its validity before being share	It very hard to stop the transmission of fake news we must make people aware that they can point
Fake accounts should be remove	out which news is true or false
Aware the society and knowledge of media literacy	It rules should be add
Should not believe blindly on such news	Government should take preventive measure to stop fake news

**The main motive behind the transmission of fake news.** Figure 12 shows the motive behind the fake news transmission of the fake news paddlers. Out of the total respondents, 13% of respondents think that people used fake news for earning, 25% of respondents believed people distributed fake news to spread propaganda, 10% respondents – to spread sensationalism, and 8% respondents think, people spread fake news for publicity. 44% of respondents mark the option “All the above”, which means they think, that fake news paddlers used fake news for profit, spreading propaganda, sensationalism, and publicity, that is the reason for fake news spreading.

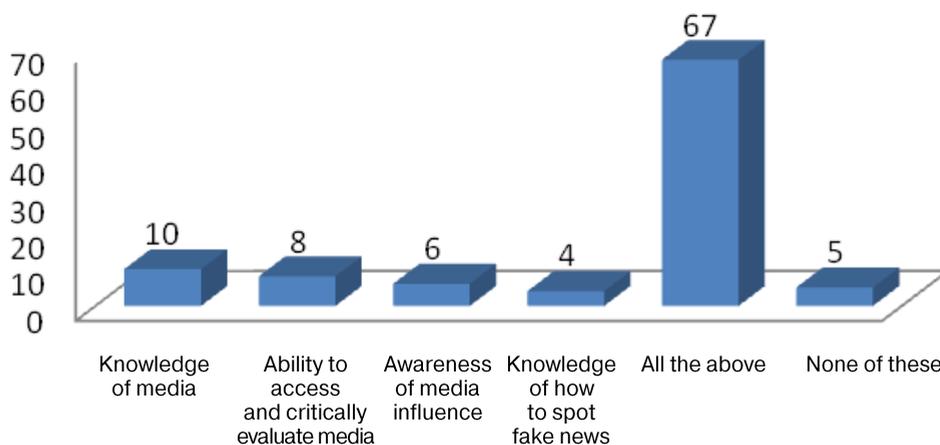
**Knowledge of media literacy.** Figure 13 shows how many respondents know about media literacy, 77% of respondents mark option “Yes”, which means most of the respondents know about media literacy, while 10% of respondents mark option “No”, and 13% of respondent mark option “Sometimes”. Data shows that the maximum number of respondents know about media literacy.



**Figure 12.** Motives behind the fake news transmission, % of respondents



**Figure 13.** Knowledge of media literacy, % of respondents

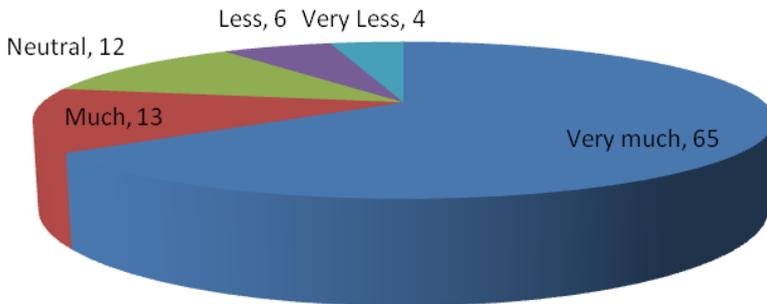


**Figure 14.** Understanding of media literacy, % of respondents

**Understanding of media literacy.** In this question, researchers asked the respondents about their knowledge and perception of media (Figure 14). A majority of respondents mark the option “All the above”. 67% of respondents think that media literacy is “Knowledge of media”, while 10% of respondents mark the op-

tion “Knowledge of media”, 8% of respondents mark the option “Ability to access and critically evaluate media”, 6% of respondents mark the option “Awareness of media influence”, and 4% of respondents mark the option “Knowledge of how to spot fake news”. But most of the respondents have sufficient knowledge of media literacy.

***Lack of media literacy is the biggest cause of fake news.*** This question is based on five pointers Likert scale (Figure 15). 65% of respondents “Very much agree” that lack of media literacy is the biggest cause of fake news, while many respondents “Agree for same”. 35% of respondents “Very less” and “Less” agree that lack of media literacy is not a cause of fake news. Thus, a majority of respondents believe that a lack of media literacy is the biggest cause of fake news.



**Figure 15.** Lack of media literacy as the cause of fake news, % of respondents

## Results

1. This study shows that the maximum number of respondents used various social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. They spend 2 hours on average per day on different social media platforms.

2. 80% of respondents in this study faced fake news on various social media platforms. It means the circulation of fake news over social media platforms is very high. Most respondents believed that most fake news circulated across all social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. But 34% of respondents mark WhatsApp that the most fake news spread across WhatsApp.

3. 70% think that most political-related fake news circulated across the various social media platforms in all media formats, i.e. photo, text, audio, and video. It means fake news paddling all forms of content and spreading fakes across many social media platforms.

4. 79% of respondents know about the fact-checking verification methods of fake news. 65% of respondents verify information through the Google search engine, trustworthy news sources, cross-checking on websites and other sources, and some respondents use different methods or sources for fake news verification.

5. 44% of respondents believe that the reason behind the spreading of fake news across social media platforms is for profit, spreading propaganda, sensationalism, and publicity.

6. 77% of respondents have proper knowledge and awareness of media literacy. 65% of respondents very much agree with the statement of lack of media literacy is the biggest cause of fake news.

## Conclusion

Nowadays, everyone is connected through various social media platforms for different purposes. This study's results also highlighted that most respondents used social media platforms for chatting, communication, information, and entertainment purposes. They know about fake news, fact-checking, and media literacy. Respondents admitted that most fake or false news is transmitted over social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, etc. It means that social media users have to be trained in fact-checking and media literacy education. The government should take the initiative and create a frame for detecting fake news. If social media users have the knowledge and awareness of fake news and fact-checking they cannot fall into the trap of fake news peddlers.

Social media created an information echo chamber on social media platforms. So, we must identify the proper sources to get the correct information or to get into the trap of fake news. We should also make a habit to check several news sources to make sure we're receiving accurate, impartial information, engaging in dialogue with others who hold opposing viewpoints, and presenting new ideas with accuracy, tolerance, and respect.<sup>6</sup> These things also help us get out of the information echo chambers that social media platforms are overloaded with.

**Limitations of the study.** This study has some own limitations. This study was conducted on a sample size of 100 and a pre-defined group of social media sites. Further, this study may also be conducted on a big sample size among the different groups.

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