The impact of fake news being viral on social media on the mind-set of users - a case of politics related fake news

Abstract

The proposed media study is based upon evaluating the effect of fake news on the social media towards the mind-set of the concerned users in the case of UK politics. The past literature revealed that fake news is not noteworthy for the mental wellbeing; however, the research will predominantly be based upon primary data through focus groups and the users of UK related social media will be approached and their respective responses will be gathered to depict the overall impact considerably.

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Research background and motivation for the study

Across the globe, fake news has had devastating effects on the concerned individuals. The nature of social media is specifically linked with viral elements and the spread of the knowledge can be intensified due to easier accessibility and maximum usage across the entities. Social media tends to serve as the least trusted platform when it comes to presenting a particular knowledge. The exaggeration of the news is certainly evident through social media platforms and it leads towards uncertainty in the concerned element. Moreover, the fake news is difficult to control when an open sourced platform is required to be deployed (Statista, 2022). In addition, Khan and Michalas (2021) presented that the social media is relatively different from the conventional media platforms. The spread of fake news is relatively faster through social media and it reflects upon increased level of misinformation about any kind of political or health related agenda. The reason is that the social media related campaigns are specifically dependent upon the input from monetary basis. Thus, it can be ascertained that the early detection and the overall spread of fake news is required to be managed. In the case of political fake news, the attitude towards a particular political agenda or a political party can be transformed; therefore, the main motivation of the proposed study is to determine whether the inclusion of fake news is impacted on the mental state of the users and how devastating are the impacts being related to it. Moreover, Olan and Suklan (2022) presented that the political outcomes and effects of social media-based fake news are quite detrimental to the cause of public as the party agenda has been emphasized through targeted advertisements and the concerned entities have been tapped accordingly. Furthermore, the case of 2016 US presidential elections is evident in this regard. The author claims that the true and fake news are two broader perspectives which has been urged by the social media platforms to highlight. This means that since the emergence of social media based political campaigning, there are two different set of beliefs particularly in the case of fake and true news which is required to be deployed in a considerable manner. In addition, the social media makes it easier to target certain set of individuals in the case of fake news and desired outcomes cannot be attained on the basis of it. The penetration rate of the users of social media in the UK is considerably high. In terms of numerical value, the penetration rate is around 84.3 % and it is considerably on a higher side (Statista, 2022b). Moreover, there are wide range of active users on social media; thus, it can be

ascertained that the mind-set evaluation of the UK users related to political campaigning is an important motivation of the media-related research being carried out.

The research of CITS (2022) indicated that the dangers of fake news are certainly there and they can somehow impact on the social elements under consideration. For instance, the existence of fake news leads towards uncertainty as it increases the level of social conflict and the trust of the people towards the news platforms available on social media tends to decline in a considerable manner. It has been affirmed that social media creates the basis of uncertainty and there is a clear cut indication of motivation a particular group towards the political agendas without giving them the actual picture and the trueness of the campaign is more likely to be scrutinized considerably. On the other hand, Allen and Howland (2014) elaborated that the consumption of handheld devices and increased use of technological gadgets has increased the severity of such fake news for the people across the globe. The geographical reach of social media related fake news is somehow quite devastating; thus, the consequences are also severe. Therefore, the role of wisdom is somehow nullified when social media comes into play related to the online affairs. From a broader context, the overall thinking patterns of the users of social media changes dramatically and the aspect of rationality is also impacted negatively on the basis of it. Science (2022) highlighted that the human beings or the users of social media tend to serve as the main catalyst for sharing of the fake news in a considerable manner. It has been ascertained that the fake news is spread by the people who consume it; thus, the basis of rationality and reliance on limited facts has been impacted on the basis of it in a considerable manner. The overall democratic structure is impacted considerably through the inclusion of fake news in the overall setup. Desired outcomes are relatively difficult to attain because of the speed at which the information is being spread through social media (Chuai and Zhao, 2022).

Research aim, objectives and questions

The proposed research in the media domain will specifically address the research aim of reviewing the effect of political fake news on the mind-set of the users of social media. The region for exploration is the UK; therefore, the political news elements related to the UK politics will be evaluated. On the basis of it, following research objectives will be addressed.

- To explore the consequences of fake news presented through social media
- To evaluate the impact of fake news spread through social media on the mental state of users
- To comprehend the effect of fake news spread through social media of the UK politics on the mental wellbeing of the users
- To provide recommendations on how to control the state of affairs related to the fake news spread in a comprehensive manner

On the basis of the above objectives, following research questions will be addressed accordingly.

- What are the negative outcomes of fake news through social media?
- What is the effect of fake news spread through social media on the mental state of users?
- How can the fake news spread through social media of the UK politics impacts on the mental wellbeing of the social media users?
- What are the recommendations on how to control the state of affairs related to the fake news spread?

Preliminary literature review

In order to understand the basis of sharing of social media related news is reliant on the *honeycomb* framework. The framework illustrates that there are seven different blocks or elements through which a user is compelled to share a particular set of information in a considerable manner. The initial focus is upon building up a viable identity by sharing a particular news and get popular followed by the intention to involve in conversations in a considerable manner. It has been depicted that the sharing and presence of the relevant material related to fake news tends to compel the individuals towards it. Moreover, the relationship, reputation and groups tend to serve as the last three elements from the framework and they reflect upon the fact that the relationship building exercise is important to deploy in order to ensure a viable spread of a particular news (fake or true) (Talwar and Dhir, 2020). The aspect of online trust is quite important when it comes to analysing the effects of fake news spread. The reason is that many users on social media reflect upon online trust despite of the inaccuracy of the social media related information in a considerable manner. It depends upon the social media penetration rate; however, there are countries where the spread of

fake information is considered a crucial element because of the rise in internet and social media penetration rate. In the vicinity of UK, the overall penetration rate is considerably high as highlighted in this regard. So, it can be affirmed that the evaluation of the fake news and its consequences is important to carry out (Obada and Dabija, 2022). In addition, Rocha and Moura (2021) reviewed that the fake news spread through social media reflects upon unclear information. The misinformation leads towards uncertainty and panic. It is somehow negative element when it comes to the alignment of the mental wellbeing accordingly. The panic being caused in this regard is required to be evaluated accordingly. On the other hand, Petrova and Enikolopov (2020) presented that the practices related to surveillance of social media fake news as well as the ability to disseminate the information is crucial; however, it is not being carried out by the core entities. In terms of reviewing the state of affairs in the case of political campaigning, the anti-political campaigns can nullify the position of other party; therefore, the actual trueness and facts cannot be justified resulting in impacting on the mind-set of the users considerably.

The research of Allcott and Gentzkow (2018) presented that the credibility of the social media platforms have been changing ever so slightly. The importance of this argument comes into play after the 2016 election campaign in the US. The reason is that the credibility of Facebook was impacted due to the fake spread of news; however, the credibility of Twitter has emerged as a viable setting after the 2016 elections. This means that the choice of the platform matters a lot in order to change the dynamics of the mind. The author highlights that the presence of fake news through Twitter is reviewed differently as compared to that on Facebook. On the other hand, Azzimonti and Fernandes (2021) clarified that the presence of bots on the social media can have a diverging effect on the users. The reason is that the inclusion of bots leads towards uncertainty and they are the ones that tend to use automated interventions to control the spread of the fake news and the mind-set of the users is aligned on the basis of it. Apart from this, almost 15 % of the users on social media believe that the information being presented is relatively true. From a broader context, the aspect of polarization is evident in the case of fake news spread through social media regarding any matter. The aspect of polarization is evident because there is uncertainty in the thought process of a particular set of audience. There is always a clear case of anti and pro arguments being generated related to a particular set of information; thus, it impacts on the existing state of affairs related to the information about the political news. In negation to this, Choi and Lee

(2021) illustrated that the aspect of network heterogeneity through the use of social media increases the risk of confusion in the mind-set of the entities. The variation in the concerned information certainly makes it difficult to organize the information in the best possible way and it is required to be utilized accordingly. The overall functioning of democracy in this situation is hampered and it can be ascertained that the network management can be aligned accordingly. Furthermore, the depiction of news coverage on the basis of mental models is important to review. The role of mental models is important in this regard to review whether the thinking patterns are aligned considerably or not. Moreover, the mental models approach affirm that the individual behaviour is impacted due to the personality dimensions. The variation in the personality dimensions tend to compel the concerned entities to excel in the desired field. Not only this, the creation of a real and imaged situation somehow matters a lot in this regard and it can be reviewed that the core interventions on the basis of human behaviours somehow matters a lot to assess the situation accordingly (Kim and Xiaong, 2021). The depiction of reality through the information presented on social media matters a lot. The existence of any kind of false or fake news on social media leads towards uncertainty as it becomes relatively difficult to comply with the set of information. Not only this, the perception of reality tends to change considerably due to the fake news under consideration. In addition, the development of conspiracies among the entities leads towards overall uncertainty and the mental confusion tends to get the better of the entities in this regard. Not only this, the flow of information is quite wide spread and a controlled intervention is difficult to deploy in this regard. Moreover, the societal norms are changing considerably due to the variation in the fake news under consideration. The deception mind set being created and the transformation of the thinking patterns through the use of fake news is predominant in this regard (Wu and Eric, 2022). Allcott (2017) presented that the focus of the concerned entities is to deploy the basis of ideological segregation through the fake news intervention. It definitely leads towards uncertainty and the thinking patterns of the entities is diversified on the basis of it. Overall control of the proceedings is also harmed considerably. Buchanan (2020) elaborated that the sense of urgency among the individuals to share information about the fake news agenda is definitely there and it can be ascertained that the basis of self-reported likelihood of such information gets the better of the individuals reflecting on their concerned mind set in a considerable manner.

Methodological patterns to be followed

When it comes to determining the methodological patterns of the proposed media study, the utilization of the interpretivism philosophy will be considered noteworthy. The reason is that the nature of reality will be considered to be multiple. From this perspective, it is evident that the role of in-depth information about the fake news and the human behaviour observation holds the key to reflect upon favourable returns (Mertens, 2015). The subject matter is reliant upon reviewing whether or not the existing state of affairs of fake news through social media is impacting on the mental elements of users or not. For this purpose, the choice of interpretivism philosophy will be influential as subjective knowledge can be gathered predominantly (Zikmund, Babin, Carr and Griffin, 2013). The approach concerning the proposed media study is inductive in nature. The inductive approach comes into play because the generation of subjective knowledge is reviewed. The lack of consensus towards testing the assumptions through hypothesis has compelled the researcher to opt for inductive approach. Moreover, the specific observations being gathered from the respondents about the fake news being spread and the level of polarization can reflect upon a generalized sense of review. Thus, the adoption of inductive approach will ensure that the specific information being gathered is converted into generalized information in a considerable manner (Wellington and Szczerbinski, 2007). The research design under consideration will be exploratory in nature because limited information is available related to topic of interest in the past literature (Punch, 2009). As in the case of past literature, majority of the depiction is related to the US presidential elections in the year 2016 and the evaluation of the topic has been based considerably towards it such as in the case of Olan and Suklan (2022) and Allcott and Gentzkow (2018); however, the intention to review the British political agenda in the case of Brexit is important to deploy to reflect upon favourable returns. The proposed media study will focus upon exploring relatively new information under consideration. The strategy that will be utilized is ethnography as the texts will be explored accordingly.

The data collection will be primary in nature and it will be supported by a research instrument of focus groups. The role of focus groups will be considered pivotal in the proposed media study because it will help the researcher to note down the key elements that have been impacting on the mental elements of the entities. As a matter of fact, the in-depth insights about a particular problem and its severity can be identified in a considerable manner with the help of it. The utilization of

focus group will work in favour of the researcher as it somehow creates a pathway for new ideas and relevant approaches to be carried out (Creswell, 2013). The sampling frame will be quite important in this regard as accessibility and joint interactivity for the basis of focus group will be quite important. The researcher will structure few base questions in terms of Brexit to understand whether the mental wellbeing is harmed or not through the Brexit related social media campaigns and the fake news concerning it. The sampling frame will involve the users of social media. The accessibility is an issue; however, the researcher will focus upon approaching the respondents through snowball sampling. The reason is that the media-based connection and media representatives will be targeted. A total of 7 respondents for the focus group will be deployed.

As far as the data analysis is concerned, the researcher will focus upon using thematic analysis as a viable activity. The research is specifically dependent on the extraction of different codes and themes on the basis of which the information is deployed. The themes will be extracted on the basis of responses to create a logical link among the core variables under consideration. The deployment of thematic analysis is influential as it allows the researcher to create a differential pattern of meaning. On the basis of the unique text being recorded through the focus group, the similar level of responses will be reviewed to understand the link between social media fake news in the case of Brexit and how it impacts on the overall proceedings being deployed. The reporting being carried out on the basis of repeated interventions and responses is crucial to assess in this regard and a broader context will be established on the basis of it (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017).

Gantt chart

	1st Oct – 15th Oct 2022	16th Oct – 30th Oct 2022	1st Nov – 15th Nov 2022	16th Nov – 30th Nov	1st Dec 2022 – 15th Dec 2022	16th Dec – 30th Dec	1st Jan – 15th Jan	16th Jan – 28th Jan

				ov 2022		ec 2022	20 22	n 2022
Structuring the background of this research on the basis of previous information	▨							
Critical assessment of past literature	▨	▨						
Structuring of methodology through research onion			▨					
Extraction of relevant primary data through focus group				▨	▨	▨		
Thematic analysis + patterns analysis					▨	▨		
Discussion related to the findings						▨	▨	
finalization of the research								▨

Figure 1: Gantt Chart

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