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FAKE NEWS ON CAMPUS: GAUGING THE LEVEL OF SHARING AMONG MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract: *Text font is Times New Roman, 12 pt size, italic, and justify the alignment. This study investigates the prevalence of fake news sharing among Malaysian university students in light of the increasing reliance on social media as a primary information source. The spread of misinformation poses a significant challenge to public trust and media credibility, especially among digitally active youth. The research addresses the problem that many university students lack the critical skills needed to verify online content, making them vulnerable to both the consumption and dissemination of fake news. The primary objective was to assess the level of fake news sharing and identify patterns of behaviour related to information verification. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was used, and data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms to 449 university students between January and February 2025. Using a five-point Likert scale, responses were analysed with IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. Findings revealed a high level of fake news sharing (M = 3.71, SD = 1.18), particularly among younger respondents aged 18 to 30, along with a significant reliance on social media and limited content verification practices. The study contributes to the growing discourse on digital media responsibility and emphasizes the urgency of implementing targeted media literacy programs within higher education institutions. Future research should consider broader demographic factors such as income and educational background and adopt*

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qualitative or mixed-method approaches to explore underlying psychological and sociocultural influences.

Keywords: *Fake news, University students, social media, Media literacy, Misinformation behaviour*

Introduction

Fake news has become a pressing issue in Malaysia, particularly with the widespread use of social media. The swift dissemination of inaccurate information has implications for public perception, undermines social cohesion, and raises questions regarding the credibility of media sources. Amanda Siddharta (2022) delineates statistical data that elucidates the outcomes of an inquiry regarding the perceived frequency of "fake news" on digital news platforms and websites in Malaysia, as sourced from Ipsos. A notable 70% of Malaysian respondents contended that these online news platforms and websites demonstrated a moderate to significant occurrence of fake news. University students, as prominent participants in the digital landscape, are particularly susceptible to both interacting with and disseminating unverified information. The research by Ibrahim et al. (2023) elucidated that individuals enrolled in higher education institutions, especially those aged below 25, frequently regard misinformation as innocuous, with a considerable number unable to differentiate between verifiable information and fabricated narratives, thereby reflecting a deficient degree of awareness and critical engagement with disinformation. In Indonesia, notwithstanding proficient capabilities in social media utilization, students exhibited a deficiency in self-assurance when it came to differentiating between authentic and fabricated news, underscoring the necessity for specialized media literacy initiatives (Syam & Nurrahmi, 2020).

According to the study by Silveira and Gancho, (2021) Portuguese students predominantly utilize digital platforms to obtain news, with a subset possessing the capability to discern misinformation based on its format and content, whereas others unknowingly propagate it. This study aims to determine the level of fake news sharing among university students. It is anticipated that the research outcomes will unveil a moderate to elevated degree of dissemination of counterfeit news among higher education students in Malaysia. The findings may also illuminate significant trends in sharing conduct, such as dependence on social media as a primary information source and insufficient verification prior to dissemination. These revelations can contribute to the development of digital literacy initiatives and awareness campaigns, which aim to mitigate misinformation and foster responsible media engagement among the youth within higher education institutions.

Literature Review

The phrase "fake news" has undergone substantial evolution throughout history, and its interpretation differs across various contexts and scholarly inquiries. Typically, fake news is perceived as a category of disinformation that is intentionally fabricated to deceive or influence audiences by portraying erroneous or misleading information as authentic news. This occurrence is not a novel phenomenon; however, its ubiquity and ramifications have been significantly intensified by contemporary technological advancements and social media platforms. Disinformation disseminated via online platforms, commonly referred to as "fake news," encompasses statements that are either misleading or entirely false, irrespective of their connection to actual occurrences. This form of communication is meticulously crafted to deceive or sway a targeted demographic by emulating a journalistic format, frequently with the objective of accruing clicks, shares, advertising revenue, or exerting ideological influence

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(Baptista & Gradim, 2022). Throughout history, misinformation has been employed for a multitude of objectives, including economic exploitation, defamation of individuals, and as a strategic manoeuvre in warfare. It has served as an instrument in media competition and pseudoscience, with print publications historically utilizing the terminology to undermine rivals and assert their dominance over factuality (Romaguera, 2023). According to Wang (2020) the phenomenon of fake news is frequently conflated with associated constructs such as news satire, yellow journalism, misinformation, and propaganda. The delineations among these constructs are often ambiguous, thereby complicating the process of differentiating fake news from other varieties of erroneous information. The study by Arin et al. (2023) indicates that the unintentional dissemination of misinformation occurs with greater frequency than intentional dissemination, particularly among younger and right-leaning participants within the United Kingdom. In contrast, in Germany, a mere 6% of respondents report inadvertently sharing three or more instances of misinformation, as opposed to 13% in the UK. The incidence of unintentional sharing diminishes with advancing age, whereas intentional sharing is significantly elevated among younger demographics in the UK. In summary, individuals with right-wing affiliations appear to engage in the sharing of misinformation more frequently. The study by Unfried and Priebe (2024) found that actual sharing rates of fake news articles among Facebook users in sub-Saharan Africa are substantially higher than those reported in developed countries. Most of this sharing occurs accidentally rather than deliberately. The research highlights that while older individuals and those who are risk-loving tend to share fake news deliberately, accidental sharing is more common among older males with high levels of trust in institutions.

The prevalence of disseminating misinformation is profoundly affected by individual political ideologies and personality characteristics, with a particular emphasis on the trait of conscientiousness. Empirical evidence suggests that conservatives exhibiting low levels of conscientiousness demonstrate a heightened propensity to share false information, whereas individuals with elevated conscientiousness, irrespective of their political alignment, show no significant variance in their behaviours related to sharing (Lawson & Kakkar, 2022). The research by Huţul et al. (2024) elucidated that the propensity to disseminate false information exhibits a positive correlation with advancing age, suggesting that older demographics demonstrate a higher likelihood of engaging in the sharing of misinformation. Furthermore, it was observed that this phenomenon is disproportionately prevalent among male participants. Individuals who recognize a discord between the European Union and Ukraine, in addition to harbouring suspicions regarding ulterior motives behind the EU's endorsement of Ukraine, are also more predisposed to propagate false narratives. Collectively, these variables significantly influence the extent of misinformation sharing identified within the studied cohort.

Methodology

The current study “Fake News on Campus: Gauging the Level of Sharing Among Malaysian University Students,”. This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional design, which involves collecting data from a population or a representative subset at a single point in time. This methodological approach is effective in assessing the prevalence of specific conditions or characteristics within a defined population (Ziauddin et al., 2023). Data for this study were collected between January 2025 and February 2025 among university students.

This study utilized an online questionnaire distributed via Google Forms to collect data from university students across Malaysia. The use of an online platform was chosen for its practicality, broad reach, and efficiency in obtaining responses within the designated data

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collection period from January 2025 to February 2025. To assess the key variables of interest, the questionnaire employed a five-point Likert scale, which enabled respondents to express their levels of agreement or disagreement with various statements. Specifically, the scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A score of 1 indicated the highest level of dissonance or disagreement with the presented statements, followed by 2 for general disagreement, 3 for neutral responses, 4 for agreement, and 5 representing strong agreement or endorsement. This scale allowed the researcher to group and analyse items of significant relevance to the research objectives. Strategies have been formulated to identify and alleviate Common Method Bias (CMB), which poses a considerable challenge in scholarly research, especially in contexts where self-reported metrics are employed, as it may result in illusory correlations that fail to accurately represent genuine relationships among constructs. Chang et al. (2020) stated to mitigate the prevalence of common method bias, assurances of confidentiality and anonymity were provided to participants in order to encourage candid responses. Due to the absence of a comprehensive sampling frame of university students in Malaysia, the study employed a non-probability sampling technique, specifically convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling method where members of the target population are selected based on practical criteria such as geographical proximity, availability, and willingness to participate (Farrokhi & Mahmoudi-Hamidabad, 2012) .This approach was considered appropriate given the logistical limitations and the need to reach a broad and diverse group of participants within a limited timeframe. Recent advancements indicate that scholars should to ascertain the appropriate sample size via power analysis (Memon et al., 2020).

Furthermore, within the basis of G*Power analysis, particularly in relation to the F-Test concerning Linear Multiple Regression: Fixed model with R2 deviation from zero, it was ascertained that a minimum sample size of 160 is requisite but the study successfully gathered responses from 449 participants, thereby increasing the statistical reliability and generalizability of the findings. The data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26, with a particular focus on evaluating the level of fake news sharing among university students. To complement this, the study also conducted descriptive statistical analysis based on the respondents' age. This allowed the researcher to observe the distribution of participants across different age groups and understand the demographic composition of the sample. These age-based insights were crucial for identifying trends and drawing comparisons related to fake news sharing behaviour among students of varying ages.

Data Analysis

Table 1. Level of Fake News Sharing

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sharingfakenews	449	3.71	1.18
Valid N (listwise)	449		

Table 2. Distribution of the Means Scores on 5-Point Likert Scale

Mean Value	Estimation Degree
1.00 - 1.80	Very Low
1.81 - 2.60	Low
2.61 - 3.40	Average
3.41 - 4.20	High
4.21 - 5.00	Very High

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Table 3. Level of Fake News Sharing (Age)

Age	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
18 – 25	135	30.1	30.1	30.1
26 - 30	132	29.4	29.4	59.5
31 - 35	66	14.7	14.7	74.2
36 - 40	56	12.5	12.5	86.6
41 and above	60	13.4	13.4	100.0
Total	449	100.0	100.0	

The multivariate assumption was rigorously evaluated to determine the likelihood of any breaches in the foundational premises pertinent to multivariate analysis. Furthermore, the investigation was directed towards assessing the normal distribution of the dataset, the homogeneity of variance, and the existence of linear relationships which provide the threshold value. An evaluation of the aggregate degree of fake news dissemination among individuals was conducted via a survey encompassing a total of 449 respondents. The mean level of fake news sharing was at Mean 3.71 (SD=1.18), as illustrated in Table 1. This measurement signifies a high propensity among the respondents to sharing fake news, based on the classification criteria outlined in Table 2. The diversity in responses further implies that while certain individuals display circumspect online conduct, others are more susceptible to inadvertently or deliberately distributing unverified information. This observation underscores the significance of media literacy initiatives in the contemporary digital landscape. Given the rapid nature of social media and digital communication, a moderate-to-high mean score accentuates the urgent necessity for programs designed to enhance information verification competencies and promote responsible sharing behaviours. As demonstrated in Table 3, the demographic distribution of respondents across various age brackets indicates a comparatively equitable participation between younger and older cohorts.

The most significant segment of participants was individuals within the age range of 18–25 years (30.1%), closely succeeded by those in the 26–30 years bracket (29.4%). Collectively, these two younger demographics constitute nearly 60% of the overall sample, suggesting that young adults represent a crucial demographic in comprehending and addressing the phenomenon of fake news behaviour 31–35 age demographic accounted for 14.7%, while the 36–40 bracket comprised 12.5%, and individuals aged 41 and older constituted 13.4% of the respondents. This age segmentation indicates that the dissemination of fake news is not restricted to a singular demographic but rather extends across all age categories. While the dataset does not furnish mean scores categorized by age group, the substantial representation of younger adults particularly those under 30 within the dataset implies that initiatives aimed at enhancing media literacy and addressing fake news may be most effectively directed at this particular age segment.

Discussion

The results of this investigation underscore a significant prevalence of the dissemination of misinformation among higher education students in Malaysia. As delineated in Table 1, the cumulative mean score for the sharing of false news was recorded at 3.71 (SD = 1.18), which categorically aligns with the “high” classification as defined in Table 2. This finding intimates that, on average, participants concede to participating in the distribution of unverified or misleading content, be it through deliberate intent or inadvertent action. The standard deviation reveals a degree of variability within the dataset, suggesting that while a segment of the population displays prudent sharing practices, others exhibit a pronounced propensity toward

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the propagation of false information. This variability is particularly alarming in the current digital epoch, characterized by the rapid and extensive dissemination of misinformation. These findings resonate with the overarching global apprehension regarding digital misinformation and imply that Malaysian university students are susceptible to its ramifications. The elevated mean score observed necessitates the immediate implementation of structured media literacy initiatives, which could empower individuals especially those within academic environments with critical analytical skills and the capacity to authenticate information prior to its dissemination. Within this framework, fostering ethical digital citizenship and improving information verification practices emerge as crucial methodologies to mitigate the virulent spread of false news across social media platforms. The results obtained from this investigation align with antecedent studies, which similarly document a significant prevalence of the dissemination of misleading information among.

The research by Martin et al. (2024) indicated that a substantial 75% of university scholars disclosed their involvement in precarious news dissemination practices that facilitate the proliferation of misinformation. Furthermore, a notable 83% of the respondents exhibited an inability to discern a misinformation narrative, thereby highlighting a considerable prevalence of misinformation sharing within this population. Another study by Atikuzzaman (2022) indicated that 61% of higher education students in Bangladesh encountered misinformation pertaining to COVID-19 disseminated through social media platforms. The scholarly article by Habes et al. (2023) reveals that the prevalence of disseminating misinformation, commonly referred to as fake news, is significantly high among university students in Jordan. The demographic analysis presented in Table 3 further enhances this interpretation. Young adults within the age brackets of 18–25 (30.1%) and 26–30 (29.4%) constituted the predominant segment of the sample, together accounting for nearly 60% of all participants. This observation accentuates the reality that young adults are not only markedly active in online spaces but are also substantially engaged in content dissemination. Consequently, they represent a pivotal demographic for initiatives aimed at curtailing the proliferation of misinformation. The prominent involvement of this age group in the digital communication sphere positions them as both potential victims and conduits of false news. Although the current study did not calculate mean scores for fake news dissemination segmented by age group, the age distribution yields compelling justification for the assertion that any media literacy campaigns ought to be primarily customized for younger adults, particularly university students, who are heavily immersed in social media and digital interactions. Nevertheless, the representation of older age demographics (31–35: 14.7%, 36–40: 12.5%, 41 and above: 13.4%) further indicates that the issue of misinformation transcends generational boundaries.

Therefore, educational initiatives should remain inclusive and adaptable across all age categories, as the impact of misinformation is pervasive throughout the lifespan. The findings of this study align with existing literature that highlights a significant level of engagement with misinformation among university students. For instance, Lan and Tung (2024) elucidate that university students are generally aware of the presence of misinformation on platforms like TikTok, indicating a substantial interaction with such content. Although their study does not specify the exact age range of those disseminating misinformation, the focus on university students strongly implies that individuals aged 18 to 24 years are actively involved in both consuming and spreading unverified information. This is consistent with the current study's results, which show that a majority of respondents nearly 60% fall within this age bracket and report high levels of fake news sharing. Supporting this view, Plaza (2023) asserts that younger college students are particularly vulnerable to the spread of misinformation due to their heavy

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reliance on digital platforms for communication and information access. Similarly, Pérez-Escoda et al. (2021) found that Generation Z students in Spain (aged 18 to 22) demonstrated a low level of trust in social media despite depending on it as their primary source of information, especially for politically and socially driven content in the post-COVID-19 context. On the other hand, Loos and Nijenhuis (2020) highlight that while young people are highly engaged with digital content, older adults were more likely to interact with and disseminate political disinformation, especially on platforms like Facebook.

These insights collectively suggest that although misinformation cuts across age groups, university-aged individuals remain a critical demographic due to their active online presence and potential influence as content sharers. Therefore, the findings of the current study are not only aligned with but also reinforce a growing body of empirical evidence emphasizing the need for age-targeted media literacy strategies. Overall, the findings of this investigation indicate a burgeoning digital challenge characterized by the dissemination of misinformation, particularly among the younger demographic. The elevated mean level of fake news dissemination and the preponderance of youth within the sample cohort underscore a pressing necessity to integrate digital media literacy into educational frameworks, particularly at the university level. Subsequent research endeavors may delve into the foundational psychological or sociocultural determinants that drive fake news sharing behaviors and contemplate the implementation of age-segmented analyses to enhance the specificity of intervention strategies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research elucidates significant insights into the prevalence of the dissemination of false information among university students in Malaysia, indicating a predominantly elevated level of interaction with unverified data. The results underscore an urgent necessity for tailored media literacy programs, particularly for younger adults who are extensively integrated within digital ecosystems. Importantly, the results also reveal notable behavioral patterns, including a pronounced reliance on social media as a principal source of information and a propensity for inadequate verification prior to disseminating content. These findings are pivotal as they advance the formulation of more efficacious digital literacy initiatives and awareness campaigns, particularly within higher education institutions, where the promotion of responsible media engagement is of paramount importance.

However, this investigation is constrained by certain limitations. The study was geographically limited to Malaysian university students, which may impede the applicability of the findings to alternative regions or demographic groups. Consequently, future inquiries should contemplate broadening the geographical parameters to encompass international or cross-cultural comparisons. Additionally, subsequent investigations could examine other demographic factors such as socioeconomic status, educational background, or academic discipline, to attain a more nuanced comprehension of the elements influencing the sharing of false information. While this study utilized a quantitative, cross-sectional methodology, further research may employ qualitative techniques, such as interviews or focus groups, to investigate more profoundly the underlying motivations, attitudes, and social influences that propel misinformation behavior. A mixed-methods strategy could also enhance the analysis, facilitating both statistical generalization and contextual richness. Overall, this study establishes a foundation for future inquiries and contributes to the expansive discourse on digital accountability and media literacy in the contemporary information era.

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