

FACT-CHECKING MEDIA INFORMATION LITERACY IN THE 'POST-TRUTH ERA'**Kawaljit Singh^{1*}, Dr. Harish Kumar²**

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ABSTRACT

In today's digital age, combating internet disinformation has become a significant challenge for society and fact-checkers alike. The proliferation of social media platforms and the ease with which information can be shared has made it increasingly difficult to distinguish legitimate news from fake news. Unfortunately, low levels of media literacy and cultural biases are shaping people's actions and decisions, which in turn are influencing the spread of disinformation. The post-truth ecosystem and polarizing propaganda are working together to divide communities, creating far-reaching consequences. This has been particularly evident during events such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict and the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, where legitimate news was at times overshadowed by unverified content on the internet. The spread of misinformation about fake remedies and conspiracy theories has caused widespread panic, concern, and fear. To address these challenges, this study takes an in-depth look at media literacy techniques to counter fake news. It evaluates various strategies that can be used to enhance media literacy, such as critical thinking, fact-checking, and source verification. The study also examines the role of technology in combating disinformation, including artificial intelligence and machine learning algorithms that can help identify and remove fake news from social media platforms. Overall, the study underscores the importance of media literacy in combating internet disinformation and highlights the need for more education and awareness around this issue. By improving media literacy and encouraging critical thinking skills, we can help individuals make more informed decisions and reduce the impact of fake news on society.

Keywords:- Fact-Checking Media Literacy, Post-Truth Society, Post-Truth Era, Cybersecurity, Digital Literacy

Introduction

In today's media environment, it is becoming more and more difficult to discern reliable news sources from the abundance of fake news circulating on the internet. The prevalence of false information is shaping public perceptions and making it challenging for individuals to access truthful news. To address this issue, citizens need to embrace a structured approach to media literacy, enabling them to filter out misinformation and disinformation. Equipping themselves with the skills to critically analyze media and understand the motives behind organizations spreading false information is essential in navigating today's complex media landscape. By enhancing their critical thinking skills through critical media literacy, media consumers can effectively combat fake information and promote the truth (Barton, 2019). The importance of digital media literacy cannot be overstated as it empowers individuals to discern the truth from falsehoods when consuming news and information through digital media. With

the internet being a breeding ground for the dissemination of fake news, it is imperative to impart these skills to students and the general public alike, to preempt any negative impact that fake information may have on the social fabric of society (Ikhsan et al., 2021).

Phenomena of ‘Post-Truth Era’

Steve Tesich, a playwright of American-Serbian origin, was the first to coin the term "post-truth". In an article titled "A Government of Lies" that he wrote for The Nation Magazine, he highlighted how the Watergate scandal, the Iraq war, and other corruption cases in America had led to dire consequences. Tesich pointed out how American society had become accustomed to politicians' lies and the concealment of facts, paving the way for a "post-truth era". Ralph Keyes, another American author, built on Tesich's idea in his 2004 book, "The Post-Truth Era", where he described how information could be creatively manipulated to present falsehoods as truth. In 2016, "post-truth" was declared the word of the year by the Oxford Dictionaries, with its usage increasing by a whopping 2000% in media and political conversations (Camacho Martín Montoya, 2019).

Post-Truth Society

In our current media landscape, there appears to be a lack of emphasis on honesty and respect. Those in positions of power, such as editors, journalists, and public intellectuals, have not taken adequate responsibility for the dissemination of information. This has resulted in a rise of misinformation, with citizens consuming content rife with deceit and falsehoods. The prevalence of hate speech and propaganda is alarming, and the spread of alternative facts has led to a deterioration of democratic values. Living in a society where emotions and personal beliefs hold more sway in shaping public opinion than objective facts can be challenging. This is especially true when deeply held beliefs contradict the truth. In this context, truth refers to information that is objective and verifiable. The consequences of such a society are significant, as opinions and fabricated "facts" can undermine healthy governance and society. Although there may be instances where withholding information is necessary, frequently misrepresenting or distorting the truth cannot become the norm in a healthy society. Despite these challenges, it's crucial to have faith that an ethical and truthful leader will emerge, and the truth will ultimately prevail. A robust democratic society is built on such a foundation (Fathul, 2023).

In a post-truth society, truth is often challenged, leading to a highly polarized society. Conflicting scientific opinions can further exacerbate this issue, leading individuals to develop their version of the truth. It's essential to strive for a society where objective facts are valued above personal beliefs to ensure healthy governance and a prosperous society.

There has been a noticeable rise in expressive individualism, causing truth and morality to become detached. A byproduct of this phenomenon is the emergence of a post-truth culture, where subjective feelings and opinions carry a greater weight than objective facts and reality. Adding to this issue are disruptive technologies such as television, the internet, and social media, which offer a conducive environment for disinformation, conspiracy theories, and propaganda to proliferate.

Phenomena of media literacy

The name ‘Digital Literacy’ was chosen by the European Commission for addressing misinformation and fostering digital literacy. Other often-used phrases include ‘Critical Literacy’ and ‘Internet Literacy.’ Critical literacy is the capacity of an individual to seek information, assess, source, and understand texts, utilize the overall picture generated by texts in making decisions, and use what they have learned while dealing with other groups. Multiliteracy refers to the ability to access, integrate, change, generate, present, and evaluate knowledge in a variety of formats, settings, and circumstances, and utilizing a variety of instruments. Multiliteracy promotes critical thinking and learning abilities.

Now it is the need of the hour to have a curriculum in schools where students must be taught media literacy (Kivinen Kari, 2022). Vice President of the European Commission for Values and Transparency, Vera Jourova tweeted on May 27, 2023, 'Bye, bye birdie'. Her contention came across after law authorities found that Twitter does not comply with the country's digital rules. She was alluding to Twitter's decision to withdraw from the EU's Code of Practice on Disinformation. She declared that "we are undoubtedly at a 'peak disinformation' argument, as Russia's propaganda in its war against Ukraine has come to dominate the stage, fresh off the repercussions of the Covid-19 deception and misinformation". Indeed, one of the most effective weapons is misinformation aimed at discouraging popular and political support for Ukraine. She gave an opinion that the current dilemma has been partially explained by the demise of conventional media and the rise of social media as disruptors. It has emerged as a major source of deception and misinformation. The discussion over whether or not to regulate them swiftly shifted to how best to govern them (Brian Fung, 2023).

The Media Literacy Index findings continue to advocate "education before regulation," but legislation appears to be an integral component of the answer to misinformation issues since education techniques take time and can only be effective in conjunction with other measures. Finland ranks top out of 41 nations in the new European Media Literacy Index 2023, with 74 points. Denmark comes in second with 73 points, Norway comes in third with 72 points, Estonia and Sweden come in fourth and fifth with 71 points apiece, and Ireland comes in sixth with 70 points. certain governments may not be addressing but rather producing disinformation. there is a risk that old-fashioned disinformation and misinformation in print and online media controlled by government, political, economic, or other organizations would be overlooked. Now this is the age of 'digital autocracies' throughout the world. The year 2023 brought another challenge like 'Artificial intelligence' and 'Chat GPT' followed by additional tools. However, experts were quick to warn that AI is more likely to exacerbate rather than ease the problem of disinformation. rising societal and political polarisation has been identified as one of the most dangerous consequences of misinformation. This would include broad support for democracy, civic education, and principles, as well as more urgent steps including targeted media literacy instruction as a form of getting immunized against the detrimental impacts of fake news (Lessenski Marin, 2023).

Phenomena of media literacy emerging as a solution to counter 'post-truth' content in all media domains. it is an essential skill to have critical thinking and technical knowledge to identify fake news and all modes of generation of fake content. We need a structured mechanism to develop critical thinking among citizens. For example, the UK Commission which was formed to counter fake news conducted a study in which they found only 2% of children have the ability of critical literacy that they can identify a piece of fake news or real news. For truthful information is essential to have media literacy while navigating online media (National Literacy Trust, 2018). UNESCO published a handbook on Journalism fake news and disinformation which is in the process to translated into 30 languages around the world. it provides a curriculum of media and information literacy to detect information disorder in news information. This curriculum covers human rights literacy and news literacy including journalistic standards. It also includes advertising and computer literacy. MIL educates citizens about information consumption, and evaluating information critically. News information literacy is very specific literacy to understand exploited news information. It helps to identify misinformation and disinformation. This is because humans communicate not only with their minds but also with their emotions. As a result, MIL must pay attention to creating awareness among persons regarding how they respond to news material, as well as their proclivity to lend credibility or not to information regardless of genre cues. MIL should, at its core, provide individuals with insight into their own identity - who they are and who they are becoming, and how this influences their interaction with news and other forms of communication. This module seeks to assist learners in identifying and distinguishing between

journalism and material that appears to be journalism. Individuals who are empowered in this way may be masters of their own identity and identify (Abu-Fadil Magda, 2018)

The International Fact-Checking Network

The International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) by the Poynter institute was established in 2015 to bring together the increasing worldwide community of fact-checkers and advocates for accurate information in the global battle against disinformation. Through networking, capacity building, and cooperation, they empower fact-checkers. Through lobbying, training, and global events, the IFCN promotes fact-checking excellence to over 100 organizations worldwide. Their team of expert's studies trends in the fact-checking industry to provide resources to fact-checkers, contribute to public conversation, and support imaginative projects and initiatives that promote accountability in media. This network has a motto that truth and openness may better equip individuals to navigate dangerous falsehoods. The Poynter Institute's MediaWise is a nonpartisan, nonprofit effort that has already reached 21 million individuals through online educational content and fact-checking training. More than 53 million people have seen MediaWise material. Find Facts Fast is a free text message course meant to assist Americans of all ages and backgrounds in distinguishing between reality and fiction when searching the web. The weeklong course includes daily lectures on essential digital media literacy subjects that have been shown to help consumers easily find accurate information and trustworthy sources on the web and in their social feeds. The MediaWise Teen Fact-Checking Network is a social media-based platform comprised of middle and high school students that refute viral misinformation and give media literacy recommendations. Since 2020, the TFCN, which combines media literacy advice with fact-checking, has been a confirmed signatory to the International Fact-Checking Network's code of principles. Millions of teachers around the world are able to access lesson plans based on the work of MediaWise's Teen Fact-Checking Network to combat fake news (Poynter, n.d.).

Media literacy in India

The audience research team of BBC in a report concluded that the Coverage of 'fake news' in the Indian media has nearly doubled. Between January 2015 and September 2018, there were 47,5437 news stories online regarding 'false news.' in India has covered a wide range of issues. Unsurprisingly, 46% of the coverage is domestic, with 15% dealing with 'false news' in an international setting. One of the most crucial facts to note here is that reporting on 'false news' relating to 'scams and scares' accounts for only 0.7% of the total coverage. Surprisingly, just 9% of the coverage is on remedies to the 'fake news' problem, demonstrating the complexities of the matter. According to research commissioned by the BBC's commercial news arm, Global News Ltd., 79% of the public in six APAC nations were "very concerned" about the spread of false news. Citizens' verification of messages obtained via social media is often low. In some cases, individuals are encouraged to double-check the information they get, and Google is frequently utilized for this purpose (Chakrabarti Santanu, 2018).

DataLEADS' FactShala is a news and information literacy campaign supported by the Google News Initiative. The curriculum teaches individuals in India's small towns and villages how to critically evaluate internet material and separate reality from fiction. FactShala India Media Literacy Network trainers - a passionate team of journalists, media educators, fact-checkers, non-profit workers, and community radio stations - are currently on an objective to empower groups around them with morally responsible approaches to information literacy and critical thinking skills. The network was launched in 2020 by Internews with support from Google.org. FactShala Zonal Hubs provide educational institutions a platform to conduct media literacy programs in their particular regions, encouraging a culture of critical thinking and information literacy. They aim to institutionalize media literacy efforts

and strengthen the capacity of participating institutions in the media literacy landscape through these collaborations. FactShala's fourth Train-the-Trainer program was designed exclusively for representatives and employees of 63 Community Radio stations that broadcast in over 15 languages. The trainers delivered media literacy briefings and narrowcast sessions to their local audiences, equipping them with crucial methods and skills for critical online information consumption (FactShala, 2020).

WhatsApp has partnered with the National Association of Software and Services Companies to provide digital literacy training to combat disinformation. According to WhatsApp, this collaboration intends to reach about 100,000 Indians with training to recognize fraudulent information and give tips and tactics to be secure on WhatsApp. According to the firm, the co-created curriculum encourages. The training will contain real-world examples, tools for verifying forwards, and actions users may take, like as reporting problematic information to fact-checkers and criminal police. The curriculum will be made available in a variety of regional languages. A multifaceted strategy is required to combat fake news. Media organizations and technological platforms should prioritize accuracy and fact-checking in their reporting. Algorithms that detect and flag erroneous content can assist in reducing the spread of fake news on social media sites. Collaborations between media outlets, fact-checking organizations, and technological firms can help to build a more robust ecosystem for information verification (Chaturvedi Anumeha, 2019).

Methodology of fact-checking media literacy

Recent studies suggest that educating individuals on media literacy is a valuable tool in recognizing deceptive stories and unreliable news sources. However, the effectiveness of different teaching methods can vary, and what works for one program may not necessarily work for another. When done correctly, media literacy education empowers individuals to take control of their media consumption and seek out reliable information, ultimately building their skills and fostering a sense of responsibility and confidence. Despite the potential advantages of media literacy education, there are challenges related to its pace, scale, and target audience. Reaching a large population, especially those who are susceptible to deception, requires significant time and resources.

Fact-checking literacy: Numerous studies have been conducted to ascertain the effectiveness of fact-checking in correcting false beliefs surrounding specific claims, particularly among non-partisan audiences. While fact-checking has shown potential in rectifying inaccurate perceptions, it may not always result in a change of attitude or behavior, such as a reduction in support for unscrupulous politicians or baseless policies. The effectiveness of fact-checking is highly dependent on contextual factors such as phrasing, presentation, and source, which can often be ambiguous and difficult to discern. Nevertheless, it has been observed that fact-checking does not reinforce inaccurate views. Unfortunately, the dissemination of false claims is a comparatively effortless process, facilitated by technological advancements, which can make it challenging to correct false information.

Literacy to Labelling Fake Content: The issue of labeling social media content has been widely discussed as a potential solution to combat the spread of misleading or untrustworthy material. Studies have shown that labels can be an effective way to deter users from sharing inaccurate content. However, the effectiveness of labeling is dependent on several factors such as the size, aggressiveness, and disruptiveness of the label. It is worth noting that labeling also has the potential to affect user trust and shareability of content. Large, aggressive, and disruptive labels are more likely to discourage users from sharing untrustworthy content, while careful and generic labels may not be as effective. Additionally, other tools can be used in conjunction with labeling to combat misinformation, such as reminders to

evaluate accuracy before resharing and trustworthiness rankings for news outlets. Despite its potential benefits, there are also unknown consequences associated with labeling. Labels can elicit varying reactions from audiences, and there is a possibility that they may lead to excessive trust or skepticism toward unlabeled content. Therefore, it is important to carefully consider the potential impact of labeling on user behavior and trust.

Literacy to Support local journalism: Local news channels, especially newspapers, have been experiencing a decline in recent years. This has led to reduced civic involvement, knowledge, and trust among communities, which in turn has facilitated the spread of misinformation. It is believed that by improving local journalism, these negative trends can be halted or even reversed. However, this has not been tested explicitly. The high cost of professional journalism and the financial struggles of the industry pose significant challenges. This has resulted in a lack of resources for local news outlets to produce quality journalism, which is essential for informing communities and holding those in power accountable. Philanthropy can play a crucial role in addressing this issue by providing targeted assistance, such as seed funding for experiments, to help local news outlets innovate and experiment with new models that can sustain quality journalism. Long-term solutions may require a more systemic approach, such as government action or alternative corporate structures, which can provide reliable and sustainable funding for local news outlets. Nongovernmental intermediaries may also play a role in supporting local news outlets by offering direct subsidies or indirect measures, such as tax exemptions and collective bargaining rights, that can help sustain quality journalism and ensure that communities stay informed and engaged.

Literacy about Cybersecurity to counter fake news: As technology continues to advance, we face new challenges in ensuring our digital safety. One of the most concerning threats is the rise of cyber criminals who use misinformation and social engineering tactics to carry out cyberattacks. These attacks are becoming increasingly sophisticated, causing understandable concern among many people. However, it is important to note that there are steps we can take to protect ourselves. By remaining vigilant and informed, we can learn to recognize and avoid malicious advertisements, or advertising, which hackers use to introduce harmful code into digital content. By doing so, we can help to prevent the inadvertent distribution of malware onto our devices. While it can be difficult to distinguish between authentic and fraudulent material, we can stay safe by being cautious and taking the time to verify the legitimacy of any content we encounter online.

Literacy to understand civic information: As we continue to progress into the digital era, how we consume, process, and disseminate information has undergone a massive transformation. The sheer amount of information that is available to us today is beyond anything our ancestors could have ever imagined. With the rise of the internet, social media, and other digital platforms, we are now exposed to an unprecedented volume and velocity of information. This shift has brought about a significant change in how people understand, exchange, and use information. With so much data available to us, individuals have had to adapt and find ways to filter through it all to find what is most relevant and useful. This has led to the rise of personalized content and information that is tailored to fit the needs and interests of each individual. Furthermore, the vast amounts of unregulated data available online have led to a growing sense of distrust among individuals. People are increasingly questioning the accuracy and authenticity of the information they come across online. This has led to an increased demand for trustworthy sources of information, and for individuals to take an active role in fact-checking and verifying the information they consume. Overall, the digital age has brought about a transformation in how we understand and use information. As the digital world continues to expand, it

is likely that we will see further changes in the way we consume and process information, and in the role that technology plays in shaping our understanding of the world around us.

Conclusion

In modern times, the spread of fake news has become a significant concern globally. As a result, it is crucial to promote media information literacy to counter the dissemination of misleading information. It is imperative to equip individuals with the necessary skills to differentiate between reliable sources and those that are not. Media literacy provides people with critical thinking abilities that allow them to navigate the complex information landscape and scrutinize the accuracy of news material. Media information literacy plays a critical role in building a populace that is resilient against the negative impact of fake news. By launching educational campaigns, utilizing technology, and raising social awareness, we can collectively build a robust defense against fake news. Educational institutions can play a vital role in developing media literacy skills by integrating media literacy into their curriculum. This can include teaching methods such as analyzing news articles, identifying bias, and evaluating sources.

Additionally, technology can play a pivotal role in developing media information literacy. Fact-checking programs can help improve people's ability to identify and counter disinformation. Social media platforms and search engines can also contribute by promoting reliable sources and flagging misleading ones. It is also crucial to raise social awareness about the importance of media literacy and the impact of fake news. This can be done through public awareness campaigns, events, and workshops. In conclusion, media information literacy is critical in ensuring a healthy and well-informed society. By promoting these skills, we can empower individuals to navigate the complex information landscape and distinguish between reliable sources and misleading ones. Ultimately, this will help build a resilient populace that is capable of countering the negative impact of fake news.

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