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What Motivates Social Media Users to Share Fake News, and What Are Its Impacts? A Systematic Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

The use of fake news to deceive the public, manipulate opinions, and advance various agendas has posed significant challenges in its dissemination online. This study systematically examines the motivations for and effects of online fake news dissemination based on English-language articles published in international peer-reviewed journals between 2018 and 2023. These articles were identified through a systematic search of the Scopus and Web of Science databases, conducted between July 1, 2023, and to January 31, 2024, following PRISMA guidelines. Twenty-one studies met the eligibility criteria, their methodologies included quantitative, qualitative, systematic literature reviews, and mixed methods. Thematic analysis revealed four key factors contributing to fake news dissemination: (a) psychological drives, such as the need for validation and sensation-seeking; (b) technological influences, including bots and clickbait; (c) political motives, particularly during

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elections; and (d) the role of media literacy in mitigating or exacerbating misinformation spread. The effects of fake news dissemination were categorized into public health concerns, socioeconomic consequences, and conflict. This review helps explain the dynamics of fake news dissemination within five years, aiding individuals and organizations in understanding the online misinformation spreads online. These insights will help stakeholders with knowledge to count fake news and reduce its societal harm.

KEYWORDS

consequences, fake news, media literacy, motivation, propaganda, psychological influence, social media, social influence, spread of fake news

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Introduction

The rapid growth of digital connectivity across the world has exacerbated the issue of misinformation (Muhammed & Mathew, 2022). In 2024, the global population was 8.08 billion; 69.4% of individuals (5.61 billion) used mobile phones and 5.35 billion had internet access (Kemp, 2024). Over half of the world population (5.04 billion people) are now active social media users, spending an average of two hours and 23 minutes daily on these platforms (Rajendra-Nicolucci & Zuckerman, 2021). Platforms such as Facebook¹, YouTube², WhatsApp³, Instagram⁴, and X (formerly known as Twitter⁵) collectively engage billions of users, enabling genuine interactions but also facilitating rapid dissemination of misinformation (Rodríguez-Ferrándiz, 2023). Given the widespread use of digital platforms, the challenges posed by misinformation spread demand closer examination⁶.

¹ Facebook™ is a trademark of Facebook Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Facebook в России признана экстремистской организацией и заблокирована.

² YouTube™ is a trademark of Google Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries.

³ WhatsApp is a trademark of WhatsApp Inc., registered in the US and other countries.

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⁶ The mention of specific social media platforms in this article, including platforms that may be restricted or banned in certain jurisdictions, such as the Russian Federation, is solely for academic and illustrative purposes. The authors acknowledge the legal sensitivities and advise compliance with all local laws regarding access and use.

Dissemination of Fake News

Fake news is characterized by fabricated details, false headlines, and selective use of facts (Vosoughi et al., 2018). Online fake news is deliberately spread to deceive the public, manipulate opinions, or promote specific agendas; users are often encouraged to share it widely across platforms. Misinformation spread significantly influences public discourse and societal perceptions, leading to widespread discord among diverse communities (Aïmeur et al., 2023). Globally, 60% of individuals believe that their compatriots prioritize belief over factual accuracy in political and societal contexts (Konopliov, 2024). This sentiment is particularly pronounced in countries such as Peru (71%), Serbia (70%), Turkey (69%), and the United States (68%).

Fake news spread is influenced by psychological and cognitive factors. Biases (e.g., the need for social validation) and cognitive mechanisms (e.g., intuition) are critical roles in motivating individuals to share misinformation (Pennycook & Rand, 2019; Vosoughi et al., 2018). Additionally, emotional triggers, such as fear, surprise, and disgust, have been identified as key drivers of engagement with false narratives (Shao et al., 2018). Although individual biases are important, the rapid misinformation spread is further amplified by technological tools (Muhammed & Mathew, 2022).

Bots and automated algorithms inflate engagement metrics; consequently, fake news appears more credible or viral (Saini & Khatarkar, 2023). Algorithmic factors, such as engagement-driven prioritization, also contribute to misinformation dissemination (Friggeri et al., 2014; Shu et al., 2019). However, emerging technological solutions, such as sophisticated detection models incorporating machine learning techniques, show promise in addressing this issue (Saini & Khatarkar, 2023).

Societal Effects of Fake News

The dissemination of fake news has far-reaching consequences, influencing various aspects of society, such as public health, political stability, and social trust. During the COVID-19 pandemic, misinformation about prevention methods, treatments, and vaccination fueled panic and confusion and undermined public health initiatives (Thanh et al., 2021; Yao, 2020). For instance, unverified claims about the efficacy of home remedies or the dangers of vaccines caused hesitancy and delayed efforts to curb the spread of the virus. The amplification of such misinformation exacerbated public health challenges and strained healthcare systems globally (Rocha et al., 2023).

In the political sphere, fake news can disrupt democratic processes by influencing voter behavior and polarizing public opinion. Misinformation campaigns during elections have been used to manipulate perceptions, spread conspiracy theories, and delegitimize political opposition (Ahmad & Murad, 2020; Habes et al., 2023). Additionally, the strategic use of fake news may disrupt political discourse and result in long-term damage to democratic institutions by fostering distrust and division (Metzger et al., 2021).

The proliferation of fake news erodes social trust by diminishing confidence in media and institutions through conflicting narratives and misinformation. This creates echo chambers; individuals seek information that confirms their beliefs, deepening societal divides and disproportionately affecting marginalized communities (Habes

et al., 2023; Rodríguez-Ferrándiz, 2023). Furthermore, the economic consequences are significant, as fake news damages reputations, disrupts markets, and causes financial losses (Petratos, 2021). During the pandemic, misinformation about supply shortages sparked panic buying and disrupted supply chains, highlighting its broad effects on consumer behavior and economic stability (Sarraf et al., 2024). Emerging technologies, such as augmented reality, the metaverse, and deepfake tools, worsen misinformation spread by creating realistic yet fake content, making truth harder to discern and requiring adaptive strategies to protect public trust (Mansur et al., 2021).

Uses and gratifications theory explains how individuals seek media to fulfill needs such as information sharing and social interaction, which drives fake news dissemination. Motivations for sharing fake news often include self-promotion and social interaction (Dan & Sannusi, 2024; Dan et al., 2022). Similarly, social control theory emphasizes the role of observational learning and social influence in shaping behavior; Rajendra-Nicolucci and Zuckerman (2021) demonstrated the significance of group identity and echo chambers in reinforcing misinformation.

The Present Study

This systematic review highlights the motivations behind fake news dissemination, its societal impacts, and the trends shaping its evolution from 2018 to 2023, offering a valuable resource for addressing this global challenge. Building on past studies including those exploring emotional triggers (Dan & Sannusi, 2024; Munusamy et al., 2024), media literacy (Lu et al., 2024), and emerging technologies (e.g., deepfakes; Ürmösné Simon & Nyitrai, 2021), this review integrates diverse perspectives into a cohesive analysis. By providing a comprehensive understanding of fake news trends, it offers actionable insights to empower policymakers, educators, and technology developers in fostering informed and resilient societies.

The study objectives are as follows:

- To explore the motivations behind fake news dissemination from 2018 to 2023;
- To assess the societal impacts of fake news on trust and polarization.

Materials and Methods

Research Question

The research questions were developed using the PICo framework, a structured approach focusing on Population or Problem (P), Interest (I), and Context (Co). Adapted for this study, P is fake news dissemination by social media users (2018–2023), I refers to motivations for sharing fake news and its impacts, and Co refers to trends in fake news dissemination on social media platforms.

Literature Search

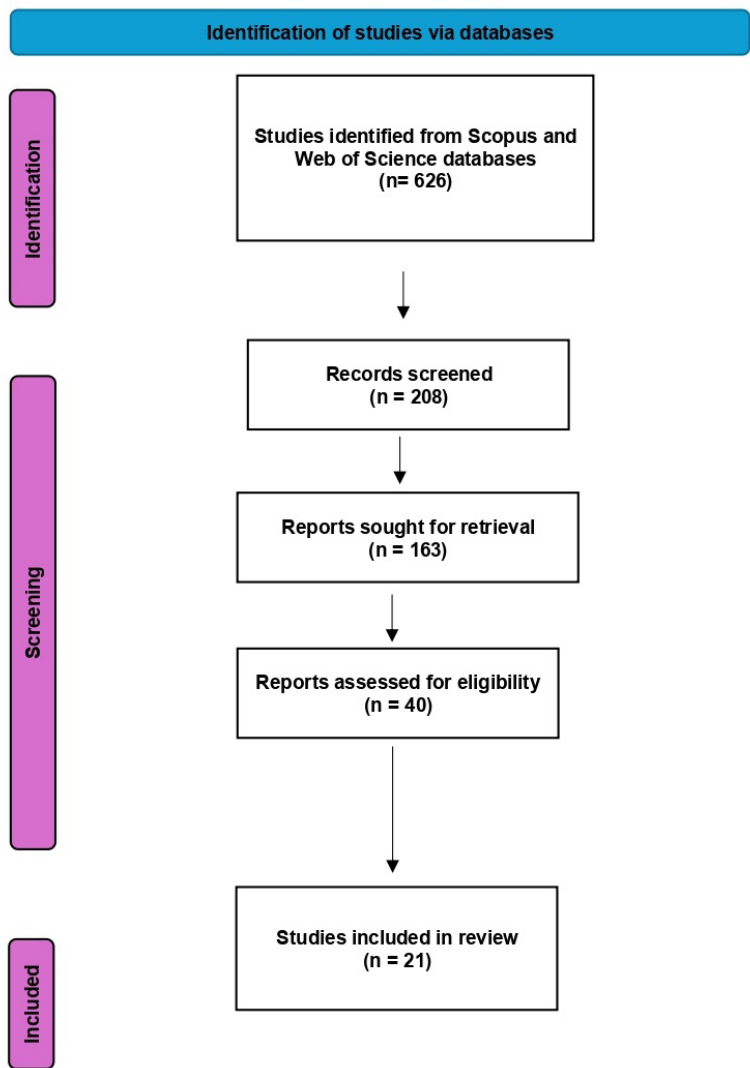
As shown in Figure 1, three main strategies were used: identification, screening, and eligibility. This systematic review used Scopus⁷ and Web of Science⁸ as the search

⁷ <https://www.scopus.com>

⁸ <https://www.webofscience.com>

databases due to their extensive collection of peer-reviewed papers in fields such of behavioral science, medicine, mass communication, and psychology.

Figure 1
PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram



Note. Source: developed by the authors.

To ensure methodological consistency, we limited the search to English-language studies published in international peer-reviewed journals from 2018 to 2023; the articles in the final selection were published between 2020 and 2023. Articles written not in English were excluded to avoid translation issues.

To identify relevant articles, key search terms and their variations were strategically employed using wildcard operators and Boolean logic. The key terms focused on three main themes: “motivation,” including variations such as “motivation,” “gratification,” “determinants,” and “influencing factors”; “fake news sharing,” with terms like “fake news sharing,” “false news sharing,” and “misinformation sharing”; and “social media,” encompassing “social media” and “social network.” The search strategy, including string and keyword calculations, is detailed in Table 1.

Table 1
The Search Strings

Database	Search strings
Web of Science	“fake news” OR “false news” OR “misinformation” (Topic) and “motivation*” OR “gratification” OR “determinants” OR “influencing factors” (Topic) and “social media” OR “social network” (Topic)
Scopus	(TITLE-ABS-KEY (“fake news”) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (“motivation”) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (“social media”) OR ALL (“false news”) OR ALL (“misinformation”) OR ALL (“determinants”) OR ALL (“influencing factors”) OR ALL (“gratification”) OR ALL (“social network”) AND PUBYEAR > 2017 AND PUBYEAR < 2024

Note. Source: developed by the authors.

Identification

A total of 615 relevant articles were retrieved, including 236 from Scopus and 379 from the Web of Science. Titles, abstracts, keywords, author names, journal names, and publication years were exported to MS Excel for screening.

Screening

The screening process narrowed the retrieved articles to those relevant to the research focus, ensuring reliability and transparency in the systematic review. Articles published in peer-reviewed journals were included, whereas articles from books and other document reviews were excluded. Full-text access was prioritized, and 40 open-access articles were retrieved for detailed analysis. From an initial pool of 5,432 articles, 236 were retrieved from Scopus and 379 from the Web of Science database.

Eligibility

After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 2), duplicate or irrelevant articles were removed, and the remaining articles were subjected to further manual screening. These articles were then reviewed to ensure they focused specifically on online fake news dissemination and trends. Articles emphasizing fake news detection, comparisons between fake and trusted news, or software development to prevent dissemination were excluded.

Table 2
Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication timeline	2018–2023	2018 and before
Types of articles	Journal (research articles)	Articles other than research articles (e.g., reviews, books, conference proceedings, etc.)
Language	English	Languages other than English
Types of findings	Empirical data	Non-empirical
Focus findings	Factors and impacts	Computer software to detect fake news, fake news model

Note. Source: developed by the authors.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The methodology used to select studies included in the systematic search is shown in Table 2. This systematic review had four inclusion criteria:

1. The articles are written in English and published in international peer-reviewed journals.
2. The articles are associated with the driving factors related to fake news sharing on social media.
3. The publication period was from 2018 to 2023.
4. Gray literature was excluded from the review (informally or noncommercially published or unpublished articles).

Data Abstraction and Analysis

Themes and subthemes were developed following the six-phase framework of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2014). Key details such as author names, participants, study design, and factors and impacts of fake news dissemination were extracted. A critical quality assessment ensured reliability and rigor, followed by data synthesis to identify patterns and gaps. The analysis revealed three main themes: (a) psychological dimensions of fake news, (b) media literacy, and (c) community manipulation. Results are discussed in the next section.

Results

Study Characteristics

Our initial search yielded 626 articles (Figure 1). After screening and applying eligibility criteria, 21 articles were included in the final review. The detailed characteristics of the included articles are summarized in Appendix. Of the 21 datasets, 13 used quantitative study designs, four were systematic literature reviews, two were content data analyses, one was qualitative, and one was a mixed-methods study. Thirteen studies collected

and used data from a country, whereas seven studies involved participants or data from more than two countries, including the United States, Spain, Nigeria, and Zimbabwe. Among these, 35% were cross-national studies. Eighteen studies reported using multiple platforms as sources of fake news content: X (formerly known as Twitter⁹) (37.5%), Facebook¹⁰ (34%), and Instagram¹¹ (22%). Some studies (6.5%) included general online social media users across multiple platforms.

Factors Contributing to Online Fake News Dissemination

Psychological Drive. Psychological factors are important in the spread of online fake news, as evidenced by 11 studies (Ajina et al., 2024; Azzimonti & Fernandes, 2023; Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021; Cano-Marin et al., 2023; Daunt et al., 2023; Lewandowsky et al., 2017; Luo et al., 2023; Pennycook & Rand, 2019; Rahmanian & Esfidani, 2023; Rocha et al., 2023; Shao et al., 2018). In Malaysia and in Vietnam, motives such as socialization, information sharing, self-promotion, and entertainment were identified (Cano-Marin et al., 2023; Pennycook & Rand, 2019). Socialization and self-promotion were the most influential motives among 869 respondents in the study by Cano-Marin et al. (2023), as well as among 200 social media users in Hanoi (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). Furthermore, social approval and enjoyment drive fake news dissemination: social approval was identified as a key motive among 1,160 young Iranian users (Daunt et al., 2023); a similar pattern was found among Instagram¹¹ and WhatsApp users (Rahmanian & Esfidani, 2023). In addition, 59.8% of 102 Weibo¹² users shared fake news for social recognition (Macarrón Máñez et al., 2024). Finally, status-seeking and the influence of public figures were significant drivers across Facebook¹⁰, X (Twitter⁹), and Instagram¹¹ (Cano-Marin et al., 2023).

Emotional triggers such as fear, curiosity, and anxiety reinforce fake news sharing. Group identity and echo chambers further exacerbate this trend, emphasizing conformity to group norms (Mansur et al., 2021). Additionally, sensation-seeking and the need for validation motivate users (Daunt et al., 2023). Several studies noted the complex interplay between psychological motives, emotional manipulation, and societal pressures, including the role of cognitive biases and social identity in shaping online behavior (An et al., 2025; Munusamy et al., 2024; Ürmösné Simon & Nyitrai, 2021).

⁹ Twitter® is a trademark of Twitter Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Twitter полностью заблокирована в России как организация, занимающаяся распространением запрещенного контента.

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¹² <https://weibo.com/>

Technological Influence. Simultaneously, technological influences such as Internet bots or clickbaits tactics drive the online fake news (Aïmeur et al, 2023; Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021). Bots artificially inflate engagement, making fake news appear more popular and credible. A study in the United States revealed that fake news swayed people away from trusted news sources and toward misinformation (Azzimonti & Fernandes, 2023). Additionally, a review of 61 articles determined that although clickbait increased website traffic, it was often used to deceive audiences using hoaxes, rumors, satire, and propaganda on social media (Aïmeur et al, 2023). Another review of 26 experimental studies identified several message characteristics that contribute to fake news sharing among Facebook¹³ users. These characteristics included source credibility, content inconsistencies, subjectivity, sensationalism, and the presence of manipulated images (Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021).

Political Motives. Three articles reported political motives as the main reason that influenced the dissemination of online fake news among users (Daunt et al, 2023; Metzger et al., 2021; Rocha et al., 2023) which has a significant impact on shaping the landscape of misinformation dissemination. An analysis of 5,303 fact-checked claims and comments from Facebook¹³, X (Twitter¹⁴), and YouTube in the United States revealed a significant finding (Metzger et al., 2021). The intent to disrupt political dialogue during elections was identified as a key factor contributing to individuals' fake news sharing behaviors. Furthermore, sharing political fake news online was perceived as a way for social media users to act as opinion leaders and advocates for their beliefs (Habes et al., 2023). Propaganda is a form of disinformation created by politicians or politically affiliated individuals that aims to influence public opinion and maintain or alter power dynamics for their benefit (Sukumaran et al., 2023). However, online fake news sharing not only disrupts political dialogues but also provides opportunities for a legitimate political debate (Metzger et al., 2021). Additionally, Rocha et al. (2023) examined the role of conspiracy, mentality, patriotism, perceived threat to freedom, media literacy, and concern for disinformation by interviewing ten participants and conducting a survey with 722 respondents in the United Kingdom. In the interviews, respondents elaborated that sharing political news, whether fake or trusted, is part of expressing their sense of freedom. The sharing of fake news reached its peak during the COVID-19 lockdown and vaccine period. Finally, the study found that the dissemination of fake political motives promoted dilemmas and posed threats to both political parties and the public (Rocha et al., 2023). People were more likely to believe online fake news because they did not trust the COVID-19 information that political leaders shared in traditional media, such as newspapers and television (Uwalaka, 2023).

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Lack of Media Literacy. Media illiteracy is pivotal role in motivating online social media users to propagate fake news within digital environments. The lack of critical skills to evaluate the credibility of information exposes individuals to the risk of falling victim to misinformation. Results from two online focus group discussions with participants from various countries, including the United Kingdom, Zimbabwe, Benin, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, and Nigeria, indicated that individuals who lack media literacy skills often struggle to critically evaluate the credibility and accuracy of the information they encounter online (Macarrón Máñez et al., 2024). Additionally, media illiteracy can contribute to confirmation bias, which means that individuals seek and share information that aligns with their preexisting beliefs and opinions (Daunt et al., 2023). By contrast, media literacy refers to the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in various forms. Fortunately, those equipped with media literacy skills are less likely to spread and believe in fake news (Habes et al., 2023). This connection between social dynamics and media literacy shows the complexity of the problems caused by fake news. People's actions in social settings and their lack of basic literacy skills combine to facilitate the spread of false information (Daunt et al., 2023; Habes et al., 2023).

Effect of Online Fake News Dissemination

Public Health Concerns. Research on the impact of sharing fake news on social media has highlighted several key points. Online fake news often reinforces existing beliefs and biases, leading to confirmation bias among individuals who seek out information that aligns with their preconceived notions. Sharing of fake news on social media promoted inaccurate information related to COVID-19 prevention and treatment (Kong et al., 2023; Rocha et al., 2023; Thanh et al., 2021; Uwalaka, 2023) and fear, uncertainty, and panic among the public during COVID-19 (Rocha et al., 2023). Therefore, it posed a risk to the health and safety of COVID-19 patients. Furthermore, the spread of fake news online exacerbated public health issues during the COVID-19 pandemic by undermining trust in vaccination efforts and health guidelines (Thanh et al., 2021). Misinformation about COVID-19 treatments and preventative measures hindered effective pandemic response efforts, prolonging the crisis and endangering lives. Additionally, fake news during COVID-19 incited panic and unrest within communities by spreading rumors and ethnic-based information (Sarraf et al., 2024). Fake news regarding COVID-19 virus transmission led to an increase in physical and emotional attacks on people of Asian origin in the United States.

Socioeconomic Consequences. The dissemination of fake news on social media has significant economic consequences. A secondary data analysis of articles from North America (439), Europe (1,202), and Asia (2,152) revealed that online fake news sharing on platforms such as X (Twitter¹⁵), Facebook¹⁶,

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and Instagram¹⁷ contributed to information overload, unverified information sharing, and supply chain disruptions caused by panic buying during COVID-19 (Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021). In addition to supply chain disruption, fake news can harm the reputation of businesses and impact their marketing efforts, as consumers may mistrust brands associated with false information. Additionally, fake news sharing behaviors on social media extends to politics and governance (Diepeveen & Pinet, 2022). Fake news has the potential to shape public opinion, influence election outcomes, and challenge the political transition in countries like Nigeria (An et al., 2025).

Social Division. The effect of fake news on social media is not limited to individuals; it can affect entire societies. For example, the dissemination of fake news can undermine trust in leaders and create social divisions (Balakrishnan et al., 2021; Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021). Compared with the older generation, younger social media users tend to believe in fake news more, and they heavily depend on social media to receive and share information (Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021). Eventually, the heavy dependence on social media among younger users and the dissemination of fake news will affect the sustainability of society (Balakrishnan et al., 2021). A quantitative study among X (Twitter¹⁸) users in the United States found that the effect of fake news on social media extends beyond misinformation (Azzimonti & Fernandes, 2023). Based on their analysis of 4,000 nodes from Twitter¹⁸, fake news sharing contributes to the polarization of society, as individuals are exposed to biased and misleading information that reinforces their preexisting beliefs. Consequently, the proliferation of fake news online can exacerbate societal polarization by amplifying echo chambers and diminishing opportunities for constructive dialogue and mutual understanding (Diepeveen & Pinet, 2022). The dissemination of online fake news on social media, particularly among WhatsApp, Facebook¹⁹, X (Twitter¹⁸), and Instagram¹⁷ users, created a lack of mindfulness among Nigerians with a low level of trust in online news, regardless of the trustworthiness of the source (An et al., 2025).

Discussion

This review analyzed trends, factors, and effects of online fake news dissemination from 2018 to 2023, synthesizing insights from 21 studies conducted across diverse countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Vietnam, and Nigeria. The findings highlight a complex interplay of psychological, technological, political, and societal factors driving the spread of misinformation.

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Psychological motivations, such as socialization, self-promotion, and the need for social approval were identified as key drivers, consistent with the uses and gratifications theory (Mansur et al., 2021; Rahmanian & Esfidani, 2023). Emotional triggers, such as fear and curiosity, as framed by social control theory, further amplify fake news sharing by weakening self-regulation and social norms, particularly during crises. These psychological vulnerabilities illustrate how individuals are drawn into the misinformation cycle through emotional manipulation.

Moreover, technological factors are important in amplifying misinformation. Algorithms, bots, and clickbait strategies inflate the perceived credibility and engagement of fake news, often deceiving audiences (Aïmeur et al., 2023; Saini & Khatakar, 2023). Although machine learning tools, such as FastNewsTracker²⁰, show promise in detecting misinformation, challenges remain in scaling and adapting these tools to evolving platforms and content (Ürmösné Simon & Nyitrai, 2021). Political motives, particularly during elections and crises (e.g., COVID-19), weaponize fake news to manipulate opinions, polarize communities, and undermine trust in governance. These findings emphasize the disruptive potential of misinformation in eroding public trust and democratic processes (Metzger et al., 2021; Rocha et al., 2023).

Media illiteracy further compounds the issue, as individuals lacking critical evaluation skills are more susceptible to confirmation bias and the spread of misinformation (Macarrón Máñez et al., 2024). However, media literacy interventions have shown encouraging results in reducing vulnerability to fake news and fostering critical thinking. Expanding these educational initiatives is crucial for empowering users to navigate the digital landscape effectively (Habes et al., 2023; Pennycook & Rand, 2019).

The societal impacts of fake news are profound and far-reaching. During the COVID-19 pandemic, misinformation undermined public health campaigns, contributed to panic buying, and disrupted supply chains. Moreover, fake news erodes trust in businesses and institutions while polarizing societies by reinforcing echo chambers and deepening divisions, particularly among younger, digitally dependent users. These impacts illustrate the urgent need for strategies to counter misinformation and its adverse societal effects (Azzimonti & Fernandes, 2023; Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021). Addressing these challenges requires a multidimensional approach that integrates psychological, technological, and educational strategies. Collaborative efforts among policymakers, educators, and technology developers are essential to mitigate the adverse impacts of fake news and build resilience against its consequences. Future research should prioritize the development of adaptive detection systems and explore the influence of emerging technologies, such as augmented reality and the metaverse, on the misinformation landscape.

Although the reviewed literature generally supports key drivers such as psychological needs, media illiteracy, and political motives, not all studies align with these dominant narratives. For example, some studies indicated that increased

²⁰ <http://fastnewstracker.com>

media exposure does not necessarily lead to belief in fake news, especially when users apply critical thinking or rely on trusted social networks (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). Other studies reported that not all fake news dissemination is harmful—certain satirical or parodic content, although false, can serve as a tool for social or political critique (Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021). Moreover, the effectiveness of media literacy interventions remains contested, with mixed evidence on their real-world impact in reducing fake news sharing. These contradictory findings underscore the complexity of misinformation behavior and caution against overly deterministic conclusions. By incorporating diverse and critical viewpoints, this review moves beyond affirmation and invites deeper inquiry into the multifaceted motivations and societal consequences of fake news dissemination.

Limitations

This review only included English-language peer-reviewed articles, excluding potentially valuable insights from gray literature and non-English studies. The reliance on Scopus and Web of Science may have restricted the scope, as relevant studies in other databases were not captured. Additionally, differences in methodologies and definitions of fake news across studies made synthesis challenging.

Another important limitation is the risk of reinforcing an “echo chamber” effect, in which similar findings and dominant perspectives are overrepresented due to the selection of frequently cited sources. Although efforts were made to include diverse viewpoints, the limited presence of dissenting or critical studies in the literature posed a challenge. Future reviews should include studies that contradict or complicate the prevailing assumptions to ensure a more balanced analysis.

Furthermore, only full-text versions of publicly available articles were included in the final review. This decision was made to ensure transparency, accessibility, and completeness of data extraction; however, it may have excluded relevant studies that were behind paywalls or had restricted access, thus limiting the scope and comprehensiveness of the review.

Conclusion

Fake news dissemination is driven by psychological, technological, political, and societal factors, with motivations including validation, social approval, and political agendas, and exploits digital platforms and engagement metrics. Media illiteracy amplifies the problem, leaving individuals vulnerable to misinformation and deepening polarization. The impacts are wide-reaching, disrupting public health responses, economic stability, and social cohesion while eroding trust and democratic processes. This review highlights the urgent need to address misinformation through enhancing media literacy and robust strategies to protect the integrity of online information ecosystems, fostering a more informed and resilient society.

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²¹ Twitter® is a trademark of Twitter Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Twitter полностью заблокирована в России как организация, занимающаяся распространением запрещенного контента.

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Appendix

Characteristics of the Articles Included in the Study

Author, Year	Methodology applied	Factor of fake news dissemination	Impact	Fake news source	Country	Sample size	Respondents
1. Thanh et al., 2021	Quantitative Cross-sectional	Altruism, entertainment, socialization, self-promotion, and instant information most substantial impact	Confusion and complicating COVID-19 situation	Facebook ²² , Tiktok ²³ , Twitter ²⁴ , Zalo ²⁵	Hanoi, Vietnam	200 participants	Adults
2. Habes et al., 2023	Quantitative Cross-sectional experimental design	Behavioral intentions related to interested to share what they viewed and received.	Impact legacy and sustainability of the society in the long term	Facebook ²³ , YouTube, Twitter ²⁴ , Instagram ²⁶	Jordan	350 participants	Educated/ university students
3. Metzger et al., 2021	Content analysis	Interested to share posts from Twitter	Increase sense of mistrust among society	Twitter ²⁴	United States	6,809 Twitter ²⁴ posts (commentary)	Twitter ²⁴ posts that have at least some misinformation (each post had > 50 comments)

²² Facebook™ is a trademark of Facebook Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Facebook в России признана экстремистской организацией и заблокирована.

²³ TikTok is a trademark of ByteDance, registered in China and other countries. TikTok has suspended all new posting and live-streaming for users in the Russian Federation.

²⁴ Twitter® is a trademark of Twitter Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Twitter полностью заблокирована в России как организация, занимающаяся распространением запрещенного контента.

²⁵ <https://chat.zalo.me>

²⁶ Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

Author, Year	Methodology applied	Factor of fake news dissemination	Impact	Fake news source	Country	Sample size	Respondents
4. Sarraf et al., 2024	Computationally intensive big data-driven	Wanted to share news about products at the market (scarcity and fear)	Threat to the society, i.e., disruption in supply chain (panic buying.)	Twitter ²⁷ , Facebook ²⁸ , and Instagram ²⁹ posts	27 countries (USA, European countries, India)	7,588 articles	Product ratings and user experience reviews of 7 popular e-com healthcare platforms
5. Apuke & Omar, 2020	Quantitative	Altruism, entertainment, socialization, pass time, information sharing, and information seeking		WhatsApp, Facebook ²⁸ , Twitter ²⁷ , Instagram ²⁹ , others	Nigeria	385 participants	General social media users (WhatsApp, Facebook ²⁸ , Twitter ²⁷ , Instagram ²⁹ , other)
6. Kong et al., 2023	Systematic literature review	Individual: information sharing, socialization, altruism, self-promotion, status seeking, instant information sharing, information seeking and self-expression	Cultural, religious factors, and news content characteristics linked to sharing, i.e, damaged reputation, especially among leaders	Facebook ²⁸ , WhatsApp, Twitter ²⁷ , Instagram ²⁹ and WeChat ³⁰	Nigeria America, Bangladesh, Malaysia, China, India, Australia, Canada, German, Jordan, Korea, Singapore, Sultanate of Oman, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom	27 articles	Articles

²⁷ Twitter® is a trademark of Twitter Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Twitter полностью заблокирована в России как организация, занимающаяся распространением запрещенного контента.

²⁸ Facebook™ is a trademark of Facebook Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Facebook в России признана экстремистской организацией и заблокирована.

²⁹ Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

³⁰ <https://www.wechat.com>

Author, Year	Methodology applied	Factor of fake news dissemination	Impact	Fake news source	Country	Sample size	Respondents
		Cognitive and emotional factors: trust in online, perceived information overload and social media exposure					
		Cultural and religious factors					
7. Diepeveen & Pinet, 2022	Qualitative (Two online consultations)	Heavy dependency towards social media and unable to differentiate between fake versus true news	Contribute to identity-based divisions	Facebook ³¹ , WhatsApp	Participants from 12 countries: Benin, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, the United Kingdom (UK), and Zimbabwe	1 st online consultation, N = 130 participants 2 nd online consultation, N = 95 participants	Anonymous
8. An et al., 2025	Quantitative	Lack of mindfulness, religiosity, instant news sharing, and self-expression	Decrease level of trust on online news	WhatsApp, Facebook ³¹ , Twitter ³² , Instagram ³³ , others	Nigeria	385 social participants	18 years and above

³¹ Facebook™ is a trademark of Facebook Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Facebook в России признана экстремистской организацией и заблокирована.

³² Twitter® is a trademark of Twitter Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Twitter полностью заблокирована в России как организация, занимающаяся распространением запрещенного контента.

³³ Instagram™ is a trademark of Instagram Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Instagram полностью заблокирована в России как экстремистская организация.

Author, Year	Methodology applied	Factor of fake news dissemination	Impact	Fake news source	Country	Sample size	Respondents
9. Macarrón Máñez et al., 2024	Mixed method	Motive to share: to manipulate others		Twitter ³⁴ , WhatsApp, Facebook ³⁵ , and others	Spain	720 posts	General social media users
10. Uwalaka, 2023	Mixed method	Political motives and heavy dependency on social media during COVID-19	Create public health issues	Facebook ³⁵ , Twitter ³⁴ , Instagram ³⁶ , and Nairaland ³⁷	Nigeria	254 participants and 10,408 Twitter contents	18 years old and above
11. Daunt et al., 2023	Mixed method	Quantitative: Conspiracy mentality and patriotism Qualitative: media literacy and patriotism.	Perceived threat to freedom	No information	United Kingdom	10 interviews and 722 surveys	Qualitative: 40% male, 25–67 years old Quantitative: 49.3% male, 18 years and over 70 years old
12. Luo et al., 2023	Quantitative	Information seeking, emotional content, sensationalism, and provocative headlines	Decrease level of trust towards online news	Weibo	China	102 participants	University students

³⁴ Twitter® is a trademark of Twitter Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Twitter полностью заблокирована в России как организация, занимающаяся распространением запрещенного контента.

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³⁷ <https://www.nairaland.com>

Author, Year	Methodology applied	Factor of fake news dissemination	Impact	Fake news source	Country	Sample size	Respondents
13. Ajina et al., 2024	Quantitative (cross-sectional)	Intention towards sharing: Social interaction Social presence Info sharing Info seeking Cognitive attitude Affective attitude	Heavy dependency on social media	Facebook ³⁸ , WhatsApp, Instagram ³⁹ , and others	Pakistan	327 participants	Adults
14. Rocha et al., 2023	Systematic literature review (SLR)	Spread propaganda	Psychological distress, fear, uncertainty, panic	Facebook ³⁸ , YouTube, WhatsApp, Twitter ⁴⁰	14 countries: Spain, Bangladesh, India, Jordan, Poland, Romania, Palestine, China, Iraq, Mexico, the USA, the UK, Ireland, South Africa	14 studies	Majority 18 years and above
15. Rahmanian & Esfidani, 2023	Quantitative (online survey)	Social approval, overclaiming, and cognitive reflection	Decrease level of trust towards online news	Four Instagram ³⁹ posts	Iran	1160 participants	University of Tehran students
16. Dan & Sannusi, 2024	Systematic literature review	Positive gratification	Mental health of the public during COVID-19	Social media platforms	14 countries	15 articles from Scholar, PubMed, and Web of Science	Adults

³⁸ Facebook™ is a trademark of Facebook Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Facebook в России признана экстремистской организацией и заблокирована.

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⁴⁰ Twitter® is a trademark of Twitter Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Twitter полностью заблокирована в России как организация, занимающаяся распространением запрещенного контента.

Author, Year	Methodology applied	Factor of fake news dissemination	Impact	Fake news source	Country	Sample size	Respondents
17. Cano-Marin et al., 2023	Systematic literature review	Spread misinformation about health	Create public health issues	Twitter ⁴¹	56 different countries	492 articles from Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect	Tweets between March 2006 and November 2021
18. Munusamy et al., 2024	Systematic literature review	Cognitive biases, emotional appeals, and social identity	No information	Social media platforms	11 countries	23 studies	Adults
19. Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021	Systematic literature review	Message characteristics, cognitive styles, predisposition, differences in news and info literacy	No information	Social media platforms	4 countries (U.S, German, Spain, and India)	26 articles from Scopus and WoS	Adults
20. Balakrishnan et al., 2021	Quantitative	Altruism, ignorance, and entertainment, availability/effort, pass time and fear of missing out	Confusion and complicating COVID-19 situation		Malaysia	869 participants	Adults

⁴¹ Twitter® is a trademark of Twitter Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Twitter полностью заблокирована в России как организация, занимающаяся распространением запрещенного контента.

Author, Year	Methodology applied	Factor of fake news dissemination	Impact	Fake news source	Country	Sample size	Respondents
21. Azzimonti & Fernandes, 2023	Quantitative (regression analysis)	Misinformation and polarization increase with 15% belief in fake news	Higher bot centrality raises polarization and lowers misinformation. Bots spread fake news, influencing misinformation and polarization	Twitter ⁴²	United States	400 tweets	Dynamic model

⁴² Twitter® is a trademark of Twitter Inc., registered in the U.S. and other countries. По решению Роскомнадзора, социальная сеть Twitter полностью заблокирована в России как организация, занимающаяся распространением запрещенного контента.