Fake News Issues and Challenges: A Study

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Abstract: *In present times the authenticity of information has become an important issue for the society. It is due to the fact that digitalization has changed the spread of information tremendously. As a result it becomes difficult to identify the false, inaccurate and distorted information. From past few years spread of misinformation /disinformation on social media platforms has done a great damage for the society. It has created an environment of fear and chaos. Particularly, when Indian media consumers are fragmented, heterogeneous and are unaware about the logistic behind the news. Any misleading information shared on social media may negatively affect people that may lead to unrest, conflict, disharmony and violence etc. To understand nature and extent of fake news in India the study aims to identify issues and challenges of fake news. In addition to this, the study shall also undertake measures taken to overcome the problem of fake news. The research methodology is based on qualitative study and the data is collected from secondary source. It is a review based study that helps in dealing with fake news and to protect the interest of society at large.*

Key Words: *Fake News, Issues, Challenges, Measures, Media.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Of late information veracity has become a major issue of concern for media professionals and society at large. The way false information is spreading on various social media platform has raised many issues of concern. On social media the information amplifies in fraction of time due to which news or information which is false, distorted, and inaccurate reaches millions of users. Such information may have subtle effect on the user that may have damaging effect on the society. In recent times the constant spread of false news has raised the issue of authenticity of digital content (Figueira & Oliveira, 2017).The propagation of fake news has become a matter of great concern and discussion. For example, during 2016 U.S. Presidential elections an impression was going among facebook users that pope had endorsed Donald Trump. In addition, there was another story about a 13 year old raped by Bill Clinton. Both of these stories were fabricated and they have hampered the image of these personalities. Such fake news affects the opinion and creates confusion in the society (Gubser, 2016). The fake news affect was more dangerous during pandemic as there was limited information available on the cause behind the virus. During pandemic the fake stories on the cure of coronavirus has created chaos among the people across the countries. In context to India, a study was conducted by boom on irresponsible reporting on COVID -19. This study was based on fake news and fact checking. About 178 fact checks on COVID-19 were analyzed. This study was done from January 2020 to May 2020 (Chowdhury, 2020). It is noteworthy that fake news shared on social media platforms have raised serious issues related to hate speeches, religion based attack and creating an environment of discrimination. In situation when entire world was under lockdown, the corporate organisations were facing high risk due to spread of false news. It has become difficult for them to filter right information (PTI, 2020).The fake news stories were generated with the help of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Some of such tools of AI are photoshops and fake news creator app. It has also been witnessed that these days deep fakes are used to mislead the public. Deep fakes are the fake news where a person's resemblance is imposed on another person in a photo or video. In such cases fake websites are created in some other countries by hiding their own identity. Thereafter, the articles are spread by using social media platforms (Ahuja, 2020). These trends of fake news indicate that it has become essential to understand the purpose behind promoting fake news, the degree of damage caused and issues & challenges that are faced due to fake news etc. The research study shall cover the following research questions to deal adequately with the problem of fake news:
RQ1: What are the recent trends of fake news?
RQ2: What are the issues and challenges related to fake news?
RQ3: How to deal with the problem of fake news
RQ4: How to identify fake news?
RQ5: What are the possible solutions to overcome the problem of fake news?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Fake news is not the recent problem it has been observed from past few years. However, in recent times the degree and extent at which fake news has increased have raised an important question of what is fake and what is authentic? Therefore, it has become essential to understand the present state of fake news. In this light the previous studies on related topic has helped in bringing some insight about the issue. The research study titled 'The current state of fake news: challenges and opportunities" has emphasized on problems of fake news on three basis. These are; content based, source based and diffusion based. Theses basis has helped in understanding the fake news problem in a detailed manner (Figueira & Oliveira, 2017).

The article on "The Problem of Fake News in India: Issues, Concerns and Regulation" has helped in giving some insight about laws and regulation to curb fake news in India (Drishti, 2013).Similarly, another article on" Fake News Solution and Challenges" has covered comprehensively effect of fake news, legal remedies to deal with fake news and challenges to combat fake news (NextIAS, 2021). The inputs of this article were of great help in conducting the study undertaken.

A research paper on "Detecting Fake News: Two Problems for Content Moderation" has helped in identifying the means of detecting fake news. The study has addressed the issue while discussing tension between fair moderation and censorship. It has argued on questions that deals with value judgment and may generate distrust towards fact checking efforts. In another study by UNESCO publication on "Handbook for Journalism Education and Training" 7 modules are covered. It covered issues related to journalism, information disorder, combating misinformation and disinformation, fact checking, social media verification and combating online abuse (Ireton & Posetti, 2018).

The previous studies that are referred in this study have covered the issue of fake news with limited aspects. The present study has focused on the comprehensive perspective of fake news that may help in putting forth measures to deal with fake news that may help the society by large.

3. RESEARCH METHOD:

The research methodology of the study undertaken is qualitative study. The data is collected from secondary source of information that includes newspapers, websites, and government and non –government reports and social media, etc. The study is review based that shall examine the following objectives:
- To identify the recent trends of fake news
- To explore issues and challenges of fake news
- To highlight the measures taken to deal with the problem of fake news
- To identify fake news
- To find possible solutions to overcome the problem of fake news

3.1. FAKE NEWS MEANING AND CONCEPT:

Ethical Journalism Network (EJN) Defines "Fake news is information deliberately fabricated and published with the intention to deceive and mislead others into believing falsehoods or doubting verifiable facts"(EJN, 2020). In other words fake news may be referred as false information or propaganda published that appears to be authentic news. According to PolitiFact: "Fake news is made-up stuff, masterfully manipulated to look like credible journalistic reports that are easily spread online to large audiences willing to believe the fictions and spread the word."(Stroud, 2020). Apart from these definitions the fake news may be further explained in form of disinformation and misinformation (Wardle, 2019).
- **Disinformation**: It is false and intentionally formed to harm an individual, group, organization and country. Disinformation is been influenced by three factors like make money; to have political influence and to cause trouble. The most important part of disinformation is to share news as a new story but in reality the story was a few years old.
- **Misinformation:** The information is false, but it has no intention to harm anyone. When people perform online activity they share information as to get connected to their community. Such activities are more on socio-psychological factors. It does not matter to them whether they are from same political parties or activists working on climate change, or any other religious or ethnic group. Sometimes any disinformation may be picked and distributed among the people under the assumption that they are helping people. In case of misinformation any incident which has emotional appeal may be used by unwanted elements and they may take benefit out of it (Ahuja, 2020).

Hence, the misinformation and disinformation may include false context and connection, spoof, distortion, manipulated content, fabricated content and misleading content etc (House of Commons Select Committee on Culture, 2018).

3.2. FAKE NEWS RECENT TRENDS:

In Indian context there are number of examples of fake news that has done great damage to the society. Some of these are (Gubser, 2016):

- In 2013 during Muzzafarnagar riots a fake video fuelled communal passions.
- A message stating 'Jana Gana Mana' is declared as the best national anthem in the world by UNESCO was circulated on whatsapp.
- A story was covered on Zee News and ABP indicating that Dawood properties worth Rs. 15000 Cr was seized in Dubai.
- News media such as Republic, Zee news and Times of India etc.; covered a story that debut of President Kovind on Twitter gains 3 million of followers in an hour.
- Zee News covered story on prediction of Nostradamus that Narendus shall rise as supreme leader.
- The Hindu covered story mentioning about a video that shows dying woman was molested.
- A story on fatwa in Saudi Arabia was covered by Aaj Tak news channel. The fatwa was issued stating when men are hungry they can eat wives.
- ABP Majha covered a story on fake new on resumption of train services in Mumbai.

Apart from these there are many more fake news stories like; fake tweets of Sushant Singh Rajput's as last words was run by AajTak, India.Com. The news claimed that actor through his twitter handle informed everyone about his mental health. The story covered screenshots of tweets that went of viral. The screenshots were shared on WhatsApp and the news media reported that these tweets were posted just before his death (Alphonso, 2021). After cross checking facts it was found that these screenshots were fake. Besides this, Boom live had done 40 unique fact checks on false reporting in the year 2020. It includes the story coverage by news agencies, news channels and websites. This survey was conducted from January 1, 2020 to December 24, 2020(Niranjankumar & Chowdhury, 2020).

As per the aforementioned examples, the fake news has the following effect:

- The increasing number of social media users has created more disaster due to spread of fake news. It has been witnessed in times Covid -19 in India.
- It has also been noted that the public opinion can be influenced by the public figure or anyone to gain popularity or malign the image of others.
- Furthermore, social harmony has been affected by spreading extremist ideology in sensitive areas.
- The spread of fake news on social media has polarized public opinion which has affected political institutions during elections. It has led to loss of civic trust in the electoral system.

4. ISSUES AND CHALLANGES:

The fake news has raised several issues of concern such as:

1.Need of truth: In present times when information gets viral on social media it become difficult for news media to check facts in short span of time and this may further promote fake news stories. Therefore, it becomes essential for news media to ensure that they are providing right information which is based on truth and facts.

2. Credibility of news media: Recently the number of fake stories in news media has increased as a result credibility of media organization has reduced. It has also raised the issues relating to fact checking.

3. Choas in the society: Sometimes the news shared with the people from unidentified source has damaged the society for example, migrant workers gathering at ISBT bus station in Delhi during Covid-19. At Delhi –Uttar Pradesh border thousands of migrant worker were gathered on March 28, 2020 that has created chaos during pandemic. An affidavit to Supreme Court was filed by the Ministry of Home Affairs. It stated that circulation of misinformation has led to gathering of migrants at Anand Vihar bus terminal and Ghazipur border (Singh & Anand, 2020). Both Uttar Pradesh government and Delhi government officials were blaming each other for this situation. However, in this blame game some people have taken undue advantage of spreading the false information which has further created the problem of mass gathering at Anand Vihar bus stand.

In the media landscape the aforementioned emerging issues of fake news suggests there is a spectacular and unexceptional change happening. Besides the societal challenges, there are challenges emerging with respect to the public sphere and journalism industry. Hence, it has become essential to debate and examine on two aspects. These are:

1. **Lost control on news publishing**: The emergence of social media has resulted in lost on control on news publishing. The news publishers are finding difficult to control on news distribution that are accessed by internet users. Additionally, the new markets that includes; Vox Fusion and BuzzFeed, etc. have made their

presence by accepting these technologies. These new markets have undermined the long term hold of traditional news publisher.

2. **Increasing power of social media organisations:** There has been growing influence of social media organisations like Amazon, Facebook, Apple and Google. These organisations have gained control over what to be published? How and whom to be published? This has raised the issue of online reliability of information. It has raised the demand of attention, regulation and monitoring of digital content shared among people on internet. It may include search engines, and social networking platforms.

Besides this, the way fake news spreads reflect the hidden agenda and propaganda of the individual/group/community. The fake news has questioned the quality of journalism. Some times news channels also get influenced by the stories that go viral and may cover fake news. In contemporary scenario adults are accessing news from social media. On social media the fictional stories are presented in such a manner that it becomes difficult to distinguish authentic news. It indicates the curation of high-quality journalism is at stake. In fact committees on media, sport and commons culture showed concern about the public as they are influenced by propaganda and untruth

5. MEASURES TAKEN TO COMBAT FAKE NEWS:

In order to deal with fake news central government, state government and other regulatory bodies have taken some precautionary measures. Some of them are mentioned below (Ahuja, 2020)**:**

- The cyber security cell at national and state-level are actively working day and night to combat disinformation.
- To trace the mischievous content the centre has launched a national cyber-crime reporting portal. Moreover, to trace the mischievous related to pandemic the forensic analysis has also started.
- The PIB Fact Check Page was launched by Press Information Bureau.
- Initiative is taken by Home and Information and Broadcasting ministry to sensitized states and the public about unverified and ambiguous content.
- On multiple platforms awareness is spread by government by asking people to approach the police when they come across any fake news that could cause violence and unrest in the society.
- Billions of dollars are invested by social media companies into technological solutions to identify fake new & its proliferation

6. IDENTIFYING FAKE NEWS- FACT CHECKING:

In the era of digitalisation it is very difficult to identify the source of fake news. For precautionary measures to deal with the problem it is required to do the fact checking. The term "fact-checking" may be explained with two different methods. The first one is the traditional way of fact checking in newsrooms. Under this proofread along with verifying facts were done. This method of fact checking shows the firmness of the reporting. The second way is of "ex post" fact-checking. This method is adopted after something has published and has public relevance (UNESCO, 2018). According to duke reporter's lab there are around 137 fact checking projects in 51 countries in December 2017(UNESCO, 2018). Some of the fact checking projects that may help in identifying fake news are AP Fact Check, Associated Press, Snopes ,The Washington Post's Fact Checker , Retraction Watch, SciCheck, PolitiFact, FactCheck.org and The News Literacy Project etc (St. Louis Community College Libraries, 2020). It is also advised that besides these facts checking sites people should refer to multiple sources for information.

7. POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO OVERCOME THEPROBLEM OF FAKE NEWS:

Fake news is a very current and rampant problem in India. It is crucial for the public, governments and social media corporations to take responsibility and stringent measures. Here are some of the suggestions to control the spread of fake news:

- It is required that people should understand the basics of news and must update themselves about modern tools of fake content.
- The readers, viewers and listeners of news must learn some tricks to identify the authenticity of the news. They must check the source of information before sharing the information further.
- The individuals must be aware of social media posts that depict unnecessary amounts of sensational, inflammatory and divisive language to promote a story. They must thoroughly check whether a video/image/audio/document is actually legitimate or has been edited for malicious purposes.
- In case of news stories on death they must double check case numbers, death tolls and mortality rates in their area to keep themselves updated. In this regard, it is advisable to follow government and other websites.

- It is essential that social media owner should take strong measures to update their standards and remove fake news as they come across. They may hire and start collaborating with experts to boost fact-checking on social media. It may be possible by hiring experts like survey researchers, civil society organizations and journalists.
- State must create social monitoring cells.
- Under Information Technology Act action must be taken against those who are spreading fake news.
- The provision of IT Act 2000 is not specifically enforced against service providers. Due to this an impression has developed that anyone can publish and disseminate fake news without fear of any legal consequences (Ahuja, 2020). It is high time that clarity must be made on this ground so that service providers become more responsible.

8. CONCLUSION:

The fake news which is shared either on social media or any other media has a very small percentage. However, the news media or social media owners are to be held responsible for acting as a medium of fake news. It is highly recommended that media platform must ensure self regulation to ensure that fake news does not spread. It is the collective responsibility of information generator, disseminator and consumers of news to adequately deal with news and cross check facts. It is important to note that the fake news may be circulated for political gains. The fake news may be circulated by anyone not necessarily from media. Controlling the fake news is a little tricky issue. However, not controlling it will be more dangerous for the society. There is a need of Media Information Literacy (MIL) to overcome the problem of fake news. MIL is an umbrella concept used by UNESCO that covers areas like news literacy, advertising literacy, intercultural literacy, privacy literacy etc. MIL plays instrumental role to inform about consumption, production, and sharing of information (UNESCO, 2018). In addition to this, it is required to have awareness campaign on fake news at grassroots level, keeping the short and long term strategies in mind (Ahuja, 2020). The problem of fake news may be dealt with education, awareness and regulation.

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