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The Effects of Twitter Posts Regarding COVID-19 Information on the Viewer's Perception of Credibility: A Study on Misinformation

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Abstract

In the current age, social media plays a large role in daily life. Although there have been massive advancements through social media, there have also been disadvantages due to its prominence. One such disadvantage is the dissemination of misinformation through social media platforms, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. There are many aspects affecting the social media posts we find credible. This study investigated the different evaluations of COVID-19 credibility ratings in groups with varying political affiliations (conservative and liberal) and primary news sources (social media and newspaper). Misinformative posts along with true posts were used to garner credibility ratings and COVID literacy scores were gathered based on the KAP (knowledge, attitudes, and practices) towards COVID scale. The study had two major hypotheses: 1) There will be a difference between groups of those who classify themselves as politically liberal and those who classify themselves as politically conservative. 2) Those who use social media as their main source of news will rank the misinformative posts with higher credibility than those who use the newspaper as their main source of news. The results indicated no difference between groups with differing news sources. However, there was a difference between groups based on their political affiliations (p=<.001). The results indicated continuity with other current research regarding the impact of social media misinformation.

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Introduction

On January 9th of 2020, the world began seeing changes unlike any before with the onset of COVID-19. By the time February ninth had arrived, the United States had declared a state of public health emergency in response to the pandemic. On March thirteenth, stay-at-home orders began being issued. Throughout the rest of 2020, a plethora of changes to daily life continued to unfold, and by the end of 2020, cases in the United States had surpassed 20 million with more than 346,000 deaths. On a global scale, cases had risen to 83,832,334 with 1,824,590 deaths (AJMC) with numbers changing daily. Amidst the chaos of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was another pandemic happening under the surface: the pandemic of social media misinformation (Ball & Maxmen, 2020). In this research experiment, we analyzed the effect of misinformation on the viewer in regard to credibility. This study's goal was to ascertain if there is a connection between either news source or political affiliation on one's susceptibility to believe posts containing misinformation. This study was looking at four different groups separated by their political affiliation and source of news. The four groups consisted of individuals who identify as politically conservative or liberal and use either social media or the newspaper as their main source of news. We used the social media platform Twitter as our medium to present both misinformation and true information related to COVID-19. This study aimed to determine if there were significant interactions between one's news source and political affiliation on the credibility ratings when presented with misinformation on a faux Twitter feed.

Literature and Expectations

What is Misinformation?

Misinformation on social media is a problem that has been deluding its users presumably from its inception. Misinformation is being operationally defined in this study as, "cases in which people's beliefs about factual matters are not supported by clear evidence and expert opinion" (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010, p. 305). Research shows a positive correlation between

social media usage and misinformation. Throughout time, social media usage numbers have continued to rise. In relation to this, a steady incline in misinformation data can be seen as well (Allcott et al., 2019). Since misinformation has filtered into social media, a variety of topics can now be influenced by it.

Scholars have noted that misinformation has played a role in recent historical events such as the 2016 Presidential election (Gunther et al., 2018). One such study inspired by the misinformation surrounding the presidential election examined the spread of true and false information online. The researchers found that "falsehood diffused significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth in all categories of information" (Vosoughi et al., 2018, p. 359). The COVID-19 pandemic is another example of widespread social media misinformation (Allington et al., 2020). As Bond (2020) writes, Twitter and Facebook have both acknowledged that they have had an uphill battle with misinformation. Both forums have been striving to take steps to curb this issue. Twitter, as well as other social media platforms, like Facebook, have tried adjusting their algorithms to prevent the diffusion of false information. Twitter has continued to expand its use of warning labels as well as add the choice to remove particularly harmful posts. It now utilizes its fact-checking method to flag and remove posts. They have also encouraged users to think before posting.

However, many have noted that these increased measures do not seem to be making a difference in stopping social media misinformation. They argue that Twitter's efforts to deter the spread of misinformation are failing (Levin, 2017). Levin (2017) has written that the fact-checking and public flagging of posts are "regularly ineffective, and in some cases appear to be having a minimal impact" (para. 3). Since this study is looking directly at the spread of misinformation through social media, specifically through the platform Twitter, it is important to understand the data regarding misinformation diffusion through social media.

Misinformation Diffusion

Scholars have noted that misinformation diffusion through social media is "a potential threat to democracy and broader society" (Allcott et al., 2019, p. 6). In their study on the trends of misinformation diffusion during the 2016 presidential election period, Allcott et al. (2019) found that user interactions with misinformation continually increased on Facebook and Twitter until the end of 2016. Their study was seeking to provide evidence on the magnitude of misinformation that was being circulated during this time. Until the end of their data collection in 2018, the researchers found that interactions on Facebook dropped significantly, while interactions on Twitter continued to increase. The authors were unable to determine whether this drop in Facebook interactions was due to the algorithmic changes Facebook installed since that time. Regardless, the data solidifies Twitter as the best mode of misinformation dissemination for this study as it is still a highly effective misinformation medium.

A recent study regarding the spread of misinformation following multiple series of rumor cascades on Twitter found showed that misinformation is 70 percent more likely to be retweeted on Twitter than the truth and reached 1,500 people about six times faster than true information (Vosoughi et al., 2018). Overall, Twitter is a platform that is allowing misinformation to foster easily and quickly. There are multiple types of misinformation that can be found on Twitter. Health-related misinformation is one potential genre.

Diffusion of Health-Related Misinformation

As social media has continued growing in popularity and user numbers, the genres of information available on the platforms have grown as well. As written by Allington et al. (2020) health-related information has become commonplace on social media. Doctors, nurses, medical professionals, and - more problematically - unqualified individuals, have begun uploading health-related information. YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter have been tagged as sites leading to the "dissemination of conspiracy beliefs and misinformation on medical and other topics" (p. 1). Furthermore, consumers continue to turn towards social media for health-specific information

(Terrasse et al., 2019) A study analyzing social media, E-health, and Medical Ethics noted that even public health researchers acquire data from platforms like Google, Twitter, and Facebook in regard to this topic. They use this information to expand their knowledge in "health trends, diagnose illnesses, and even predict behavior such as depression and suicide" (Terrasse et al., 2019, p. 24). The usage of social media in this manner has become so commonplace that Terrasse and his fellow authors discuss the ethical implications this will have for the medical community. In regard to E-health and fake news, encouraging an increase in health literacy has the potential to improve an individual's personal evaluations of health information they encounter online (Terrasse et al., 2019). This concept of health literacy was utilized in this study through the COVID-19 questionnaire distributed to the participants. This questionnaire was used as data representing the participants COVID-19 health literacy score. This study used the CDC's definition of personal health literacy, "Personal health literacy is the degree to which individuals have the ability to find, understand, and use information and services to inform health-related decisions and actions for themselves and others" (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2020).

Beyond strictly educating users outside of their time spent on social media, some have wondered if social media can be used as a corrective mechanism to reverse beliefs specific to health misinformation. Bode and Vraga were interested in the potential of correcting social media misinformation and were specifically analyzing global health-related misinformation. The global outbreak of the Zika virus in 2015 prompted their interest in this issue due to health misinformation spreading rampantly through social media during that time, with many people becoming reliant on social media as their main mode of news. This incurred the propagation of misinformation on social media (Bode & Vraga, 2017). Bode and Vraga created a false Facebook feed that contained posts relating to the Zika virus. This study is highly applicable to this research as it is conducting a study specifically about health misinformation during a pandemic. Furthermore, it is generating a false Facebook feed as their medium for transmitting

misinformation, which is similar to the method of this study as well. Although this study is helpful in understanding the issue of health misinformation during a pandemic, it is still specific to misinformation regarding Zika Virus, not COVID-19. The current study is seeking to fill a gap in the literature by looking specifically at COVID-19 misinformation and the interaction between one's news source and one's political affiliation on this topic. Furthermore, we are incorporating the element of a COVID literacy score to notice any interactions between the participants score and their credibility ratings.

RQ1: Will one's news source or political affiliation impact the participant's credibility ratings such that there will be significant differences between groups?

COVID-19 Misinformation

Social media has remained consistent in its spreading of misinformation during the COVID-19 pandemic. False reports, statistics, and information regarding all facets of COVID can be pinpointed on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (Shahi et al., 2021). The rate at which misinformation has spread regarding COVID has alarmed many individuals, with the Director-General of the WHO (World Health Organization) stating, "We're not just fighting an epidemic; we're fighting an infodemic" (WHO, 2020). Shahi et al. conducted an exploratory study examining the diffusion of COVID-19 misinformation on the social media forum Twitter. By analyzing an extensive number of fact-checked tweets relating to COVID-19 and tracking their activity on the platform, their study was consistent with others cited earlier (Allcott et al., 2019; Vosoughi et al., 2018) that misinformation "propagates faster than partially false claims" (Shahi et al., 2020, p. 1).

COVID-19 conspiracy theories are one distinct strain of misinformation that can be found on social media. Allington et al. (2020) specifically examined the connection between COVID-19 health protective behaviors and conspiracy theories. Ultimately, those who are considered to believe COVID conspiracies are less likely to follow behaviors such as wearing a mask, washing their hands, etc. Social media's ability to foster such beliefs is troublesome and

"is associated with significant negative effects" relating to the dissemination of COVID-19 misinformation (p. 6). Why is social media an effective avenue for spreading false information? Authors have noted this is due to the high levels of credibility that social media posts can elicit (Alrubian et al., 2019).

The Influence of Credibility

Credibility can be defined as "the concept of eliciting confidence" or "inherent persuasiveness and truthfulness" (Agrichtein et al., 2008, p. 1). The crux of this study is built upon the perceived credibility of the Twitter posts as rated by the participants. Due to credibility's connectedness with belief formation (Alrubaian et al., 2018), one aim of this study was to look at the connection between the credibility of the Twitter post and the COVID literacy scores, which serve as an indicator of the participants COVID beliefs and knowledge. Furthermore, we also examined the interactions between one's source of news and political affiliation. Political affiliation adds another component to the overall framework of their personal beliefs.

Credibility is the groundwork of human decision making (Alrubaian et al., 2018), causing the level of credibility elicited by each Twitter post to be an important factor in determining what COVID beliefs people foster. Alrubian et al. (2018) wrote, "Credibility beliefs stem from evaluating the attributes of an attitude object, resulting in perceptive knowledge that guides feeling and actions" (p. 2831). Furthermore, in regard to credibility, research has shown that misinformative posts are more concerned with negating other information found on social media rather than purely to spread false information (Shahi et al., 2020). There is a constant stream of information invading the viewers feed that is giving completely contradictory information. Depending on one's beliefs and the level of credibility they attribute to that post, there will be feelings and actions guided from that (Alrubian et al., 2018). This has major implications regarding the problem of misinformation. The more credible someone perceives a statement to be, the more likely they are to believe it, and then make decisions based on those

beliefs. There are so many different variables contributing to one's personal beliefs and our aim was to examine the interplay between just a few of them. One important aspect is an individual's political affiliation.

Political Affiliation's Impact on Misinformation

There has been extensive research conducted on the connection between one's political beliefs and misinformation (Michael & Breaux, 2021; Ball & Maxmen, 2020). Specifically, there seems to be a connection between news sources and political affiliation. A news source in this instance referring to different news stations like Fox News, CNN, etc. Viewers' perceptions of how real or fake particular sources of news are seemed to differ based on their specific affiliation. Conservatives and liberals have vastly different levels of skepticism for specific sources as found in recent research (Michael & Breaux, 2021). Authors Michael and Breaux (2021) note fake or misinformative news could be another name for something that is "politically and psychologically intriguing" (p. 2). Therefore, depending on your political beliefs, you will find some news sources to be more reliable than others. There was also a marked increase of information spreading once COVID reached the United States. Scholars have gone so far as to assert that most of the problem comes down to politics (Ball & Maxmen, 2020). Overall, political affiliation seems a viable angle to consider when looking at one's susceptibility to believe misinformation, especially misinformation surrounding the Coronavirus.

> **H1**: There will be a difference between groups of those who classify themselves as politically liberal and those who classify themselves as politically conservative.

News Source: Newspaper vs Social Media

Although political affiliation might seem an intuitive aspect of the COVID misinformation problem, there is another aspect worth considering - an individual's news source. A study conducted by Wu et al. (2019) on defining, manipulating, and detecting social media misinformation reported that over two-thirds of U.S. adults read news from social media. Furthermore, more than 20% of those adults reported doing so frequently. In the current age,

social media has become a quick and accessible way to learn about current events. Moon and Hadley (2014) explain the social media platform Twitter has a unique ability for utilization as a news-broadcasting platform. With features such as "retweet" and "hashtag", Twitter allows different topics to spread expeditiously on the platform. Even news organizations employ these capabilities of Twitter due to the ease at which it can spread information.

However, a practice that might seem mildly outdated is that of reading the newspaper. Data from 2018 shows that social media has outperformed the newspaper with about 20% of Americans reporting often utilizing social media for news and 18% reporting often utilizing the newspaper (Shearer, 2018). Although there seems to be a steady decline in newspaper usage, there are a significant portion of Americans who prefer the newspaper over social media. As this study has noted, social media seems to propagate the spread of misinformation (Bode & Vraga, 2018). However, the same cannot necessarily be said of the newspaper. Historically, there is a trail of misinformation that can be found in previous journalism. However, the speed with which misinformation diffuses through social media is a phenomenon that really started growing in 2016 (Heekeren, 2020). The newspaper stood no chance when it came to the power of social media (Heekeren, 2020). The question remains of whether differences can be noted between users of these different platforms. Misinformation and the newspaper are an area of current literature that have previously been neglected due to the large focus on social media specifically. This study is aiming to illuminate the potential difference in susceptibility to misinformation between those who use the newspaper and those who use social media as their main source of news.

H2: Those who use social media as their main source of news will rank the misinformative posts with higher credibility than those who use the newspaper as their main source of news.

Methods

Participants

       To test these hypotheses and research questions, a between-subjects study was

conducted through an online survey in the Fall of 2021 and in the Spring of 2022. This survey

was then distributed through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to gather participants. All

participants remained anonymous via MTurk. The total sample included 85 participants. The

participants analyzed were largely male (67.9%) and from a wide range of ages (18-61 years old)

and educational backgrounds. The educational backgrounds ranged from high school graduates

(6.3%) to master's program graduates (15.6%). However, the majority of the participants held a

bachelor's degree (65.6%) with some holding an associate's degree (6.3%), and others describing

themselves with the category of some college (6.3%). Of these participants, the majority

indicated they use Twitter as an outlet for news (86.4%). Participants also had varying ethnicity

with the majority being Caucasian (77.8%), followed by Hispanic/Latino (7.4%), Asian/Pacific

Islander (6.2%) and Black/African American (6.2%). Amazon Mechanical Turk is a "virtual task"

database that allows business and individual access to a diverse network of individuals. Those

who answer the array of questionnaires are termed "workers" and are paid a certain fee based on

the depth and length of the assignment (MTurk.com). Each of the participants in this study were

paid $1.50 based on the questionnaire taking approximately 20 minutes to answer. MTurk

allows for a new pool of individuals that many do not have access to otherwise. For the purposes

of this study, a specific demographic of people was required (one that we did not have access to

with convenience sampling). Therefore, MTurk served as a useful tool for this endeavor. Each of

the participants was selected based on the categories of liberal and conservative as well as their

main news source of either social media or the newspaper. The four groups were as follows:

Group 1 received their news from social media and considering themselves politically

conservative (N=27), group 2 received their news from social media and considering themselves

politically liberal (N=34), group three received their news from the newspaper and considering

themselves politically conservative (N=5), and group four received their news from the newspaper and considering themselves politically liberal (N=15).

Procedure

First, we obtained IRB approval for the following experimental procedure. The participants were presented with an explanation of the experiment and then prompted to consent or end their participation in the study. Each group first answered a demographics questionnaire. This questionnaire aimed to confirm the participants beliefs. It also included questions such as gender, race, and level of education. Next, the groups received a faux Twitter feed containing ten false tweets with five true tweets interspersed among the false tweets to maintain the integrity of seeing a true social media feed. Furthermore, the distribution of true and false tweets was utilized to deter participants from assuming all tweets were false and giving a credibility rating as such. The participant would scroll through the Google form and be presented with each tweet. Underneath each tweet was a likert scale (from 1-7) to denote the level of credibility they attributed to that specific tweet (the *measuring of message credibility scale*). They would go through all fifteen tweets giving a rating for each individual tweet. Twitter was the medium chosen due to its reputation for the "dissemination of conspiracy beliefs and misinformation on medical and other topics" (Allington et al., 2020, p. 1). The false tweets were garnered from the website Snopes.com, a fact-checking website, and the true tweets were gathered from the CDC Twitter account. All Tweets remained nameless in order to minimize bias specific to the source. Lastly, they were presented with the Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices towards COVID scale, which served as their COVID literacy score.

Based on the current gap in the literature regarding message credibility, this study is interested in the credibility of the misinformation itself in the eyes of the viewer. Therefore, the posts remain nameless in order that the participants remain unbiased to the merit a particular author or source might add to that information.

Measures

Credibility Evaluations of Responses

We used two dependent variables. Each tweet was followed by the Measuring of Message Credibility scale (Appleman & Sundar, 2015) on which participants denoted the level of message credibility they believe that tweet contains. This served as the first dependent variable. This is a 7-point Likert scale (*from 1 = describes very poorly to 7 = describes very well*) asking that each individual statement be rated based on the three adjectives: accurate, authentic, and believable. The scale has a Cohen's *d* of .619 and Cronbach's α = .87 indicating high validity and reliability. It also tested highly in content and construct validity (Appleman & Sundar, 2015). The ratings from each of the fifteen tweets were combined into an index (with the scores of the true tweets being reverse coded), with a higher score indicating higher credibility ratings given to the overall total of tweets. The highest credibility score possible was 105 and the lowest was 15.

Beliefs Regarding the COVID-19 Virus

Each participant also answered a thirteen-item questionnaire adapted from the Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) towards COVID scale (Zhong et al., 2020). and serves as the second dependent variable in this study. This scale was developed recently to gauge the knowledge of a population's beliefs and attitudes towards different pieces of COVID information and see how that interacts with their personal practices regarding COVID protocols. The questionnaire has sufficient internal consistency (Cronbach's α = .71) and has been utilized in multiple other studies (Lee et al., 2021; Clements, 2020). The scores from this questionnaire served as the COVID literacy scores. These scores were coded such that a higher KAP score showed a higher COVID literacy within that participant. The 6 questions pertaining to knowledge (K) had a possible high score of 6 based on yes/no/don't know options. These questions dealt with topics on the characteristics of the virus, transmission of the virus, and prevention and control of the virus. The 4 questions pertaining to attitudes (A) had a high score of 10, with their format taking a 5-point Likert scale (*1 = very low, 3 = neither low nor high, and*

5 = very high). A1 and A2 questions were specific to attitudes regarding personal susceptibility and potential severity if they were to develop COVID (A1 and A2 scores were not included in the total score and only used to gauge the participants' perceived risk towards COVID). A3 and A4 both questioned the participants' beliefs on the efficacy of COVID practices (personal hygiene and social distancing). The 3 questions pertaining to practices (P) had a high score of 12. These questions were formatted with a four-point Likert scale (*1 = not at all and 4 = extremely*). They served to gauge the participants COVID behaviors (wearing facial masks, washing hands, and avoiding crowded locations).
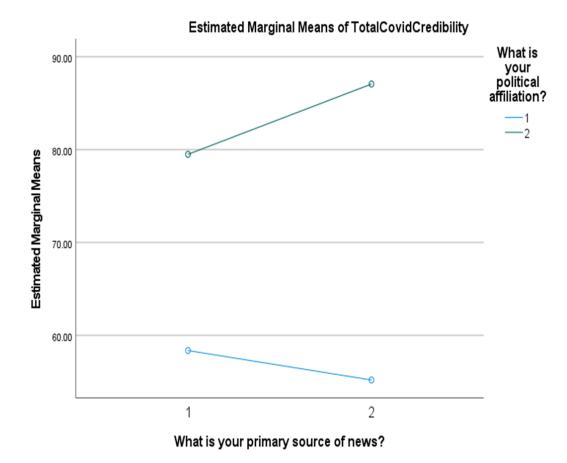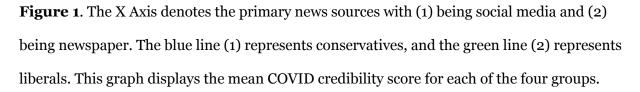
<div align="center">**Results**</div>

Main Effects

To test our research questions and hypotheses, multiple analyses of variance (MANOVA) were run on the data. A MANOVA compares the differences in means between two different independent variables and their interactions with the chosen dependent variables (Laerd.com). The MANOVAs were used to test Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2. H1 stating there would be a difference between groups of those who classify themselves as politically liberal and those who classify themselves as politically conservative. This hypothesis is based on our beliefs playing a role in what we determine as credible (Michael & Breaux, 2021). There was a statistically significant difference found between the credibility ratings (*Measuring of Message Credibility Scale)* of those who are politically liberal or politically conservative (p=<.001), which confirmed hypothesis 1. The difference in conservatives (N=32) credibility ratings (M=56.78) and liberals (N=49) credibility ratings (M=83.28) was found to be significant with liberals ranking the tweets with higher credibility than did their conservative counterparts. Furthermore, the difference in their COVID literacy scores showed a marginally significant difference when looking at the main effects (p=.053). When looking at the main effect of political affiliation, there was a significant difference found between those who are liberal and those who are conservative when examining both dependent variables.

Hypothesis 2 speculated that those who use social media as their main source of news would rank the misinformative posts with higher credibility than those who use the newspaper as their main source of news. This hypothesis proved to not carry statistical significance (ns). When examining the main effect of the news source, there was not a statistically significant difference in the participants' credibility scores (p=.619) or in their COVID literacy scores (p=.533). Those who used social media as their main source of news did not rank their tweets higher than those who use the newspaper as their main source of news. Social media (M=68.94) users ranked their tweets with an average that did not vary much from those who use the newspaper (M= 63.40). These numbers showed an insignificant difference when looking at the main effect pf news source.

When examining the independent variables (political affiliation and news source) interaction with credibility scores using pairwise comparisons, there was also significance found (p=<.001). Therefore, the news source did not have an effect its own, however, in conjunction with political affiliation there was a significant difference between the groups when looking at their COVID credibility scores (Figure 1). This data also addresses the primary hypotheses of the study (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. The X Axis denotes the primary news sources with (1) being social media and (2) being newspaper. The blue line (1) represents conservatives, and the green line (2) represents liberals. This graph displays the mean COVID credibility score for each of the four groups.

In summary, there does seem to be a notable interaction between political affiliation and the credibility ratings given for each tweet, as well as their scores of COVID literacy. Although there were no significant findings when looking at one's news source independently, there was a significant difference between groups when analyzing both independent variables together alongside the dependent variable of COVID credibility scores (p=<.001). The differences in COVID literacy scores were not found to be significant when looking at the pairwise comparisons of all four groups (p=.177). Overall, the data shows that political affiliation and main source of news together played a major role in the results, and these variables influenced credibility scores, but not COVID literacy scores.

Discussion

This study analyzes the effect of misinformation regarding COVID-19 on the perceived credibility of the viewer. Through looking at the interactions between political affiliation and news source, some points of interest were raised in regard to credibility. Based on the study at hand, there was a significant difference in the credibility ratings between groups when looking solely from the perspective of political affiliation. Previous research suggests that political affiliation does factor into what we consider misinformation (Michael & Breaux, 2021), so this is consistent with previous literature, however further research on these specific differences are warranted. The findings suggested that those who identified as politically liberal ranked their tweets as significantly more credible (M=83.28) than did those who identified as conservatives (M=56.78). Conservatives generally ranked their tweets around the 3-5 mark on the Likert scale, thus giving less drastic responses one way or the other. Further research will benefit from understanding these kinds of differences based on political affiliation to determine if liberals tend to perceive social media credibility more drastically than do conservatives.

The findings of this study suggest that news sources alone do not play an important role in people's perception of misinformation credibility. However, in conjunction with political affiliation it does seem to have influence. Current research shows that social media rapidly propagates the spread of misinformation (Bode & Vraga, 2017). Evidence has shown there to be potential damage that can come from the rise of social media in our society when used as a primary news source (Domenico et al., 2020). Luckily, social media has been shown to have the potential to correct misinformative beliefs (Bode & Vrage, 2017) making its propensity for misinformation spreading less daunting. Although the news sources chosen (social media versus print newspaper) did not play a major role in the results of this study, future research should examine other types of news sources outside of social media and the newspaper. Different mediums such as broadcast news, talk radio, or internet websites would all be fascinating avenues to compare to social media. The newspaper and social media are on two opposite

spectrums of news delivery, so seeing the data from news with a more similar style of delivery would be a useful addition to the existing literature.

This study is limited in several ways. The first being the difference in sample sizes between news sources. The disproportionate numbers could have influenced the data shown, however, the fact that the results are in line with the current research does provide more confidence in the study's results. Further research should employ a larger sample size that is closer to equal groups between the independent variables.

This study is limited to misinformation found specifically on Twitter. Twitter has shown to be one of the most, if not the most, prominent disseminator of misinformation (Allcott et al., 2019; Vosoughi et al., 2018; Shahi et al., 2021). However, further research could benefit this discussion on misinformation by looking at different social media platforms than Twitter. Also, comparing different social media platforms to other kinds of news sources would be a beneficial addition as well.

This study is also limited to print newspapers. Further research could benefit from the inclusion of both physical newspapers and online newspapers to cover a broader sample group. The variation between physical and digital newspapers may itself represent a divided group and therefore should be taken into consideration for future research.

Social media has become an aspect of everyday life for the average American (Suciu, 2021). Therefore, it is important to understand the effect it has on the information we are taking in and integrating into our lives. Misinformation on social media is not a problem that can be easily solved. Moreover, misinformation has existed far before the inception of social media (Burkhardt, 2017). However, due to social media's ascendancy in society, we should make every effort to deter the spreading of misinformation. The COVID-19 pandemic has been just one illustration of the influence of misinformation on broader society. Although this study was not focused specifically on stopping the spread of misinformation, it has important implications for what we as the users should consider when viewing social media. Knowing the impact of

misinformation, it is important to understand from these results that perhaps a "one-size-fits-all" approach is not the most effective. If political affiliation and new source contribute to our beliefs of credibility, it is important that we consider ourselves and our beliefs as we use social media to help mitigate the potential influences it is having on us. Through understanding the effects of social media misinformation, not just on the population but also on the individual, we can begin to make greater strides towards the termination of misinformation.

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