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Be Real, Do Not Be Fake: A Pilot Study on Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia Students' Fake News Literacy

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Abstract

If nothing is accomplished to stop it, the virality of fake news on social media will continue to grow and become more damaging, particularly among young people. Recognizing false information and verifying sources has become increasingly important as people rely on the Internet and social media for their news. The primary objective of this study is to assess the level of understanding of fake news media literacy among university students. Forty-three Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia students enrolled in the New Media Communication program were polled for this research. This study uses descriptive statistics to analyze the data collected via Google Forms—the results of examining the data generated immediately through a Google form. Young people read the news online but still have limited media literacy when assessing the truth of information. Research suggests that false statement is commonly discovered because young people do not carefully examine online news. Researchers conduct in-depth interviews and studies with this demographic to better understand how young people process information and evaluate its veracity. This research adds to the expanding body of knowledge on student use of social media in Malaysia, especially on how students get their news in light of the results of this pilot study, the main research project will consist of in-depth interviews with students to understand more about their perspectives on how to identify and differentiate between real and fake news.

Keywords: Media Literacy, Fake News, New Media, Communication.

Introduction

Social media and online news portals have risen to prominence worldwide, including in Malaysia, due to developments in technology and digital communication channels. According to Ahmad and Buyong (2017), a news portal is a hybrid of "old school" (conventional) digital journalism with "new school" (social) web networking. In addition, several studies (Can, Kocberber, Baglioglu, Kardas, Ocalan, & Uyar, 2008; Lee & Yoon, 2010) and anecdotal evidence (Lee & Yoon, 2010) point to the Internet as the primary source for the news portal's content. This social networking site is a basic necessity in today's society. Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram are just some social media platforms the group uses to discuss in-depth and heated debates about current events and other topics. People not active on this platform come across as oblivious to and behind the times on social concerns.

The number of news websites and blogs available on the Internet has increased. Due to the dynamic character of web portals, it is possible to account for this astonishing

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growth. In contrast, most online news portals are updated weekly, with some updating hourly (or more frequently). The usage of communication media technologies has positive and negative effects on the development of communication technology. Because information is quick and easily accessible, social media users can interact directly, not merely receive news, knowledge, and entertainment. A culture of media literacy is needed to combat the growing intensity and autonomy of the media's influence and its potential for damage. In addition, media literacy aims to protect weak and vulnerable users from the effects of media penetration of new media culture. The expansion of news portals results from overloading information (Oh et al., 2021; Chen & Masullo Chen, 2020). Due to the abundance of available information, there has been an increase in demand for news literacy on topics such as "fake news," "misinformation," and "disinformation" (Johnson et al., 2021).

With the accessibility of information at your fingertips, social media websites spread false news and information daily. Due to the expansion of social media platforms and blogs, as well as the evolution of the news writing style, fake news has been a prevalent issue among journalism specialists in recent years (Zollo, 2019; Shu, 2018; Lee & Tandoc, 2017; Rubin et al., 2016). With the development of new media and the sophistication of technology, some users have abused the complexity of technology by disseminating false news/information via social media. The dissemination of such false news or information contains elements of deception, inciting racial tensions, slandering a person to diminish their dignity and reputation, etc. The spread of fake news has become a dangerous epidemic that requires the intervention of multiple parties, including the government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and social media users. From 1 January 2020 to 31 May 2022, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) received 3,285 complaints about deemed fake news content(Sinar Harian, 2022). This research is enlightening and supports the findings of a study by Beauvais (2022), which found that the rapid spread of misinformation on social media platforms, in addition to cognitive, psychological, and sociological factors, causes people to believe fake news.

Centers of deception and online misinformation are inevitable. The increased usage of social media as a source of information contributes to spreading of fake news. False news or information transmission is known as information disorder (Monsees, 2021). Some social media users intentionally or unintentionally spread false information. Frequently, Facebook pages that disseminated misleading material had more activity than traditional media outlets, influencing how people considered the issues (Hannah et al., 2022). Disseminating false or inaccurate information can damage the public's minds, leading to prejudice and conflict.

Further research has revealed that users' digital literacy, cognitive ability, and self-worth play a role in their content creation, sharing, and feedback (Nam & Hwang2021). The low level of media and information literacy among Malaysians is one of the causes of the escalating spread of fake news. Datuk Seri Dr. Salleh Said Keruak, a parliament member for the state of Usukan, has claimed that "Malaysians are still digitally poverty." During a debate in the Dewan Rakyat, Teo Nie Ching,

a parliament member for the state of Kulai, claimed that 1.7 million students in primary and secondary schools belong to the "digitally poverty" category (Berita Harian, 2020). People in most countries still need to learn how to determine whether the information is true or false. A previous study by Himma-Kadakas & Ojamets (2022) demonstrates how journalists verify the information using traditional journalistic skills (e.g., source verification, critical thinking, and knowledge of topics outside journalism). However, online behavior demonstrates that social media users have distinct skills from journalists in receiving the news (Kaye et al., 2022). The rise of social bots (Aldayel & Magdy, 2022) has contributed to the dissemination of fake news, and users' political contexts affect their editorial decisions (Horowitz et al., 2022).

Information disorder, fake news, and disinformation are all issues linked to principals choosing information based on their propensity to behave more kindly, even when their intentions are unclear (Friedrichsen et al., 2022). Moore & Hancock's study demonstrates that older adults are especially susceptible to online fake news, possibly because they are less digitally literate than younger individuals. However, according to the statistics, most social media users in Malaysia are youth aged 13-34, and Internet users aged 60 and older accounted for a minor proportion of respondents (statista. com, 2020). Therefore, this research is crucial for comprehending the media literacy level among young Malaysians when obtaining information through social media.

Young people, especially college students, rely heavily on social media to get their news, share their creations, and connect with others, making them easy targets for disinformation

campaigns. Results from a survey conducted in Malaysia by Omar, S. Z., Kovalan, K., & Bolong, J. (2021) show that those between the ages of 21 and 30 make up the largest demographic of Internet users. Positive and bad relationships with the Internet abound. One of the most common sources of unintended results when working in the cloud is a need for knowledge of potential threats. Macedo-Rouet, Potocki, Scharrer, Ros, Stadtler, Salmerón, and Rouet (2019) found that when young people received excessive information on social media, most of them failed to recognize problems such as topic mismatch.

Furthermore, a study by Mrah (2022) indicates that assisting students become digitally media-literate information consumers is essential. In addition, the rise of fake news and disinformation is due to a lack of skill in functional and critical presumption and the tendency to share unverified information for no reason or fun (Syam & Nurrahmi, 2020). Young users are likelier to share content related to their interests, regardless of its veracity (Herrero-Diz et al. de Cózar, 2020). From the perspective of Malaysian youth, most students have a moderate level of new media literacy. Aside from that, this group of young people has broad conceptions of what constitutes news, and their news intake is primarily passive, probably due to a lack of motivation. They consider news essential but frequently dull, repetitive, harmful, and dismissed by young people.

There are concerns regarding fake news, disinformation, and misinformation. The spread of false information and slander can affect national security and cohesion. A lack of trust in social networks (Pérez-Escoda, Pedrero -Esteban, Rubio-Rodriguez,

& Jiménez-Narros, 2022) and online harassment of social media users (Oksanen et al., 2022) has resulted from the rise of fake news reports.

Song et al. (2023) demonstrate that spreading fake news can be divided into novelty and effectiveness. During the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers have focused on increasing fake news studies (Song et al., 2023; Agarwal et al., 2022; Kirn & Hinders, 2022; McEwan et al., 2022). During the COVID-19 pandemic, this news or false information spread worldwide, including in Malaysia. The safety and efficacy of vaccines are among the hottest studies of fake news during COVID-19 (Harari & Monteiro, 2022; Al-Uqdah et al., 2022; Musi et al., 2022). Studies indicate that media exposure contributes to the rise of fake news because the Internet is likely the most common source of health information (Abd-Alrazaq et al., 2020). This previous research shows that the Internet and social media attend every aspect of life. Unfortunately, lies, misinformation, fake news, and hate speech may spread rapidly through new media, driving it more difficult for everyone to deal with digital concerns. In addition, most young people assume the Internet is the best social media platform to access news.

Therefore, the primary focus of previous studies has been on methods or approaches for identifying fake news (Agarwal et al., 2022; Rath et al., 2022; Rubinelli et al., 2022; Uppada et al., 2022; Michail et al., 2022). Unfortunately, there needs to be more research on understanding how a target audience's cognitive system deals with disinformation (Hung & Hung, 2022), especially in Malaysia. However, research on young people's ability to recognize false information shared on

social media still needs to be completed.

Numerous effects of fake news or disinformation indicate that the media literacy rate remains low, particularly among young people. According to Maksl et al. (2017), understanding and practicing media literacy can assist citizens, particularly young people, avoid disinformation by allowing them to construct more conscious and informed decisions regarding their news practices and sources and encourage greater news engagement. Therefore, generational differences in journalism experience and understanding lead to different trust and reliability assessments and verification strategies. (Wunderlich, Holig, & Hasebrink, 2022).

Figure 1. Important components of digital and news media literacy

Over the past two decades, media literacy has emerged as a pressing social concern due to the rise of digital media (Abbasi et al., 2020). The rate at which new technologies emerge and become widely used is increasing rapidly. Youth worldwide are the fastest adopters of new technology, which bodes well for user involvement. Digital literacy in a disruptive era is crucial for youth. Figure 1 show illustrates the factors contributing to youth's media literate environments.

For this reason, students turn to social media to get the message out. It should be well-

versed in a variety of news sources in order to read and comprehend the news. Media literacy is important for today's students, who spend a significant amount of time-consuming content online and should have a firm grasp of digital and news media fundamentals. Young people nowadays are less inclined to rely on television, radio, or newspapers as credible information sources than on social media.

This study investigates the media literacy level among Malaysian university students, particularly regarding their understanding of fake news. The choice of university students as respondents is based on their likelihood of growing up with smartphones and their heavy reliance on social media for communication and information. With the typical student spending over 27 hours per week on social media platforms, they are constantly connected and informed about current events. The primary objective of this study is to assess the level of understanding of fake news media literacy among university students. By evaluating their knowledge and awareness of fake news, the study aims to gauge their ability to identify and evaluate the credibility of news sources in the digital era.

Additionally, the research emphasizes the significance of fake news media literacy. It aims to highlight how media literacy plays a crucial role in combating the spread and influence of fake news. By recognizing the importance of being media literate, students can develop critical thinking skills and become more discerning consumers of news and information. Moreover, the study aims to comprehend why understanding fake news media literacy is vital. It explores the implications and broader social significance of acquiring media literacy skills related to fake news. The research aims to shed light on

the benefits of understanding and navigating the complex media landscape in today's information-driven society.

Overall, these research objectives aim to contribute to understanding fake news media literacy among university students. The findings will help develop a framework for social media literacy that can effectively combat the challenges posed by fake news, ensuring that young individuals are equipped with the necessary skills to navigate the digital media landscape and make informed decisions about the credibility of news sources.

METHODS

For this study, 43 students from the New Media Communication Program at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia were surveyed. The lecturer selected students because they are new media students who study new media. Those students who could not comprehend the context or meaning of a question were provided with an explanation. The survey was performed under the supervision of lecturers so that respondents would be comfortable responding. The survey questions were based on a questionnaire used in an earlier study by Adam Maksl (2015). Additionally, researchers added a few questions based on local context. The survey incorporated a few revisions proposed by lecturers based on their experience.

This poll was administered online via Google Forms. The questionnaire included open-ended and five-point Likert scale questions to assess the respondents' demographics and social media literacy. There are different parts to the questions. For example, (1) How people use the news

Afiqah Mior Kamarulbaid, Muhammad Raqib Mohd Sofian, Nurul Nadirah Abu Hasan, Nurul Fathihin Mohd Noor Shah, Norsimaa Mustaffa, Mohamad Hafizuddin Mohamed Najid, Mohd Faridh Hafez Mhd Omar

media, (2) Why people read the news, (3) How skeptical people are of the news media, and (4) How to understand the news media on new media platforms.

This study employed a new scale based on Potter's (2004) concept of media literacy and tailored particularly to news media. The modified model claims that news media literate persons reflect profoundly on their media experiences believe they control media's influence, and have a solid foundational understanding of media content, industries, and effects. In Potter's model, five fundamental "knowledge structures" - knowledge about media content, media industries, media effects, the real world, and the self - interact with a person's combination of drives, needs, and intellectual abilities (called the "personal locus") to govern information processing and meaning construction. In the context of news media literacy, knowing about content, industries, and effects includes things like the values behind the news, what role the economics of the news media play in its construction and control of news content, and the positive and negative effects of news media exposure. Therefore, the primary focus of previous studies has been on methods or approaches for identifying fake news (Agarwal et al., 2022; Rath et al., 2022; Rubinelli et al., 2022; Uppada et al., 2022; Michail et al., 2022). Unfortunately, there needs to be more research on understanding how a target audience's cognitive system deals with disinformation (Hung & Hung, 2022), especially in Malaysia. However, research on young people's ability to recognize false information shared on social media still needs to be completed.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

a) Demographic

It was found in this research that 62.8% of female students responded to this survey question, but only 37.2% of male students did so. Women have recently overtaken males in Malaysia's higher education institutions and most academic fields (statista.com, 2020).
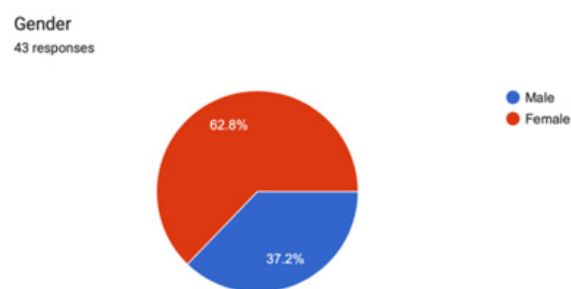

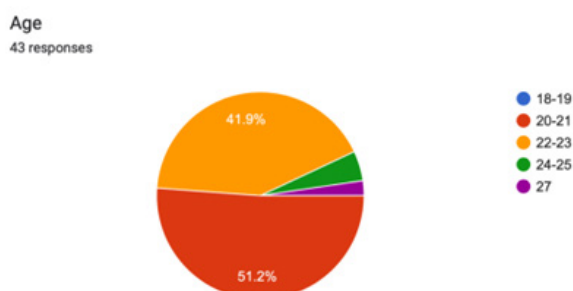Figure 2. Respondents base on gender

Figure 3. Respondents based on ages.

According to the results obtained, as shown in figure 2, 43 students have completed this online survey, 62.8% are female students, and 37.2% are male students. As shown in figure 3, 51% of these students are 20–21 years old, while 41.9% are 22–23 years old.

b) News Media Use

Based on Figure 4, which depicts the student's duration spent reading a daily print newspaper on an average weekday, 90.8% of students reported that they do not get their news from newspapers. The findings indicate

that only 9.2 percent read newspapers for news, with another word that they do so occasionally and that only 2.3% of those 9.2 percent read newspapers daily.

aligns with their browsing history and social connections. Additionally, the interactive nature of social media allows for real-time discussions, sharing, and engagement with
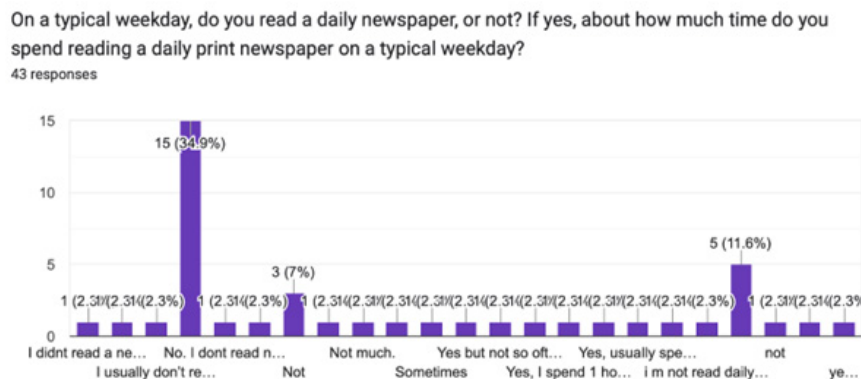

Figure 4. Duration of Reading Daily Newspapers

Millennial students' preference for digital news over newspapers and print media can be attributed to a combination of technological advancements, changing media consumption habits, and generational characteristics. First and foremost, millennials are the first generation to have grown up with the internet and digital technology as an integral part of their lives. They are more comfortable using smartphones, tablets, and laptops, which provide easy access to a vast array of online news sources. The convenience of accessing news at any time and from anywhere has made digital platforms the go-to choice for most millennials.

Secondly, the rise of social media and digital news aggregators has significantly influenced millennials' news consumption patterns. These platforms offer a more personalized and interactive news experience, tailored to individual interests and preferences. The algorithms used by social media platforms ensure that millennials are exposed to news content that

news stories, fostering a sense of community and connection around current events.

Lastly, the decline in print media circulation and the changing business models of traditional newspapers have played a role in millennials' reduced engagement with newspapers. Many traditional newspapers have shifted their focus to online platforms to reach a broader audience and stay relevant in the digital age. As a result, millennials may find it more challenging to access physical newspapers, leading them to gravitate towards digital news sources that are more readily available and easily accessible. The convergence of technology, the influence of social media, and the shift in media consumption habits have led millennial students to embrace digital news platforms over traditional newspapers and print media. As this generation continues to be at the forefront of the digital revolution, the trend of digital news consumption is likely to persist and shape the future of media consumption habits.

Figure 5 shows the duration of students spend reading news on the Internet. One hundred percent of the findings indicate that they obtain news via the Internet. Four point seven percent of respondents reported using the Internet twice daily as a news source. Others, as high as 2.3 percent, said they surf the Internet for 3 to 6 hours and 10 to 30 minutes daily.

students can access news updates at their convenience, be it during short breaks, while commuting, or in between classes. The availability of news content 24/7 ensures that students can stay informed without being restricted by the fixed publishing schedule of traditional print media.

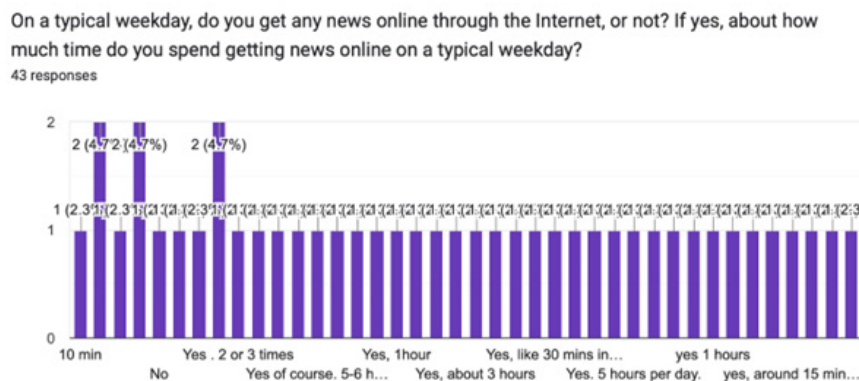social media plays a significant role in shaping news consumption habits among

Figure 5. The Duration of Spent Online News on a Typical Weekday.

Malaysian students' preference for reading news through online sites with a fairly long duration every day can be attributed to several factors. First and foremost, Malaysia has a high internet penetration rate, and access to smartphones and other digital devices is widespread among students (Kirn & Hindes, 2022). This easy access to the internet allows them to stay connected and informed through various online news platforms. Additionally, online news sites provide a diverse range of news sources, catering to different interests and perspectives, which appeals to the students' desire for comprehensive and varied information.

The convenience and flexibility offered by online news platforms contribute to their popularity among Malaysian students. With busy schedules and academic commitments,

Malaysian students (Kirn & Hindes, 2022). Social media platforms are often used as avenues for news discovery, sharing, and discussion. Students can come across news articles through their social feeds, and the interactive nature of these platforms encourages them to engage with the content and share it with their peers.

As shown in Figure 6, there are 69 percent of the respondents, firmly disagreed with the idea that news played no role in their lives. This resounding disagreement reflects the recognition among these students that news is integral to their personal and academic lives. As university students, they understand that staying informed about current events and world affairs is crucial for broadening their knowledge, enhancing critical thinking skills, and fostering informed discussions
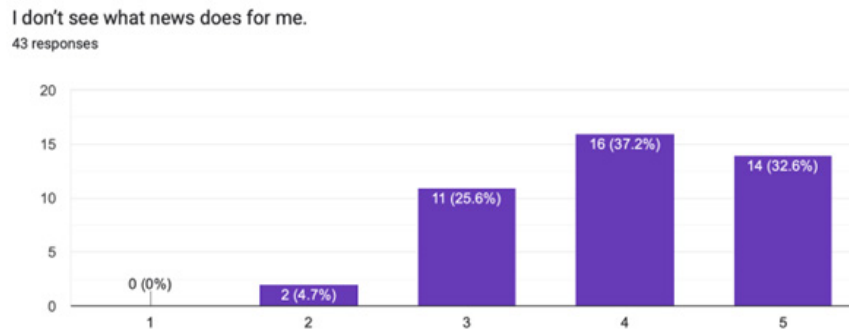
Figure 6. I do Not See Any News That is Done for Me.

in their academic pursuits. News enables them to connect with the global community, understand diverse perspectives, and engage with real-world issues, contributing to their intellectual growth and overall development.

Contrastingly, only 4.7 percent of the respondents claimed not to see the role of news in their lives. While this percentage is relatively low, it is essential to understand the reasons behind this viewpoint. Some students may hold this stance due to factors such as time constraints, overwhelming academic responsibilities, or a perceived disconnect between news and their immediate concerns.

53.5 percent of those surveyed in Figure 6 agreed that they follow the news because they are required to, while 27.9 percent disagreed and 18.6 percent were neutral. Several factors

may contribute to the trend of many students at USIM Malaysia not following the news. Firstly, the demanding nature of academic commitments and extracurricular activities may leave students with limited time and energy to keep up with current events. With their focus on coursework, research, and examinations, news consumption may take a backseat. Secondly, students might prioritize specific interests or rely on social media and peers for information, leading them to miss out on comprehensive news coverage. Thirdly, a perception of news overload and the prevalence of misinformation on various platforms could deter some students from engaging with the news. The need for media literacy education and the creation of easily accessible and reliable news sources tailored
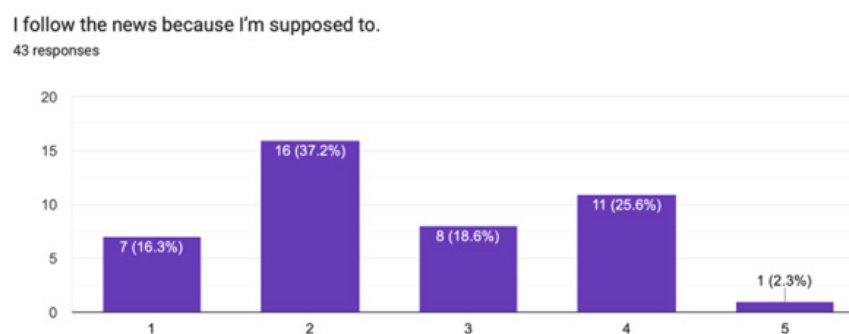

Figure 7. I Must Read the News.

to students' interests could help bridge this gap and encourage a more informed and engaged student body (Omar et al., 2021).

for news.

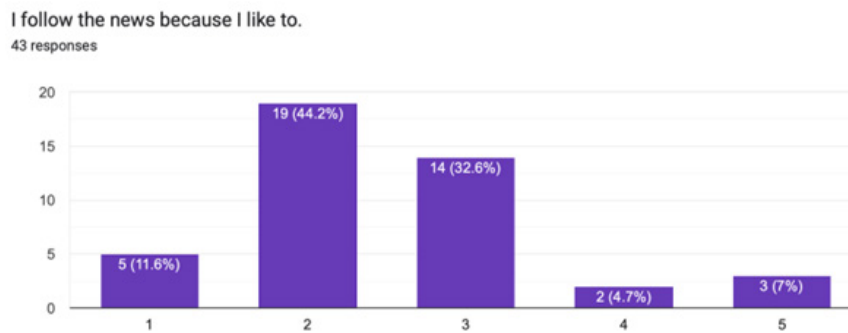**I follow the news because I like to.**
43 responses

Figure 8. I Follow The News Because I Appreciate It.

According to Figure 7, 55.8 percent of news followers do so because they enjoy it, while 32.6% are neutral and 11.7% disagree. Many respondents may disagree with the statement "I Follow The News Because I Appreciate It" because the relentless coverage of negative and sensationalist news in certain media outlets can create a sense of disillusionment or fatigue, leading respondents to view news as a source of anxiety or stress rather than appreciation. Moreover, the perception of biased or sensationalized reporting can erode trust in media, further diminishing the appreciation

According to Figure 8, 67.4 percent of respondents are neutral regarding the news media. While 32.5% of respondents agreed that the news media were fair, 11.8% of them disagreed. Many students might choose neutral because they may have limited exposure to a wide range of news sources and, therefore, lack sufficient information to form a strong opinion on the fairness of the media as a whole. Additionally, the prevalence of biased or sensationalized reporting in some media outlets could lead to skepticism and uncertainty about the overall fairness of the media landscape (Hannah et al., 2022).

I think the news media are fair. (reverse-coded)
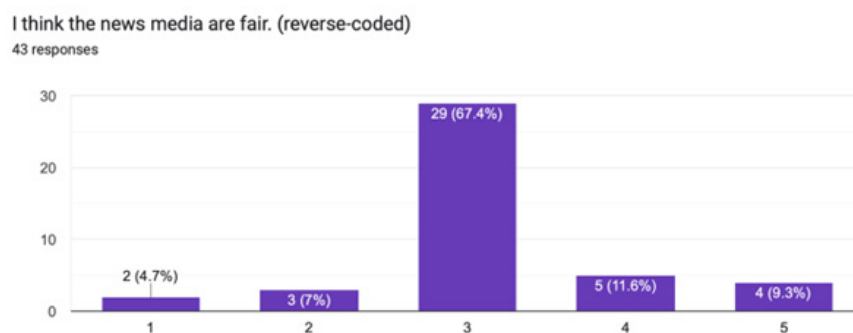43 responses

Figure 9. The News Media Are Objective.

Moreover, the term "fair" can be subjective and open to interpretation, making it challenging for students to gauge the media's fairness accurately.

Figure 11 demonstrates that 65,1 percent of the respondents describe the news media's accuracy as neutral. While 18.6 percent disagree with the statement that the
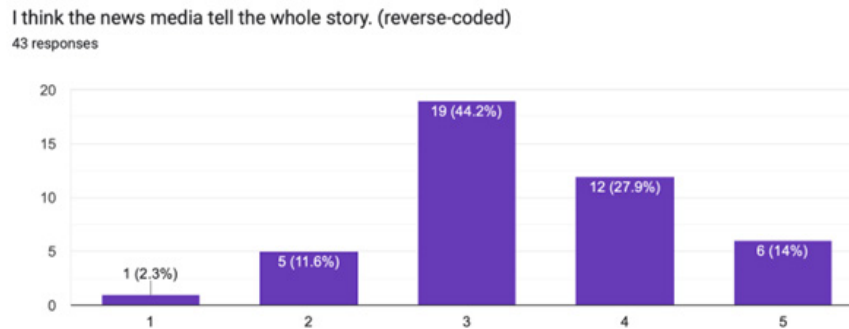

Figure 10. The News Media Tell The Whole Story

Based on Figure 10, 44.2 percent of neutral respondents about the news media tell the whole story. While 41.9 percent of respondents agreed that the news media tell the entire story, 13.9% disagreed. They might be aware of the prevalence of media bias and sensationalism in certain news outlets, which raises doubts about the media's ability to provide wholly balanced and unbiased news coverage (Moore and Hancock, 2022). Additionally, students may not have extensive knowledge of all available news sources and their respective reporting practices, making it challenging to make a definitive judgment on the overall fairness and balance of the news media.

news media are accurate, 16.3 percent believe that the news media are accurate. he spread of misinformation and fake news on social media platforms can further undermine trust in news media accuracy. To address this, media literacy education is essential to help students develop critical thinking skills and discern reliable news sources from misinformation, enabling them to make more informed judgments about the accuracy of the news media. Additionally, promoting transparency in journalistic practices and highlighting the importance of fact-checking can contribute to rebuilding trust in news media accuracy among students.
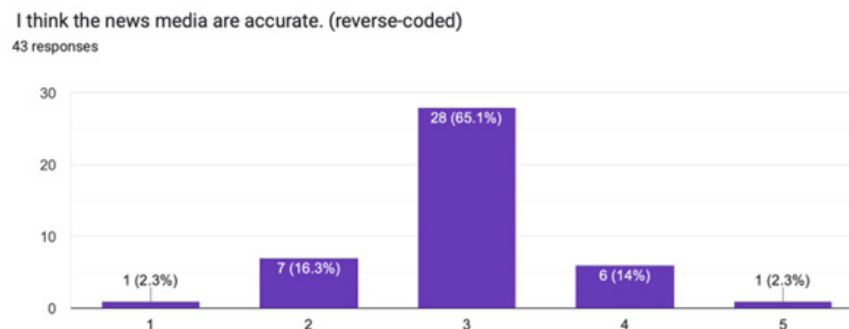

Figure 11. News Media Are Accurate

c) News Media Literacy on The New Media Platform

evaluate news sources critically and discern reliable information from misleading content.

I think the news media are accurate. (reverse-coded)
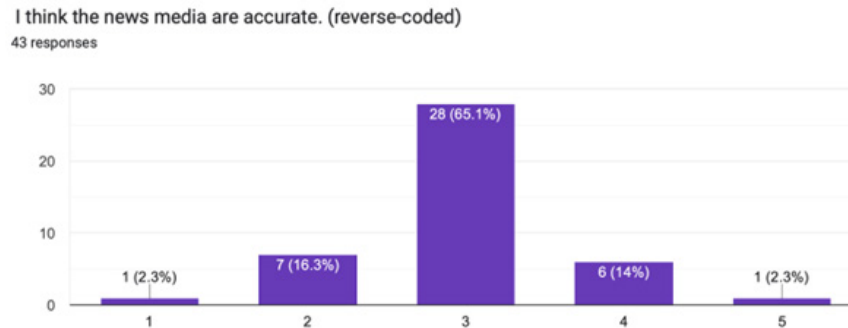43 responses

Figure 12. Differentiate Between Fake and Real

Figure 12 reveals that 65.1% of respondents are neutral about whether a piece of news or information is fake or real. In comparison, 23.3% of respondents cannot distinguish between fake and accurate news, and 11.6% can identify fake or real news. The proliferation of digital media and social networking platforms has made it easier for misinformation and fake news to spread rapidly, making it challenging for students to distinguish between credible sources and false information. Media literacy education is not uniformly integrated into academic curricula, leading to a lack of formal training in critical thinking and information verification. Students may not have the necessary skills to

Additionally, the rise of echo chambers and filter bubbles on social media can limit exposure to diverse perspectives, reinforcing pre-existing beliefs and making it difficult to challenge misinformation.

Figure 13 demonstrates that 60.5 percent of respondents did not click through to read the full story before sharing, 32.6% were neutral, and only 7% clicked through to read the whole story. the fast-paced nature of digital media and social networking platforms encourages quick information consumption and sharing, leading to a superficial understanding of the content (Musi et al. 2022). Additionally, the desire to be part of online discussions and share content with peers might drive students

When you share news stories on social media, how often do you "click through" to read the full story before sharing?
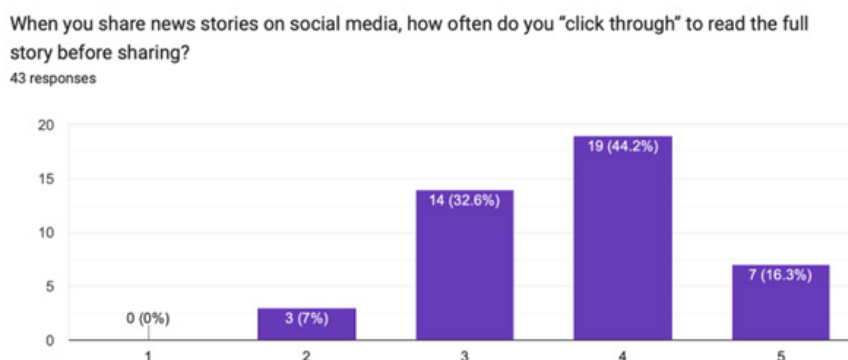43 responses

Figure 13. Click through to read the entire article before sharing it

to share articles without fully comprehending them.

There are 48.8 percent of neutral respondents chose that the number of likes increases the perception of truthful news.

with friends or followers on social media. This finding highlights the prevalence of unintentional misinformation dissemination in the digital age, where the rapid sharing of content can lead to the propagation of false

The number of "likes" or popularity of a news item shared on social media increases your perception of how truthful the item is
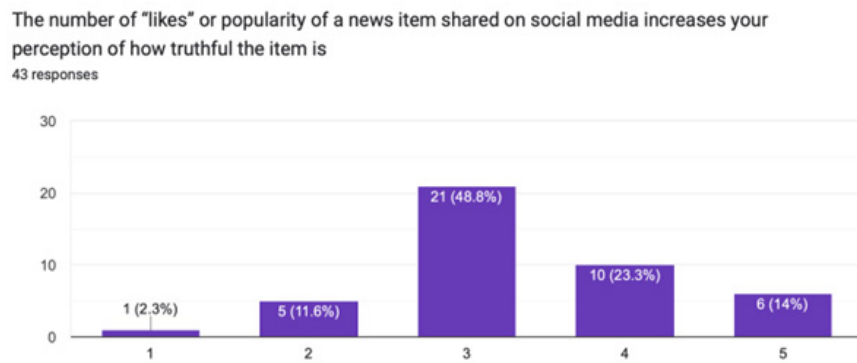43 responses

Figure 14. The number of likes increases when news is perceived as accurate.

In contrast, 37.3 percent disagreed that the number of likes played a role in ensuring the truthfulness of news, and only 13.9 percent of the surveyed agreed. More student agree due to the perception that accuracy and credibility are essential factors for garnering engagement and popularity on social media. In the digital age, social media platforms have become primary channels for news consumption and sharing. Content that is perceived as accurate and reliable is more likely to resonate with

audiences, leading to increased likes, shares, and interactions. Students who believe that accurate news attracts more attention might assume that individuals value trustworthy information and are more inclined to endorse and share such content within their social networks.

The research result, as shown in Figure 15, indicates that a significant number of respondents, 44.2 percent, admitted to accidentally sharing inaccurate information
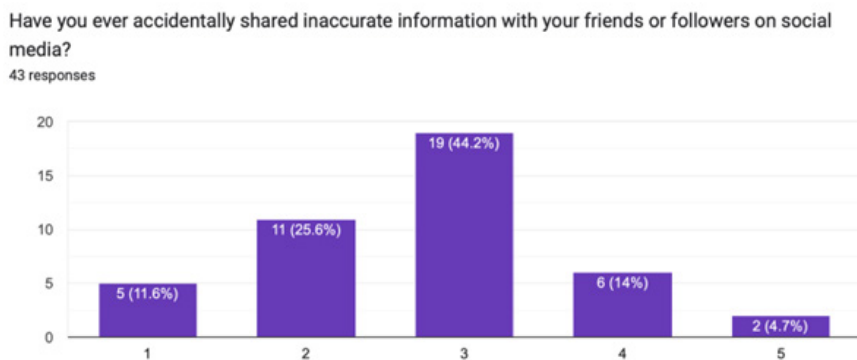
Have you ever accidentally shared inaccurate information with your friends or followers on social media?
43 responses

Figure 15: Shared Inaccurate Information Inadvertently

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or misleading information. The fact that a substantial portion of respondents, 37.2 percent, agreed with this statement further emphasizes the need for increased media literacy education and critical thinking skills to mitigate the spread of misinformation on social media. On the other hand, 18.7 percent of respondents disagreed, suggesting that a minority may be more cautious in their sharing practices. These results underscore the importance of promoting responsible information sharing on social media platforms and highlight the role of media literacy programs in empowering individuals to be more discerning and accurate in their content dissemination.

on the implications of fake news. The 9.3 percent who do not consider fake news a severe problem highlight the importance of targeted efforts to address skepticism and misinformation denial through media literacy initiatives, fact-checking tools, and fostering critical thinking skills. Overall, the research underscores the urgency of combating fake news and promoting media literacy to ensure a more informed and responsible society (Currie, 2022.

With the development of technology, the Internet, and social media, research demonstrates that young people obtain their news via the Internet. The findings indicate that these young people utilize the Internet.
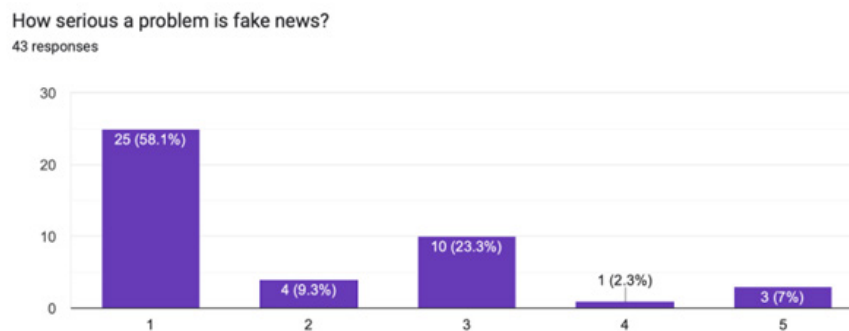

Figure 16. The Gravity of Fake News

Figure 16 indicates that the majority of respondents, 67.4 percent, strongly agree that the problem of fake news is severe. This overwhelming agreement underscores the widespread recognition of the detrimental impact of fake news on society. The high percentage of respondents who consider fake news a severe problem reflects the growing concern about misinformation's potential to mislead, polarize, and manipulate public opinion. However, it is also noteworthy that a notable portion of respondents, 23.3 percent, regard the problem as only neutral, indicating the need for further awareness and education

An increase in Internet usage during the pandemic is consistent with the trend of regular usage seen in Malaysia. Umeta et al. (2022) found that users consider social media a reliable news and information source. Research showing that readers constantly get news from social media supports this idea.

This study focuses on the low literacy level rate among students. Due to the continued dissemination of fake news in the Malaysian community, this study demonstrates that new communication students at the Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia continue to be unaware

of fake news. According to the findings, these students follow the news because they believe they should only read the news they find exciting and obtain via the Internet. This study is consistent with previous research indicating that novelty increases the likelihood of sharing by surprising people but decreases the likelihood of sharing by increasing negative emotions and decreasing positive emotions and confidence in the message (Song et al., 2022). In conclusion, the media play a crucial role in overcoming this media literacy problem, as evidenced by a study by Currie & Kelly (2022) that demonstrates the role of media engagement in the offline and online reconstitution of the social world.

Low levels of media literacy exist among these students. The fact that these students only read the news headlines contributes to the propagation of misinformation. In addition, they do not guarantee the veracity of traditional news sources. The results indicate that students do not read newspapers for the news content they contain. Yüzgec and Sütcü (2020) research indicates a correlation between high-level critical thinking and new media literacy.

The absence of a news-reading culture has made students susceptible to false information.

Even though these students recognize that fake news is a significant issue, their media literacy could be much higher. These students share information or news with their social media friends and followers based on the number of likes without verifying its veracity. According to Feerrar (2022), digital well-being necessitates a rethinking of "what" and "how." This study's findings are consistent with Sel's previous research, which indicates that trust in social media is proportional to the number of news sources followed on social media. A high number of shares and likes on a piece of news or information suggests that its veracity is questionable but that its audience finds it compelling.

Alarmingly low levels of media literacy and awareness persist among adolescents. The dissemination of false information is a problem that needs to be studied until it is eradicated. Conducting in-depth interviews and gauging media literacy and the prevalence of fake news could inform future studies. Indeed, more work is required. The measurement should be reviewed and modified for older and younger age groups. Other demographic factors that influence news media literacy should be researched. Our online survey-imposed restrictions on the types of questions we could pose and the length of each quiz.

CONCLUSIONS

the pilot study conducted on Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia students' fake news literacy reveals several critical insights. Firstly, there is a concerning trend among students, with a significant percentage unintentionally sharing inaccurate information on social media. This highlights the urgent need for media literacy education to equip students with the skills to critically assess and verify information before dissemination. Secondly, the research indicates a prevailing awareness among students about the severity of the fake news problem, with a vast majority acknowledging its detrimental impact on society. This underscores the importance of addressing this issue through targeted interventions that promote responsible information sharing and enhance critical thinking skills.

The findings of this pilot study emphasize the significance of cultivating a culture of media literacy and truthfulness among students. To combat the spread of fake news, educational institutions should prioritize media literacy programs that empower students to discern reliable sources, fact-check information, and critically analyze news content. A comprehensive approach that involves media literacy integration into academic curricula, fact-checking tools, and workshops on responsible information sharing is essential to equip students with the skills necessary to navigate the digital information landscape responsibly. By fostering a generation of informed and discerning individuals, we can collectively combat the menace of fake news and promote a more credible and authentic digital space for all.

Student Internet usage is extremely prevalent, particularly among university students. As the largest demographic that utilizes the Internet, it is highly concerning that the results of this study's pilot test indicate that students still need to distinguish between real and fake news. This conclusion indicates that students still need to improve in news media literacy. Their practice of skimming the news has made them susceptible to false information. They scan the news's headlines and draw judgments. So, based on the findings of this survey, researchers will undertake a more in-depth study employing qualitative in-depth interviews to investigate the topic of fake news among college students. The following study will examine the verification element. The next study will not simply focus on a single university but will also collect data from all public universities in Malaysia.

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