Spreading Fake Content via Social Media among Tertiary Level Students in Rangpur, Bangladesh

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Abstract: The study aimed to identify the reasons behind spreading fake content through SMP and whether tertiary-level students can identify fake content. The study used a descriptive research design. A simple random sampling technique was used for selecting the sample, and a structured questionnaire used for collecting data where the sample size was 121. The respondents were both male (78) and female (43). The ages of the participants were from 18 to 25. The use rate of SM was 100%, whereas Facebook is the most popular SMP (71.9%). More than 80% of participants use SMPs (Newspaper FB page, Journalists SMP wall, various pages and groups) as their information source. About 92.7% of respondents believe that fake content like news, misinformation, and disinformation spread via social media. Most of these are spread by Facebook (72.7%). Among various reasons, 68 (56.2%) respondents said that the most crucial reason is to endanger opposite political parties. The majority of the respondents said that they could identify fake content. They mention that if the content is news to check whether the news is fake or not, they usually look at the things like a search sources, checking photo and video clips, checking publisher's websites, noticing published dates, visiting prominent news sites, notice spelling, and language, checking reporters identity, check lascivious words, search disclaimer, search URL, read the headline several times, and use media literacy knowledge. Of the respondents, who join the survey, 50.4% don't have any idea about fake content identifying tools (Google Advance Search,

Reverse Image Search, Tin Eye, Yandex, Bing, Photo Forensics, InVID), and the rest of them(49.6%) know about this tools. More than half of the respondents do not use these tools to identify fake content on social media.

Keywords: Social Media, Fake Content, Tertiary Level Student, Fact-Checking.

1. INTRODUCTION

Fake content (news, misinformation, and disinformation) and its effects have raised serious concerns in recent years (Adjin-Tettey, 2022). Although fake content is not new phenomenon, technological advancements have created a conducive atmosphere for it to spread quickly. Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and YouTube are just a few examples of social media platforms (SMPs) that provides a space for creating and disseminating fake content (Krishnan et al., 2021). The interactive open nature of SMP allows for un-moderated user-generated content, which is one of the largest problems of fake content dissemination and there is a link between SMPs and fake content (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Vosoughi et al., 2018). The rapid adoption of social media has led to a rise in information-sharing among users, with fake content becoming a component of our digital daily routines (IONOS, 2020). Shirina and Prodhan (2020) also mentioned that Fake news is growing throughout the virtual sphere as consumers become accustomed to free digital media such as online news portals, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, and Youtube. A study conducted by Pew Research Center found of those who rely on social media for their news, industry giant Facebook where about half (52%) of American young generations get the news, while YouTube came in second at 28%, followed by Twitter at 17% and Instagram at 14%. LinkedIn, Reddit and Snapchat had smaller but still notable audiences at a respective 8%, 8% and 6%. Facebook, along with Twitter and Reddit, also stood out as the sites that had the highest proportion of respective users seeking news. Almost three-quarters (73%) of users of the social network use it as a way to get news, compared to 71% of Twitter and 62% of Reddit users the Pew study found. Three-quarters (75%) of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents said social medias have too much control to the news people see, compared to about half (53%) of Democrats and Democrat-leaning independents (Suciu, n.d.).

Social media spreading false information about threats to the public's health was becoming more and more evident during the Covid 19 outbreak. Taylor Owen, an associate professor at McGill University, revealed that misleading or erroneous information regarding the corona virus is far more likely to be shared on social media than in the traditional news media, as shown by the study of millions of tweets and thousands of news pieces. They also found social media Platforms like Twitter and Facebook are increasingly becoming the primary sources of news and misinformation for Canadians and people around the world (Bridgman et al, 2020; Escalante, n.d.). Therefore, it's crucial to research how fake news is created and disseminated via social networking sites, as well as what role users play and the motivations for doing so. It has been described as made-up information that resembles news media content in form but differs in organizational structure or intent. This definition overlaps with that of other information disorders like misinformation, which is made-up information that is false or

misleading (Lamprou et al, 2021), and disinformation, which is made-up information that is intentionally spread to mislead people (Lamprou et al, 2021). The failure of social media to confirm the veracity of a news item is partly to blame for the spread of false information. Sharing expertly altered photographs and films that appear to be real is made simple as a result the impact of false information on public opinion and conversation is now widely acknowledged. Spreading fake news over the virtual realm may have a great impact on teenagers as well as on adults (El Rayess et al, 2018) social media are considered partners in crime when it comes to filtering out or promoting news and stories through their newsfeeds, yet it is not merely the social media's responsibility to disseminate fake news (El Rayess et al, 2018). The primary SMPs have started battling the proliferation of fraudulent information. In order to detect, categorize, and lessen the appearance of misleading articles in the news feeds after the 2016 U.S. Election, Facebook began utilizing external fact-checkers (Mena, 2020). In a similar spirit, Twitter modified its customary "hands-off position" in relation to bogus material in light of the coronavirus epidemic (Hern, 2020). According to Potter (2016) Social networking websites have been shown to influence our thinking and internal spam filters. According to the argument that social networking websites personalize our online searches and experiences, the author pointed out that these platforms control our filters, so dictating what we see and what we do not. Social media platforms may not actively encourage users to believe the material being spread, but this is not uncommon given people's propensity to blindly trust everything they come across online. A recent BuzzFeed analysis identified that fake news spreads faster than real news (Silverman, 2016). The fact that a fake story goes viral, the publisher of the original story may gain money from the ads that show on the story page or may achieve a hidden agenda or a conspiracy theory regardless of its influence on the targeted audience. Therefore, fake news can be tempting and deceptive, which drives people to share them across multiple social media platforms. As a result, harm can be caused, especially when fake news is disconnected from the original sources or context (Conroy et al., 2015). Information consumers, especially students, may be tech, internet or social media savvy, but their ability to access information and identify fake, inaccurate, deceptive or biased sources remains questioned. This population may be easily deceived and tricked by phony news and stories making it difficult for them to identify (Bivens-Tatum, 2012)

This study looks at how effectively students from Begum Rokeya University can identify fake news, the information sources they trust, and the motivations behind its dissemination. It also investigates the impact social media may have on the transmission of false information. The research describes the main channels via which students obtain and disseminate information as well as their propensity to verify the veracity of a piece of news or a story before disseminating it. The findings of this study will be useful in informing library decision-makers about the significance of requiring media and information literacy instruction as a fundamental academic requirement. The rest of the research paper is as follows first, reviewed the relevant literatures on spreading fake news through social media. In the method section, researcher discussed who were the sample, how data were collected, and the instruments used. In the result section, I presented some descriptive results of spreading fake news via social media.

Objective of the study
With the ongoing rise and growth in technology and social media, students of tertiary level should know how to identify and evaluate fake news as well as the reasons behind spreading fake news. As a result, this study aims at the following objectives-
- To identify if news is from a credible source**.**
- To find out the reason behind spreading fake news.
- To assess whether students with tertiary level of education can identify fake news.

Rationale of the study
It's mentioned that, at present day, social media is the early stage of getting information for general people as well as for the educated people who are connected with the social media, plays a crucial role to be informed about something that is considered as the most concerning issue of the country. Recent socio-technological development has created a wide range of channels for information seeking and sharing. Social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, YouTube and Twitter for examples, are popular among tertiary level students. Social media information suffers from a huge lack of professional gatekeepers to supervise the content. Due to unsupervised content it is important know whether the news comes from credible sources. Rumor spreads faster than wind. Generally people have believes about religious content, political views, nationalisms and so on, even before using social media that's why they don't judge what the content is. For this weakness of those contents, fake news spreads. As a result it is time to know what reason behind spreading fake content. As the tertiary level students use social media mostly and there have enough possibilities to spread fake content by them, so it is need to investigate are tertiary level students able to identify fake content. For this purpose such types of studies help to determine fake content. This study also helps to know what social media role in spreading fake content.

2. METHODOLOGY

In this research, researchers have used a methodology that might bring a strong output of consequences of the trends of fake news and reasons behind spreading fake news among tertiary level students as well as to identify how they define fake news, in what context they believe it and so on. Survey based descriptive research design is used in this study. We can't think a single moment without using various types of social media. Most of the students at tertiary level institution in Bangladesh use social media. They explore news, views, opinions, etc. by using social media. For conducting this study, Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur (BRUR) has been selected purposively as study area. There are more than 8,000 students in Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur under six faculties. Here, there are 22 departments under these faculties. Therefore, 8,000 students are the population of this study (BRUR, 2023). Researchers randomly selected 121 respondents among the students of BRUR. Here, researcher has used simple random selection process for collecting data from 22 departments of Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur for being representative the research data. The study uses questionnaire method of data collection for collecting data. Researchers created structured questionnaire. All of the questions of the questionnaire was close ended. We used Microsoft

excels 2007 and SPSS v. 25.0 software to analyze the data. Frequency distribution and regression were used to present the result.

3. RESULT

Demographic characteristics of the respondents
From table 1 got that students from 18 to 20 years are 29.8%, from 21 to 23 years are 50.4%, and from 23 to 25 years are 19.83%. In this study researchers collected data from 121 respondents. Among them 64.5% students were male and 35.5% were female. 6.6% students were of MSS, MA, MSc, MBA and 11.6% were of 4th year students. Rest of them were 3rd year 15.7%, 2nd year 22.3% and 1st year 43, 8%.

Table 1 Demographic information of the students

Demographic information	Components	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-20	36	29.8
	21-23	61	50.4
	23-25	24	19.83
Gender	Male	78	64.5
	Female	43	35.5
Year of Studies	1st year	53	43.8
	2nd year	27	22.3
	3rd year	19	15.7
	4th year	14	11.6
	MSS/MA/MSc/MBA	8	6.6

Social media usage
In this study, researchers collected data from 121 respondents of tertiary-level education institution students at BRUR. Among them, 100% said they use social media. Most 99.2% of the respondents were Facebook users, 57.9% used WhatsApp, 24.8% used Imo, 3.3% used Viver, 13.2% used Twitter, 36.4% used Instagram, 86.8% used Youtube, and 10.7% used LinkedIn. The majority of the students 30.6% used social media from 2 to 3 hours, 29.8% used it from above 4 hours, 22.3% used it from 3 to 4 hours, and 17.4% used it from 1 to 2 hours. About 29.8% visited 1 to 2 times, 33.1% visited 2 to 3 times, 21.5% visited 3 to 4 times, and 29.8% visited more than four times. Among the students, about 47.1% frequently visit social media for easy access, 25.6% because it is easy to manage, 11.6% did for showing a reaction, 56.2% search information on social media, 35.5% watch video clips, 43.8% sharing information, 45.5% use social media for academic purposes, and 28.1% use social media for job purpose. In this table, each category carried out 100 percent values (Table 2).

Table 2 Trend of social media use among the respondents

Variable	Component	Frequency	Percentage
SMPs use	Yes	121	100
	No	00	00

Types of visiting SMPs	Facebook	120	99.2
	WhatsApp	70	57.9
	Imo	30	24.8
	Viver	4	3.3
	Twiter	16	13.2
	Instagram	44	36.4
	YouTube	105	86.8
	Linkedin	13	10.7
Time spend on SMPs	Less 1hour	2	1.65
	1 to 2 hours	21	17.4
	2 to 3 hours	35	28.93
	3 to 4 hours	27	22.3
	above 4 hours	36	29.8
Frequency of visiting SMPs	1 to 2 times	36	29.8
	2 to 3 times	40	33.1
	3 to 4 times	26	21.5
	Above 4 times	19	15.7
Reason for use SMPs	Easy access	57	47.1
	Easy to manage	31	25.6
	Sow reaction	14	11.6
	Search information	68	56.2
	Watch video clips	43	35.5
	Sharing information	53	43.8
	Academic purpose	55	45.5
	Job purpose	34	28.1

Spreading fake content through social media
The result shows that 82.6% of the respondents' source of news and information is social media, 43.8% get news from online news portals, 20.7% from traditional news platforms, and 4.1% of respondents get news offline (word of mouth). About 86.78% of respondents consider traditional news platforms as credible sources of information, 73.6% mention social media as a credible source of information, 31.4% online news portals, and 8.3% of offline sources. After seeing the news on social media, more than half of respondents (54.4%) read the news in its entirety, whereas 39.7% only read the headline, 7.4% shared after just reading the headline, 20.7% expressed an opinion, 18.2% expressed an opinion after reading the report thoroughly, 10.7% showed a reaction. The result shows that 24% of 29 respondents share political news, 28.9% of 35 respondents share religious news, 9.9% of 12 respondents share communal news, 62% of 75 respondents share fun and entertainment, 19.8% of 24 respondents share economic benefits related news, 40.5% of 49 respondents share sports news, 74.4% of 90 respondents share educational news, and 28.9% of 35 respondents share job contents. The majority of respondents—91.7%—thought that false information was disseminated via social media, while 8.3 percent disagreed. According to study participants, Facebook disseminates 72.7% fake content, Imo 0.8%, Twitter 1.7%, YouTube 23.1%, and LinkedIn 1.7% false content.

The researchers found that people noticed 64.5% political, 50.4% religious, 17.4% communal, 28.9% fun & entertainment, 24% economic benefit, 8.3% sports, 30.6% education, and 30.6% job content fake which were more notice social media (Table 3). In answering the statement 'reasons behind spreading fake content in social media' more than half (68) respondents (56.2%) of 121 thought endangering opposition political parties was one of the reasons, 44.6% thought to disseminate religious antipathy, 43.8% thought fake news spread to achieve political interest, 39.7% thought it spread to economic benefits, 20.7% respondents thought ideology is also a reason, and 30.6% thought fake news spread unwillingly (table 3).

Table 3 Spreading fake content trough social media among respondents

Variable	Component	Frequency	Percentage
Source of news	Social media	100	82.6%
	Online news portal	53	43.8%
	Traditional news platforms	25	20.7%
	Offline(word-of mouth)	5	4.1%
Reliable Sources of Getting Information	Social media	89	73.6%
	Online news portal	38	31.4%
	Traditional news platforms	105	86.78%
	Offline (word of mouth)	10	8.3%
Action after seeing the news in Social Media	Read the headline only	48	39.7%
	Read the news thoroughly	66	54.5%
	Share the news with reading	9	7.4%
	Share the news with reading thoroughly	25	20.7%
	Give opinion with reading headline only	8	6.6%
	Give opinion with reading news thoroughly	22	18.2%
	Show reaction with reading headline only	13	10.7%
	Show reaction with reading news thoroughly	25	20.7%
Types of Content Share in Social Media	Political	29	24%
	Religious	35	28.9%
	Communal	12	9.9%
	Fun and entertainment	75	62%
	Economic benefits	24	19.8%
	Sports	49	40.5%
	Education	90	74.4%
	Job content	35	28.9%
Spreading Fake Content via Social Media	Yes	111	91.7%
	No	10	8.3%
	Facebook	88	72.7%

	WhatsApp	0	0%
More Fake Content Disseminating Social Media	Imo	1	0.8%
	Viver	0	0%
	Twitter	2	1.7%
	Instagram	0	0%
	YouTub	28	23.1%
	LikedIn	2	1.7%
Types of Fake Content Notice More to the Social Media	Political	78	64.5%
	Religious	61	50.4%
	Communal	21	17.4%
	Fun and entertainment	35	28.9%
	Economic benefits	29	24%
	Sports	10	8.3%
	Education	37	30.6%
	Job content	37	30.6%
Reasons behind Spreading Fake Content	To endanger opposition political parties	68	56.2%
	To disseminate religious antipathy	54	44.6%
	To achieve political interest	53	43.8%
	Economic benefits	48	39.7%
	Ideology	25	20.7%
	Spread unwillingly	37	30.6%

Knowledge to identify fake content
According to the study findings, 71.9% of respondents are aware of fake news, while 28.1% are unaware of it. Among 121 responders, 81.8% are able to identify fake news, while 18.2% are unable to do so. From the analysis of data about the statement of 'the way of justify the authenticity of a news' 36.4% said they have media literacy, 23.1% were concerned about headlines, 27.3% searched URLs, 68.6% searched news sources, 30.6% checked photo and video clips, 38.8% check publisher's website, 27.3% noticed published data, 45.5% visit other news website, 16.5% notice spelling and language, 21.5% check reporters identity, 4.1% check lascivious words and 8.3% search disclaimer. Of the respondents, who join the survey, 87.6% don't have any idea about the tools (Google reverse image search, Tin Eye, Yandex, Bing, Baidu, Sogou, Photo Forensics, and InVID), and rest of them12.4%) know about this tools. More than half of the respondents said that they have not any idea about media (Table 4)

Table 4 idea about identifying fake content

Variable	Component	Frequency	Percentage
Idea about Fake Content	Yes	87	71.9%
	No	34	28.1%
Capacity of Identifying Fake Content	Yes	99	81.8%
	No	22	18.2%
The way of justify the authenticity of a content	Media literacy	44	36.4%
	Concern about headline	28	23.1%

	Search URL	33	27.3%
	Search news source	83	68.6%
	Check photo and video clips	37	30.6%
	Check publisher's websites	47	38.8%
	Notice published date	33	27.3%
	Visit other news websites	55	45.5%
	Notice spelling and language	20	16.5%
	Check reporters identity	26	21.5%
	Check lascivious words	5	4.1%
	Search disclaimer	10	8.3%
Knowledge about fake content identifying tools (Reverse image search, TinEye, Yandex, Bing, Sogou, Baidu Photo Forensics, InVID) or fact-checking process.	Yes	15	12.4%
	No	106	87.6%
Idea about Media Literacy	Yes	52	43%
	No	69	57%

4. DISCUSSION

The participants in this study were between 18 and 25 years old. Male 78 and female 43 and students from undergraduate to post graduate level. Everyone uses social media. The most used social media is Facebook. A similar study by Hossain and Prodhan, (2020) mention their study that the most use social media platforms is Facebook. Students who participated in the study spent a minimum of less than one hour and a maximum of more than four hours on social media. They visit social media multiple times in a day. They mention that they use social media for Easy access, Easy to manage, Sow reaction, Search information, Watch video clips, Share information, Academic purpose, and Job purpose. Some previous research in this area have found similar results (Hossain et al., 2021; Prodhan et al., 2020). The study results showed that most students mentioned that they use social media as a source of news. According to Watson (2023) 78% of respondents from Nigeria stated that they used social media as a source of news. Newman et al., (2019) revealed that Social networking sites have evolved into the new "mass media" and are now a significant source of news for many individuals. However, most of the students stated that traditional news platforms are credible sources of information. Wada, (2018) stated that Mass media or traditional media is considered to be more credible than social media. Another study identified that 44% of the people still believe in traditional news like paper and magazine, 32% in digital sources, 22% on social media and 02% through others (Prashanth Uchil & Augustine, 2019). After seeing the news on social media most 54.5% of the respondents said they read the news thoroughly, 39.7% read the headline only, 7.4% share the news with reading headline only, 20.7% give opinion with reading headline only, 18.2% give opinion with reading news thoroughly, 10.7% show reaction with the reading headline only and 20.7% show reaction with the reading news thoroughly. Students typically share

political, religious, communal, entertainment, economic, sports, education, and job content on social media. More than 90% of students said that social media spreads fake content. Among them, Facebook disseminates the most fake content. PrashanthUchil & Augustine (2019) found fake news story is high on WhatsApp and Facebook followed by Twitter, Instagram and others. Students say they see more fake political content on social media. They said fake content is being spread on social media as the reason to endanger opposition political parties, to disseminate religious antipathy, to achieve political interest, Economic benefits, Ideology, and Spread unwillingly. According to Berduygina et al. (2019), drawing sizable audiences, increasing money from ads, and establishing the news outlet's reputation are the three primary reasons why fake news is disseminated in the media. Politicians are driven by the desire to influence public opinion as well as the desire to enhance their own reputations and harm that of their opponents. False information is disseminated by businesses in an effort to boost sales and influence demand, while individuals use it to further their own agendas, including ambitions for fame and material success. Most of the students have an idea about fake content and they can identify it. Students use a variety of skills like media literacy, concern about headline, search URL, search news source, check photo and video clips, check publisher's websites, notice published date, visit other news websites, notice spelling and language, check reporters identity, check lascivious words, search disclaimer to verify the authenticity of fake content. Most students have no idea about various tools to identify fake content or fact checking process. In a previous study showed that their participants showed distrust in fact-checkers and lack of knowledge about the fact-checking process (Ardevol-Abreu et al., 2020). More than half of students have no idea about media literacy.

Limitations of the Study
Researchers faced a lot of problem to conduct this research but tried to best to overcome all the complexities. Every researcher has to face various problems to fulfill a proper study. That's why some limitations existed in this study. These were-
- ❖ The first limitation of this study was sample size. Only 121 students were sampled which is insignificant number, considering the population of the tertiary level educational institution.
- ❖ In this study, only survey method was used. Here the researcher used only this technique to identify the trends of fake news among students and the reasons behind spreading fake news. But to validate a research, researchers should apply other methods like 'Focus Group Discussion', 'Interviewing' etc.

5. CONCLUSION

Social media has become a panic of spreading fake news in Bangladesh along with the world. There are several reasons to spread fake news some of them are to endanger opposite political parties, economic benefits, to disseminate religious antipathy, to achieve political interest, and ideology etc. Spreading fake news in the virtual realm is severe. Sometimes single fake news may cause to destruction of secular entity. It's high time to prevent spreading fake news on social media for our existence.

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