

A Heuristic Approach to Media Literacy: Teaching Fake and Real News

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ABSTRACT-- *In spite of upholding as an objective, a commitment to ethical standards of journalism, a spate of claims of “fake news” appear to be a new problem in epistemology. In the fast-moving internet age, fake news spreads faster through social media platforms, gets viral and leads to tragic results. The responsibility of the fourth pillar of democracy has increased manifold as it has diverse impressions. The present study aims to emphasize the importance of understanding the difference between fake news and misinformation, such as mistakes reported in a news story. This research paper highlights a few cases which led to turmoil in the nation due to the proliferation of fake news through social media. The article uses Netnographic analysis of the content posted on social media platforms to comprehend how Fake news influence netizens across a spectrum of online involvement. A specific set of information which was fake originated and manifested on the Internet in India were studied. The paper explores how educators can help through media literacy to identify Fake News. Findings include a variety of pathways through which Fake news is cultivated. These data have made it possible to formalize the strategies of Media Literacy. Consequently, the paper identifies how Media Literacy can develop an understanding of the sources that can be trusted.*

Keywords-- *A Heuristic Approach to Media Literacy: Teaching Fake and Real News*

I. INTRODUCTION

Fake news is defined as any information completely false in nature deliberately circulated to mislead the people and gain their attention. (McGonagle, 2017) It has been with us since the inception of writings. However, the medium of fake news circulation has changed called as fake news ecosystem which has paved the way for production, storage, and proliferation of fake news. The repressive regime of colonial-era is overlapping the pathway of journalism but the way in which new media interacts is the matter of academic concern. “In 1835 New York Sun’s Great Moon Hoax claimed to be the first fake news but in the case of India it has been rampant during the last few years”. On online media, the nature of Fake news is to spread like a wildfire, so it is imperative to address its cause and look upon the methods to bring down the level of circulation of fake news. Without denying the fact that fake news has become an instrument of influencing an individual's opinion with deliberate disinformation intended to mislead. It is strongly believed that the circulation of fake news is, in fact, an active and revitalizing force fuelled by the approach of negligence. Under the disinformation context, the ethical standard of journalism is constantly challenged, in such situations. It becomes indispensable to verify the facts. (UNESCO, 2018)

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Sentiments of journalism curricula influenced by a western educational curriculum. With an orientation towards new media journalism, a plethora of factors are transforming the digital landscape, raising questions about information literacy. The development of Web 2.0 has accentuated the dissemination of Fake news across the globe. (Christian, Z. Goering, & Paul Lee Thomas, 2018) Despite “fake news” has a long history but recently it is considered to introduce the framework that focuses on media literacy. While the literacy of media continues to fuel with the modules of journalism, nature of media and developing rigorous skills of complex perspectives, it is crucial to underline media pedagogy with Information Literacy. (Mourão, 2019) There are growing numbers of journalism schools and media institutes across India. At universities across USA, Asia, Europe, and Australia, the practice of accountable journalism and information disorder has been taught in investigative journalism courses. However, with the advent of online platforms, many challenges have appeared for teaching media literacy and more specifically Information literacy. Taking into consideration Media Literacy, UNESCO defines “media literacy as a vital field of cultural-educational development”. A curriculum of media literacy has been introduced in Eastern European countries. Since the beginning of the 21st century, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic have introduced obligatory media education courses in secondary schools. However, media education has still not been covered in various European, African and Asian countries. (Grizzle, et al., 2013)

In France, Media Literacy is amalgamated with the word ‘education critique aux medias’ (or le judgment critique) refers to critical thinking development. The definition unequivocally states critical perception and evaluation of media texts, its impact on surrounding reality and its influence on the audiences. (Fedorov, 2014). The education about Information Communication & Technology has progressed in the UK too. (C. Bazalgette, 1997). To give international model to Media Education, the College of Education of the University Southampton opened Media Education Center led by professor A.Hart in 1996. (Fedorov, 2014) Thus, the curriculum of Media education revamped to equip students, teachers, and professionals with digital Media Literacy.

Digital Media Literacy is critical thinking – finding information, verifying, and validating news stories and their sources. The proliferation of disinformation dates back in traditional journalism when we were unaware of Fake News. In recent years digital media has caused widespread apprehension. (Coles, 2018) A substantial number of false stories have gone viral on digital media in 2016 U.S. elections, 2014 and 2019 General elections in India. (Allcott, Matthew Gentzkow, & Chuan Yu, 2018) Although the major players of social media like Twitter, Whatsapp and Facebook have made an array of policy changes to limit the spread of false content. In this paper, we present a plethora of misinformation circulated on social media from January 2014 to July 2019. The study assembles the sources of false information and the role of media literacy in developing various frameworks for teaching Digital Literacy skills. (Edson C Tandoc, Jr. Richard Ling, & Oscar Westlund, 2017) Employing a pragmatic approach this article draws from and integrates various Fake news surfaced on digital media, it discusses the threat to ethical journalism or to the framework of journalism. (Shu, Amy Sliva, Suhang Wang, Jiliang Tang, & Huan Liu, 2018) The goal is to develop a generic approach that proves that digital media literacy needs to be incorporated in the curriculum. Despite its history, the term “fake news” has achieved identification only after the advent of Web 2.0. “The IAMAI and IMRB 2019 report explicitly indicates that Internet usage has gone up”. The growth in internet usage has driven online news consumption and aftermath of this rise people tend to consume news on digital media platforms. The content production on the new media ecosystem has become crucial, the unfiltered news at certain times has paved the way for the circulation of fake news. (Gilster, 1998) The online

platform constantly weaves news and information into the cyberspace of millennials however, it is social media which does make access at a much larger scale. (Lankshear, 2011) Journalists and Media Professionals need a wider set of skills to produce and broadcast news. Digital media for news utilization is a twofold edged sword. From one perspective, it is simple to access, ubiquitous and real. But on the other hand, it enables the widespread of “fake news.” (Silverblatt, Jane Ferry, & Barbara Finan, 2015)

Media is technology-driven, and its constant developments have paved the way for what Deuze calls liquid journalism. (Deuze, 2006) Fake news is everywhere, and it is an age-old concept, from the earliest records of the complex societies of ancient Greece, Rome, India, Egypt it has traveled from years and recently landed in the modern age of internet algorithms. The idea behind the circulation of fake news can be upholding political apparatus or shielding religious thoughts or whether it's simple money-making schemes online (clickbait) thus it has become a business affair. “In 2016 the Macquarie dictionary declared Fake news as the word of the year.” Although there is a long tussle between fake and real news as the tactic of claiming a legitimate news story as fake and fake as real typically by politicians and other prominent personalities. For instance, Donald Trump, who won the US presidential election in 2016, often charges some stories as fake news that accuse him or his associates of wrongdoing. He is not alone; a number of other politicians have also adopted this technique to just paint the information. Across borders and boundaries, literary thinkers have immersed themselves in the study of ethical journalism still they are challenged by the colossal tragedies of fake news. (Egelhofer & Sophie Lecheler, 2019) A broader understanding is essential to survive in the information age. The inevitable move towards digitization of journalism is causing disruptions in mainstream journalism. Therefore, new journalists should be equipped with a host of skills to identify fake news. (McCoy, 2015) Times are tough for Journalists in India as they got caught up in fake news and reported them. For instance, “A Fake video of riots of 2013 in Muzaffarnagar fuelled communal passions.” (Siddiqui & Ashish Tripathi, 2013) A viral hoax broadcasted on mainstream media that 2000 Rupee notes embedded with GPS tracking nanochip.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As Jennifer LaGarde and Darren Hudgins (2018) noted, ‘with a convergence of newsroom digital literacy has been crucial to media education. (Courtney, 2018) As technology is shaping the new news ecosystem, media professionals acknowledge the need for revising the curriculum in general. The digitization of the news media industry has caused innovative disruptions. The modern age of internet algorithms has shifted its way to the digital world, so the probabilities of fake news proliferation have increased. (Coles, 2018) Despite the fact that fake news is not a new phenomenon, its nature propagation is entirely novel. (Valenza, 2016). The classic examples of fake news dissemination on social media are the 2016 Brexit vote in the United Kingdom or the stormy U.S Presidential Elections both have manifested the way news was circulated on the platforms of social media. In most developed countries media education and training have been introduced at different points in time. T. J. Coles (2018) describes “fake news as an ancient concept, the earliest records manifest the profound, complex and dynamic societies of ancient Babylon, Egypt, Greece, and Rome who have told untruths, partial truths and outright lies to uphold power.” (Kiernan, 2017) The Knight Foundation study in the USA addresses the shortcomings of the media curriculum with emerging trends in new media ecology. (Goodman & Elanie Steyn, 2017) Development in Information, Communication, and Technology over the last two decades has transformed the functioning of the

media industry with internet and mobile computing. Uncertainty and disruption have been identified in the Communication theory, production, and pedagogy. Therefore, it is imperative to focus on digital literacy to deal with fake news. To highlight the concerns posed by “fake news” Shujun Jiang and Ali Rafeeq (2019) noted, media education in UAE, UK, and the USA is being reviewed to match the pace of industry that was moving towards convergent journalism. The focus is on teaching students the skills of scrutinizing information webcasted on online platforms. (Shujun Jiang & Ali Rafeeq, 2019) The article draws attention to the journalism method and practice that can deal with the challenges of misinformation and disinformation. Fake news is not only a label for false rather a misleading information, disguised and disseminated as news. A Handbook by UNESCO (2018) reported the formal journalism education in UAE was comparatively recent as compared to other countries. (UNESCO, 2018) Therefore, the need for formal information literacy is imperative to diagnose Fake news as we are flooded with information. Media literacy skills, especially Information Literacy is essential for today's learners. (LaGarde & Darren Hudgins, 2018) However, media literacy is the ability to think critically about the information consumed and circulated. Fosnacht (2017) states, “today students face a challenge of true, partially true and untrue information as they access more information on their mobile phones.” (Bulger & Patrick Davison, 2018) Therefore, much of the information consumed by students today are of questionable quality. In point of fact, the incorrect use of technology has started a conflict or escalates the huge circulation of misinformation. The ability to assess information credibility is imperative for all individuals, but it becomes more important for media students or media professionals. In this era of fake news, it can be harder than ever for journalists to prove their integrity. Denise E. Agosto in the book entitled “Information Literacy and Libraries in the Age of Fake News” states fake news or other disinformation misleads individuals and can have an enormous influence on society. For instance, “Conspiracy theorist Alex Jones formally apologized for creating a fake video to promote the Hillary Clinton child sex ring in the pizza shop story but he apologized only after his video got viral and earned nearly a half million views during 2016 US Elections.” (Agosto, 2018) However, such deliberate circulation of news piece is considered as a subpart of conspiracy theories shared on social media, it is deeply troubling.

III. CURRENT DEVELOPMENT AND TRENDS TO TACKLE FAKE NEWS

The issue of fake news is of grave concern as social media has enabled its distribution at unprecedented speed. Facebook, Twitter, and Google are facing criticism for allowing its platform for the spread of fake news. However, while many universities across the globe are responding to the revision of media education. French President Emanuel Macron proposed laws to fight the spread of fake news, it was included by granting emergency powers to judges to ban the suspicious content. (The Gaurdian, 2018) Singaporean Home Affair and Law Minister proposed it anti-fake news law in Parliament – the protection from Falsehood and Manipulation Bill. Therefore, under this law, they will critically analyze the news as true or false. (Vaswani, 2019) But in India when on “April 2, 2018, the government amended the Guidelines for Accreditation of Journalists, to tackle fake news across media a huge protest by media houses for being authoritarian led the withdrawn of these guidelines.” (Dristi, 2018) British Education Secretary Damian Hinds outlines that it is necessary for students to understand the potential risks of digital media including fake news, so it needs to be incorporated in the school curriculum. (Cockburn, 2019) However, the idea of Media Literacy is to exemplify how the heuristic approach of students towards information

literacy is impractical in the media curriculum. Students must learn to understand the difference between true, partially true and false information. Michelle Luhtala and Jacquelyn Whiting (2018) in the book titled “News Literacy: The Keys to Combating Fake News” argues that preordained curriculum of Media Literacy will unequivocally explain students' misinformation, disinformation, and fake news. He argues that although students have learned the “right” answers about social media, but do they really understand the pitfalls of social media. Do they think about the credibility of sources, do they take heed of fake news and alternative facts? (Luhtala & Whiting, 2018) Isabelle Courtney defines Media literacy is the ability to think critically about the information created, consumed and circulated. It helps to develop the ability to scrutinize facts from opinion and how they influence people. Media literacy widens the horizon of critical thinking and helps to immunize people against false information. (Courtney, 2018) However, with well-structured lessons of media literacy, the students will become savvy inquirers, readers, writers, and responsible netizens. To combat fake news, media literacy should include Google's Fact Check. Google fact check is a tool to review the information and allow easy access to Google, Bing, Facebook and other interested parties. The other tool of Facebook’s Disputed Tag which scrutinizes the facebook post when stories have been flagged as iffy by users. The students should be made aware of this feature which helps to check the fact online. If the stories are questionable, Facebook tags it as “Disputed.” Twitter has emerged as a new platform of news circulation, so it is important to verify twitter accounts. A blue checkmark next to a verified user's name exhibits the authenticity of the account. (Knorr).

On the surface of online media, the highly exaggerated post or thumbnail link leads the individual to fall for clickbait. Therefore, click baits are intentionally misleading information that appears to propagate it. “Sarah Blakeslee of the University of California at Chico's Meriam Library developed the test of CRAAP to evaluate sources with a skeptical eye.”

“The CRAAP test suggests considering the following information using the categories of:

- Currency (the timeliness of the information),
- Relevance (the importance of the information for your needs),
- Authority (the source of the information),
- Accuracy (the reliability, truthfulness, and correctness of the content), and
- Purpose (the reason the information exists). (Duquesne Library, 2018)

Similarly, a former reporter and journalism professor John McManus has proposed the SMELL test to identify the Fake news, Alternative facts and misinformation."

- Source (Who is providing the information?)
- Motivation (Why are they telling me this?)
- Evidence (What evidence is provided for generalizations?)
- Logic (Do the facts logically compel the conclusions?) and
- Left out (What’s missing that might change our interpretation of the information?). (Duquesne Library, 2018)

Although, the experts have proposed various fact-checking standards to diagnose and curb fake news, but it is crucial for individuals to thoroughly comprehend information literacy as we are living in the age of circulation. State of Media Curriculum in India

This study examined ten journalism curriculums of Indian Universities. The University of Delhi runs a three-year undergraduate program B. A. (HONS) JOURNALISM. It covers a range of modules on Print, Electronic and

Online Media. On the contrary “Indian Institute of Mass Communication in New Delhi offers PG Diploma courses specializing in Journalism and Mass Communication”. The graduate of Christ (Deemed to be University) in Bangalore offers three-year vocational course “BA CEP-BACHELOR OF ARTS (BA) IN COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA, ENGLISH AND PSYCHOLOGY”. It is a multidisciplinary taught program that gives insight into English and Psychology to the students. The three years of undergraduate BA(JMC) program of Amity University in India focus on practical and theoretical trends and development in the media with the Open Elective and Foreign Business Language as the minor papers. Symbiosis Institute of Media and Communication in Pune offers a Bachelor of Arts (Mass Communication). It is a Multidisciplinary and Foundation Integrated Core & Interdisciplinary Cluster. “It also offers specialization courses in Data Journalism, Print/Broadcast Journalism, Digital Films and Television, Radio, Digital Advertising and Branding, Advertising Planning, Screenwriting, Copywriting, Public Relations & Corporate Communications”. The program focuses on the mass media industry offering courses like those offered at Western Universities. The Centre for Media Studies (CMS) at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi offers MA in Media in Modern India, MA in Media, Politics & Violence and MA in Visual Histories: Themes in Photography & Materiality. The courses clearly aimed at providing a multidisciplinary perspective to develop a critical understanding of media and its engagement with society, polity, and economy in India. The AJK Mass Communication Research Centre is twin collaborations between York University, Toronto/Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi and The Canadian International Development Agency. It offers M.A. (Mass Communication), M.A. (visual Effect and Animation), M.A. (Convergent Journalism) M.A. (Development Communication), PG Diploma in Acting, PG Diploma in Broadcast Technology, PG Diploma in Still Photography & Visual Communication. The courses are a systematic progression of hands-on practical and theoretical papers that allow students to experience the full range of technical and conceptual skills. The course M.A. (Convergent Journalism) focuses on the tools and techniques of new media but not fake news. Manipal Academy of Higher Education offers a plethora of courses in Journalism and Mass Communication including BSc Animation, BA Media & Communication, MA Media & Communication, MA Film Art & Film Making, PG Diploma in Sports Communication, PG Diploma in Corporate Communication and Certificate Course in Animation Technology. Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi offers an MA in Mass Communication which focuses on the role of media in society. It is interesting to note, that there is no inclusion of “Fake news” as a subject in any of the Universities of India. IIMC, Jamia Milia Islamia and other universities run a subject entitled “New Media Journalism” which seems to comply with fake news.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

With the review of literature and analysis of the content, it has been observed that Fake news has three dimensions:

- (i) Fake news is viewed as the category of information whose objective is to mislead people.
- (ii) Sometimes for the sake of self-interest, News is labelled as Fake news.
- (iii) Media Literacy needs to incorporate Fake News Module.

Objectives

The study has been carried out based on the following objectives:

- (i) To examine the state of media literacy in Indian universities.
- (ii) To examine the role of Media Literacy in curbing the propagation of fake news.

V. METHODOLOGY

(ii) Sometimes for the sake of self-interest, News is labelled as Fake news. The research employs qualitative research within the conceptual framework of fake news and media literacy to explore the stated objectives. This research paper is a conceptual presentation of notions based on observation, information retrieved from books, research journals, websites, newspapers, magazines and academic curriculum of different colleges and universities of India.

VI. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Our findings show that none of the sample universities offer a full-fledged Fake News Module. That does not mean that media educators are not teaching the subject but it needs to be taught as a module of its own so by introducing media literacy skills, an individual will be better equipped to identify fake news, alternative facts or misinformation. The research study accentuates that with the advent of online media the amount of fake news continues to grow so it becomes harder to decide what is true and what is false. A lack of media literacy has a major real-world impact. Therefore, the findings of this study advocate the integration of Media Literacy as a subject in the curriculum. Media Literacy would lead students to identify the difference between various types of media and understand the purpose of information.

Therefore, understanding that reason is the basis of media literacy. In this digital age, information is circulated from various sources, so it is crucial to know how to evaluate information. The study finds that the velocity of information circulation in India is high still there is an inadequate conversation about structured media literacy modules at the school and college level. In the Indian educational system, ICT has occupied space, but functional technology skills are still not part of the curriculum which needs to be incorporated. Since India's education system largely depends on the syllabus structure therefore, the study finds that media literacy needs to be incorporated as an integral part of the curriculum. The modules of media literacy should be developed by the Experts Committee. The second finding of this study highlights that Media Literacy is important for all students, teachers, and parents therefore they should also be sensitized about the sources of information.

The third finding of this study draw attention towards the four Cs of Information Literacy which needs to be taught to the students so that they can better diagnose the Information:

- (i) Critical Approach – The students need to develop a Critical thinking approach to diagnose the information. Individuals should be the critical thinker who directs them to understand how and why information is created, distributed and consumed in the digital environment.
- (ii) Credibility – Individuals should be aware of the reliability of the sources. It can be well recognized by understanding the point-of-view of the source. The CRAAP test can help to identify the credibility of the source.
- (iii) Clickbait – Individuals need to identify clickbait whose sole purpose is to entice people and encourage visitors to click on a link to a particular of their web page.

(iv) Circulation – Media literacy does not mean media control so the information should be freely circulated but only after verifying it otherwise it will propagate the information across media platforms.

VII. CONCLUSION

With the contemporary changes in technology, a more comprehensive approach to critical literacy is needed in Media to deal with fake news. The incorporation of Fake news Module will result in critical discussions in classrooms and may help the students to understand the nature of fake news. Media studies should be promoted more vigorously, but ICT should not only comprise computing skills rather the practical skills of the digital landscape. Additionally, a more student-centric approach is needed to develop the ability to identify misinformation, disinformation, fake news, and alternative facts. In conclusion, it is apparent that media literacy can combat fake news as asserted by Michelle Luhtala and Jacquelyn Whiting in the literature review. Furthermore, the ongoing discussions about fake news have drawn attention towards the evaluation and critical thinking skills in students for information. The study accentuates that the negative aspects of the proliferation of fake news can be combated through Information and media literacy in schools and colleges. The spread of awareness about information literacy can help students as well as individuals to think critically.

This research has found that the current lack of media literacy, specifically information literacy could be improved by adding it to the curriculum. Journalism faculties need to be well trained so that they can enhance the skills of students for information literacy. When the curriculums of various universities and colleges were explored, it was found that in the Indian educational system there is no “Fake News Module.” Demonstrating media literacy is an on-going concern for all educators as well as journalist therefore the findings of this research can be seen as an enormous opportunity to analyze fake news. By framing this research around the problem of fake news and the current discussions, it highlights that fake news module will hopefully lead to an understanding of the nature of the information. Putting these approaches in the Indian context, in light of the data, the study shows that the present pedagogy fails to instill journalists' attitudes regarding fake news situations. A change in the curriculum will focus on sensitizing the students about wider ethical dimensions associated with journalistic aptitude, in the social context of fake news. Consequently, this will lead to a higher standard of journalism in the future. Accordingly, it is recommended that the media experts and academicians who are responsible for information literacy should design and develop a bespoke Information Literacy module. This research has identified the basis of media literacy in the curriculum and has laid a path for future research. A detailed structure of the Fake News Module may encourage students to exercise their journalistic approach and comprehend its social relevance.

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