

IS FAKE NEWS AND VERACITY INTERMINGLED?***Perilous effect of social media fake news on Indian Societies*****Dr. Durgesh Tripathi**, Assistant Professor, GGS Indraprastha University, New Delhi, India**Ms. Priyanka Sachdeva**, Research Scholar, GGS Indraprastha University, New Delhi**Abstract**

Fake news can be defined as spreading misinformation or proliferate slanderous propaganda with treacherous consequences. Fake news is dominating the field of social media journalism in 21st century. India's social media penetration has witnessed a major increase over past five years. In the context of digital revolution, digital issues are majorly transforming the societies and fake news is a dark side of it. The social society grapples to recognise between post-truth and truth. This study analyses the perilous effect of social media fake news on Indian societies from the survey data of online sample. It looks into how most Indians believe fake news impacts society. Survey reveals that majority of Indians believe fabricated news creates confusion and say that most political stories followed by social narrative are made up and shared as truth. Study shows the blueprint of online platforms are indispensable to fake news with Facebook being the most susceptible and then WhatsApp. It concludes that fake news has resulted in numerous hazardous effects shepherded by lynching and followed up by polarisation. Social media platforms must bear fair share of responsibility and solitary initiatives will prove to be futile and likely to fall short while a collective effort within the public domain, social platforms and initiatives from government can help combat fake news

Keywords: Social Media, fake news, post-truth, digital revolution.

Introduction

“Our Responsibility is to prevent hoaxes from going Viral and being widely distributed”

Mark Zuckerberg, Co-founder Facebook

Two young men on a busy street in a bustling town of the state of Assam were suddenly attacked by a mob and beaten to death. Why? suspected ‘Child Lifters’. The rumour and fake videos on children being kidnapped was viral on WhatsApp since long. The neighbours and people were lurking around and piercing through the streets which lead to the spate of similar events. Child Lifters is one of the numerous fake news events causing distress and perilous effect on the societies. The stories ranging from Cambridge analytica during the Presidential election in US to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi appeal on Diwali. A survey by Microsoft of 22 countries (Feb, 2019) ahead of India's General elections (April, 2019) revealed that India is ahead of the global average of Internet fake stories. Ten percent more Indians encounter fake news on internet than the global average. “Social relations on

internet have become riskier in India” the Microsoft survey asserted after showing a jump of 29 percent taking the country on the top list of global fake news stories.”

Jim Stroud, who expertise in online research, podcasting and online community management mentioned in his blog “hoax news are the made-up stuff, magnificently controlled to look like reliable journalistic reports that are effortlessly spread online to extensive groups of onlookers willing to spread the news and trust the fictions”. The evolution of technology and the rapid penetration of social media has risen the arguments related to the information sharing. The information shared on social media networks like Facebook, WhatsApp, twitter and Instagram are from various and diverse sources. The information source is sometimes anonymous, not verified and fake source. The rise of citizen journalism has exacerbated the situation of spreading fake news and creating ill effects on society. The past researches shows that ongoing environment of truth and post truth has intermingled and where the authenticity of information becomes questionable.

Defining Fake News

Politifact (a weblog) elucidated fake news as made up news, manipulated and dispensed as trustworthy widespread mainly through online medium. The goal is to manipulate minds, promote political cause, spread sensational headlines and polarise society. With an increase penetration of social media the proliferation of fake news has snowballed. Fake news often referred to as Junk or Pseudo News. Hoaxes or fake stories are often published or shared to misinform and delude readers. Hoax news acts as a business model for anyone’s social media profile, grabbing eyeballs on website content and blog. The made-up news is also a relatively profitable business attracting clicks on stories and creating advertising revenue. A paradigm shift in last decade in media industry has lead to emergence of online news and political opinions leaving society vulnerable to mis information. Present social media platform provides good ground to spread false information. Give ground to certain political or social ideology to propagate and stage manage discourse.

The spread of fake news is not new but age old. In 1835, New York Sun published various articles about the non-existent. During the first world war a propaganda of German Corpse Factory was widely believed, where human fats were used to make lubricants, candles and human soaps . President Roosevelt himself spread fake news about a secret document of Nazi’s. Gioe in his article History of fake news pointed the purpose of haox news isn’t to demolish truth but to influence facts to achieve political or social goals.

Fake News Triangle

Fake news triangle represents the three basic elements required to spread fake news. These three elements complement each other and the absence of any of three elements results in failure to spread fake news. The first requirement to spread fake news are tools and services used to fabricate the story and send across people globally through social media networks and various online communities. The wide availability of tools and services available on internet like online polls, hired followers and paid likes escalates the fake news. The mushrooming of social media networks like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Whatsapp makes sharing of fabricated news on a faster pace. Third decisive tool is the motivation, it implies the reasons for pushing these fabricated news on internet, it can be simply for financial gains, to attract more clicks or can vary from criminal to political.



Types of Fake News

“Edson, Zheng and Richard Ling defines fake news in six types after examining the academic articles and use of the term fake news in them.”²⁰

- (1) Satirical News - This type of articles present news in the form of humour or exaggeration. These are generally in the form of television news broadcast in an entertaining manner where information delivery takes a second stand. The main motive of these are humour to maintain the attention of young audience in sarcastic and over the top comments. Satirical program help shaping the public opinion, narratives and political belief.(Brewer, Young and Morreale 2013)
- (2) Parodic News- ‘News satire and parody plays a similar role argued by specifically forming a part of ‘Fifth Estate’ complementing the non- mainstream media like bloggers and columnist’²¹ News Parody is often referred to as fake news. Its difficult to distinguish between parody and satire as it has similar characteristics. Parody also uses the humour format and mimics the mainstream news media. The difference lies in their use of non-factual information for humour.
- (3) Fabrication of News - The articles published with no factual information depicting as an authentic news story is news fabrication. The indent of publishing is to misinform the readers. It can be on social media networks, in the form of blogs and can be published on a website to mislead the readers. Readers find the news reports similar to the authentic reports and its difficult to distinguish between fake and authentic news story. The past

²⁰ Tandoc, E. Lim, Z. Ling,R (2017). Defining Fake News. A typology of scholarly definitions. Retrieved from : <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319383049>

²¹ Berkowitz and Schwartz(2016)

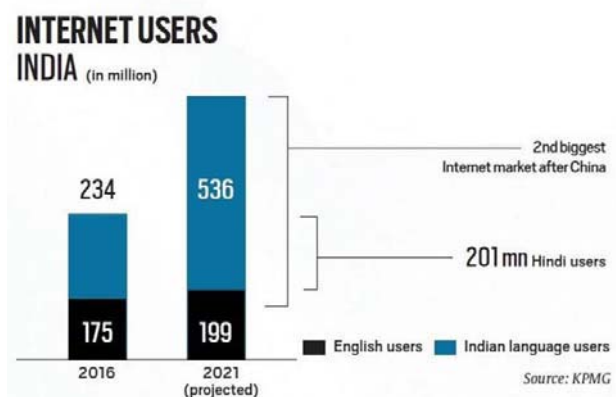
studies shows two important dimensions of news fabrication. First being the financial motive of the organisation and the author. To attract maximum clicks the news story is fabricated for widespread embrace. More clicks will lead to financial development which in turn attracts advertisers. According to Subramanian (2017) maximum number of clicks for the false story, inordinate amount flowing in the organisations account. The second objective of the news fabrication is News Bot development, in which not only the content of the news item is fabricated but the whole format is made-up to look like the real news item. These fake sites rely on the real-time propaganda, which push these sites again and again on the top giving an illusion to the readers as the most read site. Through this these fake sites hide under the facade of legitimacy.

- (4) Manipulating Photographs- With the advent of technology, photo manipulation has become customary phenomenon. Mass media is not left behind in showcasing this talent. Social media and citizen journalism has enlarged this phenomenon. The habit of sharing posts by readers without verifying it strides through the wave of fake news journalism. Recently a picture of Shri. Narendra Modi, Indian Prime Minister shared on twitter on his visit to Tolerant, UAE showing him wearing the same keffiyeh on his head as the prince of Abu Dhabi. The manipulated picture with a misleading and incorrect narrative came viral on social media. When fact checked, the Prime Minister was not wearing anything on his head and it was the use of technology that predicted a false image.
- e) Advertising- It refers to advertisements shaped as genuine news reports and press releases as news reports. In few cases the advertisements solves the purpose of news objective. The Clickbait headlines and advertisements are designed to grab the eyeballs of the audience. Maximum clicks results in increased profits.
- f) Propaganda- it refers to political stories created with the objective of manipulating public perceptions. The news stories are designed with the perceptive of organisation, public figure or the government. A study conducted to investigate the Russian channel One, a news channel which broadcast the news locally and internationally. It was found that the news stories broadcasted were untrue and designed as “strategic narratives” and “a tool for political actors to articulate a position on a specific issues to influence public perceptions and actions.” Similar to advertising, propaganda has financial motive behind promoting one side perspective. The goal of such merging of news and commentaries hid under the umbrella of objective news piece is to persuade the audience rather to inform and educate.”²²

²² Tandoc, E. Lim. W.Z. Ling,R (2017). Defining “Fake News”: A typology of scholarly definitions. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319383049>

Social Media

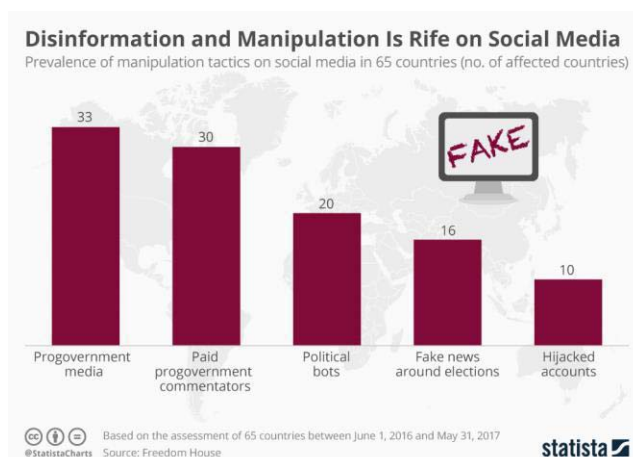
Social Media is interactive Web 2.0 Internet based application. User-generated content such as posts, comments, digital photos and videos can be shared through social media. Users operate social media through desktops, laptops, mobile phones and tablets. Most popular websites with over 100 million subscribers include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Whatsapp, and Google+. Positive impacts of social media include a sense of connectedness with the online communities. A useful tool for effective marketing for organisations, political parties and government. Negative impact of Social Media include cyberbullying, trolling, fake news and many psychological effects.



The figure shows the number of Internet users in India. According to KPMG(Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler, a multinational professional service network) the Internet users in India shows an upsurge. In 2016 number of Internet users were 409 million out of which 175 million are the English language users and 234 million are the Indian Language users such as Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Tamil etc. KPMG projected in 2021 an increase of approximately 45% in Indian and English language users and predicts India to be the biggest Internet market after China. The report highlights the internet users in an upward trend and projects to be growing in the coming years.

Fake News & Social Media

Social Media has created a whirlpool of misinformation that continues to create unwelcome ripples in India. The social society grapples to recognise between post truth and truth. In India misinformation dominated media over past half a decade. These terms such as “hoax news”, “post-truth” and “alternative facts” gained popularity after 2016 US Presidential elections globally. The issue of Cambridge Analytica further ruined the scenario by leaking confidential information of voters. A recent study by statista (as shown in the graph) carried across 65 countries between June 2016 to May 2017 indicates



media controlled by the government highlighting its freedom of expression in grave danger followed by paid commentators and political puppets created to spread propaganda which can be used during elections metastasised through hijacked or fake accounts.

Fake News in India

Child Lifters, Cow Smugglers, Mob Lynching, Polarization forms larger part of the Indian story of Fake News in 2018. The year is synonymous with fake news, with 300 million active whataspp users and growing misinformation and disinformation lead to holocaust. Incidents across the length and breadth of the country left citizens appalled, the reality check on the spread of hoax news on the social media became indispensable. A steep rise in vandalism and mobbing headlined social media in India. Here it is important to understand as how disinformation and misinformation is often used to influence citizens politically, what used to be done through word of mouth in earlier days in now taken care by bots. Each carefully assigned to identify a group of particular caste or creed and deliberate attempts are made to incite by spreading fake videos of atrocities towards a particular community and suddenly a political leaders appears as a messiah or a political party becomes the flag bearers of the victims. It is often witnessed that sham news is flamed to trigger hatred and acrimony towards a particular religion(s) in a bid to create communal disharmony often done at the behest of radical leaders. In the year 2018 cow beef related news caused the maximum furore since cow is considered as sacred animal amongst the hindu religion. New of transport of cows for culling for beef lead to killings and instilled fears amongst the transporters of bovine and particularly muslims. A large part of the Indian pollution grew up with the stories of nationalism instilled by the many sacrifice stories of freedom fighters, but use of fake news to infuse nationalism turned the heads as edited and propagated news videos and audios were used to ingrain high headed nationalism where wearing nationalism on the sleeve became the latest trend often leading to collisions of different schools o thoughts. It often said that mob has no face, mob lynching on child lifting, cow beef, temple vandalism, mosque destruction, sum up the perils of fake news in India in 2018. India or Indians had never in its human history witnessed such incidents, the epicentre being spread of fake news on social media specially WhatsApp. With the growth in social media fake news has spread its tentacles right from sports to politics to entertainment.

The study objects to find the perilous effect of social media networks like Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp on Indian society. It also looks into the fabricated news section according to the citizens of India. The study tries find out from the Indian citizen which social media network promotes maximum falsity. The survey study also strives to find the solution to curb fake news from society.

The research methodology applied for studying the Fake news on social media networks in Indian society is as follows:

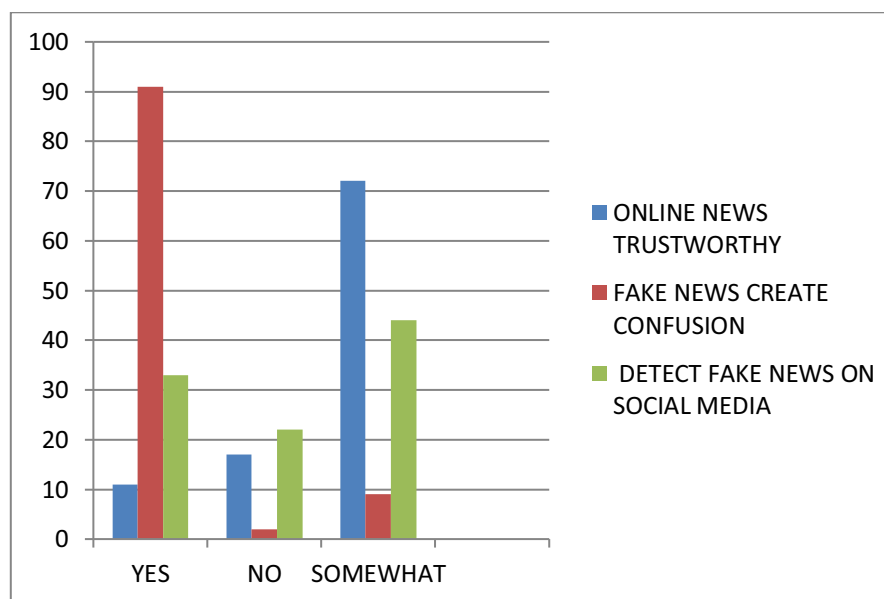
Survey method of research is used to study the national capital of India Delhi. The survey is done on the sample selected between the age group of 15-24 years of age. Random proportionate sampling was adopted. The nature of study is empirical thus the tool adopted is schedule. The data is collected from primary and secondary sources of data.

Key Findings

The findings from the survey carried on the sample selected between the age group of 18-24 years highlight some principal points:

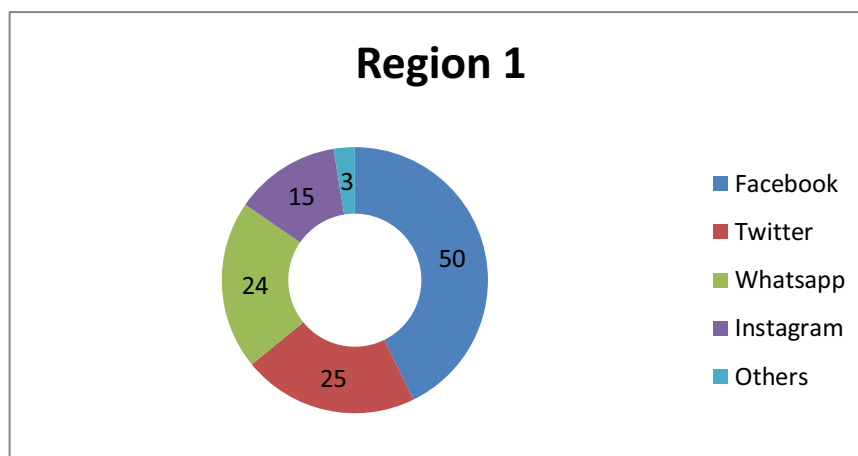
- **Is Online News Trustworthy?**

The 80% of respondents believe that online news is somewhat news worthy and 85% thinks that it creates confusion among the people whereas only 20% of respondents were able to detect fake news on social media networks.



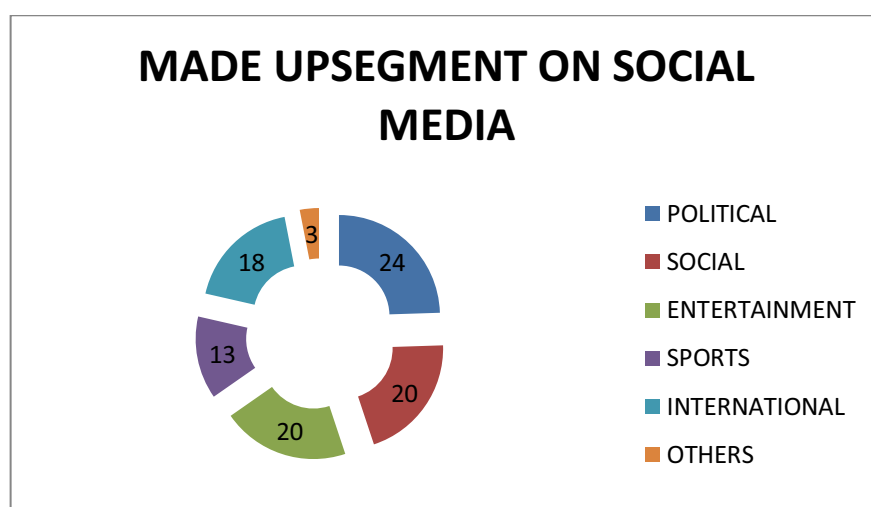
- **Which Segment of News Story is Fabricated?**

The respondents also shared that online news reports are misleading and fabricated. The survey reveals that respondents deduce that political section of the news is most fabricated, followed by social and entertainment news section.



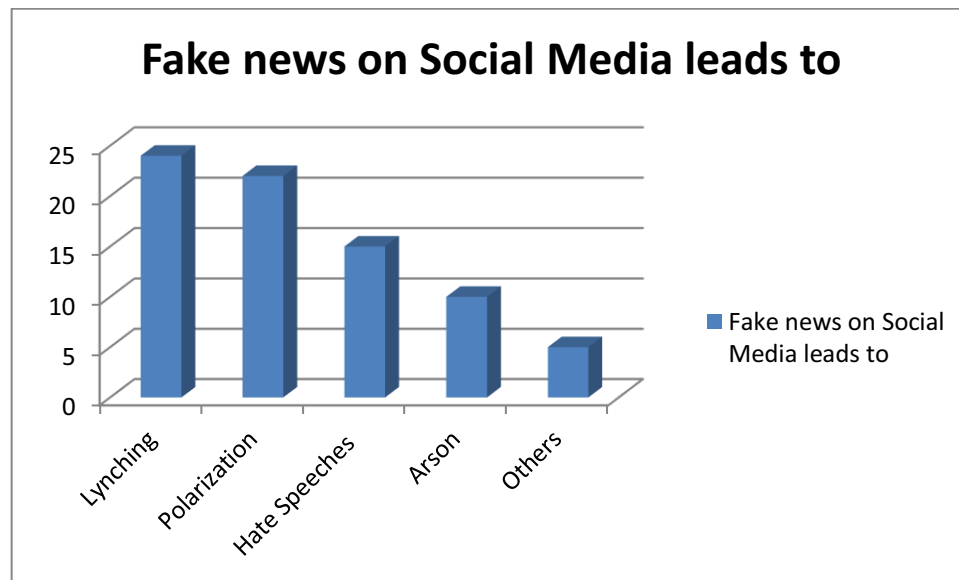
- **The social media network prone to Fake news.**

The survey divulges that Facebook is highly prone network to spread fake news. The respondents believes that Twitter and whatsapp occupy the same density of fake news followed by Instagram and other social media networks.



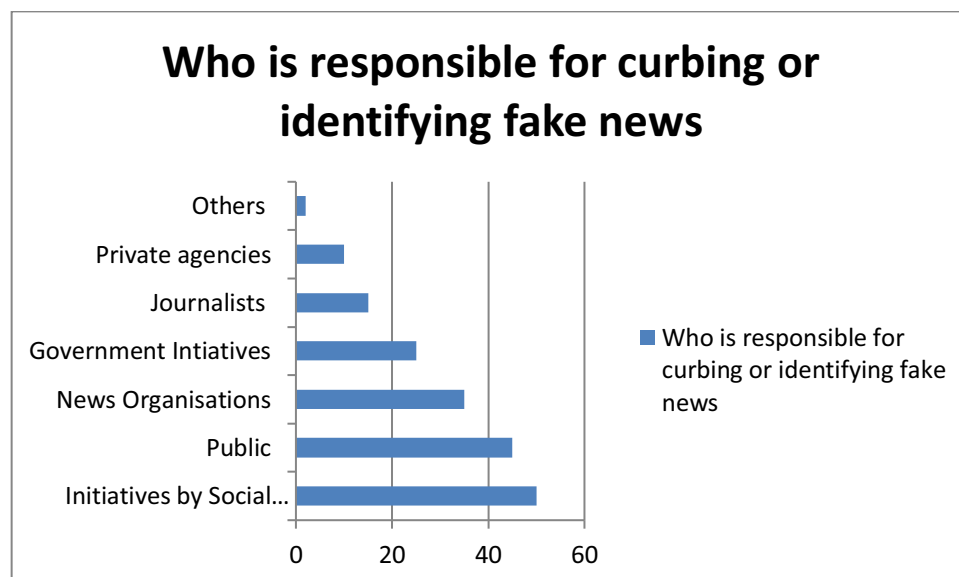
- **Fake news on Social Media leads to:**

The respondents feel that fake news creates lot of confusion and impacts the society in a negative way. They feel that Lynching has emerged as the worst fear of fake news on social media networks. Followed by polarisation of society, hate speeches and Arson are some of the major ill effects of fake news on society.



- **Who shares the responsibility to curb fake news?**

The data reveals that the initiatives by social media companies will play a major role in curbing fake news. The respondents also believe that public, news organisation and government initiatives can also be instrumental in phasing out the problem of fake news from society.



Conclusion

The above study concludes that Indians believe fabricated news on social media creates a lot of confusion, over that past year or two the upsurge in sham news has generated chaos on the online platforms. While the lions share of fake news belongs to politics, social narrative isn't lagging far behind. Often social media users get confused as fake news are carefully designed and spread as authentic news with the help of social media groups, news media bots to attract more eyeballs in order to establish fake news. It is clearly understood that the advent of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and instant messaging service WhatsApp are handy platforms to spread fake news or propagate an agenda. The study also reveals as to how Facebook is fast becoming a spinner of fake news globally followed by WhatsApp. These social media networking platforms need to come up with new algorithms and technology which can identify fake news and spurious accounts and block them to curb the issue. So the framework of most social media platforms is susceptible to fake news. Statistics from social networking sites like Facebook and messaging service WhatsApp have revealed scary story. Misinformation or cooked up news is presented in such a way that the hidden agenda is often left unseen, so far fake news has seeped in seeds of hatred and communal disharmony which is dangerous for the future of our country especially when we believe in "Unity is Diversity". A part from the people who use social media actively, it is extremely important that the statutory agencies of the government must come up with ideas and laws to identify and block fake news, its propagators and such social media groups whose core intention is to spread fake news. Stringent diktats including punishment along with steep fines must be incorporated to act as uncompromising deterrent for active social media users and groups.

References

- Allocott, H. Gentzkow, M. Yu, C. (2018). Trends in diffusion of misinformation on Social Media. Stanford University. USA.
- Bell, E. & Owen, T. (2017). The Platform Press: How Silicon Valley Reengineered Journalism. Tow Center for Digital Journalism, March 29th, 2017. https://www.cjr.org/tow_center_reports/platform-press-how-silicon-valley-reengineered-journalism.php [accessed 29/03/2018]
- Bail, C. Argyle, P. Brown, T. (2018). Exposure to opposing views on social media can increase political polarisation. PNAS. Columbia University, New York, USA
- Flynn DJ, Nyhan B, Reifler J (2017) The nature and origins of misperceptions: Understanding false and unsupported beliefs about politics. *Political Psychology* 38(S1): 127-50.
- Gioe, D. (2017). The history of fake news. *The National Interest Magazine*. Retrieved from <https://nationalinterest.org/about-the-national-interest>

- Gjylbegaj,V.(2017). Fake news in the age of social media. Proceedings of SOCIOINT- 4th International Conference on Education, Social Science and Humanities, Dubai, UAE.Holan,A (2016). Statements about fake news. Politifact-Truth -o- meter. District of Columbia, Washington.
- Howard, P. (2017) Is social media killing democracy? Oxford. Available at <https://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/videos/is-social-media-killing-democracy-computational-propaganda-algorithms-automation-and-public-life/>
- Ketchell,M.(2018). Misinformation and biases infect social media, both intentionally and accidentally. The Conversation. Australia.
- Kalsnes, B. & Larsson, O. A. (2017). Understanding News Sharing Across Social Media: Detailing distribution on Facebook and Twitter in Journalism Studies (Taylor and Francis). <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi>
- Kucharski,A (2016). Post-truth: Study epidemiology of fake news. Nature The international journal of science. Doi <https://doi.org/10.1038/540525a>. Pp.540
- Kumar, R. The growing tide of fake news in India. Retrieved from <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/growing-tide-fake-news-india-171210122732217.html>
- Livingstone,S.(2018). Time to Rethink. Media Policy Project Blog. LSE. London, UK.
- Micro.T (2017). Fake news and cyber propaganda: The use and abuse of social media. Poland.
- Newman,N. Fletcher,R. Kalogeropoulos,A. (2017). Reuters Institute digital news report. Retrieved from https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3026082
- Posetti,J. Ireton,C. (2018). Journalism, Fake news & Disinformation. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation(UNESCO). Paris, France.Silverman C, Singer-Vine J, Vo LT (2017b). Available at <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/fake-news-real-ads>. Accessed September 3,2018.
- Rubin,V. Chen, Y. Conroy, N. (2015). Deception Detection for news: three types of fakes. University of Ontario, Canada. Retrieved from <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/pr2.2015.145052010083>.
- Roozenbeek, J. Linden,S. The fake news game: actively inoculating against risk of misinformation (2017). University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK.
- Shao,C. Luca, G. Flammini, A. (2017). The spread of fake news by social bots. Indiana University, Bloomington. Retrieved from <https://www.andyblackassociates.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/fakenewsbots.pdf>
- Tandoc, E. Lim. W.Z. Ling,R (2017). Defining “Fake News”: A typology of scholarly definitions. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319383049>
- The Guardian. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/may/16/facebook-fake-news-tools-not-working>. Accessed September 3, 2018.
- The Quint’s harnessing of audience power to counter the spread of disinformation stories on WhatsApp in India, and their creative curation of verified content on the app: <https://www.thequint.com/neon/satire/whatsapp-indian-elections-and-fake-propaganda-satire>
- Zimdars M (2016)False, misleading, clickbait-y,and satirical “news” sources. Available at <http://d279m997dpfgwl.cloudfront.net/wp/2016/11>