



The Effects of Social Needs Factors on Fake News Sharing Among Social Media Users: A Study of Students in Tertiary Institutions of Katsina State

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of news sharing behaviour on social media has been investigated by many scholars, and they found several factors that determine news sharing on social media. This study aims at exploring the effects of social needs factors (socializing, homophily and status seeking) of news sharing toward fake news proliferation on social media among students of tertiary institutions in Katsina State. Drawing sample of 302 respondents virtually on students of Hassan Usman Katsina Polytechnic, Katsina, Federal College of Education, Katsina and Isa Kaita College of Education, Dutsinma, the result of the research indicated that only socializing factor from social needs factors is significant predictor of fake news, and this means that homophily and status seeking does not predict fake news on social media. The study also concluded by stating the contribution of the study to the body of knowledge.

Keywords: Fake news, social needs, status seeking, socializing and homophily.

INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of online fake news is described by World Economic Forum as one of the 10 worldwide dangers of the future generations, and it was believed and predicted by 51% of experts that this condition will continue to deteriorate in the next many years to come (Herrero-Diz et al., 2019). However, it was forecasted by 2022 half of the news in circulation will be fake (Gartner Report, 2017). In a study conducted by Gallup and Knight Foundation in 2017, discovered that 73% of citizens of United State of America stated that the circulation and proliferation of fake news on social media was a main problem and it was considered a risk to their democracy (Knight Foundation, 2018). Inaccurate information, misinformation and fake news are posing serious challenge and threat to any voter and to the existence of an up-to-date constituency which are keys to an effective democracy (Leeder, 2019). Similarly, the impact of misinformation and fake news on public opinion have become a serious source of concern for governments, organizations, institutions and societies in many countries (Tandoc et al., 2018). It is therefore not surprising that fake news has significant detrimental effects on people and the communities, this include deceiving individuals to accept wrong information as reliable one (Shu et al., 2019).

However, another important strand of literature discovered that users of internet are increasingly relying on social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter and Instagram to get information and news update on current issues (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017). Even though social media has been regarded as the source of news, information and social interaction worldwide, it is also seen and criticized for providing a room for massive sharing of unverified information. According to Lazer (2017) the rising acceptance of social network platforms as sources of news has also led to serious concerns among researchers and governments all over the world about their possible influence in distributing bulky volumes of un-edited content produced by pseudo-journalists. And it was discovered that about 59% of Twitter users shared links and information without verifying or reading them (Gabiolkov et al., 2016). Furthermore, individuals are fond of using social media platforms to share their personal actions, hobbies and views. Social network platforms have many

advantages such as getting access to information, seeking for information or news and relatively easy to use and inexpensive (Ozbay & Alatas, 2020).

In relation to the advantages of social media usage, social networks users are frequently distributing information or share other people's update without verifying the source the source of the information authenticity and trustworthiness (Bondielli & Marcelloni, 2019). And these activities make social network platforms a fruitful conduits for sharing and consuming unsubstantiated news and misinformation (Zubiaga et al., 2018). Information seeking and information sharing are some of the activities that users of social media are fond of doing frequently and without information needs engagements, these platforms will not be lively or survive (Khan & Idris, 2019). And one of the main concerns associated with information sharing, social media users may share fake news due to ease of sharing to inform other users, this trend is common on social network platforms.

There are quite numbers of papers on social media and fake news, some researchers focused on fake news detection on social media (Ozbay & Alatas, 2020; Bondielli & Marcelloni, 2019; Huang & Chen, 2020; Aldwairi & Alwahedi, 2018). And some scholars explored the concept of fake news, causes and implications (Parikh et al., 2019; Parikh et al., 2019 ; Pandey, 2018). Furthermore, some scholars studied fake news awareness and sensitization in an effort to create media literacy among the social media users (Duffy et al., 2019; Creech et al., 2018; Nelson & Taneja, 2018). And there is few previous study that was conducted empirically on the link between information sharing, information seeking and fake news sharing, while news sharing and news seeking are the major activities that keep social media users active on the various platforms (Khan & Idris, 2019). In addition to this, most information are shared on social media in order to mislead consumers (Kümpel et al., 2018). On the hand, most of past researches on fake news sharing emerged from United States of America, most especially during US Presidential Election of 2016, and looking at Malaysia as globalized and multi-racial country that is witnessing the proliferation of fake news (Ogbette et al., 2019). This paper explores the role of social needs (information sharing, homophily, and information seeking) on fake news sharing with full focused on students in students of tertiary institutions in Katsina State Nigerian context, because the data of the study were collected in Nigeria to fill the existing gap.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social media usage and fake news sharing in tertiary institutions of Katsina State of Nigeria

Katsina State is one of the 36 states of Nigeria located at approximately between latitude 11° 49' 0" – 13° 00' 00" and longitude 8° 00' 00"–10° 00' 00"E. It covers an area of about 23,662km², and the state occupied by 4.3 million people (Mukhtar, 2016). However, due the high number of internet users in the state and the country, information sharing, information seeking, and circulation of fake news are thriving on daily basis through personal chatting app such as WhatsApp and Facebook messenger (Nelson & Taneja, 2018). The government of Nigeria has witnessed drawbacks due to spread of fake news (Pate et al., 2019), and the number of internet users is increasing at alarming rate, which open suffered initiated a bill on fake news to stop the production, sharing and promoting misinformation, but the Bill was perceived as a strategy to silence opposition parties and media in 2018, there were campaigning for opposition party rather than curtailing fake news which is a threat to the unity, security and Nigeria in general (Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2019) . At the other end, international media criticized the Nigeria Fake News Act for being used as an excuse for the predators of press freedom to seize the opportunity 'to muzzle the media on the pretext of fighting false information.

Research Model And Hypotheses

The focus of this research is to investigate the effects of social needs on fake news sharing among social media users in tertiary institutions in Katsina State of Nigeria. The theoretical background for this study is designed on the assumptions of Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), the theory assumes that audiences actively seek out media in a goal-directed way which provides them with the means of gratifying a wide variety of needs (Stephen W.Littlejohn, 1978). Uses and Gratification theory was used by many researchers in their empirical studies e.g. (Fletcher & Park, 2017; Lee, 2012; Lee & Goh, 2010; Chuang, 2015) to serves as theoretical framework to developed hypotheses for the motives of news sharing on social media. UGT is described as "the social and psychological origins of needs which generate expectations of the mass media and other sources which lead to

differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities) resulting in needs gratifications and other consequences, perhaps mostly unintended ones” (Park et al., 2013, p. 5). They highlighted that UGT explains how individuals' needs are gratified by media and how gratifications reconstruct such individuals' needs. UGT which focuses on motives of media acceptance is an appropriate framework to investigate interactive media or the Internet and social media related issues (Hur et al., 2017). However, the most well-known factors of Uses and Gratification Theory discussed and recognized by many scholars in various social media literature and the variables of social needs (socializing, status seeking and homophily).

Status Seeking Gratification and Fake News

Status seeking stands for how social media users are sharing information that help them to attain status within their age mates on social network platforms. It was discovered that individuals share contents on social media to gain recognition (Long Ma, 2014). Status seeking is describes as the wish to be accurate, hence strengthening people’s moods and principles, and social media users derived satisfaction for the usage of the social network platforms, this make them to have impression of respect, and feeling of being superior by increasing self-esteem (Thompson, Wang, Daya & Wang, 2019). However, it was revealed that if people shared information on social media they get endorsement and respect from other users within their circle and therefore, this improves their status (Anstead & Stupart, 2018). Fake news is fakkbricated for financial benefits and political benefits (Krishnan, S., & Chen, 2018). In most cases, people share fake news on social media platforms in order to entertain friends or family (Duffy et al., 2019). Social media users share news to gain social approval or boost social interconnection which in turn lead to fake news sharing at the same time (Bright, 2016). Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H2: Status seeking is positively associated with fake news sharing on social media.

Socializing Gratification and Fake News

The concept of socializing was defined by Thompson et al (2019) as the passion for interaction. However, socializing was also described as the need to communicate and interconnect with others, this could solve satisfy the need for belonging and fitting (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Social needs gratification refers to the desire of individuals to be accepted as a member of group or family (Lee & Ma, 2012). In study conducted by Ham et al (2019) it was discovered that individuals with high socializing attitude tend to share more information on social media.

However, socializing gratification was found as significant predictor of fake news on social media (Destiny Apuke & Omar, 2020). In relation to this, we conclude that individuals that were motivated to share information or news on social media in order to satisfy socializing gratification are fond of sharing of contents from unsubstantiated source. Hence the following hypothesis was proposed.

H3: Socializing is positively associated with fake news sharing on social media.

Homophily Gratification and Fake News Sharing

In this study, homophily is operationalized as the degree at which two or many people that are associating which one another share some similarity in some features, such as level of education, religion, status and ideology, in a situation where people are given freedom to relate with any one among many individuals, there is no doubt they will choose to interact with anyone who is like them (Rogers et al., 2019). However, the similarity can be ascribed to various issues like attitudes, levels of education, type of business and status. In a homophilous relationship The interaction between similar people takes place at a higher rate than among people who are not similar in culture, faith, attitude and ideology (Ibarra, 2015). Furthermore, in 2012 before the U.S general election day, data from 2.2 million Twitter users was analyzed and the study discovered that because of homophily people were excessively exposed to tweets from people like-minded others (Halberstam & Knight, 2016). One of the consequences of homophily in social interaction is the sharing of false news (misleading information) and this affect the content and also lead to the partiality of the news disseminated on social media platforms (Abreu & Jeon, 2019). We thus hypothesised that:

H1: *Homophily* is positively associated with fake news sharing on social media.

Conceptual Model of the study

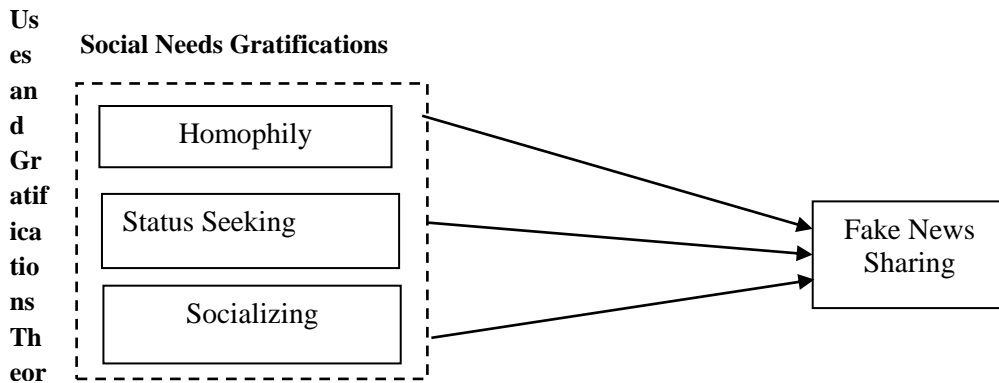


Figure 1.1: Research Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

Sample.

The data of this research was collected using survey method by administering questionnaires online through Google form, the use of this method allows the researcher to collect statistically significant data from many individuals (Ochieng, 2009). Furthermore, the study employed to steps of sampling technique: purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling which is one of the non-probability sampling method in which respondents selected as the sample of the study were chosen based on the judgement of the researcher and his conviction that they can help in answering the research questions raised in the study for achieving the research objectives (Earl Babbie, 2012). We purposively selected the samples of the research by setting three different criteria a respondent must fulfil before participating in the research such as he/she must be 18-year-old and above, must be student of tertiary institution in Katsina state and must own a social media platform (s). The link and barcode of the questionnaire were posted on various social media platforms and were also share to some respondents that possess the criteria to participate in the survey via scanner and a page was created on Facebook for that purpose only.

The second sampling technique employed in order to attain the goals of the study was snowball sampling which is also known as chain referral sampling (Babbie, 2010). In snowballing technique, the researcher selects an individual that fits the criteria fixed by the researcher for sample selection and the first respondent selected, will be asked to refer the link or barcode of the questionnaire to another respondent that met the same participation criteria. This is how the link of the questionnaire was referred to many potential respondents of the study (Earl Babbie, 2012). Snowball method is well used for multiple research purposes and is especially applicable when the focus of the study is on a controversial topic, likely linked to private subject matter, and thus requires insider information to identify individuals for evaluation (Naderifar et al., 2017). And snowball sampling can be used in the area of antisocial behavior, especially work on drugs abuse and dependency, women trafficking, prostitution, lesbianism and other sensitive issues, to collect materials for the studies because the respondents will more be comfortable with the method due it nature of privacy and freedom (Wenzel, 2017). However, the method is also used to study respondents that are hard to reach, and it can also expand the sample size, scope of the study, reduce costs and time (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). Nevertheless, the online sampling technique was criticised for its inability to generalize the finding of the survey and the tendency of error in the judgment of the researcher but still it is one of the most less cost-effective and time-effective sampling methods available (Alvi, 2016). In an effort to reduce sampling bias in the sampling method, Kirzherr and Charles (2018) recommended for the increase of a sample in any online survey.

The sample of this study was calculated using the G*power analysis, which was decidedly recommended for structural equation modelling by Hair et al (2019). Our model has three predictors

and in order to obtain a medium effect size and a power of 0.8, 96 minimum sample size is needed. And the sample of this study was augmented to 302 because our population are diverse in nature (Bartlett, 2019). Therefore, the sample size for this study is enough to establish confident findings and to resolve the issue of sampling bias of the online survey (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018).

Measures

This study had four constructs, one (1) dependent variable and three (3) independents variables, and the measures of the study were reflective while the items of this research were adapted from previous studies. The homophily gratification was adapted from the research of Long et al (2014). The items of socializing, status seeking and fake news were all adapted from the previous study of Thompson et al (2019). The whole of the items was measured using 5-point Likert scale stating from 1= Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree. Furthermore, to reduce the ambiguity of the items, we did a pilot study with thirty (n = 30) samples prior to the real data collection, and we also submitted the measurements to experienced experts for validation. Based on the result obtained from the pilot study, we rephrased some of the items to make them more precise and simpler.

Data analyses

The data obtained from this study was subjected to quantification in order to get results, taking into consideration the requirements and the nature of the available data. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS, version 24. Regression-based conditional and moderated moderation model analyses to test hypotheses using a macro-installed PROCESS, version 3.2 program in SPSS (Hayes, 2018). The SPSS tool was used to refine the data on the study variables. It was again utilized to check if there is any common method bias. Additionally, a reliability test was conducted and “mean” and “standard deviation” was computed. In relation to this, Spearman’s Correlation Coefficient was used to verify the relationship among the various variables.

RESULTS

The measurement model was assessed for construct validity and reliability. To test the reliability of the measurement, Cronbach’s alpha was used, and this produced acceptable scales. Cronbach’s alpha as an indicator of instrument quality categorized as 0.90 to 0.10 are excellent, 0.80 to 0.89 are good, 0.70 to 79 are acceptable, and 0.60 to 0.69 are questionable, and 0.50 to 59 are poor while below 0.50 is unacceptable (George & Mallery, 2003). Based on the categorization of the Cronbach’s alpha above the quality of measurements for this study are good and acceptable (see Table 2).

The results on demographic variables illustrate that the female respondents (52.1%) were slightly higher than the male respondents (47.5%). The slight gap between gender may reflect the uneven use of social media between genders which usually exist in South Asia and in Malaysia in particular (Hanafi, 2019). In terms of age, majority of the respondents (73.2%) were between the age of 26-35 years old (30.8%) and 18-25 years old (42.4%) categories, where a small number of the respondents (1.3%) reported to be between the ages 56 and above. Half of the respondents were degree holders (51.2%). Distribution of respondents according to races shows the maximum number of respondents. In relation to the time spend on social media per day, the findings reveal that more than a quarter of the respondents (42.1%) spent 10-12 hours on social media, while only a small number of respondents spent (11.9%) spent between 1 to 3 hours per day on social media (See Table 1).

Table 1: Results of sample demographics (n = 302)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	144	47.5
Female	158	52.1
Age		
18-25years	93	30.8
26-35years	128	42.4
36-45years	61	20.2
46-55years	16	5.3
56 and above.	4	1.3
Education		
Bachelor's degree	29	9.6
Diploma	86	28.4
Postgraduate	129	42.6
Time spent on social media		
1-3hrs	36	11.9
4-6hrs	65	21.5
7-9hrs	74	24.5
10-12hrs	127	42.1

Table 2.

Variables	No. of Items	M	SD	α
Social needs factors				
Homophily	4	3.466	(.679)	0.80
Status-seeking	5	3.584	(.598)	0.76
Socializing	5	3.722	(.561)	0.74
Fake news sharing	5	3.776	(.676)	0.83

Linear regression analysis was conducted to test the hypothesis of the study. The study tested the effects of social needs factors (socializing, homophily and status seeking) on fake news sharing. It was observed the social need factors, homophily ($\beta=-1.387, p=.000$) was positively and significantly associated with fake news sharing. Additionally, status seeking ($\beta=.007, p=.957$) was found not to have direct effect on fake news sharing. Whereas socializing ($\beta=.743, p=.000$) has positive significant effects directly on fake news sharing. However, the regression model tested in this study is significant ($F=766.505, p<0.05$). The results show high R^2 value suggesting that 98.9% of the total variance explained in fake news sharing were contributed by the variables examined in this study (Refer to table 3).

Table 3

Variables	Fake news sharing
	$\beta(p)$
Social needs factors.	
Homophily	-1.387** (.000)
Status seeking	.007 (.957)
Socializing	.743** (.000)
R^2	.989
Adjusted R^2	.978
F	766.505
Sig.	.000

DISCUSSION

The result the study indicated that among the social needs factors only socializing has positive and significant effect on fake news sharing. While homophily has effects on fake news sharing but at the opposite direction, but status seeking has no elements of fake news sharing on social media among the examined samples of social media users. Due to scarce literatures from past studies that examined the relationship between homophily, status-seeking, socializing and fake news, the result of previous and available research show how socializing and status seeking are positively related to intention to share news (Lee et al., 2011). However, it was discovered from a previous study by Talwar et al. (2019) that status seeking and socializing are positively and significantly related to fake news sharing among social media users, in the study status seeking was termed as ‘social comparison’ while socializing was term as ‘fear of missing out’ (Talwar et al., 2019). This study suggests that users who share news on social media for the purpose of socializing, status seeking and homophily are sharing factors that influence fake news sharing. When people are motivated to seek status, they don’t care about the accuracy of the news they shared. What they care most is the number of views and like (Lee, 2012).

Therefore, the findings of the study postulate that status seeking and socializing were the most significant predictors of fake news sharing on social media among social media users in the examined tertiary institutions of Katsina State. However, looking at the socializing as predictor of fake news sharing on social media, this is consistent with the finding of research conducted by (Guess et al., 2019). This empirically indicates that socializing is one of the contributors to fake news sharing on social media and this might not be unconnected with the attitude of social media users of sharing any news or information without verifying the authenticity, reliability, and the credibility of the source of the news. This study also discovers status seeking as positive predictor of fake news sharing, and this is also consistent with the finding of study conducted on why people share fake news. In the study, status seeking as one of the most significant predictor of fake news was term “Self-disclosure” (Talwar et al., 2019). Psychologically, it was suggested that status seeking lead to fake news circulation because it depends on the effort put in place by those that share the information to be accepted and supported by their target social network users.

This research, however, contributed to the body of knowledge from three different perspective namely: theoretical perspective, practical perspective and as well as methodological perspective. Theoretically, the study developed a social media conceptual model based on the premise of uses and gratifications theory and at the same discussed on how best this theory can be applied in the context of

social media usage. However, the study contributes to the scholarship by modifying and developing some measurement statements that were used in the method of the research. And finally, the study contributes practically by discovering the best predictors of fake news on social media, the finding of the study can guide social media users and all stakeholders on how to guard against fake news circulation among students of tertiary institutions in Katsina State

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of this study was to examine the effects of social needs factors of news sharing on social media amongst social media users in tertiary institution of Katsina State. This study achieved its objective with the utilization of survey research design that was largely non-probability. The finding of the research has discovered some momentous results. Still, some limitations were spotted in this current study, which future researchers may develop their studies in the same areas.

First, this study concentrated on the effects of three social needs factors of news sharing toward fake news proliferation on social media among students of tertiary institutions of Katsina State, the factors studied from social needs angle were 'socializing, status seeking and homophily. Furthermore, there are factors such as environmental and network ties. Therefore, researchers in the future can explore the factors that were left uninvestigated by this study.

However, the sample of this research might not represent the entire population of the students of tertiary institutions in Katsina State and may not be enough to generalize the finding to the whole of the students of tertiary institutions in Katsina State. Consequently, researchers in the future can cover a large sample size, that is larger than the sample of this study. And the future explorers can also look at the possibility of conducting this type of research on a specific group of people such as youths in the future.

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