



# FAKE NEWS AND ITS EFFECTS ON STUDENT PERCEPTION AND BEHAVIOUR AT MADHAV UNIVERSITY

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### Abstract:

*Digital technology and social media have transformed how people get and use material. But this transformation has made it easier to quickly spread false information (misinformation) and fake news (not factual). This study sought to examine the effects and implications of misinformation on student attitudes and behaviors at Madhav University. As digital media has expanded, the problem of disinformation disseminating to audiences has intensified, particularly among university students who often utilize digital platforms. This report fills a vacuum in the literature by examining the impact of fake news on student views, media trust, academic performance, and social conduct. A mixed-method qualitative research methodology was utilized, using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with a representative sample of students. The results indicate that a significant number of students are exposed to misleading and fabricated news articles, which substantially influence their viewpoints and decision-making processes. These findings underscore the imperative of evaluating the implementation of media literacy and formulating institutional policies to mitigate the proliferation of disinformation and fake news. The research affects teachers, government officials, and media companies. It looks at how these groups may work together to fight fake news while also making sure that students and the community are well-informed and educated.*

**Keywords:** Fake News, Misinformation, Media Literacy, Student Behavior, Perception, Madhav University

### Introduction:

"Fake news" is a word that academics, journalists, and the general public all use a lot. "Fake news" is a broad phrase for false or misleading information that is presented as news content, usually through digital media or, less often, traditional media. The spread of fake news poses major threats to democracy, public health, and social cohesion. For college-age students, who are often influenced by new ideas and information, the impact of processing and the belief in fake news items may be especially harmful.

Madhav University, like institutions all throughout the world, wants to teach students



how to think critically about the information they get. This project is examining the impact of fake news on student perceptions and behaviors at Madhav University, aiming to develop strategies to counter misinformation. This study focuses on a single university community, enabling it to yield data and insights that contribute to discussions around multimedia literacy and misinformation.

### Literature Review

Fake news has been around long before the internet, but digital technologies have amplified its reach and impact. According to Lazer et al. (2018), "Fake news is fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent." Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) noted that social media made it easy to spread fake news. It proliferated under the cover of political weaponization during the 2016 U.S. presidential election, but much of it was documented and studied by researchers. They discovered that fake news was widely shared, readily accepted as true by social media users, and wielded an influence on their opinions or attitudes, as well as on public opinion or public policy outcomes.

Tandoc et al. (2018) identified five types of fake news - satire, parody, fabrication, manipulated content, and propaganda. Their comparison of types of news shows the complexity involved in the phenomenon, its meaning, and the challenges involved with defining and determining fake news. Pennycook and Rand (2019) investigated how cognitive reflection and digital literacy education would affect someone's decision in whether or not to resist fake news. Their findings indicated that someone would have a lower likelihood of believing or sharing fake news if they possessed better analytical thinking skills.

In India, the proliferation of fake news has been associated with incidents of communal violence, health scares and the polarization of public opinion on political issues. Research conducted on the spread of fake news on messaging platforms in particular, by Badrinathan (2021) and Narayanan et al. (2018), has identified WhatsApp and other messaging platforms as conduits for escalation of fake news. Chhibber and Verma (2018) examined the impact of fake news on perceptions of having a political agency voter in more recent elections in India. Incidentally, Agarwal and Sureka (2019) examined the automated detection of fake news in regional languages in India.

Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) make the case that false news spreads much faster and wider than true news, particularly on Twitter, while Friggeri et al. (2014) who examined the spread of fake news on Facebook found that when fake news has been discredited, it usually does not have the same reach or impact as fake news about individuals. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) have put forward a framework to discuss the different types of information disorder, mainly misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation.



### **Research Gap**

Although there is a relatively rich literature base on fake news, a small number of studies have examined its specific impact on students at universities in India. Most of the research on fake news is located in western contexts or studies the general population. Madhav University provides the chance to study how fake news influences perceptions, behaviours, and experiences for students from a variety of backgrounds, and with a strong digital presence. Investigating this problem in an Australian context is intended to enhance understanding of challenges and potential solutions to the problem of fake news in higher education.

### **Objectives**

To evaluate the levels of fake news exposure experienced by students of Madhav University

To investigate the effects of fake news on the perception and actions of students

To assess the effectiveness of media literacy in students

To identify students' main sources of fake news and types of fake news

To make recommendations on reducing effects of fake news on campus

### **Methodology**

This study utilized a mixed-method approach to provide a holistic understanding of the problem of fake news.

### **Quantitative Component:**

A structured questionnaire was developed to examine students' exposure to fake news, their capacity to identify fake news and students' perceived impact of fake news on their behaviour. The survey was administered to 400 students in undergraduate programs including, arts, sciences, commerce and engineering programs. The questionnaire was made up of closed and open questions and was administered via online and offline methods.

### **Qualitative Component:**

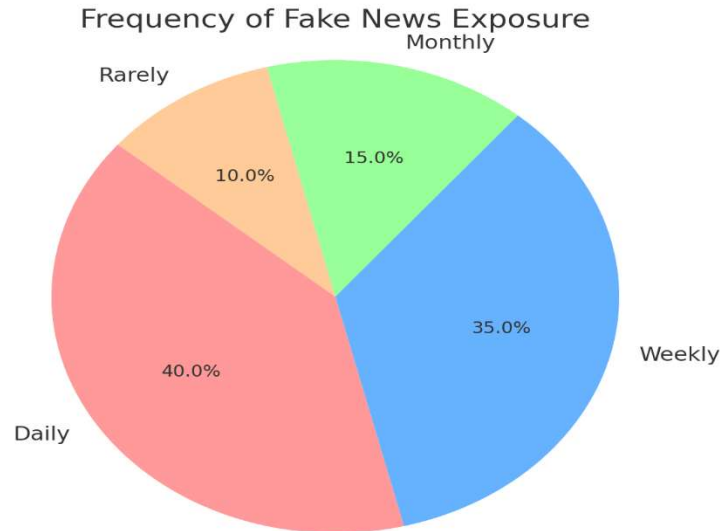
The researchers conducted interviews with 20 students from among the survey participants. These interviews took a deeper dive into students' experiences with fake news, their responses, and their thoughts on media literacy. The researchers utilized thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to report on the common themes and findings from the qualitative data.

### **Data Analysis:**

SPSS software was utilized for quantitative data analysis. Descriptive analyses were conducted with frequencies and percentages, whereas inferential analyses, chi-square tests and correlations, were conducted to explore the relationships among the variables. Qualitative data were coded, and then thematically analyzed to provide richer understandings of participants' experiences.

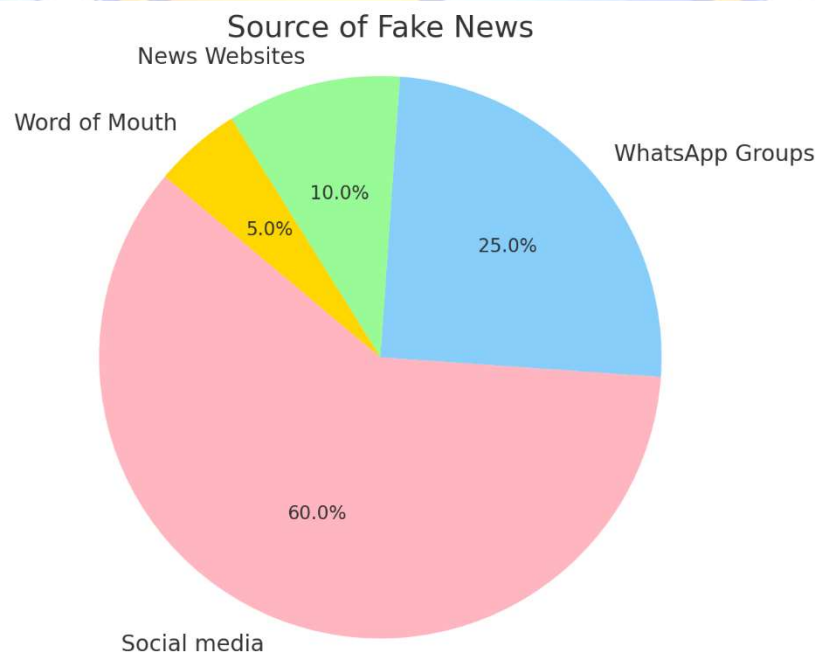
## Results and Discussion

### Pie Chart 1



The data reveals that 75% of students encounter fake news either daily or weekly. This indicates high exposure, likely driven by constant engagement with digital media. The daily exposure rate (40%) is particularly concerning, suggesting that misinformation is deeply embedded in students' everyday media consumption. This frequency increases the potential for misinformation to influence beliefs and behaviors over time.

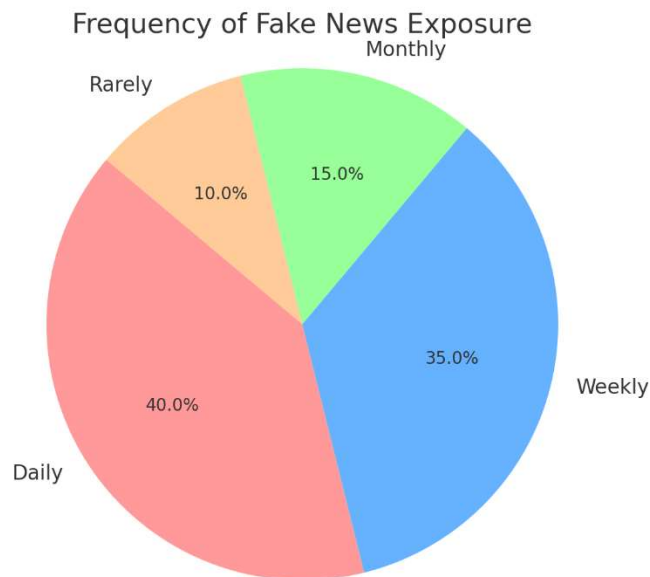
### Pie Chart 2





Social media platforms, particularly Facebook and Instagram, have been identified the most frequent sources for all fake news, and WhatsApp group messages are also high on the list of common sources, especially for emotionally charged or politically heated postings. Virtually no one stated that they saw fake news from traditional news websites or in conversation with people in person. The results of this study show a clear shift in trust from traditional journalism (and its verification procedures) to digital peer-to-peer sources devoid of verification altogether.

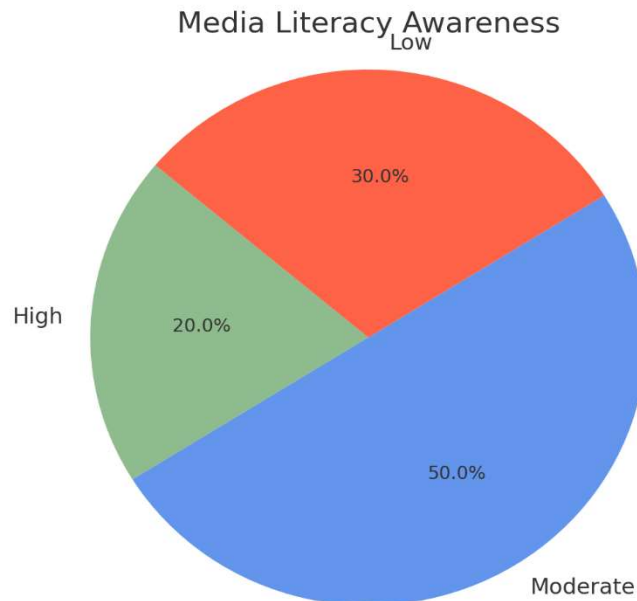
### Pie Chart 3



Almost half of the respondents stated that fake news had led them to develop their political views, which was evident in their responses to elections and social issues. This is important because it shows that misinformation can mislead students and increase the chance for misinformation to polarize campus communities. A few (30%) of respondents stated that fake news had led to issues in their social interactions or relationships. In this case, those interactions ranged from disagreements to distrust and even the potential for being ostracized by their peer groups.

Alarmingly, 15% said that misinformation led to misinformed academic projects or decreased trust in scholarly sources, while 10% reported increased anxiety or fear due to fake news, especially health-related rumors (e.g., COVID-19, vaccinations).

#### Pie Chart 4



Only 20% of students showed high awareness of media literacy defined by their ability to spot fake news, cross-check sources, and apply critical thinking. The majority of students (50%) exhibited moderate awareness, they recognized some fake content, but did not have a consistent approach to verifying authenticity. In contrast, 30% of students showed low awareness and when they did recognize fake content or misinformation relied on their first exposure only and did no deeper digging (i.e., the graphics, the headlines--no further investigation) to confirm its credibility.

These numbers demonstrate the need for organized interventions to improve students' media literacy skills, especially given the regular doses of digital misinformation students experience.

**Qualitative Insights:** The interviews identified a number of themes such as frustration with the amount of fake news, uncertainty about how to check information, and a desire for holistic guidance from educators. Students desired institutional support to develop critical thinking and digital literacy skills. Some students noted that they changed their social media habits as way to avoid misinformation, and others admitted they unknowingly shared fake news.

**Implications: The study's findings have several important implications:**

For Educators: Media literacy can be embedded in the curriculum to give students the skills to work in the digital dimension of information.

For Institutions: Schools, colleges, and universities can work to institutionalize policies and programs to marginalize and undermine the use of fake news by giving students opportunities to recognize credible and reliable information.



For Policymakers: Government or other agencies should undertake national projects to support and promote digital literacy, and work to minimize the connection to misinformation and disinformation.

For Media Organizations: Working with students in partnership with educational institutions and other agencies and organizations can raise the profile around media literacy and ultimately assist with delivering accurate, reliable information to students.

**Conclusion** The study stressed an alarming issue regarding the effects of fake news on university students; with high levels of exposure and considerable behavioral impact, universities need to act quickly. Short of working to enhance media literacies, and promote behaviours associated with responsible consumption of information, universities are complicit in the adverse effects of fake news. Madhav University can provide site for other institutions to follow. Universities would be wise to implement comprehensive measures to help educate students about the dangers of misinformation. Future studies will also provide longer-term impacts and test the effects of evidenced-based targets.

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