Examining the Effectiveness of Fact-Checking Tools on Social Media in Reducing the Spread of Misinformation

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ABSTRACT

Misinformation on social media poses a significant threat to individuals and society. This study examines the effectiveness of in-platform fact-checking tools in reducing the spread of misinformation. To this extent an online survey was conducted to assess individuals' awareness of misinformation and fact-checking tools, their behavior toward social media, and how it impacts their exposure to misinformation and the sharing of misinformation. The authors found a concerning reliance on social media as a primary news source, highlighting the need for readily available verification mechanisms. Encouragingly, awareness of misinformation correlated with fact-checking tool use. Participants utilizing fact-checking tools reported encountering less misinformation. Notably, participants with higher education displayed greater concern about misinformation. This study demonstrates the potential of fact-checking tools, particularly among educated individuals, but emphasizes the need for a multi-pronged approach. This includes improved tools, awareness campaigns, critical thinking skill development, and fostering a culture of inquiry.

KEYWORDS

Misinformation, Social Media, Fake New, Fact Checking, Fact-Checking Tools, User Behavior, Awareness, Concern

The prevalence of misinformation on social media has grown significantly in recent years, with numerous studies reporting that false information can spread more quickly and widely than true information on these platforms (Habes et al., 2023). Misinformation, also known as disinformation, refers to false or misleading information that is spread deliberately or unintentionally on social media or other online platforms (Wu et al., 2019). Some social media platforms may facilitate the spread of misinformation due to the algorithms they use, which prioritize the spread of content that is likely to generate engagement, regardless of its accuracy, helping the spread of misinformation (Lauer, 2021). Additionally, the ease with which individuals can create and share information on social media makes it easier for misinformation to spread rapidly and reach large audiences (Vafeiadis et al., 2020). According to a recent study, approximately two-thirds of adult social media users get some or all of their news on these online platforms (Dvir-Gvirsman et al., 2023). Furthermore, in another study, the criteria for the credibility of content on social media among young university students was the number of likes and shares (Waqas et al., 2021). These statistics highlight the importance of understanding the prevalence of misinformation on social media and the need for effective solutions to reduce its spread.

The impact of misinformation on society is a widely discussed issue due to its increasing prevalence on social media platforms (Rocha et al., 2021). Researchers explained that misinformation on social media impacts social media users by increasing their anxiety (Ruiz-Frutos et al., 2020), fatigue (Islam et al., 2020), panic (Duplaga, 2020), and depression (Secosan et al., 2020). Additionally, misinformation undermines trust in news sources, leading individuals to question the validity of the news they receive, making it difficult for them to distinguish truth from fiction (Shu et al., 2017). Such issues can lead to individuals making decisions based on false information, potentially affecting their health, finances, and personal relationships (Pulido et al., 2020). Misinformation can also have significant political and social impacts, particularly when it is used to spread propaganda or to influence the outcome of elections (Legg & Kerwin, 2018).

Fact-checking tools are one solution that has been introduced to combat the issue of misinformation (Bu et al., 2023). Many fact-checking platforms are available; however, awareness of using fact-checking platforms among people varies, and few of them use these tools (Schuetz et al., 2021). In addition, different social media platforms and news outlets have been incorporating fact-checking features into their platforms (L. Graves et al., 2016; Harrison, 2019). Furthermore, the effectiveness of these fact-checking platforms in changing user behavior toward misinformation and preventing users from falling for misinformation or correcting their misbelief is uncertain and unclear (Chung & Kim, 2021; Schuetz et al., 2021). Fact-checking tools may discourage people from sharing misinformation on social media. Therefore, the objective of this study is to understand the effectiveness of in-platform fact-checking tools in changing social media users' behavior and help reduce the spread of misinformation.

This initial exploratory study aims to provide early evidence on the impact of in-platform fact-checking in changing social media users' behavior and reducing misinformation exposure and sharing on social media. The study has the potential to yield valuable insights into how individuals navigate the information landscape on social media. The findings will inform interventions and educational initiatives aimed at promoting positive misinformation behavior and encouraging wider adoption of fact-checking tools. Moreover, it suggests that social media platforms can change their design and fight misinformation by using visual cues like labels and badges to flag unverified claims, provide context-rich snippets from reliable sources alongside disputed content, and enable users to easily access fact-checks. This, in turn, could contribute to a healthier and more informed online environment for all users.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of misinformation on social media has become increasingly prevalent in recent years, with many people relying on these platforms for their news consumption (Swart, 2023). This has led to concerns about the potential spread of misinformation and its impact on individuals and society (Oh et al., 2023). This increased usage of social media makes individuals more exposed to the spread of misinformation, as they may not be able to discern the authenticity of the information they are consuming (Lee et al., 2020). Research has shown that young people are more likely to believe false information presented on social media (Tandoc Jr, Lim, & Ling, 2018; Warner-Søderholm et al., 2018), particularly if it aligns with their existing beliefs or values. Additionally, people may be more susceptible to the influence of peer pressure and social media algorithms, which can further amplify the spread of misinformation (Bastani & Bahrami, 2020). It is crucial that people are equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to evaluate the accuracy and credibility of information they encounter on social media, particularly when it comes to misinformation (Pérez-Escoda, Pedrero-Esteban, Rubio-Romero, & Jiménez-Narros, 2021).

To combat this issue social media platforms increasingly integrate fact-checking tools, such as information labels, links to debunking articles, and third-party fact-checker ratings. These tools provide users with immediate access to factual information and can help identify and avoid misinformation

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