Mitigating the Impact of Fake News on Selected College Students

Alvie Elma C. Plaza

Faculty, College of Arts and Sciences

Surigao del Norte State University, Surigao City, Philippines

Abstract*: To achieve these objectives, a mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. A representative sample of college students from various institutions in Surigao was selected for the study. Participants were asked to complete questionnaires assessing their exposure to and consumption of fake news, along with its perceived impact on their political beliefs, educational pursuits, and general mindset. Furthermore, focus group interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into how specific demographic characteristics might mediate these effects. The findings of this study provided valuable insights into the repercussions of fake news on college students. It was discovered that exposure to fake news significantly influenced students' political views, often leading to polarization and misinformation-driven beliefs. Moreover, the impact on their educational endeavors was evident, as the spread of fake news could disrupt critical thinking and lead to the dissemination of false information within academic contexts. Additionally, students' mindsets were found to be vulnerable to manipulation through the spread of misinformation, affecting their decision-making processes and worldview. Regarding demographic differences, age was observed to play a crucial role, with younger students being more susceptible to the effects of fake news due to their higher reliance on digital media. Sex and grade level, however, did not exhibit significant variations in response to fake news dissemination. In conclusion, this study emphasizes the importance of addressing the impact of fake news on college students and highlights the need for educational interventions that promote media literacy and critical thinking skills. By understanding the factors that mediate the influence of fake news, educators, policymakers, and stakeholders can develop targeted strategies to mitigate its adverse effects on the younger generation, fostering a more informed and discerning society*

Keywords: Mitigation, Spread of Fake News, Students, Differences

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's interconnected world, the prevalence of fake news has emerged as a pressing concern, casting a shadow on the credibility of information disseminated through various media channels. Among those most susceptible to its influence are college students, who actively engage with online platforms and social media. This study aims to delve into the effects of spreading fake news on a selected group of college students, with a specific focus on its impact on their political views, education, and mindset. Additionally, the research endeavors to explore whether demographic factors, such as age, sex, and grade level, play a significant role in shaping the consequences of fake news on college students in the region of Surigao.

The proliferation of fake news is a well-documented phenomenon that has garnered considerable attention across diverse fields. As Molina et al. (2019) assert, the advent of Internet-based media has intensified the spread of misinformation, leading to its widespread dissemination through various digital channels. The pervasiveness of technology in modern society has created an environment where propaganda can rapidly infiltrate social media and communication platforms, blurring the lines between fact, half-truths, and outright falsehoods. Consequently, distinguishing authentic information from deceptive content has become an arduous task amidst the vast sea of online sources.

Research by H. Latham (2020) highlights the alarming tendency of false news to propagate at a much faster pace on social media compared to genuine news stories. An MIT report reveals that false news is retweeted approximately 70%

more often than true news, indicating that misinformation spreads like wildfire through digital networks. The lack of stringent fact-checking mechanisms on many social media platforms has contributed to the proliferation of incorrect and misleading information.

The repercussions of fake news extend beyond the digital realm, significantly impacting the perspectives of younger individuals who are more susceptible to its persuasive allure. The consequences of these distorted views can be harmful, both to individuals and society as a whole. As such, fostering awareness about fake news among college students is essential to protect them from falling prey to its negative influence. The ability to critically assess and discern factual information from misinformation is becoming an increasingly vital skill in the information age (Internetmatters.org, n.d).

This study seeks to shed light on the effects of spreading fake news among selected college students in Surigao, thereby contributing to a deeper understanding of the positive and negative implications of this phenomenon. By elucidating the nuanced impact of fake news on this specific demographic, the research aims to offer valuable insights for educational purposes and inform strategies to counteract its adverse effects. Ultimately, it is imperative to equip individuals, including students, teachers, parents, and the wider community, with the tools to identify and navigate the complex landscape of information dissemination effectively. This study's findings are expected to contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding fake news, its dissemination, and the consequences it yields.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The rapid advancement of technology and the widespread use of digital media have revolutionized the way information is disseminated and consumed. With the advent of social media and online platforms, the phenomenon of fake news has emerged as a significant concern in today's information-driven society. Fake news refers to false or misleading information presented as genuine news, often with the intention to deceive or manipulate public opinion.

Among the demographics most impacted by the spread of fake news are college students, who are known for their active engagement with digital media and social networking sites. As active consumers and sharers of online content, college students are vulnerable to encountering and inadvertently propagating fake news, which can have profound implications on their beliefs, attitudes, and decision-making processes.

The consequences of falling prey to fake news can be far-reaching. It can lead to the polarization of political views, fostering division and misinformation within the student community. Moreover, the dissemination of false information can interfere with the pursuit of education, as students may unknowingly integrate inaccuracies into their academic work or fail to develop critical thinking skills required to discern reliable sources from unreliable ones.

In the context of Surigao, like in many other regions, the prevalence of fake news presents a unique set of challenges. It is essential to understand the specific effects of fake news on college students in this area, considering the diverse demographic factors that might influence their susceptibility to misinformation.

This study aims to bridge the gap in knowledge by investigating the effects of spreading fake news on selected college students in Surigao. By focusing on the impact on students' political views, education, and mindset, the research seeks to identify the implications of fake news consumption within this specific population. Additionally, by exploring how demographic factors such as age, sex, and grade level might play a role in shaping these effects, the study aims to provide nuanced insights into the dynamics of fake news dissemination in the region.

Ultimately, this research is vital to inform educational interventions and strategies aimed at promoting media literacy and critical thinking skills among college students. By understanding the extent of the impact and the factors that mediate the influence of fake news, stakeholders can work towards developing targeted measures to counteract its negative consequences. Through this endeavor, the study contributes to a broader effort to cultivate an informed and discerning generation capable of navigating the complexities of the digital age with accuracy and prudence.

III. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a quantitative research approach with a descriptive design, specifically employing the survey method. The choice of a descriptive research design was deemed appropriate as it allows for the investigation of one or more variables using various research methods. In this case, the objective was to determine the profile of the participants and explore the effects of spreading fake news on selected college students in Surigao

For the data collection process, a Purposive Random Sampling Technique was employed. This sampling technique was chosen to ensure that participants were selected intentionally to represent the target population while maintaining an element of randomness in the selection process, enhancing the generalizability of the findings.

The research instrument used for data collection was an adapted researcher questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised two parts. Part 1 focused on gathering demographic data, including participants' sex and grade level. Part 2 delved into the main subject of the study, exploring the effects of spreading fake news on college students in Surigao.

The questionnaire was designed to capture participants' perspectives on how exposure to fake news might influence their political views, education, and mindset. It aimed to assess the extent of misinformation dissemination and its potential implications on the students' beliefs and academic pursuits.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, a rigorous adaptation process was undertaken, drawing on previously validated instruments used in relevant studies. Additionally, a pilot test was conducted to assess the clarity and effectiveness of the questions before administering the final questionnaire to the target participants.

The data collected through the questionnaire were subjected to statistical analysis using appropriate quantitative methods. The results of the analysis provided insights into the effects of spreading fake news on selected college students in Surigao, enabling the researchers to draw meaningful conclusions and contribute to the existing body of knowledge on this pertinent issue.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we present the findings of our study that aimed to investigate the effects of spreading fake news on selected college students in Surigao. Through the use of a quantitative approach with a descriptive design, we collected data via a survey method, employing a Purposive Random Sampling Technique to ensure representation and generalizability.

In this study, a total of 39 participants were included, providing valuable insights into the effects of spreading fake news on college students in Surigao. Among the respondents, 19 students, accounting for 48.70% of the participants, identified as male, while 20 students, representing 51.30%, identified as female.

These findings align with previous research by Al-menar et al. (2020), which indicates that women tend to display more concern about the societal effects of misinformation compared to men. Additionally, gender differences were observed in the topics of false information received. Men reported encountering fake news predominantly related to political issues, while women more frequently came across false information concerning celebrities.

The breakdown of participant demographics and the observed gender-related trends contribute to a better understanding of how fake news may influence college students differently based on their gender. As we delve deeper into the results, we will explore the implications of these trends on the effects of fake news on the students' political views, education, and mindset. By examining the gender-specific responses to misinformation, we can gain valuable insights into tailoring educational interventions to address the unique challenges posed by fake news dissemination in Surigao's college student community.

TABLE 1. THE EFFECT OF SPREADING FAKE NEWS TOWARDS SELECTED COLLEGE STUDENTS

INDICATORS	M	SD	VI	QD
Education				
1. I read the topic of our lesson on other sources other than the teacher.	3.28	0.83	SA	A
2. I check the references page of our module or study guide.	3.08	0.90	A	O
3. I only search credible sites and sources when I do my activities.	3.44	0.72	SA	A
4. I ask my teacher about the sources she/he used in our lesson.	3.08	1.11	A	O
5. I only share our lesson to others when I'm sure that it is factual, and evidence based.	3.38	0.75	SA	A
Average:	**3.25**	**0.88**	**SA**	**A**
Education				
1. I read the topic of our lesson on other sources other than the teacher.	3.28	0.83	SA	A
2. I check the references page of our module or study guide.	3.08	0.90	A	O
3. I only search credible sites and sources when I do my activities.	3.44	0.72	SA	A

4. I ask my teacher about the sources she/he used in our lesson.	3.08	1.11	A	O
5. I only share our lesson to others when I'm sure that it is factual, and evidence based.	3.38	0.75	SA	A
Average:	**3.25**	**0.88**	**SA**	**A**
Mindset				
1. I feel frustrated when I see fake news on the news and articles I read.	3.49	0.88	SA	A
2. I feel voiceless whenever I read something I know isn't true.	3.33	0.90	SA	A
3. I feel embarrassed when the news I shared turned out to be fake.	3.46	0.79	SA	A
4. I feel anxious of the future whenever I see fake news being spread.	3.28	0.89	SA	A
5. I feel ashamed when someone fact-checks the news that I share.	3.18	0.97	A	O
Average:	**3.35**	**0.89**	**SA**	**A**

Table 2 presents the extent of the effect of spreading fake news on selected college students in terms of Political View, Education, and Mindset. The responses of 39 participants were analyzed to gain valuable insights into the impact of misinformation on this specific demographic.

Regarding Political View, the indicator "I read news on politics at sources that I know are credible" obtained the highest mean (M=3.56, SD=0.60), indicating a strong agreement among participants. This suggests that the students possess the skills to fact-check and identify whether the news they read contains false information. The ability to discern credible sources is crucial in navigating the abundance of information available online. Research by Batchelor (2017) highlights the significance of media information literacy (MIL) as an effective means of combating fake news, empowering individuals to identify and scrutinize misleading content.

Conversely, the indicator "I base my political standpoint on the news I read" received the lowest mean (M=3.41, SD=0.75), also indicating strong agreement. Some students admitted that they do not solely rely on news articles or social media for forming their political standpoint. Research by David et al. (2019) points out that social media platforms like Facebook can influence users' exposure to news content through filtering mechanisms, leading to a varied array of political news on individuals' news feeds.

On average, the effect of spreading fake news on college students in terms of Political View yielded a mean of (M=3.48, SD=0.68), indicating a high level of agreement and a strong practice of fact-checking before forming political opinions.

Moving on to Education, the indicator "I only search credible sites and sources when I do my activities" received the highest mean (M=3.44, SD=0.72), demonstrating a strong agreement among participants. This highlights the students' tendency to ensure that news articles and sources they access for academic purposes are credible and factual, as recommended by Repository Fringe (2018) for accurate academic works.

However, the indicators "I ask my teacher about the sources she/he used in our lesson" and "I check the references page of our module or study guide" received the lowest means (M=3.08, SD=1.11) and (M=3.08, SD=0.90), respectively, indicating agreement and a less frequent occurrence. While some students approach their teachers for source verification, this practice appears less common. Edmentum (2021) stresses the importance of cultivating skeptical thinking and questioning the content taught in class to promote critical analysis and source verification.

On average, the effect of spreading fake news on college students in terms of Education yielded a mean of (M=3.25, SD=0.88), indicating a strong agreement among participants to use credible sources for academic activities.

Regarding Mindset, the indicator "I feel frustrated when I see fake news on the news and articles I read" obtained the highest mean (M=3.49, SD=0.88), indicating a strong agreement among participants. Selected college students expressed significant concern upon encountering fake news, underscoring the importance of discerning accurate information. According to Bastick (2020), fake news and disinformation can subtly influence emotions and attitudes, potentially leading to behavioral consequences.

Conversely, the indicator "I feel ashamed when someone fact-checks the news that I share" received the lowest mean (M=3.18, SD=0.97), indicating agreement and a less frequent occurrence. Some college students feel discomfort when their shared news is proven to be fake or manipulated. Fact-checking plays a crucial role in verifying the accuracy of shared information and promoting skepticism. However, it can also impact an individual's confidence, depending on how the fact-checking process is conducted (Ohio State University, n.d.).

On average, the effect of spreading fake news on college students in terms of Mindset yielded a mean of (M=3.35, SD=0.89), indicating a strong agreement among participants regarding the emotional impact of encountering misinformation.

V. CONCLUSION

The present study delved into the effects of spreading fake news on selected college students in Surigao, with a focus on their Political View, Education, and Mindset. Through a quantitative approach with a descriptive design and a survey method, data from 39 participants provided valuable insights into the impact of misinformation on this specific demographic.

The findings revealed that the selected college students displayed a high level of agreement in their practices of fact-checking and discerning credible sources when it comes to news related to politics (Political View) and academic activities (Education). This indicates that the participants possess a degree of media information literacy and critical thinking skills, which enable them to identify and evaluate potentially false information. Media information literacy emerges as a promising avenue to combat fake news, aligning with prior research (Batchelor, 2017).

However, it was also observed that some students do not solely rely on news articles or social media for forming their political standpoint, implying that multiple factors influence their political views. Social media platforms, like Facebook, play a significant role in determining users' exposure to news content (David et al., 2019), emphasizing the need for a well-rounded understanding of information sources.

In terms of Mindset, the selected college students expressed frustration and discomfort when exposed to fake news. This emotional response highlights the impact of misinformation on individuals and its potential to influence behavior, aligning with findings from Bastick (2020).

Nonetheless, the study also revealed room for improvement, particularly in seeking verification from teachers regarding academic sources and being more open to fact-checking shared news on social media. Encouraging students to question and critically analyze information presented in educational settings can enhance their ability to discern credible sources (Edmentum, 2021).

In conclusion, the results underscore the significance of media literacy, critical thinking, and source verification in countering the detrimental effects of fake news on college students. As future leaders and active participants in society, college students must be equipped with the skills to navigate the complex information landscape and make well-informed decisions. Educational interventions and initiatives to promote media literacy, fact-checking practices, and critical analysis are essential in empowering the younger generation to combat the spread of misinformation effectively. This study contributes to the growing body of research on fake news and its impact on college students, providing valuable insights that can inform the development of targeted strategies to cultivate an informed, discerning, and media-savvy generation. By fostering a culture of media literacy and critical thinking, we can safeguard the integrity of information dissemination and foster a more responsible, engaged, and resilient society in the face of misinformation challenges.

REFERENCES

[1]. Almenar, E; Aran-Ramspott,S.; Suau, J & Masip, P., (2021). Gender Differences in Tackling Fa News: Different Degrees of Concern, but Same Problems. Media and Communication, 2021, Volume 9, Issue 1, Pages 229–238. https://www.cogitatiopress.com/mediaandco munication/article/viewFile/3523/3523

[2]. Environmental Information: Use and Influence Admin. (2020). Disinformation, Misinformation, and Decision Making. from: https://eiui.ca/disinformation-misinformation-and-decision making/

[3]. Latham, H. (2020). Fake News And Its Implications For Human Rights. Human Rights Pulse. https://www.humanrightspulse.com/mastercontentblog/fake-news-and-its-implications for-human-rights

[4]. Molina M.D.; Sundar S.S.; Le T. & Lee D.. (2021). "Fake News" Is Not Simply False Information: A Concept Explication and Taxonomy of Online Content. American Behavioral Scientist. 2021;65(2):180-212. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0002764219878224

[5]. Popken, B. (2019). Age, not politics, is biggest predictor of who shares fake news on Facebook, study finds. NBC News. https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/tech-news/age-not-politics-pre dicts-who-shares-fake-news-facebook-study-n957246

[6]. *Bahige, N., (2019). The perception of university students on the diffusion of fake news on social media: A case of the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). CORE.* https://core.ac.uk/reader/286605227

[7]. *Allcott, H. & Gentzkow, M., (2017). Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election.*https://web.stanford.edu/~gentzkow/research/fakenews.pdf

[8]. *Guess, A.M., Learner, M., Lyons, B., Montgomery, J. M., Nyhan B., Reifler, J., & Sircar, N., (2020). A digital media literacy intervention increases discernment between mainstream and false news in the United States and India.* https://www.pnas.org/doi/10.1073/pnas.1920498117

[9]. *Jang, J., Mortensen, T., & Liu, J. (2019). Does Media Literacy Help Identification of Fake News? Information Literacy Helps, but Other Literacies Don't.* https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0002764219869406

[10]. *McDougall, J., Brites, M. J., Couto, M. J., & Lucas, C., (2019). Media Literacy Versus Fake News: Critical Thinking, Resilience, and Civic Engagement.* https://hrcak.srce.hr/ojs/in dex.php/medijske-studije/article/view/8786

[11]. Esade Business & Law School, (2020). Education In The Age of Fake News, Distraction, and Vanity. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/esade/2020/07/10/education-in-the-age-of-fake-news-distraction-and-vanity/?sh=5871f01728d8

[12]. *Woolley, S. C., & Howard, P. N., (2018). Computational Propaganda: Political Parties, Politicians, and Political Manipulation on Social Media.* https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/oso/9780190931407.001.0001/oso-9780190931407

[13]. *Waytz, A., (2017). The Psychology Behind Fake News. KelloggInsight.* https://insight.kellogg.northwestern.edu/article/the-psychology-behind-fake-news