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The Role of Online News Consumers in Lessening the Extent of Misinformation on Social Media Platforms

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ABSTRACT

This study looks into how people who read news online think about it and helps to reduce the amount of false information spread on social media. The goal of this study was to identify the tactics used by the media when confronted by opposing opinions from their audience in the social media sphere. Social media platforms are essential when people want to debate and get more information on news stories they believe to be false. This study focuses on the importance of a YouTube channel run by a global media outlet that broadcasts a conflicting story. The study used a thematic content qualitative analysis on a sampled comments and used ExportComments.com, a data extraction tool, to extract qualitative data from the YouTube channels. The study revealed that positive comments were followed by positive comments and vice versa. The commenters on these media also frequently search other social media for stories with a similar theme and compare the veracity and coherence of those stories' reported themes. Additionally, these commenters were prepared to defend stories that they believed to be inaccurate and assert that the media should uphold the principle of professionalism. Social media acts as a public sphere. It is not only a political sphere but also a place that is free from private ownership and censorship. The study established that the concept of the public sphere is likely to be abused when the media report conflicting stories that may not auger well with their audience. Although this theory guides the participation of users on the social media platforms, since most are free from the censorship of different players, the media tend to mute the comment sections of their pages for fear of further misinformation and criticism. Social media platforms offer people a reason to speak freely and demonstrate their sentiments openly. The study's results demonstrate that audiences play a significant role in correcting stories on social media, and that constructive journalism is required, with the media needing to play a better role.

Keywords

Constructive journalism, misinformation, media literacy, online news consumer, YouTube

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INTRODUCTION

This article explores the connection between the audience and social media in order to understand their experiences and attitudes towards stories that they believe to be misleading. In order to contribute to re-connecting, the article investigates relationships between news audiences in the

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internet age of a particular media by analyzing the comments on its social media pages to establish the trends and connections between the media messages and their understanding. In so doing, the article contributes in the development and sharing of knowledge which is lacking in this field. As a result, the article demonstrates how a networked society relies on their internet connections to openly speak with one voice about what they perceive to be misinformation in social media.

As institutions continue to struggle with this issue, the spread of false information in the internet age is of global concern. The world has been revitalized by the internet and its many platforms, which have made agenda-setting and information-transmission dynamic. The facts and half truths have been continuously mixed to produce false factitious information blends that spin a particular ideology (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019; Vosoughi et al., 2018; Zubiaga et al., 2016).

Misinformation has a long history of representing false beliefs, which puts people who consume it in danger (Bennett & Livingston, 2018; Clayton et al., 2019). Misinformation is thought to occur when information is spread without the knowledge that it is false, leading people to believe false rumors, insults, and practical jokes (Greifeneder et al., 2020). People who realize that the information they have been given is false tend to distrust and become wary of all sources of information. Before the invention of social media, false information used to circulate in the traditional media as hoaxes, parody news, and rumors. However, with the introduction of new media, false information spreads quickly due to insufficient gatekeeping by the media (Greifeneder et al., 2020; Zubiaga et al., 2016).

The spread of false information in the internet age is of global concern as institutions struggle with this issue. The internet and its various platforms, which have made agenda-setting and information-transmission dynamic, have revitalized the world. False factitious information blends have been created by continuously blending the facts and half truths to promote a specific ideology (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019; Vosoughi et al., 2018; Zubiaga et al., 2016).

To stay up to date on breaking news and its updates, news consumers rely on social media sites like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. The media have adapted the use of social media for information as the story develops, which is frequently released piecemeal on social media (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). Such a tactic fuels and encourages rumors, most of which circulate after the announcement without being verified (Nyhan & Reifler, 2015). Today, social media has a crucial role to play in times of crisis. These pandemics, catastrophes, and tragedies are concurrently shared, reshared, liked, posted, and tweeted online. According to Waisbord (2018), social media always portrays coverage of these events in a mixed manner. Authorities have successfully managed disasters using it, and malicious actors have deceived news consumers using it.

According to Lazer et al. (2018), using social media to consume news has taken on negative connotations. Even though it is inexpensive, readily available, and spreads information quickly, it encourages people to look for and consume news from them (Guo et al., 2019). Despite these factors, its poor quality causes it to serve as a conduit for the dissemination of false information to its customers (Guo et al., 2019; Lazer et al. 2018). When the media spreads false information on social media, the ecosystem's authenticity balance is upset. Such information could spread widely and have extremely negative effects on people and society (Ong'ong'a, 2021; Zubiaga et al., 2016).

Accordingly, Pennycook and Rand (2019) contend that misinformation detection on social media has received a lot of attention and should be explored as a research area. They demonstrate that familiarity plays a significant role in news belief and that reading a news headline just once can increase the perception of its accuracy in the future. This claim is supported by Vosoughi et al.'s (2018) argument that false stories spread faster and farther than actual news stories. According to Journalist's Resource (2019), researchers in this field are still attempting to understand how false information spreads on social media and why people continue to seek it out and believe it because it has become a part of their lives (Greifeneder et al., 2020).

Numerous studies have looked at misinformation concepts from a variety of angles, such as those related to political communication, health communication, and online platform use (Bode & Vraga, 2017; Lazer et al., 2018; Margolin et al., 2017). Regarding these studies, among others, Lazer et al. (2018) claim that despite the fact that subjects like nutrition, immunization, and food are extensively covered, misinformation has recently been documented and brought to light in a political context. The credibility of the false information harms the established news sources in a way that

is parasitic (Guo et al., 2019). Any journalistic practice requires objectivity and balance, which lessens the impression of propaganda. In the 20th century, dominant regional and national oligopolies distributed and produced these norms. News reports are reliable sources of information. Stories that aren't true turn into false information (Ackland & Gwynn, 2020).

The rate of access to news players has decreased due to the growth of the internet. This has undermined conventional news sources by rejecting the usual standards of public credibility and trust. Due to the lack of information about the nature of the misinformation contained in these sources, a large audience has been drawn to the type of content that they offer. On social media sites like Twitter, where users retweet about subjects like politics, researchers have argued that false information spreads more quickly and widely than accurate information (Bennett & Livingston, 2018; Nickerson, 1998; Zubiaga et al., 2016).

People frequently doubt the veracity of information when it contradicts their preconceptions. If other users of the same news source believe it to be trustworthy, people are more likely to believe it as well (Thornton, 2000; Vosoughi et al., 2018). This means that references will be taken seriously when there is not enough information available to verify the source's accuracy. However, because there are so many platforms available, online users come from many different places at once to access the information. Therefore, if the information supports a person's beliefs and the standards and values of their society or community, it may be accepted without question (Zubiaga et al., 2016).

Such information more convincingly supports pre-existing suspicions than bias that has been proven, leading one to accept biased information. Consumers of news prefer to get information that supports their current beliefs (Pate et al., 2019). Users believe that these social biases or false information are true. Without fact-checking a news story, misinformation is accepted as historical prejudice and philosophical viewpoints (Young et al., 2017). Even when the facts have been checked, the spreading of false information runs the risk of increasing the likelihood that someone will believe it to be true. Misperception is difficult to change once it has been formed (Wardle, 2019; Waisbord, 2018).

According to Guo et al. (2019), correcting misinformation by providing accurate and factual information does not help to lessen misperception. However, in most cases, it could exacerbate the misunderstanding, particularly among ideologically similar groups (Roozenbeek & van der Linden, 2020). According to Vosoughi et al. (2018), even when false information is accompanied by a legitimate retraction, people are more likely to believe it when it is repeated. Due to the news media's failure to deliver accurate and reliable information, there have been improvements in journalistic standards and procedures over the past century (Lazer et al., 2018).

Social media misinformation that is later revealed to be false has had a variety of effects on the people who consume it as well as societies at large (Vraga et al., 2020). Despite being confirmed, breaking news that contains unconfirmed facts often undermines the news source's credibility and spreads to a wider audience, influencing perceptions and events (Bennett & Livingston, 2018). According to Harcup & O'Neill (2016), in order to produce news, journalists must adhere to set deadlines. The value of their news, therefore, influences the degree to which the coverage of the stories can be shared, even though newsrooms are the only entities responsible for deciding what stories will be published (Domingo et al., 2008). As a result, the report is divided into categories based on its relevance to consumers. Conflicts, events deemed significant if multiple people are involved, and the one topic already covered in the report are examples of this type of news.

Domingo et al. (2008) add that the journalist is currently given immediate feedback on whether their choices for which news to present and how to present it are in line with the vast majority of online consumers. Consumers are increasingly seeking information, replacing the journalist-mediated form of consumption. The new paradigm of data produced by social media has been made available to the users (Clayton et al., 2019; Vraga et al., 2020). User-generated content has grown in significance in the context of the growth of digital and online news sources. According to Vargo et al. (2017), the topicality and independence of misinformation coverage vary. Although responding to misinformation agendas should be the focus of developing new media, to a lesser extent, the audience for online participation has continued to be seen as participants in current events debates.

As a result, the emphasis is on the interpretation stage, during which they are permitted to comment on the news story (Domingo et al., 2008).

The pervasive use of social media has continued to offer a new potent tool for information sharing and data collection. With the development of the internet, the study of false information in naturalistic settings has expanded into new territory (Zubiaga et al., 2016). People use social media posts to express their opinions, feelings, and peculiar reactions to false information (Guo et al., 2019). Examining false information using responses from the general public as displayed in posts is made easier by the ability to extract features based on posts (Vargo et al., 2017). The unique features, such as stance or viewpoint, indicate the consumer's opinion towards a piece of specific information on social media.

Self-correction with the false information associated with a larger conventional of newsworthy stories or incidents has been perceived as slow to take effect, even though the media face the new challenge of retracting news that they have no facts to support (Domingo et al., 2008; Vargo et al., 2017; Zubiaga et al., 2016). Due to the information being discredited as a result, the spread of false information has decreased as a result of the subsequent publication of such stories' corrections (Vraga et al., 2020). Traditionally, it has proven challenging to collect information about a person's perception of false information in real time (Vraga et al., 2020). Misinformation is not a problem in and of itself, but the media ecology has changed from traditional print media to modern social media and online news.

Youtube has been accused of being a hub for fake news, disinformation, and misinformation. For instance, a report by more than 80 organizations, including Full Fact in the UK and the Fact Checker at the Washington Post, wrote to Youtube to demand that changes be made to stop misinformation and disinformation from being used as a weapon against its users and society at large. These operational changes include a commitment to funding independent research into disinformation campaigns on the platform, providing links to counterarguments inside videos disseminating misinformation, stopping its algorithms from promoting repeat offenders, and taking additional measures to combat falsehoods in non-English language videos (Milmo & editor, 2022).

In addition, Posner (2022) contends that since its launch in 2005 and acquisition by Google a year later, YouTube has developed into one of the most well-known and influential social media platforms worldwide. Because of this development, a small proportion of YouTube users—though a sizable number in absolute terms—began frequenting the site to watch and distribute alarming videos, including ones that threatened democracy. For instance, Posner (2022) suggests that prior to the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, these militant groups conducted weeks-long nationwide recruitment drives, heavily relying on social media to incite their emotions and organize the attack on Congress. YouTube videos that were shared widely were crucial to this effort.

Additionally, consumers' perceptions (Ong'ong'a, 2022) of misinformation and attitudes toward it are evolving on social media platforms. For instance, a study by Mishra and Samu (2021) revealed that even fake content is preferred by users when it is relevant and shared. Sharing false information conveys the sender's friendliness but also gives the impression that they are narcissistic. People are more likely to endorse a brand if the false information is regarded as reliable and favorable (as opposed to negative) (Mishra & Samu, 2021). Additionally, Obadã and Dabija (2022) assert that the spread of false information about brands that support the environment on social media is influenced by social media flow.

The paper makes the case that comprehending the manner in which this kind of bogus content spreads on social media platforms has significant theoretical and managerial implications in light of the serious consequences of fake news. Understanding the psychological processes that drive people to spread false information about eco-friendly brands on social networking sites (SNS) could aid in a better comprehension of the causes and consequences of this phenomenon. The dissemination process, spreading channel features, outcomes, fabricated legitimacy, and attitudes are the five themes that explain the fake news phenomenon on social media (Domenico et al., 2020). According to this study, platforms like social media, particularly Youtube, are crucial for examining how users can limit the spread of false information on these platforms. Therefore, it is from this backdrop that called for the need to find out how news consumers perceive and aid in reducing the spread of misinformation in the online social media, especially YouTube.

This article explores the news going around the social media on the issue reported by the global media stations on the alleged death of "39 Chinese" nationals resulting from suffocation in a truck as they illegally migrated to the United Kingdom. This reporting brought about the debate on the authenticity of the news reported on the social media by the dominant media and the members of the public, especially the social media users. In the aftermath of this event, it turned out that the alleged individuals who perished in the airtight refrigerated truck were not Chinese nationals but Vietnamese nationals. This created a motive for the exploration of this study on how the audience perceives and aid in lessening the extent of misinformation in the international media sphere by analyzing YouTube users' sentiments.

METHOD

To further investigate this discourse, the study borrowed Habermas' public sphere theory. This theory is based in studying the emergence of public informal debates that are coined in different cultural and political backgrounds (Bosch et al., 2020). The social media users can be termed as the individual who are private found in the common podia discussing matters that affect them. The discussions going on in the social media can be presupposed to deliberate on the issues affecting the wider public. The sphere comprises of formal or informal institution and people whether physical or virtual (Bosch et al., 2020). Therefore, this characteristic, fits generally all social media platforms that have a tendency of providing platform for commenting, liking, sharing, posting and reposting as well twitting and retweeting (Ong'ong'a, 2020).

According to Habermas, the public sphere is not only a political sphere but also a place that is free from private ownership and censorship (Habermas, 2015, p. 36). Consequently, this theory guides the participation of users on the social media platforms since most are free from censorship by different players (Fuchs, 2014, p. 181). Social media platforms offer people a reason to speak freely and demonstrate their sentiments openly. Supporting this theory, (Bosch et al., 2020; Fuchs, 2014) acknowledges that social media platforms comprise an extension of the original public sphere. Besides, this offers a space for social media users to form uncontrolled public opinion towards governments, hence becoming a platform for users to engage with different issues that they may perceive as inconsistent. Fuchs (2014, p. 182) encapsulates that marginalized and minority groups express their diverse individual or political views through social media platforms. In this regard, the study incorporates Habermas' theory and views social media as a sphere for public opinion, which allows users to express their sentiments concerning a multiplicity of concerns.

The study used content analysis to dissect the various aspects of comments made by the media on a media outlet's YouTube channel about "the death of the 39 Chinese in a truck" in Essex. In studies of media evaluation and media analysis, content analysis has been applied to media data on circulation, viewers, readers, listeners, and viewers (Neuendorf, 2002). This enables a more controlled and, consequently, limited form of extracting useful information from media (Lasswell, 1927). To study the mass media, the read YouTube comments and open, unstructured discussions on news topics were systematically analyzed.

The study chose the media with the headline "the death of 39 in a truck" after conducting a purposive sampling of the YouTube media channel with the sampling criterion position of reporting the story as "the death of 39 Chinese in a truck" from September 25 to November 2, 2019. The media were ignored if they didn't cover it or use it as the breaking news headline on their YouTube channel. In this study, the open comment section of the YouTube media channel was purposefully sampled. The Guardian was chosen as a media outlet that met the aforementioned sampling requirements.

Using export.com, an online free software that has the capability of extracting comments from social media sites, the URL of the YouTube channel in question was copied and pasted on the portal and then comments were extracted. The free version of export.com only allowed up to a total of 500 comments for extraction. The data was exported in standard format that included the date, name of the person posting, likes, shares, and comments by the user. The 500 most recent comments from the YouTube channel were exported. The Guardian had 869 likes on its top feedback with a total of 2308 comments. The top comments were selected as per the scope of the study. The comments that had the highest number of likes and related to the topic of the discussion

were purposively sampled. The study drew 150 sample comments from the entire dataset of 500 comments for the thematic qualitative content analysis based on the study criterion explained above.

Thematic analysis was used to categorize the comments into various themes that answered the study question (Joffe & Yardley, 2004). Thematic analysis is a qualitative analytical method useful for research that seeks to comprehend a complex and multi-site occurrence that is engraved into different groups that view and experience situations differently (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This allows for a group of commenters to make sense of a large-scale phenomenon while examining their world at large (Iphofen & Tolich, 2018). Analyzing the data thematically provides for the systematic element of the content analysis by permitting the combined analysis of the frequency of codes with their interpretation in context (Joffe & Yardley, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002).

Following data generation, the scholar immersed himself in the data and became acquainted with the entire datasets. Then, they generate the initial codes from the YouTube comments while focusing on the central research question theme. The coding frame was created from the initial codes that came out of the comments. This was to pave the way for the systematical comparison of the set of texts for analysis purposes that answers the research question. Hence, it involved the noting of patterns in the data and dividing them up to give a concrete greater clarity in content but in details. The patterns were labeled with codes and distinctions were drawn between different aspects of the content by organizing the data into a set of categories. The codes assigned to the themes are MR, WMD, PS, and CS to postulate media responsibility, Western media domination, political stance, and correction strategies, respectively.

The comments, which were far away from answering the theme question, were disregarded. The subthemes that originated were merged into main themes as a single entity for analysis. Interpretation of the data was accrued by creating meaning in the comments and systematically sorting them to narrate the story. Therefore, the themes that emerged from the comments aligned with the research question in the study were as follows;

Figure 1. Dominant themes that are closely related to subthemes.

The main Theme emerged	Subthemes
Media Responsibility	Media should gather the evidence before reporting. Unprofessionalism of the media. Media apology for the misinformation. Media accurate and factual in reporting.
Western Media Domination	The spread of false/fake news. The proliferation of biased information and propaganda. Critics and demonize other nations.
Political Stance	Use of tragedy for political weapon and mileage. Violation of democracy and free speech.
Misinformation Correction Strategy	Substituting the headline of the story. Turning off the commenting section.

Source: Ong'ong'a, ,2020

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following are the findings of the study discussed by quoting the original comments of the commenters and expounded to create meaning. Some of the commentaries are rephrased so as not to lose their meaning and the context of the discourse to answer the study question: how do individual news consumers perceive and aid in lessening the extent of misinformation on social media platforms? It is also important to note that this discussion are entangled with the main concept of public sphere.

Media responsibility

In this theme, several subthemes emerged which were deemed suitable for the discussion and exploration in this study; In any kind of reporting, there is a tendency for the media to ensure that their reporting is gathered with evidence to support their claim. From the analysis of the comments, it appears that the above theme was mostly discussed by the commenters on this study, claiming

that the media failed to gather enough evidence before going public. Such allegations included the failure of the media to do a background check and in recognizing the nationalities of the individuals who were reported in the story. This can be seen as a strategy by many media to be in the limelight and break the news since they are always in competition with one another.

Media should gather the evidence before reporting

This shows how ignorant and incompetent the media are! so-called reporter! You can't even get nationalities right. The media is always more knowledgeable about the truth than the police and the government (MR001, 2019).

Also in the same note, one of the comments confirmed this allegation by stating:

It is now confirmed that they are Vietnamese not Chinese. Who confirmed that they are all Chinese? Why should anyone trust your news network? (MR003,2019).

In addition, a comment stated the media was not able to be consistent with their reporting as indicated in the comment below:

One thing I do not like about this media is that they tell you all this and never show you the bodies, which makes the story unappropriated. Also, when many other bad things happen, they do not show you, which is a very bad news broadcast (MR004,2019).

Unprofessionalism of the media

It is interesting to note that even though some of the commenters felt otherwise about the way the media in question carried the reporting, others felt that there was a need for the media to improve their accuracy in reporting issues that affect society. Others argue that verification of the news report was uncalled for. The question of media house policy came up with some of the commenters feeling that there was a lapse in the implementation and therefore the need for the report to be double-checked before going on air.

Although there are still a few occasional cases of Chinese committing human trafficking, the media should improve their accuracy of news as being a respectful international media (MRA001, 2019).

In addition to the above comment, another comment argue that the media should have had pulled down the video.

The media should take down their YouTube videos, not just turn off the comments. They couldn't wait to bash China with their unverified fake news. So disgusting!!! (MRA002, 2019).

Furthermore, some comments suggested that the media should focus in implementing a more robust policies to guide what is published online. As the following quotes suggests:

The media don't know the information policies. Well Done! I can't believe it (MRA003, 2019).

How ridiculous the news report is! Why does the reporter say the victims are Chinese before they doublecheck the source of information? (MRA004,2019).

What a piece of fake news! It provided so much false information to the whole world, we could not trust it anymore. Is there any other news agency that can provide us with the truth to follow this case? (MRA005, 2019).

Media apology for the misinformation

Nevertheless, it was noted from the findings that some of the commenters indicated that the media should be factual in reporting. Without facts, the news is distorted and hence regarded as individuals who have lost their journalistic interest and wisdom. Therefore, some of the commenters observed that they did not trust the media, which portrays this aspect in their reporting. The commenters indicated that this kind of reporting leads to a loss of credibility for the media that do not do a proper background checks before confirming the reports.

All the victims were Vietnamese. Please check the facts of your story. Shame on you again. Apologize to all the Chinese. I can no longer trust this new media. (MRFOO1, 2019).

In addition, a comment that support the above sentiment read as follows:

Another reporter reporting without knowing the facts. All the reporters and journalists had lost their interest and disappeared when it became clear that the victims were Vietnamese, so irony (MRFOO3,2019).

It is important to note that the commenters were also ready to scrutinize the information published by the media and argue that if such information is not verified, it could lead to discredit the media that reports such kind of news.

People, there is no point in arguing before all the bodies are identified. If the media reports false information without verifying it, they are embarrassing themselves and losing their credibility as a news source (MRP005,2019).

Media accurate and factual in reporting

It was felt that the media which carried the story lacked professionalism. All professional bodies have a code of conduct that governs their practice. Violating such behaviors may sometimes lead to consequences that are categorized as being unprofessional. Most of the commentators in the study alleged that there was a lack of proficiency in the way the story was reported. On the other hand, the media and journalists at large are viewed as the sources of news, but they end up distorting the information.

Journalists should be simple news communicators. Still, lots of western journalists deliberately turn to report selectors, distorters, or even commenters themselves to serve the western governments, totally breaking the basic principle of journalism. That's why so many people have been misled and brainwashed. In some sense, those journalists have become hate spreaders and chaos makers. They are evil criminals rather than news reporters (MRP001,2019).

Furthermore, commenters feel that media have a basic right to inform the audience of what is happening around them, but in terms of crisis, proper investigation should be carried before such crises are reported by the media. The following quotes support the above argument:

Every few years you hear of deaths due to smuggling. You confirm it's Chinese nationals before police investigation. I feel sad for the people dying such horrible deaths, but it's really funny when the media tries so hard to blame China for it (MRP002,2019).

How do you know they are Chinese nationals? The police said they are believed to be, and now you know what it was. Not at all professional (MRP003,2019).

Apparently, the Essex Police and the media didn't even try to confirm anything before making such claims about the victims' identity. This is highly unprofessional and irresponsible in this tragic event (MRP004, 2019).

Western Media Domination

Domination, in this perspective, is defined as the ability to control situations. In this context, the theme emerged as the western media having power, hence able to command other media and countries at large. The majority of commenters argued that western media took advantage of mishaps in other countries to spread fake news by falsifying information to suit their own interests. On the contrary, other commenters claimed that this could not go well for investors who would wish to do business with the media. In contrast, other commenters felt that the morals of the media needed to be adjusted.

After a week of investigation, a new source was quickly confirmed to be a liar and a fake! And everybody will not believe what it says. Its biased opinions and ability to make up stories show that this new channel is not trustworthy, professional, serious, even moral about the true news. All workers involved in this should be ashamed!!! They should ask themselves, is it the right attitude towards chasing the truth and reporting the news? They are making themselves a cheap joke! If I were the investor or advertiser, I would seriously question the negative effects on my business or products (WMD001,2019).

Furthermore, comments also blamed western media as purveyor of fake news. This means that such commenters have been exposed to an extent to misleading information and therefore they tend to generalize all the western media which in reality may not be true. Other media are credible and before reporting any news, they can not allow to spread information that can not be verifiable.

The only thing confirmed is that the western media is nothing but a bunch of heartless, hypocritical, racist degenerates manufacturing fake news so they can get off their rocks (WMD002,2019).

How did the media confirm they were Chinese even before the police? What a shame! (WMD003,2019).

Another theme that emerged was that the western media acts as a mouthpiece for spreading biased information and propaganda. Most of the commenters confirmed that the media covered information that was hyped. This kind of information was termed terrible, as well as crappie and nonfactual. Some felt that there was a need for the media to make a public apology for the misinformation, while others had a stand on the media being arrogant and ignorant.

The media should be slapped in their faces for reporting such crappie news. What gives them confirmation that the bodies are Chinese nationals? What makes them publish such a piece of biased, non-factual news? (WMD005,2019).

So you know they're not Chinese now!!!How can you open all your big mouths to say they are Chinese nationals? They are Vietnamese! I think you should make an apology to China and all Chinese people. Particularly since you are reporting this without solid evidence (WMD007,2019).

Let's not give up hope, and now that the China bashers are tracing the lineage of the 39 Vietnamese nationals, there has got to be at least one of them to have an ancestor that migrated from China to Vietnam in the Qin Dynasty. Once they find that evidence, they can continue to bash China. My heart goes out to the victims and their families, but this propaganda is just pathetic, and they are really just slapping themselves in the face (WMD009,2019).

Besides this, a handful of the commenters said that the western media criticize and demonize other nations. Therefore, it is alleged that the media fosters biasness against other countries as well as diminishes its brand by pulling down some of the articles published after it feels humiliated. While other commenters argued that the media was capable of making news without fact-checking, others opined that it spread rumors. The issue of the standard of the media was also discussed by the commenters, who pointed out that the media should own up and make apologies to the audiences. They further stated that the media was in the position of setting a particular ideological agenda, hence it could not be trusted.

The media is always itching to write stories to demonize and attack China quickly. It looks hypocritical with its lecturing and criticism of China in its smug article/story[.] as its bias is further exposed now because the victims/deaths are being confirmed as mostly or all not from China, but Vietnam. The media, in its humiliation, has pulled the above anti-China article after the latest development. It criticizes China constantly, yet itself misbehaves in its brand of journalism. It should have at least waited for further confirmation instead of always jumping the gun in a hot-headed frenzy to seize any dubious chance to bad-mouth China wrongly. It should learn from its self-righteousness and double standards and apologize to its audience (WMC001,2019).

On the same note, one of the commenters supported the above sentiment as expressed in the following quote below:

Another [...] blunder in their journalistic responsibilities. That "it emerged" these were Chinese nationals is just another way of citing rumor, innuendo, or agenda and is in no way equitable with silly things like "evidence" or "proof." They seem to thrive on pure sensationalism, and this is slanted to serve a particular ideological agenda. It has now been "evidenced" that at least some of the victims came from a farming community[...]. The news media is no longer trustworthy, and we need to be willing to think with far more than just our "primitive brain" (feelings and emotions) when seeking to understand the truth of events in the world (WMC003,2019).

Political Stance

Some subthemes emerged from this premise, which were deemed appropriate for the debate and investigation in this study. On the other hand, some of the commenters concluded that the media use tragic events that happen to people of different nationalities to gain political mileage. The information being pushed out by the media was observed as a political weapon against other countries. The reports going out were termed disgusting and without facts, while deceiving the

audience. Some commenters were of the opinion that the tragedy should not be used as a political tool to serve political agendas. Besides, some commenters advised the media that it should take responsibility in terms of spreading peace and stop spreading false political propaganda.

How can your reporters be so disgusting? These unfortunate victims lost their lives, and you only want to use them as a weapon to attack China? And the majority of the deaths have now been linked to Vietnam. You should be ashamed of yourself (PSW001,2019).

For instance, one of the commenters argue:

Spreader of fake news! Take your responsibility as a news agency seriously! How dare you deceive the audience? What a shame on your conscience! Using the death of 39 people as a great chance to attack China without any evidence is the thing you are supposed to do. (PSW002, 2019).

In addition to be above argument from a commenter, another comment claimed:

Using such a tragedy as a political tool to shame China is just inhuman. RIP to the victims. Living people should appreciate lives and appreciate peace. Western media are good at making fake news as political propaganda tools (PSW004,2019).

This is so sad, regardless of where they come from. Thank you and respect to those lights. Report news with facts. If you have any respect for the dead, stop using tragedy to serve your political agenda. It's disgusting (PSW005,2019).

Moreover, some of the commenters argued that there was a desecration of democracy and free speech by the media. This was triggered by the media reporting false information. Such sporadic reports do not sit well with some of the commenters.

I can't comment on this media's false report that all of them were Chinese. Where are my rights to democracy and free speech? You made me feel sick, not the first time, and probably not the last (PSD006,2019).

On the other hand, some of the commenters felt that there was some surveillance besides what the media was covering, and there was a need to look deeper into the matter at hand. In contrast to this, some commenters felt that there was a need for the media to apologize and stop using the tragedy for political purposes.

Could they be Uyghurs, Kazakhs, Nepalis, or Tibetans fleeing China, given what China has been doing recently in terms of mass surveillance and "re-education"? Either way, someone needs to do something about China and their expansionist ideas, or you'll get something like this to occur more often (PSD003,2019).

You are the biggest cheater in the world. You make use of this news for your political purposes, and this is such a big tragedy. You must apologize to the victims' families (PSD005,2019).

Misinformation Correction Strategy

Although the commenters had varied views on how the media reported and framed the story, on the contrary, they thought of various approaches to be adopted by the media for the correction of the reports. Most of the commenters pushed for the readjustment of the title and went further to give suggestions. Furthermore, other commenters pushed for the change of the headline of the story, while some wanted it to be corrected. Notably, some of the commenters acknowledged that the news was developing and that mistakes could occur, but they were still dissatisfied with the way the story was reported. The following are comments that support the above argument.

Time has progressed, but the news reports have regressed. It is too disappointing to report the news without correcting the rest. And it seems that no one sympathizes with those who died and is fully committed to politics. 39 bodies were hoping to be Chinese citizens (CSC001,2019).

They were not Chinese. They were Vietnamese. Check first before you use the word "confirmed"—no more fake news. Please correct your title. Police are still trying to identify the bodies, not yet 'confirmed to be Chinese nationals.' (CSC003, 2019).

It's not uncommon to make mistakes when the story is still developing, but the emphasis on "confirmed" is still jaw-dropping (CSC004,2019).

Why are none of the news outlets keen on reporting that Mo (the driver) has been released without charge? He was the one that found the bodies and called the police, and the guy had only had the trailer for 35 minutes. Just keep on assuming in the comments guys, you'll crack this case soon! (CSC006, 2019).

Apart from changing the title of the story, the commenters of this study indicated that it was vital for the media to delete the story as a way of correcting the damage caused. They also stipulated that other media, like turning their comment sections off, may be in a way to correct the turning of events.

They should remove/amend this fake news as none of them were Chinese-confirmed by the police (CSC001,2019).

Come on, you need to take this piece of fake news off the site. Others had to turn off the comments for this deadly mistake. (CSC002, 2019).

After all, this evidence showed they are Vietnamese; you are still making the story that they are Chinese? You said they are Chinese. How do you know this? Please show the evidence, otherwise please delete your title words! (CSC003, 2019).

Well, it's no longer confirmed. It is now believed they're Vietnamese. Perhaps this news channel should change its title (CSC004,2019).

They are not from China; the Western media are irresponsible and owe an apology to those who have passed away!!! (CSC005, 2019).

Discussion

In this section, the focus of the study is presented by way of argumentations of different scholastic views and perspectives with an inclination to the overall findings of the study.

Audience involvement in the news development

The study has revealed that the audience plays a crucial role in the event of any news, these can be claimed to the fact that social media has become an avenue for public sphere where people from different regions can gather and discuss issues that they fill is of importance to the society (Oloo, 2021). These sentiments are also supported by Belair-Gagnon et al., (2018). Today's news consumers have become the generators and act as the watchdogs for the media. The time where the media used to influence a particular aspect of the story is currently slowly diminishing with the advent of the internet and diverse integrated social media platforms. The power of the audience in the 21st century has shifted from dormancy to activity, hence making news verification and veracity a critical continuum for the discussion(Belair-Gagnon et al., 2018; Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016). For instance, this study found that the majority of the commenters who commented on the subject of the study offered both criticism and solutions to the media. Belair-Gagnon et al. (2018) agree that a denunciation is a form of audience engagement in the development of a story by the media. Consequently, this shows how the audience influences the consumption of news(Nelson, 2019). Besides, today's audience and consumers of news are not passive and they seek different channels to verify and confirm any news report that they consume in whatever media that is at their disposal (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2018). It is interesting to note that, apart from following a particular channel to satisfy their news needs, they form a community of online discussions(Tandoc, 2019). The discussions then follow a specific topic until an agreement is reached and an overall conclusion is reached. Commenters who were cynical about the story, for example, were followed by negative comments in the comment section, and vice versa.

On the other hand, the media, which used a particular headline that was perceived to be inappropriate, the audience judged the authenticity of the story based on the headline frame used in telling the story, even though the story might carry some element of truth in it (Nelson, 2019; Wijaya, 2019; Thornton, 2000). Moreover, in this study, the use of a particular word and a phrase made the story be termed and believed to be a hoax, false, or fake. What's more, inaccuracy in reporting in the situations of disasters, epidemics, or tragedies makes the media use catchy story headlines that invite the reader to engage with it. In this situation, the study aligns with the influence of a catchy headline to draw audience attention (Pate et al., 2019; Pennycook & Rand, 2019;

Thornton, 2000). However, audiences who read the headline and conclude as if they have read the entire story view such a strategy differently (Marchi, 2012; Pennycook & Rand, 2019).

In order to combat misinformation, news media literacy is used as a strategy

This study agrees with the confirmation of the need for media literacy skills for the online audience on the element of understanding the news content, specifically with an emphasis on the context of news production and media creation of messages (Ashley et al., 2017; Wijaya, 2019; Vraga et al., 2020). The media literacy fundamentals can alleviate the misunderstanding of the strategic media goal of selling news and increasing the media reputation (Wijaya et al., 2022) vis-à-vis the participant level of understanding of the media process.

Scholars, on the other hand, argue that news media literacy is critical to the democratization of self-governance, and that the media can profit economically not only from marketing and advertising but also from public ratings (Ashley et al., 2017; Belair-Gagnon et al., 2018; Guo et al., 2019) and media brand image (Wijaya et al., 2022). The study, instead, found the inadequacy of media-related skills strategies by the commenters made them prone to judging and positioning their minds in a specific direction. This creates biases that cause them to stay stuck in a predisposed position that is difficult to change (Nickerson, 1998). For instance, in this study, it was found that most of the commenters believed the story was fake. This only happened because of how the headline was framed in a way that was not familiar or even liked by the audience (Pate et al., 2019).

This study suggests the use of media news media literacy programs to minimize the biases formed, hence in support of (Bode & Vraga, 2017; Guo et al., 2019; Tandoc, 2019). This opinionable measure, though not appropriate, ensured that the media in question was able to achieve its objective of reaching a broad audience and informing them about current affairs and events. Media literacy is vital in the current fake news age where information gets out without being verified (Ashley et al., 2017). The consumers of this information find themselves at the midpoint of not knowing how to distinguish what information is credible from which one is not (Mihailidis & Viotty, 2017). Commenters lack media literacy skills that are based on the ability to analyze and evaluate credible information.

The capability of platform users to identify misinformation plays a significant role in discerning its spread (Nyhan & Reifler, 2015; Young et al., 2017). It is from the same users who tag information as either misinformation or fake news when the nature of the story does not fit their needs. These biases spread throughout the social network and become widespread (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2018; Ong'ong'a, 2020; Roudik, 2019). Not only does the news termed as fake reach the intended individuals, which might be media houses on target, but it also travels miles to individuals who may not be in the position or interested in the message but just accept it as legitimate or inaccurate because of mass euphoria (Young et al., 2017). Without proper media literacy skills for identification and correcting of what is viewed as misinformation, media consumers will continue to face challenges of labeling any piece of news that talks about an issue or event as inappropriate. This study revealed that users tend to blame the generalization of conduit media based on their negative sentiments towards a particular medium or geographical and political dispossession (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019; Pate et al., 2019).

Remain Committed to Constructive Journalism

The verification of truth is a critical function of the media as it is a measure of its relationship with the public. The contestation of this in the post-modern ecosystem constructs a novel vista against the media, which must play on. Thus, this begs the question as to how the media, in general, can configure their practices in the post-truth environment (Lazer et al., 2018; Lewandowsky et al., 2017; Waisbord, 2018). The media's responsibility is uncrude to the facts and expert opinions and not consigned to the sidelines in the public discourse. Shifting from a problem to a solution with rigoristic elements focuses on empowering the audience to appreciate the fuller picture of truth with media ethics in mind cures misinformation (Harsin, 2018; Hermans & Drok, 2018; Yanqiu & Matingwina, 2018). In recent times, there has been a diversion from the original, the mission of the media to click-baiting headlines (Benson, 2017) and doing the corruption of communication (Wijaya, 2022).

The use of particular phrases or words in the headlines, as indicated above, confirms the diminishing element of responsible journalism (Harsin, 2018). Commenters felt that the media was not accountable, and such a claim erupted in different sentiments from the comments. Even though there is a capitalistic backbone in the overall media eco-system, there are metrics in advertising for the editorial economy's sustainability as evidenced in some aspects of the story (Belair-Gagnon et al., 2018; Benson, 2017). The coercion behind this is to provide massive amounts of poor quality, unverifiable content for faster consumers. This sometimes leads the media to do little in-depth investigation that is often far from the truth, which favors readers' clicking on adverts that pay for the contents (Mast et al., 2018). The rush to report a particular phenomenon only because it could be leveraged on the basis of economic gain beats the logic of social responsibility in journalism (Bro, 2018; Waisbord, 2018). The bias of the new media today increases the tabloidization and sensationalism of news, which could be limited by productive investment in construction journalism. YouTube, like any other social media platform gives a podium for different users to generate information and share it within and without their networks (Guo et al., 2019).

On the other hand, the use of this platform by the media is an approach to providing audiences with fair, contextualized, and accurate information to view the world around them (Hermans & Drok, 2018). The simplification and overemphasis of negatives in society creates a conflict between the media and its users. Hence, this tends to generate an ideology of society being elusive and stereotyping particular aspects, regions, and even people (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019). This is evidenced in the way commenters viewed and interpreted the story in question by labeling certain media (Margolin et al., 2017).

CONCLUSION

This study explored how commenters of a news can lessen the spread of misinformation on the social media sphere while adopting the public sphere theory. The study reconnoitred the comments from the YouTube channel of media that carried a particular story, most of which most of the comments docketed it as false, misinformation, fake news, and misleading. From this, there are exciting highlights that are yet to be investigated. Although the story was carried out by several media and posted on various platforms, this study purposively sorts a particular media channel that had an open comment section, hence it is not generalized with other sentiments to reflect the position of users' perception of other related different media channels. The overall results indicated that there is a tendency for positive comments to be followed by positive comments and vice versa if a story is positive or negative. These can offer a field for further investigation in finding out why these patterns exist in users who post comments on the online platforms.

A strategy used by some of the media that operate social media channels is to mute or pause the comment section of their channels. It is worth noting that users who feel aggrieved by the way a report was carried out in this medium turn to other related media or social media platforms that carry the same story but with comments open and pouring their sentiments and frustration in relation to the former. Finally, this study falls under the social constructionist theorem of the belief that communication shapes the emic identity of a particular subject. Using a qualitative approach, which is subjective, limits the study to a small sample. Despite this, the study provides crucial findings on how to conduct such investigations and elaborates on how misinformation could be minimized on social media successfully. There is a need for adoption of constructive journalism to enable the media to remain afloat in the ever changing world.

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