

**INFORMATION LITERACY SKILL AMONG COLLEGE  
STUDENTS IN BIRBHUM DISTRICT IN THE CONTEXT OF  
FAKE NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA: AN ASSESSMENT STUDY**

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By

**Ibrahim Mollick**

Under the Supervision of

**Dr. Sunil Kumar Chatterjee**

Professor, Department of Library and Information Science

Jadavpur University

Department of Library and Information Science

Jadavpur University

Kolkata-700032

2025

Certified that the Thesis entitled

Information Literacy Skill among College Students in Birbhum District in the Context of Fake News on Social Media: An Assessment Study submitted by me for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the Supervision of Prof. Sunil Kumar Chatterjee, Professor, Department of Library and Information Science, Jadavpur University.

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Countersigned by the

Supervisor:

Candidate:

Dated:

Dated:

Candidate's Declaration

I, Ibrahim Mollick, Department of Library and Information Science, Jadavpur University, certify that the work embodied in this Ph.D. thesis entitled “Information Literacy Skill Among College Students in Birbhum District in the Context of Fake News on Social Media: An Assessment Study” is my own bona fide work and no part of this thesis has been submitted previously for the award of any other degree or diploma at this or any other institution.

.....

(Ibrahim Mollick)

Registration No. \_\_\_\_\_

Department of Library and Information Science

Jadavpur University

Kolkata - 700032

*Dedicated*  
*to*  
*My Loving Family*

## Abstract

The rapid increase of misleading information on social networking sites increasingly undermines individuals' ability to assess information critically, particularly among college students who devote significant time to these platforms. This study investigates the ability of college students in Birbhum District, West Bengal, to identify and handle misleading content on social media platforms. The study examines how students manage false information and the strategies they employ to verify facts, utilizing both survey data and comprehensive interviews.

The data has been collected from sixteen government-aided colleges in Birbhum District, with 1,178 undergraduate students participating in surveys. There were a few more women (52%) than men (48%) in the sample, and most of them (66%) were between the ages of 19 and 21. Most students said they had seen false information, and 82% said they had fallen for deceptive posts at least once a month. The results show that students have some serious problems dealing with problematic content. WhatsApp was the most popular platform among students (everyone used it), followed by YouTube (96%) and Facebook (87%). However, Facebook was where about 52% of students most often saw fake news. 74% of students said they would rather acquire news from social media than newspapers or TV, yet none of them visited any fact-checking websites which shows a big gap in how they check facts. Students demonstrated alarming overconfidence about recognizing real from fake content—71% felt confident of their abilities even though they failed when actually tested. False political posts were what students come across most (47%), with health-related fake news coming second (15%) and Male students shared inaccurate information more often than female students did. When performing college assignments, students relied primarily on Google (82%) instead of proper academic databases, suggesting a tendency for quick and surface-level searches. The study indicated a clear mismatch between students identifying incorrect information as a problem for society yet not taking personal responsibility for countering it. Despite recognizing the harmful nature of

fake news, the majority of students responded passively as almost 77% ignored fake posts when encountered and about 35% admitted to sharing unverified information. Perhaps most concerning was that none of the 1,178 respondents has any idea regarding information literacy, indicating a complete absence of systematic training in evaluating information sources.

The data makes clear that colleges need to step up and teach students how to evaluate information properly. This means creating actual training programs that show students how to verify content on different platforms—especially apps like WhatsApp where false information spreads behind closed doors. Schools should weave information literacy into every subject they teach, not just treat it as an add on course. Students need to learn more than how to check if a source looks credible; they need to understand how today's disinformation campaigns actually work and why they're designed to be convincing. This research helps explain how incorrect information affects students in rural college settings, offering solid facts to encourage better strategies for teaching information skills in colleges. The study reveals that fake news has become a constant presence on social media rather than an isolated issue, requiring substantial changes in how we educate students to critically assess and verify online content.

**Keywords: Information literacy, fake news, social media, misinformation, disinformation, fact checking**

## Preface

The digital transformation of how we consume information has changed the way we create, disseminate and validate information in today's society. Social media platforms, once envisioned as instruments for personal connection and communication, have morphed into significant sources of news and information for millions of people worldwide. This development has opened up new avenues for people to participate in democracy and interact with people all around the world. At the same time, it has spawned new issues that undermine the fundamental underpinnings of informed citizenry and critical thinking. This research emerged not from library resources, but from the ordinary observations of our progressively interconnected surroundings. As a researcher and a keen observer of digital trends, I observed a troubling paradox which is, we have more information at our hands than any previous age, yet we seem more prone to falsehoods than ever before. People often use the word "fake news" when referring about political divisiveness, public health problems, and social instability. It started as a specialized term and now it has become a household term according to its nature of use. I started to wonder how young people, who use social media the most, are dealing with all this vast information. Are they prepared with the needed skills to separate fact from fiction?

When looking at the Indian context and more specifically, the West Bengal setting, this question became more concrete and crucial. India is one of the biggest marketplaces for social media in the world as a lot of young individuals use internet platforms all the time. However, this fast digitization has not always been accompanied by a similar development in digital literacy. Incidents of disinformation leading to real-world consequences, such as the rumours that ignited unrest in Birbhum in 2022, underscored the crucial need to understand the dynamics of fake news at a local level. Although national studies were available, I detected a major deficiency: the absence of extensive, district-specific research capable of revealing the

distinctive socio-cultural and educational elements that impact the intake and perception of disinformation.

The study of this thesis aims to overcome that deficit. It is a focused assessment of the information literacy competencies of college students in Birbhum District—a region defined by a rich cultural past yet also recognized for its susceptibility to community falsehood. My objective was to transcend beyond abstract issues and obtain precise, empirical information on how these adolescents, who represent the future of our society, interact with the news on their social media feeds. Do people trust what they see? How do they verify it? What do people do when they suspect something is false? The answers to these problems, I decided, were crucial not merely for intellectual discourse, but for devising real remedies that could strengthen young brains. Though the journey of this research has been both tough and educational. Designing a research that could accurately measure anything as sophisticated as "information literacy" required a precise blend of quantitative and qualitative approaches. The process of collecting data from over a thousand students across multiple colleges was a massive undertaking, but it provided an invaluable peep into the digital lives of young India. The findings, as presented in this thesis, were at times eye-opening. The universal exposure to fake news was expected, but the utter absence of fact-checking tool usage and the striking disparity between felt confidence and real skill were dismal conclusions. It became obvious that the problem is not a lack of awareness about the availability of fake news, but a basic shortage in the crucial competencies needed to tackle it.

This study would not have been possible without the help and support of many persons. I extend my deepest gratitude to my thesis supervisor Prof Sunil Kumar Chatterjee, whose insightful feedback and constant encouragement guided me through every stage of my project. My deepest appreciation also goes to the principals and personnel of the participating colleges in Birbhum District for their cooperation and for supporting the data collection method. Most

critically, I am grateful to the 1,178 students who willingly contributed their time, experiences, and viewpoints. Their voices are the focus of this study, and it is my sincere aim that this work ultimately adds to initiatives that help their journey towards being more critical and informed digital citizens.

Ultimately, this thesis is more than an academic requirement; it is a call to action. It maintains that in an age where information equals power, the capacity to critically assess such information is an essential aptitude for citizenship. The findings from Birbhum District represent a microcosm of a much bigger worldwide concern. By recognizing the individual weaknesses and habits at a local level, we may begin to design more effective, context-sensitive educational techniques. It is my honest conviction that teaching kids with wide information literacy abilities is not only an educational goal, but a societal imperative for sustaining democratic discourse and public trust in the digital century.

## **Organisation of the Thesis**

**Chapter I: Introduction** examines social media's role in news dissemination and the fake news crisis in Birbhum District and with example of other regions. It covers traditional versus digital media transitions, social media usage patterns in India, fake news definitions and typologies, information literacy frameworks, and justifies the district-specific research focus.

**Chapter II: Review of Literature** systematically analyses existing studies from 1988-2024 across four phases: foundational information literacy era, fake news recognition period, educational response developments, and advanced behavioural insights, identifying research gaps in localized assessments and rural student populations.

**Chapter III: Research Framework and Methodology** discuss about the mixed-methods study design employing surveys and interviews. It gives details about the research methods,

sampling techniques used, ethical considerations, Birbhum District's demographic context, and analytical approaches combining quantitative visualization with qualitative thematic analysis.

**Chapter IV: Analysis and Interpretation** present demographic profiles of respondents and examines social media usage patterns, news consumption behaviours, fake news awareness levels, fact-checking practices and perceived technology impacts through tables and graphs, incorporating both statistical data and thematic findings from open-ended responses.

**Chapter V: Research Findings** summarizes key discoveries including universal fake news exposure, platform preferences, verification behaviour gaps, confidence-accuracy discrepancies, complete absence of fact-checking tool usage and students' reliance on informal verification methods despite recognizing fake news risks.

**Chapter VI: Conclusion and Recommendations** summarize critical findings showing students' vulnerability to misinformation despite high awareness, proposes comprehensive interventions including platform-specific training, gender-responsive strategies, institutional reforms, and identifies areas requiring longitudinal research across diverse regional and linguistic contexts.

## **Acknowledgement**

Making a dream come true is never a solo journey. It happens because of all the people who share their knowledge, work hard alongside you, and never stop believing in what you're trying to achieve - they're the ones who light up the way when the path gets dark. This doctoral journey, which started as just a dream, became reality through the generous support of mentors, colleagues, family, and friends whose impact reaches far beyond what these pages can capture.

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Special recognition is due to the administrative authorities and dedicated personnel—such as Principals, Teachers-in-Charge (TICs), Librarians, and other staff members from various educational institutions—who facilitated my data collection efforts. Their professional cooperation and institutional support proved indispensable to the successful completion of this comprehensive study, without which this ambitious undertaking would have remained unrealized.

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With profound gratitude,

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## **Glossary**

### **ACRL Framework for Information Literacy**

Information literacy is the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning. This framework emphasizes interconnected core concepts like authority being constructed and contextual, and is designed for higher education to foster critical thinking.

### **Algorithms (Social Media Algorithms)**

Social media algorithms refer to a variety of processes that rank user-provided signals to determine what type of content and advertisements to display to users, often prioritizing engagement. They can amplify sensational content, contributing to issues like echo chambers.

### **Bulletin Board Systems (BBS)**

Bulletin board systems (BBSs) were the first method that the general public widely used to communicate with other people through their computers, allowing users to post messages, share files, and engage in discussions via dial-up connections in the 1990s. They preceded modern social media and enabled the spread of unverified information.

### **Confirmation Bias**

Confirmation bias is a type of cognitive bias that favours information that confirms your previously existing beliefs or biases. It involves seeking or interpreting evidence to support preconceptions, often driving the spread of misinformation.

### **Digital Literacy**

Digital competencies encompass navigating the online environment safely, building trust in digital technologies, and addressing digital innovations like Artificial Intelligence, enabling critical engagement with information to combat mis- and disinformation. It overlaps with information literacy and is vital for vulnerable populations.

## **Disinformation**

False information that is given deliberately, especially by government organizations or to deceive. It differs from misinformation by its intentional nature, often used in political manipulation.

## **Echo Chambers**

Echo chambers are environments in which the opinion, political leaning, or belief of users about a topic gets reinforced due to repeated communications with like-minded individuals, often amplified by social media. This reduces exposure to diverse views.

## **Fabrication**

Fabricated information mimics news media content in form but is intentionally and verifiably false, often created to deceive. It is a type of fake news involving entirely invented content.

## **Fact-Checking**

Fact-checking is the process of verifying the factual accuracy of questioned reporting and statements, often conducted before or after publication. It uses cross-referencing and tools to combat fake news.

## **Fake News**

Fake news is fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent, intentionally false and designed to mislead. It spreads rapidly on social media.

## **Infodemic**

An infodemic is too much information including false or misleading information in digital and physical environments during a disease outbreak. It overwhelms discernment, especially during crises.

## **Information Literacy**

Information literacy is the set of integrated abilities encompassing the reflective discovery of information, the understanding of how information is produced and valued, and the use of information in creating new knowledge and participating ethically in communities of learning. It promotes critical evaluation.

## **Manipulation**

Manipulation involves genuine information altered (e.g., edited quotes or out-of-context images) to mislead, incorporating elements of truth to make detection challenging. It is a form of fake news.

## **Media Literacy**

Media and Information Literacy provide a set of essential skills to address challenges like mis- and disinformation, including critical analysis, evaluation, and creation of media content while recognizing biases. It extends to ethical sharing in diverse contexts.

## **Misinformation**

Incorrect or misleading information spread unintentionally, unlike disinformation.

## **Native Advertising**

Native advertising is content that bears a similarity to the news, feature articles, product reviews, entertainment, and other material that surrounds it online, but is commercial in nature. It must be disclosed to avoid misleading users.

## **Netiquette**

Netiquette guidelines provide a minimum set of rules for network etiquette, which organizations may adapt for their own use, promoting polite and ethical online behaviours. It originated from early internet protocols.

**Parody**

A parody is a creative work designed to imitate, comment on, and/or mock its subject by means of satirical or ironic imitation. It can be mistaken for facts when out of context.

**Propaganda**

Propaganda is the dissemination of information—facts, arguments, rumours, half-truths, or lies—to influence public opinion. It often uses selective facts to promote agendas.

**Satire**

Satire is a genre that uses humors, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to criticize and expose the flaws or absurdities of people and society. In media, it risks being taken seriously if context is lost.

**SCONUL Seven Pillars Model**

The SCONUL Seven Pillars of Information Literacy is a framework defining information skills as a progression through seven pillars: identify, scope, plan, gather, evaluate, manage, and present, helping navigate information environments. It encourages diverse searches.

**Social Media**

Websites and software programs used for social networking, such as Facebook and Instagram. Platforms for sharing content like text, images, and videos.

**UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Framework**

The framework provides global guidelines for assessing credibility, ethical sharing, and recognizing biases in media, promoting responsible behaviour to counter fake news in diverse contexts.

## **Usenet**

Usenet is a worldwide distributed discussion system available on computers, developed in 1979 as a network for newsgroup postings and information exchange. It foreshadowed modern misinformation issues.

## **Yellow Journalism**

Yellow journalism is the use of lurid features and sensationalized news in newspaper publishing to attract readers and increase circulation, often prioritizing attention over accuracy. It parallels modern fake news.

## List of Abbreviations

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| ACRL     | Association of College & Research Libraries                      |
| ALA      | American Library Association                                     |
| Alt News | Alternative News (Fact-checking organization)                    |
| ASER     | Annual Status of Education Report                                |
| BBS      | Bulletin Board Systems   |
| CILIP    | Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals     |
| COVID-19 | Coronavirus Disease 2019   |
| IAMAI    | Internet and Mobile Association of India                         |
| IL       | Information Literacy   |
| IT       | Information Technology   |
| MIL      | Media and Information Literacy                                   |
| NLP      | Natural Language Processing                                      |
| OTT      | Over-The-Top (streaming platforms)                               |
| PLATO    | Programmed Logic for Automatic Teaching Operations               |
| SCONUL   | Society of College, National and University Libraries            |
| SVM      | Support Vector Machine   |
| TCP      | Transmission Control Protocol                                    |
| UNESCO   | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |

*CHAPTER I*

**INTRODUCTION**

## **1.1 Introduction**

Social media sure has changed how news gets shared & understood by people these days. But it's not all sunshine and rainbows. There are some serious hiccups, especially with a ton of false information floating around. This kind of fake information can really mess things up for making smart choices in our communities. The trouble with fake news on social media is a big deal in Birbhum District, and it's troubling to see this same pattern repeating across communities around the world. In that case, college students are particularly at risk since they are super active on these platforms and, honestly, can be vulnerable to confusion. As society moves forward, getting good info becomes ever more important for shaping decisions & how people act. But the rise of social media as the favourite place for news has actually made it easier for tons of misleading information to spread around, especially among younger folks. Those algorithms that decide what people see can really push fake news to the forefront, which is a big reason why trust in true sources keeps breaking down.

This study is all about digging into how fake information spreads, or what anyone might call fake news, by looking at how people consume this information. A spotlight can be put on college students in Birbhum District specifically. The main goals are to figure out what makes fake news so popular, identify factors that lead to its acceptance & spread, and help people tell the difference between what's real & what's not. The academic world has plenty of projects trying to tackle online misinformation right now. Automated fact-checkers and tech tools designed to spot fake news are being discussed everywhere. A contribution is sought in this study by digging deeper into how and why fake news happens focusing on the role what social media plays & what drives fake information.

In our digital world which filled with endless news options, telling apart real from fake gets trickier, especially for younger audiences. This whole situation highlights just how crucial it is

to have information literacy skills especially when using social media, where lines between what's true & what's false often blur. So, this study aims to shed light on how college students navigate this information atmosphere, sorting out good sources from deceitful ones on social media platforms. An examination of how they make sense of news authenticity will be conducted and assistance will be provided to help them develop the skills needed to think critically about what is read while battling the spread of fake news. The findings won't only matter in colleges, they'll also be very useful for those people who is working in the media and policymakers too. By getting a grip on how fake news is consumed & shared, efforts to boost media literacy and build a more informed society can be guided.

Through empirical research approaches, including semi-structured interviews and quantitative analysis, an attempt is made to unravel the cognitive processes and behaviours of college students in Birbhum District concerning fake news involvement on social media platforms. By explaining the techniques adopted by users to identify and counter fake news, meaningful insights are intended to be provided to the ongoing discourse on media literacy and information integrity.

### **1.1.1 Background and context**

The issue of erroneous information on social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, X (previously Twitter) etc. has grown exponentially in recent years due to their increased accessibility. False information can make people change their minds, change political decisions, and spread fear and misleading gossip, among other negative outcomes. India is one of the biggest markets for social media sites, and the number of people using them there has clearly gone up, especially among young adults like college students. People can talk to each other and share information on social media, but it has also been utilized to spread

falsehoods. Researchers think that college students are a significant demographic to study because they make up a large part of the social media user base and are thought to have a big impact on beliefs and opinions. A lot of research has looked into whether or not fake news exists on social media and what its effects are. Some of this research has been particularly on college students. A 2017 study by Stanford University found that most middle school, high school, and college students couldn't tell the difference between real and fake news. Researchers from the University of Texas at Austin performed a second study in 2018 to see how college students' political beliefs affect how false information spreads on Facebook. According to researchers, people who are more liberal are more likely to pass on articles from reliable and mainstream sources, while people that are conservative in their views are more likely to post fake news. Other studies have looked into the causes of fake news's social media spread, with some speculating that people spread false information because it confirms their preconceptions or because they want to attract attention and gain approval from others. There have been worries expressed about the potential for social media algorithms to propagate misinformation and reinforce preconceived notions. Numerous articles have also examined how social media algorithms contribute to the spread and amplification of false information. The proposed study's goal is to find out how prevalent false information is among Indian college students on social media, where it comes from, and how it might affect their opinions and behaviour. As part of a mixed-methods approach, surveys and interviews were used in this report to collect information on students' use of social media and their opinions regarding the accuracy and veracity of the content they come across on these sites. The findings of the study could help guide the creation of programs meant to improve digital literacy and slow the spread of misleading information on social media.

All things considered, the topic of college students disseminating misleading information on social media is complex and multifaceted, requiring more research and focus. Understanding

the driving forces behind the spread of false information is essential to mitigating its detrimental effects.

### **1.1.1.1 Challenges in information literacy in India and the world**

Students in India who wish to go to college frequently have problems understanding out how genuine the material they receive on social networking sites is. This is primarily because these sites don't always have the same level of reliability and many users don't have strong routines for checking information. Bhakte (2024) thinks that this is because of deeper concerns, like unequal access to technology and a general lack of awareness about how to use digital resources efficiently. This means that pupils are vulnerable to fraudulent claims and don't have the tools to question them correctly. These challenges are worse in rural locations. For example, a survey of 175 college women in the Tirunelveli region of Tamil Nadu found that background variables, such as coming from less connected locations, directly affected their capacity to search for, retrieve, and distribute academic content online. Initial assessments showed that they were not particularly effective at fundamental tasks like using email forums or accessing free scholarly publications (Vijayalakshmi et al., 2018). After concentrated workshops, however, participants demonstrated significant improvement in these areas, demonstrating that direct instruction can fill these gaps and stimulate continuing self-education.

These challenges are made worse by the contrasts between cities and rural areas. For example, in West Bengal, where web access are limited in districts like Birbhum, it is harder to observe various points of view or use verification tools, which makes it simpler for people to publish fraudulent material. Insights from a comparable study in Namibia underline analogous issues: first-year undergraduates indicated annoyance with technology problems, such as unfamiliarity with search tools and hesitancy in group contexts due to language barriers or fear of making mistakes. This mirrors input from Indian contexts where diverse backgrounds and big class sizes hamper individualized education (Mwiiyale et al., 2025). Students commonly overrate

their own talents, which causes them to miss critical skills like recognizing biases or properly acknowledging sources. They called for more hands-on seminars at the outset of their programs to help them feel more competent utilizing digital technology in an ethical way. These flaws became very clear during the COVID-19 crisis, when false health updates made up 67.2% of all cases in India. Activity on sites like Twitter (35 examples) and Facebook (30 examples) rose sharply, exposing young people to harmful messages that spread quickly (Al-Zaman, 2021). Such content often took advantage of people's fears about safety during times of uncertainty, employing quick-sharing tools to spread political stories that were tied to religion (16.8% of the time) and echoed real conflicts, like the 2022 riots in Birbhum, which were fuelled by false allegations. Since 94.4% of these lies come from websites, this shows why specialized reviews in some areas, like Birbhum, are important for measuring and improving students' ability to recognize and deal with these kinds of threats through better training.

While these problems are significantly visible in India but international researches indicates that these issues are found everywhere. Young users, for instance, are a group of global users who face the problem of deceptive information identifications due to platform-specific and cultural reasons. For instance, research on Instagram users in Portugal and Greece shows the impact of cultural differences on people's judgment of news reliability. Portuguese users tend to consider visual hints as the most reliable, while Greek users are more sceptical and tend to question sources based on their national biases, thus, different degrees of misinformation susceptibility occur.

The situation is very much the same as Birbhum's communal disinformation problems, where the local narratives have the power to widen the gaps. Moreover, a media literacy program that was examined in both India and the United States indicated that focused instruction improved the ability of participants in differentiating real and misleading headlines by roughly 26.5

percent in both nations, thereby underscoring the necessity of such initiatives in bridging the digital gap in undeveloped regions like rural West Bengal. In 2024, a study showing that about 59 percent global persons were concerned about fake information, particularly young people in developing areas who primarily depend on social media for their updates. To understand how these issues play out in practice, this research examines the situation in Birbhum District, a region that faces many of these same challenges.

### 1.1.1.2 Study location: Birbhum District, West Bengal

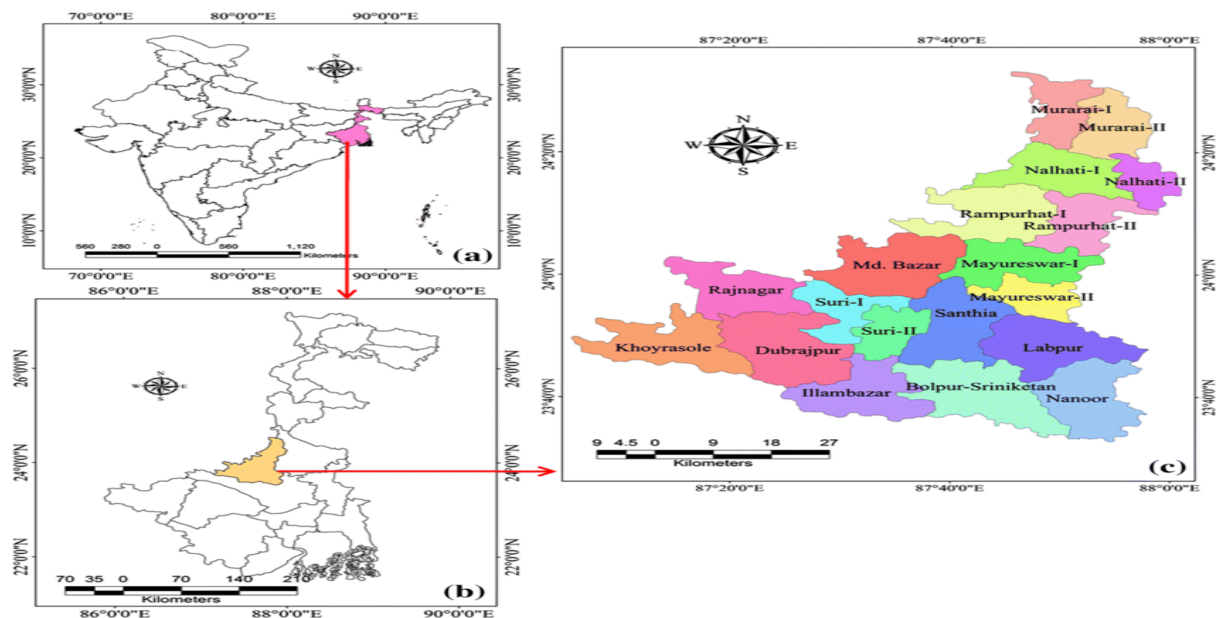


Figure 1.1.1.2: Map showing Birbhum's location in West Bengal and India

**Birbhum District: An overview**

Birbhum district in West Bengal is a fascinating place to explore how college students tackle information literacy in today's world of social media and fake news. This district has a large number of college students, rich cultural heritage, and strong educational foundations. Digital platforms have become deeply woven into everyday student life here. Students in this area use social media extensively, which provides ideal circumstances to observe misinformation patterns and their impacts. With internet connectivity expanding quickly across Birbhum, students now face an enormous variety and quantity of online information, which makes this district especially suitable for research purposes. Located within the Burdwan Division of West Bengal, Birbhum has earned recognition as a culturally vibrant region. The district forms a roughly triangular shape, with its northern section reaching toward the border areas. Key towns including Suri, Bolpur, Rampurhat, and Sainthia serve as canters for education and commerce, with Suri functioning as district headquarters. Several geographical features define this district. To the west and North, it shares boundaries with Jharkhand's Dumka, Jamtara, and Pakur districts. The Eastern border meets Murshidabad district. On the Southern side, the Ajay River forms a natural dividing line between Birbhum and both Purba Bardhaman and Paschim Bardhaman districts. These geographical factors create distinct topographical differences throughout the area. The Western parts show undulating landscapes that reflect the nearby Chota Nagpur Plateau, whereas the eastern portions consist of flat, fertile agricultural land.

Beyond its physical characteristics, this district holds significant cultural importance. Santiniketan alone establishes Birbhum's position within India's intellectual heritage. Rabindranath Tagore founded Visva Bharati University in this location, and it remains a symbol of the area's academic legacy. Every winter season, the Poush Mela festival attracts

thousands of people from different parts of India, reflecting the strong festival traditions embedded in local culture.

According to Census 2011 data, Birbhum had a population of 3,502,404 people, which corresponds to a population density of 771 persons per square KM throughout its 4,545 square kilometres. The district has largely rural habitat, with 87.17% of population residing in rural areas compared to 12.83% in urban centres. Educational indicators suggest a literacy rate of 70.68%, with male literacy at 76.92% and female literacy at 64.14%. The sex ratio stands at 956 females for 1,000 males. The district has three subdivisions—Suri, Bolpur, and Rampurhat—which together encompass 19 development blocks. Scheduled Castes form 29.50% of the population, while Scheduled Tribes account for 6.92%. Bengali is used as the main language spoken by 92.38% of population, followed by Santali at 6.01%.

## **1.2 The changing media landscape**

### **1.2.1 Traditional news sources are declining**

It is hard to imagine technological advancement without concurrent successes in several fields, given the current technological boom, digital revolution, and scientific discoveries. Changes in technology signal a new stage in which everything advances, much like changes in the natural world. Our ideas, representations, and interests have all changed significantly as a result of this evolution, which has also had a significant impact on the community's overall identity and the setting in which our ideas thrive. Modern technologies like the internet, mobile phones, and cloud computing have changed how we interact and communicate, and the latest technological advancements have accelerated growth in many areas of our daily lives, especially in communication.

### **Conventional forms of media**

Traditional media refers to mass communication means that predate digital media, such as print (newspapers, magazines), broadcast (television, radio), and outdoor advertising (billboards). Traditional media has long been the dominant source of news and information, influencing cultural norms and public opinion. In the digital age, conventional media encounters difficulties in staying relevant, profitable, and retaining circulation, despite its vital function. It continues to hold importance, particularly for older generations who depend on it as a source of news and information.

### **Digital media**

Digital media comprises content created, shared, and accessed using digital technologies. This comprises text, photos, audio, video, and interactive features available on computers, smartphones, tablets, and other internet-connected devices. The advent of digital media has revolutionised communication, education, and entertainment, as websites, social networks, podcasts, streaming services, and digital advertising have become indispensable components of our daily existence.

### **Decline of traditional media**

The demise of traditional media is ascribed to numerous factors, including the emergence of digital media and the internet, variations in consumer behaviour, and changes in advertising revenue. The broad adoption of digital media offers simple access to news and entertainment from numerous sources, increasing competition for audience attention and advertising dollars. Many customers, particularly younger generations, prefer obtaining content online or via mobile devices, further reducing conventional media's readership. Additionally, advertisers are reallocating expenditures to digital channels, drastically hurting conventional media's revenue

streams. The convergence of these causes emphasises the complicated interplay between technical improvements, changing consumer preferences, and economic upheavals, contributing to the downfall of traditional media. As society continues to embrace digital media, conventional media must adapt to thrive in this fast-altering landscape.

### **1.2.2 Why do individuals prefer social media as a news source?**

- Social media users getting real time update about news. Media outlets using social media as their breaking news platform to quickly share their update.
- A wide variety of material forms, such as articles, infographics, and short videos, are available on social media networks. In order to appeal to social media users, traditional media has changed its strategy.
- Social media networks offer a diverse range of content formats, including brief films, infographics, and articles. Traditional media has modified its approach to appeal to social media users.
- It refers to the practice of ordinary individuals, rather than professional journalists, engaging in the collection, analysis, and dissemination of news and information.
- Ordinary citizens can report events as they happen, providing firsthand accounts and varied opinions. Traditional media often employs this user-generated content, especially during crises.
- With their smartphones and other gadgets, users may access social media at any time and from any location. Access to certain channels, publications, or scheduled broadcasts is necessary for traditional media.
- Businesses can efficiently personalize content thanks to social media's accurate information on user behaviour and interests. Though it lacks the instantaneity of social media analytics, traditional media utilizes this data to improve its strategy.

- Social media is fuelled by user-generated content that presents a wide range of viewpoints. Conventional media is more dependent on experienced reporters and pre-existing stories.

### **1.3 Social Media**

People use digital spaces to create, share, and exchange ideas, facts, and images such as story, photos, and videos. They support connection building, conversations, idea swaps, and other virtual activities. Social media refers to "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010, p. 61). These platforms facilitate communication, content sharing, and community building through various formats, including text, images, and videos.

Social media can be categorized into several types: social networking sites (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn), microblogging platforms (e.g., X, formerly Twitter), media-sharing networks (e.g., Instagram, YouTube), messaging applications (e.g., WhatsApp, Telegram), and collaborative platforms (e.g., Wikipedia) (Carr & Hayes, 2015). In current times social media—which are characterized as online platforms that enable content creation, sharing, and exchange, have radically revolutionized communication environment. Its creation may have been influenced by the revolutionary PLATO system, which introduced features like online chat rooms and message boards in the 1960s.

#### **1.3.1 A brief history of social media**

The rise of messaging apps like WhatsApp and microblogging sites like Twitter (now X) has made it easier for fake news to spread quickly in India. These platforms have mimicked global

trends of false information spreading from the first online forums like Usenet to contemporary digital networks.

Social media's origins may be found in the 1960s, when the University of Illinois developed the PLATO system, an early instructional computer platform that Control Data Corporation eventually marketed. Talkomatic, the first multi-user online chat room, Notes for threaded message forums, Access Lists for managing content visibility, and community-driven online newspapers like News Report in the mid-1970s were among the innovative features that PLATO introduced beginning in 1973 as a precursor to social networking.

By the late 1970s, informal and non-official online contacts started to grow, leading the MIT Artificial Intelligence Laboratory to create a 1982 guidebook describing "netiquette" norms for good behaviour on the ARPANET, the forerunner network to the internet. This mirrored the rising interchange of information over ARPANET, which had been boosted by the 1974 release of the Transmission Control Protocol (TCP) protocol, a basic standard for reliable data transfer that laid the path for the current internet. During this time, in 1979, graduate students Tom Truscott and Jim Ellis created Usenet, a distributed discussion system that allowed newsgroup postings and served as an early online community centre. However, it also made it easier for spam and unverified rumours to proliferate, hinting at future problems with misinformation.

By enabling users to post messages, exchange files, and participate in conversations using dial-up connections, bulletin board systems (BBS), which were widely used in the 1990s, were forerunners of modern social media websites. However, the first identifiable social networking site, Six Degrees, launched in 1997, enabling users construct profiles, connect with friends, and exchange messages. This time also featured a boom in blogging services, especially Blogger (1999) and LiveJournal (1999), which let users to express their thoughts and converse via comments.

Entering the 2000s, social media struck important milestones with Friendster's 2002 launch, which promoted profile-based networking, followed by LinkedIn in 2003 for professional connections and MySpace in 2003, which appealed to teens and artists with configurable pages and music integration. Facebook, launched by Mark Zuckerberg in 2004, altered the game by reaching beyond college campuses to a worldwide audience, adding features like the News Feed and becoming a key influence in everyday communication.

Mid-decade breakthroughs were YouTube in 2005 for video sharing and Twitter in 2006 for short messages, both revolutionizing the way users accessed and disseminated material. The 2007 introduction of the iPhone pushed this further by rendering social networking portable and always accessible, fuelling mass adoption. The 2010s prioritized visual and fleeting content, such as Instagram (2010) for photo sharing, Snapchat (2011) for disappearing messages, and Pinterest (2011) for concept curation through pins.

Live streaming started with Periscope in 2015 and Facebook Live in 2016, enabling quick broadcasts and more interaction. In the latter part of the decade, TikTok (2016, global in 2018) revolutionized entertainment in terms of algorithmic short-form videos, capturing younger viewers, while Instagram TV (2018) extended the platform into longer content to meet changing expectations.

When Clubhouse came out in 2020 with its audio focus, Truth Social appeared in 2022 with a political slant, Elon Musk changed Twitter to X in 2023, and Meta launched Threads that same year with new approaches feeds and ways to chat. These announcements all show big changes in social media. It feels like a social media revolution, offering us totally new ways to connect around the world, get involved in communities, and shape what's influence online culture on the internet. Social media is growing fast. It started with little forums for students and teachers; now, platforms that serve countless different purposes.

### **1.3.2 Social media as a news source**

Globally, social media has replaced traditional news sources like TV and newspapers, changing how people obtain news. A 2024 analysis from Reuters Institute claims about 49% of people in India turn to social media for news. Even though it's popular every day, many don't trust it much. A 2018 study indicated that fewer than 35% of Europeans believe in social media as a news source. But in other Eastern European nations, more than 50% still use it for updates. This mix-up stems from its easy access and options for users to participate in, exchange tales, and make their own contributions. Social media has made news sharing fairer, providing power to common people and adding more opinions. Yet, it also spreads false information and over-the-top stories, harming trust and proper reporting guidelines.

Because they have less money and fewer viewers, traditional media now use social media to share content and communicate to people. This balance is very important to their online goals, but they continue to desire to be reliable. The connection between social media and traditional media is always changing, which creates new ways to reach people and means that we have to keep making changes to stay honest in the rapid-changing digital world.

### **1.3.3 Numbers of Social Media users in India**

Internet usage in India has grown dramatically over the last ten years, with a lot more people coming online. India is now one of the biggest digital markets in the world, with hundreds of millions of people using it. At first, this uprising was pretty simple and just involved basic activities like sending emails. Social networking sites run by big companies like Meta and X are very important for millions of people who use them every day in today's complicated digital world. Orkut, a social network owned by Google, was once the most popular website in India. When it shut down in 2014, a lot of people quickly moved to Facebook. By 2022, India had become the country with the most Facebook users in the world. There were no restrictions on

how Indians could use Meta's other platforms. India has experienced significant growth in digital technology adoption as internet access has become more affordable and widespread. India's digital landscape has expanded dramatically, with 751.5 million internet users—representing 52.4% of the population—as of January 2024 (Kemp, 2024). Social media has also gained substantial traction, reaching 462 million active users, or 32.2% of the population. Indians spend an average of 2 hours and 52 minutes daily on social media platforms, primarily accessing them through smartphones (Meltwater, 2025). This widespread adoption of social networking apps reflects the country's deep-rooted emphasis on community and connection. Video consumption, particularly on YouTube, has emerged as another significant driver of this digital growth. The short-form video business has also grown a lot, especially during the COVID-19 lockdown. In 2020, TikTok and other Chinese apps were banned, but both local and foreign companies are still growing in the area. As of early 2024, India had 1.12 billion mobile connections, 462 million people who used social media, and 751.5 million people who used the internet. This shows how much social media and online platforms have changed the way people live their lives. The internet boom has also changed advertising and marketing. Social media and influencer marketing are now very important in India.

#### **1.3.4. Historical Context and Evolution**

The story of India's internet over the past ten years has been nothing short of amazing. The numbers tell part of the story. For example, between October 2013 and September 2014, 43 million new users came online, bringing the total to 254 million. Most of them accessed the internet through their phones (IAMAI, 2014). In 2022, there will be 759 million active users, almost evenly split between rural areas (399 million) and cities (360 million) (IAMAI & Kantar, 2023). But here's what really stands out: it's not just urban tech-savvy people anymore. Villages that barely had electricity a generation ago now have kids scrolling through apps.

The 2024 Annual Status of Education Report brought some eye-opening findings—89% of children now own some kind of digital device, and 92% actually know how to use them properly. Think about that scenario for a second. This isn't just about having gadgets; it's fundamentally changing how kids learn, how families communicate, and how opportunities open up. India's now firmly the world's second-largest internet market, and there's no sign of that slowing down.

This digital boom is doing more than just connecting people—it's reshaping the entire economy. The Reserve Bank of India tracked how the digital economy's contribution to GVA jumped from 8.5% in 2019 to 12.5% by 2023. That's massive growth in just four years. And really it makes sense when you look at what's happening on the ground. Smartphones starting price that used to cost a month's salary now go for a fraction of that. Data plans that were once prohibitively expensive have become affordable. The government's been pushing initiatives like Digital India pretty aggressively. All these factors are coming together.

But if we consider in real situation, it hasn't been a smooth ride. India's diversity, while being one of its greatest strengths, creates unique challenges. We're talking about a country with hundreds of languages, vastly different cultural contexts across regions, and huge gaps in literacy and education levels. Creating digital content that works for someone in metropolitan Mumbai and also resonates with someone in a remote Bankura district village? That's genuinely difficult. Yet despite these very real obstacles, the potential is staggering—for entrepreneurs building startups, for traditional businesses going digital, for students accessing educational resources, for farmers checking market prices. What's happening goes way beyond people spending more time on their phones. We're watching a fundamental transformation in how this country operates. The way people work is changing—remote jobs are becoming possible for people who'd never have had those opportunities before. Education is evolving as online

learning supplements or even replaces traditional classrooms in some areas. Social connections are forming in new ways, bridging distances that geography once made impossible.

This digital wave is creating innovation in places you wouldn't expect. Small-town entrepreneurs are finding national markets. Rural artisans are connecting directly with urban buyers. Students in tier-3 cities are accessing the same resources as those in IITs. The doors that were firmly closed for previous generations are creaking open.

Here's the thing though—and this is crucial, for this to truly work, for this digital revolution to deliver on its promise, it can't just be a metro-city phenomenon. The real test is whether a farmer in rural West Bengal gets as much benefit from this transformation as a software engineer in Bangalore. Can a student in a government school in Madhya Pradesh access the same quality educational content as someone in an expensive private school in Delhi? That's where the rubber meets the road. The technology is here and the infrastructure is expanding. The question now is: will we use it to genuinely lift everyone up, or will it just widen the gaps that already exist? That's what'll determine whether this is truly transformational or just another advantage for those who already have advantages.

### **1.3.5. Effect of Accessible Data**

From last couple of years, the affordability of data plans has been a major factor in the growth of social media in India. As data costs plummeted, more Indians acquired access to the internet, switching to a digital lifestyle mostly through smartphones. This transformation began to gain momentum around the mid-2010s when telecom companies like Reliance Jio introduced ultra-affordable data packages, sparking a digital revolution. Villages that once relied solely on word of mouth or occasional radio broadcasts now buzz with activity as residents connect online, sharing family updates or exploring new opportunities. Accessible data has not only transformed

social interactions but also redefined economic opportunities, making marketing and e-commerce thrive in ways unimaginable a decade ago.

### **1.3.6. Using videos and social media**

If we look at social media today, it's hard to miss how video has taken over. Indians spend roughly two and a half hours daily scrolling through social platforms, and a huge chunk of that time goes to watching videos. What started with simple photo sharing has evolved into something much bigger. Take Facebook and Instagram, for instance. These platforms have made video posting incredibly accessible—literally anyone with a smartphone can share their clips. Major sporting events have capitalized on this trend brilliantly. The Indian Super League and IPL haven't just entertained millions; they've generated billions of YouTube views through highlights and commentary alone.

Then there's T-Series, the Indian music label that rode YouTube's wave to become the world's most-subscribed channel. That's not a small achievement. When COVID-19 forced everyone indoors, short-form video apps exploded in popularity, turning even casual users into regular content creators and consumers.

### **1.3.7. Shift in advertising and influencer marketing**

The rise in internet access has drastically changed how Indian businesses sell themselves. Brands don't simply buy space on billboards anymore; they also work with social media celebrities that have a lot of followers. Because of this change, digital platforms are now necessary for advertising initiatives. There is now a full-fledged influencer economy that has changed the way traditional marketing works. But here's what's truly interesting: it's not only business titans benefiting. Ordinary individuals are starting companies through Facebook and Instagram, selling everything imaginable—handcrafted jewellery, homemade pickles, vintage

apparel. Social commerce has democratized entrepreneurship in ways we couldn't have anticipated a decade ago.

## **1.4 Fake news**

The dissemination of inaccurate or deceptive information presented as real news that may be intentionally or unintentionally is known as fake news. Due to the ease with which unverified content may circulate on digital platforms and social media, this trend is getting worse. Recently fake news has greatly impacted public opinion and behaviour, often leading to widespread disinformation, divisiveness, and even societal unrest. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, misleading news about the virus and vaccines led to confusion and hesitation, impeding public health efforts. False information has also tainted international political events, affecting elections and undermining confidence in traditional institutions and media. Due to its nature of rapid spread and in minimum time it created challenge on traditional media. Concern over the truthfulness and trustworthiness of news has increased to levels previously unheard of amid the vast amount of digital content that is readily available. The Collins English Dictionary defines fake news as false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news reporting. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) define fake news as “intentionally and verifiably false” news articles. Whereas , Lazer et al. (2018) narrowly define fake news as fabricated news. Given the increasing worry about disinformation, it is essential to examine the historical origins of fake news.

### **1.4.1 Brief history of fake news**

Similar to today's problems in Birbhum, where fake reports cause turmoil, misleading stories have been used to influence attitudes or acquire power in the course of social dynamics and have become more powerful with new means of dissemination. Before the invention of printing, rumours were disseminated orally in the past. Examples include the 6th-century false accusations against monarchs and the 17th-century witch hunts that resulted in fatalities. Once printing started in the 15th century, it became easier to print exaggerated tales or political attacks, such as sensational pamphlets in Europe. By the 19th and 20th centuries, newspapers pushed "yellow journalism" with over-the-top headlines to sell copies, and wars saw governments using propaganda to boost support or demonize foes. Now, in the online world, false informations travels instantly on social sites, confusing people and harming trust, as seen in recent Indian events where it worsens divisions among young users like college students.

### **1.4.2 The threat of fake news in India**

In India, the rise of fake news has become a severe worry, exacerbated by the widespread use of mobile phones and the fast expansion of social media. According to DataReportal with about 802 million internet user and about 491 million social media users as on January 2025, India has become a fertile field for disinformation. Fake news in India has the capacity to instigate social unrest, provoke violence, and impact elections. A major occurrence occurred in Maharashtra in 2018, where misinformation disseminated over social media led to the lynching of five individuals. Political manipulation through false news is similarly frightening, with propaganda and misinformation being used to affect public opinion and election outcomes. During elections, political parties and their supporters frequently utilise fake news to affect electoral results, weakening the democratic process. The influence of fake news extends to public health, as witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Misinformation about the

infection and treatments created uncertainty and terror, while incorrect information about vaccines fuelled hesitation, impeding immunisation efforts. In response, the Indian government developed "Fact Check India" in 2018, managed by the Press Information Bureau, to fight incorrect information. Social media companies have also added measures like message forwarding limits and fact-checking tools to curb the spread of fake news. Several high-profile examples highlight the prevalent nature of fake news in India. In July 2021, the Pegasus spyware controversy erroneously claimed that ordinary residents were being spied on, sparking great panic. During the COVID-19 epidemic, the Tablighi Jamaat controversy in March 2020 saw misleading stories stating that the religious group purposefully transmitted the virus, resulting to increasing stigmatization and discrimination. The Delhi riots in February 2020 were accompanied by deceptive recordings allegedly portraying local violence, which were actually from different areas of the world, further fanning communal tensions. The violence at Jawaharlal Nehru University in January 2020 was also tainted by false narratives blaming various parties and alleging government complicity.

In case of misinformation, it is not always purposeful; occasionally, inaccurate information is provided unwittingly. However, when misleading information is spread purposely to mislead, it is disinformation. Historically, fake news existed long before the internet, typically promoted by publishers with vested interests. Today, fake news is designed to deceive, making it impossible for individuals to discriminate between fact and fiction. The term "infodemic" has been invented to characterise the excessive volume of COVID-19 material flowing on social media, which has produced serious societal difficulties. Fact-checking has become vital in the fight against fake news. Organizations like Alt News and BOOM play a key role in dispelling erroneous claims and educating the public. Despite social media firms' efforts to counteract disinformation, more rigorous actions are needed to safeguard the public from its damaging

impacts. Increasing media literacy is crucial to help folks critically analyse information and regain trust in trustworthy news sources.

The joint effort of the public, social media platforms, fact-checking organizations, and the government is needed to effectively battle fake news. This collaboration may create awareness, encourage ethical communication, and cultivate a more informed and watchful society. With tougher regulation, greater content control, and extensive media literacy initiatives, India may make considerable strides in solving the false news epidemic.

### **1.4.3 Algorithmic amplification of fake news**

To understand why fake news is such a persistent problem, you need to look at how social media algorithms actually work. These systems weren't designed with malicious intent, but they've created an environment where misinformation thrives almost by accident. Here's the core issue: social media companies make money through advertising, which means they need you glued to your screen as long as possible. Their algorithms have gotten incredibly good at this—they've learned to push content that triggers strong emotions, encourages shares, and starts debates. Sound familiar? Those are exactly the qualities that make fake news so contagious. It's a troubling paradox. What maximizes user engagement often conflicts directly with what's best for society. The platform architecture itself doesn't just allow misinformation to exist; it actively amplifies it. Content that outrages or sensationalizes gets boosted because it keeps people clicking, commenting, and sharing—even when it's completely false. The algorithms can't really distinguish between engagement driven by truth and engagement driven by outrage or curiosity about something sensational.

As Vosoughi et al. (2018) demonstrated in their landmark study analysing 126,000 stories shared by 3 million people on Twitter, false news spreads significantly faster, farther, and deeper than accurate information across all categories of content. Most strikingly, false political

news reached 1,500 people six times faster than true news, and falsehoods were 70% more likely to be retweeted than accurate information.

The mechanism behind this accelerated spread isn't difficult to understand. When an individual scrolls with social media, you've possibly noticed that the most absurd stories tend to circulate fastest. There is a reason for that. Misleading content often grabs our attention because it presents something shocking or plays on our emotions, while real journalism usually deals with messy, complicated situations that don't make for easy sharing. Social media platforms pay attention to what gets people clicking, commenting, and sharing—they see all that activity as proof that users want more of it. The problem? These systems don't actually check whether the information is true. So we end up in this strange situation where dubious claims get amplified over serious reporting, purely because they generate more buzz (Bakshy et al., 2015). YouTube's recommendation engine is especially troubling in this regard. Researchers have found that autoplay—which accounts for the majority of viewing time on the platform—has a tendency to push people toward increasingly extreme versions of whatever they're interested in (O'Callaghan et al., 2015). You might start your viewing session with some standard political commentary, but after letting the algorithm choose what plays next a few times, you could find yourself watching conspiracy videos or fringe content. Why does this happen? The system interprets your continued viewing as approval, so it keeps serving up whatever holds your attention longest, without considering whether that content is accurate or healthy for public discourse.

Facebook's feed operates on similar principles, just with different mechanics behind the scenes. The company uses an enormous number of signals to decide what you see, but the interactions that really matter are the ones showing deep engagement—particularly when people comment or share something (Eslami et al., 2015). Content that starts arguments or triggers strong

feelings rises to the top, while thoughtful pieces presenting different angles often get buried. What we are left with is a structure where virality surpasses accuracy—the stuff everyone sees isn't necessarily true, it's just emotionally charged enough to make people react. The situation becomes even more complex when we consider filter bubbles and echo chambers—phenomena where algorithms increasingly show users content that aligns with their existing beliefs and preferences. Pariser (2011) coined the term "filter bubble" to describe how personalization algorithms create unique information universes for each user, potentially limiting exposure to diverse perspectives. While subsequent research has shown that filter bubbles may be less absolute than initially feared—users do encounter some ideologically diverse content—the overall effect still tends toward confirmation rather than challenge of existing beliefs (Bakshy et al., 2015).

For college students in Birbhum District, these algorithmic dynamics have particular relevance. When students turn to Facebook and YouTube as primary news sources, as this study documents, they're not accessing neutral information streams but algorithmically curated feeds designed to maximize engagement rather than inform. The platforms' business models create inherent conflicts between user engagement and information quality—conflicts that students, without understanding these underlying mechanisms, have little chance of navigating successfully.

The implications extend beyond individual susceptibility to false information. When algorithms amplify fake news at scale, they can influence public discourse, political processes, and social cohesion. During critical events—elections, public health crises, communal tensions—algorithmic amplification can turn localized false narratives into widespread beliefs with real-world consequences. The 2022 Birbhum violence, where misleading narratives

spread rapidly through social media, exemplifies how algorithmic amplification can transform online misinformation into offline harm.

Addressing these challenges requires moving beyond individual media literacy to understanding systemic issues in how information flows through digital platforms. Students need to recognize that their social media feeds aren't objective windows onto reality but carefully constructed environments shaped by algorithms with specific goals. This understanding forms a crucial foundation for developing critical information literacy skills in the context of algorithmically mediated information environments.

#### **1.4.4 Fake News Typology**

Tandoc, Lim, and Ling published a really useful paper in 2018 where they tried to make sense of all the different kinds of false information out there. They came up with six categories based on two simple questions: How much of this is actually true? And was it created to deliberately mislead people? This classification system helps quite a bit when you're trying to understand what students are actually encountering on their feeds.

##### **1.4.4.1 News Satire**

Satire is an interesting case because it's technically "fake news" but everyone's supposed to know that. Think of websites like The Onion or shows like The Daily Show—they make up stories to make a point or get a laugh, and their whole brand is built on people understanding it's not real (Tandoc et al., 2018). The problem starts when this content escapes its original context. Here's what happens, someone shares just the headline on WhatsApp or X without any indication it came from a satirical source. Now you've got students who might see that headline in isolation and take it at face value. They're not visiting The Onion's website where it's obvious what they're reading. They're seeing a screenshot or a forward, completely divorced from the

cues that would tell them it's satire. This is especially common with text-based shares where there's no visual branding to give it away.

#### **1.4.4.2 News Parody**

Parody goes beyond what we see with satire. Sure, both aim to entertain rather than mislead, but here's where parody gets tricky—it mimics legitimate news sources way more convincingly. According to Tandoc and his colleagues (2018), parody pieces typically grab actual events and then twist them, throwing in made-up details while keeping that straight-faced, serious presentation you'd expect from real journalism.

For students, this presents a genuine challenge. Think about it: when parody content mirrors authentic news so precisely—matching the typography, copying the page structure, even creating fake logos that could pass as the real deal at first glance—spotting the fakery becomes exponentially harder. Students can't just take a quick look and trust their instincts about whether something seems "real" or not. Instead, they'd need to dig into the actual source, and let's be honest, most simply don't take that extra step. The imitation can be so well-executed that you'd sail right past it without noticing anything amiss, unless you're deliberately hunting for telltale signs of parody.

#### **1.4.4.3 Fabrication**

Fabrication refers completely false information made with the clear goal of deceiving people. This category includes completely fabricated stories, false claims, and fake incidents that are presented as real news (Tandoc et al., 2018). Fake news can sometimes spread quickly on social media because it often has interesting or emotionally charged content that makes people feel strongly and want to share it.

#### **1.4.4.4 Manipulation**

Manipulation means taking genuine information and changing it so that it means something else or has a different effect. This could mean changing quotes on intent, showing pictures out of context, or showing statistics in ways that are not true (Tandoc et al., 2018). Students find it challenging to spot manipulation because it uses parts of the truth that can make the whole thing seem believable.

#### **1.4.4.5 Propaganda**

Propaganda uses a lot of different methods to promote certain political or ideological beliefs, usually by picking and spreading real facts in a biased way. Propaganda may contain accurate information, but it presents a deliberately distorted viewpoint intended to influence public opinion (Tandoc et al., 2018). Students must acquire skills in identifying bias and understanding how accurate information can be employed to advance incorrect findings.

#### **1.4.4.6 Advertising**

"Native advertising" or "sponsored content" is a type of advertising that looks like news stories. It is meant to look like real news stories. This type of false news may not contain false facts, but it does trick people into thinking it is for commercial purposes (Tandoc et al., 2018). Students must learn how to recognise the financial objectives behind news stories that seem to be unbiased.

#### **1.4.4.7 Application to Social Media Contexts**

It is important for college students to learn how to spot fake news on social media, so we should know what kinds of fake news are out there. Research shows that students often have difficulty

dealing with manipulation and propaganda because these types of information have some factual parts that can pass initial credibility checks (Wineburg & McGrew, 2017). Because social media sites let people share things quickly, sometimes important information gets lost as it travels through networks. Satirical content can be taken seriously, altered images can be separated from factual information, and propaganda can be presented as unbiased reporting (Tandoc et al., 2018). Students must formulate strategies for authenticating the original context and comprehend the intent of content encountered on social media platforms.

### **1.5 Information Literacy**

A person who is information literate is more likely to be an engaged member of society and practice good citizenship. Finding, accessing, interpreting, analysing, managing, creating, discussing, preserving, and sharing information are just a few of the activities that involve information literacy, which encompasses a variety of skills and talents. It goes beyond these responsibilities to include the use of skills, qualities, and self-assurance required for efficient information use and analysis. This calls for awareness, critical thinking, and an understanding of the moral and political issues surrounding the use of information. The American Library Association (ALA) officially defined the term in 1989, stating that an information-literate individual should recognize when information is needed and possess the ability to locate, evaluate, and use the needed information effectively (ALA, 1989)..

Strong information literacy skills are essential for problem-solving, effective communication, and making well-informed choices in the digital age we live in, when information is widely accessible online. These skills are useful in daily life and are not limited to academic or professional settings. To improve information literacy abilities, one must learn how to search

for information effectively, critically evaluate sources, and properly reference them. It is also crucial to stay up-to-date with technology changes and adapt to new information tools and resources. Information literacy is a vital ability for lifelong learning, enabling individuals to traverse complicated information environments with confidence and competence.

### **1.5.1 Why is information literacy important?**

We must sort through the vast amounts of information that are available to us in today's culture in order to determine what is factual and helpful to become a good citizen.

Following justifies the significance of information literacy:

- It may be difficult to determine whether information is trustworthy and accurate when there is so much of it accessible online. Critical thinking skills, which are essential for making well-informed choices, are part of information literacy, which helps people assess sources and assess the reliability of the information they come across.
- Critical components of information literacy include the ability to assess information, analyse data, and consider many points of view.
- Information literacy is essential in today's age of fake news to prevent people from falling for misleading information.
- Avoiding disinformation requires the ability to recognize bias, spot propaganda, and verify facts.
- Information literacy is an essential skill for many careers. In the job, having the ability to effectively acquire and utilize information may make the difference between success and failure.
- People must keep improving their information literacy abilities as new information becomes accessible and technology advances. Information literacy is an essential part of lifelong learning, which is essential for personal development.

### **1.5.2 Information literacy frameworks in the fake news context**

Many institutions around the world have come together to create standards and frameworks that make people better at understanding information. This part will discuss about some of the widely accepted information literacy frameworks that will help people to think critically specially when facing misleading information online.

#### **1.5.2.1 ACRL Framework for Information Literacy**

Students in the Birbhum area may find this framework useful in using their critical thinking skills to identify any bogus news that circulates on social media. For instance, a student in the Birbhum area can discover information about a program that was scheduled for tomorrow being cancelled for whatever reason on the social media site "police help." After that, students may check the authority or double-check by visiting the Birbhum Police or District official websites. For Birbhum students who are exposed to local disinformation, ACRL's method for navigating complex information environments is essential for identifying lies on social media (Association of College & Research Libraries, 2015). Key concepts include understanding authority as produced by context, not fixed; seeing info output as ranging by kind, from pro journalism to user postings; recognizing info's economic importance, including incentives for fakes; and treating research as continuous issues. These aid in critically examining viral material, particularly in remote locations with little resources.

#### **1.5.2.2 SCONUL Seven Pillars Model**

When it is observe at how students can actually tackle fake news in their daily lives, the SCONUL Seven Pillars Model gives us something concrete to work with. If it can be illustrate with a real scenario that's common in our region. Say a student sees posts on their Facebook or

WhatsApp claiming there's been some kind of riot or communal violence in a nearby area. The post might be worded in a way that clearly favours one particular narrative. What should they do? The SCONUL framework (SCONUL Working Group on Information Literacy, 2011) suggests they start by actually reading the full story—not just the sensational headline that's being shared around. Then comes the important bit: they need to step outside the social media bubble. This means taking the key terms from what they've read and doing proper searches. Check what the local administration is saying. Look at multiple news outlets. See if government sources have issued any statements.

For young people in India who often find themselves trapped in echo chambers—where everyone in their feed seems to agree with each other—this kind of systematic approach helps build better habits over time. The model breaks this down into stages: working out what information you actually need, figuring out where reliable information might exist, searching in ways that don't just rely on what the algorithm shows you, and getting back to primary sources wherever possible. Students in Birbhum colleges, for instance, need these skills when rumours about communal tensions start circulating. They have to actively look for different viewpoints, not just accept what fits their existing beliefs.

### **1.5.2.3 UNESCO Media and Information Literacy Framework**

UNESCO's framework tackles this from a slightly different angle—it's really about making people stop and think before they hit that share button. Here's how it might play out: suppose someone receives a message that plays on cultural tensions (and we know how sensitive these issues can be in our context). Before forwarding it to their contacts, someone trained in this framework would ask themselves some critical questions.

First, who's behind this message? Is there any chance this has been sponsored by a political group? Second, does this information check out when you look at credible sources? And third—and this is often overlooked—is sharing this the right thing to do, even if parts of it might be true? UNESCO developed these guidelines (UNESCO, 2013) to work across different countries and contexts, which matters in India where you're dealing with multiple languages, diverse cultural norms, and complex political situations all at once.

What makes this framework particularly useful is that it doesn't just focus on spotting lies. It gets people thinking about trust, about the ethics of spreading information, and about how media outlets themselves operate and what biases they might carry. In districts like Birbhum where communities live side by side and relationships can be delicate, understanding how false information gets weaponized to exploit cultural divisions becomes crucial. The framework aims to create not just informed individuals but responsible ones.

## **1.6 Theoretical Framework Underpinning the Study**

To understand how college students interact with fake news on social media, this study draws upon three complementary theoretical perspectives that together explain the cognitive, informational, and social dimensions of fake news consumption. These frameworks—Dual process theory, Information processing theory, and Social cognitive theory—provide the conceptual foundation for interpreting student behaviours and designing effective interventions.

### **1.6.1 Dual Process Theory**

At the cognitive level, this research draws upon Kahneman's (2011) Dual Process Theory, which distinguishes between System 1 (fast, intuitive, emotional) and System 2 (slow,

deliberate, logical) thinking. In the context of social media information consumption, students predominantly operate in System 1 mode due to the rapid-scrolling nature of platforms and the sheer volume of content encountered daily. This automatic processing makes them particularly vulnerable to fake news that leverages emotional triggers, sensational headlines, or confirmation of existing beliefs (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). The theory explains why students in this study reported high confidence levels yet demonstrated poor actual performance as System 1 processing creates an illusion of understanding without engaging critical analysis. The framework suggests that effective interventions must specifically activate System 2 thinking through structured prompts and deliberate verification protocols, particularly on platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp where emotional content dominates.

### **1.6.2 Information Processing Theory**

Understanding how students handle information in today's digital landscape requires examining the cognitive mechanisms at play. Atkinson and Shiffrin's work in 1968, later expanded by Miller in 2003, established that human cognitive capacity operates within definite boundaries. The sheer volume of content flowing through social media platforms creates a fundamental cognitive limitation: our brains cannot give equal attention to everything we encounter (Miller, 2003). For the Birbhum student population, this limitation has concrete dimensions. Looking at the Birbhum student population, this limitation takes on concrete dimensions. When nearly 48% of students report spending one to three hours each day scrolling through social media feeds, they're encountering hundreds, perhaps thousands, of discrete pieces of information. Each post, each headline, each shared article represents a potential decision point—should I trust this? Does this warrant further investigation? Is this source reliable? If students attempted to rigorously evaluate every single item, they would accomplish little else. The cognitive cost would be prohibitive.

Instead, what emerges is something more practical, if less thorough: pattern-based decision making. Students learn to trust certain indicators quickly. A post from someone they know personally receives less scrutiny than one from a stranger. Information confirming what they already believe about the world feels intuitively correct and passes through with minimal examination. Content that challenges existing views triggers deeper scepticism. These mental shortcuts didn't develop because students are lazy or uncritical—they developed because they're necessary survival mechanisms in an environment of information abundance.

The study's most troubling finding relates directly to this processing behaviour. When asked about fact-checking resources, not one student among the 1,178 surveyed reported regular use of these tools. Zero. This wasn't due to unfamiliarity with such resources existing—it reflects something deeper about how verification fits (or doesn't fit) into established cognitive routines. Adding a fact-checking step requires conscious effort, takes additional time, and introduces friction into what has become an automatic scrolling-and-absorbing behaviour. Under cognitive load, facing time pressures, managing multiple information streams simultaneously, that extra verification step simply gets skipped.

### **1.6.3 Social Cognitive Theory**

While cognitive limitations explain individual behaviour, they don't fully account for how misinformation moves through communities. This is where Bandura's 1986 framework becomes invaluable. His Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes something that purely cognitive approaches miss: we learn tremendously from watching others, and our behaviours exist within constantly shifting webs of social influence. Consider what the data revealed about information sharing. More than 35% of students admitted to sharing content they hadn't verified. That's a substantial proportion, but the number alone doesn't tell us why. Bandura's framework suggests

we look at the social context. Students aren't making these decisions in isolation—they're embedded in networks where they constantly observe how others behave.

WhatsApp dominates the communication landscape for these students in ways that deserve emphasis. Every single student uses it. More than two in five identify it as their primary platform. Unlike public social media where content comes from diverse, often unknown sources, WhatsApp messages typically arrive from people students know personally—family members, close friends, classmates. When your mother forwards something, when your best friend shares an article in your group chat, the social dynamics shift entirely. These aren't random internet strangers; these are trusted relationships. The implication becomes clear: when students observe their trusted contacts sharing content freely, without apparent verification, that behaviour gets encoded as normal. Acceptable. Expected, even. One person's unverified share becomes another person's model for how to behave. The content cascades through these closed networks, picking up implicit endorsements at each step. "If my friend shared it, it must be okay" becomes the operating assumption.

Gender patterns in the data raise additional questions. Male students shared unverified content at higher rates—230 instances compared to 186 among female students. Why might this be? Bandura's concept of self-efficacy offers one possible explanation. Self-efficacy refers to how capable people believe themselves to be at particular tasks. If male students have internalized greater confidence in their ability to judge information quality (whether justified or not), they might share more readily. Alternatively, social expectations about authority and expertise might play a role—perhaps male students face different social pressures regarding appearing informed or authoritative. These are interpretations rather than certainties, but the pattern itself warrants attention. What students don't do proves as revealing as what they do. When encountering content, they suspect is false, more than three-quarters choose passivity—they

ignore it rather than reporting it or challenging it. Bandura would recognize this as reflecting low collective efficacy: students don't believe their individual actions matter. One person reporting fake news feels futile when that content continues circulating among dozens or hundreds of others. This belief, regardless of its accuracy, shapes behaviour. Fake news continues spreading partly because those who recognize it feel powerless to stop it.

#### **1.6.4 Theoretical Integration**

Each of these frameworks illuminates different aspects of what might initially appear to be a single problem. However, the situation Birbhum students face isn't actually a single problem—it's several interlocking problems that reinforce each other in ways that make simple solutions inadequate. Dual Process Theory explains something fundamental about human thinking: we rely on quick, instinctive judgments because we have to. Stopping to carefully analyse every piece of information would paralyze us. Information Processing Theory adds another layer—our cognitive capacity has real limits. When students face endless social media feeds, they develop shortcuts to cope. Those shortcuts usually work, but sometimes they fail spectacularly. Social Cognitive Theory then shows how these individual weaknesses spread. Students watch their friends share content without verification, that behaviour becomes normal, and suddenly everyone's doing it. What's frustrating is how these insights reveal that simple solutions won't work. Suppose we teach students to "think more carefully" about what they read. That acknowledges the fast versus slow thinking problem, but it ignores cognitive overload. Students are already drowning in content. Adding complex verification steps on top of everything else? They'll try it briefly, then revert to old habits because it's exhausting.

Or maybe we build sophisticated fact-checking tools. That addresses cognitive constraints, but what if everyone in a student's network still shares stuff carelessly? Worse, what if that careless

sharing gets rewarded with likes and engagement? The social pressure to share quickly like everyone else will probably override whatever individual improvements we've made. It seems that students often know better verification tools are out there, but if their friends aren't using them, they won't bother either. Getting real change requires tackling this from several directions at once. Students need small interruptions when they are scrolling social media, just enough to make them pause and think, but not so irritating that they'll look for ways around it. These little speed bumps help break the automatic, unthinking mode they fall into while browsing. At the same time, verification needs to feel natural and easy, something that fits right into what they're already doing rather than adding extra steps to their routine. The toughest challenge, though, is changing what feels normal among their peers. Right now, sharing things quickly without much thought is just what everyone does and expects. Nobody asks "did you check this?" Changing that means making verification visible, rewarding thoroughness, maybe even creating real consequences for spreading misleading information. These frameworks have shaped my research in two ways. First, they help me understand why these patterns exist, not just what they are. Students aren't thoughtless—they're adapting rationally to difficult conditions. Second, these theories guide my recommendations. I'm not offering generic advice like "improve media literacy." I'm targeting specific mechanisms: What activates careful thinking? What reduces verification burden? How do we reshape network norms? The goal isn't surface behaviour change. It's addressing the deeper cognitive structures, processing constraints, and social forces that create these patterns in the first place.

## **1.7 Need and importance of the present study**

In today's society, the spread of misleading information on social media has become a major concern. This information can quickly and readily reach a large audience because to the expansion of social media platforms and the ease with which information can be shared, sometimes leading to serious damage. The study of "Fake News on social media and its impact on college students" is important for several reasons:

- It is very important to understand the ways in which fake news spreads on social media platforms. By identifying the features that lead to the spread of false information, researchers can design measures to combat it.
- Fake news can disseminate disinformation about significant matters, such as elections or public health crises, leading to a loss of trust in institutions and even compromising people's health and safety. By examining the impact of fake news, academics can better understand its implications and devise effective measures to limit its spread.
- Social media corporations have a responsibility to counteract fake news. By conducting research on fake news on social media, organisations can build better algorithms to recognise and delete suspicious material and give consumers with tools to identify and report fake news.
- By raising awareness of the impact of fake news on social media, this study can help the general public become more aware of the issue. This, in turn, can help reduce the spread of fake news and improve the overall quality of news on social media.
- The results of this study can inform policy-making decisions related to fake news on social media. Governments can use the findings to develop policies and regulations that help combat the spread of fake news.

Research on fake news on social media is crucial in today's culture. By studying how fake news spreads and its impact, researchers may design effective techniques to combat it, and social media businesses can better fulfil their responsibilities to prevent the spread of incorrect information.

### **1.8 Research gaps and justification for Birbhum focused assessment**

While multiple national-level studies have explored the frequency and themes of false news in India, there is a noteworthy lack of localized or district-specific evaluations, especially in locations like West Bengal. In their extensive investigation of 419 false news incidents from November 2019 to April 2020, for example, Kanozia and Narula (2021) utilized data from the fact-checking website Alt News. They discovered that topics including politics (24.3%), religion (25.1%), and health (27.2%) were commonly interwoven in religiopolitical content. With 87.4% of fake news coming from online media, their findings underscored the role of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and WhatsApp in spreading such content. They also revealed vulnerabilities among internet-illiterate users in underprivileged communities, where digital divides—like limited access to verification tools—heighten susceptibility. The absence of platform-specific frequency data, timings of misinformation modifications, and demographic information about affected users are among the significant research gaps revealed by the study, which limits the application of the conclusions to particular geographical regions. In order to decrease the consequences of crises like the COVID-19 epidemic, Kanozia and Narula's emphasis on religious and political false news underscores the significance of undertaking targeted literacy evaluations in places that are sensitive to communal disinformation, like West Bengal.

This gap is also visible in interventions targeted at improving media literacy, which have generally been urban-centric and focused on younger age groups, leaving higher education settings in rural regions underexplored. An article by The Hindu (2023) outlined a two-month media literacy program in Kolkata, hosted by Alt News and Vikramshila Education Resource Society, instructing roughly 30 students aged 12-14 at the Nabadisha Community Centre. The program, which included fact-checking activities (e.g., validating assertions about currency notes and vaccination incentives using official sources like the Reserve Bank of India website) and conversations on media biases, exhibited better critical thinking abilities via a student-led display. Co-founder Pratik Sinha underlined the program's concentration on formative ages before widespread smartphone usage, with hopes to grow it via government incorporation into school curriculum. While this highlights successful urban interventions in West Bengal, the article implies a need for broader adaptation, as pre-pilot efforts extended to schools in Kolkata and adjoining districts but did not address rural areas, where socioeconomic disparities and limited digital resources could amplify misinformation risks.

The present study addresses these gaps by conducting a district-level assessment in Birbhum, a region with a documented history of communal misinformation, including misleading narratives surrounding the 2022 violence that resulted in eight deaths and were rapidly disseminated on social media despite fact-checker debunking. By employing surveys and interviews to evaluate college students' information literacy skills—such as source evaluation and fact-checking—in the context of fake news consumption, this research fills the void in localized empirical data post-2022 events. In order to support scalable interventions designed for college-level audiences in susceptible regions, it builds on urban models such as the Kolkata program (The Hindu, 2023) and applies national insights from studies like Kanozia and Narula (2021) to a rural West Bengal setting. It extends national lessons from studies like Kanozia and Narula (2021) to a rural West Bengal setting, while building on urban models like the Kolkata

program (The Hindu, 2023), to justify scalable interventions suited for college-level audiences in susceptible regions. This concentrated approach not only enriches comprehension of regional dynamics but also adds to policy suggestions for media literacy programs in higher education, building resistance against misinformation in disadvantaged regions.

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**CHAPTER II**

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

**2.1 Introduction**

In the last decade, one of the major concerns in the world has been about fake news, especially with social media platforms. Fake news has been linked to various harmful effects such as inciting communal violence, polarizing political groups, and disseminating false information in general. In this literature study, the evaluation will be based on those studies and publications that explore the subject of fake news or related terms and consequences and literacy skills of people who are encountering these false contents. in India and the world. With this thought the intersection of fake news, social media and information seeking behaviour of students became a crucial area of study as they are the most active members on social media platforms. In the context of fake news, it is very important to have a better understanding of how people find information and what they do with that information. The review will start from those years when fake news was not so popular but some paper discussed how people react when then seek information and their information gathering process.

**2.2 Review of Related Literature**

The related literatures have been divided according to published texts chronologically and those analyses texts has been put into related research themes.

| <b>Phase Number</b> | <b>Theme</b>   |
|---------------------|--|
| Phase I             | <b>Foundational information literacy era</b>         |
| Phase II            | <b>Fake news recognition era</b>                     |
| Phase III           | <b>Educational response &amp; detection focus</b>    |
| Phase IV            | <b>Advanced solutions &amp; behavioural insights</b> |

### **2.2.1 Phase 1: Foundational information literacy era**

The groundwork for understanding how people seek and evaluate information was laid decades before fake news became a household term. Carol Kuhlthau's pioneering research in the 1980s and early 1990s established crucial frameworks for understanding students' information-seeking processes. Her work identified key stages that students experience when searching for information, providing a foundation that continues to inform research in digital literacy and misinformation studies (Kuhlthau, 1988; Kuhlthau, 1991). When internet connectivity grew during the 1990s, researchers began moving their focus away from traditional print materials toward digital and web-based settings. The phenomenon of misleading information, however, extends far beyond our modern era. Fox's (1997) examination of how rumours and news circulated in Elizabethan and Stuart England shows remarkable similarities to today's fake news landscape. Even though most working-class people couldn't read, false claims travelled efficiently through spoken conversations in taverns and marketplaces, through popular songs and stories shared by travellers. Government attempts to silence "seditious speech" proved largely ineffective at stopping political discourse. Fox's (1997) research illustrates how false news has consistently taken advantage of societal divisions and human nature, with each emerging medium, whether the printing press or social media which intensifying rather than originating this issue. This long-term view helps us recognize that although dissemination speed and reach have evolved, the core difficulty of separating trustworthy information from questionable sources persists.

During the 2000s, as the internet became more established, academics turned their attention to examining trustworthiness in digital contexts. Metzger (2007) created foundational approaches for evaluating the reliability of web-based sources, building frameworks and suggesting research pathways that later proved essential for investigating misinformation and content assessment. That same year, Michael Gorman (2007) expressed concerns about Web 2.0 and

its potential threats to information quality through the promotion of user-created content (Chronicle of Higher Education, "Revenge"). Miriam Metzger, Andrew J. Flanagin, and Ryan B. Medders (2010) examined how people make these judgments, applying heuristic and social perspectives to understand online credibility evaluation and further addressing these concerns. They particularly noted the growing challenges users encounter when trying to verify the accuracy of information circulating online—a critical consideration given how fake news proliferates. Responding to these challenges, Mackey and Jacobson (2011) introduced "metaliteracy" as a framework that brings together different literacy types, including traditional IL, to better equip information consumers for navigating the digital landscape. Looking at how online communities function regarding perceived trustworthiness of information, Marchi (2012) discovered through her research that young people typically receive news from trusted adults in their lives or through their social media networks. They also stressed the significance of staying informed about current events.

Meredith Morris, Scott Counts, Asta Roseway, Aaron Hoff, and Julia Schwarz (2012) revealed that examining how individuals assess credibility on microblogging platforms yields valuable insights. They showed how people judge and trust information through the brief, compact exchanges typical of social media platforms—precisely the channels where fake news spreads through seemingly credible sources. G. Hofmann (2012) explored the psychological motivations driving Facebook engagement. The authors identified core reasons why people use Facebook and examined factors contributing to misinformation spread through content sharing that reinforces users' preferred online identities. Nam Nguyen, Guanhua Yan, My T. Thai, and Stephan Eidenbenz (2012) examined strategies for containing false information propagation in online social networks, concentrating on user patterns and network architecture. Witek and Gretano (2012) discussed how Facebook influences students' IL capabilities.

While these pioneering studies emerged before fake news became a central public concern, they laid essential groundwork regarding information trustworthiness, social media dynamics, and digital literacy that proved vital for comprehending and addressing misinformation in later years.

### **2.2.2 Phase 2: Fake news recognition era**

The period from marked a turning point as researchers began recognizing fake news as a distinct phenomenon requiring urgent attention. This phase was characterized by growing awareness of social media's dual role as both a news source and a vector for misinformation.

Anderson and Caumont (2014) documented Facebook's emergence as a major news source, though they noted an important distinction: people who accessed news directly from news websites spent more time engaging with content compared to those who encountered it through social media feeds. This finding hinted at differences in information processing depth that would later prove significant for understanding fake news susceptibility. Building on these observations, Schifferes et al. (2014) raised concerns about information accuracy on social networks, suggesting that unreliable information was eroding trust in traditional media outlets and leading to poor decision-making. Westerman et al. (2014) emphasized the importance of timely updates from trustworthy sources, though what constituted "trustworthy" was becoming increasingly unclear.

Journalists' retweets were examined by Molyneux (2015), who found trends in things like opinion, humour, and brand development. Conroy et al. (2015) claim that because false news is more likely to be deceptive and most people share sensational information, it spreads more quickly than actual news. According to Flaxman et al. (2016), there exist "echo chambers" on social media where users see posts that support their beliefs. However, Lim (2016) has demonstrated that these platforms' algorithms are frequently motivated more by engagement

characteristics than accuracy, which makes them fertile ground for false information. According to Mushtaq and Baig (2016), fake news has generated a great deal of societal turmoil in India, which indicates that it is difficult to establish a universal code of ethics or even specialized training for journalists. Therefore, a combination of technology-driven, juridical, and instructional strategies must be used to combat bogus news on social media. Ayre (2016) listed many roles that librarians and other information professionals should play in promoting media literacy and thwarting this kind of propaganda. Maroun (2017) highlighted the importance librarians play in guiding information consumers.

Shu and associates (2017) indicated that while technology is insufficient, artificial intelligence and natural language processing (NLP) might be utilized to detect and highlight misleading material. Lim (2017) asserts that fake news intentionally aims to deceive people by fusing lies with bias, distortion, or the absence of important information. This implies that spreading misleading information is not the only aspect of fake news; it also involves disseminating information in a way that will mislead or distort the audience's perception of reality. Digitality, as defined by Chayko (2017), is the dissemination of content using digital and mobile technologies to cater to a variety of interests. However, Burkhardt (2017) contrasted this with the earlier, controlled news delivery, which he ascribed to the unregulated nature of the internet. Advertisements on their websites allow the producers of fake news to make enormous sums of money (Frederiksen, 2017). During the 2016 US presidential election campaign, some fake news producers made between \$10,000 and \$30,000 a month from their ads (Sydell, 2016). In the early days of the Trump administration, Thrush and Haberman (2017) noted online defiance by those in positions of authority, highlighting the ferocity of platforms. Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) conducted a groundbreaking analysis on fake news that shed light on how it proliferated on social media, particularly during the 2016 US presidential election. They analyzed the amount of fake news's distribution on social media platforms in a groundbreaking research on

the subject. Underscoring the financial reasons driving spurious material, which is typically created in a way that attracts a large number of hits and thereby generates substantial advertising earnings, they demonstrated that fake tales were more likely to be spread than real ones. Additionally, they put out a clear definition of fake news as items that are purposefully false in order to deceive readers. Scholars have been using this concept extensively ever since to help focus their research on the problem's scope. Their research also revealed the factors—such as political manipulation and financial gain—that encourage the creation and consumption of fake news. McGrew et al. (2017) assert that the danger of civic reasoning in social media contexts is a greater threat than the fake news problem. They emphasized the need for improved instruction on how to critically assess information found online. Additionally, Batchelor (2017) contends that by offering correct information and encouraging media literacy among users who might be able to distinguish between truth and falsehoods, libraries can play a significant role in mitigating the impact of fake news. Furthermore, according to Jacobson (2017), librarians are crucial allies in the fight against the attempt to distinguish fact from fiction or true news from fake, and their proficiency with internet data can always help the general public as they attempt to confirm their claims about anything they see on their screens. However, despite their inability to assess such data online, Koohikamali and Sidorova's (2017) study showed that students' perceptions of the quality of online content influenced their social network sharing behaviour. The term "information disorder" was coined by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) to categorize various forms of deception, distinguishing misinformation from disinformation and malinformation. This approach has shown to be important for comprehending the intricacies of information diffusion. Gu and Yarochkin (2017) described the workings of the fake news machine to show how propagandists utilize the internet to sway public opinion. It emphasized the strategic and technological elements of spreading false information. Farrell (2017) examined the implications of fake news for journalism students in one article, emphasizing the

importance of preparing aspiring journalists to critically evaluate news before publishing it and stressing education as a tool for fostering media literacy in future professionals. The majority of students struggle with analyzing internet information, according to studies by McGrew, Ortega, Breakstone & Wineburg (2017), Robertson & Felicilda-Reynaldo (2015), and Walraven et al. (2009).

However, according to Alvermann (2017), critical inquiry education is essential, particularly when it comes to social media writings, which typically contain inherent biases. According to her, critical inquiry is a method that dispels myths and misrepresentations in social media, where socioeconomic realities that control the flow of information online collide with cultural practices that are politically charged. Comisso (2017) looked at the archiving of fake news in order to make the case for placing the phenomena in context and advancing knowledge of its repercussions. S e (2017) explored the topic of misinformation detection using algorithms and asserted that while algorithms are capable of detecting misleading information, they should be contextually constructed to account for potential biases in their programming languages. The essential interdisciplinary connections between technology, ethics, and communication theory were among the things that made reference to this text. Fake news is nothing new, but it has truly taken off with digital media, as Gray (2017) noted. Misinformation can travel great distances and extremely quickly thanks to this technology. His discussion demonstrates the historical prevalence of false information. Although "fake news" is a word, Jacobson (2017) point out that its popularity presents an excellent opportunity to teach information literacy (IL). They stress the importance of teaching outside of the classroom so that students may make the connection between what they learn in the classroom and the information they encounter on a daily basis. According to Stein-Smith (2017), students frequently aren't aware of how IL skills might be useful when navigating their social media feeds. Faculty members may also occasionally fail to perceive the link between IL and comprehending bogus news. In order to

address this problem, some people recommend holding educational activities that unite educators and community members as efficient teaching methods.

This phase established fake news as a serious object of academic inquiry, developed conceptual frameworks still in use today, and began identifying the multifaceted approaches—technological, educational, and professional—needed to address the challenge.

### **2.2.3 Phase 3: Educational response & detection focus**

Building on the recognition established in the previous phase, research from this period shifted toward understanding psychological mechanisms underlying fake news susceptibility and developing concrete educational interventions and detection methods.

Richter (2018) investigated why people fall for fake news, identifying the illusory truth effect (repeated exposure to false information increases perceived accuracy) and confirmation bias (favouring information that confirms existing beliefs) as major factors. His research made clear that combating fake news requires more than technological solutions—educational initiatives to enhance media literacy are essential. Similarly, Rand and Pennycook (2018) examined psychological traits making people vulnerable to fake news, including excessive receptivity to "bullshit," overclaiming knowledge, comfort with inaccurate information, and insufficient critical thinking skills. Sør (2018) explored deliberate deceptive strategies, while Tandoc et al. (2018) used these insights to categorize fake news types including propaganda, satire, and fabrication. According to Potter (2018), social media companies falsify their search results in order to personalize them, which facilitates the propagation of fake news. At the University of Lethbridge, Romany Craig and Tara Wiebe led a workshop demonstrating active learning strategies for critical information literacy. They emphasized the need for reflective learning techniques and contended that conventional approaches don't quite work with social media nowadays. By encouraging users to evaluate information critically based on its context, critical

literacy can help combat cultural misinformation, according to Cooke (2018). According to Buschman (2018), libraries play a crucial role in promoting democracy by giving people access to reliable information and assisting them in differentiating between what is true and what is not. Teachers and librarians today face many shared concerns, particularly when it comes to complicated issues like the proliferation of fake news, as highlighted by Glisson (2019) and Musgrove (2018).

In order to combat fake news, Farmer (2019) investigated how school librarians could teach K–12 students news literacy. According to the study, students struggled to determine the reliability of sponsored content and photographs, although they excelled at identifying advertisements. Even if deceit has become more common, news literacy was hardly ever taught in schools. Farmer emphasized the need of teaching media literacy and visual literacy, as well as the ability of librarians to spearhead these initiatives. The results support Stanford's previous research and highlight the importance of equipping students with critical evaluation skills so they may successfully traverse the ever-changing media world of today. In order to make social media companies responsible for the content that is posted online, Ians (2019) proposed that regulations and policies are necessary. Sullivan (2019) talked about library efforts to combat fake news and conveyed the strong belief that librarians have a duty, if not an opportunity, to spearhead the battle against all types of misinformation. It is crucial that pupils understand how to evaluate information! These reading abilities are crucial for future participation in democracy as well as for school assignments! According to Mourao and Robertson (2019), combining truth, misinformation, and sensationalism regarding political parties leads to serious issues with incorrect information. Bali and Desai (2019) investigate the ways in which social media might be abused to disseminate misleading information in India. They contend that policies should be implemented to stop the spread of fake news since it causes public turmoil and occasionally bloodshed. They look at international policy initiatives and offer potential

courses of action for India. After conducting a mini-course during orientation, Davidson College researchers Evanson & Sponsel (2019) investigated this topic and discovered significant deficiencies in students' abilities to assess source dependability! Their results demonstrate the need for ongoing learning initiatives due to the prevalence of false knowledge. According to Guess et al. (2020), interventions can reduce the perceived accuracy of false articles, emphasizing that digital media literacy aids individuals in differentiating between real and fake news! It's interesting to notice that these initiatives are less successful in rural regions, where social media usage is often lower, but they are most successful among individuals with higher education levels in both the US and India. Targeted methods seem to be important for diverse audiences. De Paor and Heravi (2020) discuss how information literacy acts as a key defense tool against fake news, building on the critical thinking approaches that librarians have continuously advocated. Their research shows that when people learn library-based information literacy skills, they become better at finding, evaluating, and using information accurately. The authors point to frameworks developed by SCOUNL and CILIP as useful tools for checking whether sources are reliable. They also mention a 2016 study that exposed how college students struggle with evaluating information, which demonstrates why academic libraries need to provide workshops, courses, and resources that help students sharpen these abilities.

Mumusamy et al. (2020) conducted a systematic review looking at the psychological reasons behind why misleading information gets created and shared on social media, which offers useful insights for information literacy. Their research found that personality traits—such as factors like how comfortable or extraverted someone is—as well as personal characteristics including generosity and ethical awareness, matter a lot when it comes to spreading suspicious content. They discovered that emotions such as fear and anger, along with thinking patterns like confirmation bias, contribute substantially to how misinformation travels. The problem

gets worse because of social circumstances, particularly people wanting acceptance from their peers and the way algorithms decide what content to show. What their findings really show is that we need to teach people how to critically evaluate information if we want to tackle fake news effectively. Fake news is common in Indian apps like WhatsApp, which can occasionally cause problems! It's difficult work, but regulatory organizations like India's Press Council are working hard to combat fake news while upholding free speech! For digital libraries, Mertoğlu and Genç (2020) suggested developing automated methods to identify fake reports; smart algorithms could identify tech needs and detect fakes at the same time. Ahmed et al. (2020) investigate how social media, particularly Twitter, amplified the 5G and COVID-19 conspiracy theory in the United Kingdom, contributing to real-world consequences like the vandalism of 5G towers. Their study reveals how a dedicated Twitter account, alongside other users, actively spread this misinformation, drawing attention away from critical public health discussions. The research highlights that 34.8% of analyzed tweets linked 5G to COVID-19, while 65.2% either opposed the conspiracy or were neutral, indicating a vocal but small group of believers. The authors note that influential accounts, including one specifically created to promote the conspiracy, fuelled divisive narratives, while the absence of authoritative voices combating the misinformation allowed it to gain traction. Nowlan (2020) explored how digital technologies can enhance library services, particularly in helping users navigate toward credible information sources more efficiently. In the meantime, Bastone (2020) highlighted the importance of digital literacy in combating false information—because everything is constantly changing, libraries should implement comprehensive literacy programs! Increasing public awareness and honing our media literacy encourages us all to consider information more critically. As Raj & Goswami (2020) noted, campaigns that emphasize social media intelligence can undoubtedly promote fact-checking points. According to a Pew Research Center survey, false information has left 64% of Americans perplexed about current affairs. According to a survey of 9,220

adults in the US, a lot of people are concerned about false information on the internet. Older persons and others with less education may be more likely to believe these claims as truth—a big concern! User behaviour is crucial because, according to the Reuters Institute, fake reports on social media platforms propagate much more quickly than factual ones around the world. These studies demonstrate the prevalence of false information in our everyday media landscape and the threats it poses to the well-being of democracy. We must remain alert! Even though some bloggers are making a lot of effort to stop false stories, more research is still necessary because it can be difficult to determine what causes misinformation to persist when it has a significant negative impact on society. According to a number of research on Indian college students, many of them come across bizarre stories online. According to Prasad et al. (2020), 75% of participants had come across false information on social media, and half of them thought it was true! According to Deka et al. (2020), algorithms also influence what we see, promoting our own opinions. They noted that political opinions change as a result of the things we are exposed to—significant political discussions are taking place!

This phase represented a maturation of fake news research, moving beyond description and recognition toward practical solutions, deeper psychological understanding, and recognition that effective responses required coordinated efforts across education, technology, policy, and professional practice.

#### **2.2.4 Phase 4: Advanced solutions & behavioural insights**

The most recent phase of research, has been characterized by increasingly sophisticated understanding of behavioural factors, refined technological solutions, and growing recognition of the need for comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approaches.

Social media platforms are already a commonplace aspect of contemporary life, giving users access to information and news never before possible. However, the deliberate distribution of

false or misleading narratives, known as fake news, has also been made easier by the quick broadcast of information. This has created serious obstacles to correct information consumption and public discourse (Das et al., 2021). In their investigation of the characteristics of disinformation in India, Kanozia & Narula (2021) examined subjects, information presentation styles, detecting techniques, and social media platforms. They emphasized how frequent political misinformation is and how it may deceive people through video content. Credible sources must refute these falsehoods. Additionally, beginning in mid-2021, the government took action to combat false information by enacting new IT regulations. Platforms must respond to content complaints promptly under these regulations! Supported by programs like Google News' "FactShala" or DataLEADS, civil groups are also attempting to start campaigns to increase community understanding. These efforts are still vital because studies have shown that the dissemination of inaccurate information online has increased disorder. Al-Zaman (2021) looked into fake news about COVID-19 that was making the rounds on Indian social media, exposing seven false themes, the most prevalent of which were health rumours. In this instance, it is believed that Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube are important platforms for spreading rumours and purposefully false information across international borders.

During the COVID shutdown, misinformation reached new heights, and many people spread misleading information on social media, further undermining public confidence in established media. In this context, what should be the role of library professionals, Adetayo (2021) discusses the importance of librarians in combating fake news, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. He emphasizes that librarians are essential in teaching the public about fake news and also argues that stricter social media control may violate the right to free speech. Siddiqui et al.'s (2022) study looked into this trend in India. According to Madan, (2022) the literature on this subject indicates that various factors contribute to the proliferation of fake news,

including the design of social media algorithms that prioritize sensational content, users' cognitive biases, and the lack of digital literacy among the population, which is particularly pronounced in regions like India with large populations and uneven internet access. (Machete & Turpin, 2020; Shu et al., 2018). The study by Borgohain et al. (2023) examined themes and frequencies related to false news articles in PIB fact-checking in conjunction with fake news being promoted by mainstream media and social networks. They described how fake news can propagate through a variety of media venues due to its many forms and languages. Al Zou'bi (2022) evaluated how media and information literacy (MIL) affected students' capacity to identify false material, particularly in the context of COVID-19. MIL training significantly enhanced students' evaluative abilities, according to the study, which used a one-group experimental design with Jordanian undergraduates. Sreeraag & Shynu (2023) used stiffness analysis to model the spread of fake news in Indian states during the COVID pandemic. According to their article, a greater stiffness index enhances the spread rate, thus it becomes crucial to identify and combat fake news as soon as possible! The immediate and short-term benefits of fact-checking and media literacy interventions in thwarting fake news on social media are assessed in the study by Berger et al. (2023). It emphasizes how professional fact-checking is not scalable and frequently delayed, which limits its effectiveness when done alone. According to the study's comparison of interventions, fact-checking plus content removal and prompting works better than fact-checking alone at reducing the spread of false information. Media literacy interventions provide modest effects on consumer perceptions, particularly with regard to the effectiveness of vaccinations, but their effectiveness is diminished when participants are exposed to false information. The results highlight the need for all-encompassing strategies to improve information literacy and successfully combat false information. A systematic review by Melchior & Oliveira (2023) examined the reasons why people would wish to spread false information online as well as countermeasures. They even

discussed other factors that influence disinformation in various societies. The Oxford Internet Institute (2020) pointed out significant volumes linked to online awareness messes emerging that urgently need attention to clarify facts that are more important now than ever, while the Pew Research Center (2023) noted a significant engagement among adults in India, with numbers nearly reaching their peak. Tan Huey Shyh et al.'s paper "Combat Fake News: An Overview of Youth's Media and Information Literacy Education" (2023) emphasizes how important media and information literacy (MIL) is in preventing youth fake news. It examines how MIL education equips students with the knowledge and skills necessary to identify misinformation, understand media ethics, and develop critical thinking and fact-checking skills. In order to encourage active participation, the study supports constructivist and experiential learning strategies, such as project-based learning. It also highlights the challenges in Malaysia's educational system, where MIL is not integrated, and suggests long-term, culturally aware methods to improve media literacy.

Oladokun et al. (2024) underline the vital demand for enhanced fact-checking abilities among information and media professionals in battling misinformation and disinformation on social media platforms. Their thorough investigation indicates that, especially during health emergencies like COVID-19, the rapid spread of false information via social media creates significant obstacles for existing gatekeeping protocols. Critical fact-checking skills, according to the authors, include chronology analysis, expert contact, source verification, cross-referencing, and contextual evaluation. They contend that in order to preserve public confidence and stop the "infodemic" of false information that spreads more quickly than actual news in digital environments, media professionals must take on the role of "gatekeepers' gatekeepers," implementing stringent verification procedures. Khan and Pandey (2024) explore how media literacy empowers college students to navigate the digital landscape effectively, particularly in the context of widespread smartphone use in higher education. Their study

highlights how media literacy enhances critical thinking, enabling students to assess digital content, identify biases, and detect misinformation. By integrating smartphones as tools for learning, students can practice source verification and ethical media consumption, which are crucial for combating fake news. The authors advocate for embedding media literacy into higher education curricula to foster informed, responsible citizenship in an increasingly complex media environment. Notwithstanding obstacles such as disparate definitions and limited generalizability, media literacy is nevertheless essential for building civic engagement and resilience against misleading narratives. Disadvantaged groups, especially older persons, who have difficulty critically evaluating online content, are disproportionately harmed by the spread of fake news on social media (Hakim & Easwaramoorthy, 2024). While biases and growing misinformation tactics continue to pose obstacles, machine learning techniques such as SVM and neural networks provide impressive accuracy (93%+) in identifying bogus news. In order to prevent misinformation, the study emphasizes the need of digital literacy and the need for user education in addition to technological solutions. It is advised that academics, platforms, and governments work together to improve media literacy and bolster detection mechanisms, particularly for age groups who are more susceptible to misinformation. Bhardwaj et al. (2024) discussed machine learning and sentiment analysis's value in identifying misinformation. By analyzing emotional cues and linguistic patterns in messages, their method achieved 99.68% accuracy, showing that false information was usually associated with negative emotions and misleading language. The study emphasized people's sensitivity to emotionally charged content and suggested combining technology solutions with media literacy instruction, recommending that legislators, educators, and platforms work together to help the public identify trustworthy content in digital spaces.

Recent research has documented fake news's profound societal effects. Misleading stories are covertly changing Indian society, causing security concerns and political repercussions. These

narratives attempt to control audiences by appealing to emotions, resulting in social divisions that influence both public opinion and institutions. The confusion brought on by fake news spread makes it difficult to distinguish fact from fiction, creating a reactive atmosphere where some opinions are accepted while others face disapproval. Different societal frameworks have experienced disputes that require rational resolution. Reviews and analyses have shown that information still tends to follow paths set by powerful interests, frequently motivated by fear. The prominence of these sensitive issues in public debate necessitates thorough understanding and engagement with academic perspectives. Communities need to understand these dynamics to reveal hidden connections and encourage collective participation. Open dialogues have been initiated to navigate through disinformation complexities and achieve more significant, inclusive, and meaningful change.

Recent scholarship has affirmed that academic librarians play a crucial role in combating fake news by helping people develop critical information literacy. They actively assist students in verifying that information comes from reliable sources, developing skills to critically assess information veracity. Through various training programs and workshops, librarians improve media literacy—a crucial component allowing people to discern fact from fiction. They also use technology to ensure consumers have access to reliable sources and to assist in content identification and authentication. Beyond academic environments, librarians engage with the general public to promote responsible information practices and work to persuade governments to enact laws facilitating ethical and appropriate information distribution. Their multi-layered approach is essential for helping people understand how to deal with contemporary information systems' complexities and the persistent problem of incorrect information—making them critical allies in the battle against disinformation.

### **2.3 Research Gaps**

Despite the substantial body of research reviewed across these four phases, several significant gaps remain that warrant further investigation:

- While numerous studies have examined fake news in Western contexts, particularly the United States, research specifically focusing on Indian college students remains limited. Given India's unique linguistic diversity, cultural context, and rapidly expanding internet user base, this population deserves dedicated attention.
- Most existing research examines either urban or rural populations separately. However, transition zones—areas experiencing rapid urbanization and changing media consumption patterns—remain understudied. These areas may present unique challenges and opportunities for intervention.
- Much of the existing research relies on self-reported information literacy skills or simulated environments. There is a need for studies that assess students' actual ability to identify and respond to fake news in authentic social media contexts.
- While some studies have considered education level and age, other demographic factors—including gender, socioeconomic status, field of study, and regional background—have received insufficient attention in understanding fake news susceptibility and information literacy skills.
- The specific mechanisms through which fake news propagates among college students and how effective rebuttals function within student social networks remain inadequately examined. Understanding these dynamics could inform more effective interventions.
- Most intervention studies examine immediate or short-term effects. The long-term retention of information literacy skills and sustained behavioural changes in social media use need further investigation.

This study aims to address these gaps by examining information literacy skills and fake news susceptibility among college students in Birbhum district, with attention to how demographic factors influence these capabilities and how students actually engage with potentially false information in their daily social media use. By focusing on real-world behaviours rather than self-reports and by considering the specific cultural and linguistic context of the study population, this research seeks to contribute practical insights for developing effective educational interventions tailored to Indian college students' needs.

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## **CHAPTER III**

### **RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Background**

Recent technological advancement in social media have fundamentally changed the way how people access and share information forever. Social media platforms such as Facebook, X (previously Twitter), YouTube, Instagram and WhatsApp facilitate rapid access to information. This may be a positive thing in one aspect but it also introduces significant challenges, most notably the proliferation of fake news. The rise of one of the most dangerous issues of our time is fake news which lies at the top of the list of these challenges. Furthermore, the increased ability to spread the false ideologies has eroded the average persons comprehension regarding current events, as well as the trust that individuals place on conventional media outlets. With these circumstances in mind, it is important to assess how well college students, a population group that has seen the growth of social media, are able to identify real news from fake news. The importance of measuring information literacy of college students cannot be stressed enough. They must realize that while there may be a vast of information available online, the importance of being able to evaluate it should not be disregarded especially considering how college students are defined by a globalized high-tech environment. Kops, Schittenhelm, and Wachs (2025) found that a majority of young people are unable to apply such qualities as critical thinking and problem-solving when there's a need to find useful and reliable data. This study seeks to examine these skills among college students, in particular the efficiency of their abilities to detect social media misinformation. The study by Harjule et al. (2023) found that about 62.4% of college students somehow share misinformation over social media, with main motivations being self-expression, information characteristics and socializing. This is worrying since many students lack the critical skills to navigate the huge volume of information available in the cyber space. The problem becomes worse in developing countries such as India where social media has replaced conventional media and deficiency in handling false information can bring about harmful repercussions in the society. According to an impact evaluation of the

FactShala media literacy program in India, “participants, including a significant portion of students (58% of respondents), were initially susceptible to misinformation, with 54% believing emotionally charged posts such as fundraising appeals for a child's medical treatment or viral audio notes about incidents like mob lynchings, often sharing them without verification due to the emotional impact.” A separate study on a digital media literacy intervention in India found that “without such training, participants rated false news headlines as more accurate, but the intervention reduced perceived accuracy of false headlines by 0.126 points on a 4-point scale among an educated online sample, improving overall discernment by 17.5%.” Additionally, a case study of fact-checking organization Alt News' educational initiatives in Kolkata revealed that students aged 12-14 are particularly vulnerable to fake news due to emotionally charged language and clickbait titles, but targeted training enhanced their critical thinking to better detect and question such manipulative content. In addressing these challenges, this research attempts to assess the information literacy of college students by means of fake news detection skills in collated questions within a survey. Many scholars assert the defining features of a credible news article and the reasons which foster the spread of false news. Vosoughi et al., (2018) in their articles states that, "Falsehood diffused significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth in all categories of information, and the effects were more pronounced for false political news than for false news about terrorism, natural disasters, science, urban legends, or financial information."

By interpreting the responses, the study wants to assess and provide information on the level of students' information literacy. In addition, it is important to look at the aspects of social networking sites algorithms in the fake news distribution. These algorithms optimize for the highest level of engagement which is often an engagement regardless of the truth. Hence, there exists a cycle of false information whereby the false information is repeated over and over again, how then will people know what is real and what is fake? Therefore, Roestenburg et al.

(2024) state, "To support students with this 'acculturation process' a strong focus is placed on skills that will enable students to access, process, and produce information in their field of study (discourse community)." It is increasingly common for institutions to teach these information literacy skills to students in order to try and get them to reason critically. For example, the ACRL framework (2016) on its part has tried to develop even further the norms that relate to the information literacy which includes how to determine the credibility of sources and why this information is important in context . In the end, what the objectives and results of this research will add to the already acquired knowledge is within the discussion of the fake news phenomenon that is present in the modern world. Targeting the particular group of entities ,college students – this research sets out to emphasize the need for nurturing of critical media literacy especially in this current age where information is rapidly disseminated through the internet. The knowledge gained from such research are beneficial in the crafting of lesson plans that assist students in the detection of misuses of information while creating active and informed citizens.

In conclusion, the problem of manipulative news could be tamed by integrating different dimensions including checking the information literacy of university students and designing educational projects with a special emphasis on strengthening critical thinking. With social media cementing its role as a dominant news outlet, the fight against disinformation is more relevant than ever, and particularly in the context of the youth. If learners are trained to properly operate in such a complicated virtual world, it will be possible to reduce the adverse effect of dubious news and raise the level of awareness of the society at large.

### **3.2 Research Design**

In this study, a semi-structured questionnaire with closed and open ended questions and a set of face-to-face semi-structured interviews are used as data gathering techniques to establish the level of information literacy of college students in Birbhum District in relation to fake news on social media. This paper focuses on college students since they are among the most active users of the social media platforms and one of the groups most affected by the information found on the web. The quantitative part consists in a set of closed questions that are delivered to a group of students; these questions address their ability to distinguish between fake and real news as well as sources they use and the frequency of encountering untrue data. Another element focuses on the qualitative aspect, which is interviews with selected participants, trying to gain insight into their thinking and reproduce the reaction to receptions containing possibly false information. Demographic variables are also incorporated into the design of the research study regarding the effect they may have on the capacity to distinguish between fake and real news. The study's objective is to analyse specific patterns as well as contributing factors relating to the acceptance and diffusion of false information and to determine recommendations for enhancing digital literacy among students. Thus, this approach will provide a multifaceted perspective on fake news consumption and existing media literacy interventions and their effectiveness to aid educators, media specialists, and lawmakers.

### **3.3 Research Ethics**

Ethical considerations in research involving human participants are essential to prevent any misuse of participants' rights, welfare and interests. Now that we know this, we can start collecting information from college students in Birbhum District. We wanted to find out how students can actually recognise and use information about fake news when they are scrolling

social media. To make sure this research was done properly and ethically, some basic ground rule has been established.

- Before anyone agreed to participate, participants must have enough information like, the research goals, described data collection approach and outlined both the potential risks and benefits. Participants could go through all this information before agreeing to participate.
- The shared data is restricted to the researcher only and nobody else can distribute it. All identifying details has removed from students responses to protect their privacy.
- Efforts were made to ensure that no one got hurt physically or mentally when they are participating in this study. If someone felt uncomfortable research was immediately paused and they were given the support they needed.
- From start to finish, participants were received respectful treatment in every stage like, respect for their liberty, dignity, privacy and cultural diversity. Withdrawing from the study was an option and nobody faced any negative outcomes by doing so.
- The study was reviewed and approved by the institution, ensuring that the study upholds ethical principles and standards.

By maintaining these ethical principles, the study was conducted in a responsible manner that protected the rights and welfare of all the research participants.

### **3.4 Statement of the Problem**

Social media facilitates easy access to information but also raises questions about the veracity of such information. A large portion of the youth population in Birbhum District use the internet and social media at a high rate. There is cause for concern regarding the amount of fake information that young people in the area, particularly college students, take for granted as their primary source of news on social media. Despite increased access to education and the

Internet, acquiring critical thinking skills to detect false news remains a challenge. The quality of information consumers is significantly affected by the lack of social media literacy among their younger audience, thus it is vital that they work to improve this competence. Particularly in places like Birbhum, where fast technical development coexists with pan-media culture, the problem is worse. This study seeks to address the following concerns by examining government college students in Birbhum District and their ability to employ skills like reasoning and analysis on social media, as well as the amount to which the information impacts them. Researchers hope to learn more about how students dealt with possible false information and the tactics they utilised in this study. Further, the study seeks to evaluate how students' information literacy is influenced by age, gender, the subject of study, and the year in which they are enrolled. This worry is especially applicable in Birbhum in view of the physical and demographical qualities that the district possesses. On the one hand, few urban regions have the potential for better resource availability, but on the other hand, educational deprivation in rural places significantly affects the ability to acquire reasonable information literacy abilities. It becomes vital to grasp these gaps and repercussions in the context of the issues that information disorder offers in this portion of the country. As a very final objective, this research tries to propose practical recommendations aimed at increasing information literacy instruction in colleges and through policies that would enable students to survive the digital age of social media with the ability to separate true information from what is not.

### **3.5 Research Objectives**

- ✓ To evaluate the level of information literacy skills among college students in Birbhum district regarding fake news on social media.
- ✓ To study the demographic parameters (age, gender, academic discipline) of students and their influence on information literacy..
- ✓ To examine students' usage patterns of social media platforms and their impact on exposure to fake news.
- ✓ To identify the primary sources and strategies students utilise to validate the authenticity of social media news.
- ✓ To determine the most common categories of fake news encountered by students.
- ✓ To study the extent to which students rely on fact-checking tools or websites.
- ✓ To investigate students' confidence in distinguishing between real and fake news on social media.
- ✓ To understand students' reactions upon encountering fake news and assess their ability to handle such content.
- ✓ To explore students' perceptions of how social media and technology have influenced their information literacy.
- ✓ To recommend strategies to improve the information literacy skills of college students to counteract fake news effectively.

### **3.6 Research Questions**

- What is the current level of information literacy among college students in identifying and evaluating fake news on social media?
- How do demographic characteristics (age, gender, academic discipline) affect students' information literacy skills?
- Which social media platforms do students primarily use, and how do these platforms expose them to fake news?
- What methods and sources do students utilize to verify the authenticity of news on social media?
- What are the most common categories of fake news encountered by students on social media?
- To what extent do students use fact-checking tools or websites to verify news?
- How confident are students in distinguishing real news from fake news on social media?
- What are students' typical reactions upon encountering fake news on social media?
- How do students perceive the influence of technology and social media on their information literacy skills?
- What strategies can be implemented to enhance students' ability to combat fake news on social media?

### **3.7 Research Scope and Coverage**

We are more and more worried about the spread of fake news in social media that has become a real problem for one's decision making as well, to be a good citizen of a society. Research focused on understanding information literacy among college students is essential, particularly as they navigate a media landscape filled with misleading and potentially harmful content that can distort public perception and influence behaviour (Bonnet & Rosenbaum, 2019). Evaluating the effectiveness of educational initiatives aimed at enhancing digital media literacy is imperative, as studies indicate that even brief interventions can notably improve individuals' ability to distinguish between credible and misleading news sources, thereby fostering informed citizenship within local communities and beyond (Guess et al., 2020; Neely-Sardon & Tignor, 2018; Hanz & Kingsland, 2020). This study dives into information literacy among college students in the fake news on social media, through a study of Birbhum District from West Bengal, India. It is just one example of what educational institutions around the world are grappling with as they try to prepare students for online discussion and information evaluation in an age when sheer exposure does not suffice. So, this study focuses to discover the incidence and consequence of fake news through social media among college students in Birbhum District. This will investigate the way these students handle data, the issue of the so-called fake news and the factors that could affect their ability to find out such data. The study is also trying to uncover the reasons why the social media users, especially college students, fall into the trap of fake news and consequently become its ambassadors of fashion.

This research focuses on undergraduate students from government-aided colleges across all eleven blocks of Birbhum district, West Bengal, India. The study includes students pursuing B.A., B.Sc., and B.Com. degrees—the three major streams that represent most of the district's higher education enrolment. The geographical spread covers both rural and urban colleges throughout the district, capturing the diversity of Birbhum's educational landscape. The student

population naturally reflects the region's linguistic mix, with Bengali speakers forming the majority (92.38%) alongside significant Santali-speaking tribal communities (6.01%). Students from first year through final year are included, providing insights into how information literacy skills develop across different academic levels.

The study examines how students identify fake news, verify facts, evaluate source credibility, and share information on social media platforms. Beyond these practical skills, the research explores the psychological and social factors behind fake news vulnerability—such as confirmation bias, peer pressure, and emotionally charged content that triggers quick sharing without proper verification.

### **3.8 Research Limitations**

While this study offers valuable insights into information literacy skills among college students in Birbhum district, it needs to acknowledge some limitations that shape how these findings should be understood and what directions future research might take.

#### **Sampling and generalizability constraints**

This study focused exclusively on government-aided colleges in Birbhum district, which means the findings may not apply to other educational settings. Private colleges, with their potentially different resources, student populations, and technology infrastructure, weren't included, so it's hard to say whether these results reflect the broader higher education picture in West Bengal. The multi-stage cluster sampling approach study used, while practical and cost-effective, means students from the same institution likely share similar information literacy characteristics simply because they're in the same educational environment with shared peer networks and institutional policies. Another limitation is the large representation of Bachelor of Arts students compared to B.Sc. and B.Com. students. This imbalance might skew the

findings toward humanities-oriented perspectives on information evaluation, potentially missing how science and commerce students approach critical thinking differently.

**Self-report and social desirability bias**

Relying on questionnaires where students report on their own abilities brings some validity concerns. Students may have overestimated their information literacy skills because they wanted to present themselves favourably—particularly when discussing their ability to spot fake news or verify information. The striking gap between self-reported confidence levels and actual performance might partly reflect this tendency. Memory is also unreliable when it comes to questions about how often students encounter or share fake news, especially behaviours that happen while casually scrolling through social media.

**Cross-sectional design limitations**

Because the collected data at a single point in time, which can't establish cause-and-effect relationships or track how information literacy skills develop as students progress through college through years. A longitudinal study tracking the same students from their first year through graduation would be necessary to address this limitation and observe how individual students' skills evolve over time.

**Contextual and cultural specificity**

These findings are deeply rooted in the specific context of Birbhum district, West Bengal, where the linguistic diversity (92.38% Bengali speakers, 6.01% Santali speakers), rural-urban divisions, and recent local experiences create a unique information environment. These contextual factors mean the findings might not transfer well to other Indian districts or international contexts with different media landscapes, political climates, and cultural approaches to sharing and verifying information.

### **Acknowledgment of researcher positionality**

As a researcher embedded within the Birbhum educational community with library and information science expertise, researcher's insider status gave him valuable access and contextual understanding. The researcher's background and established presence in the community may have shaped the study in subtle ways. Participants might have seen the researcher as an authority figure and adjusted their responses accordingly, perhaps trying to give "correct" answers rather than honest ones.

### **Disciplinary representation imbalance**

Perhaps the most significant limitation in this study concerns the distribution of students across academic streams. Bachelor of Arts students constitute 86.92% of the sample (1,024 respondents), while Bachelor of Science students represent only 12.98% (153 respondents), and Bachelor of Commerce students barely appear with a single respondent (0.084%). This severe imbalance happened for several interconnected reasons that became apparent during fieldwork. This doesn't mean the findings lack value. Arts students form the majority of the college-going population in many rural Indian districts, so understanding their information literacy patterns remains important. The universal exposure to fake news and complete absence of fact-checking tool usage likely transcend disciplinary boundaries. However, any interventions designed based on this research should be tested across different academic streams before assuming they will work equally well for all students.

These limitations don't invalidate what this study has contributed, but they do define the boundaries within which the findings should be interpreted and point toward important areas for future research to address.

### **3.9 Methodology**

This study employed a multi-stage cluster sampling approach to ensure a representative sample from all government-aided undergraduate institutions in Birbhum District, West Bengal. Sixteen colleges were selected as primary sampling units to examine information literacy skills regarding fake news encounters and its effects on college students. Data were collected using a survey method with a semi-structured questionnaire as the primary research tool. After obtaining approval from college authorities, on-site data collection was conducted at each college. The study successfully collected data from 1178 participants representing 16 government aided college of Birbhum district. About 100 questionnaires were distributed per college, targeting those enrolled students who use social media platforms. The responses were on average almost 74 per college, based on participant availability and accessibility, leading to in a broad dataset for analyzing patterns of fake news consumption and verification behaviours.

#### **3.9.1 Sampling Procedure**

The research aims to understand how fake news spreads among college students in Birbhum District, West Bengal, and what impact it has on their perceptions and behaviours. Students who spend considerable time on social media platforms became the natural focus, given their frequent exposure to potentially misleading information. The sampling approach was designed to balance two priorities: ensuring the data would be representative enough to draw meaningful conclusions, while also keeping the data collection process practical and achievable.

##### **3.9.1.1 Target Population**

Undergraduate students from government-aided colleges in Birbhum district formed the core population for this research. At the time data collection began, the district had 16 such colleges, with students enrolled across diverse streams—arts, science, and commerce. These students represented an ideal group for investigating information literacy patterns and fake news

exposure. Birbhum's unique blend of rural and urban educational settings added another layer of richness to the research, offering insights into how different environments might shape students' interactions with online information.

### 3.9.1.2 Sampling Frame

The sampling frame was developed from all the 16 government-aided colleges distributed across three subdivisions—Suri Sadar, Bolpur, and Rampurhat. The subdivision-wise distribution naturally reflected the district's geographical diversity, spanning from plateau regions in the western areas to the more fertile plains in the eastern parts. The 16 government-aided colleges distributed across the three subdivisions are listed in Table 3.9.3.2 below:

Table 3.9.1.2 List of government aided colleges in Birbhum district

| Sl No. | Name of the Institution   | Sl No. | Name of the Institution                   |
|--------|---------------------------|--------|---|
| 1      | Abhedananda Mahavidyalaya | 9      | Lokepara Mahavidyalaya                    |
| 2      | Birbhum Mahavidyalaya     | 10     | Purni Devi Chaudhuri Girls' College       |
| 3      | Bolpur College            | 11     | Rajnagar Mahavidyalaya                    |
| 4      | Chandidas Mahavidyalaya   | 12     | Rampurhat College                         |
| 5      | Hiralal Bhakat College    | 13     | Sailajananda Falguni Smriti Mahavidyalaya |
| 6      | Kabi Joydeb Mahavidyalaya | 14     | Sambhunath College                        |
| 7      | Kabi Nazrul College       | 15     | Suri Vidyasagar College                   |
| 8      | Krishna Chandra College   | 16     | Turku Hansda Lapsa Hemram Mahavidyalay    |

### **3.9.1.3 Sampling Procedure**

This study employed a multi-stage sampling design combining census sampling at the institutional level with systematic convenience sampling at the individual level. This hybrid approach was necessary to balance the ideal of probability sampling with the practical realities of conducting research in educational settings where complete student rosters are unavailable due to privacy concerns and institutional policies.

#### **Stage 1: Selection of District**

Birbhum District was purposively selected as the research site based on several criteria: (1) its mixed rural-urban character representative of many West Bengal districts, (2) documented incidents of social media-driven misinformation affecting local communities, (3) presence of multiple government-aided colleges serving diverse student populations, and (4) researcher accessibility for extended fieldwork. This purposive selection acknowledges that findings are specific to Birbhum's particular socio-cultural and educational context.

#### **Stage 2: Selection of Colleges**

Rather than sampling from available colleges, all 16 government-aided colleges in Birbhum District were included in the study (see Table 3.9.3.2). This census approach at the institutional level eliminates sampling error related to college selection and ensures representation across all three subdivisions: Suri Sadar (5 colleges), Bolpur (6 colleges), and Rampurhat (5 colleges). This comprehensive inclusion captures institutional diversity in terms of size (ranging from approximately 800 to 5,500 students), location (urban, semi-urban, and rural), and resource availability.

#### **Stage 3: Selection of Students**

Unlike Stage 2, where a clear sampling frame existed (the complete list of government-aided colleges in the district), no comparable frame was available for individual students. Colleges could not provide comprehensive student enrollment lists due to data protection policies and

administrative constraints. Even if such lists were accessible, they would not indicate which students actively use social media platforms—a necessary inclusion criterion for this study. Attempting to create a sampling frame by surveying all enrolled students about their social media use would have been prohibitively time-consuming and resource-intensive across 16 institutions.

To be eligible for participation, students had to meet the following criteria:

- Currently enrolled as a full-time undergraduate student (any academic year, any discipline)
- Active user of at least one social media platform
- Present on campus during scheduled data collection periods
- Able to provide voluntary informed consent

Students were excluded if they were enrolled in graduate programs, attending as part-time or distance learners, or not actively using any social media platforms. The target was approximately 100 completed questionnaires per college to achieve adequate representation while remaining feasible within time and resource constraints. However, actual participation varied considerably across colleges based on several factors like, student availability, and accessibility, institutional culture, student engagement etc. The final sample comprised 1,178 students distributed across all 16 colleges, with an average of nearly 74. While this variability reflects the realities of field research in educational settings, every college contributed meaningfully to the dataset, and the aggregate sample size remains substantial for analysis purposes.

#### **3.9.1.4 The Population and the Sampling Frame**

The target population consists of all undergraduate students enrolled in all government-aided colleges in Birbhum District. The sampling frame encompasses students from 16 such

institutions, covering diverse academic disciplines and year levels to provide a comprehensive overview of the district's higher education landscape.

### **3.9.1.5 Sampling Justification**

Educational research inherently involves nested structures—students within colleges, colleges within districts. A multi-stage design acknowledges this hierarchical reality and allows for systematic decision-making at each level. By clearly articulating decisions at district, college, and student levels, the methodology becomes transparent and replicable.

**Practical feasibility-**There is no portal containing enrolment information for all government-aided college students in Birbhum district each institution maintains separate records with different organizational systems Rather than spending more time building a district wide student list that might still have gaps in it, the cluster approach tapped into existing systems. Colleges worked perfectly as sampling units because they're already organized and their enrolment data is readily available.

**Geographical coverage-** The district is huge with colleges scattered through all types of terrain. All 16 government-aided colleges have been included, which means students from every subdivision and geographical setting were part of the study. This comprehensive institutional coverage eliminated any worries about missing certain areas or excluding particular types of colleges.

**Natural clustering-** Students experience their education within specific institutional contexts that shape their digital practices and information behaviours. Each college has particular infrastructure for internet access, library resources, faculty guidance, and peer interactions that influence how students engage with digital media and evaluate information sources. Recognizing colleges as meaningful clusters acknowledged these shared environmental factors rather than treating students as isolated individuals randomly distributed across space.

**Sample size planning-** The study aimed to reaching 100 students per college to capture adequate representation from each institution while staying realistic about time and resource limitations. Ultimately, 1,178 students across all 16 colleges participated, providing a strong foundation for analysis.

Statistical approach: Despite practical advantages, the design maintained probabilistic principles. At the second stage, a structured availability and accessibility based selection was used within each college, where students present on survey days were approached systematically to ensure diverse representation across all the academic years. By balancing what was feasible on the ground with genuine efforts to represent all colleges and student types, this methodology lets us reasonably extend our findings to the wider undergraduate population in Birbhum district's government-aided colleges.

**Established precedent-** Multi-stage sampling is widely used for studying student populations that are naturally clustered in educational institutions, particularly when it's difficult to compile complete student lists across multiple campuses. This approach has proven effective in many comparable research settings.

### **3.9.2 Data Collection Methods**

The study used a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, to offer a detailed insights into students' expertise with fake information. A semi-structured questionnaire was used in the quantitative component to collect numerical data regarding social media usage, information practices and exposure to Fake news when scrolling social media platforms. The qualitative component comprised interviews with students to investigate factors influencing susceptibility to and circulation of misleading information on social media.

### **3.9.2.1 Quantitative survey and questionnaire design**

The questionnaire emerged from a carefully structured development process for a long time. It began with an extensive review of scholarly literature, which helped to identify the core dimensions of information literacy, fake news detection behaviours, and social media engagement patterns particularly relevant to the college student population.

Main data have collected by distributing structured questionnaire to the students who using social media. The questionnaire covered following areas:

#### Part I

- Demographic details like age, gender, academic discipline, and year of study for comparisons.

#### Part II

- Social media using habits-which platforms there are using, frequency of use, content preferences.
- Their ability to differentiate real from fake news and their trust levels.
- Their responses like, sharing, removal, or verification when encountering suspicious content.

### **3.9.2.2 Qualitative Semi-structured interviews**

Interview participants were picked using maximum variation sampling. Basically, this helped to gather a bunch of different viewpoints by including students from various genders, academic fields (like arts, science, and commerce) and all class years from 1<sup>st</sup> year to 3<sup>rd</sup> year. Those students were asked during the interview when they shared insightful answers in the open-ended part, and figured they'd help us understand their thinking best.

Those students during the survey were interviewed to learn more about:

- Their own experiences when dealing with misleading information and what they did about it.
- How they evaluate source credibility and the challenges they face when doing this.

These narratives gave us real-world examples that added depth to the statistical data and helped make sense of the patterns we found.

### **3.9.2.3 Pilot testing and questionnaire refinement**

The questionnaire went through careful development before being used with all participants. After reviewing of related literature the first version had 25 questions covering six areas: demographics, social media use, news habits, fake news awareness, verification practices and information literacy understanding.

At first this questionnaire was tested with 25 students and these pilot participants represented different genders, academic streams, and year levels to match the larger sample I planned to study. They weren't included in the final research to keep the data clean. The pilot testing revealed serious problems, especially with language. Even though these students study in English, they struggled with academic terms like "verification," "credibility assessment," and "cross-reference" etc. Many asked for clarification repeatedly or simply looked confused and it became obvious that formal information literacy terminology meant nothing to them.

This language barrier also killed my original plan to use Google Forms for data collection. Students needed to ask questions and sometimes hear explanations in Bengali. An online survey would have produced garbage data from misunderstood questions.

Based on pilot feedback, the questionnaire was rewritten using as much simpler language as can do. Number of questions were reduced to 20 items and a demographic part. The pilot study forced a practical decision: that to administer surveys face-to-face at all 16 colleges rather than collecting data online. This took far more time and travel, but it was the only way to ensure

students actually understood the questions. During data collection, clarify terms verbally and occasionally translate key phrases into Bengali when needed, can be done by researcher. Though face-to-face administration may have introduced interviewer bias—students might have adjusted their answers because they were talking directly to a researcher. The two fake news examples were used to test actual skills were too few to thoroughly assess identification ability. And everything relies on what students reported about themselves, which doesn't always match their real behaviour.

### **3.9.3 Data Organization and Analysis**

This section covers organizing and analysing the collected data, which serves as the foundation for the key findings. Once the data is gathered, it will be systematically arranged, examined, and visualized through tables, charts, and diagrams to uncover meaningful insights. Here is a breakdown of the main steps involved:

#### **3.9.3.1 Data Organization**

The data collection process was followed by careful organization to make analysis easier. Survey data got transferred into Excel for statistical work. Each person received a unique ID number to keep things confidential and ensure it could properly match up their responses. Interview content was organized around key themes that emerged. Thematic coding is applied to categorize the data into relevant themes, such as "perception about fake news" and "strategies for identifying fake news" etc.

#### **3.9.3.2 Data Analysis**

Both numerical and narrative data were analysed to get a clear picture of fake news effects on college students in Birbhum District. Then these were broke down each type of data differently, as explained below:

### **3.9.3.2.1 Quantitative Data Analysis**

#### **Data Visualization:**

Survey data were analysed using descriptive statistics and presented through appropriate visual representations like, bar charts, pie charts, and frequency tables, to facilitate interpretation of response patterns.. This data visualization aids in the summarization of the responses and gives an overall view of the data that has been gathered.

### **3.9.3.2.2 Qualitative Data Analysis**

- **Transcription**

Detail notes were taken down throughout the interviews that include the precise words of the students to avoid distortion of their opinions and experiences.

- **Thematic Analysis**

To do this, thematic analysis is executed on the transcribed data in an attempt to find the primary themes and patterns based on the notes. This involved thoroughly reviewing the data, applying codes systematically, creating themes from those codes and revising them until they properly conveyed participants' perspectives. These themes were then broken down in percentage form.

- **Integration of quantitative and qualitative data**

The combination of quantitative survey data with qualitative data then offers a viewpoint on the issue. This implies mixing quantitative and qualitative data to extract significant findings. It facilitates cross-validation, which increases the validity and dependability of study findings. They have also been included in the discussion, and there is an open-ended topic about how individuals identify fake news.

- **Interpretation and Reporting**

The last process refers to making conclusions about the detected level of false information and its impact on college students in Birbhum District. The findings are presented in a concise and

straightforward manner outlining the main aspects, the analysis of their significance, and the suggestions for further research and practice. Recognising the importance of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to data analysis this study aims to provide a detailed perspective on the impact of false information among college students and how they cope with the information environment.

### **3.10 Documentation and citation standard**

For all citations and references in this research, the American Psychological Association (APA) 7th edition style has been used. This standardized format is used for in-text citations and entries in the reference list. APA style was selected because it is widely used in social science research and has clear rules for how to cite different types of sources, such as journal articles, books, websites, etc. Proper credit of all sources ensures academic integrity and allows readers to verify and explore more about the scholarly basis for this research.

### **3.11 Summary of the chapter**

This chapter is dedicated to describing the methods that are used during the research. It opens with an overview of fake news challenges and their effects on trust in media, emphasizing the need to evaluate how well college students can separate accurate content from falsehoods given their extensive social media engagement. The study uses questionnaire as data collection tool and face-to-face interviews to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data. About the sampling, the research design is also diverse, and the subject is selected from multiple colleges in the district with reference to demographic factors. Information about Birbhum District, those selected colleges, as well as cultural background of the area are also presented in this chapter in detail. The data gathered by closed preliminary questioning and semi-structured interview are quantitatively categorized and described by statistical and thematic approaches This

approach is meant to give a balanced view on fake news consumption and the efficacy of the existing IL interventions. The study respects the ethical consideration because the participants identity was concealed and their permission was sought. Some of the limitations of the study include limited sampling, and regional which restrict the generalization of the results.

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**CHAPTER IV**  
**ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION**

## **4.1 Demographic profile of respondents**

Many research reports have shown that the number of young minds of our country who using social media is at large scale. The 2022 IAMAI-Kantar reports highlighted that, the 12-29 age constitutes a significant portion of internet users, particularly due to high engagement with social media, OTT platforms and gaming. This Research conducted to check the skills related to fake news on social media of undergraduate college students in Birbhum districts whose ages are around 16 to 24 years. The most important criteria of this study is that they have to use social media platforms to be the respondents of this study. All the government aided college students from Birbhum district have selected for this study irrespective of stream of their study, all have been taken into consideration. The study utilized multi-stage sampling to gather data from college students across 16 educational institutions in the region, resulting in a final sample of 1,178 respondents. This sampling method was the most practical choice considering the limited timeframe, the ease of reaching students, and the institutional cooperation requirements needed. While the sampling method limits strict statistical generalizability, the achieved sample size provides sufficient statistical power for conducting meaningful analyses and drawing reliable inferences about student attitudes and behaviours. The sample represents diverse institutional contexts, ranging from large colleges with over 5,000 students to smaller colleges with fewer than 1,000 students, thereby capturing variation in educational environments and student demographics that enhances the descriptive value of the findings.

### 4.1.1 Gender of the respondents

Present study is not based on any particular gender, rather it is gender neutral. The gender wise division is mentioned in following table and graph:

**Table 4.1.1 Gender distribution**

| Gender | No. of Respondents |
|--------|--------------------|
| Male   | 564                |
| Female | 614                |

The above Table 4.1.1 represents gender distribution of 1,178 respondents. Among those 1,178 respondents, the majority are females with 614 individuals (52.12%), while males have 564 (47.88%) individuals..

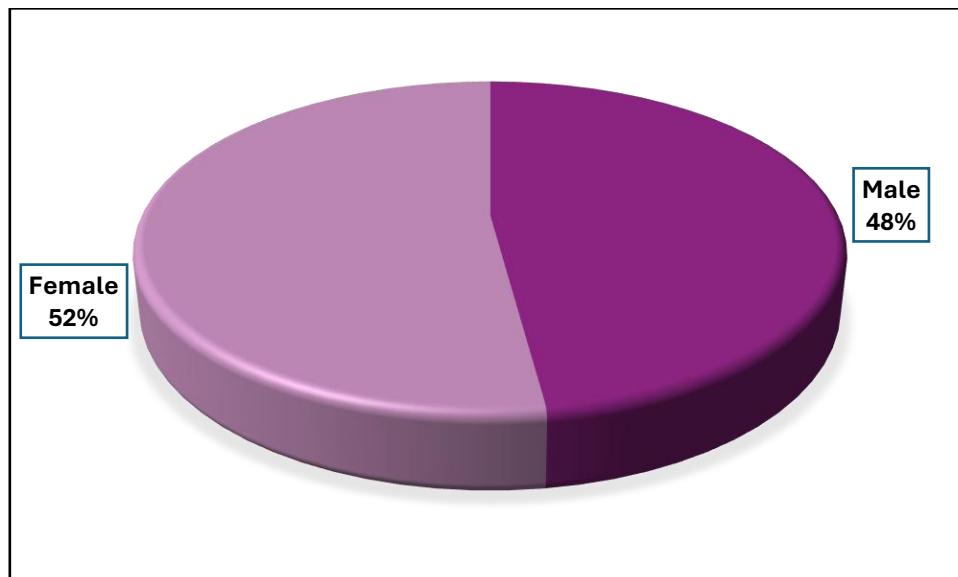


Figure 4.1.1 Respondents gender graph

#### **4.1.2 Students belonging to different age group**

It's very important to know the age distribution of the respondents in order to understand how they use social media and how they learn about information. The table below shows the age distribution of the respondents to represent which age groups are more common in this study.

**Table 4.1.2 Age Group Distribution**

| Age Group | No. of Respondents |
|-----------|--------------------|
| 16-18     | 354                |
| 19-21     | 772                |
| 22-24     | 52                 |

The analysis of data in Table 4.1.2 shows the age wise distribution of 1,178 respondents. Out of 1,178 respondents, 772 (66%) belong to the 19-21 age group, establishing it as the dominant demographic in this study. 16-18 age group follows with 354 respondents (Around 30%), while the '22-24' age group is the smallest, comprising 52 individuals (About 4%).

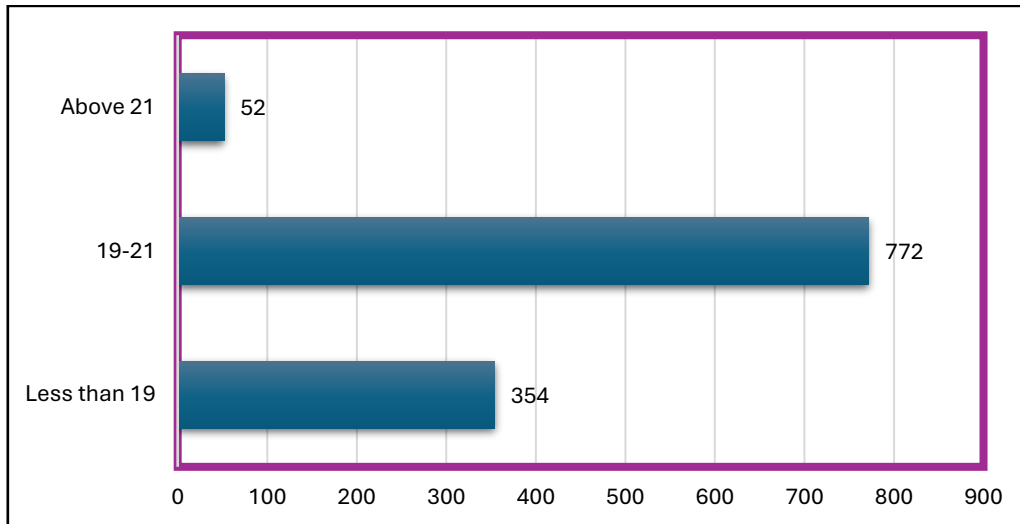


Figure 4.1.2 Respondents age graph

#### 4.1.3 The respondents belonged to different stream

Education has a major impact on how people use their knowledge and how well they can think critically. The various academic streams that the respondents came from show how diverse the sample population's education is.

Table 4.1.3: Educational Streams

| Stream | No. of Respondents |
|--------|--------------------|
| B.A.   | 1024               |
| B.Sc.  | 153                |
| B.Com. | 1                  |

The analysis of data in Table 4.1.3 shows that out of the 1,178 respondents, students from Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) are the majority with 1024 individuals (86.92 %). Students of Bachelor

of Science (B.Sc.) comprising 153 respondents (12.98%), and Bachelor of Commerce (B.Com) represents only 1 student (0.084%)

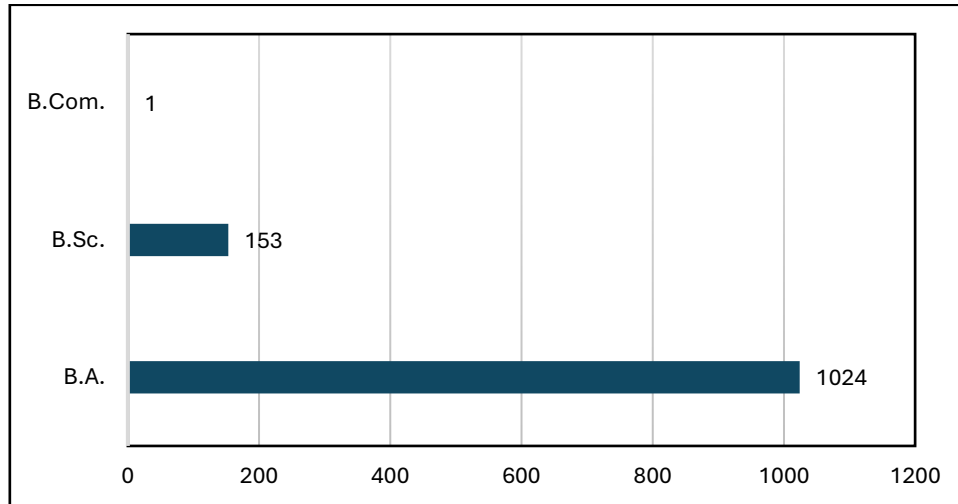


Figure 4.1.3 Educational streams of respondents

**4.1.4 Year of study of the respondents**

This distribution helps us to understand how old and experienced the respondents are in colleges and how it affects their thinking for information.

**Table 4.1.4 Year of Study**

| Education status | Respondents |        |
|------------------|-------------|--------|
|                  | Male        | Female |
| 1st Year         | 177         | 299    |
| 2nd Year         | 158         | 111    |
| 3rd Year         | 229         | 204    |

The analysis of data in Table 4.1.4 shows the distribution of respondents by their year of study out of the 1,178 participants. Out of these, the 1st Year group is the largest with 476 respondents (177 males, 299 females), making up 40.41% of the sample. This is followed by the 3rd Year with 433 respondents (229 males, 204 females), or 36.76%. The 2nd Year has the smallest number, with 269 individuals (158 males, 111 females), representing 22.83%. Overall, this chart shows a mix of experience levels, with more input from first-year and third-year students, which might tie into how new generation or more advanced undergrads handle info on social media.

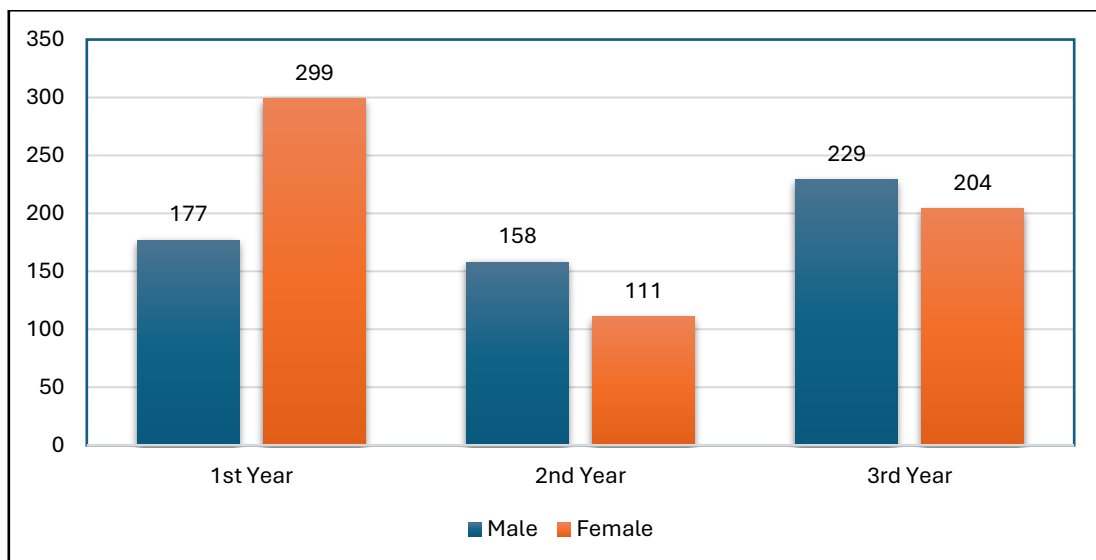


Figure 4.1.4 Year of Study of the respondents

## 4.2 Social media usage patterns

### 4.2.1 Frequency of social media platform usage

To know about what students like to do when they are online and it's important to look at the social media sites they visit the most. The statistics below shows how popular each social media network is among them and how many students use it gender wise.

**Table 4.2.1 Frequency of Social Media Platform Usage**

| Social Media Platforms | Number of Respondents |        |
|------------------------|-----------------------|--------|
|                        | Male                  | Female |
| Facebook               | 528                   | 493    |
| WhatsApp               | 564                   | 614    |
| Twitter                | 65                    | 08     |
| Instagram              | 408                   | 437    |
| YouTube                | 562                   | 570    |
| LinkedIn               | 36                    | 03     |
| Telegram               | 22                    | 01     |

The data in the Table 4.2.1 shows that WhatsApp is the most used platform among the total 1,178 respondents, as all respondents using this platform (564 males, 614 females), accounting for 100%. YouTube follows closely with 1,132 users (562 males, 570 females) accounting for 96.09%, and Facebook with 1,021 users (528 males, 493 females) accounting for 86.67%. Instagram is also significant, with 845 users (408 males, 437 females) accounting for 71.73%. On the other hand Twitter consist 7.83% (65 males, 08 females), LinkedIn 6.92% (36 males, 03 females) and Telegram 4.56% (22males, 03females).

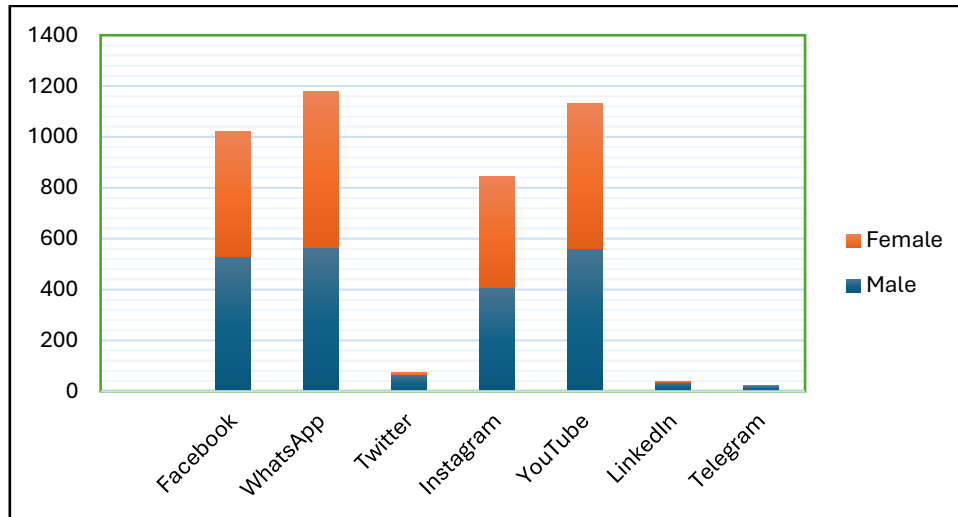


Figure 4.2.1 Platform wise social media usage of respondents

#### 4.2.2 Ranking of social media platforms by usage preference

While many students use numerous platforms, determining their major preference provides insight into their most trusted and frequently accessed source of information. The below table illustrates which sites students consider most vital in their daily digital activity.

**Table 4.2.2: Ranking of Social Media Platforms by Usage Preference**

| Social Media Platforms | Most used Social Media according to Respondents |        |
|------------------------|---|--------|
|                        | Male  | Female |
| Facebook               | 151   | 104    |
| WhatsApp               | 193   | 292    |
| Instagram              | 53  | 96     |
| YouTube                | 167   | 122    |

The analysis of data in Table 4.2.2 shows out of all social media platforms, WhatsApp ranks as the most preferred social media platform among the 1,178 respondents, with 485 individuals or 41.17% (193 males, 292 females) considered it as their top choice. YouTube follows with 289 i.e. 24.53% respondents (167 males, 122 females), Facebook with 255 i.e. 21.65% (151 males, 104 females) and Instagram is selected by 149 respondents i.e. 12.65% (53 males, 96 females).

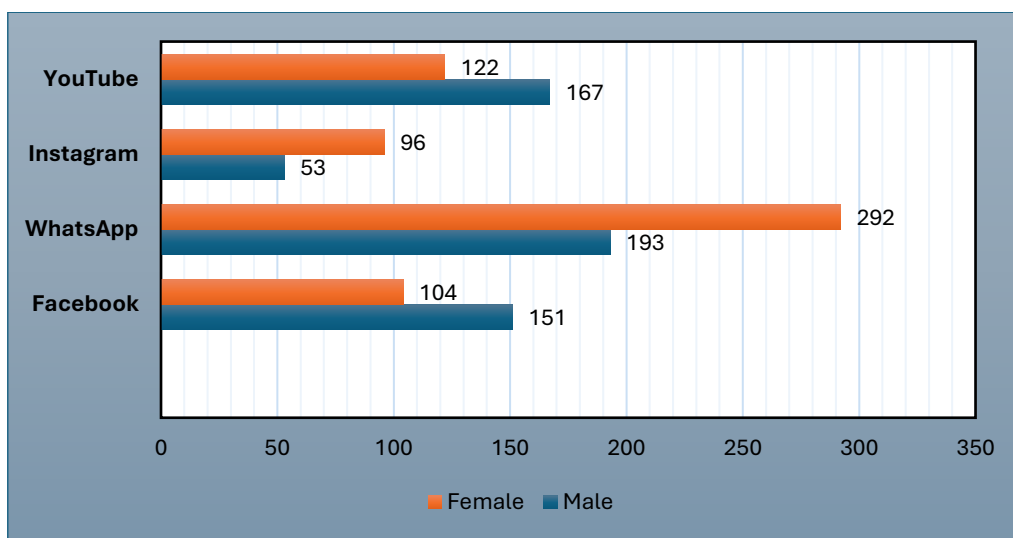


Figure 4.2.2 Social media platforms usage rank by respondents

### 4.2.3 Daily time spent on social media

The amount of time students spend on social media closely correlates with their exposure to information, both trustworthy and unreliable. Analysing everyday usage patterns helps evaluate the amount of digital involvement and potential impact on information consumption habits.

**Table 4.2.3 Daily Time Spent on Social Media**

| Time Spending     | Number of Respondents |        |
|-------------------|-----------------------|--------|
|                   | Male                  | Female |
| Less than an hour | 48                    | 25     |
| 1-3 hours         | 235                   | 330    |
| 3-5 hours         | 163                   | 178    |
| 5-7 hours         | 85                    | 50     |
| More than 7 hours | 33                    | 31     |

The data in Table 4.2.3 shows that among the 1,178 respondents, 565(235 males, 330 females), spending 1-3 hours daily on social media, representing 47.96% of the sample. The 3-5 hour category follows with 341 respondents (163males, 178 females), which is 28.95%, whereas 73 respondents i.e. 6.20% (48 males, 25 females) spend less than an hour, and 64 i.e. 5.43% (33males, 31 females) exceed 7 hours. The 5-7 hour group includes 135 respondents (85males, 50females) which is 11.46%

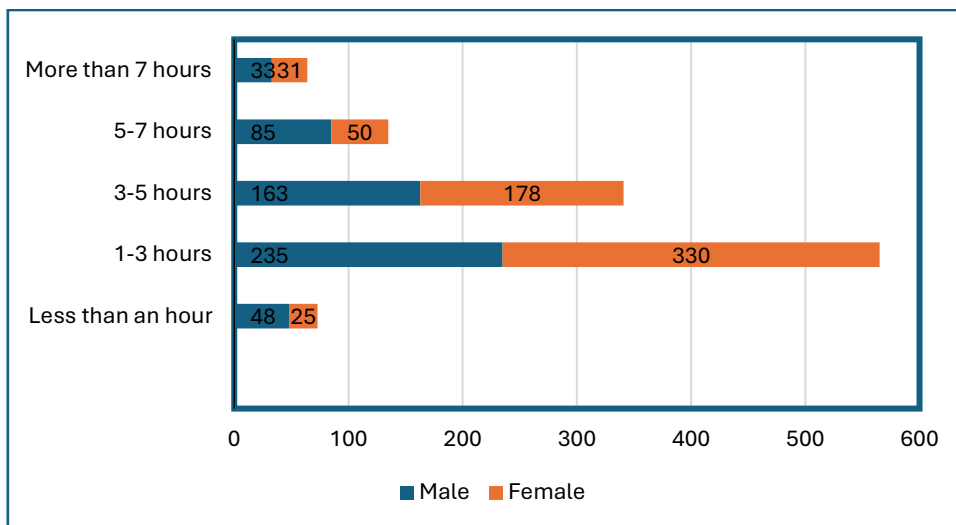


Figure 4.2.3 Daily time spent by respondents

#### 4.2.4 Primary purposes for using social media

Understanding the motivations behind social media usage reveals whether students engage these platforms with information-gathering intent or only for fun purposes. This disparity is critical for measuring their sensitivity to fake news and their information literacy needs.

**Table 4.2.4 Primary purposes for using social media**

| Purpose of using social media                            | Number of Respondents |        |
|--|-----------------------|--------|
|  | Male                  | Female |
| Information (Find, read or share the news)               | 296                   | 338    |
| Time pass (Entertainment purpose)                        | 238                   | 256    |
| For relationships reasons (To stay in touch with people) | 27                    | 20     |
| Other  | 3                     | Nil    |

Table 4.2.4 disclose that among the 1,178 respondents, the primary purpose for using social media is information-seeking, with 634 individuals (296 males, 338 females), or 53.82%, selected this reason. Entertainment ranks second, with 494 respondents (238 males, 256 females), comprising 41.93%. Staying in touch for relationship purposes went with 47 respondents i.e. 4% (27 males, 20 females), and 3 males (0.25 mention other purposes.

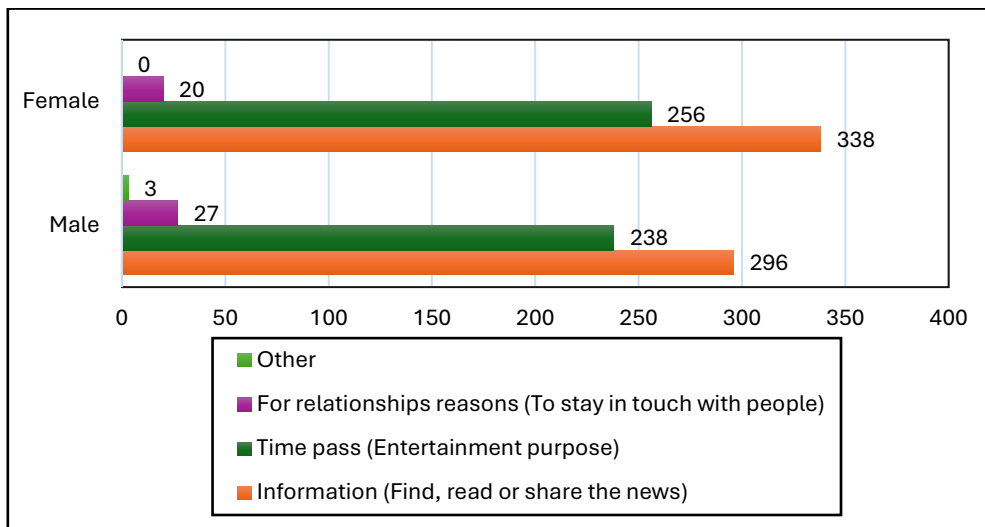


Figure 4.2.4 Respondents' primary purpose of using social media

### Summary

These social media usage patterns paint a picture of a generation whose lives are deeply woven into the fabric of digital communication. WhatsApp and YouTube aren't just apps installed on their phones, these are essential parts of how these students connect, learn, and understand the world around them. It can be seen that nearly half of students spend 1-3 hours daily on social media, with another third spending 3-5 hours, we're looking at young people who are constantly swimming in a sea of information. What makes this particularly concerning is that more than half of them isn't just scrolling for entertainment—they're actively seeking information and news. They've come to trust these platforms as legitimate sources of knowledge, even though these spaces lack the careful fact-checking and editorial oversight that traditional news outlets provide. This creates a perfect storm, students who spend significant portions of their day consuming information from sources that mix truth with fiction, without always having the tools to tell them apart.

### 4.3: News consumption and information-seeking behaviour

#### 4.3.1 First choice for Breaking News

Changes in the media landscape and generational preferences are reflected in the evolution of news consumption patterns. Analysing students' first pick for breaking news reveals their degree of confidence and availability in various media outlets and emphasises how digital platforms perform better than conventional media.

**Table 4.3.1: First Choice for Breaking News**

| Sources       | Number of Respondents |        |
|---------------|-----------------------|--------|
|               | Male                  | Female |
| Television    | 57                    | 116    |
| Newspaper     | 71                    | 38     |
| Word of Mouth | 12                    | 9      |
| Social Media  | 424                   | 451    |

Table 4.3.1 reveals that out of all the 1,178 respondents, social media is the leading source for breaking news, with 875 individuals (424 males, 451 females), or 74.28% preferring it. Television follows with 173 respondents (57 males, 116 females), representing 14.69%, and newspapers with 109 (71 males, 38 females), or 9.25%. Word of mouth is selected by 21 respondents i.e. 1.78% (12 males, 9 females), and no other sources are mentioned.

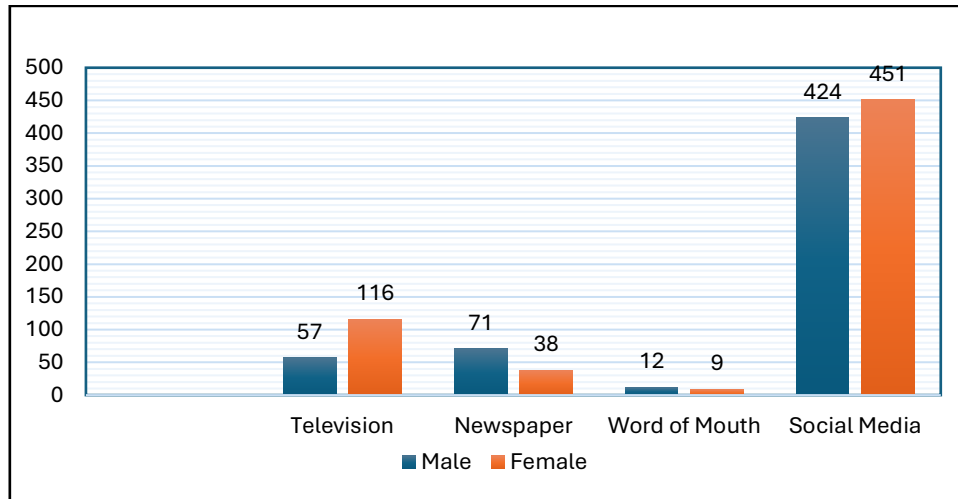


Figure 4.3.1 Choice of first source of breaking news

### 4.3.2 Social media for maximum daily news

The shift from traditional news sources to social media platforms has transformed how young people consume news and stay informed about current events. Understanding which platforms serve as primary news source helps to find potential vulnerabilities to fake news.

Table 4.3.2: Social media for maximum daily news

| Social Media Platforms | Number of Respondents |        |
|------------------------|-----------------------|--------|
|                        | Male                  | Female |
| Facebook               | 201                   | 253    |
| WhatsApp               | 08                    | 11     |
| Instagram              | 23                    | 18     |
| YouTube                | 192                   | 169    |

The Table 4.3.2 shows that Facebook is the primary platform for breaking news among the 875 respondents who choose social media as their breaking news source out of 1178 respondents,

with 454 individuals (201 males, 253 females) which constitute 51.88% relying on it. YouTube ranks second with 361 respondents (41.26%) whereas WhatsApp and Instagram are used by 19 respondents (2.17%) and 41 (4.69%) respondents, respectively.

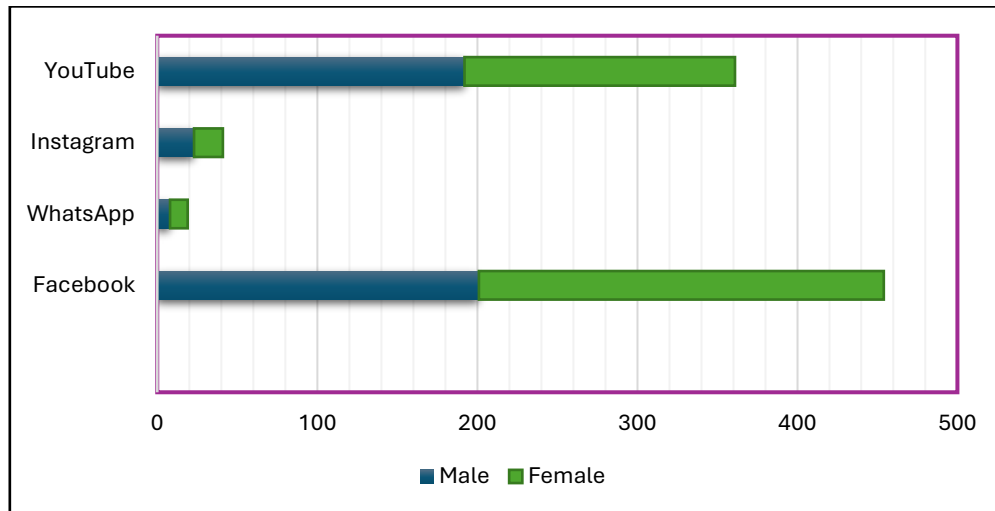


Figure 4.3.2 Social media for maximum daily news

### 4.3.3 Frequency of News Topics Encountered on Social Media

The type of news content that dominates social media feeds changes students' perspective and information priorities. Understanding which themes are most commonly encountered helps identify areas where fake news might have the most impact on student attitudes.

**Table 4.3.3: Frequency of News Topics Encountered on Social Media**

| Topic          | Number of Respondents |        |
|----------------|-----------------------|--------|
|                | Male                  | Female |
| Social News    | 257                   | 454    |
| Health News    | 49                    | 53     |
| Political news | 115                   | 81     |
| Sports news    | 137                   | 25     |
| Other          | 6                     | 1      |

Table 4.3.3 reveals that among all the 1,178 respondents, social news is the most encountered topic, with 711 individuals (257 males, 454 females) which constitutes 60.35%. Political news follows with 296 respondents (115 males, 81 females) i.e. 25.12% and sports news with 162 (137 males, 25 females) i.e. 13.75%. Health news is selected by 102 respondents i.e. 8.66% (49 males, 53 females), while other topics with 7 respondents i.e. 0.64% (6 males, 1 female).

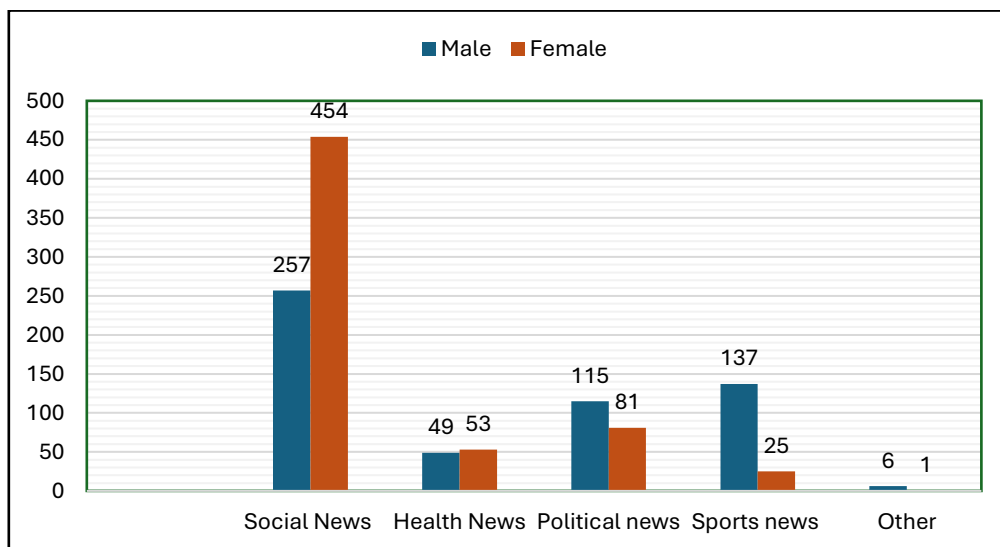


Figure 4.3.3 News topics encountered on social media

**4.3.4 Main sources for assignments**

Academic research habits shows students' attitude to information verification and their dependence on digital versus conventional sources. The choice of sources for assignments reflects both convenience factors and trust in different kind of information sources.

**Table: 4.3.4 Main Sources for Assignments**

| Topic                      | Number of Respondents |        |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|--------|
|                            | Male                  | Female |
| Library (Physical/Virtual) | 53                    | 75     |
| Google                     | 458                   | 504    |
| Wikipedia                  | 43                    | 34     |
| Other                      | 10                    | 1      |

The above Table 4.3.4 reveals that among the 1,178 respondents, Google is selected by 962 respondents (458 males, 504 females), i.e. 81.66%, relying on it. Libraries (physical or virtual) are used by 128 respondents (53 males, 75 females), comprising 10.87%, followed by Wikipedia with 77 (43 males, 34 females), or 6.54%. Other sources selected by 11 respondents i.e. 0.93% (10 males, 1 female).

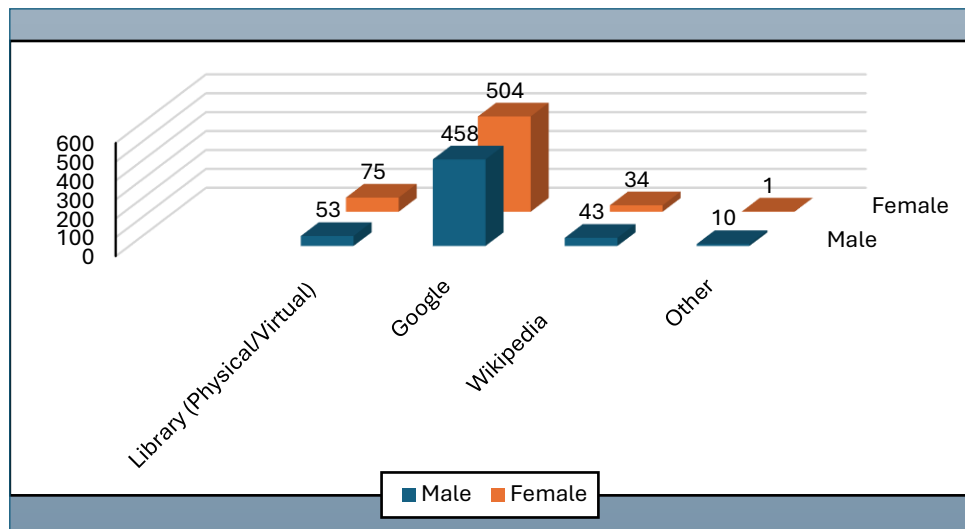


Figure 4.3.4 Respondents' main sources for assignments

### Summary

The shift that witnessing here is profound and troubling to see. When three out of four students turn to social media first for breaking news, choosing it over newspapers and television, we're seeing a complete transformation in how young people stay informed about the world. Facebook has become their newsroom, YouTube their broadcast channel. Even for their academic work, they've essentially replaced the library with Google—over 80% depend on it as their primary academic research tool. This isn't just about convenience or laziness; it reflects a fundamental change in how students approach information itself. They've grown up in a world where answers are supposed to be instant and accessible through a search bar. The problem is that this approach works reasonably well for straightforward facts but falls apart when dealing with complex, contested, or deliberately misleading information. Students have learned to find information quickly, but they haven't necessarily learned to evaluate whether that information deserves their trust.

**4.4 Fake news awareness and behaviour**

**4.4.1 Frequency of Encountering Fake News**

The outbreak of fake news exposure among students reflects the extent of the disinformation crisis in digital settings. Universal exposure to fake news shows that learning critical assessment skills is not optional but needed for all social media users.

**Table 4.4.1: Frequency of Encountering Fake News**

| Noticed Fake news on Social Media sites? | Number of Respondents |        |
|--|-----------------------|--------|
|  | Male                  | Female |
| Yes                                      | 564                   | 614    |
| No                                       | Nil                   | Nil    |

Table 4.4.1 reveals universal exposure to fake news, with all 1,178 respondents (564 males and 614 females) reporting they have encountered fake news on social media platforms, resulting in a 100% exposure rate..

**4.4.2 Platforms where fake news is most frequently encountered**

Different social media sites have different levels of content filtering and verification processes, resulting to different experiences with fake news. Identifying which platforms are more related with falsehood helps understand platform related dangers and issues.

**Table 4.4.2: Platforms where fake news is most frequently encountered**

| Social Media with most fake news | Male | Female |
|----------------------------------|------|--------|
| Facebook                         | 316  | 300    |
| WhatsApp                         | 39   | 25     |
| Instagram                        | 21   | 15     |
| YouTube                          | 185  | 274    |
| Others                           | 3    | Nil    |

Table 4.4.2 shows that among the 1,178 respondents, Facebook is most associated with fake news, with 616 individuals (316 males, 300 females), i.e. 52.29%. YouTube follows with 459 respondents (185 males, 274 females), representing 38.96%. WhatsApp and Instagram assigned with 64 i.e. 5.43% (39 males, 25 females) and 37 i.e. 3.14% (21 males, 15 females) respondents, respectively and others platforms with 0.25%.

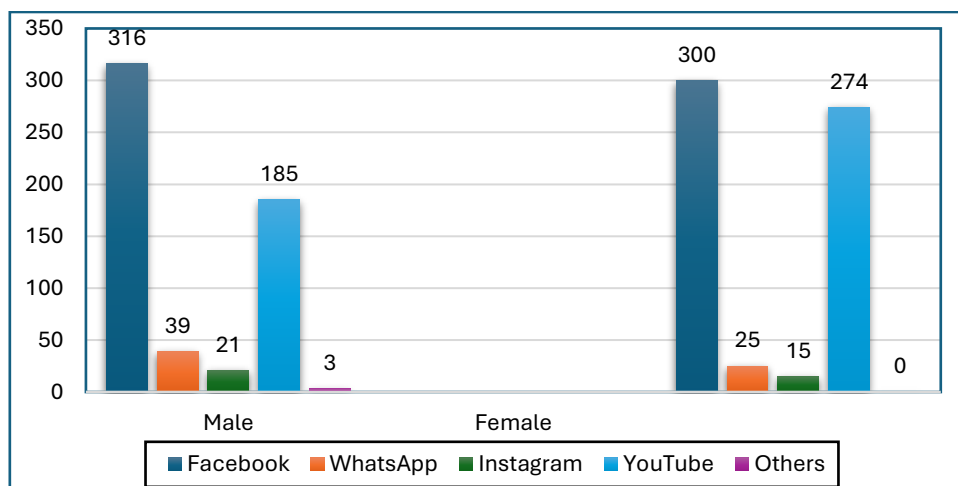


Figure 4.4.2 Platforms with maximum fake news

**4.4.3 Fooled by fake news frequency**

The regularity with which respondents fall victim of fake news reflects their critical thinking and awareness of information literacy. Regular deception by fake news suggests widespread deficiencies in critical thinking and verification skills.

**Table 4.4.3: Fooled by Fake News Frequency**

| Fooled by thinking Fake News as real news | Number of Respondents |        |
|---|-----------------------|--------|
|   | Male                  | Female |
| Hourly                                    | 09                    | 5      |
| Daily                                     | 46                    | 43     |
| Weekly                                    | 76                    | 67     |
| Monthly                                   | 183                   | 186    |
| Too many times to count                   | 142                   | 214    |
| No never                                  | 108                   | 99     |

The above Table 4.4.3 shows that out of the 1,178 respondents, 369 individuals (183 males, 186 females) i.e. 31.32%, have been fooled by fake news monthly, making it the most common frequency. On the other hand, 356 respondents (142 males, 214 females), or 30.22%, report being deceived "too many times to count." Weekly incidents are selected by 143 which is 12.13% (76 males, 67 females), daily by 89 (46 males, 43 females) constitute 7.55% , and hourly by 14 (9 males, 5 females) i.e. 1.18%. Only 207 respondents (108 males, 99 females), or 17.57%, claim never to have been fooled.

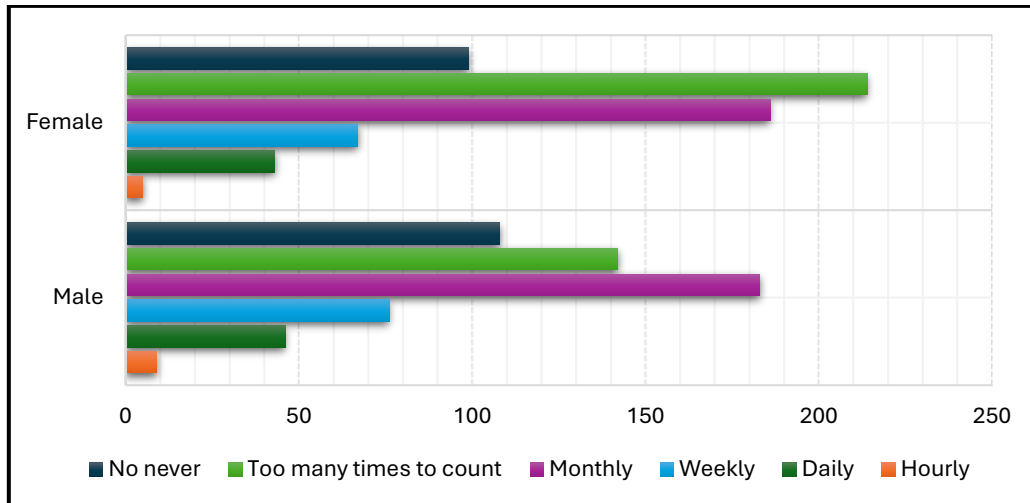


Figure 4.4.3 Frequency of fooled by fake news

#### 4.4.4 Actions taken when facing fake news

How students react to fake news encounters reflects their digital citizenship abilities and comprehension of their responsibility in preventing fake news spread. The decision between ignoring, reporting, or sharing demonstrates various levels of engagement with platform safety systems.

Table 4.4.4: Actions taken when facing fake news

| Reactions                        | Number of Respondents |        |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|--------|
|                                  | Male                  | Female |
| Re-share the post to warn others | 68                    | 58     |
| Ignore the post                  | 387                   | 519    |
| Report the post                  | 109                   | 37     |

Table 4.4.4 shows that out of the 1,178 respondents, 906 individuals (387 males, 519 females) or 76.91%, choose the option ‘Ignore the post’. Reporting the post follows with 146

respondents (109 males, 37 females) i.e. 12.40%, while 126 (68 males, 58 females), or 10.69%, re-share to warn others.

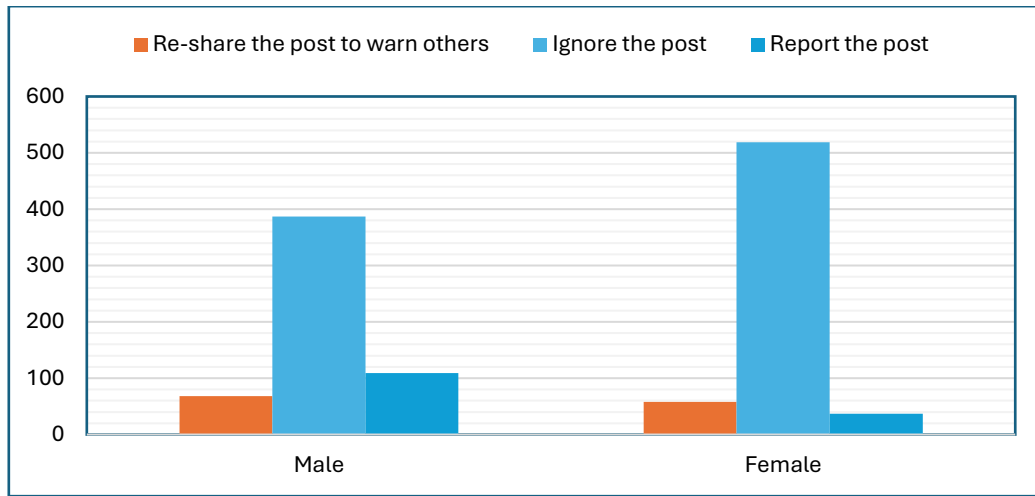


Figure 4.4.4 Respondents reactions when facing fake news

**4.4.5 Self-confidence levels in identifying fake news**

Students belief in their ability to differentiate between authentic and fake news strongly effects their information intake behaviour and susceptibility to fake news. Self-assessment of this skill indicates disparities between perceived and real information literacy competencies.

**Table 4.4.5: Self-confidence levels in identifying fake news**

| Confident Level      | Number of Respondents |        |
|----------------------|-----------------------|--------|
|                      | Male                  | Female |
| Very confident       | 104                   | 93     |
| Somewhat confident   | 347                   | 287    |
| Not very confident   | 76                    | 201    |
| Not at all confident | 37                    | 33     |

The analysis of data in Table 4.4.5 reveals that out of the 1,178 respondents, the majority, totalling 634 (347 males, 287 females), or 53.82%, are somewhat confident in distinguishing real from fake news. A smaller group of 197 respondents (104 males, 93 females), or 16.72%, feel very confident, while 277 (76 males, 201 females), or 23.52%, are not very confident. Only 70 respondents (37 males, 33 females), or 5.94%, are not at all confident. This distribution suggests moderate assurance prevails, though a significant portion, particularly females, lack strong confidence, indicating gaps in media literacy within this sample.

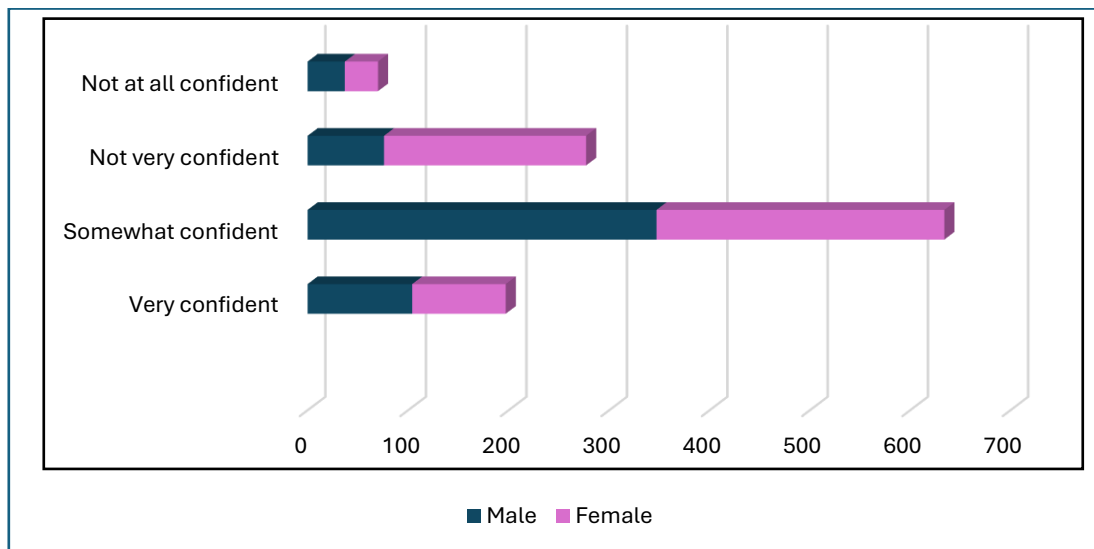


Figure 4.4.5 Confidence levels in identifying fake news

#### **4.4.6 Categories of information most associated with fake news**

Various forms of content are more prone to misleading and identifying these trends helps identify high-risk information categories. Political content, health information, and entertainment news often become vehicles for propagating false information due to their emotive appeal and rapid sharing potential.

**Table 4.4.6 Categories of information most associated with fake news**

| Most fake news contents | Number of Respondents |        |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|--------|
|                         | Male                  | Female |
| Academic                | 40                    | 43     |
| Politics                | 286                   | 271    |
| Humour & Gossip         | 63                    | 122    |
| Health & Diet           | 60                    | 116    |
| Sports                  | 50                    | 6      |
| Entertainment           | 57                    | 56     |
| Others                  | 8                     | Nil    |

The analysis of data in Table 4.4.6 shows that among the 1,178 respondents, political fake news is the most prevalent, with 557 individuals (286 males, 271 females), or 47.28%, identifying it. Humour and gossip follow with 185 respondents which constitute 15.70% (63 males, 122 females), and health and diet with 176 i.e. 14.94% (60 males, 116 females), showing female prominence. Entertainment is noted by 9.59% or 113 (57 males, 56 females), academic by 7.04% (40 males, 43 females), and sports by 56 which 4.75% (50 males, 6 females). Other categories are minimal, with 8 males (0.70). This suggests politics dominates misinformation, with lifestyle topics are also important.

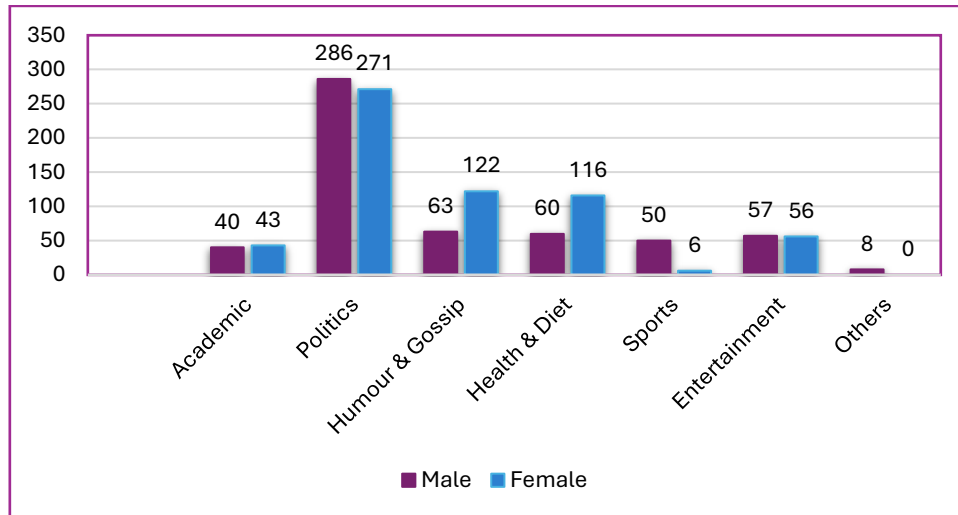


Figure 4.4.6 Information categories most associated with fake news

### Summary

What emerges from these findings is a troubling paradox as students are simultaneously aware and vulnerable. Every single student has encountered fake news, and most have been fooled by it at least occasionally. They know the problem exist, they can talk about it, worry about it, even point to examples of it. Yet when fake news appears in their feeds, their most common response is to simply ignore it and scroll past. Very few participants report it, and even fewer try to warn others. It's as if they've accepted fake news as an unavoidable part of the digital landscape, like ads or spam, something annoying but not worth actively fighting against. This passive stance becomes even more concerning when we see that over a third of students admit to sharing information without verifying it first. They're not malicious; they're just moving through their digital lives without pausing to question what they see. Political content dominates their fake news exposure, which means the fake news they encounter isn't just misleading them about random facts—it's potentially shaping their understanding of democracy, governance, and civic life.

## **4.5 Fact-checking behaviour**

### **4.5.1 Usage frequency of fact-checking sites**

The employment of dedicated fact-checking websites reflects a proactive approach to information verification. The lack or presence of such activity indicates the level of sophisticated information literacy practices among students and their understanding of accessible verification tools.

**Table 4.5.1: Frequency of fact-checking website usage among respondents**

| Use of Fact Checking Sites | Number of Respondents |        |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|--------|
|                            | Male                  | Female |
| Yes                        | Nil                   | Nil    |
| No                         | 564                   | 614    |

The analysis of data in Table 4.5.1 indicates that none of the 1178 respondents, 564 males and 614 females—use fact-checking sites, with all responding "No." This 100% non-engagement rate highlights a critical gap in verifying information, particularly alarming given the high social media reliance for news observed earlier. The complete absence of fact-checking behaviour suggests that respondents may be vulnerable to misinformation, potentially exacerbating its spread within this demographic. This finding underscores the urgent need for educational interventions to promote fact-checking practices among students, especially in an era dominated by digital information sources.

**4.5.2 Sharing without verification**

The practice of sharing information without verification contributes significantly to fake news spread across social networks. Understanding how many students engage in this behaviour reveals the extent of unintentional misinformation propagation and highlights the need for digital literacy.

**Table 4.5.2: Sharing Without Verification**

| Shared Information without verifying | Number of Respondents |        |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------|
|                                      | Male                  | Female |
| Yes                                  | 230                   | 186    |
| No                                   | 334                   | 428    |

The analysis of data in Table 4.5.2 reveals that among the 1,178 respondents, 416 individuals (230 males, 186 females), or 35.31%, have shared information without verifying its authenticity, while 762 (334 males, 428 females), or 64.68%, have not. This indicates that while the majority exercise caution, a substantial minority contributes to fake news. The higher male tendency to share unverified content (230 vs. 186 females) may reflect gender differences in online behaviour or risk perception. This behaviour, combined with the lack of fact-checking, poses a significant challenge to information reliability within this sample..

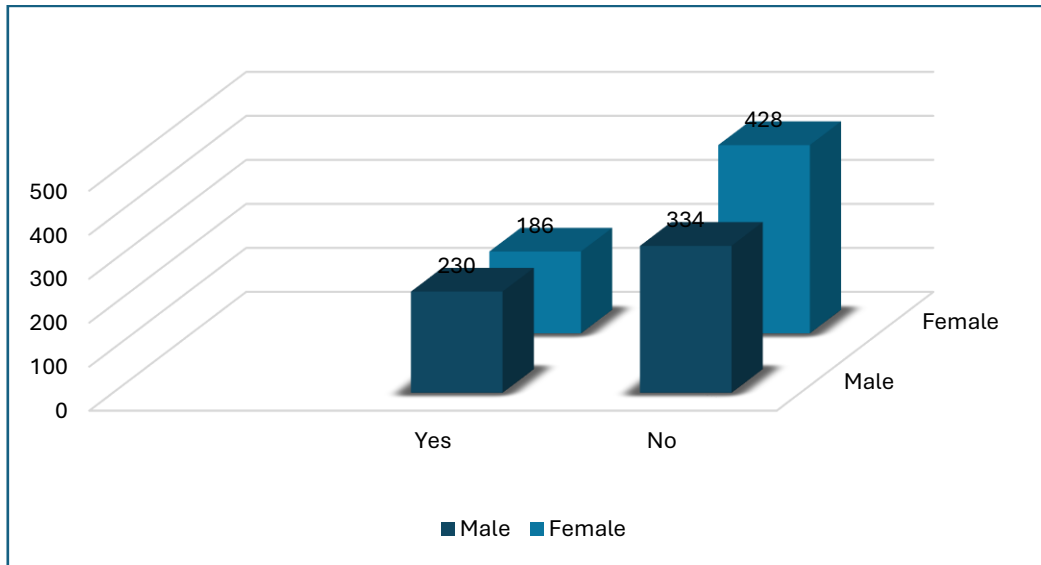


Figure 4.5.2 Frequency of sharing information without verification

### 4.5.3 Trust levels in news found on social media

The way students approach or news on social media, whether they're doubtful or accepting—directly shapes what they read and what they ultimately believe.

**Table 4.5.3: Trust Levels in News Found on Social Media**

| Topic            | Number of Respondents |        |
|------------------|-----------------------|--------|
|                  | Male                  | Female |
| Always           | 162                   | 74     |
| Most of the time | 154                   | 107    |
| Sometimes        | 201                   | 336    |
| Rarely           | 18                    | 57     |
| Never            | 29                    | 40     |

The analysis of data in Table 4.5.3 shows that out of the 1,178 respondents, the majority, totalling 537 (201 males, 336 females), or 45.59%, believe social media articles are sometimes reliable. Next, 261 respondents (154 males, 107 females), or 22.16%, trust them most of the time, and 236 (162 males, 74 females), or 20.03%, say always. Only 75 (18 males, 57 females), or 6.37%, say rarely, and 69 (29 males, 40 females), or 5.85%, say never. This predominant scepticism, with nearly half viewing reliability as inconsistent, reflects a cautious stance toward social media content among this demographic.

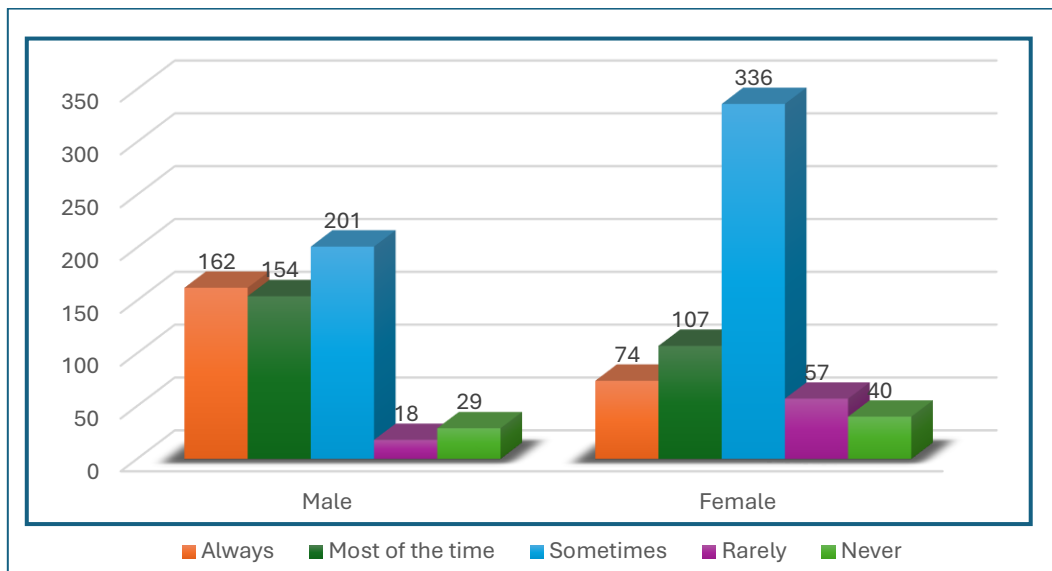


Figure 4.5.3 Trust levels of respondents on news found on social media

#### **4.5.4 Identification methods of fake news**

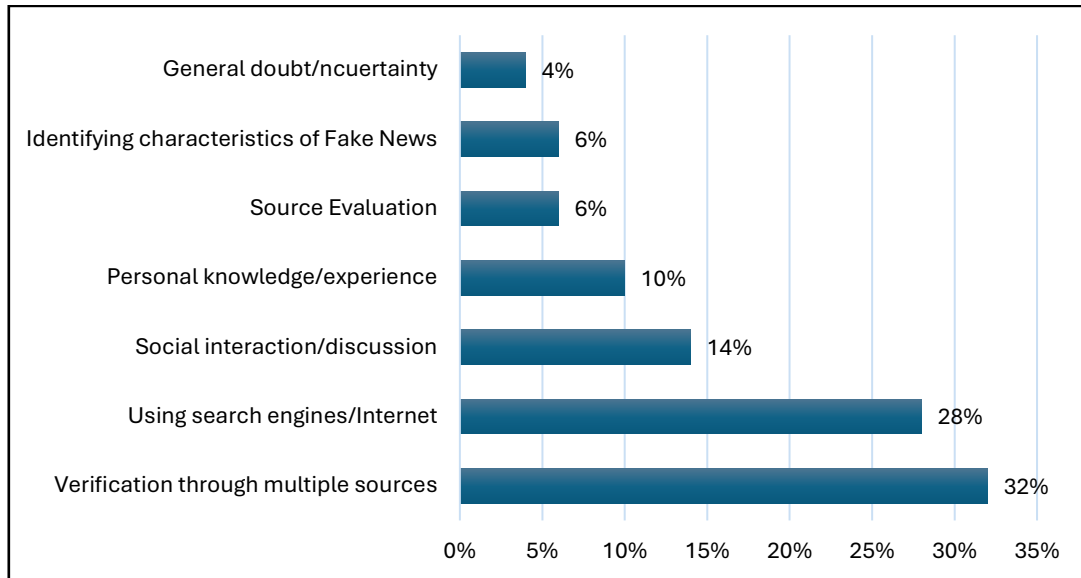
Understanding the methods that students employ to identify fake news reveals their current information literacy strategies and highlights areas for improvement. The diversity of approaches indicates varying levels of sophistication in information evaluation techniques among the student population.

Table 4.5.4 Identification methods of Fake News

| Theme                                 | Percentage | Key identification methods  |
|---------------------------------------|------------|---|
| Verification through multiple sources | 32%        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Checking other news channels</li> <li>• Searching newspapers and TV</li> <li>• Checking for the same news on 2 or 3 websites</li> <li>• Looking out to other sources of social media</li> <li>• Checking verified websites and other applications</li> </ul> |
| Using search engines/Internet         | 28%        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Searching it on Google</li> <li>• Checking it on other internet sites</li> </ul>   |
| Social interaction/discussion         | 14%        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussing with friends</li> <li>• Talking with someone</li> <li>• Consider posts with friends</li> </ul>  |
| Personal knowledge/experience         | 10%        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• From previous knowledge</li> <li>• I know about the news so I can easily identify</li> <li>• From my previous knowledge and experience</li> </ul>  |
| Source Evaluation                     | 6%         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Check the source/website where story comes from</li> <li>• Checking verified news channel or source</li> </ul>   |

|  |    |  |
|--|----|--|
| Identifying characteristics of Fake News | 6% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less relevance, non-convincing</li> <li>• Fake news contain irrelevant items</li> <li>• Fake news are too unrealistic to believe</li> </ul> |
| General doubt/uncertainty                | 4% | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If I have doubt about information, I check on internet</li> <li>• If information creates doubt, I check on Google</li> </ul>                |

Table 4.5.4 shows the different ways students identify whether any news on social media is fake. Percentages based on thematic coding of 1,178 open-ended responses; some responses contained multiple themes. Out of 1,178 respondents, almost a third (32%) identify by checking multiple sources, comparing what they see across different websites, news channels, and social media platforms. Another 28% immediately head to Google to verify the information or clear doubt regarding that fake news. Some students (14%) came to know from friends or peers, while 10% know from experience. A smaller number by checking from where the news is coming from (6%), and another 6% know by just seeing the features of the news. And then there's 4% who just trust their instincts when something feels off.



4.5.4 percentage-wise distribution of how respondents identify fake news

#### 4.5.5 Understanding students verification process

The numbers tell us what students do, but conversations with them revealed why they struggle. Sitting down with students brought out their confusion, frustration, and sometimes resignation about navigating information online.

##### Why they avoid fact-checking sites

When asked about fact-checking websites like Boom , India Today Fact Check, Factly or Alt News, a second-year male student from Suri said simply: "I didn't know these websites existed. Nobody told us about them." This came up again and again and students weren't rejecting these tools, they just had no idea they existed. Even after learning about them, many expressed doubt. A third-year female student from Bolpur was straightforward: "If I have to open a different website every time I see something on Facebook, that's too much work. I'm just scrolling between classes." For students whose primary education was in Bengali, language created another barrier.

Trust became an issue too. A second-year female student questioned: "How do I know the fact-checkers aren't biased? They might have their own agenda." When everyone claims to have the truth, figuring out who to trust becomes paralyzing.

### **The confidence gap**

A third-year male student who rated himself "very confident" at spotting fake news struggled to explain his method: "I can just feel it. If something seems too crazy, it's probably fake." When pressed, he couldn't describe clear criteria—just intuition. A first-year female student was more self-aware: "I believed that UNESCO thing about our anthem. It made me feel proud, so I didn't question it. Now I realize I believe things that make me feel good, even when they're not true." A second-year male student indicates: "Teachers taught us the textbook is always correct. We never learned to question things. Now suddenly we're supposed to doubt everything on social media? We don't know how."

### **Why they share without checking**

A first-year male said candidly: "If something's interesting or funny, I share it. We're just having fun, not writing a newspaper." He didn't see casual sharing as part of the problem. Others had emotional reasons. A second-year female explained: "When I see posts about injustice, I feel I should share quickly on social media to spread awareness. Isn't that better than taking time to verify?" She genuinely believed speed mattered more than accuracy. Peer pressure played a role too. A first-year female admitted: "In our WhatsApp group, everyone shares constantly. If I question something, I look like I'm being superior. It's easier to just share along."

### **WhatsApp's special problem**

A third-year female explained WhatsApp's appeal: "On Facebook, I see posts from strangers but on WhatsApp, it's my close friends and family so I trust them more, they wouldn't send me something false on purpose." This relationship-based trust made WhatsApp particularly

effective at spreading misinformation. A second-year male student noted: "On Facebook, you see comments calling things out as fake. In WhatsApp groups, nobody wants to ruin the mood by saying 'this might be fake.' So false things just circulate."

These conversations revealed students who aren't indifferent—they're aware fake news is a problem but confused about how to handle it, overwhelmed by constant vigilance, and open to solutions that would make verification feel less burdensome.

### **Summary**

Perhaps one of the most striking findings in this entire study is the complete absence of fact-checking tool usage. Not a single student used dedicated fact-checking websites or verification tools. It simply means, students are navigating a digital world filled with misinformation and disinformation, they know fake news is everywhere, many have been deceived by it, yet none of them have adopted the most basic tool available for protecting themselves. It's like knowing there's a storm coming but never checking the weather forecast. When they do try to verify information and not all of them do, they rely on informal methods like, asking friends, searching Google, or looking at multiple sources that might all be repeating the same false claim. While these approaches show some critical thinking, they're simply not sufficient against sophisticated false information campaigns. Their own words reveal the heart of the problem: they're not indifferent or careless, but rather overwhelmed, confused about whom to trust, and caught between the effort verification requires and the speed at which their social circles expect them to engage with content. The verification methods students use was perhaps adequate for an earlier internet era, but they're increasingly inadequate against modern fake news that's designed to fool precisely these casual checks.

**4.6: Perceived impact of social media on information literacy**

**4.6.1 Perceived impact of technology/social media**

Students’ perspectives about how social media influences their information literacy reveal their self-awareness regarding digital information consumption. These perceptions influence their approach to internet content and their willingness to learn critical evaluation abilities.

**Table 4.6.1 Perceived Impact of Social Media**

| Responses  | Number of Respondents |        |
|--|-----------------------|--------|
|  | Male                  | Female |
| Yes, I'm more informed from the news I read                      | 197                   | 82     |
| I'm somewhat more informed, but unsure of reliability            | 298                   | 440    |
| Yes, I'm highly informed as I read a lot and question everything | 38                    | 40     |
| No, I don't trust what I read, so I'm not informed.              | 31                    | 52     |

The analysis of data in Table 4.6.1 (noting 1,178 respondents) shows that among 564 males and 614 females, the majority, totalling 738 (298 males, 440 females), or 62.64%, feel somewhat more informed by social media but are unsure of its reliability. Next, 279 respondents (197 males, 82 females), or 23.68%, say they are more informed, while 78 (38

males, 40 females), or 6.62%, feel highly informed and critically engaged. Only 83 (31 males, 52 females), or 7.04%, don't trust the content entirely.

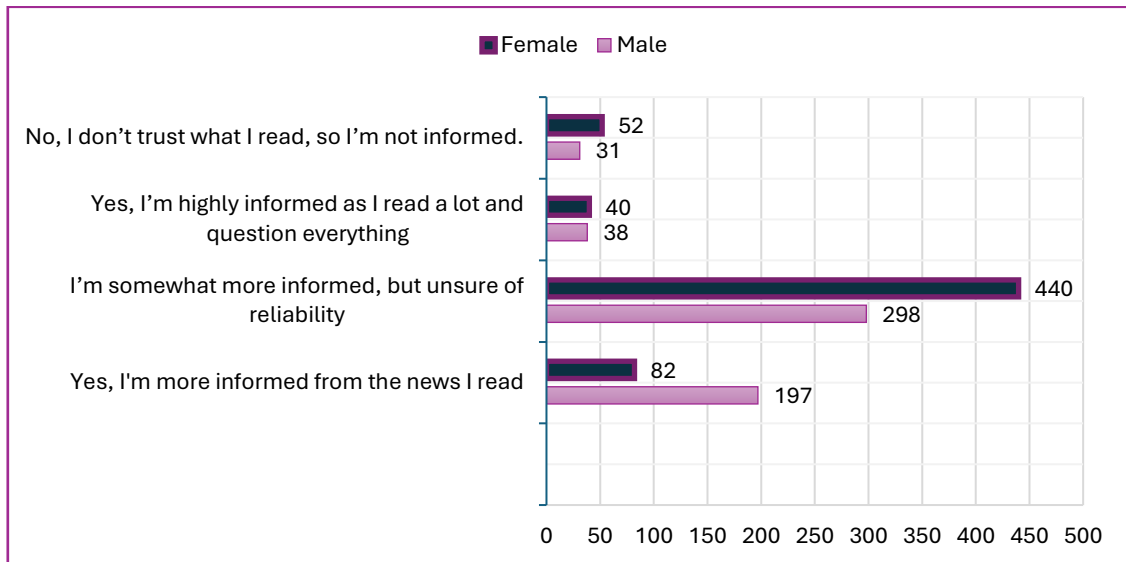


Figure 4.6.1 Impact of social media/technology on information literacy

#### 4.6.2 Accuracy in identifying fake vs. real news

Testing students' actual ability to discriminate between fake and real news provides objective evidence of their information literacy skills. The discrepancy between perceived confidence and actual performance reflects the effectiveness of existing information evaluation systems and educational needs.

**Table 4.6.2: Accuracy in Identifying Fake vs. Real News**

| Statement   | Number of Respondents |            |            |
|---|-----------------------|------------|------------|
|   | Fake                  | Real       | No Idea    |
| UNESCO has declared ‘Jana Gana Mana’ best national anthem in the world  | <b>211</b>            | <b>261</b> | <b>706</b> |
| 5G was responsible for spreading the COVID-19 virus, and the pandemic was a cover-up for the installation of 5G infrastructure across the country | <b>672</b>            | <b>55</b>  | <b>451</b> |

The analysis of data in Table 4.6.2 tests the 1,178 respondents’ ability to identify fake vs. real news. For the statement "UNESCO has declared ‘JanaGana Mana’ best national anthem," 211 (17.91%) say fake, 261 (22.15%) say real, and 706 (59.93%) have no idea, indicating high uncertainty. For the incomplete "5G" statement, 672 (57.04%) say fake, 55 (4.66%) say real, and 451 (38.28%) have no idea. The significant "No Idea" responses (706 and 451) highlight limited discernment, with many respondents unsure or incorrect, underscoring challenges in information literacy.

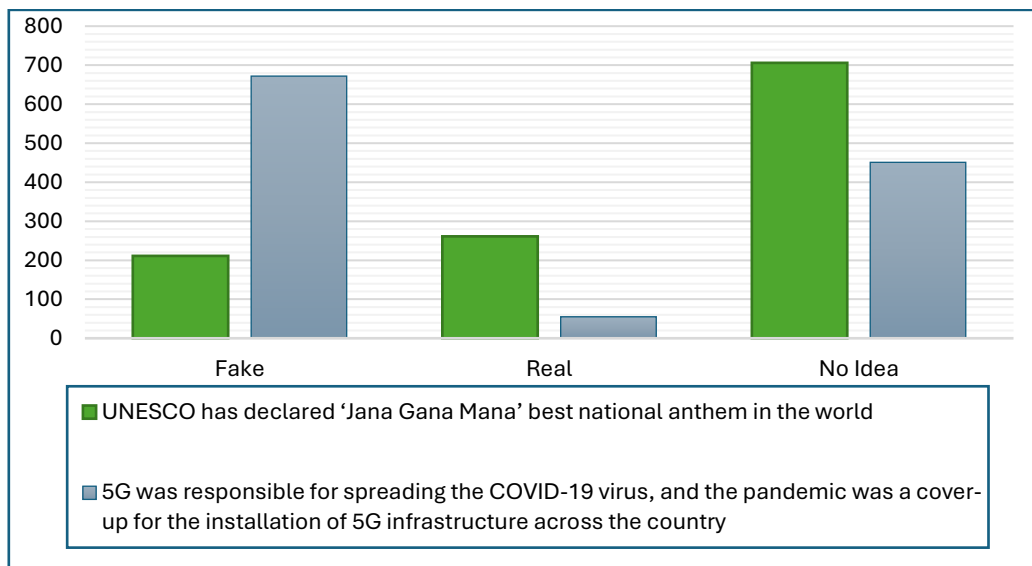


Figure 4.6.2 Respondents accuracy of identifying fake and real news on social media

#### 4.6.3 Awareness and understanding of information literacy concepts

Information literacy as a formal term comprises fundamental skills for evaluating, understanding, and employing information successfully in academic and professional contexts. The awareness level of this subject among students reveals if they recognize the methodical approach needed for effective information management and assessment in the digital age.

**Table 4.6.3: Awareness and understanding of Information Literacy**

| Response Category    | Number of Respondents | Percentage | Description  |
|----------------------|-----------------------|------------|--|
| I don't Know/No Idea | 1178                  | 100%       | Complete lack of awareness regarding information literacy concepts in respondents according to their feedback. |

When students were directly asked if they had any idea what 'information literacy' meant, every single one of the 1,178 respondents admitted they'd never heard the term before . This universal unfamiliarity also indicates that, students may practice some verification behaviours, but they lack formal awareness of information literacy as a structured skill set.

**4.6.4 Respondents views on fake news on social media**

Students personal thoughts on fake news indicate their deeper awareness of the false information epidemic beyond standardized survey replies. These qualitative insights provide significant context on their understanding of societal impacts, personal experiences, and recommended solutions to counteract fake news on social media platforms

**Table 4.6.4 Analysis of respondents’ views about fake news on social media**

| <b>Main Themes</b>                              | <b>Percentages</b> | <b>Description</b>   |
|---|--------------------|--|
| Fake news is harmful/detrimental                | 40%                | A large proportion said, fake news confuses people, misleads the public, and promotes false information, which hurts trust in society.   |
| Rapid spread & proliferation                    | 15%                | A lot of the answers say that fake news travels quickly on social media. It is hard to manage and fix misleading information once it is online since it spreads so quickly.                            |
| Need for Government/Regulatory intervention     | 20%                | A lot of the answers say that the government or other appropriate authorities should step in.  |
| User Responsibility in verification & reporting | 15%                | Many people say that people should take responsibility for dealing with fake news by making sure they only share authentic news.   |
| Social discord & erosion of trust               | 10%                | A smaller but important group of comments talks about how fake news causes societal problems, stirs up hostility, and breaks down trust within groups, which can even lead to real-world difficulties. |

This table shows how much students care about fake news on social media, giving us a picture of a generation that is dealing with the effects of false information. About 40% think that these are deeply harmful, which shows how frustrated people are with how it erodes public trust and makes daily life more confusing. 15% percent of students said the quick spread felt like an unstoppable epidemic online, making corrections feel worthless. 20% of people want the government to step in, which shows a desire for stronger protections. 15% of people want individuals to be responsible for their actions, like checking facts before sharing, to give them more power. Lastly, 10% talk about the emotional impact, which divides people and breaks down community ties. In general, these overlapping feelings show a nuanced awareness, mixing fear with proactive hope for a more transparent digital world.

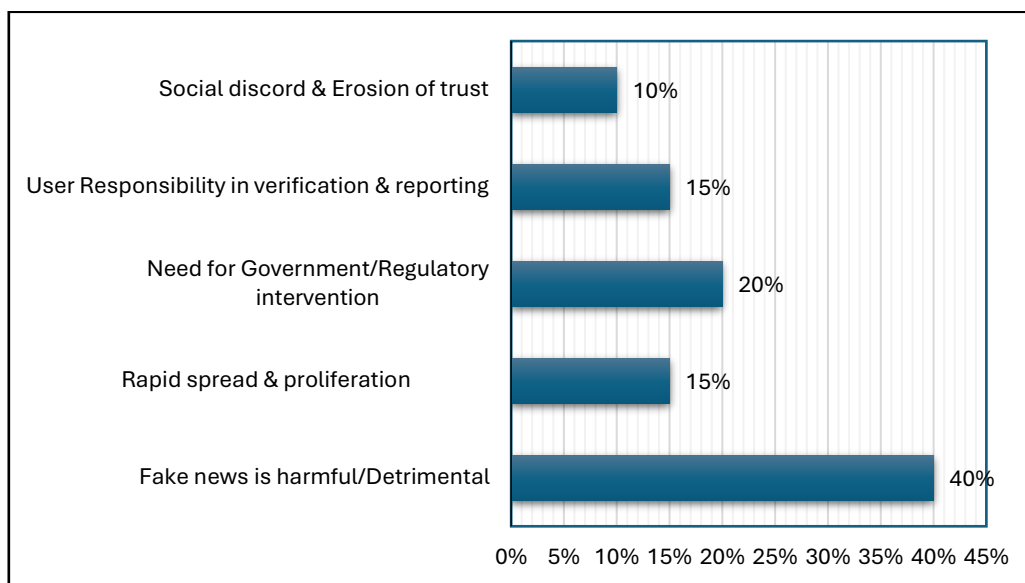


Figure 4.6.4 Respondents' views about fake news on social media

**Summary**

Students find themselves caught in a confusing space between knowing and not knowing. The uncertainty shows this section defines their entire relationship with digital information. They're getting information constantly, they feel like they're learning things, but there's always this nagging doubt about whether what they're learning is actually true. When it was tested their actual ability to spot fake news, the results revealed just how big the gap is between their confidence and their competence. Most students thought they were reasonably good at identifying false information, but when faced with actual examples, they struggled. Many simply couldn't tell. In fact, not one of them had ever heard the term "information literacy" before. They're developing survival strategies for dealing with fake news on their own, through trial and error, without any formal framework or training. It's like trying to learn to swim by being thrown into deep water—some might figure it out, but many will struggle, and the process is unnecessarily difficult and dangerous.

**CHAPTER V**

**RESEARCH FINDINGS**

## **5.1 Research Findings**

Based on the careful analysis and interpretation of the gathered data, here are the key findings that emerged from this study:

- Students between ages of 19 to 21 comprises 66% of the sample, which is the main group that uses social media the most out of the 1178 respondents. Following this concentration are the age group of under 19, which makes up 30% of the sample and the age group of above 21 which makes up only 4%. This demographic profile is important as this age group is at a formative stage, transitioning from high school to higher education, where exposure to diverse information shapes lifelong habits.
- Among total 1178 respondents, First-year students constitute near about 40% of the sample, followed closely by third-year students at 37% and second-year students representing 23%. This year wise breakdown of students study year helps to understand their information literacy rate and development of critical thinking over the years.
- Among all the social media platforms, all students (1178) are using WhatsApp with 100% rate as information sharing medium and as personal communication tool. Then the second most used channel by the respondents is YouTube with 96% rate as a source of respondents' entertainment and educational resource. Facebook is the third most popular medium for communication and entertainment with almost 87% using this platform. Facebook's continued relevance at 87% despite shifts in platform popularity among younger demographics. About 72 % students are using Instagram while other platforms like X, LinkedIn and Telegram is lagging behind. This uneven adoption of social media platforms showing how students access diverse information sources, increasing both their exposure to knowledge and their risk of encountering fake news. Here LinkedIn and X is lagging behind may be for their professional and niche focus.

- When respondents were asked of their social media preferences related to daily information need WhatsApp dominates with about 41% (485) students choose it as their top ranked platform and among them females students engaged more with 292 respondents. WhatsApp's private group chats and easy forwarding features may amplify misinformation, especially among female students who use it heavily for social connections. YouTube ranks second for daily use with 289 (about 25%) responses selected this with mostly male users with 193 responses. Instagram retains a total of 149 active preferences and ranks fourth, while Facebook draws 255 regular users and holds the third position. This ranking system emphasizes how much students enjoy conversing and consuming information simultaneously. However, this could be detrimental to them because it makes it simple for false information to proliferate without scrutiny.
- Daily usage of social media platforms showing a significant variation where 48% students use social media for 1-3 hours daily and about 29% use for 3-5 hours daily. A good number of students i.e. 11% using it for 5-7 hours per day while 6% use it for more than seven hours. And about 6% of students use social media sites for less than an hour per day. While some respondents spend a lot of time online i.e. more than 5 hours daily but most people fall into the moderate usage category. When they're constantly exposed to endless forms of digital content, it gets harder to tell what's real and what's fake. This kind of exposure can be problematic - it might prevent people from building good information evaluation skills and makes them more likely to believe false claims.
- Most of the students using social media to find, read, or share news and information - about 54% (634 respondents) said that information seeking as their primary reason for using these platforms. Students treat social media as a primary news source, despite its

lack of editorial oversight, which increases their vulnerability to fake news.. Entertainment comes in as a close second, with 42% mentioning it as another significant reason for using social media, which highlights how recreational and educational material exist side by side. Only 4% are there mainly for social connections. The problem is that, students who depend on social media for news are stuck in an information landscape that usually doesn't have reliable fact-checking or editorial gatekeepers.

- Social media is clearly the winner when it comes to breaking news for students and about 74% students use social media as a source of breaking news, while newspapers and TV trail far behind at about 9% and 15% respectively. Social media overwhelmingly leads as a source of breaking news, signalling a shift away from traditional media. The actual problem is how dependent have student become on social media sites that don't follow the similar journalistic guidelines as established news agencies. Unlike traditional media, social media platforms often prioritize viral content over accuracy, amplifying unverified stories
- In case of getting daily news from social media, it's clear that every platform serves a distinct purpose. Out of 74.27% (875 respondents) who prefer social media as their daily breaking news source, 51.88% (454) students getting their news from Facebook, followed by YouTube (41.26%), Instagram (4.69%) and WhatsApp (2.17%). Facebook's algorithms often amplify engaging but unverified content, creating echo chambers that reinforce misleading information.
- The types of information encountered by students on social media helps to understand the important patterns in students information diet. The study shows that, Social and life style news dominates with 60.35% (711) whereas political news hold a strong presence at 25.12% and sports news accounts for almost 13.75% of news consumed.

The 8.65% prominence of health news raises concerns, especially about medical false information that may directly affect students' decision-making and general well-being. According to this distribution students are mostly exposed to content on current events and lifestyle on social media, where false information can have serious negative effects on both individuals and society as a whole.

- Students academic research activities reflect a high dependency on widely accessible digital sources, with Google acting as the principal research tool for almost 82% students. This too much dependence says that how speed and ease of use have overtaken source quality and verification procedures. Only 11% of students use traditional academic resources, such as physical and digital library collections, but around 7% of users use Wikipedia, indicating a discrepancy between official academic instruction and real research practices. This excessive reliance on search engines for academic work suggests that students have formed rapid information-retrieval habits that do not prioritize the source evaluation or verification procedures necessary to spot false contents.
- One of the most noteworthy finding is the universal exposure of Fake news, with all surveyed students (100%) reporting with fake news on social media platforms. This overall exposure rate shows that encountering false information is a common feature of social media use that impacts all users in digital information ecosystems, rather than a risk that some students confront while others avoid. Fake news on social media is so common that it seems fake information is becoming into a characteristic of social media sites rather than a stand-alone problem that students can avoid by choosing any particular social media platform.
- Out of total 1178 students surveyed, more than half identified Facebook as the primary source of misleading information they come across and with 39% YouTube coming at

second position. WhatsApp and Instagram accounted for smaller share with approximately 6% and 3% of fake news, which illustrate that, social media works as both trusted media source as well as source of false information. WhatsApp's private nature may limit its role in public fake news spread, unlike Facebook's open sharing environment. These figures align with the platforms' news consumption usage patterns, demonstrating that students' primary exposure to fake news comes from the same channels they depend on for reliable information.

- This study reveals that, about 82% of students fooled by fake news on social media, with the highest percentage being fooled monthly, followed by too frequently (30%), weekly (12%) and daily (1%). Only 18% said that they have never been fooled by fake news. These numbers point to students critical thinking skills are seriously lacking and current information literacy levels fails to protect students from misleading information. The frequency with which students claim to have been duped by fake news reveals worrying trends of being readily fooled by misleading information, which could significantly impact how people participate in society and make decisions.
- About 70% students choose not to report fake news when they come across during social media use. Just about 12% of responders report the posts to the site, and just about 11% share them to alert others. The findings indicate that there are a lot more passive behaviours than active attempts to counteract misinformation.
- The study found that with approximately 47% response, political false news is most common form of fake news student encounter. With nearly half political fake news they view, may undermine their awareness regarding democratic process and policy concerns. Apart from political content students regularly receive erroneous information through everyday social interactions. About 26% of fake news exposure in combination through comedy, gossip, and entertainment contents, which creates

seemingly harmless channels that normalize the consumption of questionable information. The most disturbing fact is also that, in contrast to political content, which mostly promotes civic activity, approximately 15% students come across erroneous information regarding health and diet, which poses severe threats to their physical welfare. This pattern suggests that students are exposed to a confluence of misleading information that endangers their health and their participation in democracy, with political manipulation being increasingly common threat during election cycles when young voters are most vulnerable to influence campaigns.

- Information sharing behaviours of students indicate alarming tendencies regarding false news spread inside student networks that have consequences for false information amplification and community-level information quality. A large number of students (35%) acknowledge spreading content without verification, whereas 65% respondents saying that they never distributed unverified information on social media. This vast numbers of student social media user increases the likelihood that incorrect information may spread inside student networks due to the interconnection of social media platforms. It is also interesting to note that male students are more prone than female students to spread unverified content, which would suggest that there are gender differences in how people act online or perceive risk.
- The level of confident students shows on social media contents reflect problematic patterns of reliance on platform based information. They believe on those information which are not filtered or no editorial control. That suggest that they generally don't doubt any source of information on social media. Almost 46% believe that social media articles are Sometimes reliable while 22% believe Most of the time and 20% trust always. Only 12% students indicate constant doubt by picking the options like 'rarely' and 'never'. That means over 40% students saying that they believe social media news

‘Always’ or ‘Most of the time’, this high level of confidence indicates a lack of scepticism about platform-based information sources.

- When asked for the fake news identification methods they are using, it was seen that, students are reliance on ordinary verification tools to check fake news which are not sufficient in this complex digital environment. Most students (32%) try to verify numerous sources before trusting something, which sounds fine in theory but might backfire if they're consulting several inaccurate sources that all regurgitate the same misleading information. While 14% prefer discussing it with friends or family, 28% rely on search engines and internet to confirm what they read. A smaller portion depend on their own existing knowledge (10%) or try to evaluate the credibility of the original source (6%), and only 6% actively look for telltale signs that content might be fake. While these verification habits show students are thinking critically about the information they encounter, these methods often fall short when dealing with smart disinformation campaigns that exploit people's existing beliefs or mimic trustworthy news sources so well that they're hard to distinguish from the real thing.
- A significant discrepancy exists between students awareness relating to information issues and their actual efforts to avoid doubtful sources. When respondents are accessing social media for news, the majority of students (about 63%) indicated that they feel "somewhat more informed but unsure of reliability". This indicates that, students are aware the content may be fraudulent yet continue to consume it. Though there are more worries about false information, about 24% respondents indicate they feel "more informed" by social media news, hence demonstrates their faith on these channels. Merely 7% of the students have developed the ability to ignore social media contents whereas 6% feel ‘highly informed and critically engaged’ with what they read online. This pattern suggest that students are stuck in a habit of reading social media

content that know might be wrong due to its easy to access nature. Even though they are able to identify problems with the quality of the information but they struggle to exercise the discipline required to avoid misleading information.

- Consider the untrue assertion, according to UNESCO, “Jana Gana Mana” is the best national anthem in the world, about 18% students correctly identified this as fake news, while about 22% students thought it was real and approximately 60% students were unsure about it. Students perform better with 5G conspiracy theory; 57% correctly recognised it as fake news, 38% are not sure and 5% believed it to be true. These findings that are at odds with each other show that while students may be more sceptical of some types of fake news than others, most of the students find it difficult to identify inaccurate information when they come across it in real life, despite being aware of fake information.
- There is a complete gap in knowing regarding basic information literacy skills where every respondents(100%) is indicating that they no idea about information literacy or any term related that skill. This indicates that students were not being taught anything regarding ongoing information hazards or methods how to verify what they read or examine the accuracy of content in institutions. Without these fundamental abilities, students are effectively blindly navigating the internet; they are unable to distinguish between reliable news sources and phony websites, are unable to verify claims they come across on social media, and lack the resources necessary to determine whether information is coming from reputable experts or anonymous individuals expressing their opinions.
- When students are discussing about fake news, they generally worry about its impact on society rather than figuring out how to stop themselves. According to 40% students , fake news is really bad because it confuses people and helps them to believe lies which

breaks down confidence in our communities. Around 20% of students say the government should step in and develop guidelines to rectify the problem and 15% think that fake news spreads too rapidly on social media sites. Only around 15% of students actually think they should take responsibility for confirming if news is authentic before share it, and the last 10% fear that fake news encourages people argue with each other and stop trusting vital organizations. What's remarkable is that most students can understand the damage misleading news produces - they realize it's a major problem - but they're not really thinking about what they individually can do about it. In place of learning themselves how to recognize fake news or how to analyse them, students want to hope steps from government and social media sites. This suggest that rather than merely learning why something is inaccurate, students desire extra focus on how to spot false news and independently check content.

- Perhaps the most alarming discovery in this study is the complete absence of fact-checking tool usage among all 1,178 respondents (Table 4.5.1). This zero-percent engagement with verification resources becomes particularly troubling when we step back and look at the bigger picture. Consider what we know: every single student has encountered fake news on social media (Table 4.4.1), over 82% have been fooled by it at least occasionally (Table 4.4.3), and 74% turn to social media first when breaking news happens (Table 4.3.1). Now layer on top of this another finding: 100% of students use WhatsApp (Table 4.2.1), with 41% ranking it as their most-used platform (Table 4.2.2). WhatsApp creates a particularly dangerous situation because it's a closed messaging system where information arrives through trusted family members and friends rather than from strangers or public pages. Yet WhatsApp's design makes verification harder, not easier—forwarded messages lose their original context and source information, and the platform's end-to-end encryption prevents any automated

fact-checking. So, we have students operating in a high-risk information environment—constant exposure to fake news through their most-used platform, regular deception despite moderate confidence in their abilities, heavy reliance on social media for news—but they're doing all of this without any of the protective tools that could help them. It's not that these tools don't exist or aren't accessible. Fact-checking websites are free and easily available. The challenge is that students just haven't incorporated verification into their information consumption behaviours. They've created workarounds—32% try to cross-reference multiple resources (Table 4.5.4), 28% search Google—but these informal strategies, while displaying some critical thinking, simply aren't enough against sophisticated propaganda designed to mislead exactly these kinds of casual checks.

- One finding jumps out as particularly revealing about student psychology. When asked directly, around 70.54% of students said they felt confident or very confident in their ability to spot fake news. That sounds reassuring on the surface. But the actual test results tell a little different story—as a number of students unable to correctly identify clear examples of false information. This pattern shows up in psychological research as the Dunning-Kruger effect, where people with limited skills in an area tend to overestimate their abilities (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). It's a common phenomenon across different contexts. The danger here goes beyond just having the wrong impression. Students who believe they can already spot fake news effectively have little motivation to improve. Their approach feels like it works, so they keep using it. When something appears on their feed, they make a quick judgment call, and if it passes their internal test, they share it. The problem is that modern misinformation gets designed precisely to fool these kinds of informal checks. The fake content mimics real news so well that casual evaluation methods simply can't catch it. Addressing this issue requires

a two-step approach, and the order matters. Teaching better verification techniques is important, but it's actually step two. Step one involves something trickier—helping students see that their current methods have serious gaps. Nobody enjoys discovering they're not as capable as they believed. Until this realization happens, though, students will continue relying on strategies that keep failing them, letting misleading information pass through their filters again and again.

- Looking at the gender breakdown reveals some interesting patterns worth paying attention to. Male students turned out to be more likely to share content without checking it first—230 males admitted to this compared to 186 females. But here's the twist: female students expressed more doubt about whether social media content could be trusted in the first place. These differences aren't random. Earlier research by Meyers et al. (2013) found similar patterns when studying how different genders approach online information. Their study showed that women tend to use more thorough methods when evaluating content, while men often show higher confidence in their judgments even when their accuracy isn't actually better. The current findings line up with this earlier work. What makes these patterns significant for practical purposes is that any intervention program needs to account for these behavioural differences. Male students might need approaches that address overconfidence and encourage more careful verification habits. Female students, despite being more cautious, still shared unverified content at substantial rates—just less frequently than their male counterparts. Both groups need support, but the specific challenges each faces appear somewhat different based on how they perceive and respond to online risks. However, the gender dynamics prove more nuanced than simple male carelessness versus female caution. Females reported higher exposure to fake news in health and lifestyle categories, while males encountered more sports-related misinformation. These differences suggest

misinformation creators target content to audience interests and that effective interventions must account for how gender intersects with content type to shape vulnerability patterns.

- Nearly half the students i.e. 47% to be exact said political content was the fake news they ran into most often. So political manipulation isn't just one problem among many in Birbhum. It's the main one. And this isn't something specific to this area either. When Kanozia and Narula (2021) looked at fake news patterns across India, they found the same thing: political and religious misinformation everywhere. The timing aspect makes this especially messy. Fake political stories don't spread evenly throughout the year. They spike hard during elections. College students, a lot of them voting for maybe the first or second time, end up right in the crosshairs. There are actual organized campaigns targeting young voters during these periods, pushing content designed to shift how they think about candidates, parties, and issues. Students at this stage are still figuring out their political beliefs. They're deciding how involved they want to be in civic life, what issues matter to them, who they trust. Getting fed a steady diet of false political information during this formative period can really shape those decisions in problematic ways. The vulnerability isn't theoretical—it hits right when students are becoming active participants in democracy.

## 5.2 Execution of Objectives

**Objective 1:** To evaluate the level of information literacy skills among college students in Birbhum district regarding fake news on social media.

Table 4.4.1 reveals that every single participant has come across fake news on social media, indicating to extensive exposure. More alarming is the data from Table 4.4.3, where just 17.57% of students reported never been fooled by misleading information. The majority confessed being fooled either monthly (31.32%) or too many times to count (30.22%). When their actual skill was assessed using genuine instances (Table 4.6.2), the results portrayed an even starker picture. For the UNESCO national anthem claim, 59.93% had no clue whether it was genuine or not, and just 17.91% properly classified it as fake. Similarly, with the 5G-COVID conspiracy, 38.28% remained unclear. Most significantly, Table 4.6.3 demonstrates that none of the 1,178 respondents had any understanding of information literacy or any related term as a concept, indicating a complete absence of systematic training in evaluating information critically.

**Objective 2:** To study the demographic parameters (age, gender, academic discipline) of students and their influence on information literacy..

The demographic data from Tables 4.1.1, 4.1.2, and 4.1.3 reveals somewhat equal gender distribution (52% female, 48% male), with the majority age group being 19-21 years (66%). The sample comprised largely of Bachelor of Arts students (86.92%), with lower representation from B.Sc. (12.98%) and B.Com. (0.084%). Gender inequalities arose in various areas. Table 4.4.5 demonstrates that females demonstrated less confidence in spotting fake news, with 201 females reporting being "not very confident" compared to 76 males. Table 4.5.2 reveals that males were slightly more likely to share unverified information (230 males versus 186 females). However, Table 4.5.3 demonstrates that females displayed more scepticism, with 336 females indicating they "sometimes" believe social media news compared to 201 males.

**Objective 3:** To examine students' usage patterns of social media platforms and their impact on exposure to fake news.

Tables 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 indicate considerable social media participation. WhatsApp gained 100% use, followed closely by YouTube around 96% and Facebook 87%. When asked about their most-used platform, students picked WhatsApp about 41%, followed by YouTube almost 25% and Facebook 22%. Table 4.2.3 demonstrates that almost half the students (about 48%) spend 1-3 hours everyday on social media, with another 29% spending 3-5 hours. This excessive usage strongly connects with fake news exposure. Table 4.4.2 indicates Facebook as the platform where fake news is most commonly found, nearly 52%, followed by YouTube about 39%. The relationship between usage patterns and information quality becomes clearer in Table 4.2.4, where almost 54% reported using social media primarily for information-seeking rather than entertainment, suggesting they view these platforms as legitimate news sources despite the prevalence of misinformation.

**Objective 4:** To identify the primary sources and strategies students utilise to validate the authenticity of social media news.

The investigation found a disturbing dependence on unreliable sources. Table 4.3.1 demonstrates that almost 74% of students look to social media first for breaking news, considerably exceeding television (almost 15%) or newspapers (about 9%). Among social media sites, Table 4.3.2 suggests Facebook serves as the leading news source (about 52%), followed by YouTube (about 41%). For academic work, Table 4.3.4 demonstrates enormous dependency on Google i.e. almost 82%, with negligible usage of libraries (about 11%) or Wikipedia (about 7%). The verification techniques mentioned in Table 4.5.4 demonstrate some beneficial practices: 32% cross-reference numerous sources, and 28% utilize search engines to confirm information. However, these techniques are informal and ad hoc. More troubling is Table 4.5.1, which reveals 0% utilization of dedicated fact-checking websites among all

1,178 respondents. This complete absence of involvement with expert fact-checking resources constitutes a key weakness in their information validation process.

**Objective 5:** To determine the most common categories of fake news encountered by students.

Table 4.4.6 shows clear evidence that political contents dominates the fake news environment, with above 47% of students selecting it as the most prominent category. This is followed by comedy and gossip (about 16%), health and diet information (15%), and entertainment news (nearly 10%). Table 4.3.3 supplements this by demonstrating that social news is the most commonly seen topic overall (60%), followed by political news (25%) and sports (14%). The gender breakdown in Table 4.4.6 shows interesting differences, as females reported encountering more false news in health and nutrition categories (116 females against 60 males) and humour and gossip (122 versus 63), whereas men experienced more sports-related fake material (50 versus 6 females). These findings suggest that creators of false news target specific audiences with content tailored according to their interests and concerns, using echo chambers to more effectively mislead these users.

**Objective 6:** To study the extent to which students rely on fact-checking tools or websites.

Table 4.5.1 illustrates full non-engagement with fact-checking websites, with all 1,178 respondents indicating they never use such tools. This 100% non-usage rate stands in sharp contrast to their widespread exposure to fake news (Table 4.4.1) and how often they are deceived by it (Table 4.4.3). The gap becomes even more evident when viewing Table 4.3.2, which shows students actively consuming news through social media channels renowned for false information concerns. Despite almost 63% expressing doubt about social media dependability (Table 4.6.1), students have not incorporated fact-checking tools as part of their information consuming routines. This implies not only a competence deficit but a complete absence of systematic verification techniques in their everyday digital lives.

**Objective 7:** To investigate students' confidence in distinguishing between real and fake news on social media.

Table 4.4.5 reflects the self-assessed confidence levels, demonstrating that nearly 54% feel "somewhat confident" in spotting fake news, while just 17% feel "very confident." Notably, about 24% report being "not very confident," while 6% feel "not at all confident." However, when this subjective confidence was compared against actual performance in Table 4.6.2, large discrepancies developed. The significant number of "no idea" replies (60% for the anthem allegation, 38% for the 5G conspiracy) implies that real abilities trail behind perceived confidence. This overconfidence is worrisome, since it may cause pupils to accept their opinion without seeking proof. The data from Table 4.4.3 confirms this view, revealing that over 82% had been tricked by fake news at least once, with many deceived often. Figure 4.4.5 graphically illustrates these confidence levels, highlighting the gap between self-perception and demonstrated performance.

**Objective 8:** To understand students' reactions upon encountering fake news and assess their ability to handle such content.

Table 4.4.4 demonstrates passive responses to fake news encounters. The vast majority (77%) chose to ignore misleading information when users see it, while only around 12% report it to platform administrators and only about 11% re-share it to alert others. This mainly idle response pattern, together with the data from Table 4.5.2 revealing that 35% have disseminated unverified material, shows low involvement with platform safety systems. The theme analysis in Table 4.6.4 gives greater insight through students' own words. Approximately 40% realize that fake news is destructive and detrimental to society, while 15% accept its fast growth. Interestingly, 20% ask for government engagement, while another 15% highlight user responsibility in verification. However, these voiced worries don't transfer into action, as indicated by the low reporting rates and utter non-use of fact-checking tools. This gap between

awareness and action implies that pupils comprehend the problem theoretically but lack the practical skills or drive to solve it successfully.

**Objective 9:** To explore students' perceptions of how social media and technology have influenced their information literacy.

Table 4.6.1 depicts mixed viewpoints concerning social media's influence. The largest group (63%) feels "somewhat more informed" but still "unsure of reliability," suggesting a knowledge that social media is a mixed blessing. About 24% say they're merely "more informed," while only about 7% feel "highly informed" and critically engaged with material. A tiny minority (7%) don't trust social media at all and consequently feel misinformed. These assessments reflect cautious optimism tempered by scepticism. Students appreciate social media's utility for getting information fast (as indicated by Table 4.3.1 indicating 74% turn to it first for breaking news), however they remain concerned regarding content quality. Table 4.5.3 illustrates this tension, with about 46% believing social media news only "sometimes," and just 20% trusting it "always." This shows students are caught between relying on social media as their main information source and having serious doubts about its trustworthiness, which is a conflict they seem unable to resolve through consistent fact-checking practices..

**Objective 10:** To recommend strategies to improve the information literacy skills of college students to counteract fake news effectively.

The complete absence of information literacy knowledge (Table 4.6.3) and fact-checking tool usage (Table 4.5.1) suggests the necessity for formal educational initiatives. The discrepancy between confidence level and actual skill (Tables 4.4.5 and 4.6.2) implies that students require hands-on training with genuine instances. The verification procedures currently utilized (Table 4.5.4) while exhibiting certain advantages such as cross-referencing sources, remain informal and inconsistent. The passive response to fake news encounters (Table 4.4.4) necessitates education on digital citizenship and platform reporting methods. Looking at where the

problems cluster gives some obvious clues about what to do next. Students kept running into political fake news more than any other type (Table 4.4.6). At the same time, Facebook turned out to be their go-to spot for daily news updates (Tables 4.3.2 and 4.4.2). Put those two things together, and it becomes pretty clear—students need help figuring out how to handle political content on Facebook specifically. Generic warnings about "being careful online" won't cut it when students face very particular challenges on very particular platforms.

There's also a deeper problem with how colleges currently approach this whole issue. Right now, information literacy gets squeezed in as an afterthought—maybe a library orientation session, maybe a one-off workshop if students are lucky. That's not going to work anymore. Three-quarters of these students turn to social media first when news breaks. Digital evaluation skills aren't some bonus capability at this point. They're as basic as knowing how to read a textbook or solve an equation.

What the data shows is that these skills can't live in isolation. They need to show up in history classes when students analyse sources. In science courses when they evaluate studies. In every subject where students encounter information and have to make judgments about it. Students don't separate their social media lives from their academic ones—they're constantly moving between Instagram, course readings, YouTube videos, and research databases. Their education needs to acknowledge that messy, interconnected reality instead of pretending these are separate worlds.

**CHAPTER VI**

**CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

## **Conclusion**

This research shows that fake news is a major issue exists in young people like college students. All the respondents (100%) said they had seen fake news, and more than 80% said they had been misinformed at least once a month or many times, which shows a worrying lack of basic critical thinking skills or information literacy. This study shows that the reliance on social media as a news source is exceptional, as about 74% prefer social media to traditional media. This was made even worse by the fact that, the lack of skills of fact-checking site usage among all respondents showing no attempt to verify information or go for such process. Students were notably uninformed about information literacy or any related terminology. Students who spend a lot of time on social media are more susceptible to believe in misleading social media information than students who don't spend as much time on it and the reason is that, students rely too much on unverified social media sources and don't know how to evaluate information. As the study shows, all students use WhatsApp which is a close network platform, this kind of platform will spread false information quickly without checking the facts. But it's not just about how much time they spend in front of a screen; it's also about the lack of training in information literacy. This lack of information literacy not only amplify the close network like WhatsApp but also extends to broader platforms Like Facebook or YouTube. For example, featured news related to politics are found to be the most contentious fake news category and Facebook with YouTube found to be the most common mediums (about 91%) for being exposed to fabricated content or fake news, with these being most favourite platform of most students for news consumption.

This has produced an informational environment where trustworthy and untrustworthy content is mixed together without clear separation, which undercutting students' capacity to develop sound judgments with respect to personal, academic, and civic issues. The fact that students

were more inclined towards ignoring (Almost 77%) than reporting fake news whenever they notice, also reflects the lack of understanding on who individually is responsible in getting rid of fake news. These behaviours, together with the fact that about 35% of students report they forward unverified information, can lead to a rapid spread of fake news regarding certain topics in educational circles. Our responses to fight fake news are clearly not enough to handle the smart and advanced types we are seeing now, which mimics real journalism and taking advantage of our cognitive biases.

Looking at all these findings together reveals something quite troubling about how college students handle information online. Students grew up with technology and feel confident about spotting fake news, but there's actually a huge disconnect between how skilled they think they are and how well they actually perform. Most students get their news from social media, but hardly anyone checks whether what they're reading is true. This creates exactly the kind of situation where fake news can spread without anyone questioning it. Things get even messier when considering that students aren't just reading misleading information—they're sharing it too, especially on platforms like WhatsApp where false information moves quickly through groups of friends who trust each other. At this point, students have seen so much fake news that many of them have simply stopped caring. When they spot something false, they usually just scroll past it instead of reporting it or calling it out. This passivity, along with clear differences in how male and female students share unverified content, the specific dangers of different platforms, and students turning away from reliable academic sources because search engines like Google is faster and easier—all of this indicates that current educational approaches to teaching information literacy aren't working. This isn't about a few students who need extra help here and there. This represents a much bigger problem with how information literacy skills are being conceptualized and taught in general. Students need better, more

thorough programs that recognize just how complicated this problem has become and address the many different ways they can fall for fake news.

## **Recommendations**

- According to the research results, every single student often came across false news during survey; yet, none of them have the resources or knowledge to confirm material veracity. This global knowledge combined with utter lack of fact-checking policies provides an immediate need for extensive intervention plans targeting both personal skills and institutional vulnerabilities in educational institutions.
- Intervention plans should pay particular attention to WhatsApp's dominance as both as the most used platform and also highest ranked everyday choice selected by all students. Unlike public forums where misleading contents could be under community scrutiny, WhatsApp's closed messaging technology enables incorrect information grow through reliable personal networks free from dispute. Educational endeavours have to notably target the particular threats offered by private messaging platforms and train students' in verification methods suited for these confined settings. This includes constructing basic tools that respondents may use to evaluate information before disseminating it beyond their family and friend groups and establishing peer-to-peer verification networks.
- It is worrying that about 77% students ignore fake news when they encounter it which is a key opportunity for collective counteraction is being overlooked. If provided sufficient resources and motivation, students could become active participants in information quality control instead of just passive viewers. Academic institutions should design campus-wide reporting systems that not only encourage students to flag misleading content but also provide feedback on their reports, generating a learning

loop that strengthens their detection skills over time. These systems could interact with current information portals of students and give rewards such as academic credit or recognition for persistent engagement in fact-checking activities.

- There is gender disparity in sharing unverified content over social media, where males demonstrate substantially higher rates of propagating misleading content, suggests uniform intervention strategies may be insufficient.
- Male respondents often possess unique risk perceptions or social constraints that influence their sharing behaviour, necessitating targeted interventions that tackle the fundamental psychological and sociocultural factors underlying these trends. Research-based programs should investigate if elements such as social status seeking, peer group influence, or varying exposure to misinformation themes contribute to these gender variances and develop acceptable responsive measures.
- With almost 82% students' reliance on google which means convenience and speed is winning over depth and credibility. Along with that, low library engagement implies fundamental changes needed in how institutions teach information literacy and research methods. The academic methods we use now unintentionally teach students the same quick-search habits that make them easy to fool when they use social media. Colleges need to change the rules for research so that students have to use peer-reviewed sources and learn how to judge things in a more advanced way that they can use in both school and everyday life. This includes designing assignment frameworks that require students to trace information back to primary sources and evaluate the believability chains of different types of assertions.
- More than half of students encounter fake news on Facebook yet this same platform acts as the major news source for daily consumption, creates a particularly complex intervention position. Simply instructing students to avoid platforms where they

encounter fake news is ineffective as often these are their primary sources of legitimate news and updates. Instead, intervention must focus on equipping complicated filtering and evaluation skills that allow students to help them navigate the blurred boundary between credible and misleading content. This involves partnering with social media organisations to build teaching tools that fit inside existing platform interfaces and user behaviours.

- The striking difference between their self-reported confidence in spotting fake news either very confident or somewhat confident and their actual performance where only about 37% correctly identified clear examples of false information shows how clearly the current educational structure fails to equip students for negotiating environments with complex digital information. Beyond conventional media literacy tactics, colleges must establish practical, hands-on training courses modelled on real-world occurrences students come across on social media platforms.
- Students show radically different vulnerability patterns, demonstrating higher confidence levels but also falling victim to fake news more frequently, signalling dangerous overconfidence in their abilities. Educational interventions must be tailored to address these issues. Colleges should confront these gaps by designing programs that challenge student assumptions about their information literacy skills.
- The dominance of political content in fake news contacts, affecting about 47% of students, coupled with health misinformation exposure among almost 15%, highlights the importance for topic-specific intervention methods. Political fake news usually leverages existing beliefs and emotional responses, demanding different debunking approaches than health related misinformation, which may play on fear and worry about physical safety. Educational initiative should incorporate specialised modules

addressing various kinds of fake news, training students to decode the specific strategies and emotional appeals utilised in each category.

- Over half of the students using social media for their daily information seeking rather than entertainment which profoundly challenges perceptions about students social media usage and needs a complete reconsideration of digital literacy methods. Because students use these sites as their main sources of information instead of just for fun, educational activities need to reflect this by teaching them how to evaluate information at a professional level instead of just running awareness campaigns. This involves complex processes like reverse image searching, source triangulation, and understanding algorithmic content selection that influences the information learners access.
- Technology solutions alone cannot fully address the complexity showed in this research, but this can give crucial aid for human judgment and decision-making. Educational institutions should spend on developing or obtaining verification technology specifically intended for student processes and implemented into their existing digital learning environments. These technologies should not replace critical thinking instead these should help students by making it easier to check facts, evaluate the trustworthiness of sources and verify different types of content.
- Achieving long term effectiveness in reducing fake news vulnerability involves systematic reforms that go beyond just teaching individual students. This includes pushing for improved content labelling and verification mechanism on social media platforms, developing partnerships with fact checking organizations to provide student accessible resources, and creating research programs that continuously monitor evolving misleading information tactics and student vulnerability patterns. Educational institutions must adopt a proactive role in information quality development

rather than passive consumers of whatever information environment social media platforms supply.

- The widespread exposure of students to fake news shows that it has become a basic component of current information ecosystem rather than an isolated problem affecting only certain groups or platforms. Information literacy must thus be taught in schools with equal importance to traditional reading skills. It should be a part of all subjects and grade levels, not just an extra or optional part of learning. Colleges and universities need to know that getting students ready for their professional and civic lives today means making sure they can find their way around complicated and disputed information landscapes with enough critical awareness and verification skills.

### **Future scope of the research**

- The present study clarifies several significant information literacy challenges that face college students in the Birbhum district; however, numerous aspects remain unexplored that demand systematic investigation. A longitudinal research design running over two to three academic years could offer significant insights into the success rate of targeted information literacy interventions in encouraging permanent improvements in students' recognition and response to misinformation. Tracking the same group of students over time would show if better critical thinking skills develop slowly through education or require further intensive intervention strategies, and if these skills remain with students even after college and into their everyday digital lives.
- Another important area for future research is to look at locations other than Birbhum district. Comparative studies involving students from various districts in West

Bengal, and possibly extending to other states with diverse socio-cultural contexts, would clarify whether the patterns identified in Birbhum are indicative of localized phenomena or signify more extensive systemic difficulties associated with information literacy education. This type of comparative analysis could show how misleading vulnerability differs from region to region. It could also show whether things like the divide between urban and rural areas, institutional resources, or local media ecosystems have significant impacts on how well students can find their way around digital information landscapes.

- Future investigations should also examine the intersection of socioeconomic factors and information literacy capabilities more thoroughly. Students from different economic backgrounds probably have different levels of access to excellent educational institutions, a variety of information sources, and technologies that could make them more likely to believe false information. Family educational background, parental media consumption, household internet access patterns, and exposure to critical thinking methodologies at home may significantly influence students' assessment of online information. recognizing these socioeconomic factors may assist in pinpointing student demographics that encounter increased risks and necessitate specialized assistance, therefore ensuring that information literacy initiatives effectively reach those in greatest need, rather than solely benefiting already privileged groups.
- Platform- specific research requires significantly more attention given that different social media environments appear to facilitate falsehoods in distinct ways. Future studies should investigate the structural features, algorithmic mechanisms, and interpersonal dynamics that make certain platforms particularly vulnerable to fake news spread. Understanding why Facebook appears as the dominant source of both

news consumption and false information dissemination requires examining its specific design choices, suggestion systems, content filtering practices, and user communication patterns. Similarly, research should explore what safeguarding factors, if any, exist on platforms showing lower deception rates. This platform-focused analysis could inform efficient mitigation strategies, including pressure on firms to modify harmful features, development of platform-specific media literacy guidance for students, and identification of design principles that could reduce inaccurate information spread without compromising trustworthy communication.

**END MATTER**

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## **APPENDICES**

## Appendix A: Questionnaire

Information Literacy Skill among College Students in Birbhum District in the context of Fake News on Social Media: An Assessment Study

Institution Name:

Institution Roll/ID No.:

Gender

Male  Female

Age Group

Less than 19  19-21  Above 21

Stream of your Education?

BA  B.Sc.  B.Com   
 Others  (Please Specify.....)

Department/Subject of your study?

Course type?

Honours  Pass/General

What is your Present Education status?

1st year   
 2nd year   
 3rd year

1. Which of the following social media platform do you currently use? (Please tick as applicable)

Facebook       WhatsApp       Twitter       Instagram   
 Telegram       YouTube       LinkedIn       None   
 Other  (If other, please specify).....

2. Would you please rank the social media according to your preference order and level of usage? (Rank these social media platforms from 1 to 7 based on your usage)

Facebook       WhatsApp       Twitter       Instagram   
 Telegram       YouTube       LinkedIn       Other

If other, please specify...

3. How much time do you spend on social media platforms in a day?

Less than an hour       1-3 hours       3-5 hours       5-7 hours   
 More than 7 hours

4. Please prioritise the purpose of using Social Media platforms?

Information (Find, read or share the news)   
 Time pass (Entertainment purpose)   
 For relationships reasons (To stay in touch with people)   
 Other (Please Specify) ...

5. Where do you look first when there is breaking news?

Television  Newspaper  Word of Mouth

Social Media  (If Yes, please specify) .....

Other (Please specify) ...

6. What news topic do you primarily see on social media normally?

Social News  Health News  Political news  Sports news

Others (Please specify)...

7. If you want to read about any topic or make any assignment, where do you look first?

Library (Physical/Virtual)  Google  Wikipedia  Others (Please Specify).....

8. When reading an article on social media, do you look at its reliability and relevance, as you would for assignments?

Always  Most of the time  Sometimes  Rarely  Never

9. Have you ever used any fact-checking site when you were unsure of information on social media?

Yes  No

If yes, what fact-checking site(s) have you used?

10. Have you noticed fake news on social media sites?

Yes

No

If Yes, on which of the following sites have you come across fake news/misinformation?

Facebook  WhatsApp  Twitter  Instagram

Telegram  YouTube  LinkedIn  Other

If other, please specify...

11. Have you ever shared news or information on social media without verifying its authenticity?

Yes

No

12. Have you ever been fooled by thinking Fake News as real news?

Hourly  Daily  Weekly  Monthly  Too many times to count

No never

13. Which categories of information you think to be more related with fake news?

Academic  Politics  Humour and gossip  Health and diet

Sports  Entertainment  Others (Please Specify)

14. How do you identify fake news?

15. What is your reaction upon receiving fake news?

Re-share the post to warn others

Ignore the post

Report the post

16. How confident are you in your ability to distinguish between real and fake news on social media?

Very confident

Somewhat confident

Not very confident

Not at all confident

17. If you have any idea about Information Literacy then share it.

18. Do you believe technology and social media have made you a smarter, more informed person?

Yes, I'm more informed from the news I read.

I'm somewhat more informed, but unsure of reliability.

Yes, I'm highly informed as I read a lot and question everything.

No, I don't trust what I read, so I'm not informed.

19. Identify Fake and Real news from the following (Give a tick that applicable):

UNESCO has declared 'Jana Gana Mana' best national anthem in the world (Fake/Real/No idea)

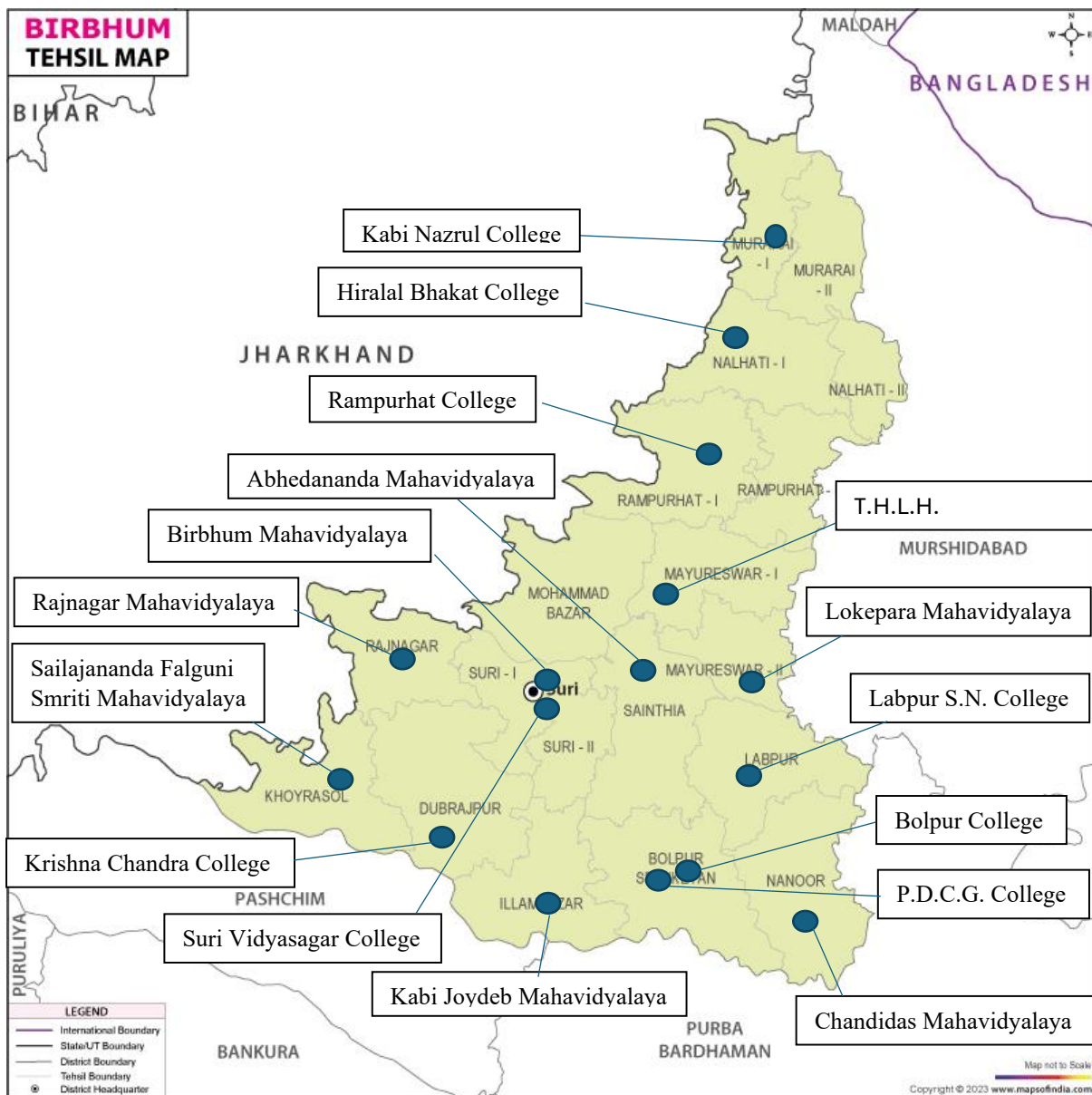
5G was responsible for spreading the COVID-19 virus, and the pandemic was a cover-up for the installation of 5G infrastructure across the country (Fake/Real/No idea)

20. Share your views about fake news on social media.

**Appendix B: List of Colleges taken as Sample**

| Sl No. | Name of the Institution   | Sl No. | Name of the Institution                   |
|--------|---------------------------|--------|---|
| 1      | Abhedananda Mahavidyalaya | 9      | Lokepara Mahavidyalaya                    |
| 2      | Birbhum Mahavidyalaya     | 10     | Purni Devi Chaudhuri Girls' College       |
| 3      | Bolpur College            | 11     | Rajnagar Mahavidyalaya                    |
| 4      | Chandidas Mahavidyalaya   | 12     | Rampurhat College                         |
| 5      | Hiralal Bhakat College    | 13     | Sailajananda Falguni Smriti Mahavidyalaya |
| 6      | Kabi Joydeb Mahavidyalaya | 14     | Sambhunath College                        |
| 7      | Kabi Nazrul College       | 15     | Suri Vidyasagar College                   |
| 8      | Krishna Chandra College   | 16     | Turku Hansda Lapsa Hemram Mahavidyalay    |

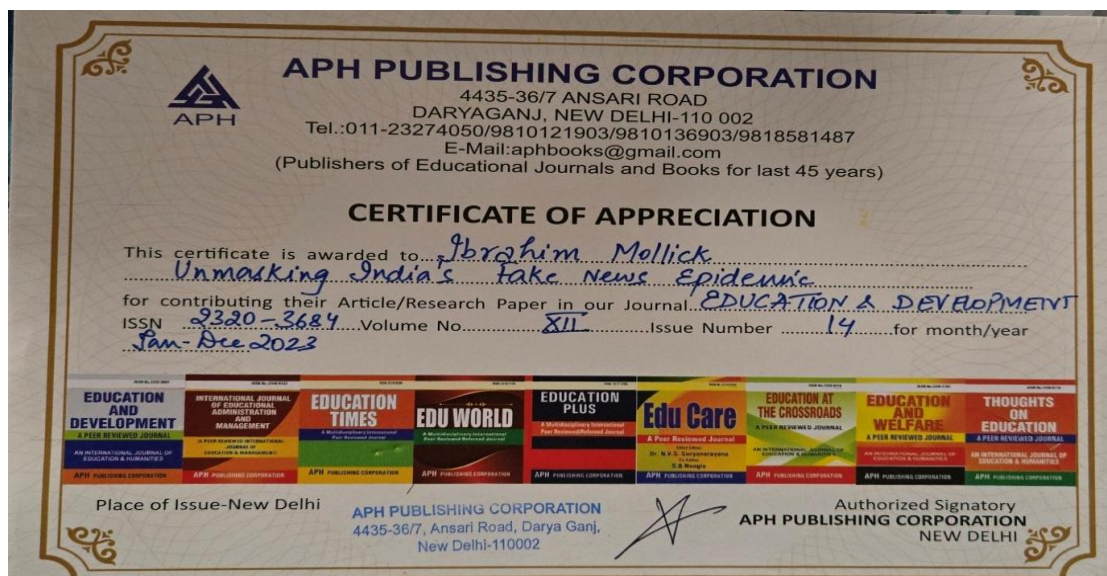
Appendix C: Map of Birbhum district showing college locations



## Appendix D: List of Publications

### A) Journal Articles

1. Mollick, I., & Chatterjee, S. K. (2023). Unmasking India's fake news epidemic: Insights from the 2022 year-end report. *Education and development*, 12(14), 27–37.



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## Unmasking India's Fake News Epidemic: Insights from the 2022 Year-End Report

Ibrahim Mollick\* and Dr. Sunil Kumar Chatterjee\*\*

### ABSTRACT

This study offers a thorough analysis of the features and frequency of fake news on the internet in India in 2022. The analysis uses information from Alt News and BOOM, two reliable fact-checking websites. The study explores the sources, forms, and topics of disinformation that circulates in the Indian setting. These topics include religious, political, social, historical, defence, and economic issues. The inquiry highlights the damaging effects of political misinformation on public opinion formation and highlights how important accurate information is to upholding democratic values. However, the study admits some shortcomings with regard to gathering and evaluating data. The information under examination is primarily composed of viral videos and graphics, with misreported news pieces coming in second. Other classifications include fake social media accounts, WhatsApp group chats, and fake quotes.

**Keywords:** Fake news, Internet, Fact-checking websites, Disinformation, Data gathering.

### INTRODUCTION

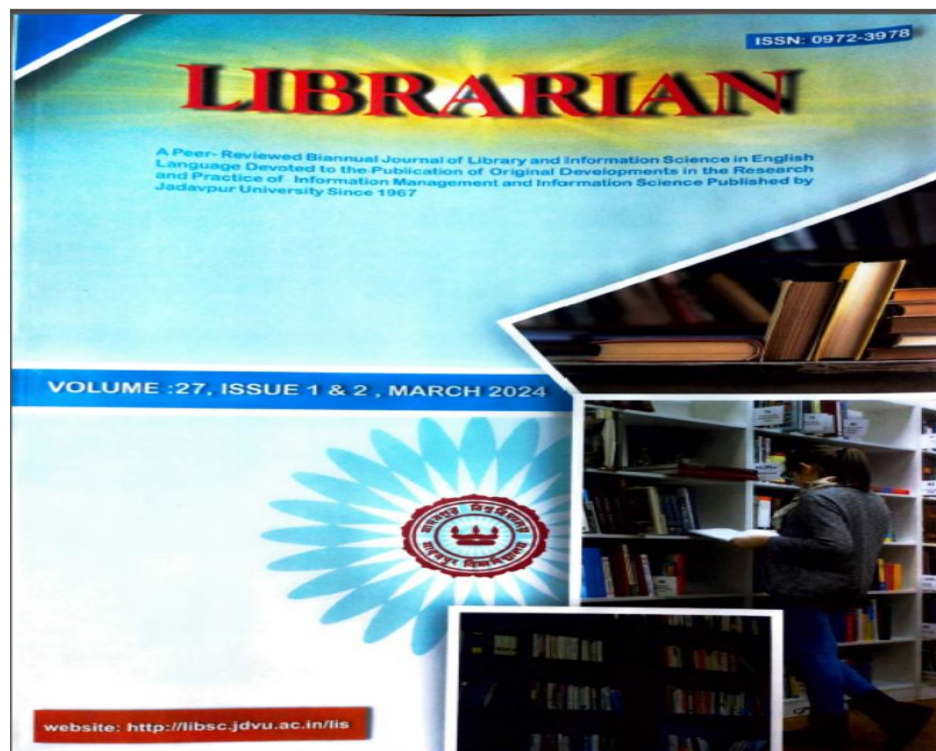
The spread of false information and fake news has become a major issue in India in recent years, with potentially dire repercussions for both individuals and society as a whole. A prominent media watchdog group's year-end report from December 2022 provides insight into the concerning nationwide proliferation of false information and fake news. According to the survey, there has been a noticeable rise in the spread of misleading material on social media, messaging apps, and traditional news sources, among other media channels.

The use of false information and fake news to incite hatred and incite communal tensions is one trend that the research highlights as being very alarming. False

\*Librarian, Government General Degree College, Ranibandh.

\*\*Professor, Department of Library and Information Science, Jadavpur University.

2. Mollick, I., & Chatterjee, S. K. (2024). Digital divide: An in-depth analysis of information literacy disparities in the transition from print to digital media in India. *Librarian*, 27(1–2), 31–37. <https://libsc.jdvu.ac.in/lis>



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### Digital Divide: An In-Depth Analysis of Information Literacy Disparities in the Transition from Print to Digital Media in India

Ibrahim Mollick  
Librarian, Government General Degree College at Ranibandh

Dr. Sualil Kumar Chatterjee  
Professor, Department of Library and Information Science, Jadavpur University

**Abstract:** The ICT sector and the Digital media are important forces behind the rise of the Indian economy, as digital media is displacing print media at a rate that was never seen before. It is anticipated that by 2025, the ICT industry will account for approximately 13 percent of GDP, or 20 percent of the total GDP. In this situation, it is critical to comprehend gaps in information literacy. The rapid growth of information technology has made the internet an essential medium for social and business connections. This paper aims to examine the current state of the digital divide in India and explore strategies for overcoming it. The study emphasizes particular areas where gaps still exist while highlighting the multifaceted nature of information literacy discrepancies in a changing media world. It also covers the significance of several government programs targeted at enhancing digital information access and reducing the digital divide. The study also looks at how these differences affect people's interactions and access to digital information, with particular attention on the implications for education, social interaction, and general socioeconomic development. The study uses a thorough research methodology that combines qualitative and quantitative techniques to collect and analyse data in an organised manner. This study reveals that, still there are gaps in computer and internet use based on gender, caste, religion, and demographics. The results provide vital insights for future study and strategic planning, and they significantly improve scholarly understanding of information literacy gaps in the shift from print to digital media. The ultimate goal is to help India become a more digitally literate and inclusive society.

**Keywords:** Digital Divide, Information Literacy, Inclusive Society

#### Introduction

In order to achieve overall national growth, it is essential to address and eliminate the discrepancies in digital access and usage. The digital gap in present-day India is a significant obstacle to fair and equal access to advanced information and communication technologies (ICT). This distinction divides different groups of people and areas into those who have unlimited access to digital resources and those who are limited by technological constraints. The consequences of the digital divide are complex, especially in the field of education, where its effects are deeply felt. This discussion examines the complexities of the digital divide in Indian education, investigating its origins, manifestations, and the ongoing efforts to close the gap. In the ever-changing realm of digital transformation, it is crucial to comprehend the intricate nature of the digital divide in order to create educational models that are inclusive. This narrative aims to analyse relevant reports and examine the current situation in order to understand the intricate issue of digital inequity in India. It seeks to outline ways to create a future where all learners can succeed, regardless of their access to digital resources.

#### Review of Literature

The transition from print to digital media has brought about substantial changes in information access and consumption habits internationally. In the context of India, this change has underlined the existence of a digital gap, wherein gaps in access, skills, and utilization of digital technology have emerged as major predictors of socio-economic imbalances.

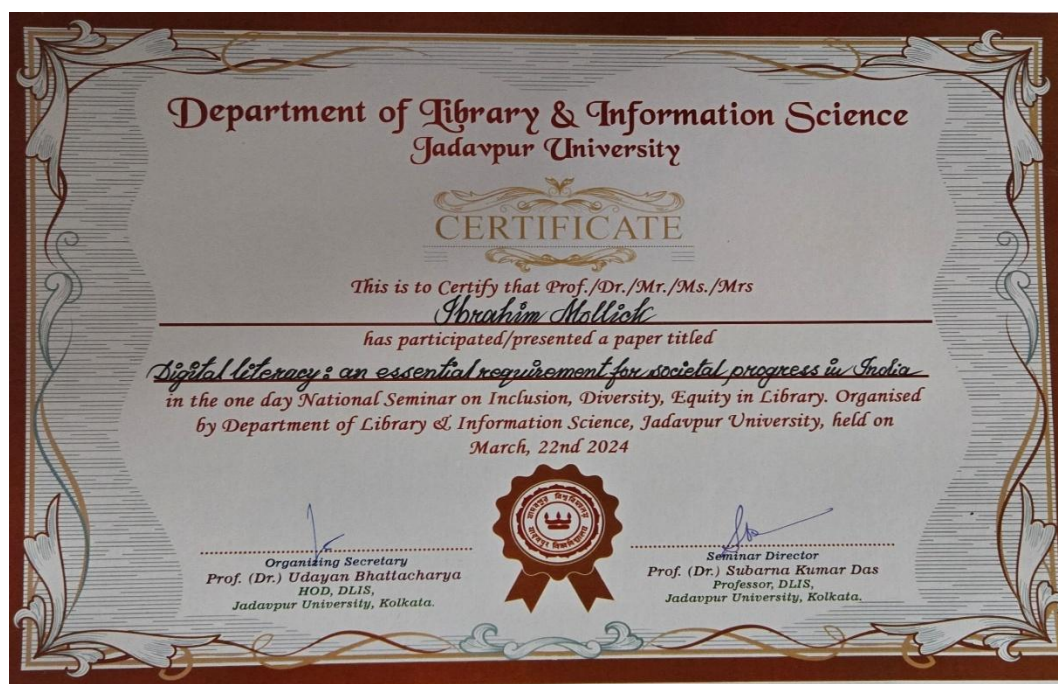
Sheikh (2017) addresses the worldwide issue of digital inequality. While India has launched projects to overcome the gap, further efforts are needed. The focus should be on personalised technological solutions, infrastructure enhancement, ICT awareness, linguistic inclusivity, governmental backing, and private sector investment to lessen the digital gap. Dasgupta Tapashi (2018) emphasises India's demographic advantage and

**B) Conference/Seminar Presentations**

1. Mollick, I. (2024, February 17–18). *Investigating uncharted cyberspace with fake news, social media algorithms, and intellectual property laws in the modern era* [Conference presentation]. Two-Day International Seminar on Intellectual Property Rights and the Conundrum of Information Managers Toward Creating an Open Society, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India.



2. Mollick, I. (2024, March 22). *Digital literacy: An essential requirement for societal progress in India* [Conference presentation]. National Seminar on Inclusion, Diversity, Equity in Library, Jadavpur University, Kolkata, India.



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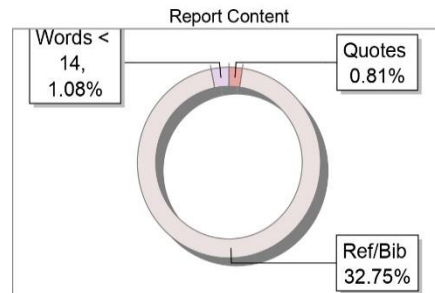
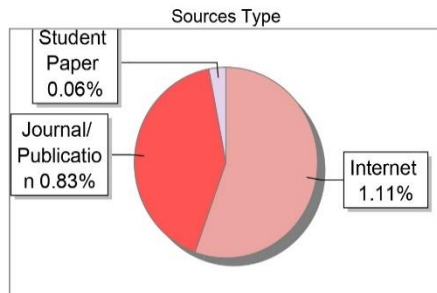
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- 2 social media
- 3 information literacy
- 4 misinformation
- 5 disinformation
- 6 fake news