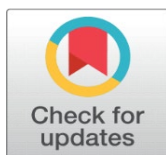
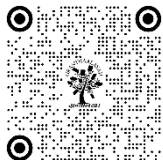


DIGITAL IMMIGRANTS AND DIGITAL DECEPTION: CONSUMING AND COMBATING FAKE NEWS ONLINE

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ABSTRACT

The present-day digital media ecosystem is defined by the proliferation of fake news. Although the term has become popular recently, its incidence has been exponential, and its omnipresence in the global news media, undeniable. Digital immigrants occupy an important online demographic. They represent individuals who were born prior to internet services becoming ubiquitous. They are projected to be the primary internet users in India by 2025 [Statista \(2022\)](#). Due to the existence of filter bubbles and algorithmic judgement on social media platforms, users get limited perspectives that reiterate their existing ideologies [Baptista & Gradim \(2020\)](#). This study seeks to investigate how digital immigrants understand, encounter, and respond to fake news. By conducting in-depth interviews with Indian digital immigrants, it was found that selective exposure was a predominant reason for fake news to be consumed. Confirmation bias explained why users sought out and remembered information which reinforced their ideas and attitudes, and muted and blocked sources which contradicted them. It is suggested that digital immigrants make concerted efforts such as exploring diverse points of views, undertaking basic training courses in fact-checking and source corroboration, and exhibiting cautiousness when encountering content in order to combat fake news.

Keywords: Confirmation Bias, Digital Immigrants, Fake News, Filter Bubble, Selective Exposure Theory

1. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary media landscape has witnessed the unprecedented rise of the insidious phenomenon of fake news. Although the term has gained currency recently, its incidence has been exponential, and its ubiquity in the global news media, undeniable. Fake news has emerged in a context when people's faith in the media has been deteriorating the world over. This is compounded by a fragmentation of audiences who access news online. Due to the existence of filter

bubbles and the algorithmic judgement on social media platforms, users get limited perspectives that reiterate their existing ideologies [Baptista & Gradim \(2020\)](#).

In the early days of the internet, it was seen as a medium that could be a public square – a virtual forum where individuals could come together to discuss matters of importance. Through a process of dialogue and debate, opinions would be generated, and attitudes could be changed. However, this idealized imagination of the internet has metamorphosized into a contemporary reality where users are more akin to polarized packs instead of conscientious publics [Viner \(2013\)](#). The extremely competitive nature of content publishing online which is predicated on a profit-driven model, coupled with an audience that consumes information vociferously and demand instant gratification, has created an ecosystem where anyone can post anything, and misinformation thrives.

Scholars argue that we live in a post-truth age, where facts are not believed to be true, but one's feelings and emotions trump empirical evidence. It does not matter anymore if a news story is authentic as long as users click on it. Truth has become subordinate to online clicks. If a certain news story is not shared with one's online network, then does it even qualify as news? [García-Perdomo et al. \(2018\)](#)

[Shu et al. \(2017\)](#) state that fake news has potentially detrimental effects on society. Purposely misleading stories and intentionally malicious claims made through fake news threaten the democratic ideals of a well-informed electorate [Nyhan et al. \(2017\)](#). It is in this backdrop that it becomes pertinent to understand how online audiences comprehend, consume, and combat fake news.

1.1. FAKE NEWS

Fake news is defined as information that is intentionally and demonstrably false, and could deceive audiences [Allcott & Gentzkow \(2017\)](#). A distinguishing feature of fake news is its disregard and undermining of the voices of authorities, experts, and established institutions. The notion of objectivity is sacrificed, and false information is perpetuated, creating a biased and partisan discourse that prevents rational discussion [Baron & Crootof \(2017\)](#).

There are two primary driving factors behind publishing fake news. One is monetary - news articles that get clicks and go viral online, earn substantial advertising revenue. Another reason is political ([Subramanian, 2017](#) as cited in [Allcott & Gentzkow \(2017\)](#)). Fake news seeks to build-up the perception of one particular ideology, party, or candidate by tarnishing the reputation of competing political groups.

1.2. DIGITAL IMMIGRANTS

The term digital immigrant was coined by Marc Prensky in 2001 to refer to someone who was born and came of age before the internet became omnipresent. Such a person would have to migrate and acclimate to digital devices and technologies. The counterpart to the digital immigrant is the digital native, who was born into a world where internet was publicly available and accessible. Digital natives have grown up with the entire gamut of new media technologies such as video games, iPods, smart phones, and tablet devices, and are well-versed in using the same ([Prensky \(2001\)](#)).

In the United States of America, any individual born after 1985 is recognized as a digital native. However, in the Indian context, [Darbha & Rao \(2016\)](#) posits that only those born after 1995, a decade after their Western counterparts, can be

suitably termed as digital natives. This is due to the fact that internet services were introduced in India only in the mid-1990s. A digital immigrant in India, therefore, constitutes any individual born before 1995.

[Prensky \(2001\)](#) posits that digital immigrants demonstrate an “accent” when they use the internet, using the analogy of learning a new language to describe the experience of adopting to digital technologies. This accent may include practices such as relying on the internet as a secondary rather than primary source of information, printing out emails, using outdated terminology, or not intuitively exploring digital tools. Digital immigrants as a group have a socialization process which differs significantly from digital natives.

While digital natives are estimated to constitute about 33 percent of internet users in India, digital immigrants are projected to account for nearly 66 percent of the internet using population by 2025 ([Statista. \(2022\)](#)).

1.3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1.3.1. SELECTIVE EXPOSURE

Selective exposure theory, proposed by Joseph T Clapper, states that audiences tend to pay attention to information in their lives that is consistent with pre-existing beliefs. This is done to prevent cognitive dissonance, which is the unease that a person feels when something does not coincide with their attitudes or views ([Festinger, 1962](#) cited in [Williams et al. \(2016\)](#)).

There are three components to this theory:

- 1) Selective exposure: This motivates individuals to avoid material which challenges their current perspectives and ideas.
- 2) Selective perception: The process by which people do not comprehend information which opposes their worldviews or how they negotiate with such information to suit their understanding.
- 3) Selective retention: This causes individuals to suppress, dismiss, or forget information inconsistent with their attitudes.

Apart from vetting information presented to them, people also search for and rely on information that corroborates their prevailing views. This is termed as confirmation bias, and it has a consequence on how individuals look for, understand, and remember information. Both selective exposure and confirmation bias have a role to play in how online audiences perceive and respond to fake news.

Although research related to selective exposure dates back to more than half a century ago, the developments made in the online ecosystem have revived focus in this area. A predominant change is the easy availability of news related resources. From an era monopolized by a news environment which featured only a few voices, now there are a plethora of outlets that audiences can choose from. Media consumers can determine the extent to which they are exposed to news. In an effort to stay relevant and be profitable in an extremely competitive publishing space, online news organizations attempt to target niche audiences without fear of appearing to be partisan. Biased news consumption seems to have grown exponentially in a post-internet world ([Metzger et al. \(2020\)](#)).

The element of bias seems to appear at two stages – firstly, the political leaning at the organizational level, and second, at the news story or content level. When exposed to stories that challenged one’s existing attitudes and those that were consistent with one’s attitudes, it is seen that people are averse to sources of news

that confront and contradict their beliefs. They click and spend more time reading stories that reiterate their views (Garrett, 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick, & Meng (2009) as cited in Metzger et al. (2020))

1.3.2. FILTER BUBBLE

Today, in an effort to provide a customized news experience for users, search engines, social media platforms, and news organizations construct algorithms that learn and recommend content based on user preferences. It is in this context that Pariser proposes the idea of the filter bubble. It refers to a virtual space where each user only gets content that resonates with their respective worldviews. These digital cocoons help users surround themselves with news that aligns with their beliefs. Social media fortifies these echo chambers. For instance, platforms like Facebook and Instagram learn the preferences of their users, and continue to serve them similar content on their feeds. Users are given the tools to block or mute viewpoints from users and organizations they do not agree with. Contradictory views and ideas are hardly available for the user to see, and this gives a false view to the user that only their perspectives are correct and the majority of other online users supporting it as well. The algorithms that underlie these platforms, become automated gatekeepers (Pariser (2011)).

Pariser (2011) argues that the filter bubbles that are custom made to coincide with the interests of users, can have far reaching implications. Firstly, these filters disrupt the cognitive equilibrium between reinforcing our pre-existing ideas and learning new ones. They inundate us with notions and ideologies that we are already accustomed to, thereby encouraging us to become self-assured in our outlooks and ways of thinking. We get dissuaded from learning new points of view that might contradict what we know. The filter bubble also dismantles structures that might encourage us to discover new things. It becomes an obstacle between us and how we perceive the world, regulating what is in our purview. It can either be an illuminating intermediary, shedding light on our areas of interest, or it can be a constraint that cuts out opposing information. It skews our vision of the world.

Pariser (2011) also outlines how personalization can constrain a person's inventiveness. The filter bubble imposes a false barrier around the potential resolutions we come up for problems we encounter. Furthermore, since our creative abilities stem from the cues that surround us, exposure to the same ideas might restrain our imagination. We come across fewer and fewer novel ideas. Lastly, the filter bubble also creates an environment that fosters a submissive framework to learning. Since information is doled out to us by algorithms which think they know us, we are less likely to take strides that result in the obtaining of new knowledge. We feel inert to act against the online ecosystem that has been created for us.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Numerous studies have found that the primary intent of fake news is to misrepresent and fabricate facts to make a story appear more strange, shocking, and contentious so that it may be reposted by users. Scholars note that the language used by fake news stories is more simplistic and casual, not just in terms of the headline, but also the text of the story, and additional elements like photographs and captions. Fake news articles use fewer jargon laden words, punctuation, and lesser number of quotes. This informal and easy to comprehend nature of the fake news makes it more persuasive (Horne & Adali (2017)). Fake news is also likely to be more emotive and sensational, lending to its ability to sway users (García-Perdomo et al. (2018)).

Fake news by design, does not only seek to deceive the user, but its objective is to be shared with the user's online network.

Individuals and organizations with ulterior motives can easily construct fake news to push forth hidden agendas. Some sites are set up with the sole intention of publishing made up and misleading articles. Even the names of these sites are selected to mimic those of actual news organizations (Allcott & Gentzkow (2017)). The manipulative nature of these sites is evidenced by the fact that several fake news portals tend to be short-lived. Sites publishing fake news about the 2016 US elections, for instance, were no longer up and running just a few months after the elections were over.

Researchers posit that there also financial factors that have led to the rapid rise of fake news. On social media, the expenditure incurred while breaking into the publishing market and creating content is miniscule. This is perfectly suited for the short-term strategies adopted by fake news producers. Fake news is economically cost effective to produce and it services the needs of audiences who prefer partisan information. With the advent of online journalism, individuals are armed with the power to publish their content at relatively low costs. The process to establish a website and monetize it through advertising is also very convenient. Exploring the circumstances that might have created an environment conducive for the rise of fake news, Allcott & Gentzkow (2017) cite Sunstein (2001) and Pariser (2011), stating that in the early 2000s, the profusion of news on the internet meant that there was a space for a multiplicity of opinions. However, the preponderance of diverse viewpoints made it more convenient for similar thinking individuals to form echo chambers or filter bubbles where they would be isolated from different perspectives. In such spaces, news could be disseminated to users with no systematic vetting, fact checking, filtering, or editorial discretion. A source with legitimate reputation or verifiable credentials could in some instances have the same reach as established media organizations.

Bakshy et al. (2015) state that friend networks on social media sites like Facebook are segregated based on ideology. Only posts from those individuals who seem to resonate a user's point of view, are shown to them on their feed. The ideological and political affiliations reported by people on their profiles determines the kind of content they see. This tailor-made messaging has a more personal appeal than the homogenous reach of traditional media. People who received their news from social media were less likely to be aware about current events that would oppose what they believed. Marwick (2018) noted that incorrect or conspiracy theories had a higher chance of being shared if it reiterated the individual's beliefs.

Another reason for the fervent growth of fake news is the increase in mobile phone usage. Smartphones have become an integral instrument to access news. The number of news aggregator apps like Google News and Flipboard for mobile devices have also become popular. Smartphone users access enable push notifications for news. The spaces where people consume news is also shifting. More online users access news in bed using their mobile devices than when commuting to work (Newman et al. (2017)). Online media is overtaking traditional media as the primary medium for delivering news. Allcott & Gentzkow (2017) reflect on these changing practices and underscore that the very nature of social media, with tiny bursts of information consumed on smartphones or other mobile devices, makes it hard to evaluate the authenticity of an article.

Allcott & Gentzkow (2017) examined the impact of fake news, which first emerged as a force to be reckoned with during the 2016 US Presidential election. In a survey where respondents were exposed to a combination of real news stories and

fake news stories about the prime Presidential nominee's Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton and Republican candidate Donald Trump, it was seen that users gravitated towards certain kinds of stories, based on their political leaning, age, ethnicity, social class, and gender. Fake news stories were more likely to be remembered than real news stories. [Silverman \(2016\)](#) also found that fake news stories outperformed mainstream news stories in terms of online shares.

The presence of fake news has become a universal occurrence. In European countries, the vitriol of fake news was directed against immigrants. In South Asia, fake news crammed sites like Facebook where articles were coloured with ostensible hatred for the minority religious populations. Many of these stories also make their way into mainstream media coverage ([Connolly et al. \(2016\)](#)).

Fake news stories can confuse and confound voters. Fake news plays a crucial role in distorting information that undermines the political process. The public's susceptibility to fake news has increased as audiences have come to significantly utilize social media as a source of news [Blair et al. \(2017\)](#).

Battling false information could pose to be a challenge. Blair et al. argue that although people's initial belief in fake news can be difficult to change, it is not impossible. Continued warnings about the dubious distinctions of certain sites, declaring the lack of veracity of false reporting, and increased dissemination of correct information could counter fake news. Facebook too has taken steps to delineate and distinguish fake news articles in their user's news feed by flagging false articles ([Mosseri \(2016\)](#)).

There are demographic differences which are indicative of variations in how false information is shared. The elderly and those who were extroverted were more susceptible to fake news. Older individuals had an affinity for clickbait content ([Munger \(2020\)](#)). This refers to articles with the sort of headline that purposely withholds information or offers a sensational tease to a story. While men opted to consume more news on social media, women demonstrated more instances of sharing fake news with their social network.

3. STUDY DESIGN

3.1. BROAD OBJECTIVE

This study seeks to investigate how digital immigrants understand, encounter, and respond to fake news. While scholarship pertaining to fake news has grown in the last few years, there has been little research on digital immigrants as an online audience in India. This study attempts to address this research gap by focusing on this crucial demographic.

3.2. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- 1) To examine how digital immigrants use online media for news consumption
- 2) To examine digital immigrants' awareness and understanding of fake news
- 3) To find out how digital immigrants encounter, consume, and respond to fake news

3.3. RESEARCH METHOD

For the stated objectives, in-depth interviews are chosen to be a suitable method for data collection. This is an important qualitative technique in which information is gathered directly from the stakeholders in a study. The advantage of

this approach is that it offers a holistic understanding of different perspectives, ideas, and processes. Once the interviews are conducted, the responses are analyzed and themes are identified.

3.4. STUDY TOOL

An open-ended interview questionnaire was designed for the study that dealt with the participants' history of internet usage, online news consumption habits, comprehension of fake news, and measures to combat fake news. Since the questionnaire was semi-structured, it provided the researchers with some flexibility to follow up on interviewee responses.

3.5. SAMPLING

The respondents for the study were contacted through purposive sampling. This allowed the researchers to enlist those individuals who could provide comprehensive and exhaustive information about the topic under study. In-depth interviews of 10 digital immigrants were conducted. [Guest et al. \(2020\)](#) suggest that 6-12 interviews provide an appropriate range to attain a point of saturation for qualitative interviews. Saturation is understood as the stage in coding where further themes do not emerge.

3.6. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE DATA

Validity is understood as the process of ensuring that relevant data is collected by using sound practices. For this study, the validity of the qualitative approach was established by selecting a diverse sample of digital immigrants whose ages ranged from 30-72 years. The participants history of internet usage varied from those who started going online only six years ago to those who had spent over two decades using the medium. They also had varying proficiencies when it came to the use of digital devices. This was done in order to eliminate any slant towards a fixed result. The interview questionnaire utilized in the study was pilot tested prior to being administered to the sample. Any questions which seem leading or outside the scope of the study, were removed.

Reliability refers to the consistency of responses which ensure that the results have a certain degree of replicability. To ascertain reliability, the researchers followed two measures. Firstly, all the interview responses were transcribed word for word. Next, to establish the trustworthiness of what the researchers had recorded, the answers were presented back to the interviewee for corroboration. In-depth interviews are designed to comprehend phenomenon from the perspective of a participant, credibility is therefore founded on the interviewee believing that their ideas have been accurately recorded. Then individual results for each respondent were analyzed first in relation to the study objectives and then interpreted again in the context of all participant responses. This was an attempt to get a more holistic outlook and understand the larger picture about prevailing thoughts and practices. Secondly, the researchers also relied on the canon of scholarship in the same area, presenting studies in the review of literature and comparing it with the findings of the data analysis, to offer another measure of consistency.

4. ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis was employed in order to examine the responses. The data collected from the interviews with digital immigrants were interpreted using the approach delineated by Braun & Clarke (2006). This involves becoming familiar with the data, creating preliminary codes, outlining recurring ideas, filtering the ideas, articulating themes, and writing up the analysis. This method could be summarized into three overarching steps – transcription, coding, and detecting themes.

As the first step, all interviews were transcribed verbatim. Next, the researchers undertook the process of open coding, using sentences as the unit of analysis. In open coding, there are no pre-existing codes, instead, codes are found and fine-tuned. The data was then organized into smaller blocks of information. Finally, themes were identified. A theme is any key view which captures and links the responses with the objectives of the study. It can also be a concept which recurs in the information collected, resulting in patterns in the data set.

In an effort to ensure confidentiality of the responses, the answers discussed in the next section have been anonymized. Each participant was assigned a number from P1 to P10 (Participant 1-10), in the order in which they were interviewed.

4.1. THEMES AND FINDINGS

1) Migration to the digital realm

One of the unifying experiences that participants in the study shared was their earliest memory of using internet services. For many digital immigrants, their initiation to the internet occurred at cyber cafes in the late 1990s and early 2000s. These were places where users would pay charges at an hourly rate for surfing the web. The initial migration to the virtual realm was therefore predicated on a physical migration to these spaces.

There was a certain curiosity about the medium and excitement about the communication possibilities it brought forth. One participant recalled, “When I first started to use the internet, there was not a lot of hand-holding. I had to explore it and learn its features on my own. It offered a whole new window to the world” (P1). Along the same vein, another participant (P8) said, “Creating an email address for yourself was a milestone. It was like forging a virtual identity in cyber space. You could customize it. The idea that I could send an email to someone on the other side of the world was unimaginable.”

For older digital immigrants, using the internet has been a more recent phenomenon after the proliferation of smartphone devices. “I did not pay much attention to the internet until after my retirement. Now that I have time on my hands, I use it to stay in touch with my family. Especially during the early months of the Covid pandemic, when we had to be physically distanced from each other, we could only stay connected through online platforms” (P2).

Despite these differences in the duration of internet usage, all participants acknowledged that internet usage has become an indispensable part of contemporary life.

2) Consumption of news on the internet

For most of the 20th century, there were distinct mass mediums from which people could get their news – print publications, radio, and television. However, after the internet became available to the Indian public in the mid-1990s, the platforms and places for people to consume news have grown.

As one participant (P1) explained, “Today, nearly all the news I consume is from the internet. We are always on our computers for work. We rely on smartphone devices for day-to-day functioning. News is readily available at our convenience.”

There is also a plethora of formats of news presentation which are accessible. “I use voice assistants to get updates about the top news stories as I go about my daily chores. I listen to news podcasts while travelling. I scroll through news related posts on my social media feeds” (P4). The multimedia capabilities offered by the internet have allowed for varied kinds of storytelling which can be text-based, audio, visual, or interactive in nature.

However, not all digital immigrants unequivocally depend on the internet alone for news. Legacy media is still predominantly favoured. “I get all my news from newspapers, which I read thoroughly. Then, I watch TV news to get a better picture of the event. I only go online in case I need to find out more about an issue” (P2). Another participant echoed this sentiment. “There is an overabundance of news sources online. It becomes difficult to sift. Newspapers and television do the vetting for you and inform you about what to pay attention to” (P7).

3) Motivations for sharing online news

Participants admitted to sharing news they found online with others if it seemed concerning or bizarre. “I do not share news unless it worries me, or I find that it affects my loved ones. A story has to be truly out of the ordinary for me to send it to others” (P3). Unusualness appeared to be an important factor affecting why online news may be disseminated by users.

There was also a socializing aspect to sharing news found online. As one participant pointed out, “Discussing news stories can be a great ice-breaker at social gatherings. It makes interactions easier. If a story is a unifying issue that affects our immediate communities, I am more inclined to talk about it” (P5).

4) Perception of fake news

All participants in the study were familiar with the term fake news. Given that the term has gained currency over the last few years, it had become a part of the lexicon around online news consumption.

The consensus among participants was that fake news was any news story which was sensational in nature and not fact-based. Some participants defined it as partisan media. “Fake news is agenda driven and seeks to spread a particular ideology through a false narrative” (P3).

Another participant noted that fake news is cloaked to resemble real news. A cursory look at a fake news story would make it seem indistinguishable from story published by an authentic and verified news source. Participants noted that fake news has certain tells. “The language of fake news will seem exaggerated. The tone and vocabulary used will not be very formal, but emotive” (P6).

Many of the fake news stories have clickbait headlines. One participant (P9) explained, “The titles tease you with a hint of information and entice you to click and find out more. It might seem like downright hype.”

When asked about the probable causes of fake news, participants seemed to indicate two broad reasons. A participant (P6) speculated the fake news seeks to promote divisiveness and discord. "Fake news always creates a false narrative which might favour a particular group. Or it could be publicity, something that brings a lot of unwarranted attention to an issue."

Other participants stated that because clicks are rewarded and content can be monetized online, there could be economic incentives to publishing fake news. Since there are very low barriers to entry, anyone can publish anything they want online without the story being subjected to a fact checking process. "In newspapers, it is hard to print unsubstantiated opinion without fear of repercussions. But online, there is no liability. This lack of accountability emboldens people to post without thinking about the consequences" (P8).

5) Being in a bubble

Participants in the study stated that they were accustomed to encounter news stories online which were aligned with their existing worldviews. "When we sign up on social media platforms, we are asked about our topics of interest. It is like these online algorithms are constantly studying me and my interests. I keep getting suggestions to follow similar content" (P10). This personalization of online experiences has created an ecosystem which is ideal for targeted messages. Fake news relies on these online echo chambers which are tailor-made for audiences based on their predispositions. "If a story seems to confirm something I believed it, I would not worry about checking whether it was fake or not," explained a participant (P5).

The veracity of a story is often seen as secondary to the ideological stance it exhibits. "If a story says negative things about a politician or public figure I admire, I simply do not trust it. I know that it could be written by an opposing party or online trolls" (P7).

When confronted with stories that contradicted their world views, the primary response seems to be to block the post or source. "If I come across a story I don't like, I try not to give it engagement. I don't read past the headline" (P4). Others go a step further. "I mute or report the post or the outlet immediately. I would rather not have such content on my feeds" (P9).

6) Fighting fake news

Many digital immigrants reported that the complexity of fake news has grown over the years. Responding to them has been a process of trial and error. "I remember falling victim to messages a decade ago saying I had won a huge cash reward. I used to be naïve and had a tendency to believe them. I grew up with social media. I made mistakes. I hope I am in a position now where I can distinguish between fake and real news," said a participant (P1). Similarly, another participant (P8) observed, "We have all received WhatsApp messages saying UNESCO had declared a certain country's national anthem or culture as the best in the world. These seemed like harmless forwards. These days, the fake news messages look so much like real articles. Their websites look like news sites. And they are not as innocuous as before."

When it came to sharing fake news stories among one's network, the size and composition of the network seemed to matter to digital immigrants. "When I get links to news stories on WhatsApp or Facebook, I do not check if it is from a legitimate or non-legitimate source. My social circle is small, comprising only my

close family members. Even if I share a story which turns out to be untrue, I know there is no harm done. Someone will correct me or disprove the message” (P2).

Others were more cautious. “I never forward news stories on my work related groups. I think twice about what stories are sent to me” (P4). The profusion of fake news messages has also led to some digital immigrants strategizing on how to identify if a story is from an illicit source. “I countercheck the language. The choice of words reveal the intent” (P3). Another participant (P8) added, “The internet is oversaturated with news stories. I read 2-3 articles from different outlets to get the complete picture and use my own judgement. I compare sources and then make a decision for myself about an issue.”

For some participants, being able to identify a fake news story was not enough. They felt a responsibility to set the record straight. “I report the page when they seem to propagate false information. I repost the story to my followers and label it as fake. I have learnt to only subscribe to trustworthy outlets which have cultivated a certain reputation” (P6).

For others, combating fake news went beyond the digital realm. “Since online media is personalized for my preferences, I am afraid I might miss out on diverse viewpoints. I discuss contradictory opinions with my family members. I am open to opposite views. I listen to different perspectives and then take a stand for myself” (P3).

4.2. DISCUSSION

The first objective of this study was to examine how digital immigrants use online media for news consumption. The in-depth interviews with the participants revealed dichotomous results. Some digital immigrants attested to the ubiquity of online news and multiplicity of news formats available. This confirms the claim by [Hermida \(2010\)](#) that news today has become ambient. There is a clutter of digital audio-visual components always disseminating information and updates. Other digital immigrants still demonstrated a predilection for legacy media. Newspapers and television were seen as primary news delivery mechanisms, while online news constituted only a secondary preference. However, all participants confirmed that online news media consumption had become an inextricable part of their news media diet.

The second objective of the study sought to examine digital immigrants’ awareness and understanding of fake news. It was found that all the respondents in the study had some degree of awareness about fake news. They described it as news that was not fact based or verified, overly sensational, and were published by illegitimate organizations. The participants also had experiences of mistaking fake news for real news. They identified certain attributes that fake news stories had, such as emotive language, informal tone, lack of identifiable sources, and enticing clickbait headlines and thumbnails. The tendency to read such stories confirms the study from [Munger \(2020\)](#) which found that older online users were more likely to be attracted to clickbait content.

Participants also stated that if a news story they encountered seemed to resonate with their existing views, they were more likely to believe it and less likely to investigate if it were true. [Bakshy et al. \(2015\)](#) found that friend networks on social media sites are forged based on ideology. Posts which reconfirmed a user’s beliefs appeared more on their feed. One’s ideological and political affiliations coincided with kind of content they were shown. Inaccurate stories or conspiracy theories were more likely to be reshared if it reiterated a user’s beliefs ([Marwick](#)

(2018)). This is the embodiment of selective exposure theory which posits that audiences consume information that is in-keeping with their beliefs and dismiss information which is inconsistent with their attitudes. Online actions such as muting or blocking outlets and publications which challenge one's ideas, represent the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962 cited in Williams et al. (2016)). Fake news relies on selective exposure, selective perception, and selective retention to be successful. Confirmation bias explains how people seek out and remember information which reinforces their ideas and attitudes.

The third objective of the study was to find out how digital immigrants encounter, consume, and respond to fake news. Given that this demographic is estimated to constitute nearly two-thirds of all internet users in India by 2025 (Statista. (2022)), an investigation into their comprehension and preparedness for fake news is pertinent. The participants admitted to have some encounters with fake news stories, whether it was in the form of harmless text forwards or more sinister stories which intend to spread the seeds of discord. Their unquestioning acceptance of online content from the early era of the internet has given way to a shared scepticism in contemporary times. Participants spoke about having learnt from their mistakes and actively adopting methods to not fall prey to fake news. These practices included looking up how the same news is covered from different sources, comparing different media outlets, corroborating the authenticity of a source, looking for supplementary evidence, and speaking to people in the real world who might hold contradictory viewpoints.

5. CONCLUSION

This study was an attempt to contribute to the understanding of how fake news affects the digital immigrant's experience of navigating the internet. Since this cohort migrated to the internet, their unique and evolving experiences help map a trajectory of how digital technologies are also changing. The social impact of this study lies in the revelation that that most digital immigrants do not need to be conscientized about the existence of fake news. However, as internet penetration in India grows, with nearly half the country's population having access to the medium (Statista. (2022)), the power and influence that the internet can have on the behaviours and actions of users, is something to be reckoned with.

Fake news can have devastating consequences on society. As Allcott & Gentzkow (2017) pointed, it can be used to topple democracies, sway public opinion, polarize people, and endanger communities. Digital immigrants must recognize the responsibility that accompanies reading and sharing stories online. Concerted efforts such as exploring diverse points of views, basic fact-checking and source corroboration, and cautiousness when encountering content, must become a part of routine online news consumption behaviour.

Basic training courses in media literacy should be made available to online users by trained media practitioners. There has to be greater regulation of online publications. Social media sites must clamp down on pages and accounts which violate the platforms by masquerading as news outlets.

As digital media technologies grow, the digital immigrant's role in it will not be one of passive spectatorship, but an active one of reason and responsibility. Since the popularity of fake news depends entirely on the audience, it is up to readers to become more discerning, and separate fact from fiction while reading articles online.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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