

Fake News Sharing Among Weibo Users in China

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ABSTRACT

In an era where social media's impact on public discourse is increasingly pronounced, this study probes into the spread of fake news among Weibo users in China, a significant issue given the platform's massive user base and China's unique media environment. Adopting a quantitative research approach, the study primarily investigates how situational motivation and information-seeking behaviours influence the sharing of fake news. Utilising regression analysis, a method pivotal for understanding the relationship between various independent variables and the sharing of misinformation, the research sheds light on the nuanced interplay of factors that drive users to disseminate false information. Key findings reveal that situational factors, such as the need for social recognition or the urge to disseminate urgent news, considerably elevate the likelihood of sharing fake news. Additionally, the study uncovers the complex nature of information-seeking behaviour: while it generally leads to better-informed decisions, it can sometimes result in the sharing of unverified news under certain circumstances. These outcomes are crucial for understanding the behavioural patterns behind fake news sharing on social media. They offer valuable insights for policymakers, social media platforms, and educators in formulating effective countermeasures against misinformation, aiming to foster a more discerning and informed online community. This study, therefore, contributes significantly to the existing body of knowledge on digital media, misinformation, and public opinion, highlighting the critical need for strategies to combat the spread of fake news in the digital age.

Keywords: *Fake news sharing, information seeking, situational motivation, agenda-setting theory, China.*

INTRODUCTION

It is believed from the study of Apuke and Omar (2021a) that fake news sharing has become a popular trend among Weibo users in China. This phenomenon is driven by the ease of access to various sources of information, combined with the desire for more sensational stories that appeal to readers. It is important to understand how fake news is shared on Weibo in order to mitigate its effects and protect users from manipulation. After conducting background research on the predictors of fake news sharing among Weibo users in China, the findings determined Weibo users are more likely to share false information when the content appeals to their beliefs or political opinions. Fake news stories that include an emotional tone, exaggerated language, and inaccurate facts are more likely to be shared by Weibo users (Pang, Liu & Lu, 2022).

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This study has explored the growing problem of fake news sharing and discussed methods for mitigating its effects as. There are both cognitive and non-cognitive factors that contribute to the sharing of fake news (Apuke & Omar, 2021b). Fake news sharing not only affects the accuracy of information provided to users but also poses a threat to their security and privacy (Balakrishnan, Ng & Rahim, 2021). Therefore, it is important for us to understand the factors that influence fake news sharing among Weibo users in China. In China, Weibo users have been sharing fake news more than ever before, and this has had numerous negative consequences for the country (Baptista & Gradim, 2020).

Numerous factors have made social media fake news a major issue. Among them are the lack of education and awareness among users, quick sharing without verification, clickbait headlines to spread misinformation, platform algorithms to maximise engagement, and deliberate campaigns to sow distrust in information sources are examples (Sharma et al., 2019). Weibo users in China are concerned about fake news. How social media platforms spread false information and how users interact with it is the main issue. To stop misinformation and reduce its negative effects, we aim to identify factors affecting fake news sharing and possible solutions (Singh & Sharma, 2022). In doing so, this study examines fake news sharing by Chinese Weibo users and its potential impact on public opinion. The current study has followed the research objectives:

RO1: To explore the relationship between situational motivation and fake news sharing.

RO2: To assess the relationship between information seeking and fake news sharing.

Consequently, the current study has followed the research questions:

RQ1: What is the relationship between situational motivation and fake news sharing?

RQ2: What is the relationship between information seeking and fake news sharing?

A study on fake news sharing could identify cognitive biases or ideological motivations as possible causes. Management across different sectors, including media organizations, technology companies, and social media platforms could use this research to inform fake news prevention policies (Wang, He, Xu, & Zhang, 2020). In conclusion, studying factors affecting Chinese Weibo users' fake news sharing is important and practical (Guo & Zhang, 2020). This research can improve algorithms for identifying fake news, social media regulations, and platform design to contain misinformation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fake News Sharing as Dependent Variable

Someone who intentionally spreads false information about people, places, events, or things is considered spreading fake news (Obadă & Dabija, 2022). Agenda-setting theory suggests that the media influences public attention to fake news (Liu, Auge, & Yan, 2021). According to Obadă and Dabija (2022), message content, structural bias, and social media news network connections. The researchers found that fake news spreads faster and deeper than real news. As people share news on social media, they are more likely to share news they think their network will enjoy. They found that people who trust more news sources spend more time verifying information

before sharing it. This study suggests that social media users should research facts before sharing them and be more aware of their sources (Schmierbach et al., 2022). Agenda setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) proposes that news coverage of certain topics can influence public opinion by making them more visible and popular or by presenting subjective “frames” that may influence public interpretation (Su & Borah, 2019). Despite fake news not being a new phenomenon, its comprehensive study within the context of agenda-setting theory is still evolving (Balakrishnan et al., 2021).

Situational Motivation and Fake News Sharing

Situational motivation is when a person's actions are influenced by their surroundings, where this includes the pressure to finish an assigned task on time based on the researcher's point of view. Situational motivation is when a person's actions are influenced by their immediate environment or circumstances. A fitting example in the context of fake news sharing could be the pressure to share breaking news quickly in a social media group. If a person is part of an online community that values rapid sharing of news, they might feel compelled to disseminate information they come across without thorough verification. This desire to be seen as a timely source of news within the group, or to maintain their status and relationships within that community, becomes a situational motivator. Consequently, this pressure can lead to the sharing of unverified or false information, aligning with the findings of researchers like Guo (2020) and Obadă and Dabija (2022).

Research shows that situational motivation increases fake news sharing (Guo, 2020). Obadă and Dabija (2022) examined situational motivation and fake news sharing to explain why people share it. Recent studies (Bermes, 2021; Di Domenico & Visentin, 2020) show that situational motivation spreads fake news. Specifically, when motivated by external factors like recognition or relationships, people are more likely to share false information (Duffy, Tandoc, & Ling, 2020). People are also more likely to share fake news in a group that encourages it. According to Gilardi, Gessler, Kubli and Müller (2022), people who are motivated by their values and beliefs are more likely to spread false information where readers may share false information if it matches their views or gives them a sense of belonging. Situational motivation appears to predict fake news dissemination. Even though people are more aware of fake news, they would still share it. Network structure, perspective-taking, and social reality-making influence fake news sharing, according to research. Xu, Zhou and Wang (2023) found network structure mediated fake news sharing speed.

Information Seeking and Fake News Sharing

Researching facts can help stop fake news, according to Duffy et al. (2020). People who actively verify information and double check sources are less likely to share fake news on social media. To prevent misinformation from spreading, accurate information must be accessible (Liu et al., 2021). One of the main causes of fake news is information seeking. False information is harder to detect and combat due to its ease of sharing (Schmierbach et al., 2022). To combat fake news, educate individuals on evaluating online sources and accuracy (Šimalčík, 2021). Bermes' (2021) study on information seeking and fake news sharing is crucial to understanding digital media's role in society. Digital media and social media have fuelled fake news. Therefore, understanding

how information seeking and fake news sharing influence each other is crucial (Talwar et al., 2019).

Further to this, Schmierbach et al. (2022) examined how information seeking affects fake news sharing. Research shows that people who seek information are more likely to spot fake news and share it less. Their ability to spot fake news and tendency to verify news before sharing it contribute to this. The literature review also examines how digital media affects information seeking and fake news sharing. Facebook and Twitter are major sources of fake news. People may struggle to spot and avoid fake news due to algorithmic curation and viral content.

Wei et al. (2023) found that fake news has become a pervasive issue in media spaces over the past few years. Technology has made spreading fake news easier, causing concern for governments, businesses, and academia. According to Yang, Kuo and Fei (2021), active information seekers who frequently searched for current events and updated their knowledge were more likely to share fake news. Political fake news was shared more by active information seekers than non-partisan fake news. The study suggested that their dedication to political climate research and updates may explain this.

Agenda-Setting Theory

Agenda-Setting Theory states that the media influences what people consider important issues, which can lead to them sharing false information (Xu, Zhou & Wang, 2023). According to agenda-setting theory, the media can influence our opinions and focus our attention on certain topics. This means media can influence our opinions on a topic and our willingness to accept and share fake news (Yang et al., 2021). Agenda-setting theory allows media outlets to use information seeking to spread and stop fake news (Yang, Kuo & Fei, 2021).

Theoretical Framework

Media agenda setting theory holds that topics chosen by the media can influence viewers. The theory states that media topics shape public opinion (Schmierbach et al., 2022). News outlets may cover fact-checking and fake news (Xu, Zhou & Wang, 2023). This shows how the media can influence public opinion on this issue. Agenda setting theory also explains how media affects people's worldview (Gilardi, Gessler, Kubli & Müller, 2022). Agenda setting theory can reduce online fake news by raising standards for news content on these platforms and actively monitoring misinformation.

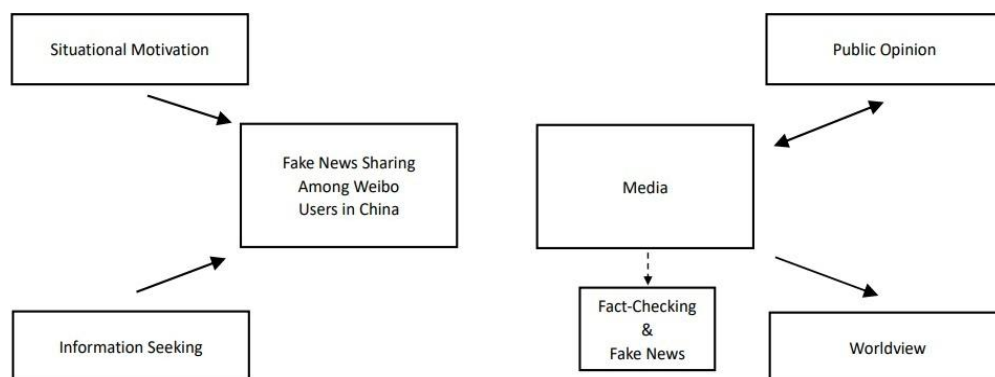


Figure 1: Agenda-Setting Theory

The framework further explores how specific factors such as situational motivation and information seeking behaviour contribute to the spread of fake news among Weibo users. Situational motivation refers to the external circumstances or contexts that prompt users to share information, which in this case, might include the desire for social recognition or the urge to contribute to trending topics. Information seeking behaviour, on the other hand, pertains to how users search for and interact with news content, a process that can either mitigate or exacerbate the spread of fake news based on the accuracy and reliability of the information sought and shared.

This theoretical construct is significant because it extends the traditional view of the Agenda-Setting Theory into the realm of social media, a landscape vastly different from traditional media platforms. It recognizes the nuanced ways in which digital platforms like Weibo not only disseminate information but also how they foster environments where fake news can thrive due to specific user behaviours and platform algorithms. The study's framework seeks to dissect these intricate dynamics, offering insights into the patterns of fake news sharing and the potential strategies for addressing this issue. By doing so, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the modern information ecosystem and the challenges posed by the prevalence of misinformation online.

Based on agenda-setting theory, it is proposed that situational motivation and information seeking have influence on the spread of fake news sharing among the Weibo users in China. The following hypotheses is based on the literature analysis and theories.

H1: Situational motivation positively influences the likelihood of sharing fake news.

H2: Increased seeking information is associated with a higher propensity to share fake news.

Operational Definition of Concepts

a) Fake News Sharing

Definition: Fake news sharing is defined as information that is either entirely fabricated or deliberately distorted to present an inaccurate portrayal of a situation. This concept was described by Liu et al. (2021). It can also be defined as the practice of inaccurately distributing false news stories over the internet in order to influence public opinion or gain financial or political advantage. According to Guess, Nagler and Tucker (2019), fake news can be generated and disseminated by trusted sources, bots, trolls, or interactive media. It can be found in various formats including articles, videos, messages, and is prevalent on social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Despite the rise in media literacy in recent years, as noted by Osmundsen et al. (2021), fake news can still create confusion and lead to a misinformed voting public.

b) Situational Motivation

Definition: Situational motivation occurs when people are influenced by their current environment, or external stimuli, and then act according to this influence. This concept was explored by Pang et al. (2022). It can also be described as the phenomenon where an individual's motivation to engage in an activity or behaviour is influenced by their external environment or

the current situation they are in. The underlying idea, as explained by Apuke and Omar (2021b), is that when a person is exposed to certain environmental cues, such as rewards or incentives, their motivation is heightened, making them more likely to complete the task or behaviour.

c) Information Seeking

Definition: Information seeking is the process of identifying, locating, and obtaining information in order to answer a query or fulfil a need. This process was detailed by Cham, et al. in 2020. Information seeking involves finding and gathering facts, data, and information in all its forms, including printed, electronic, or digital. It is essentially the process of seeking knowledge and understanding about a given topic or field, often for a purpose such as problem-solving. Information seeking requires a conscious effort and can involve actively gathering information through researching, reading, or asking questions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study of fake news dissemination on Weibo is ideal in China due to its large user base of over 600 million (Šimalčík, 2021). Secondly, the strict Chinese social media and online content regulations of the government have affected Weibo's information flow. Last, as technology and social media grow rapidly in China, machine learning algorithms may have contributed to fake news and its impact on Weibo users (Pang, Liu & Lu, 2022). Thus, China is ideal for studying how user behaviour and government censorship affect Weibo fake news sharing. The questionnaires for this study were distributed online, specifically through an online survey. The area was mainly Chinese users of Weibo. This method allows for quick and efficient data collection from a large number of respondents. Online questionnaires, which include multiple choice questions and open-ended answers, are convenient and cost-effective, and can be distributed through a variety of channels such as email and social media. Regarding the age of respondents, the study included participants from three age groups:

1. 18-25 years old: 61 respondents, representing 59.8% of the sample.
2. 26 to 30 years: 38 respondents, or 37.3% of the sample.
3. 31-35 years: 3 respondents, or 2.9% of the sample.

Research Design

The design of this research study is a quantitative research study. Quantitative research involves asking more specific questions, making quantitative measurements of physical characteristics and collecting numerical data. Quantitative research helps to objectively explain and describe the variables under investigation (Bauer et al., 2021). Quantitative research is also useful for measuring trends, making predictions and testing hypotheses. Since quantitative methods allow for a statistical representation of data, results can be easily analysed for patterns and correlations and then used to answer questions about the population studied (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019). In this study, the questionnaire was carefully designed to ask more specific questions related to the variables under investigation, such as fake news sharing, situational motivation, and information seeking. The responses gathered through this method provided a quantitative measurement of these characteristics, allowing the research team to objectively analyse and interpret the data to draw meaningful conclusions about the broader population of Weibo users. This approach aligns

with the principles of quantitative research, which focuses on numerical representation and analysis of data to enhance objectivity and reliability in research findings.

Population and Sampling

This study used convenience and nonprobability sampling. Convenience sampling allows researchers to focus on relevant factors rather than the likelihood that all population members will be sampled (Balakrishnan et al., 2021). To ensure study validity, researchers must justify participant selection. This study "Krejcie and Morgan's Table (1970)" describes the population sample size. This table makes sample size definition easy for researchers. The Krejcie & Morgan (1970) table recommends 338 samples for 2800 people. The total number of Chinese students is 130, the established sample size is 97 as suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), and 5 sample sizes are added around this number to increase study reliability, resulting in 102. Thus, this study targets 102 Chinese students.

Data Collection Procedures

Data will be collected via online questionnaire. Online questionnaires can quickly and efficiently collect research data from a wide range of respondents. The simple and user-friendly survey interface makes online surveys easy to distribute and complete quickly (Tandoc Jr, 2019). Using multiple-choice and open-ended questions helps collect data quickly and accurately. Email and social media surveys allow organisations to quickly reach a large audience with little effort. Additionally, online survey data can be tracked, analysed, and exported in CSV and Excel formats. Product and service offerings and marketing campaigns can be strategically planned using this data. Online questionnaires allow organisations to quickly and cheaply collect valuable and meaningful data. Research instruments and measurements for research surveys for current students. Fake News Sharing using Guo's scale. Situational motivation was measured using Apuke and Omar's scale. Information seeking was used in the study by Pang, Liu and Lu (2022).

Data Analysis

a) Descriptive Analysis

This research study employed descriptive analysis to quantify or summarise data to understand its patterns. Descriptive analysis helps understand data relationships and trends. Descriptive analysis can reveal patterns and answer questions that raw numbers cannot. Descriptive analysis helps researchers quickly understand their data sets. Visualisation and exploratory analysis can reveal trends and relationships between variables (Wang et al., 2020). Descriptive analysis can help identify factors that may affect target outcomes by understanding the data. Predictive descriptive analysis is possible. Descriptive analysis identifies outliers and allows correction. Data analysis quality and accuracy improve, leading to better decisions (Wei et al., 2023).

b) Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis is individual social media Weibo users while data collection will be cross-sectional and through online questionnaires. The study purposes to investigate the proposed hypotheses using the hypothetic-deductive method.

c) Reliability Analysis

This study measured data consistency, stability, and predictability using reliability. Reliability analysis evaluates hardware, software, networks, databases, and other system components and design. This analysis helps organisations identify and resolve system design issues before they become costly (Williamson & Luke, 2020). It can help identify areas that need more maintenance or improvement to lower maintenance and repair costs. Based on system components and their characteristics, reliability analysis can identify risk areas and develop plans to reduce outages and failures. Most importantly, reliability analysis helps organisations make informed decisions and maximise efficiency by revealing system performance (Bloomfield & Fisher, 2019).

d) Factor Analysis

In the study on fake news sharing among Weibo users, factor analysis, specifically confirmatory factor analysis, plays a crucial role. This statistical method is used to extract and identify meaningful underlying factors from large data sets, helping to find patterns in many related variables. Confirmatory factor analysis is particularly useful in fields such as psychology, sociology, education, and healthcare, as it tests a theoretical model of variables and assists researchers in determining if the relationships among variables match a theory or model. This method aids in identifying model flaws, validating hypotheses, and pinpointing critical variables that influence behaviours related to fake news sharing on Weibo (Duffy et al., 2020). By assessing a factor's variability and identifying its characteristics, confirmatory factor analysis clarifies the relationships between variables, making it a reliable tool for revealing these relationships and providing critical research data (Gilardi et al., 2022).

e) Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was employed in this study to further understand data relationships. Correlation analysis is a powerful statistical method extensively used in finance, business, economics, and social sciences. It allows researchers to identify potential relationships between variables, indicating their strength and direction, which is essential in the context of social media where factors such as user engagement, content type, and network dynamics can significantly impact the spread of fake news. Understanding these correlations can reveal market trends and other factors that affect business success, as well as the spread of misinformation on platforms like Weibo (Guess et al., 2019; Guo, 2020). This combined approach of factor and correlation analysis in the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted factors influencing fake news sharing among Weibo users.

f) Regression Analysis

Regression analysis analyses relationships between two or more independent variables and one dependent variable to predict how changes in the independent variables affect the dependent variable. Regression analysis helps businesses and organisations identify meaningful relationships between variables and gain insights for decision-making (Sürücü & Maslakci, 2020). It quantifies the effect of one variable on another, showing how changes in one variable affect another. It can also reveal customer behaviour, helping businesses understand their customers and create profitable strategies. Regression analysis also reveals variable relationships that raw

data may not (Talwar et al., 2019). Finally, regression analysis can predict future trends using historical data.

Role of the Pilot Study

Pilot studies are crucial to research. Gadke et al. (2021) states that allows researchers to test their research design and identify issues before conducting a full-scale study. It improves their methodology, data collection tools, and analysis plans. Pilot studies can determine if the proposed research is feasible and if any changes are needed to improve results. Pilot studies can also give researchers new perspectives on their topic (Cham et al., 2023). A pilot study has been conducted with 30 Weibo users in testing the reliability and credibility of the questions in the questionnaire, it is believed that all respondents answer and understood the questionnaire well. This led for the study to proceed in completion of the remaining sample as indicated in the previous section.

Reliability Analysis (Cronbach’s Alpha)

Research shows that reliability analysis is crucial to determining results accuracy and consistency. Surveys, interviews, and experiments are used to evaluate data reliability. Reliability analysis helps researchers find data errors and ensure their results are accurate. This helps them draw meaningful research conclusions. Reliability analysis also shows how well a research instrument or technique performs over time or in different contexts. Researchers can benefit from understanding the pros and cons of various methods and techniques (Sürücü & Maslakci, 2020). Survey questionnaire reliability is shown in Table 2. Dependability testing has been done on all variables. This test uses 30 student data. Fake news sharing has 0.699 Cronbach's Alpha, situational motivation 0.748, and information seeking 0.709. Taber (2018) consider data acceptable if Cronbach's Alpha is greater than 0.6.

Table 1: Reliability analysis of survey questionnaire

| Variables | Dependent Variable | Independent Variables | |
|--|--------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| | Fake News Sharing | Situational Motivation | Information Seeking |
| Cronbach's Alpha | .699 | .748 | .709 |
| Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items | .724 | .731 | .781 |
| N of Items | 05 | 04 | 03 |

Table 2: Hypothetical factor loadings for survey questionnaire items

| Variables | Items | Factor Loading |
|------------------------|-------|----------------|
| Fake News Sharing | 1 | .68 |
| | 2 | .70 |
| | 3 | .71 |
| | 4 | .69 |
| | 5 | .67 |
| Situational Motivation | 1 | .74 |
| | 2 | .76 |
| | 3 | .75 |
| | 4 | .73 |

| | | |
|---------------------|---|-----|
| Information Seeking | 1 | .71 |
| | 2 | .70 |
| | 3 | .72 |

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to examine the causes of online fake news. Situation motivation and information seeking are the independent variables affecting fake news sharing in agenda setting theory. This quantitative study uses Weibo users as Chinese students in China. Different analysis methods are used with SPSS 23.0. The study used regression analysis to test hypotheses. Before starting regression analysis, correlation, descriptive, demographic, normality, and multicollinearity analyses were used to check estimation level results. Regression analysis tests the current study's hypothesis.

Descriptive Analysis

Descriptive analysis uses tables and charts for tests. Researchers use descriptive analysis to describe a population or phenomenon. Tables, graphs, and charts are used to summarise and organise data. Descriptive analysis helps researchers identify data patterns and draw conclusions about the population or phenomenon. It can also identify variables' trends and relationships.

a) Demographic Analysis

Demographic analysis is based on 102 respondents. The demographic analysis included the gender profile of respondents, the age profile of respondents, and daily time spent on Weibo.

b) Gender Profile of Respondents

Table 3 is showing the general profile of respondents. There are 67.6 percent males and 32.4 percent females while showing frequency of 69 males and 33 females. A total number of 102 respondents are shown in the table. From the number of participants, it is evident that males dominate the data as compared to females. They are more in number.

Table 3: Gender profile of respondents

| Gender | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|--------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Female | 33 | 32.4 | 32.4 | 32.4 |
| Male | 69 | 67.6 | 67.6 | 100.0 |
| Total | 102 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

c) Age Profile of Respondents

Table 4 and Figure 2 are showing the age profile of the respondent. The frequency of age from 18 to 25 is 61, from 26 to 30 is 38, from 31 to 35 is 3, and the total number of respondents is 102 while showing the percentage from 18 to 25 is 59.8 %, from 26 to 30 is 37.3 %, and from 31 to 35 is 2.9 %.

Table 4: Age profile of respondents

| Age | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| 18-25 | 61 | 59.8 | 59.8 | 59.8 |
| 26-30 | 38 | 37.3 | 37.3 | 97.1 |
| 31-35 | 3 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 100.0 |
| Total | 102 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Figure 2 is representing the age profile of respondents with percentages and three colors; green, off-white, and green colour. The green colour is indicating the age group from 26-30 with a percentage of 37.25. The blue colour is indicating the age group from 18-25 with a percentage of 59.80. The off-white colour is indicating the age group from 31-35 with a percentage of 2.94. It is confirmed from the pie chart that the age group of 18-25 has a high percentage and dominance over the other age groups.

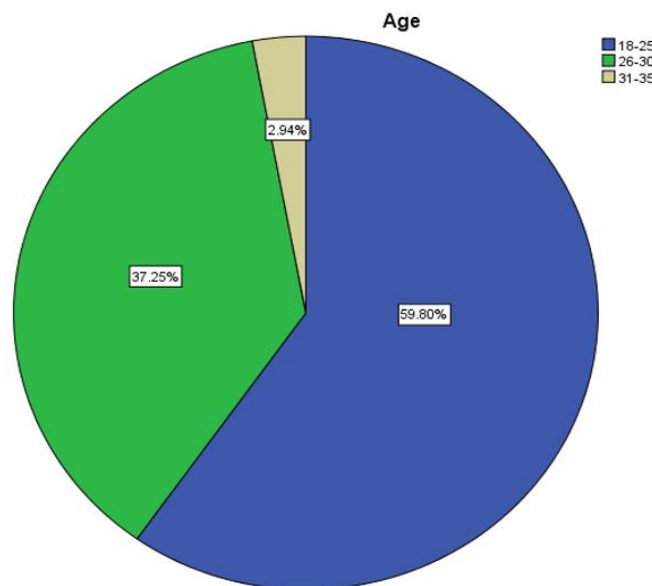


Figure 2: Age profile of respondents

d) Daily Time Spent on Weibo

Table 5 is showing the daily time spent on Weibo. The frequency of time less than 01 hour is 31, the frequency of time 1 hour to 2 hours is 36, from 3 hours to 4 hours is 28, and from 5 hours and more is 7. The valid percentage is 30.4, 35.3, 27.5, and 6.9 accordingly.

Table 5: Daily time spent on Weibo

| Daily Time Spent on Weibo | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Less than 01 hour | 31 | 30.4 | 30.4 | 30.4 |
| 1 hour to 2 hours | 36 | 35.3 | 35.3 | 65.7 |
| 3 hours to 4 hours | 28 | 27.5 | 27.5 | 93.1 |
| 5 hours and more | 7 | 6.9 | 6.9 | 100.0 |
| Total | 102 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

Figure 3 is representing daily time spent on Weibo. There are four colours in the pie chart one is blue, second is green, third is off-white and fourth is purple. The blue colour indicating those persons who use Weibo less than 1 hour and they have the percentage of 30.39. The persons or the participants who have tendency of using Weibo from one hour to two hours come under the green colour and representing the percentage of 35.29. The off-white colour is representing the percentage of 27.45 showing the group of 3 hours to 4 hours while the purple colour is indicating the group from of the people who have tendency of using Weibo from 5 hours and more and having the percentage of 6.86. So, the group from 1 hour to 2 hours has the dominance over other groups of daily time spent on Weibo.

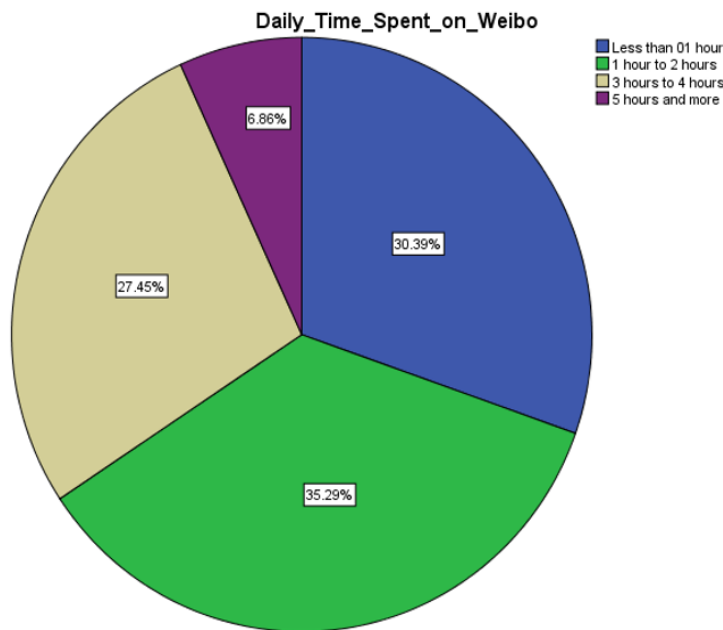


Figure 3: Daily time spent on Weibo

Inferential Analyses

a) Data Normality Analysis

The distribution of data is checked through the normality testing technique in the quantitative study. Skewness and Kurtosis are used to check the normality of data and it is the most preferred technique. According to the information given by Hair et al. (2019) the acceptable value for this test is from -2 to $+2$. In the table, the values of Kurtosis and Skewness are given and these are according to the acceptable range that shows that can be used for further analysis. The value of Skewness for fake news sharing is $-.785$, The value of Skewness for situational motivation is $-.284$, and the value of Skewness for information seeking is $-.040$, while the value for Kurtosis for fake news sharing is $.031$, the value for Kurtosis for situational motivation is $-.125$, the value for Kurtosis for information seeking is $-.685$.

Table 6: Skewness and Kurtosis analysis

| Statistic | Fake News Sharing | Situational Motivation | Information Seeking |
|------------------------|-------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
| N | 102 | 102 | 102 |
| Skewness | -.785 | -.284 | -.040 |
| Std. Error of Skewness | .239 | .239 | .239 |
| Kurtosis | .031 | -.125 | -.685 |
| Std. Error of Kurtosis | .474 | .474 | .474 |

b) Multicollinearity Testing

According to Hair et al. (2019), the Multicollinearity test is an important tool used in research to identify and assess the degree of correlation between independent variables. This test helps researchers to understand the relationship between independent variables and how they affect the dependent variable. It also helps them to identify any potential problems associated with Multicollinearity, such as an increase in the standard errors of regression coefficients. The Multicollinearity test can be conducted using a variety of methods, including linear regression models; variance inflation factors (VIFs), tolerance values, and condition indices. According to the recommendation of the study if the tolerance value is more than 0.9, it shows that the data is problematic and not ready for further analysis, if the value the tolerance value and VIF value are according to the recommendation of the study then the data is normal and there is no multicollinearity present in the data. Table 9 is showing that the Collinearity statistics. The value of VIF for information seeking is 1.675, the tolerance value for information seeking is .597, that shows that there is no multicollinearity. Data is ready for implementing the further analysis of regression in order to test the hypothesis because there is no multicollinearity present in the data.

Table 7: Multicollinearity analysis

| Coefficients | Collinearity Statistics | |
|------------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| | Tolerance | VIF |
| Situational Motivation | .822 | 1.216 |
| Information Seeking | .597 | 1.675 |

a. Dependent Variable: Fake News Sharing

c) Correlation Analysis

This analysis Table 10 shows a mean standard deviation correlation and reliability for the variable included in the current study. The most appropriate technique of correlation is the Pearson correlation coefficient which measures the relationship among variables. According to the recommendations of Hair et al. (2019) the relationship between the variables can be positive or negative and its value is + 1 to – 1. According to the given table, the results of the analysis of correlation are given as follows:

- Fake news sharing and situational motivation have a positive relationship ($r = .48, p < .01$)
- Situational motivation and information seeking has positive relationship ($r = .37, p < .01$).

The values of correlation that are given in the table are showing a positive relationship between fake news sharing and information seeking, which means that fake news sharing increases with information seeking.

Table 8: Correlation analysis

| | Mean | SD | FNS | SM | IS |
|-----|------|-----|-------|-------|----|
| FNS | 3.71 | .37 | 1 | | |
| SM | 3.56 | .29 | .48** | 1 | |
| IS | 3.48 | .41 | .51** | .37** | 1 |

Note:

N = 102

FNS= Fake News Sharing; SM= Situational Motivation; IS= Information Seeking

* $p < .05$,

** $p < .01$,

*** $p < .001$

Hypotheses Testing

a) Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis is a statistical method used to analyse the relationship between multiple independent variables and one or more dependent variables. It is used in research to understand the influence of multiple independent variables on a single dependent variable. This type of analysis helps researchers to identify which factors have the most influence on the outcome and can be used to make predictions about future outcomes (Hair et al., 2019).

b) ANOVA Model

Table 9 is showing that how to determine whether the model is suitable for further analysis or not for the acceptance of the research model for further analysis, the significant value must be less than or equal to 0.05 if the significant value is greater than 0.05 then the model will be rejected according to the table 10. The significant value is less than 0.001 which is showing that model is suitable for further analysis. The f value is 26.906. There is a great variation in the sample demonstrated by a higher value of F. The sample is not unvarying. The independent variables are bringing variances in the dependent variable and there is a significant relationship between situational motivation, information seeking and fake news sharing.

Table 9: ANOVA table

| Model | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|--------------------|
| Regression | 25.424 | 3 | 8.475 | 26.906 | <.001 ^b |
| Residual | 30.867 | 98 | .315 | | |
| Total | 56.291 | 101 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: Fake News Sharing

b. Predictors: Constant, Situational Motivation, Information Seeking

Table 10 All the values of significance level are given. The significant value for situational motivation is .010, and for information seeking significant value is .035. All the values are lower than 0.05. That means all the hypotheses are acceptable. This study is based on primary data collection and the independent variable that has the highest B value is the most crucial factor. In this study table, 4.8 show that situational motivation has the highest beta, which is .436. Moreover, all the values of Beta are positive that showing that due to the increase of independent variables fake news sharing will also increase. The beta value for information seeking is .203 and for situational motivation is .436.

Table 10: Multiple regression coefficients for fake news sharing

| Coefficients | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | t | Sig. |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|------|---|-------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | Beta | | |
| Situational | 1.066 | .306 | | | | 3.486 |
| Motivation | .436 | .078 | .464 | | | 5.622 |
| Information Seeking | .203 | .095 | .206 | | | 2.133 |

Note:

a. Dependent Variable: Fake News Sharing

N =102

**p* < .05

***p* < .01

****p* < .001

Summary of Findings

A summary of the hypothesis is given in Table 11 that shows all the hypotheses are accepted and H1 and H2 have positive values with the value of 0.010 and 0.035 while with beta values of .436 and .203 respectively. Hypothesis one shows that there is a significant relationship between situation motivation and fake news sharing. The relationship shows a positive relationship when the situational motivation increases the fake news sharing also increases. This hypothesis is accepted and it is confirmed by Baptista and Gradim (2020) that suggested that there is a strong correlation between personal values, external factors, and beliefs, and the spread of false information. It is significant to be responsive of the motivations behind why people are sharing false news and information with the purpose of better understand the spread of fake news. These two variables are interrelated. The second hypothesis shows that there is a significant relationship between information seeking and fake news sharing. With the increase of information seeking, the sharing a fake news also increases. This hypothesis is also accepted and shown a positive relationship between these two variables. It is also indicated by another study that has shown by Pang, Liu and Lu (2022) that there is an impact of information seeking on fake news sharing. The findings of this study have also shown that people who seek out information are more likely to identify fake news.

Table 11: Summary of hypothesis

| H. No. | Hypothesis Statements | p-value | Beta-Value | Decision |
|--------|--|---------|------------|----------|
| H1 | Situational motivation positively influences the likelihood of sharing fake news. | .010 | .436 | Accepted |
| H2 | Increased seeking information is associated with a higher propensity to share fake | .035 | .203 | Accepted |

Summary

SPSS software version 23.0 is applied for analysis. This section has all tools and methods that are used in this research study such as demographic analysis, factor analysis, multicollinearity, correlation, normality, Kurtosis and Skewness and regression analysis, all the hypotheses have confirmed positive results and accepted.

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

a) Objective 1: Relationship between Situational Motivation and Fake News Sharing

Objective one of this study matches the first hypothesis results. Situation motivation significantly affects fake news sharing, according to hypothesis one. The relationship is positive when situational motivation increases fake news sharing. According to Pang, Liu and Lu (2022), situational motivation is strongly linked to the spread of false information. Apuke and Omar (2021a) found that situational factors affect fake news sharing. Emotional content, sensationalism, and provocative headlines can make people share misinformation. Research shows that people share fake news without verifying it to satisfy their need for social validation and fit in with online communities (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2020).

b) Objective 2: Relationship between Information Seeking and Fake News Sharing

This study's goal matches the hypothesis. The hypothesis shows that information seeking and fake news sharing are linked. As information seeking increases, so does fake news sharing. Accepting this hypothesis shows a positive relationship between these variables. Baptista and Gradim (2020) show that information seeking affects fake news sharing. This study also found that information seekers find more fake news.

Balakrishnan et al. (2021) confirm that information-seeking behaviour shapes knowledge acquisition and decision-making. Some information-seeking habits can lead to fake news. Due to filter bubbles and echo chambers, social media users may encounter more misinformation, according to research. Evidence suggests that confirmation bias, where people actively seek information that supports their beliefs, can lead to uncritical acceptance and sharing of fake news (Baptista & Gradim, 2020). Effective media literacy and critical thinking strategies must recognise the link between information-seeking and fake news.

Discussion

This study uses two hypotheses. The first hypothesis is that situational motivation affects Chinese Weibo users' fake news sharing. Regression analysis confirmed that situational motivation strongly influences fake news sharing ($\beta=.436$, $p<.001$). It supported the first hypothesis, and Zanuddin and Shin (2020) found a significant relationship between these variables. The current study found, like Obadă and Dabija (2022), that situational motivation is linked to fake news sharing. Thus, past studies accept the first hypothesis.

The second study hypothesis was that information seeking strongly influences fake news sharing. The regression analysis confirmed the hypothesis and revealed a significant relationship between the variables ($\beta=.203$, $p<.001$). The second hypothesis is confirmed. Cham et al. (2023) found a link between information seeking and fake news sharing. This study found that people need more information to make decisions. Due to this need for information, people may share and believe fake news without verifying it. Thus, understanding the relationship between information seeking and fake news sharing can help combat this issue. The previous study by Apuke and Omar (2021b) supports this relationship between information seeking and fake news sharing.

Research Implications

a) Theoretical Implications

This study highlights the link between situational motivation information-seeking and fake news sharing. This supports information behaviour theories. It also emphasises the importance of situational motivation and information-seeking behaviour in analysing widespread fake news. This suggests that information overload, curiosity, and the desire for knowledge may motivate people to actively engage with fake news (Guo & Zhang, 2020). This study lays the groundwork for further research and theory refinement to better account for the complex factors that lead to fake news sharing.

b) Practical Implications

The findings of this study have many practical implications for stakeholders fighting fake news on Weibo in China. These practical implications can be used to develop fake news prevention and information literacy strategies.

Situational motivation, information seeking, and fake news sharing necessitate media and information literacy initiatives. Educational programmes should teach Weibo users information verification. These educational programmes improve users' news source credibility evaluation skills. Educational institutions, technology companies, and media organisations should collaborate to start these programmes at a basic level (Liu et al., 2021). This will teach people how to navigate information landscapes before using social media like Weibo.

These implications guide platform operators, content creators, educators, and other stakeholders in preventing fake news sharing. Stakeholders can create a more informed online environment for Weibo users.

Research Limitations

It is also of utmost importance to recognize the limitations of this study to identify areas requiring further research and investigation.

This study's findings are limited by its focus on Chinese Weibo users. Based on cultural and behavioural context, other social media platforms may vary significantly by country. Thus, future research should examine this issue. Comparative studies across multiple platforms can help researchers understand what motivates people to share fake news (Obadă & Dabija, 2022).

Second, the study uses quantitative methods. This obscures the motivations and experiences that lead people to share fake news. Include qualitative research methods for a more informed investigation. Interviews, surveys, and psychological aptitude tests provide nuanced perspectives that quantitative methods cannot. Understanding these psychological and social factors allows contextual factors to be studied to explain fake news sharing.

The study's small sample may not fully represent Weibo users' diversity (Osmundsen et al., 2021). Diverse and larger samples reduce bias in studies and improve platform understanding.

Suggestion for Future Research

The following suggestions for future studies can be implemented to enhance knowledge regarding fake news sharing on Weibo and other platforms as well.

To understand users' fake news sharing motivations and attitudes, future research should examine cultural norms, values, social structures, and other contexts. This will illuminate cultural differences that spread fake news and aid targeted interventions. Comparative research across cultures and countries is needed.

Second, qualitative research methods like focus groups, interviews, and surveys should be used to understand people's experiences, perceptions, and decision-making. This will provide insights into the emotional and cognitive factors that lead to fake news sharing among individuals (Rodríguez et al., 2020). Use content analysis of user comments to gain insight.

Finally, assessing the media landscape's role in fake news sharing will help future studies find multi-level solutions.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the causes of online fake news. This study examines how Agenda-Setting theory applies to fake news sharing. Weibo-using students provide data for this quantitative study. This study used convenience sampling with non-probability sampling. This study investigates why Chinese Weibo users share fake news. For test analysis, SPSS 23.00 is used. This research found that situational motivation and information seeking directly affect fake news sharing.

Future researchers should use mixed methodology approaches to understand fake news sharing in different contexts. Quantitative analysis and qualitative methods like interviews or focus groups can reveal Weibo users' fake news motivations, attitudes, and behaviours. Future researchers should also examine moderating or mediating variables to better understand fake news sharing. Cognitive biases, personal values, and social influence may influence situational motivation and information seeking in Weibo users' decisions to share fake news.

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