

The relationship between specific personality disorders and making and sharing fake news on social media

Dr. Abdul Wahab Pathath^{1*}, Dr Nurjahan Begum²

ABSTRACT

Lots of things you read online especially in your social media feeds may appear to be true, often is not. Fake news is news, stories or hoaxes created to deliberately misinform or deceive readers. Usually, these stories are created to either influence people's views, push a political agenda or cause confusion and can often be a profitable business for online publishers. Fake news stories can deceive people by looking like trusted websites or using similar names and web addresses to reputable news organizations.

Keywords: *Fake news, Psychology of fake news, Personality disorder, Dissocial personality disorder, Narcissistic personality disorder, Dependent personality disorder, Schizotypal personality disorder.*

As more of our lives migrate online, many believe the use of disinformation as a tool of persuasion and weapon of influence has reached new heights. We have more access to news than ever before—from mainstream news channels to social media to radio and podcasts. And it's easier than ever to reach us—at any hour of the day or night—on any one of our many Internet-connected devices (think smartphone, tablet, laptop, smartwatch, Alexa, and more).

“Fake news” is a term used to refer to fabricated news. Fake news also known as junk news, pseudo-news, or hoax news is a type of yellow journalism or propaganda that consists of deliberate disinformation or hoaxes spread via traditional news media (print and broadcast) or online social media. Digital news has brought back and increased the usage of fake news, or yellow journalism. The news is then often reverberated as misinformation in social media but occasionally finds its way to the mainstream media as well.

According to Martina Chapman (Media Literacy Expert), there are three elements to fake news; ‘Mistrust, misinformation and manipulation’. Traditionally we got our news from trusted sources, journalists and media outlets that are required to follow strict codes of

¹Assistant Professor, Dept. of Clinical Neurosciences, College of Medicine, King Faisal University, Al Ahsa, Saudi Arabia.

²Assistant Professor, Dept. of Clinical Neurosciences, College of Medicine, King Faisal University, Al Ahsa, Saudi Arabia.

[*Responding Author](#)

Received: January 8, 2020; Revision Received: January 30, 2020; Accepted: February 10, 2020

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practice. However, the internet has enabled a whole new way to publish, share and consume information and news with very little regulation or editorial standards.

Many people now get news from social media sites and networks and often it can be difficult to tell whether stories are credible or not. Information overload and a general lack of understanding about how the internet works by people has also contributed to an increase in fake news or hoax stories. Social media sites can play a big part in increasing the reach of these type of stories.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A web-based experiment (n = 960) examined how debunking of publicly shared news on social media affects viewers' attitudes toward the source who shared the fake news, their agreement with the news position, and perceived credibility of social media as a news platform. Exposure to debunking information did not lower participants' agreement with the news position, but led them to derogate (1) the source who shared the misinformation and (2) social media as a news platform. However, participants who initially favored the source were less likely to attribute the sharing of fake news to the source's dispositions, rather than situational factors, thereby maintaining their positive attitudes toward the source.

A recent study by the American Psychological Association 1 found that 66% of Americans are stressed out about the future of the country, and the constant consumption of news was pinpointed as a major contributor. It looks like breaking news is breaking us. And now, with so much misinformation being posted as truth, we are in an even more entrenched era of “headline stress disorder,” a term coined by author and therapist Steven Stosny, PhD in the aftermath of the Trump/Clinton election in 2016.

“For many people, continual alerts from news sources, blogs and social media, and alternative facts feel like missile explosions in a siege without end,” says Dr. Stosny in an Op-Ed published in the Washington Post.

TYPES OF FAKE NEWS

There are differing opinions when it comes to identifying types of fake news. However, when it comes to evaluating content online there are various types of fake or misleading news we need to be aware of. These include:

1. Clickbait

These are stories that are deliberately fabricated to gain more website visitors and increase advertising revenue for websites. Clickbait stories use sensationalist headlines to grab attention and drive click-throughs to the publisher website, normally at the expense of truth or accuracy.

2. Propaganda

Stories that are created to deliberately mislead audiences, promote a biased point of view or particular political cause or agenda.

3. Satire/Parody

Lots of websites and social media accounts publish fake news stories for entertainment and parody. For example; The Onion, Waterford Whispers, The Daily Mash, etc.

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4. Sloppy Journalism

Sometimes reporters or journalists may publish a story with unreliable information or without checking all of the facts which can mislead audiences. For example, during the U.S. elections, fashion retailer Urban Outfitters published an Election Day Guide, the guide contained incorrect information telling voters that they needed a 'voter registration card'. This is not required by any state in the U.S. for voting.

5. Misleading Headings

Stories that are not completely false can be distorted using misleading or sensationalist headlines. These types of news can spread quickly on social media sites where only headlines and small snippets of the full article are displayed on audience newsfeeds.

6. Biased/Slanted News

Many people are drawn to news or stories that confirm their own beliefs or biases and fake news can prey on these biases. Social media news feeds tend to display news and articles that they think we will like based on our personalized searches.

PERSONALITY DISORDERS AND FAKE NEWS

1. Dissocial personality disorder

Callous unconcern for the feelings of others, gross and persistent attitude of irresponsibility and disregard for social norms, rules and obligations, incapacity to experience guilt or to profit from experience, marked proneness to blame others are some of the characteristics of this disorder. These people may deliberately make or share fake news to disturb politico-religious harmony of the society without experiencing any guilt feeling. In some extreme situation these fake news lead to violence, street fights and crime against a particular group of people. Many such incidents reported from various countries all over the world.

2. Narcissistic personality disorder

According to DSM-IV a magnified sense of self-importance, underlying deep self-esteem issues, exaggeration, manipulation, envy, arrogance, impatience, depression are some of the features of this personality disorder. People with this disorder tend to make and share fake news in order to establish their authority in the society, showing their elated self-esteem, as part of their excessive need for admiration by others or hoping to achieve power, success and intellectual supremacy. They have a tendency to take advantage of the people around them.

3. Dependent personality disorder

Limited capacity to make everyday decisions without an excessive amount of advice and reassurance from others, encouraging or allowing others to make most of one's important life, decisions, feeling uncomfortable or helpless when alone, because of exaggerated fears of inability to care for oneself are the main characteristic of people with this disorder. They prefer to share fake news to get confirmation about the news from others. They tend to seek reassurance and help from others for minor things in the day to day activities. They will not have enough confidence to take a decision on time.

4. Schizotypal personality disorder

According to American Psychiatric Association's DSM-5 strange beliefs or magical thinking, abnormal perceptual experiences, strange thinking and speech, strange behavior or appearance are some of the symptoms of people with this disorder. As part of their magical thinking make and share fake news according to their preferences mainly related to various

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topics like superstitious experiences, extrasensory perception and pseudo-sciences. They share them because of their belief in these information.

5. The fourth edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, a widely used manual for diagnosing mental disorders, defines obsessive-compulsive personality disorder (in Axis II Cluster C) a preoccupied with details, rules, lists, order, organization, or schedules to the extent that the major point of the activity is lost, over conscientious, scrupulous, and inflexible about matters of morality, ethics, or values. People with this disorder will have a compulsive tendency to share some news including fake news. Here they may experience an obsession in their mind to share the news then based on this obsession they forced to share the news as part of the compulsion.

CONCLUSION

This study looks at the relationship between certain personality disorders and spreading fake news on social media. It is evident that the tendency to create and share fake news either deliberately or unintentionally is more among persons with personality disorders. The worst condition to the society about fake news is that it can distort people's beliefs even after being debunked. A study recently published in the journal *Intelligence* suggests that some people may have an especially difficult time rejecting misinformation. Asked to rate a fictitious person on a range of character traits, people who scored low on a test of cognitive ability continued to be influenced by damaging information about the person even after they were explicitly told the information was false. The study is significant because it identifies what may be a major risk factor for vulnerability to fake news.

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Acknowledgements

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interests.

How to cite this article: A W Pathath & N Begum (2020). The relationship between specific personality disorders and making and sharing fake news on social media. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 8(1), 113-117. DIP:18.01.014/20200801, DOI:10.25215/0801.014