A Study of Spreading Fake Information in social media and the Utility of Fact-Checking Organizations (Specifically for 'Fact Seekers' Organization)

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Abstract

With the rise of social media, the rapid global proliferation of fake news has become a significant phenomenon. Fact-checking organizations have emerged as a critical intervention to mitigate the spread of such misinformation. While the number of fact-checking entities is steadily increasing in developed nations, scholarly research examining the utility of these organizations and the fact-checking process in Southern nations, including Sri Lanka, remains limited. The primary objective of this study was to examine the utility of fact-checking organizations in minimizing the spread of fake news on social media, with a specific focus on Fact Seekers, a recognized fact-checking body affiliated with the Sri Lanka Press Institute (SLPI). Data for this study were collected through interviews and consumer surveys. The findings reveal that the information overload on social media has accelerated the spread of fake news, resulting in adverse religious, ethnic, political, health, and economic impacts on individuals, institutions, and society at large. Furthermore, the study identifies a substantial demand for fact-checking organizations to prevent the spread of misinformation, noting that existing organizations are currently playing a significant role in this effort. However, it is evident that completely eradicating fake news from society remains a challenge due to the relatively low level of public awareness regarding fact-checking processes. The researcher suggests that a systematic social media culture can be established through state intervention in fact-checking processes, policy formulation, the establishment of new organizations, the enhancement of existing entities, community awareness programs, and ongoing research. Ultimately, this study contributes to building a democratic society that upholds the citizens' right to access accurate, misinformation-free information.

Keywords: *Social Media, Fake News, Fact-Checking, Fact-Checking Organizations, Fact Seekers*