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Age Differences: Fake News Sharing among East Coast People during COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The spreading of coronavirus (COVID-19) around the world has affected society in many ways. Because of this, fake news sharing is rapidly shared among society by using social media. This situation has made chaos in society as they basically believe on news that has been shared on media. This research aims to identify the age differences that affected the dissemination of fake news on the East Coast of Malaysia during COVID-19 pandemic. A cross-sectional survey design was conducted on 130 respondents (N=130) from Pahang State by using probability sampling method. Questionnaires that based on Users and Gratification Theory which adapted from Apuke & Omar (2020) was used in this study and the researchers undergone for descriptive data analysis, consists of two sections (demographic and variables - altruism, instant news sharing, socialization, entertainment, self-promotion, and fake news sharing. As result, respondent who are in the range age of 18 -24 years showed highest participation in this research (41.5%) as compared to other age range. From all the variables tested, altruism showed the highest impact mean for all ages. Recommendation for future study suggest inferential analysis should be conducted to generalize the data. Data collection method and respondent also should be tested in other states within Malaysia.

Introduction

Media is the most common platform that has been widely used by all people and social media has become one of the most important communication devices in daily life. There are many pros and cons using social media today, for example the fast spreading of fake news. According to Duffy et al (2020) sharing news on social networks has grown in popularity and as a result have also provided a favourable environment for the dissemination of fraudulent news. The wide spread of fake news among people was surprisingly increase during COVID-19 pandemic around the world. Based on a research that has been conducted by Apuke & Omar (2021) found that altruism was the most important feature that predicted COVID-19 fake news sharing. The growth of the Covid-19 crisis has recently imperilled the nation, but the 'epidemic' of fake news, which has become more difficult to manage and is wreaking havoc on society, has made matters worse (Ngadiron et al., 2021). Research that was done by Talwar et al (2019) showed that social media is used by the public to spread news about COVID-19 because the people's cognitive ability to filter news information is affected by the

high fear and uncertainty brought on by the COVID-19's severity. This study is to determine age differences that impacted fake news sharing among East Coast people during COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature Review

COVID-19 virus was declared as pandemic on the year 2020 by World Health Organization (WHO). There was a lot of changes that happened during that year including implementing Movement Control Order (MCO) by the government to stop spreading of infection causes by COVID-19 viruses. In the year 2020, the coronavirus pandemic has a tremendous impact on people's daily lives in a variety way, one of which unquestionable how they utilise the internet. These includes the spread of fake news about many things for example news related to COVID-19 spreading and other things. According to Tandoc et al (2018), fake news is typically described as viral posts based on false accounts that pass for news reporting, particularly in media coverage.

Fake news is described as news pieces that are purposefully and demonstrably untrue and may mislead readers in an article by (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). According to a survey by the Institute of Strategic and International Studies Malaysia (ISIS), Covid-19 and the spread of viruses in the community account for 70% of the 363 fake news stories about government action (Nor, 2020). People may quickly access an unprecedented amount of content through social media, which may spread rumours and misleading information (Cinelli et al., 2020). The news that circulates on social media not only makes individuals more anxious, but it also paints the entire national leadership in a negative light (Ngadiron et al., 2021). Based on research that has been done by Brashier & Schacter (2020), even while fake news caters to readers of all ages, older folks spread false information the most frequently.

On the other hand, past research showed that females were more likely to engage in fake news than males and younger people tend to significantly spread more misleading information for charitable purposes than older ones (Balakrishnan, 2022). Users over the age of 65 shared nearly seven times as many bogus news pieces as those under the age of 25 (Guess et al., 2019). This showed that the tendency of old folks in spreading fake news is higher than among youth.

Methodology

A cross-sectional survey design was conducted on 130 respondents (N=130) from Pahang State. As sampling frame do not exist in this study, probability sampling method was used in this study. Questionnaire that was used in this study was based on Users and Gratification Theory adopted from (Apuke & Omar, 2020). Additionally, this study was conducted online using a Google form that had two parts which are Section A and Section B. Section A consists of demographic factors such as gender, occupation, age, income, and others while Section B consists of variable like altruism, instant news sharing, socialization, entertainment, self-promotion, and fake news sharing. Five Likert Scales was used in this questionnaire which represents; 1 – significant disagreement, 2 – disagreement, 3 – neutrality, 4 – agreement, and 5 – strong agreement. As this paper will focuses on age differences, descriptive analysis was carried out and data generated using mean and percentage approach.

Data Analysis

Table 1 showed percentages of respondent that participated in this study. Respondent who are in the range age of 18 -24 years showed highest participation in this research (41.5%) as compared to other age range.

Table 1

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-24 years	54	41.5	41.5	41.5
	25-34 years	36	27.7	27.7	69.2
	35-44 years	29	22.3	22.3	91.5
	45-54 years	8	6.2	6.2	97.7
	65 years and above	1	.8	.8	98.5
	55-64 years	2	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	130	100.0	100.0	

Table 2 shows mean of altruism, instant news sharing, self-promotion, socialization, entertainment, and fake news sharing among respondents during COVID-19 pandemic. For respondents between age of 18 years to 24 years, mean showed 3.53, 3.44, 2.65, 3.20, 2.40 and 2.11 for all the variables respectively. As for respondents 25 to 34 years, result showed that the mean for variables altruism, instant news sharing, self-promotion, socialization, entertainment, and fake news sharing were 3.53, 2.99, 2.27, 3.16, 2.66 and 1.95 respectively. Above all variables, altruism showed the highest impact mean for all ages which are 18-24 years ($M=3.53$), 25-34 years ($M=3.53$), 35-44 years ($M=3.33$), 45-54 years ($M=3.70$), 55-64 years ($M=3.40$) and 65 years and above ($M=3.40$) as compared to other variables. The second highest mean out of all variables that was tested in this study is instant news sharing which recorded total mean of 3.2763. Based on the result, the highest mean for fake news sharing was participant that is 65 years old and above. However, the researchers cannot conclude that as it was an outlier in data collection (only one person above 65 years that answered this questionnaire).

Table 2

Age		Altruism	Instant news sharing	Self-promotion	Socialization	Entertainment	Fake news sharing
18-24 years	Mean	3.5384	3.4444	2.6528	3.2077	2.4028	2.1148
	N	54	54	54	54	54	54
25-34 years	Mean	3.5384	2.9944	2.2708	3.1611	2.6641	1.9556
	N	36	36	36	36	36	36
35-44 years	Mean	3.3379	3.1072	1.9308	2.5274	2.1810	1.8129
	N	29	29	29	29	29	29
45-54 years	Mean	3.7000	3.7768	2.3438	3.0750	2.1250	2.0218
	N	8	8	8	8	8	8
65 years and above	Mean	3.4000	4.8000	5.0000	5.0000	5.0000	5.0000
	N	1	1	1	1	1	1
55-64 years	Mean	3.4000	3.5000	2.1250	3.5000	2.1250	1.4822
	N	2	2	2	2	2	2
Total	Mean	3.5004	3.2763	2.3769	3.0532	2.4243	2.0101
	N	130	130	130	130	130	130

Discussion

Based on the result shown in table 1, most of the respondent that participate in this study was generally from 18 to 24 years old. This is because most social media users in today's technology are from younger generation, inline with research that was done by (Chaffey, 2022). This is due to younger generation are more likely to use social media as their main platform of communication especially during COVID-19 pandemic. As we have known, restriction or movement control order that was imposed by the government to decrease the number of cases of COVID-19 infections throughout the nation made citizen engaged longer in social media daily. As for result shown in Table 2, the highest mean was respondent who is 65 years and above. Somehow, this result can be supported by the research which has been done by Guess et al (2019) users over the age of 65 shared nearly seven times as many fake news pieces as those under the age of 25. Old folks basically only shared what they have read without take any consideration whether that news are genuine or fake. Major findings of this study was respondents who were 45 years and above have highest mean compared to the other age differences which was 3.77 and above. Because of this findings, authority should not take this matter lightly because fake news can make chaos among citizen. Authorities should take proactive steps such as creating awareness campaign through social media, mass media or other platform about what consequences that they may face if they involve in spreading fake news. Second, the authority should enforce guidelines or enhance cybersecurity regarding fake news. There are several limitation of studies which are the sample obtained from this research are from east coast Malaysia. It is advisable for future researcher to obtain or undergo this study in other part of Malaysia. Secondly, this paper contain descriptive statistic and future researcher can extend the analysis by using inferential statistic to get more deeper result.

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