Study: Information literacy can combat 'fake news'

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It's not difficult to verify whether a new piece of information is accurate; however, most people don't take that step before sharing it on social media, regardless of age, social class or gender, a new Ohio University

study has found.

A new study conducted by Ohio University professor Dr. M. Laeeq Khan found that several factors can be used to predict someone's ability to detect misinformation, otherwise known as "fake news," on social media. Additionally, the study found that, by looking at certain factors, it is also possible to predict if someone is likely to share misinformation based on the same factors.

The study, titled "Recognise misinformation and verify before sharing: a reasoned action and information literacy perspective," was published in the journal *Behaviour and Information Technology*.

"This is a pioneering study that helps understand why individuals would share misinformation on social media using a theoretical lens and information literacy factors," Khan said.

The idea for the current study came from a larger research project in which Khan investigated the spread of misinformation on social media during past U.S. elections.

In this study, Khan wanted to take a look at misinformation as a whole.

"Fake news and misinformation could be rightly termed as the major issues of our time. Almost every other study in this realm falls short of highlighting the vital role of individuals in halting the spread of misinformation," Khan said.

To test the research hypotheses that predict the sharing of misinformation, Khan decided to extend his work from a U.S. framework to gather data in Indonesia. Indonesia is not only one of the largest social media markets in the world, the country has caught news headlines for fighting misinformation and hoaxes, especially during its

election season.

The study asked participants to rate their perceived internet skills, self-esteem and internet experiences as well as their attitudes towards fact-checking online information, belief in reliability, and how often participants shared information without fact checking.

There were 396 participants in the study, which found that age, social class and gender did not play a huge part, but rather media and information literacy was found to be the biggest factor in recognizing misinformation.

"The important role of information literacy is often taken for granted. It was found that information verification skills such as simply Googling some new piece of information and not sharing it right away could prove beneficial in halting the spread of misinformation," Khan said. "In addition, information verification attitude greatly mattered."

Those who have a strong belief in the reliability of the information are more likely to share information online without verification.

"Online users must possess an attitude of healthy skepticism when any information comes their way. Such an attitude of information verification by individuals can prove to be a major counterweight to the rising misinformation online," Khan said.

While many respondents said that they felt it was important to share verified information, some do not have the media or information literacy to accurately assess whether information they are sharing is in fact correct.

The study found that people from lower education levels, lower income and those newer to the internet would benefit most from learning

additional information literacy.

More information: M. Laeeq Khan et al. Recognise misinformation and verify before sharing: a reasoned action and information literacy perspective, *Behaviour & Information Technology* (2019). [DOI: 10.1080/0144929X.2019.1578828](#)

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