

Social Media: Misinformation and Trustability

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Abstract

The traditional communication system has been revolutionized with the advent of technology and the creation of several social media platform. However, this is joined with its negative side effect. The pressing impact of misinformation that is proliferating online is affecting the current communication ecosystem in almost all areas that the social media can reach.

Although there is a decline of trust on digital media channels, the constant exposure and usage of netizens to these channels create a pathway for truth to be twisted and for dubious to be accepted.

This study determined the level of usage of social media and the trustability of the respondents to the information on media channels. This descriptive survey used a validated researcher-made questionnaire administered to three hundred thirty-four (354) maritime students of the academic year 2023-2024.

The findings revealed a high usage on Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram and similarly a high level of trust that is in place for information and contents on these sites. In addition, there is greater trust when information is sourced from celebrities and from famous people. This result yields result of an alarming susceptibility to misinformation that the social media platforms can deliver side by side the entertainment and self-appraisal that they offer the student-netizens. These findings call for a more intensive implementation of media and information literacy education in the academe.

Keywords: Social media, misinformation, trustability to social media

Introduction

Misinformation is the unintentional propagation of false information (Harsin, 2018). This has existed long before the rise of the internet and social media and has caused fear, anxiety, and even hatred making an already stressful circumstances more difficult. In today's digital age, social media platforms have become primary sources of news, opinions, and everyday information. While these platforms offer unprecedented access to real-time updates and diverse perspectives, they also serve as fertile ground for the rapid spread of misinformation. From misleading headlines to manipulated images and false claims, the challenge of verifying the truth has become increasingly complex. As a result, trust in social media content is being questioned more than ever yet the use of social media platforms has not dwindled.

Humans constantly make mistakes and occasionally tell lies. News viewers are more likely than ever to come across and spread false news in social media where these serve as



the primary news and information source for many people globally. Every day, consumers turn to social media to update themselves of their favorite celebrity to their chosen political candidate. They frequently assume that what they discover is accurate and trustworthy (Watson, 2022). This significantly affect the learning community where various online platforms take hours of engagement from student-netizens. The repercussions of too much exposure and usage of student-netizens can lead to nnegative consequences such as decreased productivity, disrupted sleep patterns, and increased feelings of anxiety and depression, among others. Additionally, their vulnerability to trust false information is heightened during their engagement to online activities.

Social media has become a highly addictive and influential force especially in the lives of the students. According to Pellegrino et al (2022), the habitual social media use of students their school performance and may further affect their social behavior and interpersonal relationship. The apparent belief in unconfirmed information disseminated among the respondents within their learning environment prompted the conduct of this study. The threat of false information disseminated on social media poses the potential to stir more discord not only in the learning environment but as it moves out of the learning space to affect society, in general.

Various studies have already been conducted regarding social media and the risks associated with their usage, but few studies were conducted to concretely investigate the level of trust that maritime students give away to these social media sites. Thus, this study aimed to determine social media usage and trustability to information among maritime students. This specifically determined the following: 1) The level of use of the Maritime Students to the sources of misinformation as to Facebook, Instagram; and YouTube; 2) The level of reception of information from the identified platforms and; 3) The level of trustability of the information to the maritime students as to from the identified social media platforms.

Literature Review

People often become dependent on the media in industrialized and information-based societies, the academia included, to meet several requirements. Social media have provided answers to these needs making information fast and accessible as they offer more comfort and ease compared to the era before the widespread adoption and utilization of internet. Yang Lin's Media Dependency Theory (2014) postulated that a relationship exists when one party's ability to meet demands and achieve goals depends on the resources of the other party. The interaction between media and audience, the students as consumer-netzines, is a vital area of the theory.

The country has been consistently earning the title of the social media capital of the world for number of years. In Meltwater (2023) and We Are Social Statistics (2023), the Gen Z generation (aged 18-24 years old) of the county comprises the most significant demographic of social media users which has 30.6% of total users (Kemp, 2023a). This trend based on the current usage and activity in Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok which is becoming more popular, is yet heading to its peak. In terms of fake news, Filipino social media users are aware that false news is present on the various social media platforms (Pulse Asia Research, Inc., 2018), but the allure of social media such as Facebook which offers a day-to-day update on interesting issues surrounding the population attracts the unprecedented use.



The study of Yang et al (2023) found out that numerous Facebook images are misleading. The images can potentially shift attitude when they are added to stories and heightens the potency of misinformation of the news when reshared. Seeing that most netizens oftentimes do not take the time to verify before sharing the information, this collective effort of resharing eventually solidifies the falsity of the information. Confirmation bias which refers to the influence of existing belief and expectations of an individual on his evaluation of information which more likely presents his partiality (Jin, 2023; Nickerson, 1998; Peters, 2020) plays a significant role in this stage of information where trustability progresses and matures with every share.

Misinformation on social media has raised at an alarming rate over the years (Allcott et al, 2019; Lazer et al, 2018). While there is a decrease in Facebook engagement with the availability of other social media platforms such as twitter (Alcott et al, 2019) and others such as Instagram and YouTube, the pandemic of 2019 brought more people online. The internet users swell due to pandemic (United Nations, Sustainable Development Goals, 2021 and YouTube becomes a popular website for information (Andika et al, 2021) along with Instagram and others which promoted the widespread of misinformation (Nayar et al, 2023). The spread of false information via social media is a possible danger to knowledge exchange and society at large

There are several features of communication that are inviting and largely trigger interest among individuals. While the advancement of technology has offered ease to communication, it created amongst some of its users the ability to distort reality and deceive others. The visual nature of Instagram, for example, makes it easy to manipulate contents such as pictures and videos. Studies have shown that fake messages are more easily believed when it is in a form of video (Swayne, 2021) and fake images (Shen et al., 2018). In addition, the persuasive nature of endorsements from trusted individuals frolic in this platform and the liking of content can largely be based on the trustworthy personalities and source (Mena et al., 2020). The algorithm of Instagram such as its automated recommendations further drives netizens to view and encounter similar topics exposes netizens to misinformation (Bond, 2021).

Since the underlying reasons and trust of netizens to available information are complex and have not been fully explored, this favors an opportunity for those who intentionally falsify information. The lack of skill to determine misinformation leads netizens to accept information at face value and re share information without verification. Reliance to people in authority, including celebrities, amplifies this foundation of trust especially when the message aligns with the views of netizens. These factors of confirmation bias and the persuasive actors that are at play in the dissemination of false materials render the fact that the digital communication ecosystem is highly vulnerable to misinformation pollution. It is worth noting that the digital literacy education has been in placed to address this issue. However, the worsening misinformation activities online is a far merit to this campaign.

The study of Bautista (2021) revealed that although Media and Information Literacy (MIL) has already been adopted in the DepEd curriculum for Senior Highschool in the Philippines, there is a need for more intensive teachers' trainings to arm learners with media literacy and navigate digital media use effectively. The lack of skill to detect misinformation does not only make netizens susceptible to false hood but it most likely deepens trust within the learning community where information is shared and strengthened especially when presented among those with common belief system.



This phenomenon is a reminder of how crucial critical thinking and media literacy are in a hyperconnected world where information, true or false, spreads in seconds. Understanding how misinformation spreads and how trust is built or broken in online spaces is essential for navigating the modern information landscape and fostering informed digital communities. Thus, this paper was conducted to determine the level of trustability of the respondents on the platforms that have been identified bearing sources of misinformation and the level of trust the maritime students have for the information they read online.

Methodology

The study used descriptive survey research that was conducted at a maritime university. The Krejci and Morgan table was used to determine the 354 respondents who were randomly selected from a total population of four thousand five hundred ninety-one (4591). The validated researcher-made questionnaire used was composed of parts to answer the objectives of the study. An open space in the questionnaire was made available for comments of the respondents so they can share further experience that may not have been mentioned in the questionnaire. The study commenced after a clearance to conduct the study from the Ethics Review Board was released and transmittal letters were approved and consented.

Results and Discussion

After a comprehensive data gathering and sorting the data. The succeeding tables are here presented to make meaningful analysis of the data.

Table 1

Use of Social Media as Sources of Misinformation

Social Media Platform	Mean	Interpretation
Facebook	3.37	Very High
Instagram	2.52	High
YouTube	3.15	High
Aggregate Mean	3.01	High

Table 1 presents the perceived extent to which different social media platforms serve as sources of misinformation. The data evidently shows that users perceive all three platforms as sources of misinformation. However, the usage of the respondents is still significantly high. Facebook stands out as highly used possibly due to its broader user base, having more users and connecting more netizens denoting that even with the presence of false information online, the respondents' interest does not diminish with it. In Pulse Asia survey, Facebook is



the most popular social media platform among internet users in the Philippines (Malig, 2021) and still one of the most popular even on the third quarter of 2023 (Kemp, 2023b). This data shows a trend that Facebook is one of the social media platforms that will retain its dominance.

Similarly, YouTube is highly used which can be attributed to its access and ease of use while Instagram may have the lowest statistical mean nevertheless it is still highly utilized which can suggest a more stricter user guidelines and lesser access or ease of use. These platforms have also shown growing number of users and its potential to be used in the spread of misinformation is also growing. These platforms enable individuals to generate the spread of misinformation and as easily in an anonymous and decentralized fashion (Del Vicario et al. 2016)

Table 2

Misinformation Reception of the Maritime Students from the Social Media Platform

Social Media Platform	Mean	Interpretation
Facebook	3.49	Very High
Instagram	2.65	High
YouTube	3.07	High
Aggregate Mean	3.07	High

Table 2 illustrates the extent to which the respondents receive misinformation from the social media platforms. The students are notably exposed to misinformation across all platforms, with Facebook being the most dominant platform where they receive and engage with misinformation. With a 3.49 and very high reception this means that the students are highly vulnerable to wrong information and trusting them eventually if without thorough counter. The algorithm-driven news feeds feature of Facebook increases this susceptibility to misleading information. YouTube and Instagram, respectively, are sources of misinformation available to the student-respondents. While these are not as high as Facebook, they are still significant misinformation contributor.

Table 3

Sharing of Unverified Information from the Identified Social Media Platforms

Social Media Platform	Mean	Interpretation
Facebook	2.94	High
Instagram	2.38	Moderate



YouTube	2.54	High
Aggregate Mean	2.62	High

The previous tables revealed the high engagement of the students to social media platforms regardless of the proliferation of misleading information. The Table 3 presents a confirmation of exchange using the social media platforms where the 2.94 statistical mean suggests that students are more likely to share unverified information using Facebook followed by YouTube and Instagram, where sharing is less common. The aggregate mean of 2.62 suggests that in general, the students are frequently sharing contents without verifying its accuracy.

Table 4

Trustability of the Maritime Students in Facebook as Source of Information

Social Media Platform	Mean	Interpretation
1. I believe that Facebook is credible.	2.94	High
2. I believe the information and updates in Facebook are reliable	2.80	High
3. I believe in conspiracy theories from Facebook.	2.62	High
4. 4. When there are more sharers of posts (bad or good), it means the information is quite reliable.	2.76	High
5. I agree with viral information posts in Facebook when it is from famous people such as politicians and celebrities.	2.82	High
Aggregate Mean	2.79	High

The data in table 4 indicates a consistently high level of trust that maritime students place in Facebook content, including both conventional information and questionable sources such as conspiracy theories. The general trust in Facebook presented in Statements 1 and 2, with means of 2.94 and 2.80 respectively, show that students perceive Facebook as both credible and reliable, suggesting they may not frequently question the authenticity of posts they read or share. The concerning belief in conspiracy theories in statement 3 with a mean of 2.62, indicating that a significant portion of students believe in conspiracy which is alarming, as it suggests susceptibility to misinformation narratives that often lack evidence or factual basis. In addition, popularity in statements 4 and 5 reflect a heuristic bias where students often equate popularity (number of shares or celebrity endorsement) with truthfulness.

The aggregate mean of 2.79 (High) confirms that Facebook is viewed as a reliable platform, even when the content might be unverified, sensationalized, or influenced by public figures or mass sharing. As the statistics over the years have proven, the popularity of Facebook as favorite social media platform attests the level of trust rendering of the consumers.

Table 5

Trustability of the Maritime Students in Instagram as Source of Information

Social Media Platform	Mean	Interpretation
1. I believe that Instagram is credible.	2.61	High
2. I believe the information and updates in Instagram are reliable.	2.61	High
3. I believe in conspiracy theories from Instagram.	2.55	High
4. When there are more sharers of posts (bad or good), it means the information is quite reliable.	2.60	High
5. I agree with viral information posts in Instagram when it is from famous people such as politicians and celebrities.	2.61	High
Aggregate Mean	2.61	High

Despite being a platform known for its visual and entertainment-based content; Instagram is still highly trusted by maritime students as a source of information. Table 5 illustrates that students believe Instagram to be both credible and reliable as an information platform. This high level of trust is notable considering Instagram's format favors images and short videos, which may lack context or detailed sourcing. Like Facebook, the score for conspiracy theory belief (2.55) is still within the "High" range, raising a concern that students may not be applying enough skepticism toward sensational or misleading content, especially from influencers or anonymous accounts.

In addition, statements 4 and 5 both score high, suggesting that students rely on social signals (number of shares or fame of the poster) to assess credibility. This reflects a psychological shortcut where viral popularity is mistaken for truth which is a potentially dangerous habit in evaluating information. The in this table data reinforces that Instagram is perceived as a generally trustworthy platform, even when that trust may not be fully supported by the quality or sourcing of the content.

Table 6

Trustability of the Maritime Students in YouTube as Source of Information

Social Media Platform	Mean	Interpretation
1. I do not need to validate information from YouTube.	2.62	High
2. I embrace information I saw on YouTube. (conspiracy theories, etc.)	2.83	High
3. I believe in the information of the celebrity I viewed on YouTube	2.77	High
4. The number of likes and views on YouTube means that the information is believable.	2.77	High
5. When there are more sharers of posts (bad or good), it means the information is quite reliable.	2.73	High
such as politicians and celebrities.	2.61	High
Aggregate Mean	2.74	High

The result in Table 6 reflects a high level of trust that students place in YouTube, regardless of content accuracy or verification. Several concerning trends are worth noting such as the statistical mean of Statement 1 with 2.62 implying that many students feel no need to validate what they see on YouTube, suggesting a heavy reliance on perceived credibility without critical evaluation. Like Facebook and YouTube, the acceptance of conspiracy theories (Statement 2 – 2.83) being the highest-rated item, shows that students are likely to accept conspiratorial content on YouTube. This is especially concerning given the platform’s history with algorithm-driven recommendations that sometimes promote misleading or extreme content.

Additionally, belief in content increases if it comes from celebrities especially when it has many likes/views or is shared widely. This highlights a popularity bias, where engagement metrics are mistaken for evidence of truth. These patterns show that students may trust style, status, and numbers over substance or source. Indeed, the overall aggregate mean of 2.74 (High) signals that YouTube is widely regarded as a credible platform by students, regardless of whether content is fact-checked or evidence-based.

The high trust placed for the social media platforms without validation increases the risk of misinformation, especially when dealing with technical, safety-related, or global maritime issues. Students need to build stronger critical thinking and source evaluation habits. There is a clear need to strengthen critical thinking skills, especially when evaluating visually appealing content that may lack substance or factual grounding. Trust in conspiracy theories and viral posts could undermine their understanding of real-world issues, especially in a technical and safety-critical field like maritime studies. The findings reveal a need for better information evaluation skills. Given the technical and safety-sensitive nature of

maritime professions, relying on unreliable sources could lead to misinformed decisions in real-world practice.

Conclusions

This paper merely expounds to verify the students' engagement to various social media platforms amidst its imposing threat of misinformation during this engagement. Social media platforms remain to be appealing to the student-netizens revealing a consistent and concerning trend of exhibiting a high level of trust toward social media platforms—Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube. Across all three platforms, the students rated statements related to the credibility, reliability, and influence of social engagement indicators (likes, shares, and celebrity endorsements). Notably, students not only trust general information but also show a worrying openness to conspiracy theories and viral content, especially when shared by public figures or when heavily engaged with by others. This reflects a popularity-over-accuracy bias, where the number of views or the status of the source outweigh the need for validation or factual correctness.

Therefore, it is imperative for maritime institutions to not only recognize the influential role of social media in shaping student perspectives but also to actively equip learners with tools for responsible and discerning media consumption. Promoting awareness of misinformation, source credibility, and the manipulative power of social metrics will help foster a more informed, critical, and digitally literate future workforce.

Recommendations

Based on the collective findings, the following recommendations are proposed to address the critical concerns revealed in the data:

1. Integrate Media and Digital Literacy into the Maritime Curriculum

Maritime students demonstrated high levels of trust in social media platforms—even towards unverified, viral, and conspiratorial content. To counteract this, maritime schools and institutions should integrate media literacy education into their core curriculum. This may include leveraging social media positively for Learning.

2. Promote the Use of Verified and Authoritative Sources

Institutions must encourage students to seek information from verified sources such as government agencies, maritime authorities, and reputable academic journals—especially when the information concerns safety regulations, global events, or industry trends. Lecturers and mentors should model this by sharing and referencing credible content during instruction.

4. Strengthen Institutional Social Media Policies

Colleges and universities should consider implementing or updating policies that guide responsible online behavior.

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