

Undergraduate Students' Understanding of Fabricated Information on Social Media Platforms

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Abstract

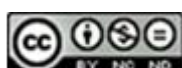
Undergraduate students, who are heavy social media users, are more vulnerable to this information than any other group. For this reason, this study sought to uncover these students' understanding of fabricated information on social media. To study this topic, a cross-sectional descriptive research design was applied. The study employed a survey to collect data from 354 undergraduate students at two universities in Tanzania. To analyse the data and derive descriptive statistics (frequencies and crosstabulations), the study used IBM Statistical Product for Service Solutions (SPSS) version 21. The study has revealed that undergraduate students had inadequate knowledge of fabricated information on social media. The study has also shown that a lack of training and awareness programs on types of fabricated information is related to the inadequacy of knowledge of this information among university students. The study has also revealed the main types of fabricated information, which are fabricated information against individuals and the government. To reduce the prevalence of this information on social media, training programs must be developed and implemented to raise awareness and understanding of the concept of fabricated information, its impact, and mitigation mechanisms.

Keywords: University students, Social media, Knowledge, Awareness, Fabricated information.

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Introduction

The growth of social media usage worldwide shows no signs of slowing down (Fitzpatrick, 2018). The increase in the use of these media has become a catalyst for the extremely rapid transmission of information and news. The increasingly connected world enables all news, information, and news sources to have a higher, if not the highest, speed of circulation and the broadest reach than ever before (El Rayess et al., 2018). This reach aligns with the growing popularity of news consumption from these media. Social media benefits users through its rapid dissemination of content, low cost, and ease of access (Shu et al., 2018). Specifically, young adults are heavy users of social media (i.e., social networking sites, including Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, and Tumblr). According to recent statistics, adults (18 to 29 years of age) are the most common users of these media (Pew Research Centre, 2021). In total, 88 per cent of 18 to 29-year-olds have reported using social media, and these young adults spend more time (averaging over 3 hours daily) on social media than older adults (Ilakkuvan et al., 2019; Leeder, 2019).



Many of these young adult social media users are university or college students (Hartzel et al., 2016; Sreehari et al., 2018; Melro & Pereira, 2019). Several previous studies (see, for example, Mai & Tick, 2021; Subrahmanyam et al., 2008; Talaue et al., 2018) have shown that social media use has become widespread, indispensable, and integral to the lives of university students. The popularity, growth, proliferation, effectiveness, and heavy usage of these media among students are attributed to their ubiquity, ease of use, flexibility, affordability, functionality, and convenience (Masele, 2021; Shu et al., 2020; Rampersad & Althiyabi, 2019). Most university students spend their time accessing and exchanging information and news primarily through social media on a daily basis (see, for example, Hartzel et al., 2016; Melro & Pereira, 2019; Sreehari et al., 2018).

However, a variety of studies have established that social media platforms are responsible for most of the fabricated information present today (Chin et al., 2022; Garbe et al., 2023; Daud & Azmi, 2021; Al-Zaman, 2021; Anansaringkarn & Neo, 2021; Daud & Zulhuda, 2020; Boberg et al., 2020; Magufuli, 2019; Vargo et al., 2018; Lazer et al., 2018). Therefore, as heavy users of social media, university students are exposed to information that efficiently circulates in the media (Shrestha & Spezzano, 2021; Leeder, 2019). More specifically, Al-Zaman (2021) has reported that 94.4 per cent of fabricated information is on social media. Social media platforms, including Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and Instagram, are reported to produce the majority of fabricated information (Boberg et al., 2020; Al-Zaman, 2021; Wanda et al., 2021). For instance, an examination of the prevalence and source analysis of COVID-19 misinformation in 138 countries revealed that Facebook alone produces 66.87 per cent of the fabricated information available on social media (Al-Zaman, 2021). Overall, during the pandemic, social media was reported to be responsible for the circulation of massive amounts of COVID-19-related misinformation, including false cures, misleading medical advice, and misinformation about the virus's origin (Brennen et al., 2020).

Although the media may not seem to encourage people to believe the information being disseminated, individuals tend to accept it readily, just as they do with any other information they encounter (El Rayess et al., 2018). University students are alarmingly vulnerable to this because of their inability to determine the quality of information (Karduni et al., 2019) available on social media. These students are generally unable to distinguish fabricated information from real information (Syam & Nurrahmi, 2020; Ebrahimi et al., 2015). For example, Aran Ramspott et al. (2021) reported that 76.8 per cent of university students experienced difficulties in detecting fabricated information. Literature has associated this problem with undergraduate students' inability to extensively self-protect from cybercrime (Matlhare et al., 2020; Aljuboori et al., 2020; Sreehari et al., 2018; Syam & Nurrahmi, 2020), which makes them susceptible to consuming and distributing fabricated information (see Aljuboori et al., 2020; Syam & Nurrahmi, 2020; Matlhare et al., 2020; Sreehari et al., 2018; Leeder, 2019). The increase in fabricated information can be partly attributed to the limited awareness and knowledge about it and its impact among many social media users, the majority of whom are students (Setyawan & Sulistyawati, 2020; Vosoughi et al., 2018; Lazer et al., 2018; Sreehari et al., 2018). Similarly, Magufuli (2019) has linked the high prevalence of fabricated information to a lack of sufficient awareness of its repercussions.

Various studies have been conducted on undergraduate students' perception of fabricated information (Melro & Pereira, 2019; Wanda et al., 2021), factors behind the spread of the information (Setyawan & Sulistyawati, 2020; Vosoughi et al., 2018), fabricated information diffusion trends (Allcott et al., 2019; De Regt et al., 2020), and the regulation of the spread of this information (Fidelis et al., 2023; Daud & Azmi, 2021; Daud & Zulhuda, 2020; Shu et al.,

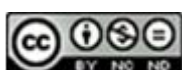
2020). However, the state of knowledge and awareness programmes about this information among university students remains unclear. This state prevails despite Shu et al.'s (2020) revelation that the creation, dissemination, and consumption of fabricated information on social media is accelerated by the ease of access to such sources and the lack of awareness of its existence. For this reason, this study has investigated undergraduate students' understanding of fabricated information on social media. Specifically, the study examines students' knowledge of fabricated information, the types of fabricated information on social media, students' understanding of fabricated information on social media, and awareness programmes on fabricated information.

Literature Review

Students' Knowledge of Fabricated Information

Knowledge plays an important role in shaping someone's behaviour. For example, fair use of cyberspace and taking preventive measures against threats depend on the knowledge an individual has (Mehta & Singh, 2013). Regarding the preventive aspect of knowledge, Aminatuzzuhriyah and Formen (2021) reported that social media users who are more knowledgeable about cybercrimes are less likely to commit them than those with less knowledge. While establishing the cybercrime risk perception, knowledge, and preventive strategies of youths at the University of Botswana, Matlhare et al. (2020) found that the majority (80%) of study participants were knowledgeable about and capable of recognising cybercrimes as real crimes. Additionally, according to a study by Munir and Shabir (2018) conducted in Pakistan, 30 per cent of students were very aware of cybercrimes, 23 per cent were highly aware, 40 per cent were somewhat aware, and seven per cent were not aware at all. The study concluded that both undergraduate and postgraduate students, who are also heavy users of social media, are more aware of these crimes.

In contrast, Akram and Abdullah (2011) reported that 38.5 per cent of social media users are unaware of cybercrimes, suggesting that in some regions, the majority of social media users have limited knowledge about these crimes. The study revealed that only 11.55 per cent of social media users in Pakistan had excellent knowledge about these crimes. In comparison, 12 per cent had sound knowledge at an expert level, and 58 per cent of them had never heard about the crimes. Additionally, Mbogoro's (2020) study on cybercrime awareness, cyber laws, and related practices in the public sector of Tanzania revealed that most public servants are not adequately knowledgeable about cybercrimes, while some are unaware of their existence. Besides, Syam and Nurrahmi (2020) conducted a study titled "I do not know if it is fake or real news", targeting to find out how little Indonesian students understand social media literacy. Although almost all the students demonstrated good social media usage skills and an understanding of the information they received, they lacked confidence in their ability to distinguish between fake and real news. In other words, while the students demonstrated enough literacy in some aspects of media, they lacked the same ability in terms of social media-based information. As such, to handle fabricated information on social media through creating awareness and training students is pivotal. On this, Naffi et al. (2025) reported that training students in fact-checking, citing sources, composing respectful counter-comments on social media, and practising identifying fabricated information through exposure and



education on underlying technologies are crucial in handling fabricated information on social media.

However, this lack of knowledge is not limited only to the general public. For example, a study by Akram and Abdullah (2011) on the effective enforcement of cyber laws in Pakistan revealed that judges and lawyers had limited knowledge about cybercrimes and the international laws that govern them. In addition, Sreehari et al. (2018) reported that the majority of social media content law enforcers lack the necessary knowledge to identify fabricated information, which hinders their ability to take proper precautionary measures. The lack of knowledge about this information among these individuals also accelerates the rate of these crimes, as it limits their access to and comprehension of electronic evidence that can be used in court to convict offenders (Kamran et al., 2019). Overall, a lack of this knowledge is currently a significant problem due to the rapid creation and dissemination of fabricated information, making it more challenging for the general public to distinguish reliable information from misleading content (de Regt et al., 2020).

Types of Fabricated Information on Social Media

The sharing of fabricated information on social media is a common phenomenon in various contexts. According to Daud and Azmi (2021), the creation and publication of this information on social media have affected governments, industries, and the private sector. Specifically, information related to politics, health, and nutrition (Fidelis et al., 2023), as well as politics, sports, and entertainment (Molina et al., 2021; Al-Zaman, 2021), and health, religion, crime, and miscellaneous topics (Al-Zaman, 2021) is commonly found. In addition, social media-based fabricated information about the government, individuals, institutions, or companies (Terian, 2021; Allcott et al., 2019; Magufuli, 2019) has been reported. Apart from that, Uddin et al. (2021) reported that the creation and publishing of fabricated information on social media have been observed in significant amounts across the globe, affecting people and entities for numerous business, political, and personal reasons.

Similarly, a study by Al-Zaman (2021), which analysed 419 fake news items published in India, reported that fabricated information is mainly shared on social media in six major contexts: health, religion, politics, crime, entertainment, and miscellaneous. The study further reported that health-related information is more prevalent (67.2%) on social media than any other type and that it is more common during health crises. Additionally, a study by Fidelis et al. (2023), which employed a scoping review method to ascertain the contexts, regulatory frameworks, and impediments in regulating fabricated information, revealed that 80 per cent of fabricated information is related to politics, health, and nutrition. Specifically, the study revealed that while approximately half (48%) of the news was about politics, 32 per cent was related to health and nutrition, 16 per cent involved socioeconomic issues, and four per cent was about economic issues.

Moreover, Magufuli (2019) revealed that fabricated information on social media against the government/leaders (18.6%), individuals (7.2%), and institutions/companies (4.3%) is prevalent in the education sector. The information affects a large group of students who are essentially the key consumers of online content. Since students are not adequately prepared to evaluate the variety of online content they consume (Damasceno, 2021; El Rayess et al., 2018), they unknowingly engage in the creation, access, sharing, and publishing of this information, which affects the education sector. However, existing studies (Dame Adjin-Tettey, 2022; Sharma & Kaur, 2019) have reported that when university students are media and information literate, they are more likely to be cautious about evaluating the authenticity

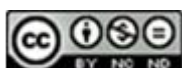
of online content before sharing. For this reason, Dame Adjin-Tettey (2022) argues that equipping information consumers with the necessary knowledge to evaluate information and determine its authenticity is imperative.

Materials and methods

This study employed a cross-sectional descriptive research design and utilised a survey to collect quantitative data from undergraduate students, aiming to assess their understanding of social media-fabricated information. The study has gathered data from two universities (the University of Dodoma and the University of Dar es Salaam), and undergraduate students were the data sources for two reasons. First, university students aged between 18 and 25 years, as well as those aged 18 to 29 years, frequently use social media to access and exchange information and news (Sreehari et al., 2018; Hartzel et al., 2016). Second, this category of social media users is susceptible to consuming and distributing fabricated information (Syam & Nurrahmi, 2020). The two universities involved in the study were selected because they have a large number of undergraduate students and a diversity of academic programmes, colleges, schools, and institutes that were deemed representative enough of the target population.

Due to the diversity of programmes, colleges, schools, and institutes within the selected universities, this study employed a stratified simple random sampling technique to select undergraduate students. Specifically, the Cochran formula (1977) was used to calculate the sample size from the total population of the study, which consisted of 54,580 individuals (30,779 from the University of Dodoma and 23,801 from the University of Dar es Salaam, respectively). Additionally, proportionate sample size calculations were conducted to determine the sample sizes for the respective universities, which were 215 for the University of Dodoma and 166 for the University of Dar es Salaam. On the whole, a total of 381 individuals from the entire population (54,580) participated in the survey. From these people, a printed questionnaire with closed-ended questions was personally distributed through face-to-face contacts by researchers and research assistants to gather data. Specifically, the questionnaire was divided into three sections. Section 1 sought information on the demographics of participants, Section 2 aims to understand the knowledge of fabricated information, and Section 3 focused on the types of fabricated information and awareness programmes on fabricated information on social media. Following the survey, a review of the collected questionnaires led to the elimination of some that displayed inconsistencies and incompleteness. This left the study with 354 questionnaires, which accounted for a response rate of approximately 93 per cent. These data were analysed quantitatively using Statistical Package for Service Solutions (SPSS) software version 21 to derive the descriptive statistics presented in tables and figures in the next section.

Overall, the study participants consisted of 158 (44.6%) from one university and 196 (55.4%) from the other. Gender-wise, 201 (56.8%) of the participants were males, while 153 (43.2%) were females. Approximately half (49.4%) of the undergraduate students surveyed were aged 18 to 20 years, and 45.8 per cent were aged 21 to 23 years. This indicates that youths (18-23 years old) made up 95.2 per cent of all the responding students.



Results

Students' Knowledge of Fabricated Information

Social media users were asked about their knowledge of fabricated information. In this instance, the study participants were asked to rate their knowledge using a 3-point Likert scale (i.e., 1 = Adequate knowledge, 2 = Inadequate knowledge, 3 = Not knowledgeable at all). Figure 1 presents the findings of this study:

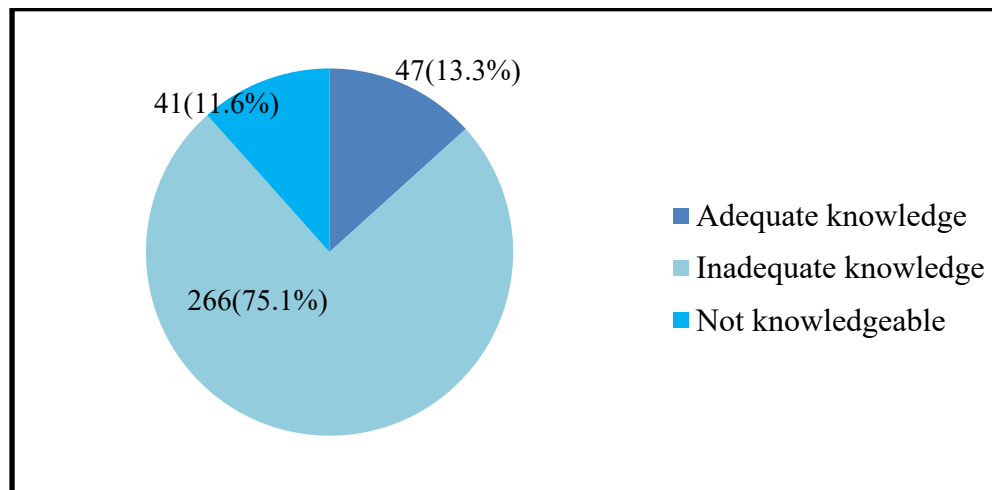


Figure 1: Knowledge of the Fabricated Information

The results in Figure 1 indicate that the majority (75.1%) of the undergraduate students had inadequate knowledge about fabricated information, only 11.6 per cent were knowledgeable, and 13.3 per cent were adequately knowledgeable. These results suggest that although social media users access and publish online information, they often lack adequate knowledge about fabricated information. In other words, these individuals are likely to access and publish fabricated information on social media. Similarly, cross-tabulation analysis was conducted to examine the socio-demographic characteristics of undergraduate students and their understanding of fabricated information on social media. A summary of the demographic characteristics and level of knowledge of fabricated information is presented in Table 1:

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics by Knowledge of Fabricated Information

Characteristics (n=354)		Adequate knowledge	Inadequate knowledge	Not knowledgeable	Total	p.value
Sex	Male	23(11.4%)	151(75.1%)	27(13.4%)	201(56.8%)	.992
	Female	18(11.8%)	115(75.2%)	20(13.1%)	153(43.2%)	
Age	18-20	20(11.4%)	133(76%)	22(22.6%)	175(49.4%)	.983
	21-23	19(11.7%)	119(73.5%)	24(14.8%)	162(45.8%)	
	24-26	2(14.3%)	11(78.6%)	1(7.1%)	14(4%)	
	27-29	0(0%)	1(100%)	0(0%)	1(0.3%)	
	Above 29	0(0%)	2(100%)	0(0%)	2(0.6%)	

Year of Study	First-year	12(10.8%)	88(79.3%)	11(9.9%)	111(31.4%)	.499
	Second year	15(11.7%)	96(75%)	17(13.3%)	128(36.2%)	
	Third year	14(12.7%)	79(71.8%)	17(15.5%)	110(31.1%)	
	Fourth-year	0(0%)	3(60%)	2(40%)	5(1.4%)	

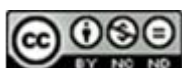
The results in Table 1 show that more than three-quarters (75%) of both male and female undergraduate students had inadequate knowledge of fabricated information. Additionally, the findings show that whereas all (100%) the undergraduate students aged between 27 and 29 years and those with more than 29 years of age had inadequate knowledge of fabricated information, more than 70% of those aged between 18 and 20 years, 21 and 23 years, and 24 and 26 years had inadequate knowledge. Moreover, approximately four-fifths (79.3%) of the first-year students had inadequate knowledge of this information. While three-quarters (75%) of second-year students had inadequate knowledge of fabricated information, 71.8 per cent of third-year students had the same level of knowledge. In addition, the findings indicate that three-fifths (60%) of the fourth-year students had inadequate knowledge of fabricated information. Furthermore, the results reveal that a significant proportion of male and female undergraduate students in all age groups had inadequate knowledge of fabricated information. To generate more details on this basis, the Pearson chi-square test was used. The test revealed no association ($p\text{-value} > 0.05$) between demographic characteristics (i.e., gender, age, and year of study) and knowledge of fabricated information among undergraduate students.

Students' Understanding of the Concept of Fabricated Information

To further establish the level of knowledge about fabricated information among participants, this study presented them with various descriptions from which they had to select those that represented what fabricated information meant to them. This was aimed at further establishing what the participants knew about the information. Table 2 presents the results that this inquiry has produced:

Table 2: Students' Understanding of the Concept of Fabricated Information

Understanding (n=354)	Frequency	Percent
Any content published with the intent to violate intellectual property rights protected under any written law	207	58.5
Any piece of information that has no factual basis but is published in a particular style to create legitimacy	195	55.1
Content that is created to harass, threaten, and/or embarrass another person	180	50.8
News outlets that pretend to be real but are fake	162	45.8
Any published statements and photos that defame someone	153	43.2
Any information that allows access to a computer system by unauthorised personnel	146	41.2
Content that is designed to misinform and do harm	142	40.1
Content that can be deleted and/or modified with the intent to obstruct or delay the investigation	108	30.5



The results in Table 2 suggest that most (58.5%) of the responding undergraduate students identified intellectual property rights violations as fabricated information. Similarly, a significant percentage of students (55.1%) felt that any piece of information lacking a factual basis but published in a particular style to create legitimacy is fabricated. The students also shared similar views on content created to harass, threaten, and/or embarrass another person (50.8%), as well as news outlets that pretend to be real but are fake (45.8%). Moreover, moderate percentages of the students mentioned published statements and photos that defame someone (43.2%), any information that allows access to a computer system by unauthorised personnel (41.2%), content that is designed to misinform and do harm (40.1%), and content that can be deleted and/or modified with the intent to obstruct or delay the investigation (30.5%).

Types of Fabricated Information on Social Media

In addition to determining undergraduate students' definition of fabricated information knowledge, the study sought to establish the types of fabricated information that the students were aware of. Details of what has been found on this are presented in Table 3:

Table 3: Types of Fabricated Information on Social Media

Types (n=354)	Frequency	Percent
Fabricated information against individuals	254	71.8
Fabricated information against the government	253	71.5
Fabricated information on celebrities	201	56.8
Fabricated information on business products	198	55.9
Fabricated information on the education sector	173	48.9
Fabricated information against companies	171	48.3
Fabricated information on health services	158	44.6
Fabricated information about sports and games	28	7.9

These results indicate that the majority of undergraduate students were knowledgeable about fabricated information against individuals (71.8%) and fabricated information against governments (71.5%). Moreover, a significant percentage of undergraduate students were knowledgeable about fabricated information on celebrities (56.8%), fabricated information on business products (55.9%), fabricated information on the education sector (48.9%), fabricated information against companies (48.3%), and fabricated information on health services (44.6%). In contrast, a negligible percentage (7.9%) of study participants were knowledgeable about fabricated sports and game information.

Awareness Programmes on Fabricated Information

Considering the role of knowledge in addressing the issue of creating and sharing fabricated information, as discussed in the literature section, it was essential for this study to determine whether students had ever attended awareness programmes on the topic. The results of this inquiry are presented in Table 4:

Table 4: Awareness Programmes on Fabricated Information

Receiving education on FI (n=354)	Frequency	Percent
Undergraduate students received FI	128	36.2
Undergraduate students never received FI	226	63.8

The results in Table 4 indicate that most (63.8%) undergraduate students had never attended awareness programmes on fabricated information, whereas a moderate percentage (36.2%) of them did. These results suggest that a significant proportion of social media users have yet to receive education on fabricated information, despite the magnitude of the problem they face. The participants who had been subjected to awareness programmes on this topic were further asked about the kind of knowledge they gained from the programmes. Their responses have resulted in the findings presented in Table 5:

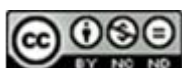
Table 5: Types of Knowledge Gained from the Programmes

Types (n=128)	Frequency	Percent
Proper usage of social media	97	75.8
Fabricating is against the law	86	67.2
Not to share information without verifying the source	84	65.6
Request for consent and verification	82	64.1
Not to publish fabricated information	79	61.7
Fabricated information can lead to conflicts, loss of trust, misunderstanding, etc.	61	47.7
Not to manipulate information	59	46.1
How to distinguish real from fabricated information	50	39.1
Not to send money without clear information	47	36.7

The results in Table 5 indicate that three-quarters (75.8%) of the undergraduate students who responded to this question reported knowing the proper usage of social media. The results also show that another significant percentage (61–68%) of the students was taught that fabricating is against the law (67.2%), not to share information without verifying the source (65.6%), requesting consent and verification (64.1%), and not publishing fabricated information (61.7%). The students were also taught that fabricated information can lead to conflicts, loss of trust, and misunderstandings (47.7%), that they should not manipulate information (46.1%), to distinguish between factual and fabricated information (39.1%), and to avoid sending money without clear information (36.7%).

Discussion of Findings

The main objective of this study was to investigate undergraduate students' understanding of fabricated information on social media. In particular, the study has examined undergraduate



students' knowledge of fabricated information and the awareness programs about fabricated information to which they were exposed.

Undergraduate Students' Knowledge of Fabricated Information

Regarding undergraduate students' knowledge of fabricated information, this study's findings indicate that students have inadequate knowledge about this type of information. The reasons for this are diverse. This can be attributed to the lack of training and awareness programmes on the types of this information. As a consequence, students are at risk of consuming and sharing information without verifying the source, obtaining consent, and verifying its accuracy. This finding aligns with what has been documented in some of the preceding literature (see, for example, Syam & Nurrahmi, 2020; Sreehari et al., 2018). However, these findings differ from those reported in a study by Matlhare et al. (2020), which found that, through training and awareness programmes, students at the University of Botswana were knowledgeable about fabricated information.

The lack of knowledge and awareness programmes makes it easier for undergraduate students to believe and share fabricated information (El Rayess et al., 2018; Vosoughi et al., 2018) and difficult for them to distinguish fabricated information from real information (Syam & Nurrahmi, 2020; Ebrahimi et al., 2015). These findings have not deviated from the findings of many prior studies (see, for example, Setyawan & Sulistyawati, 2020; Lazer et al., 2018; Sreehari et al., 2018) that have shown that the increase in fabricated information can be partly attributed to the majority of social media users' limited awareness and knowledge about it and its impact. The lack of knowledge and awareness programs about fabricated information also increases undergraduate students' inability to self-protect against cybercrime, making them susceptible to consuming and distributing fabricated information (see, for example, Aljuboori et al., 2020; Syam & Nurrahmi, 2020; Leeder, 2019).

By revealing that the surveyed students lacked knowledge about fabricated information, the findings of this study concur with those of Mambile and Mbogoro (2020). In contrast, the findings diverge from those revealed by other prior studies (e.g., Matlhare et al., 2020; Sreehari et al., 2018). These studies revealed that most university students had adequate knowledge of multiple forms of cybercrimes that are against cyber laws. Generally, the findings of the current study reveal that while some undergraduate students understood the term fabricated information, others did not. A large proportion of these students identified content published with the intent of violating intellectual property rights protected under any written law, as well as information that allows access to a computer system by unauthorised personnel, and content that can be deleted and/or modified with the intent to obstruct or delay the investigation, as fabricated information. The reasons behind the limited understanding of the term "fabricated information" are diverse. For example, Anansaringkarn and Neo (2021) reported that the issue of fabricated information transcends national and state borders, making it challenging to devise a definitive definition of the term as a whole. As a result, social media users continue to face the risk of publishing and sharing information that is more widely believed to be true than the facts (Vosoughi et al., 2018).

Moreover, the findings suggest that there is no association between inadequate knowledge of fabricated information and the sex, age, or year of study of undergraduate students. These findings diverge from those of a study by Uddin et al. (2021), which reported that male students and those older than 21 years of age are more knowledgeable about fabricated information on social media. Similarly, Shu et al. (2018) have revealed that inadequate knowledge among female students increases their possibility of trusting fabricated

information. This finding indicates that females are more prone to share fabricated information than males. Males have been noted to be more sceptical about the same news items (Shrestha & Spezzano, 2021). This finding differs from those of Aran Ramspott et al. (2021), who reported that although both males and females experienced similar difficulties in identifying fabricated information, females expressed greater concern than males about the pernicious effects of fabricated information on society.

Types of Fabricated Information on Social Media

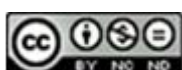
This study also reveals various types of fabricated information that students are aware of, published on social media. Specifically, the most prevalent types of fabricated information that students are aware of are those targeting individuals and the government. This confirms Magufuli's (2019) findings that there is an increase in access to and sharing of fabricated information against government leaders on social media compared to individuals, institutions, and companies. The reasons behind this include the government leaders' roles in the livelihoods of all citizens of specific nations. As a consequence, some citizens opposed to the government tend to create, publish, and share fabricated information about the government. According to Molina et al. (2021), individuals who are politically antagonistic to government leaders often lead the creation and dissemination of fabricated information against them. Lack of trust is another reason for creating and publishing fabricated information against the government (Molina et al., 2021; Terian, 2021; Allcott et al., 2019). The present study further reveals other types of fabricated information, including fabricated information about celebrities, business products, sports and games, companies, health services, and the education sector. These findings are similar to those of Daud and Azmi (2021), who reported that the creation and dissemination of fabricated information on social media have impacted governments, industries, and the private sector.

Study Implications

This study's findings are expected to expand the theoretical body of knowledge on the uses of social media, as well as the knowledge, awareness, and understanding of fabricated information on social media, including the types of fabricated information that exist. Specifically, relevant stakeholders, including social media regulatory bodies, information specialists, policymakers, and academic researchers, will be direct beneficiaries of these study findings. The findings also provide planners and policymakers with a basis for formulating, improving, and implementing policies that can be used to control the menace of fabricated information on social media. The study's findings also provide insight into social media users who are likely to be vulnerable to fabricated information that circulates efficiently on social media. Overall, the study contributes to the literature on fabricated information on social media, knowledge of fabricated information on social media, and social media users who are likely to be victims of fabricated information.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Creating, accessing, using, and disseminating accurate and real information and news on social media is pivotal among social media users. However, this behaviour is also associated with the creation, access, use, and dissemination of voluminous fabricated information in the media, especially by people of university age. The ubiquity, ease of use, flexibility,

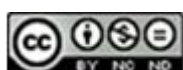


affordability, functionality, and convenience of social media, along with limited training, awareness, and education programmes, are behind this state. In addition, it was expected that university students would be more knowledgeable about fabricated information, but the present findings have not confirmed this. This finding suggests that the access, use, and dissemination of fabricated information will persist as a challenge for social media users, particularly young people. In particular, this study recommends developing and implementing training programs to raise awareness of and enhance understanding of fabricated information and its types among students. Additionally, universities should provide training on the ethical usage of social media to students who are more vulnerable and susceptible to consuming and distributing fabricated information. This could be achieved by integrating topics related to fabricated information and the ethical use of social media into the university curriculum. Not only that, but universities should also conduct training through electronic or virtual means, as well as face-to-face seminars or workshops, digitised content, and audio-visual resources on university and/or library websites.

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