

# Research Question: Whether Social Media Audiences With Higher Media Literacy Ability are More Likely to Identify fake News

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**Abstract:** Fake news is not a new thing, and with the development of the Internet and social media, the relationship between fake news and audiences has become closer. The definition of fake news or false information is a fabricated content that imitates traditional news and serves to serve certain entities or personal interests<sup>[1]</sup>. It can be divided into the following categories, including satire, mischief and propaganda. The purpose of the satire is not to mislead the audience, but users will mistake satirical articles for real news. Mischief is a fake news coverage designed to mislead people, usually for web traffic, but without political motives<sup>[2]</sup>. Propaganda is the use of misinformation or misleading information for political purposes, and it may affect elections, intensify political disagreement and even violence. The development of social media has increased the possibility of dissemination of false information, and therefore can be used in extremely short exponential spread over time, which means that there will be a large number of users exposed to fake news, especially on social media with insufficient information control mechanism<sup>[3]</sup>. Therefore, the research question of this essay is whether social media audiences with higher media literacy ability are more likely to identify fake news.

**Keywords:** Social media; Media literacy; Research design

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## 1. Literature Review

Some scholars believe that people are weak in identifying fake news, people cannot distinguish between real news and fake news, In particular, the Brexit Movement and the 2016 US presidential election, so people are more concerned about the media literacy of users than before<sup>[4]</sup>. The influence of the audience's media literacy ability on the identification of fake news is the subject of this study. There are two main theories that provide them with theoretical support, the two theories are the rational selection theory and the inoculation theory. The theory of rational choice which is often used to understand various aspects of the behavior of social media users that lead to the spread of fake news, and also to explain why social media viewers consciously decide to use social media. In recent years it has been widely used to understand fake news sharing behaviors, so rational choice theory can be used to explain why viewers sometimes share fake news on social media<sup>[5]</sup>. The definition of media literacy is "the ability to obtain, analyze, evaluate and create various forms of information", and the shortcomings of these literacy of the audience are the reasons for the widespread dissemination of fake news. The academic community generally believes that the intervention of media literacy to the audience can help the audience to "inoculate in advance", to reduce the negative impact of any misleading information, and the vaccination theory provides solid theoretical support for the intervention of media literacy. Research shows that less educated audiences are more likely to spread fake news than educated audiences, so they are more likely to identify fake news. Chan (2021) also believes that audiences with high media literacy have a stronger ability to judge true and false news headlines. The research results show that in the general public, the standardization of high media literacy can weaken the impact of online false information. Deepening the audience's understanding of media literacy can positively improve their behavior. Improving the audience's media literacy can deepen their understanding of fake news. Wei and Li (2023) also believe that media literacy skills enable people to critically think about the content and sources of news they encounter on social media, so media literacy skills are indeed a powerful

tool for combating fake news. As a vulnerable group of online risks, are more susceptible to negative impacts. Although young people often use social media, this does not necessarily mean that they have a high level of media literacy. Therefore, McDougal (2019) believes that media literacy education should promote the participation of young audiences, and education can enhance their ability to resist “information chaos”. In the above literature, it has been mentioned that the level of audience media literacy ability has an impact on identifying fake news, especially for the elderly and young people with poor economic conditions, and it is necessary to strengthen media literacy education.<sup>[6]</sup>

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1 Research design**

The research method I have chosen is audience research in quantitative research, and I will use questionnaire surveys as my tool. The literature mentioned above has provided me with inspiration and support, such as the use of questionnaire surveys in the article written by Jones Jang et al. The reason why I chose this method is composed of the following aspects: firstly, it has large-scale data collection capabilities, can have a large sample size, and the method is transparent and fair. The second is anonymity: questionnaire surveys can usually be conducted anonymously, which helps respondents answer questions more candidly and reduce psychological burden. The third is relatively scientific standards and objectivity. Standardization of questionnaire design can ensure consistency and reliability of questions, ensuring consistency and comparability of data, as each respondent answers the same question. The fourth is broad coverage: questionnaire surveys can be used for large-scale respondents, covering a wide range of people, geographical regions, or types of respondents, thus ensuring that survey participants include a wide audience. The questionnaire adopts a closed survey to obtain quantifiable responses, which can be divided into personal media use, media information collection channels, social media literacy, and self-evaluation.

### **2.2 Participants**

Seeking participants can seek help from large companies engaged in audience research, such as Nielsen and Celebrity DBI. I chose stratified sampling, dividing the population into different levels first, and then randomly selecting participants from each level. The basic characteristics of participants are social media users aged 18 and above, who have a habit of accessing information online for a fixed period of time.

### **2.3 Collect and process data**

After the audience questionnaire is submitted, they can receive a chance to draw a prize to ensure the collection of sufficient sample size. In order to collect meaningful data for analysis, use multiple types of questions and analyze data. Ensure that each question is relevant to the research purpose and is concise and clear. Design a questionnaire that includes different types of questions, such as single choice, multiple choice, open-ended, and scale questions, and provide appropriate confidentiality measures to inform participants of how their data will be processed to comply with privacy regulations. Once the data is collected, use statistical tools and methods to analyze the questionnaire results.

### **2.4 Ethics, Challenges, and Limitations**

There are several possible ethical issues: firstly, it is inevitable to collect personal information and opinions of participants during the questionnaire survey process, which may involve privacy issues. Secondly, it may violate the informed consent of the audience, and the process of collecting data may not clearly inform participants of the purpose of participating in the survey, such as how the data will be used. Finally, there may be ethical review. In the research process of this article, research involving vulnerable groups, such as the elderly, may require approval from the Ethics Review Committee. The challenges and limitations encountered during the implementation process may include inaccurate data: participants may not honestly answer some questions, this may affect the accuracy of the data. Taking into account the ethical issues, challenges, and limitations mentioned above, I need to carefully design the questionnaire, take appropriate measures to ensure data accuracy and privacy protection.

## **3. Conclusion**

In recent years, fake news has spread rapidly on social media, which increased political divisions among different groups. This study recognizes that as the audience’s media literacy improves, their ability to resist fake news will also improve, making it easier to identify fake news. Therefore, quantitative research is adopted, using questionnaire surveys to collect sufficient data, and sampling surveys to ensure representativeness of the samples. The key points mentioned in the academic literature above include: firstly, as the audience’s media literacy ability improves, they are more likely to identify fake news. The improvement of media literacy ability helps people deepen their understanding of fake news, also effectively handle prank news and significantly mitigate

the impact of fake news dissemination. Secondly, improving media literacy can help older audiences understand these issues and better evaluate information and sources. Thirdly, McDougal believes that media literacy education can enhance the ability of young audiences to resist “information chaos”. However, the above academic articles did not mention the impact of media literacy education on social media audiences, and social media is the main battlefield for spreading fake news. Therefore, this study can provide relevant support.<sup>[7]</sup>

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