

Fake news spreads further on X if the story is about the future

Submitted by: BlueSky Education

Tuesday, 11 March 2025

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Fake news spreads further on X if the story is about the future

The more a fake news story talks about the future, the more likely it is to be spread on X (formerly Twitter), research from Trinity Business School has found and this is linked to human evolution.

The study, undertaken by Ashish Kumar Jha, an Associate Professor in Business Analytics at Trinity Business School, alongside Rohit Nishant from Queen's Business School, found that future-oriented fake news receives higher engagement in terms of retweets on X than other false news items.

The paper, which sought to examine the role of future-facing elements within fake news stories' in supporting their proliferation on X, analysed data from 465,519 Tweets, sourced via the FakeNewsNet project, and observed a clear relationship between the future-facing nature of the fake news story and how many users shared the item.

Such fake news stories included: "WE WILL RIOT! Michelle Obama's Mom Will Receive \$160k Every Year Out Of Taxpayers' Pockets!", which received considerable engagement, while "Donald Trump Protester Speaks Out: 'I was Paid \$3500 to Protest Trump's Rally!'" received little engagement.

"A plausible reason for the trend we see in our study is that these messages evoke a sense of uncertainty, which is a potent reason for sharing something; fake news with a strong past orientation may be used to discredit political leaders but, ultimately, these narratives don't elicit uncertainty," says Trinity Business School's Kumar Jha.

The study sheds fresh light on a pervasive issue facing researchers, practitioners, and policymakers – the widespread consumption of false information, spread on social media platforms.

Examining the role of future-facing narratives within some fake news stories, and the impact this messaging has on how quickly it spreads on X, the researchers also found that fake news stories were shared most when the title of the news story and the accompanying Tweet 'moderately' differed in how they framed the future.

"The study identifies a 'U-shaped' relationship between similarity of the messaging in the Tweet and fake news story title, and how much engagement that story gets. A moderate difference generated the most engagement, whereas the posts with the lowest user engagement were those with no difference in sentiments," Kumar Jha notes.

Reflecting on the broader implications of the research, Trinity Business School's Dr. Jha says:

"Our study found that we have evolved to react in certain way to certain information like future-oriented news. It is interesting to note how our evolution is impacting the way we react on social media

platforms. But, more importantly, our study lays the ground form for responsible digital platforms and what social media platforms should do to limit the spread of fake news.”

The paper, Judging a Book by its Cover: Understanding the Phenomenon of Fake News Propagation from an Evolutionary Psychology Perspective, has been published in the Journal of the Association for Information Systems.

END/

For more information, a copy of the research paper, or to speak to Ashish Kumar Jha, contact Jonny Stone at jonny@bluesky-pr.com or call 01582 790704.