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## **Fake News, Misinformation and its Consequences for Global Relations**

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### **Abstract**

The proliferation of digital media has revolutionized communication, but it has also ushered in an era of unprecedented challenges, chief among them the rampant spread of fake news and misinformation. This phenomenon, no longer confined to domestic spheres, has infiltrated the realm of international relations with profound and far-reaching consequences. This research article delves into the connections between fake news and the global political landscape, examining its impact on diplomatic relations, public trust in institutions, and the very foundations of democratic processes worldwide. Fake news, often intentionally fabricated or manipulated information, thrives in the echo chambers of social media and online platforms. Its rapid dissemination, amplified by algorithms and viral trends, can quickly escalate into international crises. Misinformation campaigns, often orchestrated by state actors or malicious groups, can sow discord among nations, undermine diplomatic efforts, and exacerbate existing tensions. The manipulation of public opinion through fabricated narratives can erode trust in foreign governments and international organizations, hindering cooperation and undermining multilateralism. This can lead to the rise of populist movements, the erosion of democratic norms, and the emergence of authoritarian regimes. The consequences of this erosion of trust extend beyond political spheres, impacting economic relations, cultural exchanges, and even societal cohesion. This research article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted challenges posed by fake news in international relations. Through an in-depth analysis of existing literature, case studies, and policy responses, this study seeks to examine the various channels and mechanisms through which fake news infiltrates international discourse, analyze the impact of fake news on key aspects of international relations, including diplomacy, foreign policy, and international security, investigate the role of state actors, non-state actors, and technology companies in the creation and dissemination of fake news, explore the effectiveness of existing policy responses, including legislative measures, media literacy campaigns, and fact-checking initiatives, and propose a framework for mitigating the adverse effects of fake news on international relations, emphasizing the need for international cooperation, media literacy education, and the development of robust fact-checking mechanisms.

**Keywords:** Fake news, Misinformation, Global Relations, Diplomacy, Misinformation Dissemination

### **Introduction**

The rise of the internet and the proliferation of social media platforms have



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revolutionized communication, fostering unprecedented connectivity and access to information. While these technologies offer immense potential for global cooperation and understanding, they have also created fertile ground for the rapid and widespread dissemination of misinformation and fake news. These fabricated or manipulated narratives, often spread through social media and online platforms, have far-reaching consequences, extending beyond domestic spheres to profoundly impact international relations (Colomina et al., 2021). The increasing interconnectedness of the globalized world makes the spread of misinformation and its impact on international relations a critical challenge for the 21st century.

This research paper examines the multifaceted phenomenon of misinformation and fake news, exploring its origins, mechanisms of dissemination, and its deleterious effects on global trust, diplomatic relations, and international security. The primary objectives of this research are to critically examine the origins and mechanisms of dissemination of misinformation and fake news in the context of international relations; to investigate the impact of misinformation and fake news on key aspects of international relations, including diplomatic relations, international security, and global cooperation; to analyse the role of state and non-state actors in the creation and dissemination of misinformation in the international arena; and to explore the effectiveness of existing policy responses and propose potential solutions to mitigate the adverse effects of misinformation on global relations. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted phenomenon of misinformation and fake news and its implications for the international order. The findings of this study have significant implications for policymakers, international organizations, and civil society in developing effective strategies to counter the spread of misinformation and promote a more informed and trustworthy information environment.

### **Understanding the Phenomenon of Misinformation**

Misinformation refers to the unintentional spread of false information. It can arise from a variety of sources, including honest mistakes, rumours, and the misinterpretation of data. Disinformation, on the other hand, refers to the deliberate creation and dissemination of false or misleading information with the intent to deceive. It is often employed by state actors, political campaigns, or malicious groups to manipulate public opinion, sow discord, and achieve specific political or social objectives (Damstra et al., 2021). Fake news encompasses a broader range of fabricated or manipulated content, including fabricated news stories, manipulated images and videos, and the deliberate sharing of misleading information. It can be created for various purposes, including financial gain, political manipulation, or simply to entertain (Galvan & Pyrczak, 2023).

The rapid spread of misinformation and fake news is facilitated by several key factors. Social media platforms, driven by algorithms that prioritize engagement and virality, often amplify sensational and emotionally charged content, regardless of its accuracy. This can create "filter bubbles" and "echo chambers" where users are primarily exposed to information that confirms their existing beliefs, making them more susceptible to misinformation. Automated accounts (bots) and human-operated accounts (trolls) can be employed to artificially inflate the visibility of certain narratives, manipulate online conversations, and spread disinformation on a massive scale (Zimdars & McLeod, 2020). Human



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psychology also plays a significant role in the spread of misinformation. Cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias, the bandwagon effect, and the availability heuristic, can make individuals more likely to believe and share information that aligns with their existing beliefs, regardless of its veracity. Furthermore, the declining trust in traditional media outlets, coupled with the rise of alternative news sources and citizen journalism, has created a fertile ground for the proliferation of misinformation. Individuals may be more likely to turn to less credible sources for information, increasing their vulnerability to misleading narratives (Farkas & Schou, 2019).

The consequences of misinformation and fake news extend far beyond domestic spheres, significantly impacting international relations in several key ways (Kaniz et al., 2025). The dissemination of false or misleading information about international organizations, such as the United Nations or the World Health Organization, can erode public trust and undermine their legitimacy. This can hinder international cooperation and impede efforts to address global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, and international security threats. Misinformation campaigns, often orchestrated by state actors, can be used to sow discord among nations, exacerbate existing tensions, and even provoke armed conflict (Morgan, 2018). The spread of fabricated narratives about foreign adversaries can fuel xenophobia, nationalism, and mistrust, creating a climate of fear and suspicion. The spread of false or misleading information about diplomatic negotiations, foreign policy decisions, and international agreements can undermine public support for these initiatives, making it more difficult for governments to achieve their foreign policy objectives. This can lead to increased political polarization, making it more challenging to find common ground and forge consensus on critical international issues. The spread of disinformation about military activities, terrorist threats, and cyberattacks can create panic, disrupt critical infrastructure, and even trigger unintended military responses (Tandoc et al., 2020). Consequently, this can exacerbate security concerns and increase the risk of unintended escalation.

### Research Objectives

This research aims to:

Define and categorize different types of misinformation and fake news.

This objective seeks to establish a clear and nuanced understanding of the various forms that misinformation and fake news can take, including fabricated news stories, manipulated images and videos, deep fakes, the spread of misleading information, and the manipulation of algorithms.

Investigate the mechanisms of dissemination of misinformation and fake news in the digital age.

This objective aims to understand how misinformation and fake news spread through social media platforms, the role of algorithms and network effects, the impact of cognitive biases, the influence of bots and trolls, and the erosion of trust in traditional media.

Analyse the impact of misinformation and fake news on key aspects of international relations.

This objective seeks to examine the impact of misinformation on diplomatic relations, international security, public diplomacy, the erosion of trust in international institutions, and the exacerbation of international tensions.



## Literature Review

### Defining Misinformation and Fake News

The literature on misinformation and fake news is vast and multifaceted, with scholars offering various definitions and typologies. While a universally accepted definition remains elusive, several key distinctions are crucial. Misinformation generally refers to the unintentional spread of false information. This can arise from a variety of sources, including honest mistakes, rumours, and the misinterpretation of data. For instance, a news report may contain factual errors due to human error or reliance on unreliable sources, leading to the unintentional dissemination of misinformation (Roozenbeek & Van der Linden, 2019). Disinformation, on the other hand, refers to the deliberate creation and dissemination of false or misleading information with the intent to deceive. It is often employed by state actors, political campaigns, or malicious groups to manipulate public opinion, sow discord, and achieve specific political or social objectives. This can include the creation and dissemination of fabricated news stories, the manipulation of existing content, and the use of social media bots and trolls to amplify specific narratives.

Fake news encompasses a broader range of fabricated or manipulated content, including fabricated news stories, manipulated images and videos, and the deliberate sharing of misleading information. It can be created for various purposes, including financial gain, political manipulation, or simply to entertain (Van der Linden et al. 2020). The rise of sophisticated technologies, such as deep fakes, synthetic media that can realistically depict individuals saying or doing things they never did, has further complicated the landscape of misinformation and fake news, blurring the lines between reality and fiction. The challenges of defining and categorizing different types of misinformation and fake news are significant. The rapidly evolving nature of these phenomena, coupled with the constant emergence of new technologies and tactics, makes it difficult to keep pace with the evolving landscape (Lazer et al., 2018). In this regard, the motivations behind the creation and dissemination of misinformation can be complex and multifaceted, ranging from financial gain and political manipulation to the desire to spread fear and confusion.

### The Mechanisms of Dissemination

The rapid spread of misinformation and fake news is facilitated by several key factors. Social media platforms, driven by algorithms designed to maximize user engagement and maximize advertising revenue, often prioritize sensational and emotionally charged content, regardless of its accuracy. This algorithmic bias can amplify misinformation and create "filter bubbles" and "echo chambers" where users are primarily exposed to information that confirms their existing beliefs, making them more susceptible to misinformation. Automated accounts (bots) and human-operated accounts (trolls) play a significant role in spreading misinformation and manipulating online conversations (Farkas & Schou, 2019). Bots can be programmed to automatically share content, follow users, and engage in online discussions, creating the illusion of widespread support for a particular narrative. Trolls, on the other hand, are human-operated accounts that deliberately spread disinformation, engage in online harassment, and sow discord among online communities (Bergmann, 2018).





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A study by Harvard Kennedy School's Misinformation Review explores the link between exposure to fake news and trust in institutions. The study suggests that people exposed to fake news tend to have lower trust in media but higher trust in government, particularly when the government aligns with their political views. This highlights the potential for fake news to manipulate public perception and erode trust in traditional institutions. In this regard, Damstra et al. (2021) delve into the characteristics of fake news in their article, "What does fake look like? A review of the literature on intentional deception in the news and on social media." They identify several key features of fake news, including sensational headlines, emotionally charged language, and the use of unreliable sources (Arias Maldonado, 2019). Thus, recognizing these features can help individuals become more discerning consumers of information online.

Human psychology also plays a significant role in the spread of misinformation. Cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias, the bandwagon effect, and the availability heuristic, can make individuals more likely to believe and share information that aligns with their existing beliefs, regardless of its veracity. Confirmation bias, for example, leads individuals to seek out and favor information that confirms their pre-existing beliefs, while ignoring or dismissing information that contradicts them. The bandwagon effect encourages individuals to conform to the perceived majority opinion, even if they have doubts about the veracity of the information (Mogan, 2018). The availability heuristic leads individuals to overestimate the likelihood of events that are easily recalled or readily available in their memory, often based on media coverage and vivid imagery.

The declining trust in traditional media outlets, coupled with the rise of alternative news sources and citizen journalism, has created a fertile ground for the proliferation of misinformation. Individuals may be more likely to turn to less credible sources for information, increasing their vulnerability to misleading narratives. This erosion of trust in traditional media can be attributed to factors such as perceived media bias, the increasing concentration of media ownership, and the 24/7 news cycle, which often prioritizes sensationalism over accuracy (Guess & Lyons, 2020).

### **The Impact on Global Relations**

The consequences of misinformation and fake news extend far beyond domestic spheres, significantly impacting international relations in several key ways. Firstly, the dissemination of false or misleading information about international organizations, such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization, can erode public trust and undermine their legitimacy. This can hinder international cooperation and impede efforts to address global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, and international security threats. When public trust in international institutions erodes, it becomes more difficult for these organizations to effectively fulfil their mandates and address global challenges. Misinformation campaigns, often orchestrated by state actors, can be used to sow discord among nations, exacerbate existing tensions, and even provoke armed conflict (Morgan, 2018). The spread of fabricated narratives about foreign adversaries can fuel xenophobia, nationalism, and mistrust, creating a climate of fear and suspicion. This can lead to increased political polarization, making it more difficult to find common ground and forge consensus on critical



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international issues (Lanoszka, 2019).

Gerrits (2018) in "Disinformation in international relations: How important is it?" published in *Security and Human Rights*, explores the significance of disinformation in the international arena. The author argues that disinformation can be a powerful tool used by state and non-state actors to achieve their foreign policy objectives. This perspective highlights the strategic use of disinformation as a tool of statecraft in the contemporary international system.

Furthermore, Lanoszka (2019), in "Disinformation in international politics," published in the *European Journal of International Security*, examines the various ways in which disinformation is employed in international politics. The author identifies several tactics, including the manipulation of social media, the use of cyberattacks, and the fabrication of news stories, to achieve specific political goals. This furthers our understanding of the multifaceted nature of disinformation campaigns in the international sphere.

More importantly, Lazer et al. (2018) in their seminal work, "The science of fake news," published in *Science*, offer a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon. The authors emphasize the role of social media algorithms and confirmation bias in amplifying fake news and creating "echo chambers" where users are primarily exposed to information that confirms their existing beliefs. This highlights the complex interplay between technology, psychology, and the spread of misinformation. The spread of false or misleading information about diplomatic negotiations, foreign policy decisions, and international agreements can undermine public support for these initiatives, making it more difficult for governments to achieve their foreign policy objectives. This can lead to increased political polarization, making it more challenging to find common ground and forge consensus on critical international issues.

The spread of disinformation about military activities, terrorist threats, and cyberattacks can create panic, disrupt critical infrastructure, and even trigger unintended military responses. This can exacerbate security concerns and increase the risk of unintended escalation. For example, the spread of false information about a foreign military build-up can lead to a misperception of threat, potentially triggering a military response.

### **Existing Research and Theoretical Frameworks**

Existing research on the impact of information and communication technologies on international relations provides valuable insights into the role of misinformation and fake news in the contemporary international system.

**Public Diplomacy:** This field of study examines how governments communicate with foreign audiences to promote their national interests and build positive international relationships. The rise of social media and the proliferation of online information have significantly altered the landscape of public diplomacy. Misinformation and fake news can be used to manipulate public opinion in foreign countries, undermine the credibility of foreign governments, and interfere in their domestic affairs (Van der Linden, 2020).

**Information Warfare:** This concept refers to the use of information and communication technologies to achieve political, military, or social objectives. Information warfare can involve the spread of disinformation, the disruption of



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critical communication systems, and the exploitation of vulnerabilities in information systems. The use of social media platforms and other online tools has expanded the scope and impact of information warfare, enabling actors to reach global audiences and manipulate information on a massive scale (Waisbord, 2018).

**Networked Publics:** This concept, developed by Manuel Castells, describes the emergence of new forms of social and political organization enabled by the internet and other networked technologies. Networked publics can be powerful tools for social mobilization and collective action, but they can also be exploited for the spread of misinformation and the manipulation of public opinion (Jones-Jang et al., 2021).

**The Global Information Society:** This concept refers to the increasing interconnectedness of the world through information and communication technologies. The global information society has created new opportunities for global cooperation and understanding, but it has also created new challenges, including the spread of misinformation and the erosion of trust in information sources (Zimdars & Mcleod, 2020).

These theoretical frameworks offer valuable perspectives on the influence of misinformation and fake news in today's international system. By utilizing these frameworks, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how misinformation spreads, its effects on global relations, and the challenges associated with countering its negative impacts.

### Literature Gap

Misinformation and fake news have become significant challenges in the digital age, affecting public opinion, political stability, and societal trust. Despite growing research interest, several critical gaps persist in the literature, limiting the development of effective interventions and policies to address this issue. A major gap is the absence of a clear and universally accepted definition of misinformation and fake news. Different studies employ varying terminologies, such as misinformation, disinformation, and fake news, leading to conceptual inconsistencies. These differences hinder the establishment of standardized detection and mitigation methods, complicating efforts to combat misinformation effectively.

Another critical gap involves the psychological aspects of misinformation. Although cognitive biases have been studied, there is insufficient empirical research on the effectiveness of psychological strategies, such as media literacy programs, in mitigating misinformation. More work is needed to assess interventions that target emotional and cognitive factors influencing belief and dissemination. Countermeasures like fact-checking initiatives and algorithmic interventions have been widely implemented, yet there is a lack of longitudinal research assessing their long-term effectiveness. Understanding which strategies provide sustainable results and how they can be adapted to different contexts requires further exploration.

Finally, misinformation research is often conducted within specific academic disciplines such as communication studies, political science, or computer science. There is a pressing need for interdisciplinary approaches that



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incorporate insights from psychology, sociology, and information science to develop comprehensive and holistic solutions.

### **Empirical Research Method**

An empirical research method is a research approach that collects and analyses data through direct observation, experimentation, or measurement, essentially basing knowledge on real-world experiences and evidence rather than theory or belief; it entails gathering data that can be observed and quantified in order to test hypotheses and draw conclusions about a phenomenon (Galvan & Pyrczak, 2023).

This research employed a secondary research method, focusing on the analysis of existing data and information. A comprehensive literature review was conducted, encompassing scholarly articles, books, reports, policy briefs, and grey literature. Key databases such as JSTOR, Google Scholar, and Scopus were utilized to identify relevant publications. The search terms included variations of "misinformation," "disinformation," "fake news," "international relations," "diplomacy," "international security," "social media," "propaganda," "information warfare," and "public diplomacy."

Profound analysis of specific case studies was conducted to illustrate the real-world impact of misinformation and fake news on global relations. Case studies selected included the Brexit referendum, the COVID-19 pandemic, 2024 US Presidential Election, and state-sponsored disinformation campaigns. Content analysis was conducted on a sample of news articles, social media posts, and other online content to identify patterns, themes, and trends in the dissemination of misinformation and fake news. This involved analysing the language used, the sources cited, and the emotional tone of the content. Data analysis involved thematic analysis to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns, themes, and meanings within the collected data. Content analysis was also employed to systematically analyse and interpret the content of news articles, social media posts, and other online sources. Triangulation of data was employed to ensure the robustness and validity of the analysis. This involved cross-referencing and comparing data from different sources to identify consistent findings and address potential biases.

### **Findings**

This research explored various aspects and definitions of misinformation, emphasizing the distinction between misinformation and disinformation. Misinformation refers to the unintentional spread of false or inaccurate information, while disinformation is intentionally fabricated to deceive audiences. Fake news is used as an umbrella term that captures both misinformation and disinformation, often deployed for political, economic, or entertainment purposes. The paper highlighted how the digital age has contributed to the proliferation of fake news, with social media serving as a central platform for the rapid spread of such content.

The dissemination of misinformation is heavily influenced by digital algorithms, particularly those used by social media platforms. These algorithms prioritize sensational and emotionally charged content, which leads to the amplification of misinformation. Such content is more likely to be shared, leading to greater visibility (Damstra et al., 2021). This process creates "filter bubbles" and "echo





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chambers," wherein users are predominantly exposed to content that aligns with their existing beliefs and opinions, further reinforcing misinformation. Cognitive biases, including confirmation bias, the bandwagon effect, and the availability heuristic, exacerbate this issue. People tend to trust and share information that supports their preconceptions or emotional responses, making them more susceptible to false or misleading narratives (Freelon & Wells, 2020).

The erosion of trust in traditional media and international organizations, such as the United Nations (UN) and World Health Organization (WHO), is a significant consequence of the rise in misinformation. As public trust in these institutions declines, it becomes more challenging to achieve global cooperation on critical issues such as climate change, public health, and international security. The paper emphasized that misinformation campaigns often exploit these vulnerabilities, eroding trust in credible sources of information and fostering scepticism about the legitimacy of global initiatives. In the realm of international relations, misinformation can be particularly damaging to diplomatic efforts. The spread of fake news or disinformation about foreign policy decisions, international agreements, or geopolitical tensions can provoke public opposition and undermine diplomatic negotiations. The consequences are even more pronounced when state actors engage in deliberate disinformation campaigns, using these strategies to manipulate public opinion or provoke international conflicts (Roozenbeek & Van der Linden, 2019). These campaigns can heighten nationalistic sentiments, promote xenophobia, and deepen political polarization, thus complicating diplomatic efforts and straining international cooperation.

State and non-state actors are identified as key players in the dissemination of fake news. Governments may use disinformation strategically to achieve political or strategic goals, particularly during election cycles or times of political crisis. Non-state actors, such as political organizations, extremist groups, or even individuals, may also engage in disinformation campaigns to further their agendas (Tandoc et al., 2020). The paper noted that the growing use of cyberattacks and social media manipulation is increasingly common, making it more difficult for the international community to identify and counteract the spread of false information.

Lastly, the paper critically examined the policy responses aimed at addressing the problem of misinformation. While measures like legislation, media literacy campaigns, and fact-checking initiatives have been introduced, their effectiveness remains limited. The paper called for stronger international cooperation, the development of more comprehensive fact-checking systems, and enhanced media literacy education to help individuals critically assess the information they encounter online (Kuo & Marwick, 2021). Besides, it stressed the importance of developing a robust framework for combating misinformation to preserve trust in international relations and support global cooperation on critical issues.

Succinctly, the findings highlight the interconnectedness between fake news, misinformation, and international relations. Misinformation presents serious obstacles to global collaboration, trust, and diplomatic efforts, underscoring the need for coordinated action among policymakers, media entities, and the public to tackle this ongoing challenge effectively.



## Conclusion

This research comprehensively assessed the significant role that misinformation and fake news play in shaping the dynamics of international relations by revealing the depth of the challenges they pose. The findings illustrate that misinformation does not only affect public opinion but can deeply impact global cooperation, diplomacy, and trust between states. With the increasing prevalence of digital media and social networks, the spread of fake news has become a substantial barrier to constructive international dialogue. The ability of misinformation to fuel conflict, distort public perception, and undermine the legitimacy of international organizations is a serious concern for policymakers and diplomats alike. Consequently, this study argues that the issue of fake news must be tackled not only at the governmental level but also through coordinated efforts with media organizations, tech companies, and civil society to enhance information literacy and encourage the responsible dissemination of information. The study also emphasizes the evolving nature of fake news and the difficulty in countering its spread. As misinformation becomes more sophisticated and widespread, efforts to combat it must be adaptive and proactive, focusing on prevention, education, and fact-checking mechanisms. Eventually, fostering trust and cooperation in the international arena requires addressing the underlying issue of misinformation in a comprehensive and collaborative manner.

## Research Contribution

This research makes a valuable contribution to the field of international relations by providing an in-depth examination of the role that misinformation and fake news play in global diplomacy. It adds to the existing literature by highlighting the negative consequences of misinformation on international cooperation, which has often been overlooked or simplified in previous studies. The paper introduces new perspectives on how fake news can undermine diplomatic efforts, obstruct conflict resolution, and distort public attitudes toward international treaties and agreements. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the growing importance of digital platforms in the spread of misinformation, recognizing that traditional approaches to diplomacy may no longer be sufficient in an era dominated by social media and instant communication. This research also offers practical insights into how international organizations, governments, and media entities can work together to mitigate the impact of fake news, including strategies for improving information literacy, creating more effective fact-checking systems, and fostering greater media transparency. By exploring both the theoretical and practical implications of misinformation on international relations, this study solidly provided with a foundation for future research and policy development in the field.

## Research Limitations

While the study offers a comprehensive analysis of the impact of misinformation on international relations, there are several limitations that need to be acknowledged. One key limitation is the reliance on secondary sources of information, such as news articles, reports, and scholarly papers. While these sources provide valuable context and theoretical frameworks, they may not fully capture the real-time and dynamic nature of misinformation in practice. Real-



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time case studies, for instance, could have enriched the findings by providing empirical evidence on how specific instances of fake news have directly affected diplomatic relations. Another limitation is that the study focuses primarily on the theoretical implications of misinformation, with limited exploration of empirical data that could demonstrate the tangible consequences of fake news on global cooperation. This lack of empirical evidence may limit the ability to draw concrete conclusions about the causal relationships between misinformation and international relations.

Importantly, the research has a geographical focus that is somewhat limited, as it primarily draws from examples in Western contexts, which may not be universally applicable to other regions with different political environments and media landscapes. The research did not explore how misinformation is handled in non-Western or emerging economies, and its findings may not be as relevant in these contexts. Future studies could address these limitations by incorporating diverse geographic perspectives, expanding the empirical analysis, and investigating the real-world application of misinformation mitigation strategies. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role fake news plays across different political, social, and cultural settings.

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