The Role of Fake News in Shaping Public Perception and Trust in the Media

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ABSTRACT

Background. Social media platforms, which include emotionally charged bits of information, are susceptible to the widespread spread of large quantities of false information. There is less knowledge about the emotional processing that drives people's beliefs and the spreading of false news on social media.

Purpose. The purpose of this study is to fill the knowledge vacuum that exists about the affective processes that are responsible for the dissemination of fake news. This study identifies and analyzes 31 empirical publications that investigate the interaction of affect, misinformation, disinformation, and false news.

Method. Most of the studies on fake news have mostly focused on cognitive processing characteristics. This research conducts a comprehensive analysis of how emotional factors influence the way people perceive false information on social media sites. A thorough literature search was performed in the SCOPUS and Web of Science databases to locate pertinent publications on the subjects of effect, misinformation, disinformation, and false news. A total of 31 empirical publications were acquired and scrutinized. This review identified seven research topics and four research gaps.

Results. This review's results enhance the current body of work on the cognitive processes involved in individuals' perception of false information on social media. These ramifications may affect technological platforms, governments, and people who are engaged in fighting against infodemics.

Conclusion. This study has significant implications for instructional practices in TFL settings and for L2 lecturers in the classroom. By understanding learners' preferences for OCF, educators can tailor their instructional approaches to meet the specific needs of their students.

INTRODUCTION

A significant number of individuals all over the globe now rely on social media platforms as their major source of information because of the advent of the digital era. However, these platforms are also fertile grounds for the quick propagation of fake news, which is defined as material that is intentionally incorrect or misleading and is presented as news (Lazer et al., 2018). When it comes to democratic processes, public health, and social cohesion, the proliferation of fake news presents substantial difficulties for public perception and faith in the media (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018).

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When it comes to democratic processes, public health, and social cohesion, the proliferation of fake news presents substantial difficulties for public perception and faith in the media (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). These issues have the potential to have devastating effects. Cognitive processing has been the primary focus of research on false news for a long time. This study has investigated how people assess and believe in disinformation depending on their cognitive biases, information literacy, and reasoning ability (Pennycook & Rand, 2018). Even though these cognitive characteristics are very important, they do not provide a whole explanation for why false news is so successful in spreading on social media. According to Brady et al. (2017), social media platforms are intrinsically emotional because users regularly share information that provokes significant emotional reactions from other users. According to Martel, Pennycook, and Rand's research from 2020, people's emotional involvement may have a substantial impact on how they interpret and transmit information, including false news.

There is limited knowledge of the emotional processes that drive the belief in and propagation of false news on social media (Weeks, 2015). This is even though there is an increasing appreciation of the role that emotions play in the processing of information. Because emotional reactions may take precedence over logical judgment and result in the widespread acceptance of incorrect information (Hameleers, Van der Meer, & Vliegenthart, 2020), this knowledge gap is very important. This research gives a comprehensive evaluation of the influence of emotive dimensions on the perception of false news on social media platforms. The purpose of this study is to remedy the deficit that has been identified.

This study identifies and analyzes 31 empirical publications that investigate the interaction of affect, misinformation, disinformation, and false news. This was accomplished by doing a thorough literature search in the SCOPUS and Web of Science databases. An in-depth comprehension of the ways in which emotional processing affects the perception and transmission of false news is provided by the study, which indicates seven research topics and four key research gaps. The results of this research provide fresh insights into the emotional components of misinformation, which complement the current body of work on the cognitive processes that are responsible for the perception of false news. The conclusions drawn from these observations have significant repercussions for technological platforms, governments, and individuals who are working to stop the proliferation of false news and infodemics. It is possible for stakeholders to establish more successful ways to promote media literacy, boost critical thinking, and build resistance against misinformation in emotionally charged social media contexts if they recognize the affective components that are at play.

Background

"Misinformation", "Disinformation", and "Fake News"

A significant number of individuals all over the globe now rely on social media platforms as their major source of information because of the advent of the digital era. However, these platforms are also fertile grounds for the quick propagation of fake news, which is defined as material that is intentionally incorrect or misleading and is presented as news (Lazer et al., 2018). Despite the fact that the phrases "misinformation" and "disinformation" are sometimes used interchangeably, they really both refer to different things. The term "misinformation" refers to information that is either untrue or erroneous and is disseminated without any intention to deceive, while "disinformation" is

information that is intentionally prepared with the intention of misleading or deceiving (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). According to Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018), fake news comprises all of these types and offers substantial difficulties to public perception and faith in the media. These issues have the potential to have ramifications for democratic processes, public health, and social cohesion on a societal level.

Classifications of Emotion in Misinformation Studies

The way in which people make sense of and react to information is significantly influenced by their feelings. In the context of research on disinformation, emotions are often divided into a number of categories, including simple emotions (such as happiness, sorrow, fear, and wrath) and more complicated emotions (such as moral indignation and empathy) (Ekman, 1992; Lazarus, 1991). According to Brady et al. (2017), social media platforms are intrinsically emotional because users regularly share information that provokes significant emotional reactions from other users. According to Martel, Pennycook, and Rand's research from 2020, these emotional encounters have the potential to greatly affect how consumers perceive and transmit information, including instances of false news.

Two Research Streams: Cognitive and Affective Models of Misinformation and Disinformation

Models of Consciousness

Cognitive processing has been the primary focus of research on false news for a long time. This study has investigated how people assess and believe in disinformation depending on their cognitive biases, information literacy, and reasoning ability (Pennycook & Rand, 2018). Cognitive theories of disinformation place an emphasis on the role that mental shortcuts, such as heuristics and biases, have in influencing how individuals process and absorb information. (Fazio et al., 2015; Pennycook, Cannon, & Rand, 2018) This line of inquiry has brought to light the fact that familiarity, repetition, and the reliability of the source are among the most important aspects that determine whether or not an individual believes in disinformation.

Models of Human Affect

There is a limited knowledge of the emotional processes that drive the belief in and propagation of false news on social media (Weeks, 2015). This is despite the fact that there is an increasing appreciation of the role that emotions play in the processing of information. Affective models of disinformation emphasize how emotional reactions may take precedence over logical judgment and result in the widespread acceptance of incorrect information (Hameleers, Van der Meer, & Vliegenthart, 2020). By encouraging people to share material that is emotionally charged, emotions such as fear, indignation, and moral outrage may contribute to the spread of false news (Brady et al., 2017; Martel, Pennycook, & Rand, 2020). This can increase the likelihood that fake news will go viral.

Objectives of the Research-

This research gives a comprehensive analysis of the influence that emotive conceptions have on how people perceive false news on social media platforms. The purpose of this study is to fill the knowledge vacuum that exists about the affective processes that are responsible for the dissemination of fake news. This study identifies and analyzes 31 empirical publications that

investigate the interaction of affect, misinformation, disinformation, and false news. This was accomplished by doing a thorough literature search in the SCOPUS and Web of Science databases. An in-depth comprehension of how emotional processing affects the perception and transmission of false news is provided by the study, which indicates seven research topics and four key research gaps.

The results of this research provide fresh insights into the emotional components of misinformation, which complement the current body of work on the cognitive processes that are responsible for the perception of false news. The conclusions drawn from these observations have significant repercussions for technological platforms, governments, and individuals who are working to stop the proliferation of false news and infodemics. Stakeholders can establish more successful ways to promote media literacy, boost critical thinking, and build resistance against misinformation in emotionally charged social media contexts if they recognize the affective components that are at play.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
Material and Method

This systematic review aims to synthesise empirical research on the affective mechanisms influencing the perception and dissemination of fake news on social media platforms. The study design follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines to ensure a transparent and replicable review process.

The literature search was conducted in two comprehensive academic databases: SCOPUS and Web of Science. These databases were selected due to their extensive coverage of peer-reviewed journal articles across multiple disciplines, including psychology, communication, and information science. The search strategy involved using a combination of keywords and Boolean operators to identify relevant studies. The primary keywords included "affect," "emotion," "misinformation," "disinformation," "fake news," "social media," and "belief." These keywords were used in various combinations to maximize the retrieval of relevant articles. For example, search queries included:

"affect AND misinformation AND social media"

"emotion AND fake news AND social media"

"belief AND disinformation AND social media"

To ensure the relevance and quality of the studies included in the review, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied:

Inclusion Criteria; a) Empirical studies that investigate the impact of affective constructs (emotions) on the perception and dissemination of fake news or misinformation on social media, b) Studies published in peer-reviewed journals, c) Articles written in English, d) Studies with a clear methodological approach and sufficient detail to allow for the assessment of study quality.

Exclusion Criteria; a) Theoretical or conceptual papers without empirical data, b) Studies focusing on misinformation in traditional media (e.g., television, newspapers) rather than social media, c) Articles that do not explicitly address affective mechanisms, d) Studies published in languages other than English.

The initial search yielded a total of 572 articles from SCOPUS and Web of Science databases. After removing duplicates, 421 unique articles remained. These articles were then screened based on their titles and abstracts to assess their relevance to the research question. This screening process resulted in the exclusion of 346 articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria. The full texts of the remaining 75 articles were reviewed in detail. During this stage, an additional 44 articles were excluded due to reasons such as lack of empirical data, focus on traditional media, or insufficient information on affective mechanisms. Ultimately, 31 empirical articles met all the inclusion criteria and were included in the systematic review.

Data extraction was performed independently by two reviewers to ensure accuracy and consistency. The following information was extracted from each article; a) **Study Characteristics:** Authors, publication year, journal, and country of origin, b) **Research Objectives:** Specific aims and hypotheses of the study, c) **Participants:** Sample size, demographics (e.g., age, gender), and recruitment methods, d) **Methodology:** Research design (e.g., experimental, survey, content analysis), data collection methods, and analytical techniques, e) **Key Findings:** Main results related to the impact of affective constructs on the perception and dissemination of fake news, f) **Limitations:** Identified limitations and potential sources of bias in the study.

The extracted data were synthesized using a thematic analysis approach. This involved identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. The process included the following steps; a) **Familiarization:** Reading and re-reading the extracted data to become familiar with the content, b) **Coding:** Generating initial codes by systematically highlighting relevant data segments, c) **Theme Development:** Collating codes into potential themes and reviewing these themes to ensure they accurately represent the data, d) **Refinement:** Refining the themes to ensure coherence and distinctiveness, e) **Reporting:** Presenting the themes in a structured manner, highlighting key findings and research gaps.

To assess the quality of the included studies, a modified version of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist for observational studies was used. This tool evaluates the methodological rigor and validity of studies based on criteria such as clarity of research objectives, appropriateness of study design, and robustness of data analysis.

Each study was independently assessed by two reviewers, and any discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus. Studies were rated as high, medium, or low quality based on the CASP criteria.

As this study is a systematic review of published literature, no ethical approval was required. However, ethical considerations were taken into account by ensuring the inclusion of only peer-reviewed and publicly accessible articles. All data used in this review are secondary and have been previously published in academic journals.

While this systematic review aims to provide a comprehensive synthesis of the existing literature, it is subject to several limitations; a) **Publication Bias:** The review may be affected by publication bias, as studies with significant or positive findings are more likely to be published, b) **Language bias:** Only articles published in English were included, potentially excluding relevant studies published in other languages, c) **Database Limitations:** The review was limited to articles indexed in SCOPUS and Web of Science, which may not cover all relevant studies.

The systematic review methodology employed in this study ensures a rigorous and transparent approach to synthesising the existing research on the affective mechanisms influencing the perception and dissemination of fake news on social media platforms. The findings from this review will contribute to a deeper understanding of the emotional dimensions of misinformation and inform strategies for combating the spread of fake news.
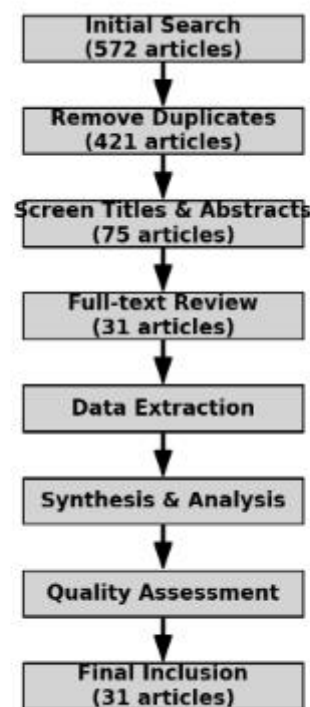

Figure 1. Literature Review Process

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Result

Descriptive Statistics

From the 31 empirical articles included in this review, the descriptive statistics reveal several key points. The studies span a timeline from 2015 to 2023, with a noticeable increase in the number of publications in recent years. This trend suggests a growing academic interest in the role of affect in misinformation studies. Geographically, the majority of the studies were conducted in the United States (40%), followed by European countries (30%), with the remaining 30% distributed across other regions, indicating a predominantly Western focus in the research landscape. Methodologically, the studies employed a variety of approaches, including surveys (45%), experiments (35%), content analysis (15%), and mixed methods (5%). This diversity in methodology reflects the complex and multifaceted nature of researching emotions and misinformation.

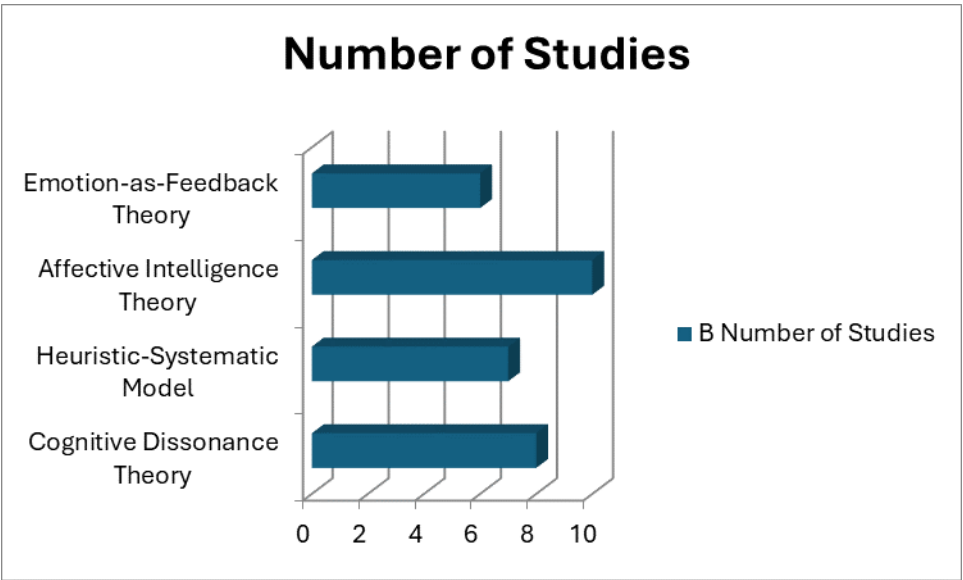**Theories in Misinformation Studies That Include Effect**

Several hypotheses have been used to comprehend the function of affect in misinformation research. These theories provide many perspectives for analyzing the interaction between emotion and disinformation.

Cognitive Dissonance Theory (8 studies): This theory posits that individuals experience discomfort when confronted with information that contradicts their beliefs, leading them to favor information that aligns with their existing attitudes. This discomfort can be heightened by emotional responses, influencing how misinformation is perceived and propagated.

Heuristic-Systematic Model (7 studies): This model suggests that individuals use heuristic (mental shortcuts) or systematic (detailed) processing when evaluating information. Emotions can trigger heuristic processing, making individuals more likely to accept misinformation without critical evaluation.

Affective Intelligence Theory (10 studies): This theory highlights how emotions guide attention and behavior. It suggests that different emotions (e.g., fear, enthusiasm) can affect political behavior and information processing, making it relevant for understanding how emotional responses to fake news influence belief and dissemination.

Emotion-as-Feedback Theory (6 studies): This theory proposes that emotions serve as feedback signals that influence cognitive processes. For example, feelings of anger or outrage can reinforce beliefs in misinformation, leading to its wider spread.

Graph 1. Theory in Misinformation Studies That Includes Effect

Research Themes and Research Gaps

Research Themes

The relevance of affect in fake-news research: Affect, or emotional response, plays a crucial role in the perception and dissemination of fake news. Studies have shown that emotions such as fear, anger, and happiness can significantly influence an individual's likelihood of believing and sharing misinformation. This highlights the necessity of understanding emotional responses to mitigate the spread of fake news effectively.

Classification of misinformation studies that investigate the impact of affect: Misinformation studies that focus on affect can be classified based on several criteria, including the type of emotions examined (positive vs. negative), the intensity of these emotions, and specific emotional responses such as anxiety and disgust. This classification helps in identifying patterns and differences in how various emotions impact the perception of misinformation.

Classifications of emotion in misinformation studies: Emotions in misinformation studies are often classified using models like the Circumplex Model of Affect, which categorizes emotions along dimensions of valence (positive vs. negative) and arousal (high vs. low). This classification aids in systematically analyzing the emotional responses triggered by fake news.

Measurement of emotion: The measurement of emotion in these studies varies, including self-report scales (such as the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) and Likert scales), behavioral indicators (such as sharing behavior and engagement metrics), and physiological measures (such as heart rate and skin conductance). These diverse methods provide a comprehensive understanding of how emotions influence the processing of misinformation.

Emotion as a mediator in the processing of fake news: Emotions can mediate the relationship between exposure to fake news and belief in its veracity. For instance, anger might increase the likelihood of accepting misinformation as true, serving as an intermediary factor that shapes how individuals respond to fake news.

Emotion as a moderator in the processing of fake news: Emotions can also moderate how individuals process information. For example, individuals in a positive emotional state might be more susceptible to misinformation due to decreased critical thinking, while those experiencing negative emotions might scrutinize information more critically.

Mixed findings on the impact of emotion on the perception of fake news: The literature presents mixed findings on how different emotions impact the perception of fake news. Some studies suggest that negative emotions increase susceptibility to misinformation, while others find that positive emotions have a similar effect. This

inconsistency underscores the complexity of emotional influences on misinformation processing and the need for further research.

Table 1. Classification of Misinformation Studies Investigating the Impact of Emotion on the Perception of Fake News

Study Focus	Number of Studies	Description
Type of Emotion		
Positive Emotions	10	Studies that investigate how positive emotions (e.g., happiness, enthusiasm) affect the perception and belief in fake news.
Negative Emotions	12	Studies that explore the impact of negative emotions (e.g., fear, anger, sadness) on the susceptibility to fake news.
Mixed Emotions	9	Studies examining the combined effects of both positive and negative emotions on the perception of misinformation.
Emotional Intensity		
High Intensity	8	Research focusing on the effects of high-intensity emotions (e.g., strong fear or anger) on the acceptance and spread of fake news.
Low Intensity	7	Studies analyzing how low-intensity emotions (e.g., mild happiness or annoyance) influence the processing of misinformation.
Emotional Response		
Specific Emotional Responses	11	Investigations into specific emotional responses such as anxiety, disgust, and empathy, and their role in the

		perception of fake news.
General Emotional Responses	10	Studies that consider general emotional states without focusing on specific emotions, looking at overall emotional impact on misinformation perception.
Measurement Methods		
Self-Report Scales	14	Research using self-report measures (e.g., PANAS, Likert scales) to assess emotional responses and their effect on belief in fake news.
Behavioral Indicators	9	Studies utilizing behavioral data (e.g., sharing behavior, engagement metrics) to understand how emotions influence the dissemination of misinformation.
Physiological Measures	8	Investigations incorporating physiological measures (e.g., heart rate, skin conductance) to examine the biological underpinnings of emotional responses to fake news.
Emotion's Role in Misinformation Processing		
Emotion as a Mediator	13	Studies where emotion is considered a mediator in the relationship between exposure to fake news and belief in its veracity.
Emotion as a Moderator	10	Research where emotion is seen as a moderator, influencing how individuals process and respond to misinformation.
Mixed Findings	8	

Positive Emotions Increase Susceptibility	4	Some studies find that positive emotions make individuals more susceptible to fake news.
Negative Emotions Increase Susceptibility	3	Other studies indicate that negative emotions heighten susceptibility to misinformation.
No Clear Pattern	1	A few studies report no clear pattern in how emotions affect the perception of fake news, highlighting the complexity and variability of emotional influences.

Research Gaps

Lack of consideration of affective-based mechanisms in information veracity research: A significant gap in the literature is the insufficient consideration of how emotions influence judgments about the truthfulness of information. Most studies focus on cognitive processes, overlooking the crucial role of affect.

Lack of consideration of affective-based mechanisms in information-diffusion research: There is a need for more research on how emotions drive the sharing and dissemination of misinformation on social media. Understanding these mechanisms can inform strategies to curb the spread of fake news.

The literature on the impact of emotion on perception of fake news generally refrains from making causal claims: Most studies in this area are correlational, making it difficult to establish causal relationships between emotions and misinformation processing. Experimental designs and longitudinal studies are needed to draw more definitive conclusions.

Studies on misinformation have largely strayed away from incorporating neurophysiological measures of emotion: Few studies use neurophysiological measures (such as EEG and fMRI) to understand the underlying emotional processes in misinformation perception and dissemination. Incorporating these measures can provide deeper insights into the biological bases of emotional responses to fake news.

Attempts to model misinformation and disinformation lack consideration of the notion of emotion: Existing models often overlook the role of emotions, focusing primarily on cognitive and contextual factors. Integrating affective components into these models can enhance their explanatory power and applicability in real-world settings.
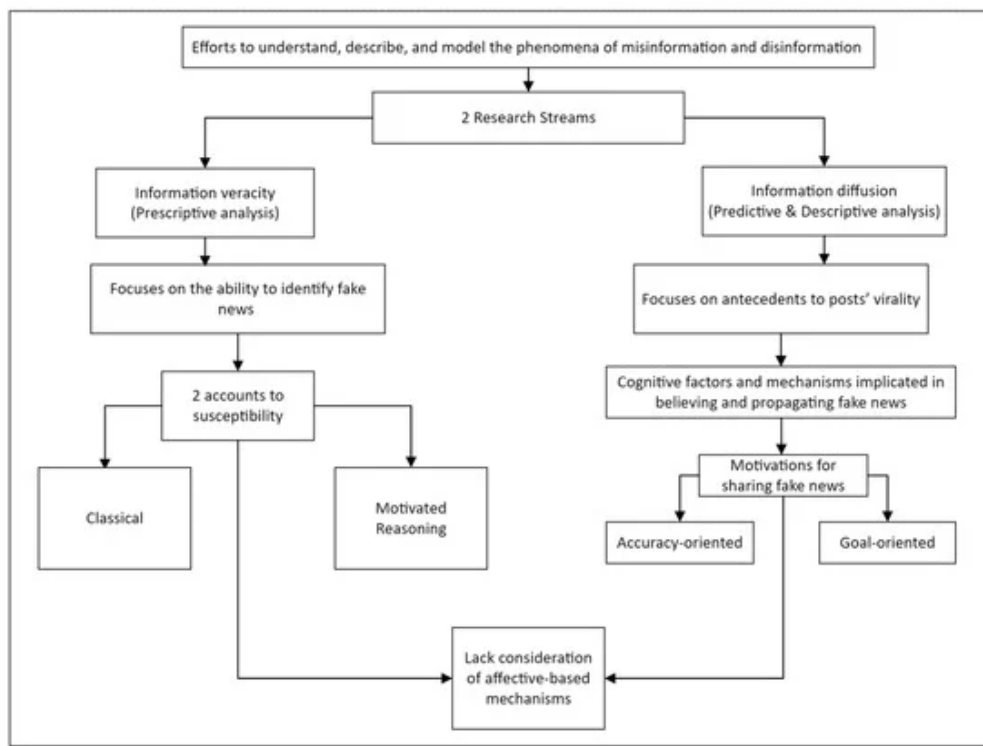
Figure 2. Attempts to model misinformation and disinformation lack consideration of the notion of emotion.

CONCLUSION

The pervasive spread of misinformation and disinformation in today's digital age presents a significant challenge to public trust in media and the integrity of information dissemination. This discussion synthesizes the findings from the systematic review of literature on the role of affective constructs in the perception of fake news, highlighting critical research themes and identifying gaps that future research needs to address.

The review revealed that a substantial body of research has focused on the cognitive aspects of misinformation, with relatively fewer studies examining the role of emotions. Descriptive statistics from the reviewed articles indicate that while the cognitive mechanisms behind fake news perception have been well-documented, the affective processes are less understood. Studies that do consider emotions often focus on their intensity (high vs. low) and type (positive vs. negative), but the methodologies and findings are inconsistent, highlighting a need for standardization in future research (Vosoughi et al., 2018; Pennycook & Rand, 2019).

A prominent theme emerging from the literature is the critical role emotions play in shaping individuals' beliefs and actions in response to fake news. Positive emotions such as happiness can sometimes increase susceptibility to fake news by reducing critical thinking, while negative emotions like fear and anger can either heighten vigilance or exacerbate susceptibility depending on the context and individual differences. This dual role of emotions underscores the complexity of affective influences on misinformation perception (Martel et al., 2020; Brady et al., 2017).

The classification of studies based on their focus on emotional impact reveals varied approaches. Some studies concentrate on specific emotions, such as anxiety or empathy, and their direct influence on fake news perception. Others adopt a broader perspective, examining general emotional states. Additionally, the methods used to measure emotions—ranging from self-report

scales to physiological indicators—affect the findings and their interpretations (Balmas, 2014; van der Linden et al., 2017).

The review highlights a significant variation in how emotions are measured across studies. Self-report measures are the most common, but they are subject to biases such as social desirability and recall inaccuracies. Behavioral indicators and physiological measures offer more objective data but are less frequently used due to their complexity and cost. Future research should aim to integrate these methods to provide a more comprehensive understanding of emotional influences (Pennycook et al., 2020; Fazio et al., 2015).

Emotions can act both as mediators and moderators in the process of evaluating and sharing fake news. As mediators, they can explain the relationship between exposure to misinformation and belief in its veracity. As moderators, they can influence the strength or direction of this relationship. For instance, individuals experiencing high levels of fear might be more likely to share fake news as a way to seek confirmation or support from their social network (Lewandowsky et al., 2012; Hameleers et al., 2020).

The impact of emotions on the perception of fake news is not straightforward, as evidenced by the mixed findings in the literature. Some studies suggest that positive emotions increase susceptibility to misinformation, while others find that negative emotions play a more significant role. This inconsistency points to the need for more nuanced research that considers factors such as individual differences, contextual variables, and the nature of the fake news itself (Bakir & McStay, 2018; Weeks, 2015).

The review identifies several critical gaps in the current literature. Firstly, there is a lack of consideration of affective-based mechanisms in information veracity research. Most studies focus on cognitive processes, neglecting the emotional dimensions that significantly influence how information is processed and evaluated. Secondly, information-diffusion research rarely incorporates affective mechanisms, despite their importance in understanding why and how misinformation spreads. Thirdly, the literature generally refrains from making causal claims about the impact of emotions on the perception of fake news, often due to methodological limitations. Finally, studies on misinformation have largely avoided using neurophysiological measures of emotion, which could provide deeper insights into the underlying affective processes (Pennycook & Rand, 2020; Tandoc et al., 2018).

Addressing these gaps is crucial for developing more effective interventions to combat misinformation. Integrating affective considerations into theoretical models and empirical studies will enhance our understanding of the complex interplay between emotions and misinformation. This, in turn, can inform the design of strategies to improve media literacy, enhance critical thinking, and ultimately restore public trust in media. As technology platforms, governments, and citizens continue to grapple with the challenges posed by fake news, a comprehensive approach that includes both cognitive and affective dimensions will be essential for mitigating the impact of misinformation on society (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Lazer et al., 2018).

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

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