

False News Sharing Behavior on Social Media: A Systematic Review of User-Centered Perspectives

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Abstract

The rapid development of social media has accelerated the spread of false information, which threatens public trust, democratic processes, and social stability. This research aims to systematically review existing studies on false news sharing behavior from the user perspective and identify the essential factors and pathways.

This review, based on the PRISMA standards, examined 86 studies published from 2015 to 2025 in Web of Science, Scopus, and CNKI databases. According to the research themes, false news sharing behavior can be divided into four dimensions: user traits, psychological motivations, intervention methods, and user roles in governance.

This review found that personal traits, such as high extraversion and low conscientiousness, and motivations, including information-seeking, social utility, fear of missing out, and emotional regulation, are critical factors in false news sharing. Although some studies suggest that technology-based interventions, such as accuracy prompts and warning signs, have limited effectiveness, user-centric and multi-level interventions are more likely to produce sustainable results.

This review proposes an integrated three-dimensional framework for analyzing false news sharing behavior, which links user traits, motivations, and intervention methods. It also emphasizes the necessity of cross-cultural studies, longitudinal research, and multivariate interaction models. By focusing on the user role in the chain of false information dissemination, this research offers new perspectives on the development of governance policies.

Keywords: misinformation; social media, user characteristics, personality traits, human behavior, intervention strategies

1. Introduction

Social media sites have significantly emerged as the modern sources of information exchange and changed the ways in which people socially interact and acquire news. According to the latest available data in 2025, Kemp (2025) identified approximately 5.4 billion social media users globally, which makes for 65% of the global population. On the other hand, the spread of false information has emerged as a major problem in many countries in the world. Fictitious information usually takes the same form as real news, with titles and designs that make it more effective in society (Baptista & Gradim, 2020). It has been established that some people spread false information in society despite their awareness that the information is false (Littrell et al., 2023).

The spread of false information in society has significantly damaged the social environment and intensified social conflict by potentially eroding the public's democracy of information acquisition. Lazer et al. (2018) and Vosoughi et al. (2018) note that it reduces public trust in political institutions and operational frameworks, thereby creating polarization, creating a lack of trust in journalism, and encouraging meaning interpretation based on unverified and false information. Naturally, these approaches undermine the voting abilities of the public by highlighting their lack of ability to distinguish between accurate and false political claims, due to the increased spread of misinformation as compared to verified facts (Alivi et al., 2018). As a result, these information-sharing approaches increase the misleading narratives, thereby compromising transparency in democratic debates.

This algorithm-recommended system on social media has further intensified the 'information cocoon' issue, as users are likely to be exposed only to information that aligns with their existing views. This issue, also known as the echo chamber effect, is defined as "a state wherein people are consistently exposed to monolithic opinions, while opposing views are suppressed and eliminated from their 'information cocoon'" (Lazer et al., 2018). This, in turn, can strengthen the circulation of false information (Melchior & Oliveira, 2024).

Although there has been substantial research on the characteristics of false information content and the methods used in the identification of false information in recent years, the literature remains theoretically scattered, demanding an integrated approach. While the previous studies have identified themes of motivation, personality traits, media literacy, and intervention strategies, the literature displays incoherence in developing a framework. There remains a gap in the observation of who shares false information, why they do so, and which interventions are most effective under different user conditions, and this review synthesizes the identified 86 studies into an integrated user-centered framework.

To that end, this study does not address these questions individually, but rather through the intersectional correlation of the user traits, intervention strategies, user motivation, and role in governance. It constructs a multidimensional interpretation of the behavior influencing fake news and disinformation sharing. Additionally, it is imperative to clarify that this research, based on the study of the identified sources, uses the terms ‘fake news’ and ‘false news’ interchangeably. Furthermore, for the sake of conducting this review, the idea of false news or fake news is not limited to conventional news pieces. It includes social media posts, AI-generated photographs and video content, opinion pieces, and any fabricated content intended to inform the readers about social and political affairs, and which can be presented and interpreted as facts.

Thus, the research gap in this area has led this review to focus on the following research questions:

RQ1: What kind of personality traits are more likely to spread false information among social media users?

RQ2: What kind of psychological motivations make social media users more likely to share false information?

RQ3: What kind of intervention strategies can effectively stop social media users from spreading false information?

RQ4: What role can social media users play in curbing the spread of false information?

Accordingly, RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3 are not restricted to users who knowingly spread false information. The questions also include users who share inaccurate content unintentionally, impulsively, carelessly, or in the hope of obtaining confirmation from others. In some cases, users may circulate questionable information precisely because they are uncertain about its truthfulness and seek a second opinion from friends or followers.

To sum up, the research results in the field of fake news and the sharing behavior of false information have already reached a rich accumulation in terms of the field of conceptual definition, research objects, analysis level, and research methods. Nevertheless, in general, the existing literature is still in a scattered state, and the theoretical perspectives are diversified but not integrated. The above research questions are put forward based on the comprehensive analysis of the developmental process and practice in this field. The purpose is to clarify the background and core issues concerning the research field of fake news sharing from a macro perspective and to separate the inherent links among different research directions. Based on this, this paper systematically integrates the existing literature and presents the research progress in the field of social media users’ fake news sharing behavior in a structured way.

2. Literature Review

Existing literature related to the sharing of false news can be organized around the three central research questions of who, why, and how about the spread of false information and the measures to prevent it. The question of who shares this false news relates to the demographic traits and personal characteristics of the participants. This leads to the second question, identifying the reason why they share it, and relating it to the factors of social motivation and psychological traits. Then, the third question is about the mechanism for sharing such content and the intervention that can help to mitigate the issue. This review examined these strands as groundwork for claiming the need for a more integrated approach.

The research path of fake news and its sharing behavior

The early research on fake news mainly focused on conceptual clarification and content recognition, especially in terms of differentiating it from other related concepts. However, with the internationalization of the fake news issue, the research on its sharing behavior has gradually increased.

In the first period, researchers mainly focused on the detection of fake news using various techniques, such as natural language processing and image verification, as well as fact-checking systems. However, with the occurrence of major political and medical incidents, researchers gradually shifted their attention from detecting fake news to its sharing behavior as a major driver of the diffusion of misinformation (Lazer et al., 2018). This shift marked the beginning of a more user-oriented research path, emphasizing psychological, social, and contextual factors in fake news sharing. After the 2016 US presidential election, the academic community generally accepted that users’ sharing behavior is at the core of the spread of false information. A series of interdisciplinary research paths centered around user characteristics, psychological motives, and social environments has emerged (Lazer et al., 2018). Therefore, it has been determined that using only technological means to intercept false information is far from sufficient.

Currently, there are three main research directions among the academic community. The first kind is the behavior

prediction path; at this level, individuals are selected as the basic units, and the causes that lead to the spread of false information are explored through questionnaires, experiments, and social media data analysis (Pennycook et al., 2021; Littrell et al., 2023). The second type is the network diffusion route; Using model establishment, simulation, or big data visualization methods to study how false information diffuses across the platform (Vosoughi et al., 2018). The third way is the path of situational awareness, that is, to examine how the effects of particular social, cultural, and platform factors on users' behavior (Lazer et al., 2018). Among these, the first path has conducted an in-depth study on variables such as users' characteristics, motivation, and cognitive bias, and formed the core research focus of this review.

Multidisciplinary Perspectives and Models

To study the reasons for the wide diffusion of false information, scholars have used many theoretical frameworks and research tools to analyze this problem in earlier works. Firstly, from the perspective of personality psychology, using the Big Five personality traits theory and other theories, stable personality traits of users are linked to their tendency to share (Osatuyi & Dennis, 2025). For example, the Big Five personality model divides personality into five dimensions: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness. Based on this framework, researchers explored the relationship between different personality dimensions and the spread of false information. Secondly, communication studies and motivation theory provide an analytical perspective for understanding sharing behavior: the use and satisfaction theory emphasizes the subjectivity of users, believing that individuals use social media for entertainment, socializing, information seeking, or self presentation purposes, and these motivations may further drive the sharing of fake news (Sampat & Raj, 2022; Munusamy et al., 2024).

Similarly, self-determination theory focuses on how users satisfy their three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and belonging through sharing behavior, and then project identity and self-worth into sharing behavior (Klein, 2019). These theoretical perspectives suggest that users often share false content to meet specific psychological needs, such as seeking recognition or expressing themselves. In addition, in terms of information diffusion modelling, some studies have drawn on epidemiological models, such as the Susceptible–Infectious–Recovered (SIR) model, which conceptualizes information diffusion in a manner analogous to epidemic spread, as well as network dissemination models to simulate the spread of fake news as an infection process (Zollo & Quattrociochi, 2018). This type of model categorizes users as susceptible, infected, and recovered and aims to quantify the dynamics of the spread of false information on social networks and its speed and scope on a macro scale. Alivi (2023) applied Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS SEM) to verify the user motivation model in cross-cultural contexts, helping policy makers develop more accurate intervention strategies.

Finally, in terms of the methods applied in the relevant studies, it is found that they involve massive data analysis and simulation methods such as social media log data analysis, social network analysis, simulation modeling, etc., as well as questionnaire surveys and experiments. However, it should be noted that users' self-reported behavior may differ from their actual behavior (Lawson & Kakkar, 2022). Nevertheless, it is found that the application of interdisciplinary theories and models allows existing research to successfully reveal the causes of fake news sharing behavior from different angles. However, it is also found that different research paths are applied in different studies, and there is still a lack of a unified framework that could integrate the three key issues of “who is sharing, why sharing, and how to share.”

3. Research Method

The research methods in this field are showing a trend of diversification. Large-scale data analysis, such as social media log analysis and social network analysis, can help reveal communication patterns at a macro level. At the same time, questionnaire surveys and experimental methods are commonly used to investigate users' willingness to share and the relationships with personality, motivation, etc. (Lawson & Kakkar, 2022). However, the latter method relies on self-reported data and might not align with real-life behavior. It should be noted that most studies are based on cross-sectional studies, lack longitudinal data, and have mainly been conducted in Western countries, which, to some extent, limits the research conclusions. That is, there are some limitations in terms of the research design and generalizability of research conclusions (Chen, 2021; Lawson & Kakkar, 2022).

To ensure the comprehensiveness of the research, this review employs the systematic literature review method, and the research process is carried out in accordance with the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) 2020 standards for systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021). The approach provides a framework for the identification, screening, selection, and reporting of the relevant studies. Figure 1 below shows the entire literature search, screening, and selection process. This research systematically searched the literature published between 2015 and 2025 from three authoritative academic databases, namely Web of Science, Scopus, and CNKI. The search terms used must include the main words ‘social media fake news sharing’ or ‘fake news sharing’, and at least one of the words ‘personality’, ‘motivation’, and ‘intervention’.

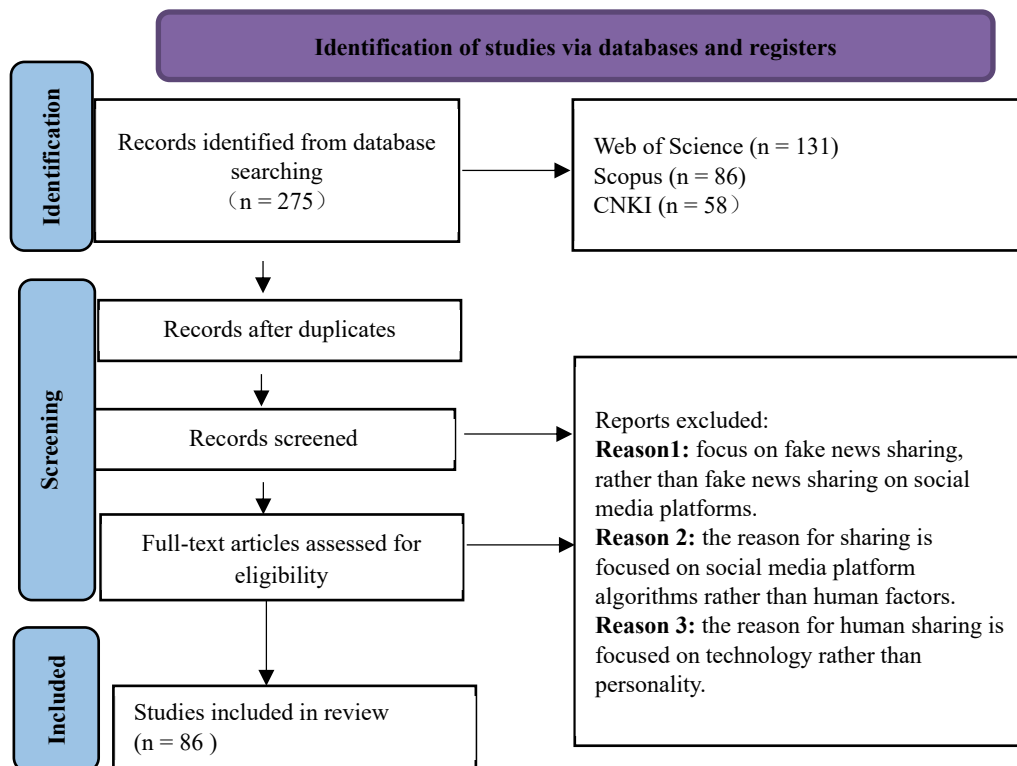


Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Systematic Review Search Procedures

The preliminary results of the search process for articles in the three databases are as follows: there are 131 articles in the Web of Science database, 86 articles in the Scopus database, and 58 articles in the CNKI database. After removing duplicate articles (141 articles), there are 134 articles remaining for title and abstract screening. After this stage, 30 articles were excluded because they did not meet the predefined inclusion criteria. Then, the full-text articles of the remaining 104 articles were screened for inclusion. Finally, 18 articles were excluded because they did not sufficiently focus on individual user factors or exclusively focus on algorithmic or technical explanations. In the end, 86 articles met the predefined inclusion criteria for this systematic review.

Articles were excluded if they exclusively focus on the sharing of fake news in general without mentioning social media platforms as a medium for sharing fake news. Articles were also excluded if they exclusively focus on algorithmic mechanisms for understanding the sharing of fake news without focusing on individual user factors. They were excluded if they exclusively focus on understanding the sharing of fake news from a technical perspective without focusing on personality traits or motivational dimensions of individuals. The included literature includes quantitative research (questionnaire surveys, experiments, analysis of behavioral data), qualitative research (interviews, content analysis), as well as systematic reviews and meta-analyses to ensure the academic reliability and representativeness of this study.

Based on a systematic review and analysis of the 86 studies mentioned above, this study has determined the main dimensions affecting the behavior of social media users in disseminating false information and provided an overview for subsequent research. Based on this literature, the following sections of this article will first classify and integrate the key research results into thematic categories. Then, a comprehensive discussion will be conducted around the four aspects of user traits, psychological motivation, intervention strategy, and user role, and their inherent connections will be analyzed. Finally, a user-centered conceptual framework will be constructed to systematically explain the internal mechanism of fake news sharing behavior.

4. Discussion

Key Findings and Thematic Classification of the Literature Review

Based on the review of relevant literature from 2015 to 2025, this article divides the research on fake news sharing into four core thematic dimensions, and summarizes key research findings accordingly: (1) user trait factors (including personality dimensions, demographic variables, media literacy, etc.); (2) Psychological motivational factors (such as fear of missing out, self-presentation, social needs, emotional regulation, political stance, etc.); (3) Intervention strategies (such as accuracy prompts, cognitive vaccination, interface design optimization to limit transmission, etc.); (4) User roles

and subjectivity (users play roles such as gatekeepers, correctors, educators, etc. in the information dissemination chain). The above classification helps to build a comprehensive understanding of the behavior of sharing fake news.

As shown in Table 1, existing research mostly focuses on a single dimension, and there are few comprehensive studies that integrate multiple levels. This indicates that current literature mostly examines the spread of false information from an isolated perspective and has not yet formed a mature unified framework to integrate the three major issues of ‘who is sharing, why sharing, and how to intervene’. This fragmented state is also reflected in the review results: there is relatively little cross-disciplinary research between the four major themes, indicating that research that can systematically integrate user traits, motivations, and governance measures is still relatively scarce. Based on this classification, the subsequent sections will elaborate on each dimension in detail and construct a user-centered analysis framework on this basis.

It is important to note that the studies reviewed do not all examine the same type of false news. Some focus on deliberately fabricated political misinformation, while others analyze rumors, unverified health claims, misleading visual content, or entertainment-oriented misinformation. These categories differ in seriousness, intentionality, and social consequences. Consequently, the motivations for sharing and the effectiveness of intervention strategies may vary according to the specific type of false news involved.

Table 1. Research literature on false news sharing in the classification dimension

Research literature on false news sharing in the classification dimension			
Classification Dimension	Quantity	Feature Description	References
Personality traits and user characteristics	15	Individual's relatively stable psychological traits (such as Big Five personality traits), demographic attributes (age, education, political orientation), media literacy, and usage habits	(Ahmed & Rasul, 2022); (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017); (Castioni et al., 2022); (Calvillo et al., 2024); (Golkar & Kaedi, 2015); (Lawson & Kakkar, 2022); (Li et al., 2022); (Lin et al., 2024); (Osatuyi & Dennis, 2025); (Rozgonjuk et al., 2019); (Sultan et al., 2024); (Zhou et al., 2018); (Littrell et al., 2023); (Sampat & Raj, 2022); (Osmundsen et al., 2021)
Sharing Motivation	20	Psychological and social motivations, including confirmation bias, social needs, fear of missing out (FOMO), entertainment, emotional regulation, altruistic motivation, self-presentation, etc	(Abu Hassan Shaari et al., 2025); (Apuke & Omar, 2021); (Balakrishnan et al., 2021); (Talwar et al., 2019); (Colliander, 2019); (Chen & He, 2023); (Munusamy et al., 2024); (Melchior & Oliveira, 2024); (Osmundsen et al., 2021); (Lawson et al., 2023); (Lazer et al., 2018); (Littrell et al., 2023); (Vosoughi et al., 2018); (Wu et al., 2025); (Sampat & Raj, 2022); (Klein, 2019); (Baptista & Gradim, 2020); (Schoenmueller et al., 2025); (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017); (Zollo & Quattrociocchi, 2018)
Intervention policies and governance measures	28	Platform governance, fact checking, cognitive warning, prompt labeling, user error correction, legal regulations, and cross-platform cooperation mechanisms	(Badrinathan & Chauchard, 2024); (Basol et al., 2020); (Bieliková et al., 2025); (Celadin et al., 2023); (Chen, 2021); (Eccles & Dingler, 2021); (Feng, 2024); (França & Camarão, 2022); (Garcia-Pueyo et al., 2022); (He et al., 2024); (Kaushik, 2024); (Lewandowsky & Van Der Linden, 2021); (Lees et al., 2022); (Lo et al., 2021); (Martel & Rand, 2023); (Martel & Rand, 2024); (Melchior & Oliveira, 2024); (Mena, 2020); (Pennycook et al., 2021); (Purificato et al., 2022); (Roozenbeek & Van Der Linden, 2019); (Siron, 2022); (Stoeckel et al., 2024); (Tang et al., 2024); (Verstraete et al., 2022); (Zollo & Quattrociocchi, 2018); (Lawson et al., 2023); (Ru, 2019)

User Trait Factors: Who Is More Likely to Share Fake News?

Personality traits and demographic characteristics are important foundational factors that influence users' tendency to spread false information. A large number of studies have used the Big Five personality model to explore the relationship between personality and sharing behavior, and the results show that some traits have significant predictive power. There is a significant positive correlation between extraversion and the tendency to share fake news: individuals with high extraversion are more active on social media and tend to widely share content, even if the information has not been verified (Zhou et al., 2018).

Its strong social participation and a certain degree of impulsivity make it easier for it to quickly spread information driven by social motivation (Sampat & Raj, 2022). Individuals with high conscientiousness are generally more careful and thorough, and they will check the information before releasing it; therefore, they have a low probability of spreading

rumors (Lawson & Kakkar, 2022). The relationship between agreeableness and sharing behavior is more complicated; people who are highly agreeable generally have empathy, emotional stability, are willing to create content, and also pay more attention to verify the truthfulness of information, so they are less likely to spread false information (Sampat & Raj, 2022).

However, in some special cases, people with a higher degree of agreeableness may also avoid directly challenging false information in public to preserve interpersonal relationships, indicating that the impact of agreeableness is context-dependent. The mechanism of neuroticism (emotional instability) is more complicated: In the face of crises such as epidemics, people who are highly anxious may alleviate their stress by spreading unverified information (Ahmed & Rasul, 2022). However, some studies have not found a significant correlation between neuroticism and rumor spreading in daily life; thus, it is concluded that this effect is situation-dependent. The relationship between experiential openness and the dissemination of false information is unclear; due to a lack of direct evidence, existing research on whether those who are open in experience are more likely to identify rumors or novel things as true has not reached a consensus (Lin et al., 2024). Besides personal factors, numerous research works have also indicated that apart from these, factors such as differences in age groups, gender differences, and differences in knowledge structures and skill levels at various stages could also have a considerable influence on these findings. For example, age and educational background affect the media literacy and risk awareness of the users, and older people and those who are not technology-savvy tend to believe and spread more rumors (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Mena, 2020).

As mentioned earlier, political stance and ideological inclination are both essential factors, and partisanship can lead people to be less suspicious of false information (Osmundsen et al., 2021). In addition, users with higher media literacy and cognitive reflection tend to doubt sensational or exaggerated content, thus lowering the likelihood of unintentional spread (Ahmed & Rasul, 2022; Pennycook et al., 2021).

It should be pointed out that the effect of these traits may differ from country to country and culture to culture, and at present, there is no cross-cultural evidence (Chen, 2021). In general, users' personal traits - that is, both innate personality factors and acquired abilities and qualities - are at the core of their tendency to share false information. That is to say, we need to apply different strategies in formulating interventions under various characteristic conditions of users.

Psychological Motivation Factors: Why Share Fake News?

Based on the above analysis, this paper explores various psychological reasons that prompt users to release false information, and each has distinct inner needs and external backgrounds. Firstly, as described above, confirmatory bias may lead users to share information that aligns with their preconceived notions, thereby strengthening their cognitive structure (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017); Secondly. In particular, in the political context, it is more likely that rumors will be widely disseminated among homogeneous groups due to this type of motivation. Secondly, social belonging and the psychology of conformity will drive users to spread hot topics within the community to integrate into the group and gain recognition (Apuke & Omar, 2021). If false information pervades social circles or group chats, people may find it difficult to remain unshaken or behave indifferently out of concern that they will be socially ostracized if they do not conform to the trend. (Talwar et al., 2019). This type of sharing, driven by group dynamics, sometimes exceeds the focus on content authenticity. In addition, users satisfy their social needs and personal satisfaction through online news consumption, which may indirectly drive the sharing of fake news (Alivi et al., 2021).

Thirdly, self-presentation and identity management are important driving factors. Some users express their personal values, knowledge level, or sense of humor through sharing information to meet their needs for self-esteem and self-efficacy (Munusamy et al., 2024). For example, being the first to share information during an epidemic or public event can make one appear well-informed or socially responsible. However, self-presentation motivation can lead to hasty sharing (ignoring verification to gain attention) or cautious behavior (cautiously forwarding to avoid embarrassment), depending on an individual's self-positioning and social reputation concerns (Chen & He, 2023). Fourthly, emotional regulation and entertainment needs are also related to the sharing of fake news. When rumors trigger strong emotions such as anger and fear, users often use forwarding to vent their emotions, seek resonance and support (Lazer et al., 2018). Many shares of fake news are not based on fact-checking, but are driven by entertainment needs.

A large amount of false information deliberately caters to such emotional needs, leading users to lower their judgment threshold and forward content when their emotions are high. At the same time, some users share absurd and exaggerated false information for fun, treating it as a joke or topic of discussion (Balakrishnan et al., 2021). In such cases, under the impetus of entertainment motives, the truthfulness of the information yields to fun. However, in severe cases such as large-scale disasters, the impact of the desire for amusement may decrease. For example, users may casually share an unverified humorous quotation or celebrity meme for entertainment, while they are likely to apply stricter standards when encountering claims about war, elections, or public health emergencies. Thus, the context and perceived seriousness of the issue strongly influence the extent to which entertainment motives affect false news sharing.

Finally, there is altruistic motivation that deserves attention; the genuine wish to help others is the primary reason why many people spread unverified information, particularly in the health and safety domain (such as sharing folk remedies or warnings) (Apuke & Omar, 2021). The occurrence and degree of such benevolent sharing may differ among cultures, and research has shown that in societies with stronger collectivist tendencies, people are more inclined to share out of care for others (Balakrishnan et al., 2021).

In summary, users' psychological motivations are interwoven and include cognitive biases, social needs, emotional factors, and consideration of both self and others, all of which promote the spread of fake news. It should be noted that these motivations do not act independently; that is, the same user may be motivated by several factors at once (for example, wanting to help others and fear of missing out), and the strength of different motivations can change according to the particular circumstances. Therefore, understanding the spread of fake news requires an integrated perspective that incorporates multiple psychological driving factors into a unified framework for analysis.

Intervention Strategies: How to Curb the Sharing of Fake News?

Regarding the behavior of sharing fake news, academia and industry have proposed and tested multidimensional intervention strategies, covering multiple levels such as technology, education, and institutions. Platform-based technological interventions have different focuses: accuracy prompts and delayed sharing mechanisms aim to reduce impulsive sharing by guiding users to reflect (Pennycook et al., 2021; Lees et al., 2022); Cognitive vaccination and gamification training aim to enhance users' immunity to rumors in advance (Roozenbeek & Van der Linden, 2019); Fact checking and content annotation are post correction measures (Martel & Rand, 2024). Overall, the effectiveness of platform intervention has been supported by a large amount of experimental evidence, but there are still limitations.

For example, annotation strategies may have unexpected side effects, such as "hidden truth effects" (unannotated content is assumed to be true), or weakened effects due to users' distrust of the platform (Martel & Rand, 2023). Therefore, scholars emphasize that technological intervention must be combined with user education to form a closed-loop system. User education and media literacy improvement are more fundamental and long-term strategies. Governments, educational institutions, and platforms are gradually conducting digital literacy training to cultivate critical thinking and information verification habits among the public (Lewandowski & Van Der Linden, 2021). For example, adding media identification courses to school curricula, organizing public welfare lectures, and incorporating immersive simulation-based interventions, such as educational misinformation games, can allow users to experience the process of creating and disseminating false information, thereby enhancing their vigilance. The enhancement of the general public's media literacy can help reduce the likelihood that users will be deceived and spread false information, and also promote the formation of a social custom of 'verify first, then share'.

At the policy and regulatory level, governments around the world are also exploring legislative and institutional solutions to address the problem of online rumors (Kaushik, 2024). Specific policy options include: it is necessary to clarify that social platforms have the duty of deleting false information and banning false accounts. Formulate punishment regulations to crack down on malicious rumor spreaders. Build a cross-platform information-sharing and collaborative mechanism to deal with major false information incidents (França & Camarão, 2022). It is important to achieve a balance in legal regulation between curbing rumors and protecting freedom of speech, and to prevent over-regulation that may impede the normal flow of legitimate information (Verstraete et al., 2022).

The studies reviewed also reflect important national differences in regulatory environments. For example, the intervention studies by Pennycook et al. (2021) and Martel and Rand (2023) are primarily based on the observations from the United States, while França and Camarão (2022) examine Brazilian and international legal approaches, and Badrinathan and Chauchard (2024) focus on India. European studies, such as those by Verstraete et al. (2022) and Stoeckel et al. (2024) reflect legal frameworks shaped by stronger platform regulation and data protection requirements. These differences suggest that intervention strategies cannot be assumed to work uniformly across countries.

In general, the current intervention strategies have shifted to a multi-dimensional framework that encompasses the link between platforms and users, technology and education, and finally, industry self-regulation and external regulation. According to experimental evidence, the effectiveness of technological interventions, such as accuracy prompts and warning labels, has been shown to reduce users' intentions to share information in the short term (Pennycook et al., 2021; Martel & Rand, 2024). However, their effectiveness may be short-lived, especially in the long term or in relation to political and ideological groups (Martel & Rand, 2023). On the other hand, educational and media literacy interventions are considered to be more effective in the long term, given that the aim is to improve users' critical thinking and ability to resist misinformation (Lewandowsky & Van Der Linden, 2021). However, this may take a longer time to be effective, depending on the engagement levels of the users. According to the literature, there is a need to adopt a multi-strategy approach that incorporates both technological and educational interventions, especially in relation to diverse users.

User Agency and Role Differentiation in the Fake News Dissemination Chain

Social media users are not passive targets for governance; they are also active participants in the governance of fake news. In this review, emphasis is placed on the fundamental position of the "human" factor in the communication process. According to the literature, users can be involved in a subjective role as preventors, correctors, and educators in three active ways. Users can be preventors as ordinary people in their daily use of social media by not passing on false information without verification and by using the report button to report suspicious content to prevent the circulation of false news at its source (Tang et al., 2024).

Many platforms rely on user reports to identify and remove false content, making every user the first line of defense against rumor spread. As correctors, users with discerning ability can actively speak out to correct false information. For example, attaching authoritative debunking links, explaining the truth in the comments section of untrue content, or forwarding corrective information within one's own social circle (Badrinathan & Chauchard, 2024; Feng, 2024). Research has shown that when individuals see acquaintances or other users explicitly stating that a piece of information is false, their trust and willingness to share that information will significantly decrease (Stoeckel et al., 2024). This peer correction can quickly spread accurate information and is crucial in limiting the impact of rumors (Lawson et al., 2023). As educators, experienced or media-savvy users can lead by example on social networks: on the one hand, they can set an example through their consistent responsible behavior (such as verifying information before sharing); On the other hand, imparting methods to identify rumors to family and friends in daily interactions can enhance the overall cognitive level of the group (Bieliková et al., 2025). As more users actively assume responsibility for verifying and correcting misleading content, the circulation of false information may gradually decline, contributing to a more self-regulating information environment (He et al., 2024).

However, the literature points out that the user faces a series of challenges when playing these roles. Among the major challenges the user faces are technical barriers. For instance, the user lacks the skills required for professional verification, such as image verification and source verification, and also lacks the required comfort with the reporting and filtering tools, which makes them less confident and less effective as participants in governance (Feng, 2024). Cognitive bias and group pressure further inhibit active participation; even if they know it is a rumor, many people are still affected by confirmatory bias and make uncertain judgments; some people choose to remain silent out of concern that correcting the public will offend friends and cause trouble (Stoeckel et al., 2024). Research has found that not forwarding widely spread rumors in online communities may be perceived as "unsociable", resulting in social exclusion or isolation (Lawson et al., 2023). In addition, there is also a problem of behavioral inertia; many users are unwilling to take the trouble to identify, verify, and spread knowledge, but rather tend to look up false information sources for their own convenience (Siron, 2022). This 'inaction' has allowed the rumors to continue spreading.

On the one hand, although users have engaged in the struggle against false information as much as possible, turning their desire to participate into actual behavior needs both outer assistance and inner drive. We should not only enhance users' abilities and awareness through digital literacy training, but also create a community atmosphere that encourages rational error correction and alleviates individuals' concerns about group pressure. Only when a vast number of users have both the ability and willingness to actively participate can a bottom-up and sustainable information ecological purification mechanism be formed.

User-Centered Analytical Framework: Integrating Mechanisms of Fake News Sharing

Building on the above-discussed elements, this study proposes a user-centric model for understanding the sharing of fake news (as presented in Figure 2). The model comprises three major elements: user traits, motivational elements, and intervention paths. The model proposes that the sharing of fake news results from the interaction of these elements. At the individual level (Red Layer), user traits like personality, demographics, and media literacy ability define the ease with which a user can be influenced to share fake news. At the same time, they define the user's overall propensity to share news. At the motivational level (Green Layer), internal motivational elements define the user's interpretation of news in a particular situation. The two elements do not function in isolation. In other words, user traits can influence the strength of motivational elements in defining the user's propensity to share news. At the intervention level (Blue Layer), elements like platform rules, peer pressure, and the overall climate of news define the interaction with user traits and motivational elements. For instance, media literacy ability can define the user's response to the intervention. In the same vein, ideological motivations can reduce the impact of intervention. In essence, the interaction of the three elements defines a very embedded process. In other words, the three elements define a process that functions as a whole. In this regard, the process of studying the sharing of fake news must be dynamic.

In essence, the elements define the overall effectiveness with which the spread of rumors can be controlled. The overlapping and intersecting areas of the three dimensions in the framework represent the study that integrates user traits, motivation, and intervention into an integrated perspective. However, as mentioned in the previous review, these interdisciplinary fields are still relatively narrow, indicating a lack of cross-dimensional research in existing literature.

Therefore, the framework calls for future research and practice to break down the barriers between these three aspects and build more holistic models.

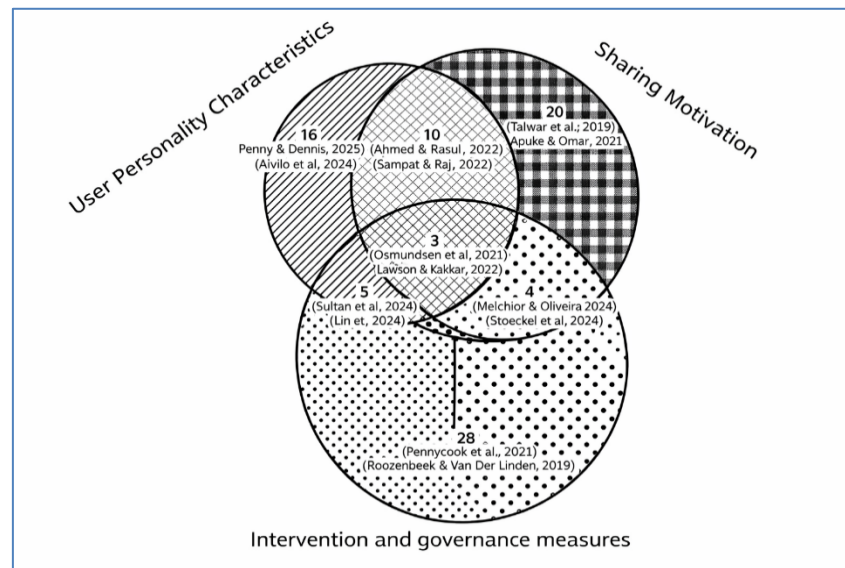


Figure 2. Venn Diagram of the Three-Dimensional Classification of Research on Fake News Sharing Behavior

First of all, it demonstrates that humans are at the heart of the ecology of false information dissemination and provides an effective supplement to the emphasis on content or algorithms in previous studies. By foregrounding the questions of who shares misinformation and why they do so, this study provides a user-oriented analytical basis for the development of more targeted and demand-sensitive intervention strategies. For example, platforms and policy makers can design differentiated intervention strategies according to users' different personality traits and motivational tendencies: strengthen authenticity prompts for impulsive and socially active users; strengthen media literacy education for groups driven by social identity; provide objective information alternatives for groups with specific political orientations. The second point of this framework is that users can also be enabled as active participants in governance. Personalized interventions can be carried out based on the features of each user. Meanwhile, these interventions should also motivate users to take on roles such as gatekeepers and correctors proactively. Taken together, this integrated model is intended to link the separated research fields in prior studies and explore in detail how fake news diffuses, providing a theoretical basis for developing more precise, user-oriented governance methods.

Despite its integrative contribution, several limitations in the existing body of research warrant further attention. As indicated in the literature review, there remains insufficient understanding of similarities and differences in user behavior across diverse cultural contexts. Further cross-cultural studies are needed to verify the extent of its applicability (Chen, 2021). The existing studies also fail to provide long-term observations and longitudinal perspectives on the dynamic process of fake news spread and the sustainability of its intervention strategies. The longitudinal perspective will help us understand how this framework works at different times and in different information contexts. Though this framework suggests different factors affecting each other in the context of fake news dissemination, it is assumed that in reality, these factors are complexly related and context-dependent. Future studies could be carried out using multivariate interaction analysis techniques to refine and verify the proposed model of fake news dissemination (Lawson & Kakkar, 2022). Despite these limitations, this study is a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge on fake news dissemination as it develops a comprehensive and user-centric analytical framework for fake news dissemination and draws on different aspects of personality psychology, social motivation theories, and intervention strategies. Theoretically, this framework will help us understand the process of rumor spread from a people-centric perspective. Pragmatically, it provides a clear platform for social media platforms and policymakers to develop different approaches for governance of social media beyond algorithmic and content-based approaches, and suggests that human factors-based approaches could be more sustainable in tackling fake news dissemination.

5. Conclusion

This article reviews high-quality studies conducted in recent years (from 2015 to 2025), both at home and abroad. Moreover, it pioneers a user-centered model for the analysis of the sharing of fake news. Its major contribution lies in its clear illustration that, in the sharing of fake news, the human factor is as important as, if not more important than, the content of the news itself or the algorithm used in the process.

The article proposes that the sharing of fake news can be considered as a multi-level process in which users play a key role. In its exploration of the sharing of fake news in the form of user behavior, the article succeeds in bringing together various studies that illustrate that the personal characteristics of individuals, as well as what drives them to behave in certain ways, can have a considerable influence on the sharing of misinformation. Its major contribution lies in its clear illustration that the user behavior in the sharing of misinformation is not random; rather, it follows a certain structure that can be explained by the interaction between personal characteristics and psychological triggers. In this regard, effective governance of the sharing of fake news should go beyond the technical to the integrative.

Nevertheless, this review identifies some gaps that need to be filled in order to advance research in this area. For instance, the portability of the proposed user-centered integrative model in different socio-cultural contexts remains an understudied phenomenon. Further research in this area should examine whether the relationship between personality traits, motivational processes, and intervention effects changes in different socio-cultural contexts.

Additionally, most of the research in this area has been conducted using cross-sectional research designs. Although cross-sectional research provides preliminary evidence for the proposed user-centered integrative model, it provides a limited understanding of the dynamic processes underlying motivational processes. Further research in this area should be conducted longitudinally to examine the temporal stability of user traits.

Finally, although this review identifies several interactions in the proposed user-centered integrative model, few studies have empirically examined the proposed integrative structure. Further research in this area can be conducted to validate the proposed integrative structure. In conclusion, advancing research in this area can be conducted in order to refine the explanatory potential of user-centered integrative models.

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Author contributions

MUMTAZ AINI BINTI ALIVI was responsible for supervision and project administration. YUHONG was responsible for conceptualization, conceptual framework development, drafting the original manuscript, and completing manuscript review and editing. WU LINKAI participated in conceptualization and was responsible for literature collection. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

MUMTAZ AINI BINTI ALIVI : Supervision, Project administration.

YUHONG : Conceptualization, Conceptual framework development, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

WU LINKAI : Conceptualization, Literature Collection.

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Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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