

WHAT MAKES PEOPLE SHARE NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS?
EXPLORING THE MODERATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED FAKENESS

by

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ABSTRACT

Social media platforms help individuals form social relationships and enable the quick spread of information. One of the most common misuses of these platforms is the creation and sharing of fake or misleading news or content. ‘The extent to which an individual believes that a news article is fake’ varies among different individuals for various reasons. This study proposes the concept of ‘perceived fakeness’ as a key factor influencing news readers' intention to share the news. The research model explores the relationship between emotional reaction, topic expertise, topic attitude, and individual news readers' intention to share news articles on social media and investigates the moderating effect of perceived fakeness. This study uses survey data from 367 individuals. The findings show that all three factors positively affect the intention to share news on social media. And perceived fakeness significantly negatively moderates the relationship between topic expertise and intention to share.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

ATT	Topic Attitude
EXP	Topic Expertise
ER	Emotional Reaction
Fake	Perceived fakeness
FN	Fake News
IShare	Intention to share

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Internet users worldwide spend an average of 147 minutes daily on social media as of July 2022 (Dixon, 2022). As per 2022 statistics, 48% of Americans, 76% of Kenyans, 75% of South Africans, 72% of Malaysians and the Philippines, and 69% of Chileans rely on social media platforms for news (Wise, 2022). As more users turn to social media for news, these platforms serve as the main conduit between users and news sources by compiling traditional and non-traditional media into one practical feed (Sommariva et al., 2018). The popularity of social media for news sharing not only contributes to the spread of genuine news but also makes it easy for fake news (FN) or misrepresented information to quickly spread due to the nature of social media that allows anyone to create any stories and post them to their social media and the high amount of social engagement that it generates (Lee, 2019). FN is not a new phenomenon; it can be dated back to centuries when there were 'rumors.' With the advent of technology and the use of different sources for news, it is being termed differently by different people (Oh et al., 2013). All members of society, including the government, policymakers, organizations, corporations, and citizens, are extremely concerned about the proliferation of possible FN on the Internet (Talwar et al., 2020).

Given the growing significance of news engagement on social media, researchers have looked at several user attributes, beliefs, and perceptions from news articles, such as motivation or the structural elements of news content, to determine what increases user engagement (Lee & Ma, 2012). Emotional arousal or reaction, however, can be one of the potentially important factors that increase news attention but has received relatively little attention (Choi et al., 2021). Social media are crucial for exchanging information and emotions. Emotions are contagious and social (Kramer, 2012; Parkinson, 1996). People are compelled to discuss, react to, and exchange emotionally charged material because doing so enables them to regulate their emotions through interpersonal relationships (Zaki & Williams, 2013) and return to emotional balance (Rimé, 2009). Thus, based on the literature on the social functions of emotion (Morris & Keltner, 2000; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1991) and the literature on the role of emotions in affecting individuals' sharing of online content (Table 1), this study proposes that news readers' emotional reaction after reading

a news article makes people have the intention to interact or share information with others. Further, it has been found that people's expertise and attitudes toward a topic of news are relevant to their engagement with news content (Buchanan, 2020; Kim & Dennis, 2019; Pennycook & Rand, 2020), so expertise and attitude are added in the research model to examine if emotional reaction is still significantly associated with such an intention with the co-presence of topic expertise and attitude toward the topic of a news article.

Finally, for various reasons, some people see a news article as FN, while others believe the same article is genuine (Tsang, 2021). That is, individual readers perceived percentage of genuine content in a news article differs for different people because of multiple factors such as their beliefs, education level, culture, experience, etc. The degree of genuineness/fakeness of news from a perspective of an individual news reader should not be treated as dichotomous but as a continuum. This phenomenon implies that for the same news articles, the degree of so-called 'fakeness' should differ among news readers. While a couple of studies investigated the 'perceived fakeness' as a dependent variable for the research (Tandoc Jr et al., 2021; Tsang, 2021), little effort has been made to examine its role in forming users' intention to share the news articles on social media and to apply it as a moderating factor on the facilitating factors and online news sharing intention. Thus, this study proposes a concept of 'perceived fakeness' and applies it as moderating factor for the relationship between emotional reaction, expertise, and attitudes toward the content of a news article and intention to share the news article in the context of those who read news on social media. To conclude, this study addresses the research gap by focusing on the impact of emotional reactions generated after reading a news article on the intention to share news on social media with perceived fakeness as a moderator. This study introduces the conceptualization and operationalization (created measurement with prospective measurement validity tested) of the 'perceived fakeness of news in social media.

In sum, this study will address the following research questions;

1) how do emotional reactions, expertise about the topic of news, and attitudes toward the topic influence a news reader's intention to share the news on social media? and

2) how does the news reader's perceived fakeness of a particular news article moderate the relationships between emotional reactions (expertise and attitude) and their intention to share the news on social media?

The rest of this study proceeds as follows. First, the next chapter reviews the literature on FN sharing. Second, chapter 3 proposes the research model and hypothesis. Chapters 4 and 5 cover the research model and data analysis, followed by chapter 6. discussion and conclusion.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW ON FAKE NEWS SHARING

Social media platforms have become a part of our everyday life. They enable the creation and development of relationships, communities, and businesses (Kietzmann et al., 2011). A key aspect of these platforms is the quick spread or sharing of information. In a matter of seconds, any information or post, or video can be shared publicly or privately with anyone connected on the platform (Ferguson et al., 2014). Although this capability has brought great benefits to society and the corporate world, the spread of misinformation or misuse of certain system features has resulted in the financial failure of organizations (Nadaraja & Yazdanifard, 2013). For example, the falling stock price of Tesla because of a tweet by Elon Musk and Facebook posts, the brand name of Volkswagen was affected by misrepresentation, negative comments on social media platforms, etc. (Talwar et al., 2019).

One of the most common misuses of these social media platforms is the creation and sharing of FN. FN has been interchangeably related to other concepts such as misinformation (misleading information), disinformation, propaganda, satire, hoax, and conspiracy, information without a source or information that cannot be verified (Di Domenico et al., 2021). FN has been defined differently by different scholars such as ‘online falsehoods formatted and circulated in a way as to make them appear authentic and legitimate to the readers’ (Mustafaraj & Metaxas, 2017), ‘information perceived as news which is both factually incorrect and explicitly created to deceive’ (George et al., 2021), ‘uncertain or unverified rumors’ (Coast & Fox, 2015). One of the definitions that seems most suitable for multiple situations is the definition by Gelfert (2018, pg.108): *“The fake news term should be reserved for cases of deliberate presentation of typically false or misleading claims as news, where these are misleading by design, (...) systemic features of the sources and channels by which fake news propagates and thereby manipulates (...) consumers’ pre-existing cognitive biases and heuristics.”*

FN has become a major threat to organizations, celebrities, social media, etc. (Lee, 2019). As per 2021 statistics, on average there have been 376,032,773 false messages were

detected (Orred, 2022). In 2021, 62% of internet users saw content they considered to be 'false or misleading' (PA Media, 2021). What makes things worse is that FN and legitimate (genuine) news look so similar that unless the reader spends more time and attention to verify the truthfulness of it or is an expert in the content subject, it is not easy to say the news is 100% genuine or fake. As such, fake and genuine news is often mistaken for one another (Forestal, 2021). Thanks to the technological affordance of social networks, any individual can act as a news creator, propagator, and consumer, making it impossible to do so-called 'fact-checking' of all content generated by anyone that looks like a piece of news (George et al., 2021). Hence FN has become an important concern for many individuals and organizations, such as celebrities, companies, and the government.

To identify the research gap and highlight the importance of this study, the literature on FN has been reviewed. While some studies on FN focus on detection methods of FN using various statistical and machine learning techniques (Alonso et al., 2021; Bondielli & Marcelloni, 2019), the scope of my literature review is on the influencing factors for individuals' sharing behavior (or intention) of FN on social media. Table 1 summarizes the studies on the factors influencing individual users' intentions or behaviors of FN sharing on social media. Based on the literature review, the following takeaways are identified.

First, the spread of FN or sharing behavior of FN has been termed differently in different papers. Sharing behavior can also be called rumourmongering, engagement, sharing of misleading news online, sharing of FN, spreading (support & denial) of FN, and spreading misinformation. This study focuses on individual news readers' intention of sharing (possibly fake) news on social media platforms.

Second, in sum, source ambiguity, highlighting of source, source ratings, content ambiguity, lack of reasoning, knowledge (expertise), emotional thinking, tie strengths, poor truth discernment, and third-person perceptions are the important factors that led to an increase in sharing of FN (Table 1). This study has classified the influencing factors for

FN-sharing behavior into source-related factors, content-related factors, and individual tendencies.

Source-related factors include source ambiguity, highlighting of source, and source ratings (Kim & Dennis, 2019; Oh et al., 2013). All three factors impacted the perceived influence on others and sharing of FN with others. For unknown sources, low source ratings had a negative association with believability. Content-related factors include content ambiguity, message characteristics, and writing style (Bryanov & Vziatysheva, 2021; Oh et al., 2013; Zubiaga et al., 2016). Out of these, message characteristics and writing style significantly impacted sharing of FN, whereas content ambiguity and language had negative associations. In addition, individual tendencies or cognitive characteristics include a lack of reasoning, knowledge, emotional thinking, tie strengths, poor truth discernment, and third-person perception (Antonopoulos et al., 2015; Apuke & Omar, 2020; Pennycook & Rand, 2020). All of these had a positive association with sharing of FN.

While these studies have provided us with a good understanding of how different factors lead to sharing and believing in FN, it is found that little effort has been made to explore the role of news readers' emotional reaction to the news article in forming the intention to share a (possibly) FN. Therefore, this study will examine how emotional reaction could affect the intention to share (possibly)¹ FN with the presence of two well-known variables for information sharing (i.e., the expertise of and attitude toward the news topics).

Further, except for very few recent studies (e.g., Tsang (2021)), most studies have not considered the fact that the fakeness of a news article could be perceived differently by different news readers. Some people might have the intention to share the news on their social media without thinking of the genuineness of the article. Further, to the best of my knowledge, no studies have yet applied the 'perceived fakeness' as moderating effect on

¹ The term '(possibly)' is used here because although I have provided the survey respondents with slightly manipulated (with some fake information) news from original news article, they will perceive the degree of fakeness differently in that some would see the news as a genuine one while others would see it as somehow fake.

the relationship between influencing factors and news-sharing intention, which is one of the key contributions of this research.

Table 1 Literature Review Table

Author (year)	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	Research Method	Findings
Wasko & Faraj (2005)	Individual motivations, structural capital, cognitive capital, relational capital	Knowledge contribution	Message boards	A person's knowledge, skills, and abilities should increase the likelihood of knowledge sharing. Experts are more willing to contribute when they feel their professional reputations are enhanced and when they are structurally entrenched in the network. Experts contribute more volume in terms of knowledge despite not expecting anything in return and despite their commitment to the network.
Van Den Hooff et al. (2012)	Emotions	Attitudes and intentions towards knowledge sharing	Survey	An individual's attitude toward the subject will likely play a substantial role in deciding their knowledge-sharing behavior. The effects of emotions indicated that the reader's emotional state affected their inclination to share news on social media.
Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan (2013)	Written emotional expressions	Information diffusion	Observing tweets	The impact of written emotional expression on information-sharing behavior extends to social media, as seen in other disciplines. People believe that because people would be more inclined to disclose their emotionally charged information, their influence might increase even more.
Zaki & Williams (2013)	Emotion and Language impact	Fake news credibility	Two Experiments	Negative emotionality and news credibility are strongly related, irrespective of the language.
Zubiaga et al. (2016)	Rumor threads data	Spread, support, and denial of fake news	Analysis of tweets	This study shows that rumors that are ultimately proven true tend to be resolved faster than those that turn out to be false. While one can readily see users denying rumors once they have been debunked, users appear less capable of distinguishing true from false rumors when their veracity remains in question.

Author (year)	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	Research Method	Findings
Shin & Thorson (2017)	Partisanship	Information diffusion	Twitter datasets analysis	Sharing news from an unpopular source is uncommon, but it can signify someone who wants to stir up opposition among supporters of the same ideology.
Bhagat & Parrish (2018)	Information quality, relevance, expertise	News sharing on social media	Experiment and survey	By thoroughly examining the news's content, experts can produce more accurate opinions without using supplementary cues. Regular or knowledgeable viewers of current affairs are more likely to review any news or information disseminated on social media carefully.
Dafonte-Gómez (2018)	Motivations and emotions	News sharing	Observing audience	Research on information-sharing behaviors suggests that emotional variables play a crucial role in decision-making. They affect feelings. The information arouses in the audience and the effect, identity, and social needs people satisfy through sharing.
Amazeen et al. (2019)	Individual antecedents (Age, ideology, behavior, attitude)	Sharing fact-checks	Survey	An earlier study on the attitudes of individuals who monitor the news on social media revealed that the majority of people mostly share information to support their opinions.
Rubenking (2019)	Emotions, attitudes, norms, and sources	Sharing intent	Survey	Applying the theory of reasoned action, good attitudes toward content and sharing, and positive subjective norms surrounding content and sharing improve intentions to share.
Buchanan (2020)	Attitudes, message attributes, viewer characteristics, and their interaction	Spreading of fake news	Online survey	The people reporting the greatest likelihood of sharing disinformation were those who thought it likely to be true or who had pre-existing attitudes consistent with it. They were likely to have previous familiarity with the materials.

Author (year)	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	Research Method	Findings
Martel et al. (2020)	Emotions and emotion processing	Belief in news	Experiment	Reliance on emotions increases the belief in fake news. They also say that fake news sharing might be influenced by emotional processing.
Pennycook & Rand (2020)	Political motivations, truth discernment	Believing and sharing misleading news online.	Survey	There is a significant gap between people's beliefs and what they post on social media. More so than deliberate disinformation spreading, inattention is the main cause of this alienation.
Talwar et al. (2020)	Online trust, self-disclosure, fear of missing out (FoMO), social media fatigue, social comparison	Sharing of fake news	Cross-sectional data	The study results suggest that online trust, self-disclosure, fear of missing out (FoMO), and social media fatigue are positively associated with sharing fake news (intentionally).
Hameleers et al. (2021)	Misinformation, fact-checking, attitudes(moderator)	Perceived credibility	Survey	Fact-checking could easily refute completely incorrect information, but this is less the case with partially inaccurate information, according to a study on COVID-19 fake news that looked at different levels of misinformation.
Horner et al. (2021)	Emotions	Fake news on social media	Survey	Participants with higher levels of emotion were more likely to spread or suppress false information. In contrast, those who expressed lower levels were more likely to ignore or disengage from spreading false information. This relationship between participants' emotional reactivity and intentions for action was found to exist.

Author (year)	Independent Variables	Dependent Variables	Research Method	Findings
Tandoc Jr et al. (2021)	Fake news	Media Credibility	Survey	Used fakeness as a variable. The study has tested fake news for characteristics of real news, including timeliness, negativity, prominence, and impact. They discovered that 98.6% of the articles under study carried the news value of timeliness, 89.2% contained the news value of negativity, 79.7% contained the news value of prominence, and only 32% contained the news value of effect.
Tsang (2021)	News sources and policy support	News fakeness	Experiment	They discovered that a news story's perceived fakeness was unaffected by whether it was allocated to no source, an internet forum, or a traditional news station. Participants with opposing opinions were demonstrated to regard the same news message as fake to various degrees.

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

3.1. THE EFFECT OF EMOTION, COGNITION (EXPERTISE), AND ATTITUDE ON INTENTION TO SHARE NEWS

This section discusses the role of emotions in content-sharing behaviors (or behavioral intention). According to the literature on the social role of emotion (Morris & Keltner, 2000; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1991), emotional expressions (EE) can affect how people react and behave (Lee et al., 2010). EE's can enable interaction, such as communicative behavior and psychological responses (Lee et al., 2010).

Quite a few studies have found that emotions or emotional expressions could affect the spread or engagement of social media posts. Tweets that are emotionally charged are more likely to be shared than neutral ones (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). This research demonstrates that the influence of written expression of emotions on human information-sharing behavior can be extended to the context of social media. People feel that their influence might grow more because people would be more willing to share their emotionally charged information (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). When people tend to feel emotional after reading or watching emotionally loaded content, they feel like sharing it with others (Martel et al., 2020), so emotionally loaded content leads to increased engagement on social media. The valence of the news influences online audiences' emotional reactions to the news, and the emotional responses of these audiences impact how widely news is disseminated on social networking sites (de León & Trilling, 2021). According to research on content-sharing behavior, emotional aspects play a big role in affecting the audience's feelings toward the content and the effect, identity, and social needs that sharing satisfies (Dafonte-Gómez, 2018). Another study found that participants were more inclined to believe headlines that supported their current views. Participants' emotional reactivity was linked to their intentions for action, so those with higher levels of emotion were more likely to spread or suppress false information.

In comparison, those with lower levels of emotional reaction were more likely to ignore or disengage from the spread of false information (Horner et al., 2021). While these studies

focused on the spread or engagement of emotionally loaded content with the contents (i.e., social media posts) as the unit of analysis, little effort seems to be made to investigate how the emotional reactions of individuals can affect their intention to share it on social media in the context of online news articles. Based on these findings and the theoretical perspective of the social function of emotion (Morris & Keltner, 2000; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1991), this study proposes a hypothesis on the role of emotional reaction in sharing news on social media. More specifically, when an individual news reader finds that a news article is emotionally loaded, they are emotionally aroused, and they tend to share it on their social media to affect their friends (on social media platforms) more than when they do not find that the news article is emotionally loaded. Therefore, H1.

H1: Emotional reaction is positively associated with the intention to share a news article on social media.

In addition to emotional reactions, this study will propose two other well-known factors for individuals' intention to share content online; cognitive factor (expertise) and affective factor (attitude) toward the topic of the news article to show that the relationship between emotional reactions and the intention to share the news at the individual level is non-spurious against the two well-known factors for online information sharing.

First, for expertise, online discussion boards are frequently used in virtual communities to exchange information and viewpoints. The degree of expertise in a topic is significantly related to knowledge contribution in online communities (Bhagat & Parrish, 2018; Chiu et al., 2006; Wasko & Faraj, 2005). When experts feel their professional reputations are improved and structurally anchored in the network, they are more likely to contribute. In terms of knowledge, experts provide more volume, despite their belief that their assistance would not be returned and their dedication to the network (Wasko & Faraj, 2005). According to another research, those with greater degrees of expertise are more likely to offer helpful recommendations through virtual platforms (Chiu et al., 2006). The expertise on a topic has proven significant for online information-sharing behavior. In the context of online news as well, experts on a certain topic may generate more accurate views by carefully analyzing the news's content about a topic, so they no longer need to look at

additional cues to verify if the content in the news is worth to be shared (Bhagat & Parrish, 2018). Due to the expertise of the topic, experts will be willing to share or make people aware of the right information through their social media. Thus, if a news reader has a good level of expertise on the news, they will tend to share more than those with a low level of expertise. Therefore, H2.

H2: Topic expertise is positively associated with the intention to share news on social media.

Second, attitude toward a topic refers to how much a person values the subject favorably or unfavorably (Fazio et al., 1982). The previous research on attitude and knowledge-sharing has found that there is a positive association between individuals' attitude toward a topic and their knowledge-sharing behavior in the context of online communities (Amazeen et al., 2019; Kümpel et al., 2015; Shin & Thorson 2017; Van Den Hooff et al., 2012). For example, an individual's positive attitude about a topic is a significant factor in determining an individual's knowledge-sharing behavior (Van Den Hooff et al., 2012). Based on the theory of reasoned action, Rubenking (2019) found that favorable attitudes toward content and sharing boost intentions to share. Also, sharing information from a disagreeable source is uncommon (Shin & Thorson, 2017). In the context of social media as well, users tend to spread information to either support their viewpoints, inform others or influence their viewpoints when they have a positive attitude about a topic of the post. In a recent study by Amazeen et al. (2019) on attitudes related to news consumption on social media, it was discovered that most users share content to support their opinions. Also, a positive attitude toward an advertisement on social media is positively associated with sharing the advertisement (Lee et al., 2016). Similarly, in the context of the news articles on social media, the reader's attitude towards the topic should influence their intention to share it on social media because a positive attitude toward the topic of a news article encourages the readers to support their viewpoints, inform others or influence their viewpoints to their peers on social media. Therefore, H3.

H3: Attitude towards the topic is positively associated with the intention to share news on social media.

3.2. THE PERCEIVED FAKENESS

A news article's degree of fakeness could vary from 0-100%. Ideally, news articles with 0% fakeness can be fully genuine, whereas, on the other side of the continuum, news articles with 100% fakeness can be fully fake. In reality, it is not possible to identify 100% genuine or fake news articles (Hameleers et al., 2021), which so-called sophisticated fake-checking endeavors can verify. This concept, however, should be different from a reader's 'perceived fakeness.' Perceived fakeness looks at a reader's opinion of the degree of fakeness in a news article (Tsang, 2021). As mentioned, the fakeness of a news article can be verified through fact-checking efforts or detected through FN detection algorithms. In contrast, fact-checking cannot detect perceived fakeness because it is a reader's perception of 'how fake a news article is based on their personal experience, opinions, and knowledge (Alonso et al., 2021; Bondielli & Marcelloni, 2019; Tsang, 2021). So, perceived fakeness could only be assessed by asking people about a news article (i.e., with a survey question) (Tsang, 2021). This study focuses on the perceived fakeness in a news article.

Irrespective of the online fact-checking services and technologies and mitigation efforts to reduce the spread of FN, over 50% of the survey respondents in the US admit to sharing FN online (George et al., 2021). The same survey also revealed different perspectives on the use of FN. For some people, the news that does not align with their opinions can be considered fake. For others, their definition of FN is a statement used to deceive someone. As per previous literature, disclosure is not sufficient to recognize FN. For example, in an advertisement, in the middle of an article, an easily recognizable feature (a logo similar to a real media channel logo, a name similar to that of a popular news reader, etc.) was used. Still, only 40% of the people were able to recognize it as a different one even after disclosing the actual advertisement (Chien, 2005). A previous study compared factually accurate, partially false, and completely fabricated news related to COVID-19. They tried to assess the degree to which the consistency of FN concerning prior beliefs influences the persuasiveness of FN and fact-checkers. Even though fact-checkers can reduce the

perceived incredibility of misinformation, they do not affect participants' attitudes. They found that different levels of misinformation can have varied effects. More minor deviations from facticity may be more detrimental since they are more difficult to spot and rectify while also being more trustworthy (Hameleers et al., 2021). As such, when it comes to studying the phenomena related to FN, we need to consider the individual readers' perception 'that a news article is fake or not or 'how fake the article is rather than taking a dichotomous view of either genuineness or fakeness of the article, which is often hard to validate.

Recent studies have used 'perceived fakeness' as a variable. In a study by Tandoc Jr et al. (2021), fakeness has been defined as the perception of news as fake. They have tested FN for genuine news values such as timeliness, negativity, prominence, and impact. They found that the news value of timeliness was contained in 98.6 percent of the articles studied, 89.2 percent in the news value of negativity, 79.7 percent in the news value of prominence, and just 32 percent in the news value of the effect. In a study by Tsang (2021), fakeness refers to how the audience assesses the fakeness of a news post. Participants with opposite viewpoints were shown to perceive the identical news message as fake to differing degrees. They found that a news story's perceived fakeness was unaffected by whether it was assigned to no source, an online forum, or a traditional news channel. Another study by Hameleers et al. (2021) conducted concerning COVID-19 FN on different degrees of misinformation found that fact-checking could easily debunk fully false information, but this is less the case with partially false information. They say that deviation from facticity or genuineness is a primary source of FN legitimacy and has consequences for fighting against misinformation. Based on these studies above, this study defines *the perceived fakeness* in a news article as the extent to which a reader perceives that the creator is trying to mislead them with a news article (Tandoc Jr et al., 2021; Tsang, 2021).

However, all these studies have applied the concept of fakeness as a dependent variable in their studies but not as a moderator. But, this study would include the perceived fakeness as a moderator over the relationships between other influencing factors and the intention to share a news article that somehow contains some perceived fakeness because I believe

that news readers' perception of the perceived fakeness should somehow adjust the strength of the relationships between direct influencing factors proposed (i.e., emotional reaction, expertise, and attitude) and their intention to share the news article on social media.

As per previous research and hypothesis 1, emotional content in the news increases social engagement, resulting in a higher level of intention to share the news article (Martel et al., 2020). If the reader feels that the perceived fakeness of news content is too high, they may not be able to believe it as true, and it might affect the strength of the relationship between the emotional reactions and their intention to share the news. For the same news article, as long as one feels that the article is very much loaded with emotion and has overall genuine content, their intention to share should increase. In the same way, if the reader is an expert on the topic and feels that the news article has genuine content (i.e., a low degree of the perceived fakeness of the article), s/he is more likely to share it on social media. Suppose a reader has a positive attitude toward a topic but finds that the news article seems fake. In that case, it will impact the strength of the relationship between attitude and intention to share. In sum, perceived fakeness is an overarching judgment of a news article that could weaken the relationship between emotion (expertise and attitude) and one's intention to share it on social media. Therefore, the stronger one's perception that an article is fake, the weaker the relationship between the abovementioned factors (emotional reaction, expertise, and attitude) and their intention to share the news.

H4a: Perceived fakeness negatively moderates the relationship between emotional reaction and intention to share news on social media.

H4b: Perceived fakeness negatively moderates the relationship between expertise on the topic of the news and intention to share news on social media.

H4c: Perceived fakeness negatively moderates the relationship between attitude toward the topic of the news and intention to share news on social media.

To summarize, this study hypothesizes a non-spurious significant relationship between news readers' emotional reactions from reading a news article and their intention to share the news even with the presence of well-known cognitive and attitudinal factors (topic expertise and topic attitudes) for information sharing in the online environment and the

mitigating effects of their perceived fakeness of the news article on the relationships between three factors (emotional reaction, expertise, and attitude) and intentions to share news on social media. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship.

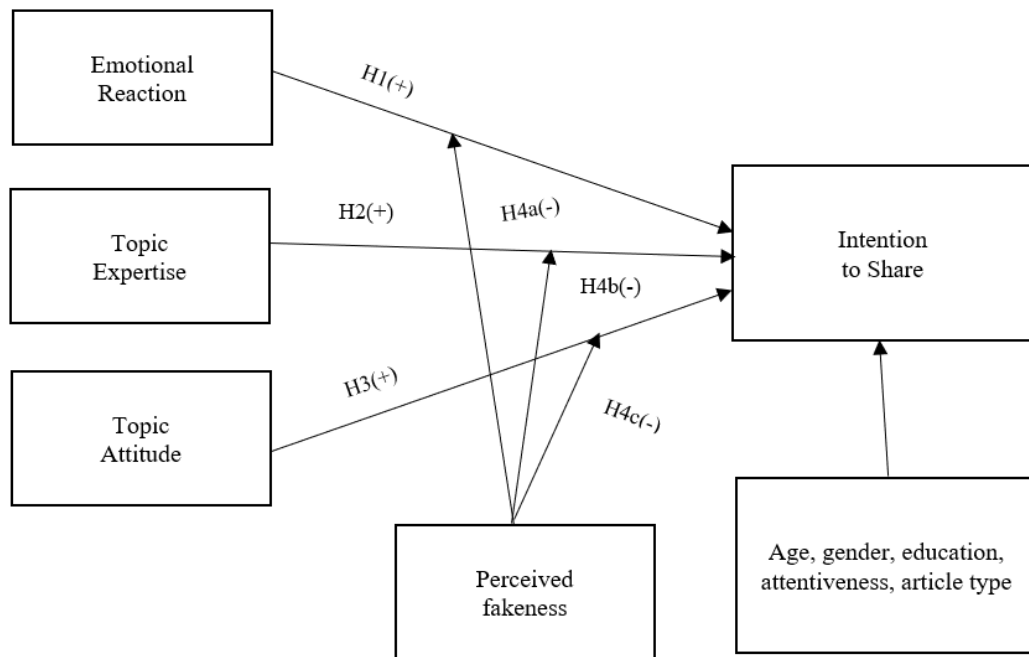


Figure 1 Research Model

CHAPTER 4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Survey data from online news readers on social media was gathered using Amazon MTurk. A total of 367 samples were used to analyze the hypothesized relationships. A partial least square (PLS) analysis was conducted on the data to test our hypothesis. The PLS analysis technique using SmartPLS 4.0 is suitable for this study since it examines the impact of important influencing factors for the intention to share news and allows multiple moderating effect analyses in a single bootstrapping test (Chin et al., 2003; Hair et al., 2011).

4.1. MEASUREMENTS

The items were adopted from previous studies and modified to fit the context of this study. For the majority of the items, a 7-point Likert scale was used that ranged from "strongly disagree" (as 1) to "strongly agree" (as 7), and for the variables asking for opinions, "extremely unlikely" (as 1) to "extremely likely" (as 7) was used. To measure the emotional reaction, readers were asked if they think that the article has emotional expressions or not, and to measure it, "strongly unaffected" (as 1) to "strongly affected" (as 7) were used (Bayer et al., 2018). For expertise level, "extremely knowledgeable" (as 1) to "not knowledgeable at all" (as 5) were used (Dafonte-Gómez, 2018). Readers were also asked about their attitude toward the topic of electric vehicles, and this was adopted from (Amazeen et al., 2019). The measurement items for perceived fakeness and intention to share have been adopted from (Tsang, 2021) and Lee & Ma (2012). The contents of the survey questionnaire are listed in Appendix A.

4.2. DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLING

To collect survey data from individuals who have ever read a news article on social media, Qualtrics was used to create a survey questionnaire with some news articles that are modified from their original content with some sentences and pictures with some perceived

fakeness and emotional expressions. Amazon MTurk was used to recruit the survey participants. Two screening questions were asked (1) Are you a current user of any social media services (e.g., Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.) and 2) Have you read a news article on the social media that you are currently using?). Those who answered ‘Yes’ to both questions could continue participating in the survey. After answering the screening questions, the survey respondents were randomly assigned to eight news articles on the electric vehicle, with some perceived fakeness and positive/negative emotions. The articles used in the survey contain mostly the same sentences from the real news article, and several sentences and images with certain degrees of emotional expressions and subjective contents (to achieve the variation in the perceived fakeness) were added to manipulate the degree of emotional reactions and fakeness (Appendix 1). An article on electric vehicles was chosen because the article's topic is trending. Moreover, there is a mixed level of our variables (i.e., attitude, expertise, emotions, etc.) about the news topic among different people, making it easier to achieve variation in their perception of fakeness, expertise, and attitude.

The survey participants were asked to read the presented article very carefully. Then, they were asked to answer the questions related to the dependent variable (intention to share the news article) first, followed by the moderating variable (perceived fakeness) and the independent variables (emotional reactions, expertise, and attitude). Rewards for completing surveys on MTurk were 0.75 USD. It has been demonstrated that the survey data obtained through MTurk using micropayments is as effective as other survey data collection methods in terms of data quality, sample reliability, and representativeness (Buhrmester et al., 2016; Lowry et al., 2016).

Table 2 Survey respondents' demographics

Demographics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	262	71.4
	Female	104	28.3
	Other	1	0.27
Age	18-24	9	2.4
	25-34	235	64
	35-44	80	21.8

Demographics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
	45-54	28	7.6
	55-64	12	3.3
	65-74	3	0.8
Education	Less than high school	1	0.3
	High school graduate	26	7.08
	Bachelor's degree	76	20.7
	Master's degree	257	70
	Doctorate	7	1.9
Occupation	Management & Admin	69	18.9
	Sales & Marketing	47	12.8
	Health sector	70	19.1
	IT sector	121	33
	Banking & Finance	37	10.1
	Education sector	14	3.8
	Other	9	2.4

The data was collected in September 2022. The data was collected from 400 people. The standard deviations of the Likert-scale measures were calculated, and the responses with a standard deviation of less than one were removed from the dataset to identify and delete inattentive survey responses. The responses with time to completion below 100 seconds were also removed, leaving 367 usable responses. Table 2 above represents the demographics of the 367 responses collected.

CHAPTER 5 RESULTS

To assess the measurement properties and test the structural model, the partial least square (PLS) technique is applied using SmartPLS 4.0. PLS analysis is suitable for this study because this study is exploratory in that it explores the relationships between key factors such as attitude, expertise, and emotions and the intention to share FN, and SmartPLS 4.0 support the moderating test with multiple moderating effects.

5.1. MEASUREMENT MODEL TEST

This study uses confirmatory factor analysis for three reflectively measured latent variables (emotional reactions, perceived fakeness, and intention to share the news article) to evaluate the measurement properties of our data (Table 3). Cronbach's α was calculated for all three variables, and it exceeds the acceptable threshold value of 0.60, which means that our variables have satisfactory levels of internal reliability (Gefen & Straub, 2005; Henseler et al., 2016).

For convergent validity, the Composite Reliability (CR) of all variables was calculated, which is above the minimum acceptable value of 0.7, which means that all our variables are internally consistent (Aguirre-Urreta et al., 2013). I also calculated the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, and all of those are also above 0.50, which shows that all our latent variables have satisfactory variance amounts above the variance from measurement errors (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The factor loading values of the three variables exceed the minimum acceptable value of 0.6. These (CR, AVE, and factor loadings) indicate acceptable convergent validity (Hair Jr et al., 2021).

The intercorrelation table (Table 4) shows that all intercorrelation coefficients among variables are significant at 0.01, except for those between perceived fakeness and three variables (indicated with 'ns') that are insignificant. The values of all the square roots of the AVE in the diagonal cells of Table 4, denoted by bold italics, were higher than the

values of the inter-construct correlations of the corresponding latent variables. Additionally, the Heterotrait Monotrait (HTMT) ratio values in Table 5 are below the 0.9 maximum threshold value, indicating good discriminant validity. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) is examined to determine the model fit of our research model. Our research model has an acceptable fit between the observed correlation matrix and the model inferred correlation matrix, as evidenced by the fact that the SRMR value of our model is 0.059 for the saturated model and 0.059 for the estimated model, both of which are below 0.08 (Hair et al., 2011; Henseler et al., 2016; Hu & Bentler, 1998).

Due to our data collection's cross-sectional and self-reported nature, common method bias is possible (CMB). Based on Kock (2015), I performed a full-collinearity test for CMB to solve this problem. The findings showed that none of the Variance Inflation Factors (VIFs) exceeded the cut-off point of 3.3 (Table 5), which indicates that CMB is not a big concern for this study.

5.2. STRUCTURAL MODEL TEST

After demonstrating the reliability and validity of our measurement model, I conducted the path analysis to test the structural model, measuring the explained variance (R^2) of the dependent variable, path coefficients (β), and their levels of significance (t -values) using the PLS algorithm and bootstrapping method with the re-sampling size of 5000. Figure 2 presents the results of the path analysis of our structural model, with the explained variance (R^2), path-coefficient estimates (β), and significance levels (t) of each hypothesized relationship. All hypotheses, except H4a, and H4c, are supported, as displayed in Figure 2 and Table 6, at the significance levels of 0.05, 0.01, and 0.001. Additionally, five control variables (gender, age, education, attentiveness, and article type) were added to the main model with three independent variables and the dependent variable. While gender and education are significant, age, attentiveness, and article type are insignificant.

Table 3 Reliability and convergent validity

Construct	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	The average variance extracted (AVE)
Perceived fakeness (Fake)	Fake01: 0.875 Fake02: 0.939 Fake03: 0.863 Fake04: 0.888	0.919	0.939	0.795
Emotional reaction (ER)	ER01: 0.806 ER02: 0.929	0.692	0.861	0.756
Intention to share (IShare)	IShare01: 0.885 IShare02: 0.817 IShare03: 0.863	0.817	0.891	0.732

Table 4 Construct Correlations and discriminant validity

Construct	Fake	ER	IShare	ATT	EXP
Perceived fakeness (Fake)	0.892				
Emotional reaction (ER)	0.194	0.870			
Intention to share (IShare)	0.111 (ns)	0.45	0.855		
Topic Attitude (ATT)	0.077 (ns)	0.2	0.47	1	
Topic Expertise (EXP)	0.08 (ns)	0.246	0.425	0.27	1

Table 5 HTMT Ratio

Construct	Fake	ER	IShare	ATT	EXP
Fake					
ER	0.223				
IShare	0.114	0.571			
ATT	0.072	0.22	0.515		
EXP	0.093	0.298	0.472	0.27	

Table 6 Collinearity Statistics -VIF

Construct	DV - Intention to share (VIF)
Fake	1.042
ER	1.121
ATT	1.102
EXP	1.126

5.3. INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The model's predictive power is demonstrated by calculating R^2 in the endogenous constructs (Chin, 1998; Gefen et al., 2000). The explained variance of intention to share as

the final dependent variable is 42.7%, indicating the dependent variable's good predictive power in the structural model.

First, emotional reaction is positively associated with the intention to share FN (H1: $\beta = 0.304$ at $t = 6.275$). Second, topic expertise has a significant positive association with the intention to share news (H2: $\beta = 0.260$ at $t = 5.355$). Topic attitude is also positively associated with the intention to share news (H3: $\beta = 0.347$ at $t = 6.140$). It shows that even in the presence of well-known factors for information sharing online (expertise and attitude), the relationship between emotional reaction and intention to share was non-spurious.

To test the moderation effects of the perceived fakeness on the relationships between emotional reaction, topic expertise, topic attitude, and intention to share, I used the procedure introduced by Chin et al. (2003). I measured the t-value of the interaction factors and calculated the effect sizes. The moderating effect of the perceived fakeness on the relationship between emotional reaction and intention to share has a negligible effect size of 0.002. It is insignificant ($t = 0.684$), indicating that H4a is not supported. The moderating effect of the perceived fakeness on the relationship between the topic expertise and intention to share is significant at 0.05 level ($t = 1.974$) with a very small effect size of 0.020, supporting H4b. Finally, the moderating effect of the perceived fakeness on the relationship between the topic attitude and intention to share is insignificant ($t = 0.164$), with a negligible effect size of 0, indicating that H4c is not supported.

Figure 3 displays the slopes between the topic expertise and intention to share, with varying perceived fakeness by +/- one standard deviation. From the figure, a decrease of one standard deviation in the perceived fakeness results in a larger slope between expertise and intention to share. In contrast, one standard deviation increase has made the slope flatter. This shows that the perceived fakeness negatively moderates the relationship between topic expertise and intention to share. The more the perceived fakeness, the weaker the relationship between topic expertise and intention to share. The non-significant moderating effects of perceived fakeness on the relationships between emotional reactions (attitude)

and intention to share can be interpreted in the following ways. Emotional reactions and topic attitude are affective factors about the topic of a news article. In contrast, topic expertise and perceived fakeness are cognitive assessments of the topics regarding news readers' knowledge about the topic. While the cognitive factor (perceived fakeness) seems to significantly mitigate the effect of cognitive factors (expertise) on readers' intention of sharing a news article, the cognitive moderating factor (perceived fakeness) does not have any impact on the way affective factors (emotional reactions and topic attitude) influence users' intention, which is an interesting finding.

Overall, four hypotheses are significant, i.e., H1, H2, H3, and H5. Furthermore, the structural model analysis included five control variables (gender, age, education level, attentiveness, and article type). Gender and education were statistically significant, indicating that females have more intention to share than males and highly-educated people have a higher intention to share.

Table 7 Structural model test results

Hypothesis	Path Coefficient (β)	t-values	Results
H1: ER \rightarrow IShare	0.304	6.275	Supported
H2: EXP \rightarrow IShare	0.260	5.355	Supported
H3: ATT \rightarrow IShare	0.347	6.140	Supported
H4a: ER x Fake \rightarrow IShare	-0.038	0.684	Not supported
H4b: EXP x Fake \rightarrow IShare	-0.114	1.974	Supported
H4c: ATT x Fake \rightarrow IShare	0.013	0.164	Not supported

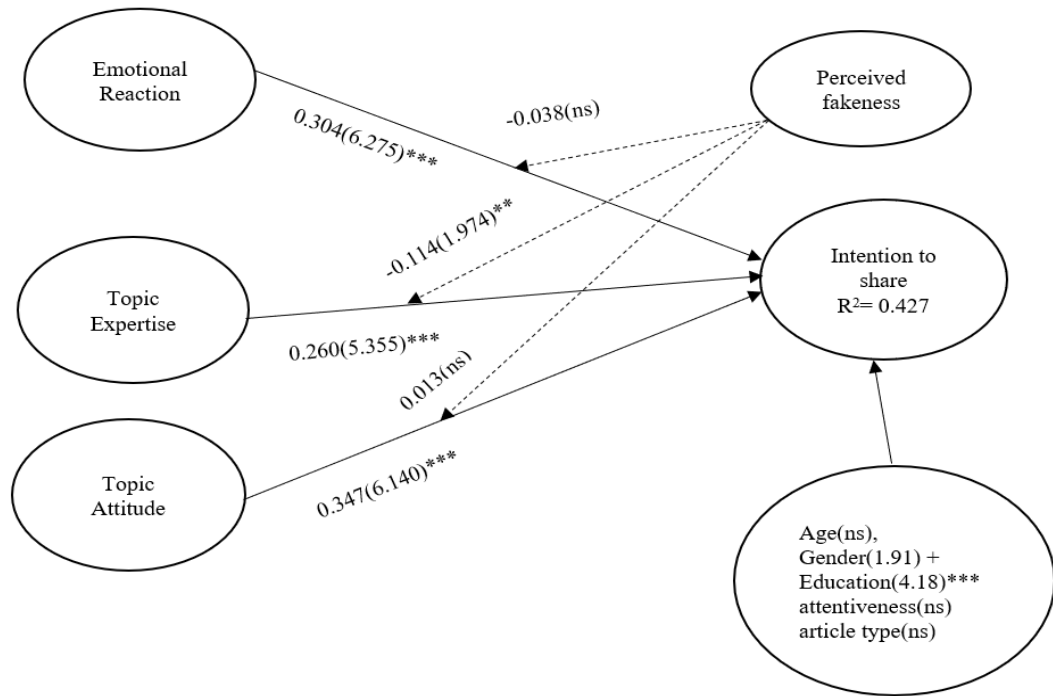


Figure 2 Structural model results

Note: ns: not significant, +: significant at the level of 0.1, *: significant at 0.05, **: significant at 0.01, ***: significant at level of 0.001

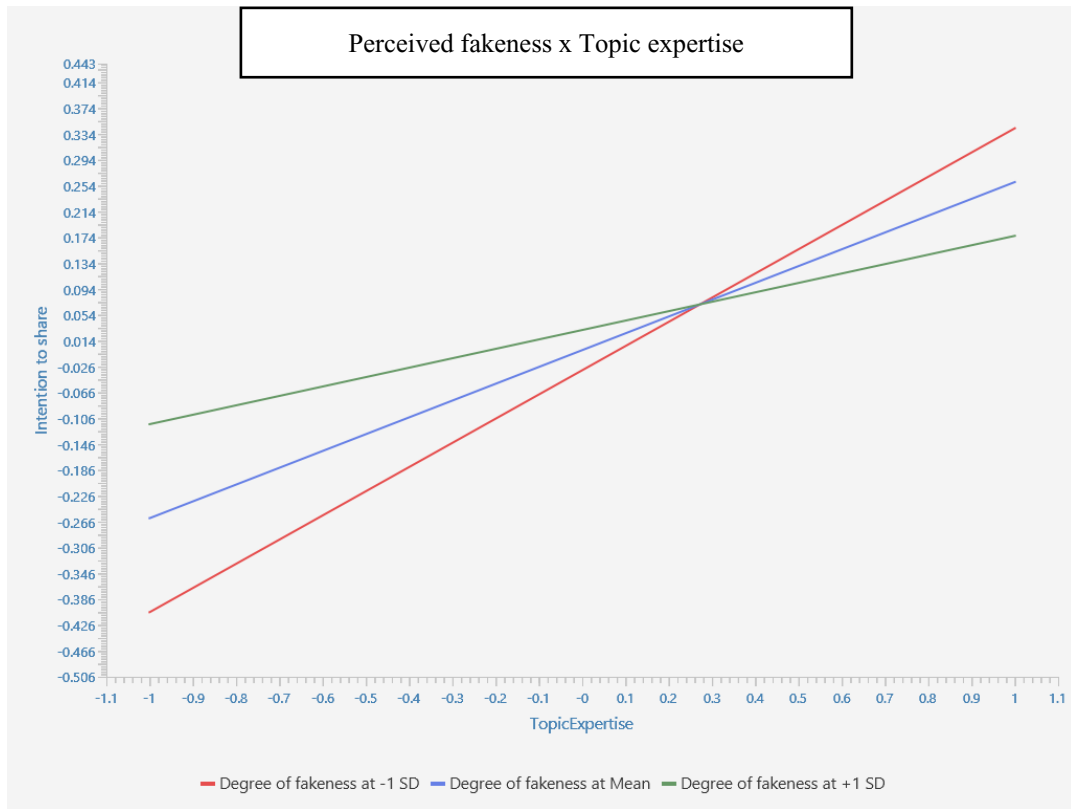


Figure 3 Displaying the effect of perceived fakeness on the relationship between topic expertise and intention to share

CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our results indicated that emotional reaction, topic expertise, and attitude towards the topic are all strongly associated with the intention to share the news. News with emotional content tends to generate emotional reactions among its readers or viewers. As people get emotional or as the emotional reaction gets intense, people are more likely to believe in the news and probably share it on their social media. An interesting finding is that emotional reaction is as significant as other well-known knowledge-sharing factors. Also, this study proposed and validated the measurement properties of the perceived fakeness of content at the individual level in the context of news articles and found a significant moderating effect of fakeness on the relationship between expertise and intention to share a news article.

6.1. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

First, this study proposed the idea of perceived fakeness and empirically validated the measurement properties. It was suggested that fakeness is not dichotomous (i.e., the news is either 100% fake or 100% genuine) but should be taken into account based on reader perception. It illuminates the literature on disseminating false information. Perceived fakeness was employed as a moderating factor in this study, contrary to the extant studies (e.g., Tsang, 2021). Our findings suggest that the perceived fakeness lessens the effect of expertise on sharing the intention of possibly false news. Our findings suggest that perceived fakeness should be considered when academia examines information propagation on social media.

Second, the results provide empirical support for the theory of the social function of emotions (Dafonte-Gómez, 2018; Horner et al., 2021; Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013) by showing that users' social activities, such as sharing news on social media, are influenced by their emotional reactions. Also, numerous academic works have discovered the importance of having a positive outlook and knowledge to share in online communities. The non-spurious association between emotional reactions and the news-sharing intention

was discovered with the presence of these two variables (expertise and attitude), underscoring the significance of the emotional content of news stories as a factor in how widely they are shared on social media.

Third, this study adds to the expanding body of knowledge on the intention to share FN via social media (Bakir & McStay, 2018; Susarla et al., 2012; Vosoughi et al., 2018). FN is a problem that harms society by undermining public trust, and many scholars have studied its spread (Bermes, 2021; Shen et al., 2021; Talwar et al., 2020). Most recent research has concentrated on spotting FN after it has already been spread, posted, and disseminated. Or some studies on an individual's intention to share 'fake' news do not take a deeper look into the perceived fakeness of the news, which should be considered as a continuum from 100% fake to 100% genuine (e.g., Tan & Hsu, 2022). This study closes this gap in this body of knowledge on the FN literature.

6.2. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

As per our study, emotional reaction, topic expertise, and attitude towards the topic are all significant influencers of the intention to share the news. People with different attitudes towards a topic evaluate the perceived fakeness in the news differently, so their intention to share the news will differ. Experts on a topic will try to spread the right information to the people around them. They will also refrain from sharing a news article when they see false information about their topic of expertise. This study might be useful for people working on the detection of FN and the spread of FN. Concerned authorities and people working on FN or false information detection should also focus on emotional reaction, expertise, and attitude while developing algorithms.

Since experts play a major role in clearing any misconceptions, fact-checkers or concerned authorities of social media platforms should have subject matter experts from different fields who can stop the false information spread and help people become aware of the genuine information. Researchers must examine how people evaluate fakeness to comprehend how false news spreads and how the public's trust in the news on social media

declines. Therefore, all social media users should try to cross-verify information before sharing it on their social media. Government, organizations, and social media platform management should try to make people aware of how much harm is caused because of false information spread on social media.

Third, this study proposed the concept of perceived fakeness as a moderating factor for the relationships between key influencing factors and a reader's news-sharing intention. A significant mitigating effect has been found on the relationship between topic expertise and intention to share. News readers should consider that even genuine or so-called 'fact-checked' news can be perceived as fake depending on the individuals who read it. While a news reader's perceived fakeness of a news article might prevent them from sharing the news article on social media when the reader has a good level of expertise, it may not prevent sharing of a possibly fake news article when the reader has a high level of emotional reactions or positive attitudes about the topic. Therefore, news readers should double-check the genuineness of a news article when they get emotional and have a positive attitude toward a topic after reading a news article before sharing it on their social media. They should also note that emotionally loaded shared news articles could be more easily propagated even though they can possibly be fake.

6.3. LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

First, this study has some limitations. The articles used in this study are all related to electric vehicles. A different choice of topic for the article might have produced slightly varying results. This study acknowledges that given the nature of FN, the platform's capacity to identify it reliably will probably not be ideal. Emotionally loaded news might also be true in some cases, such as the news about the death of the Queen, making people all over the world sad. Therefore, the generalizability of this study might be an issue when we deal with very factual news articles that could be highly emotionally loaded.

Second, although expertise and attitude are added to the research model to show the non-spuriousness of the relationship between emotional reaction and intention to share, as they

are used as main independent variables, they should have been measured with multiple items. Therefore, future research on the impact of attitude and expertise on (fake) news-sharing intention or behavior should use a multi-item measure of these variables.

Third, this study used attentiveness as a control variable and found it insignificant. Hence, people might not answer the surveys mindfully, even on popular professional platforms. Also, probably because the survey was done with MTurk workers, the respondents' occupations could have been biased. About 1/3 of respondents are from the IT section, which could have resulted in the research findings that are not a good representation of the general public who are experienced in sharing news online. So, future research should find an unbiased sample to test the proposed hypothesis.

Fourth, other factors influencing the intention to share FN can be focused upon. Not just the intention to share but the believability of FN can also be taken as a dependent variable. Fact-checking services and traditional media channels must be fully updated to cope with the FN issues created on social media. Future researchers can also focus on finding out which emotions (positive or negative) strongly influence the intention to share the news.

6.4. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between emotional reactions generated after reading a news article on social media in forming the intention to share it in the presence of two well-known factors for online information sharing (topic expertise and topic attitude). It also considers the perceived fakeness of news readers as a moderating variable. The results indicate that emotional reactions, topic expertise, and topic attitude are positively associated with the intention to share news articles on social media. Perceived fakeness has a significant (negative) moderating effect on the relationship between topic expertise and intention to share the news. Perceived fakeness does not significantly affect the other two relationships between emotional reaction (topic attitude) and the intention to share the news. This study has not only introduced perceived fakeness as a moderator and validated its' measurement properties but also found results the

cognitive moderating factor (perceived fakeness) only interacts with the cognitive influencing factor (topic expertise) when influencing the intention to share a news article, not with the affective factors (emotional reactions and topic attitude). This study contributes to the body of knowledge on the intention to spread FN via social media and the social function of emotions.

APPENDIX 1: Survey Questionnaire

A news article about Electric Vehicles and the future

(Original Text from the news)

Electric Vehicles are good for the environment. And some of the latest models look pretty decent. But consumers, so far, have been reluctant to embrace electric vehicles on a mass scale.

Electric Vehicles are the hottest thing in the car industry and are consuming the plans, resources, and time of almost every automotive manufacturer in the world. There are many reasons for the increasing popularity of electric vehicles. First, the cost of electricity is competitive for consumers with the price of gasoline. Second, nearly everyone with a car has a power outlet in their home. Recharging is easy.

Moreover, consumers are becoming more aware of the dangers associated with fossil fuels. Not only are carbon emissions an existential threat to human civilization, but gasoline pollution is also a leading cause of mortality.

(Modified Text to affect respondents' emotional reactions and the perception of fakeness)

Ethan (36 years old, Montana) is excited about his new EV from Tesla, and his family says they love traveling in it. He is also happy with the looks, performance, and cost associated with maintaining the EV.

Stephen (45, New Jersey) is unhappy that the battery doesn't last as long as he expected, and he cannot use his car to travel to far-off places. Moreover, he is worried as there is news that several tesla cars have recently caught fire.

(Modified pictures to affect respondents' emotional reactions and the perception of fakeness)



Questionnaire

** 7-point Likert scale (1 – strongly disagree to 7 – strongly agree) was used unless specified otherwise.

1. **Intention to share this article on your social media:** Please answer the following questions about your intention to share this news article on social media (Lee & Ma, 2012).
 - Do you intend to share such news stories on social media in the future?
 - Do you expect to share such news stories when contributed by other users?
 - Do you plan to share such news stories on social media regularly?

2. **Perceived fakeness:** To what extent do you agree with the following statement? (Tsang, 2021)
 - I think this news article has fake information.
 - I think the information in this news article is misleading.
 - I think this news article is created to deceive readers
 - I think this news article is not genuine.

3. **Emotional Reactions (ER):** (Bayer et al., 2018)
 - Do you feel that this article has any emotional expressions?
 - To what extent are you affected by this article?
Scale: (1 – Strongly unaffected to 7 – Strongly affected)

4. **Topic Expertise (Exp):** (Dafonte-Gómez, 2018)
 - What is your level of expertise on the topic of electric vehicles)?
Scale: (1 – Extremely knowledgeable, to 5 – Not knowledgeable at all)

5. **Topic Attitude (Att):** (Amazeen et al., 2019)
 - What is your attitude towards the topic of electric vehicles?
Scale: 1 – Strongly negative to 7 – Strongly positive

6. **Degree of attentiveness:**
 - How carefully have you read this article before you answer the previous three questions?
Scale: (1- Extremely well to 7- Extremely not well)

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