Peer-Reviewed Article

HOAX: How perceived authority of information sources affects students' likeliness to disseminate misinformation

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to understand how students interact with social media and information sharing, and how perceived authority impacts their habits using a mixed-methods survey approach. The changing landscape of misinformation on social media has called into question how students' perception of authority impacts the spread of misinformation among undergraduate students. Previous research has surveyed students on their information sharing behaviors but has yet to address the specific consequences of information spread by a perceived authority. The findings from this study indicate that students rely on traditional forms of authority (such as doctors, police officers) to determine the validity of a source and that "verified" status of a social media post significantly increases the perceived authority of the source. The work finds that the emotional tone of information sources also influences students' evaluations of a source's authority. These findings have important implications for teaching information literacy, and it demonstrates the need to address this issue in instruction sessions.

KEYWORDS

authority, information literacy, social media, misinformation

Source evaluation has long been a hallmark of academic library instruction. To investigate how students perceive source authority, a mixed-methods survey in which students were asked to evaluate social media posts was designed and disseminated to 321 full-time, first-year students. The purpose of the student is to determine whether perceived authority influences student willingness to share social media posts, even when the suspect or know it contains misinformation. In this paper, the definition of authority aligns with Wilson's (1983) seminal work on cognitive authority. Cognitive authority, defined as an information source having perceived or actual credibility that influences thoughts or actions, is highly subjective. While cognitive authority can often be derived from experience, profession, or performance, it can also be socially constructed and therefore subjective and fallible. This study places particular focus upon how perceived authority influences decision-making on social media platforms among college students. Additionally, the author sought to better understand how students perceive authority in a world where influence is ill-defined and unregulated and found that students are still likely to share misinformation if the content is emotionally charged, political, or funny.

Literature Review

The difficulty and necessity of teaching source evaluation has been well-studied, and this issue became increasingly important as misinformation, fake news, and internet hoaxes continues to grow. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education" explicitly addresses this issue in the Information Literacy Framework, a central plank of which is that "authority is constructed and contextual" (ACRL, 2015). When teaching this concept, students are asked to recognize markers of authority, particularly within information evaluation, and are expected to understand how an authority establishes credibility. This aspect of information literacy instruction is vital because students regularly have difficulty understanding the construction and contextualization of authority while they assess the credibility of sources.

There is, unsurprisingly, a large body of literature **on** students**'** ability to evaluate sources, fake news, misinformation, and internet hoaxes (Auberry, 2018; Evanson & Sponsel, 2019; Koohikamali & Sidorova, 2017; Rush, 2018; Saunders et al., 2017). Saunders et al. (2017) found that the group of students who ranked themselves as "extremely/very proficient" at evaluating sources for authority in fact scored the lowest in being able to accurately evaluate for authority. Rush (2018) has found that students become "more knowledgeable" or "somewhat more knowledgeable" about identifying fake news after receiving information literacy instruction**.** In a 2019 study, Evanson & Sponsel found that students use social media to access news and current events, and that perceived credibility of the source determined whether students would reshare the information. This reflects findings in an earlier study by Koohikamali & Sidorova (2017), which examines social networks and perceived attitudes and risks among information consumers. Finally, Auberry (2018) examined fake-news awareness

education for undergraduate students, concluding students desperately need to better understand the constructed nature of knowledge to better evaluate sources critically. Auberry further argues that more research is needed to understand why people share mis-information (Auberry, 2018).

This article builds upon Wilson's definition of authority in *Second hand knowledge*, which argues that authority is a relationship in which a source is regarded by an audience as credible and influential. Wilson begins with the premise that no individual can be an expert in everything and is thus forced to depend upon the expertise of others when forming opinions or learning about a new topic. Readers must therefore use a wide variety of factors to determine whether an information source is worthy of shaping their thoughts and opinions. Wilson further argues that there are degrees of authority and perceived trustworthiness; the perceived authority of a source directly influences the extent to which an audience allows themselves to be influenced by the source. This perceived authority can, Wilson notes, be unmerited. Similarly, Wilson argues that spheres of expertise are considered when individuals assign authority, so the extent to which a source is allowed to influence an audience depends upon the topic. Ultimately, Wilson argues that the perceived credibility and authority of an information source is directly related to the extent to which the audience allows themselves to be influenced. The approach toward authority in this study was directly influenced by Wilson's work, particularly when considering how students evaluate sources to determine the extent of their authority (Wilson, 1983).

This definition of authority as a perceived and constructed relationship is also reflected in the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education adopted in 2016, which contains the principle "authority is constructed and contextual." This section of the framework declares:

> Information resources reflect their creators' expertise and credibility and are evaluated based on the information need and the context in which the information will be used. Authority is constructed in that various communities may recognize different types of authority. It is contextual in that the information need may help to determine the level of authority required. (ACRL, 2015, para. 9)

This element of the ACRL framework has received extensive criticism from librarians (Baer, 2018; Bauder & Rod, 2016; Bull et al., 2021; Wilkinson, 2014). Wilkinson (2014) critiqued the framework because it failed to account for different forms of authority and the power of lived experiences (Wilkinson, 2014). Similarly, Baer (2018) argues authority is often misconstrued as a matter of opinion or contingent on subjective or personal evaluation, and various interpretations of authority are equally valid. Authority can be separated from the social constructs that surround these authorities, including power, privilege, and social standing. Baer argues librarians should encourage students to focus less on "good" or "bad" sources, but

instead provide nuanced discussions that address these constructed notions of absolute relativism ideology (Baer, 2018). Other works have similarly concluded that it is difficult to teach the ACRL framework goals in short "one shot" sessions that are too short to sufficiently explore the nuanced topics (Angell & Tewell, 2017; Glisson, 2019; Mathson & Lorenzen, 2008)

Studies have also evaluated the "checklist" approach toward teaching source evaluation. Angell & Tewell (2017) conducted a two-year study in which they found success using the CRAAP (Currency, Relevance, Authority, Accuracy, Purpose) checklist as a teaching framework for evaluating sources, but also found students could still not distinguish the nuance beyond these criteria (Angell & Tewell, 2017). Mathson & Lorenzen (2008) use a different approach, teaching source evaluation in a library credit course, utilizing internet hoaxes and misinformation. In their article, they emphasize educating students on cherry-picking and confirmation bias as well as how to be discerning of information, two critical parts of being information literate with mixed results and effectiveness. Similarly, Glisson (2019) studied the approach of utilizing social media posts, internet hoaxes, and fake news reports to teach students source evaluation and nuance in a variety of library workshops. Glisson concludes it is critical for students to think beyond traditional forms of source evaluation checklists. He also introduces discernment of truth, and whether truth is relative, as well as the normalization of distrust in scientific information.

Works in this field have also evaluated the success of lateral reading as an instructional process. The Stanford History Education Group, an organization that teaches source evaluation, has been particularly active in promoting the lateral reading technique. A seminal work on his topic is Breakstone et al. (2021), which examined students' ability to evaluate online resources. This technique encourages students to evaluate a source's claims by visiting the original material to verify its validity. The study found that four one-hour online learning modules of lateral reading instruction resulted in half of the participants being able to successfully utilize the practice.

Finally, a major field of literature with which this article intersects is the study of social media. Platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have increased use among Generation Z and Millennials, which are the target demographic of this study. For the purposes of this article, "Generation Z" is defined as persons born from 1997-2012, "Millennial" is defined as persons born from 1981-1996 (Dimock, 2019). The way people seek out information on social media has changed rapidly (Auxier, 2020; Shearer, 2018; Tien & Prodanovic, 2021; Witek & Grettano, 2012). Marketing brands have shifted focus from television and radio ads to social media promotion, and some partner with social media "influencers" who promote a brand's product on their own social media platforms (Tien & Prodanovic, 2021). Evidence shows, however, that regardless of which platform people frequent, social media is outpacing traditional print for news consumption among Americans (Shearer, 2018). The rise in social media usage, and the prevalence of news or current events circulating the platform, is directly

related to the initial creation of this study. The correlation between social media and news consumption has been studied before, though previous studies of news circulation on social media have largely looked at Facebook and not more recent platforms (Witek & Grettano, 2012). A decade of changes to the platforms and media treads makes updated studies necessary. Pew Research Center has also done extensive research on the perception of social media and its effects on "the way things are going in the U.S. today" (Auxier, 2020, para.1).

As social media has evolved, platforms have become more intentional about stopping misinformation. One way in which platforms address this issue is through "Verified Users." According to Wang et al. (2021), identity verification on social media platforms can be an effective tool to deter fake news, but requires intentional system design and verification systems, including the manner in which accounts are verified via personal information. Additionally, a 2020 study of misinformation found that perceived authority and underdeveloped skills to determine credibility led to misinformation (Buchanan, 2020). This article builds upon and adds to this growing body of scholarship by focusing more specifically on information literacy instruction and source evaluation within the context of social media.

Methods

This study was designed to evaluate students' information sharing habits and to better understand how students evaluate source authority. This was achieved by prompting students to evaluate social media posts in a survey. These social media posts contained misinformation or internet hoaxes, and they were written by different types of authority figures, both real or perceived. The guiding research question was: How does perceived authority affect students' likeliness to share misinformation? Source authority within this study was defined as the credibility of the author or organization producing the information. This study was conducted in Fall 2021. The library already had a pre-existing relationship with the institution's First-Year Seminar program, so the study drew upon that group of students for participation. After completing all necessary Institutional Review Board application and approval procedures, the survey was distributed to the 321 first-year students enrolled at the institution. The survey was distributed through Baseline CampusLabs via email with an information statement from the researcher. Students enrolled in a first-year experience class were encouraged to take the survey during class time by their instructor. The survey was open from November 8th, 2021, to December 5th, 2021, with one initial call for participants and two follow up reminders after that.

The circulated survey included 2 Facebook posts, 2 Twitter posts, and 2 TikTok posts, for a total of six evaluation activities. Posts used in the survey are included in Appendix A. The content of these posts varied from objective information to leading or ill-informed information, to direct misinformation. There were several considerations when choosing the social media posts to present in the survey, and the themes chosen for inclusion were immigration, COVID-19, and popular internet hoaxes. These themes were intentionally chosen due to their polarizing content, as misinformation is often spread through appeals to authority. In order to better

understand how students construct authority, content was chosen that contained misinformation but that also contained a variety of authorities, including verified and unverified users.

One of each of these types of posts contained misinformation, while the other contained factual information. When designing the survey, priority was given to real social media posts that had been posted online from different sources and from different platforms. This was meant to test students' responses to differing forms of authority and to determine whether the author of the content was a factor in influencing student behavior. It was important that students experienced these posts in the most authentic way possible in order to emulate their real evaluation process, while also considering the challenges and restrictions of the survey platform. Due to the transient nature of internet content, and to account for the fact a post could be taken down or deleted during the survey administration period, students viewed a screenshot of each of the Facebook and Twitter posts. This image included the content of the post as well as the number of shares, likes, and replies to the post. Alternative text was included for each screenshot. For the two posts that contained videos, students used an external link to visit the TikTok webpage and watch the video. A transcript was also included of each video.

For each evaluation, the survey introduced each activity in a new section, with the screenshot or link, followed by the three questions that evaluated each activity:

View this social media post.

1.   After viewing this post, how likely are you to share this information with anyone via text, email, or social media?

2.   Please explain your reasoning for the likelihood of you sharing this information (1-2 sentences).

3.   How confident are you that this information is accurate?

For the survey questions, participants were asked to score their likeliness/confidence on a five-point Likert scale, with one being likely or very confident and five being very unlikely or very unconfident. Question two was entirely open-ended. This design was implemented to get both qualitative and quantitative responses that could be analyzed to understand whether students favored authoritative sources and to study how students evaluated authority and why they chose to disseminate the information.

Following the six evaluation scenarios, participants were asked to provide demographic information including, age, gender, major, which campus location they take classes, and military affiliation. The final question asked about their social media usage and which platforms they consulted for current events or news. According to the survey data, this survey took an average of 20 minutes for participants to complete. The complete survey can be found in Appendix A.

After the conclusion of the survey period, the collected qualitative and quantitative data was analyzed. While the survey did not ask for students to report personally identifiable information, the survey instrument collected IP addresses and email addresses, so all survey responses were anonymized in order to protect the participants from any risk of personal identification. The qualitative data was then examined by looking for common themes or similarities both between all the participants on a single evaluation activity using open coding. Then, the author analyzed how each student moved through all six evaluation activities and tracked their responses across the entire survey. The quantitative data was analyzed to find trends among the data. Specifically, the students' responses were compared to evaluation activities that featured posts from the same social media platform. There was also consideration of how students responded to posts containing misinformation versus posts with credible information. To compare the activities, students' willingness to share was examined, as well as their confidence in the accuracy of the posts. This was also examined with qualitative data to connect the trends in the data with the themes identified. These findings shaped the results and takeaways from the study.
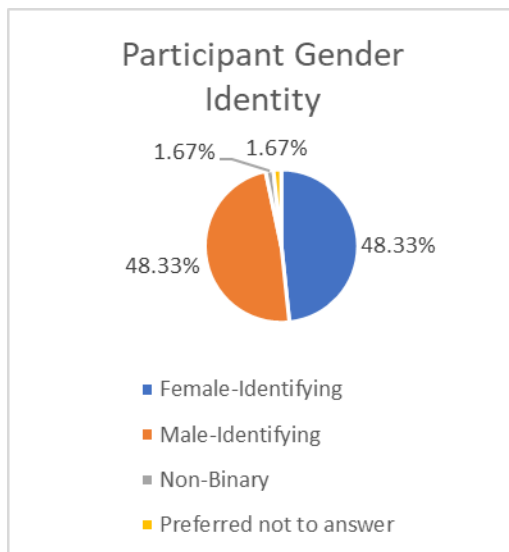
Results

After sending the survey to 321 students, the author received 65 responses for a 20.25% response rate.

Demographic Data

Demographic data was collected in this survey, which provided additional context about the participants.
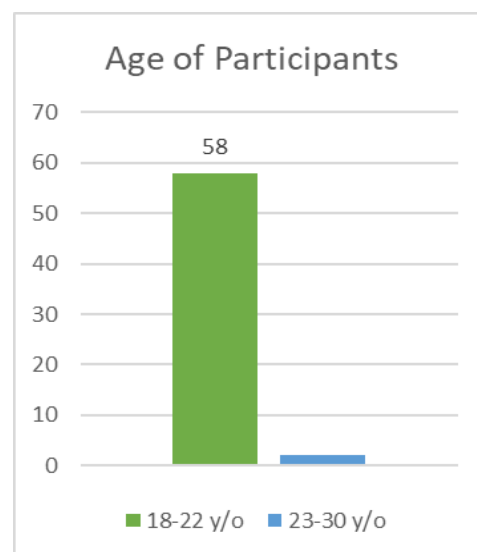
Figure 1

Participant Gender Identity

Figure 2

Age of Participants

Note: Student demographics are shown in the figures above. In addition to the above questions, students were asked to self-report the modality in which they attend classes at the institution, and major.

Overall Results

Upon analyzing the data, several trends emerged. 68% of participants described having an emotional response, such as an expressed fear or anxiety, to the content in their qualitative responses. In fact, only 15% of the qualitative responses showed any kind of critical analysis of the source in their reasoning of either sharing or not sharing the post. Students who reported an emotional response did not engage in critical analysis. Another overarching theme was that students were more likely to share the information if it came from a traditional authority figure, and within the qualitative data many responses pointed to the user being "verified" on the social media platform. Another theme present in the data is that students' reasoning for sharing information can be different from the intent of the content, bringing into question online social responsibility for sharing correct information.

Only 3% of students mentioned the authority of the author of the post, most of which mentioned being "verified" on various platforms. Across the board, students trusted the source material of traditional authority figures, including the police department and the TikTok user @dr.noc, a medical doctor who posts short videos on current topics related to medicine. However, students were split on the relative authority of "verified" influencers, including TikTok user @chrisfahmy, with 30% being either very confident or somewhat confident in the accuracy of the post, 20% being unsure, and 50% being either somewhat unconfident or very unconfident in the accuracy.

Emotional responses

Three of the evaluation activities contained rather polarizing content, including themes of immigration, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the "MoMo Challenge." This was purposeful, as the study intended to recreate the kinds of posts that are often vehicles for misinformation on social media. This highlighted a major theme within the data: when asked to share their reasoning for whether they would share the information on social media, 68% of the qualitative responses provided an emphatic emotional response as to why they would or would not share the post. For the purpose of this study, an emotional response is defined as a response that cited personal feelings rather than objective observations about the post.

Respondents' comments included: "[I would not share because] Covid is stupid and needs to be over, I don't really care" and "I do not share my opinions on social media it's not my place in my eyes." This emotional response was significant throughout every evaluation activity; rather than providing a critical analysis or response, students were triggered to share or not share based on their emotional reaction, such as fear, anxiety, or anger. Ramifications of this can be seen when comparing how likely students are to share and how confident they are that the information is accurate in a single evaluation activity.
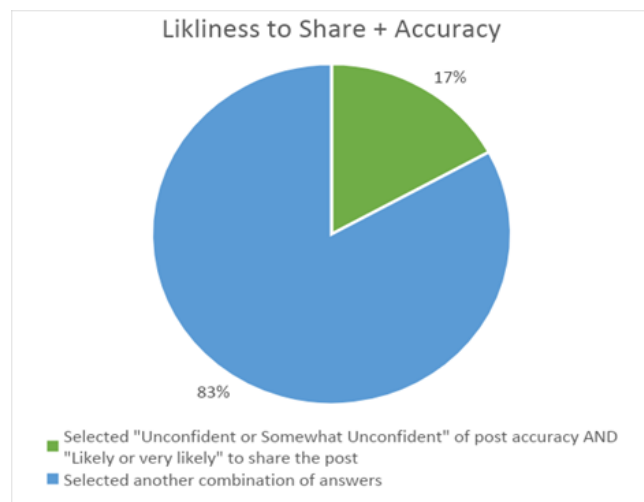
Figure 3

Data from Evaluation Activity 2
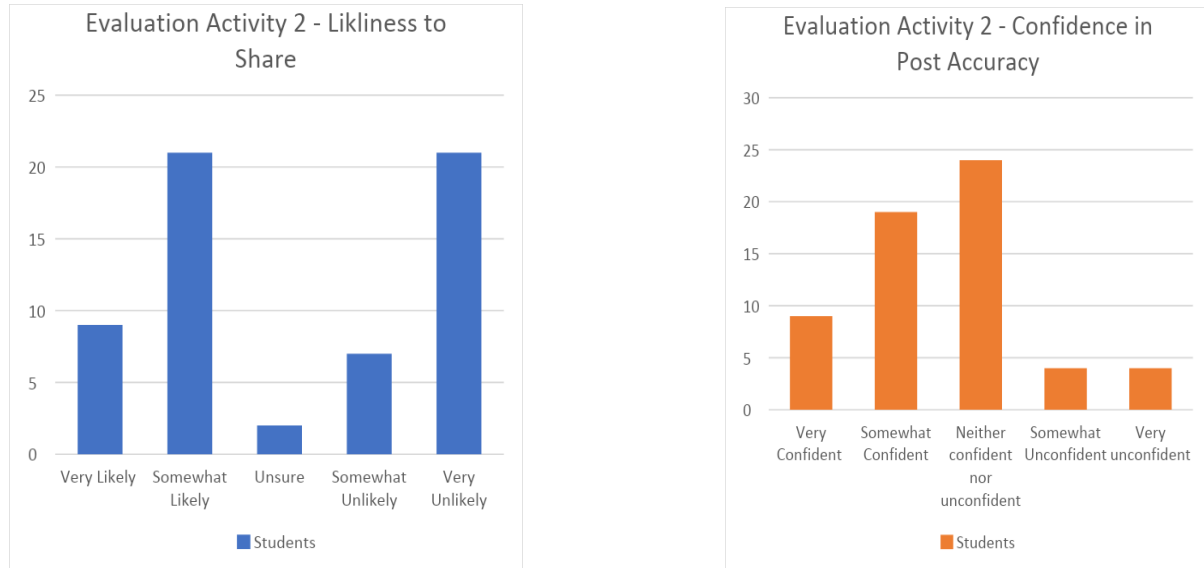
The study found that in evaluation activity 2, 17% of participants marked that they would share the post while being unsure of the post's accuracy. Evaluation activity five had similar results, with 15% of participants answering in a similar fashion. These evaluation activities contained sensitive material related to an internet hoax, known as the MoMo Challenge. This was a contrast to the other evaluation activities, as activity one had just 1%, activity four had 2%, and activity six had 7% of participants answering in the same manner.

Figure 4

Individual student responses across both prompts, evaluating likelihood of sharing the post and perceived accuracy in Evaluation Activity 2

Traditional authority figures

Another theme that emerged from the data was that students were more likely to share posts from traditional authority figures. For the sake of this paper, "traditional authority" figures are defined as accounts associated with organizations or people that are widely regarded as knowledgeable in the field or societal roles. When comparing evaluation activities that had posts on the same platform, one with accurate information and the other with misinformation, students favored the posts that were shared by perceived authority figures. As an example, 50% of students marked they would very likely or somewhat likely share a post from the Spring Hope Police Department. This evaluation activity had the highest likeliness to be shared out of all six of the activities. When assessing student's confidence in the validity of the same post, 47% of participants indicated that they were very confident or somewhat confident that the post was accurate, 30% marked that they were unsure, leaving only 23% of students either very unconfident or somewhat unconfident that the post was accurate. Though this post contained similar content to another post regarding the MoMo Challenge in regard to messaging and imagery, there is a clear difference in response between the evaluation activities. (See Appendix A)

Of the ten responses that did provide critical reasoning in the post by Spring Hope Police Department, several pointed to the police department as a source of authority. One student wrote: "I would share because it's being posted directly from the police department itself hence, its credibility to be reliable information." In contrast, many students were unbothered by whether the information was completely reliable, and instead relied on that emotional response. Some wrote "I have nieces and nephews, rather be safe than sorry" and "Though I am not sure this information is correct or not, I will share this because it seems kind of risky for children." These responses provide important context to supporting students and are further analyzed in the discussion section of this publication.
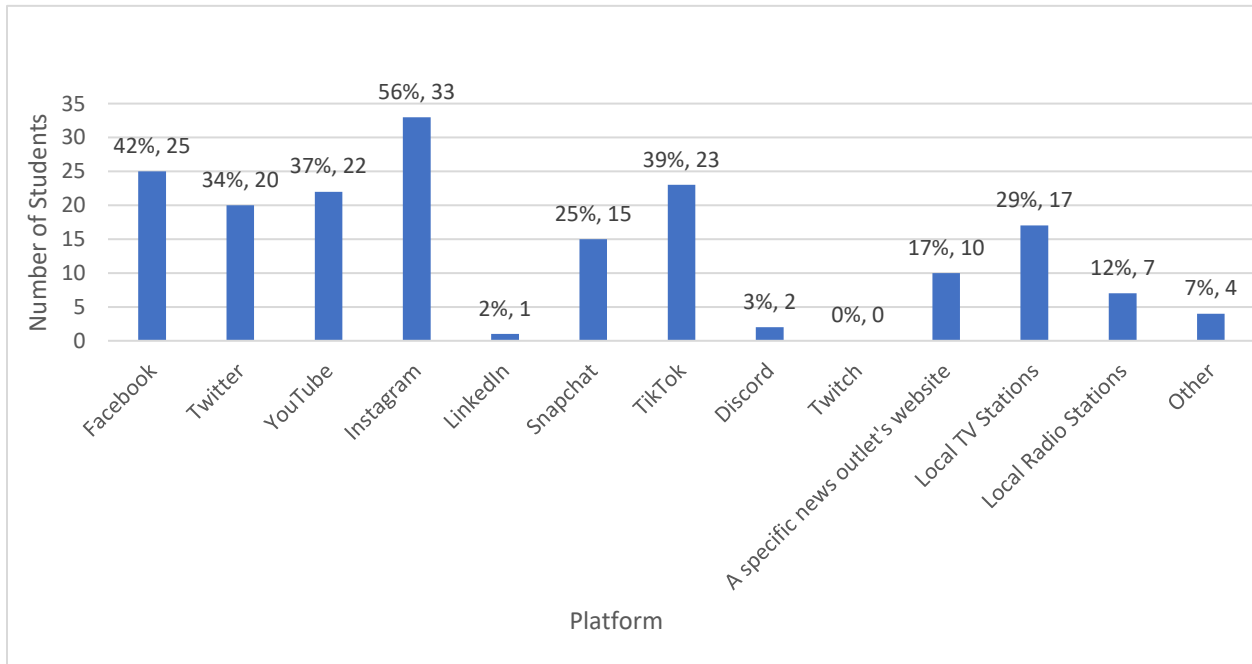
Markers of credibility

With the rise of the social media "influencer," the study also sought to explore whether the perceived status of the label "influencer" had significant impact on students' likeliness to share information online. This introduced another theme: students pointing to markers of credibility, such as a post or account being "verified" on the social media platform. In the final evaluation activity in which a TikTok Verified Influencer shared information about the alleged "Zone of Death," 27% of participants were very likely or somewhat likely to share this video. A proportion, 30%, believed that it was accurate. However, 43% marked that they were very unlikely to share this video, due to an overwhelming skepticism for TikTok: "[I wouldn't share this because] TikTok is literally just people making things up." While this TikTok creator did not cite sources or point to any external information, and the study concludes students still showed a likeliness to share the information based on the authority the TikTok creator holds by being a verified user and through their status as an official TikTok influencer. These labels are relevant

to students' consumption of information online because they have power to influence sharing and reposting information, regardless of validity, and students themselves are often unsure of what level of validity these labels merit.

This was a particularly important finding. Despite the fact students cited skepticism for the platform, TikTok was the third highest platform for which students got their news in the last week of the study, with 35% of participants getting their news on that platform.

Figure 5

Platforms where students report seeing news (students select all that apply)

The qualitative data offered additional insight into how students construct markers of credibility. In activity one, several students note in their open-ended question about whether the account was "verified" on Twitter: "[I would share because] the source that shared the article is verified on twitter and is related to the content on the rest of the page" and "I chose somewhat likely because it is coming from a verified account." The students identify being "verified" on the platform as evidence that the post was trustworthy. While there is a different user verification process for each social media platform, this has emerged as a trend across different platforms, and students are looking towards these badges or labels of being Verified as markers of credibility. As a result, they are more likely to share this information, because of the perceived credibility. This reliance on social platform verification influenced students' decisions to share a source, even if the information was inaccurate.

Social Responsibility

Findings from the qualitative data suggest students shared sources without regard for how it may affect the greater social media landscape. For example, students shared posts specifically because they were humorous. One student wrote about evaluation activity two: "[I would share the post] Because its funny. For the meme [sic]." Another student commented: "While it isn't from a reliable source, I doubt there would be intent to lie about something like this."

This was consistent throughout the evaluation activities, which raises questions of social responsibility: At what point are users liable for the information we share online? How do students perceive that liability? For example, in evaluation activity four, there was a tweet from user @DonaldTrumpJr, the verified account of a prominent political figure, which included a false report from *NBC Miami* about voter fraud. This post was chosen to assess how students respond to an authority figure immersed in politics. The study sought to determine if this was polarizing to students, and if so, how students would respond. This provided additional context to study on how students construct authority. This evaluation activity was notable, as it had one of the highest levels of uncertainty for participants while 56% of participants were very unlikely to share the tweet, 39% were unsure of its accuracy.

This trend was also reflected in evaluation activity one, which was a similar political tweet about immigration. In this activity 41% were unsure of the accuracy of the tweet. Since the tweet contained more neutral information, however, possible reasons for this lack of response are due to a combination of three prominent themes present throughout the study: it did not elicit a strong emotional response; it was a verified account on twitter; it did not spur any feelings of social responsibility.

Discussion

This survey offered an opportunity to evaluate how traditional college students disseminate information, with special attention to the way they interpret and construct authority. The results of the survey also shed light on participants' social media activity and habits. Despite educators' efforts to increase awareness of misinformation on social media, only 15% of responses showed any kind of critical analysis of the source. Of these, many referred to the "verified" status of the account holder, citing a correlation between being "verified" and being an authority. This assumed relationship between verification and authority, however, is not always accurate. Many of the accounts featured in the study were verified on various platforms, yet they lacked any real authority on the topic being discussed. These same verified accounts were sharing misinformation or information that lacked context and nuance. Similarly, students were more trustful of traditional authority sources, including @dr.noc on TikTok and Spring Hope Police Department. This highlights the primary finding of the study: students are

dangerously likely to share and trust information from a "verified" social media source, even when the information is objectively inaccurate.

Another important finding from the data is participants' willingness to share misinformation even when they suspected it is not credible. Multiple qualitative responses reflect a willingness to share a social media post that they did not find accurate or credible, often because the subject matter was humorous or entertaining. Another factor that causes students to share posts they suspect to be untrue was whether the content was emotionally charged. This was particularly true when students shared internet hoax posts. The extent to which emotional change and humorous content influenced students' sharing behavior is reflected in the study's evaluation exercises two and five, which dealt with the "Momo Challenge." Respondents, while skeptical of the posts, note an inclination to share the post "just in case" the information was true.

The data gathered showed that some student participants struggled to engage critical thinking when evaluating sources. This led to an unexpected conclusion that the level of emotional response was a major factor in students' assessment process; 64% of the total qualitative responses across all evaluation activities showed an emotional reaction, rather than critical thinking. This illustrates the power that evocative posts have over social media users. This finding also raises questions over how students can be taught to consider the accuracy of the information before sharing it with others. While an initial emotional reaction to content is natural, students need to be trained to favor tempered, analytical analysis of the works. Stanford Education Group's lateral reading provides an important framework that could be used by librarians when teaching students to overcome their initial emotional reactions to information sources. Caulfield's SIFT framework may be of use. In this study, the most extreme emotional reaction and subsequently the highest disregard for validity was on the famous "MoMo Challenge" internet hoax (evaluation activities two and five), in which the posts contained a disturbing image of a sculpture and a frightening description. It was perhaps notable that these were the only posts that contained information about children, though further study on this aspect is required before meaningful conclusions can be drawn.

Limitations

A major limitation of this study was the inability to create an organic social media stream that simulates a true-to-life social media experience. The survey platform limited the study's ability to get the most accurate experience for students, though the results still present interesting considerations. Another limitation, which was only identified after data collection was complete, is that it is impossible to account for every factor that shapes students' decisions to share social media posts. For example, the study did not account for the possibility that students failed to share posts because they were generally uninterested in the topic, and not due to considerations over whether the post was untrustworthy. The high degree of variety in student motivations for sharing, or not sharing, a post makes it impossible to account for every

possible factor. Another limitation of the study was the use of extremely polarizing political figures as sources of information, which may have artificially skewed the results. In future studies of this type, it is recommended that slightly less overly polarizing social media users are used as examples.

The findings of this study also demonstrate that there are areas for further study. Foremost, a similar study should be conducted with other demographics groups, such as non-traditional students or students at various university and college types. Studies of how concepts of perceived authority in social media are taught in an ever-changing internet setting would also be useful. There are also additional opportunities for studying students' interaction with social media and how they seek out news, with particular focus on how students construct and understand authority. Future studies may also increase or decrease the number of evaluative activities, though this study suggests longer studies may result in survey fatigue. The six exercises of this study required an average of 20 minutes to complete, yet respondents showed signs of fatigue. A still longer survey may result in lower participation.

Conclusion

This study sought to provide a better understanding of how traditional college students evaluate social media posts, and to determine how perceived authority affects students' likeliness to share misinformation. Findings from the project both supported and challenged the study's initial hypothesis that students generally lack the critical information literacy skills needed to identify misinformation on social media. This hypothesis was reinforced in the results, while an unexpected finding has been the extent to which students trust traditional authority figures. The findings also confirmed the need for educating students about the dubious link between social media account verification and expertise, as students have difficulty recognizing that verification alone does not equate to subject authority. Another unexpected find is the extent to which emotion response outweighs critical thinking, as demonstrated by students' willing to share information they suspect to be untrue "just in case." This finding is particularly important because it explains why social media posts that are clearly misinformation are shared by students. Finally, this study reinforces the view that perceived authority has a significant influence on whether students shared information. Knowing that this is a key factor in whether students share misinformation, librarians are reminded of the importance of discussing the nature and criteria for authority in their information literacy instruction. Overall, the collective findings of the study demonstrate the need for information literacy instruction to place more emphasis on perceived authority in source evaluation. As social media posts continue to play an ever-growing role in influence students' information gathering and sharing behaviors, the ability to evaluation source authority should also become an increasingly key focus of information literacy instruction.

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Appendix A

Survey Instrument

Evaluation Activity 1

Evaluation Activity 2

Evaluation Activity 3

https://www.tiktok.com/@dr.noc/video/6998634525156756742

Video Transcript:

Person 1: "Hey, I was wrong, I actually have one more question for you"

Person 2: "What's up?"

Person 1: "I was talking with my cousin again and they said the CDC themselves admitted that the COVID tests can't tell the difference between COVID and influenza!"

Person 2: "Yes, I know what they're referencing, and they have greatly misunderstood what the CDC actually said."

Person 1: "Well, yeah, I figured so, but I don't understand, can you explain it?"

Person 2: "Yes, the COVID tests can only tell you if you are positive or negative for COVID. They can't tell you anything about influenza."

Person 1: "Yeah, the COVID tests test for COVID that's what I would have assumed… so what are they talking about?"

Person 2: "So the CDC made an announcement encouraging the use of what are called multiplex assays, where you test for both COVID and Influenza at the same time."

Person 1: "I see where this is going. So, people interpreted that to say all the current COVID tests pick up influenza as a false positive and maybe COVID has been the Flu the whole time."

Person 2: "Oh yes, that is exactly how some people have interpreted it, which is very incorrect. You could have a raging influenza infection take a COVID test and it would be negative because you don't have SARS-CoV2. It would be positive on a flu test though if you took a test that was both for COVID and influenza."

Person 1: "Oh I see, so the CDC is saying instead of testing just for COVID you test for both COVID and influenza at the same time. So, if they do have influenza, you know. It comes up as a positive flu result instead of coming up as just a negative COVID result."

Person 2: "You've got it."

Evaluation Activity 4

Evaluation Activity 5

Evaluation Activity 6

https://www.tiktok.com/@chrisfahmy/video/6908807126873804038

Video Transcript:

"This [referring to text on the screen that reads: "Did you know that there is a[n] area in America that murder is legal"] is 100% true. There is actually a place in the US where murder is legal. It's literally called the Zone of Death and it's a pretty scary loophole. And for your own safety, you should probably watch this video, so you don't end up there with a stranger. But it's easy because I'm doing this all in one part. So keep up. You see, this all takes place in Yellowstone National Park. Here are the state lines, and you can see that the park crosses over into Montana and Idaho. And that's the problem. See this small 50-mile strip of land in Idaho? That's where murder is legal. Here's why. In all criminal proceedings in the US, the jury has to live in both the state and the district in which the crime takes place. In other words, if there's any crime that happens in this little strip of land, the jury in the trial has to be people who live in this little strip of land. The problem is that nobody lives there. So, the case would get thrown out."

Section 1: Evaluation Activities

Evaluation Activities 1-6

View this post.

　　After viewing this post, how likely are you to share this information with anyone via text, email, or social media?

- Very Likely
- Somewhat likely
- Somewhat unlikely
- Very unlikely
- Unsure

　　Please explain your reasoning for the likelihood of your sharing this information (1-2 sentences).

- Fill in the blank

How confident are you that this information is accurate?

- Very confident

- Somewhat confident

- Neither confident nor unconfident

- Somewhat unconfident

- Very unconfident

Section 2: Demographic Questions

How old are you?

- 18-22 years

- 23-30 years

- 31-40 years

- 41-50 years

- 50+ years

What gender do you identify as?

- Male

- Female

- Non-binary

- Prefer to self-describe (Fill in below)

- Prefer not to answer.

How do you take classes at Park University?

- Mostly Online

- Mostly on the Parkville Campus

- Mostly at a campus center

Have you ever served or are you currently serving in any of the United States Armed Forces?

- Yes

- No

- Other

What is your major?

- Humanities (Art and Design, English and Modern Language, Music, Theatre, and Fine Arts)

- Communication, Journalism, and Public Relations

- Computer Science and Information Systems, Mathematics, Natural and Physical Sciences

- Criminal Justice Administration

- History, Political Science, and Interdisciplinary Studies

- Education

- Sports & Exercise Science

- Nursing

- Social Work

- Psychology, Sociology

- Business (Accounting, Business Administration, Economics, Finance, Administration, International Business, Marketing, Project Management, Public Administration)

- Undecided

- Other

In the past week, where did you learn about current events or news? Select all that apply.

- Facebook

- Twitter

- YouTube

- Instagram

- LinkedIn

- Snapchat

- TikTok

- Discord

- Twitch

- A specific news outlet's website

- Local TV Stations

- Local Radio Stations

- Other

- I did not learn about current events at any of these places in the past week.