Role of Familiarity in Misinformation

Pohai Lacaran

Research Methods in Psychology

08.08.2020

Myth Busting

Revised Literature Review

Misinformation remains a significant concern, primarily when it negatively affects the credibility of facts and truth. Daily, individuals are often exposed to fake news, which leaves them at risk of making wrong decisions and conclusions. Rapp and Salovich (2018) note that fake news is intended to confuse the audience by intentionally incorporating mistakes in reporting to entertain the readers. Often, Rapp and Salovich (2018) explain that exposure to fake news and misinformation leads to problematic consequences, especially to the reader of the news. The recent past has seen an increased use of social media to spread fake and inaccurate news and information while leaves the public open to misinterpretation and wrong conclusions. Szpitalak and Polczy (2019) note that exposure to "incorrect information results in confusion about what is correct, doubt true understandings, and consequent reliance on falsehood." Despite efforts to pull down information considered fake or inappropriate, significant efforts are yet to be witnessed. This calls for a combined effort, which takes into account the need to reduce misinformation while at the same time retracting misinformation from the general public.

Retracting misinformation is a tedious and highly sensitive approach that needs an extensive consideration and strategy. Despite this, debunking myths and misinformation remain a significant challenge, especially when the audience tends to perceive myths and misinformation as being the truth. When misinformation becomes familiar, debunking, or retracting, it can be complicated and can often lead to unintended consequences (Berinsky, 2017). This means that the audience is likely to believe the myths; the more certain approaches are adopted in busting them. Ecker, Hogan, and Lewandowsky (2017) note that misinformation's continued influence can make the process of retracting myths and misinformation complicated and ineffective. Familiarity with misinformation has also been attributed to challenges that remain relating to refuting or retracting misinformation. One way individuals can make rumors and misinformation familiar to the audience is by repeating them. By directly quashing rumors while mentioning them within the process, Berinsky (2017) notes that their familiarity is enhanced, making them more believable and harder to refute.

How best to refute myths or retract misinformation remains a topic of controversy. While a section of literature argues that withdrawing misinformation should avoid repeating it in the process, others hold a different view (Pluviano, Watt, & Sergio, 2017). According to Ecker, Hogan, and Lewandowsky (2017), explicitly mentioning the misinformation while retracting it is highly effective compared to avoiding mention altogether. To explain this, Cook, Lewandowsky, and Ecker (2017) note that mentioning the myth or misinformation being retracted helps activate people's minds to label it as wrong. After activating their mind and communicating that the tale is wrong, replacing the myth with the alternative narrative is needed (Pluviano, Watt, & Sergio, 2017). This entails explaining clearly why the myth is wrong and why they shouldn't hold the view. In explaining the purpose of illustrating the misinformation before clarifying and updating the audience with the new information, Cook, Lewandowsky, and Ecker (2017) note that this made the right information clear and helped distinguish the myths from the facts. Clarifying that the data is wrong makes a high likelihood of convincing the audience when the right message is finally communicated.

Misinformation can cause conflict, especially when the wrong message becomes widely accepted over the truth. Shmerling (2011) notes that the perception that humans only use about 10 percent of their brains has been broadcast and widely communicated to become socially acceptable as the truth. Similar to the usage of the human mind, Cook, Lewandowsky, and Ecker (2017) note that misinformation about climate change has widely been popularized to the point of becoming acceptable despite this being the opposite of the truth. This has often led to reduced lowered support for mitigation policies based on continued discreditation of the fact. To address the continued misinformation regarding climate change, Cook, Lewandowsky, & Ecker (2017) argue that protecting messages that explain the flawed argumentation techniques can be adopted to minimize misinformation. Other than this, there is a need to communicate the scientific consensus regarding climate change to reduce the misinformation (Cook, Lewandowsky,& Ecker, 2017). Rather than communicating the scientific consensus, there is a need to take into account the scientific information that has been distorted in the misinformation process. Similarly, to debunking popular myths, there is a need to communicate the miscommunication while clarifying the facts.

The fact that familiarity makes rumors hard to demystify remains a contentious issue for psychologists on the best approach in correcting misinformation. Chan et al. (2017) clarify that correcting misinformation is complex and remains incompletely understood considering the emerging patterns that show that retracting can lead to persistence in message belief. Cook, Lewandowsky, and Ecker (2017) further clarify that when the audience that is targeted by the retraction process generates reasons to support the initial misinformation, the debunking effect is often weaker and fails to achieve the intended outcome. In contrast, when the debunking message is put forward more strongly and positively, it is more effective. It strongly correlates with the audience understanding the initial misunderstanding and the new message being communicated. The impact of audience generated reasons to back misinformation is based on the notion that rather than being a recording device, the human brain is a process of reconstruction that is vulnerable to internal and external influences (Chan et al., 2017). When these influences support misinformation, the status is likely to remain despite efforts to communicate otherwise.

The continued popularization of certain myths has made more significant segments of the population consider them. Despite being a myth, there is a degree of consensus that humans only utilize 10% of their brains. This is despite being a myth and further from the truth (Berinsky, 2017). Considering this, there is a need to debunk this popular myth by highlighting the existing perception as mythical and popularizing the facts relating to brain utilization among humans. We hypothesize that the general population will lean towards accepting the myth as truth rather than viewing it as misinformation. Considering that the argument that humans only utilize 10 percent of their brain, it is impossible to change this perception.

A wave of inaccuracies is spreading on politics, Covid-19, among other things through social media's vast networks (Chan et al. 2017). For example, currently, Peoples' phones are being flooded with misinformation from providing unverified home remedies to handle Coronavirus to sharing conspiracy theories and floating fake advisories requesting people to avoid foods like chicken and ice creams. The Coronavirus pandemic has brought out even more people spreading fake news than usual, so it is a lot more evident to more people (Cook, Lewandowsky & Ecker, 2017). The best thing we can all do is to be discerning, educated, objective, and use our critical thinking skills to avoid falling for fake news about the Coronavirus or anything else. The very best way to combat COVID-19 and Coronavirus fake news and misinformation is to educate yourself. Source your information only from legitimate websites and publications. Science is your friend in this situation. There are many experts in virology and epidemiology worldwide, and many of them are taking time to publish and do interviews regarding this situation. But we need not be afraid of death initiating hunger and suicidal deaths across the globe (Ecker, Hogan, & Lewandowsky, 2017). We need to firmly believe that we can fight and win COVID-19 with new innovative measures and try a few creative methods ignoring WHO protocols in a few cases.

**Definition of operational variables**

In this study, the dependent variable will be misinformation, while familiarity will be the independent variable.

**The hypothesis of the study**

H1: Familiarity helps in correcting misinformation

H2: Familiarity does not help in remedying misinformation

**Sampling of participants**

The selection of interview participants will be conducted through purposive sampling (Berinsky, 2017). This will enable the targeting of a subset of departments and classmates within the course. The high technical nature of the research problem will restrict the targeted organizational and the ultimate choice of participants from the departments. Their primary roles will influence the decision of sampled classmates in the department. In contrast, the selection of actual participants will be affected by experience and expertise on the subject matter. The interview participants’ will be drawn from my classmates and critical stakeholders in the department. The most crucial aspect of these interviews will be facilitating a comprehensive view of classmates and other critical stakeholders on the familiarity role in correcting misinformation (Chan et al. 2017). Therefore, it is necessary to ensure that the various participants to be interviewed have an appreciation of the critical issues such as misinformation.

Methods to gather and analyze data

Interviews and direct observations will be used to obtain the primary data specific to classmates and teachers in particular (Cook, Lewandowsky & Ecker, 2017). Interviews will be conducted with students and other industry experts to gather comprehensive views on the subject matter. Primary data collection will be based on semi-structured interviews and direct observations. To ensure participants' anonymity, respondents' details will not be identified in data presentation and analysis (Shmerling, 2011). However, interview participants will be identified with the respective departments they represented to give context to their responses and experiences. The interview data were complemented with direct observation. Semi-structured interviews will allow the researcher to pose follow-up questions to gather additional information and establish new information leads (Pluviano, Watt, & Sergio, 2017). This will be supplemented by secondary data from published and online documents, including government reports and academic journal articles.

The primary data will be analyzed inductively and thematically (Rapp &Salovich, 2018). Data collected from interviews will be explained to complement the secondary data collected. Data obtained from primary and secondary sources will be presented, starting from a subsequent chapter by the sub-question being addressed (Shmerling, 2011). Primary and secondary data obtained were grouped into themes by the sub-question being discussed and analyzed. This will be guided by the identification of the critical parameters for each sub-question. The analysis will be along with topics such as misinformation. Observations from various data sources will be used to identify themes and patterns that guided further investigations to derive sub-findings on each sub-question. Content analysis will be critical to connect the best practices from various parts of the world and link it to the policy framework and practices. Contextual analysis of international cases on misinformation will highlight the best practices that can be adapted to reduce or eliminate misinformation (Berinsky, 2017). Appraisal of the literature review will help derive sub-findings on the misinformation relative to insights from secondary data on international experiences.

**The measurement that matches the study**

**The credibility of the Literature Review**

The mixed research approaches depend on the credibility elements that ensure the reliability and validity of the information collected. Literature review credibility is created via literature review and case studies cross-checking, repetitive observations, peer-debriefing, and triangulation (Chan et al. 2017). The possibility of gathering incorrect empirical data and information has to be minimized to establish as high credibility as possible. This achieved by concentrating on two essential elements: validity and reliability.

 **The Measurement of the Reliability and Validity of the Study**

**Reliability**

Reliabilities are the level of which the data collection methods and data analyses provide reliable results and findings for the investigator. Best reliabilities are when results are similar to previous studies and minimize biases within the research. Reliability ensures that the researcher creates reliable findings and conclusions. The research will be based on qualitative and quantitative traditional notions research(Cook, Lewandowsky & Ecker, 2017). Moreover, the procedures used in the study will comprise reviewing the document, as well as systematic analysis. A research design that will allow for thorough research exploration will be essential in answering the research questions conclusively. Subsequently, the study design will be evolved from within mixed research methods and will be explained as a multiple case study.

The validity of Information Acquired

The validity will be established through a detailed analysis and interpretation of data collected. The researcher also carried out an audit process. Audit processes enabled the researcher to develop dependability and confirmability. Triangulation of evidence and data was carried out to ensure that the study's findings were trustworthy (Rapp &Salovich, 2018). Triangulation involved comparing information from diverse data sources to reach a convincing conclusion. The information and data were acquired from various case studies and literature reviews of existing journals, books, and published industry reports. Diverse approaches and multiple investigations are conducted to obtain a similar set of data.

A procedure based on research design

The chapter explains the researcher's research methods in performing the thesis (Shmerling, 2011). Also, the section explains the populations that are investigated. The sample approaches applied, the methods utilized in data collection, and approaches employed in the data interpretation and analysis. This chapter presents the six stages, covering research design, data collection tools, data presentation, data analysis and interpretation, study themes and parameters, limitations, and ethical considerations. The first part provided details on the research design employed to ensure that the research process is clear. The second part is dedicated to data collection techniques such as interview guide questionnaires for primary and secondary sources. The Third section covered specific themes and parameters being investigated. The fourth section examined data presentation, analysis, and interpretation, while the fifth section presented limitations in research and data collection processes (Berinsky, 2017). The last part appraised the ethical considerations taken in data collection, analyses, and reporting.

Research design approaches are systematic plans that summarize the procedures employed in conducting the study to answer the research question (Cook, Lewandowsky & Ecker, 2017). Research designs guide the investigators in the processes of gathering, analyses, and interpreting data. It is a reasonable classical that enables researchers to draw deductions regarding causal relationships among the variables under study.

This research will adopt an inductive qualitative approach to conducting an inquiry on the familiarity role in correcting misinformation. This will be achieved through the evaluation of multiple data sources to gather empirical evidence. The use of the exploratory case study method will allow the researcher to contextualize the conditions highly pertinent to the phenomenon of the study to be covered (Chan et al. 2017). It focused mainly on the "what" question to develop the relevant hypotheses and propositions for further inquiry. The use of a case study will be complementary and is believed to provide explanatory information on a more extensive evaluation of familiarity role in correcting misinformation.

The research approaches will be objective, elaborative, and even investigational. The data collections will also be organized methods and will be carried out more extensively on a sample of the population. The research will also be conducted with specific and targeted samples that involve multiple groups of samples, along with comparative analysis (Ecker, Hogan, & Lewandowsky, 2017). In this way, the researcher will maintain the accuracy of the obtained results because a wide variety of samples tested using purposive sampling. The study is purposely planned to gather primary data from selected participants who are regarded as relevant to the study. The secondary data will be abstracted from various published documents.

The second stage will involve reviewing literature from multiple sources to be acquainted with experiences on the information (Rapp &Salovich, 2018). Data from these reviews will be used to identify research themes on the misinformation and principles used to develop data collection tools guided by the research question. Secondary data from academic journal articles will supplement this. The primary data will be analyzed inductively and thematically. The themes that emerged will be linked systematically to the concepts and theoretical framework that emerged from the literature review. The last stage will involve the inductive analysis and the data interpretation in deriving the research findings (Shmerling, 2011). Data from the various sources will be thematically analyzed for evaluation based on the established parameters to obtain sub-findings for each sub-question.

References

Berinsky, A. J. (2017). Rumors and health care reform: Experiments in political misinformation. *British Journal of Political Science, 47*(2), 241–262.

Chan, M. S., Jones, C. R., Hall, Jamieson, K., &Albarracín, D. (2017). Debunking: A Meta-Analysis of the Psychological Efficacy of Messages Countering Misinformation. *Psychological Science, 28*(11), 1531–1546.

Cook, J., Lewandowsky, S., & Ecker, U. K. H. (2017). Neutralizing misinformation through inoculation: Exposing misleading argumentation techniques reduces their influence. *PLoS One, 12*(5), 1–17.

Ecker, U. K. H., Hogan, J. L., & Lewandowsky, S. (2017). Reminders and repetition of misinformation: Helping or hindering its retraction? *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition, 6*(2), 185–192.

Pluviano, S., Watt, C., & Sergio, D. S. (2017). Misinformation lingers in memory: Failure of three pro-vaccination strategies. *PLoS One, 12*(7), 1–12.

Rapp, D. N., &Salovich, N. A. (2018). Can't we just disregard fake news? The consequences of exposure to inaccurate information. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences, 5*(2), 232–239.

Shmerling, R. H. (2011). Ask the doctor. Is it true that we use only 10% of our brains? *Harvard Health Letter*, *36*(7), 5.