



FROM RECEPTION TO RESPONSE: PUBLIC RESPONSIVENESS TO MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION IN THE REGIONAL LANDSCAPE

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

Misinformation and/or Disinformation are not recent phenomena but have been used at all times to create chaos in society and disturb the state equilibrium. In the current socio-political scenario, political misinformation and disinformation are widespread and sometimes challenge the existence of truth and influencing society. The challenge posed by such misleading content is multi-layered, encompassing its spread, the distrust it creates, and, lately, countering such acts. The present study attempts to study the awareness of the people in Kashmir regarding the phenomenon of misinformation and/ or disinformation, with reference to the political context and their responsiveness towards it. Apart from understanding the media consumption behavior of people, the study also aims to understand whether people receiving such deceptive information consciously act as receivers only, or further share it, to create a spiral of misinformation or disinformation in society. The researchers conducted a survey using a questionnaire tool to collect data and evaluate people's responses to such content. The study finds that respondents are aware of the phenomena of misinformation and/or disinformation and can single out the genuineness of information. However, the majority of people tend to filter information manually rather than using any fact-checking tool or consulting any fact-checking agency. It is evident that people are conscious of the spread of fake content; however, they lack the technical skills for filtering such information and mostly depend on manual approaches to filtering information.

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Introduction

Public spaces, whether physical or virtual, are full of information overload, leaving no chance for people to escape from a flurry of information coming from different sources. The tendency of people to know what is happening around them also makes them vulnerable to information overload (American Psychological Association, 2024). With the rise of information sources, people nowadays receive information not just from recognized or institutionalized platforms; rather, information reaches them from other open sources like the internet and social media, etc. The fact is that with the increase in the information flow, the chances of falling prey to fake information, which is popularly termed as misinformation, and/or disinformation, also increase (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016). In earlier days, whatever information was received from mainstream channels as the sole source of information would be treated as genuine and trusted; however, with the rise in information coming from different sources, it cannot always be genuine and needs to be scrutinized thoroughly (Aïmeur et al., 2023).

In technical terms, misinformation is any such information that has the tendency to mislead, which may be deceptive or fabricated in nature but there is no purpose or intention to mislead behind sharing such information. Researchers refer to misinformation as an honest mistake (Comito, 2023). However, Disinformation is deceptive and false information intentionally disseminated to mislead or harm its consumers (Chen et al., 2023). Both misinformation and disinformation contribute to falsifying and supporting misperceptions and thus affect the opinions and behavior of the people (Broda & Strömbäck, 2024).

The Dilemma Of Information Consumption

The phenomenon of misinformation/disinformation is an intricate process, which demands a comprehensive understanding of media literacy of the people and their reception of messages. The researchers across the globe see misinformation as a complex issue that demands a comprehensive understanding of the media landscape, and people's perception of it varies from place to place (Brennen, 2019). The spread of false information, fake news, or disinformation has also seen rapid growth with the

development of the internet-driven information sphere; however, they may vary as far as their meanings and motives are concerned. The spread of disinformation is deliberate and intentionally spread to manipulate the opinions and perceptions of people, and it might decline the people's trust in democratic institutions (West, 2017). According to Jerit & Zhao, (2020), misinformation in the political sphere can endanger democracy, as when people confidently receive information that is not factual; the chances of getting misinformation are higher. The researchers argue that misinformation tends to spoil people's political viewpoints as it may sometimes strengthen false beliefs, which later are difficult to correct. They believe that the political opinions, perceptions, or views of a misinformed chunk of people are more vulnerable to being non-factual. This non-factual information might prove dangerous because people tend to take action based on the information they receive. World Economic Forum, in its annual global risks report 2024, has ranked India the highest for the risk of misinformation and disinformation (World Economic Forum, 2024).

Mis/Disinformation – A Challenging Threat

For democracy to function smoothly, information diffusion must not be deceitful. De Angelis et al., (2022) emphasized that the misinformation propagated in the political sphere through various channels hugely impacts on how people think and perceive political issues. With the abundance of content available across social media platforms, people need to understand the genuineness of the information they receive. Information consumers must be media literate to overcome the challenges of understanding the authenticity of the information they receive. Hilary & Dumebi, (2021) have found that misinformation and disinformation are fake news generated and spread through social networking sites. Thus, its spread can be prevented by increasing awareness and media literacy among people using different social networking sites. To understand the accuracy of the information, people must be able to filter the manipulated content widely created and shared via various social media platforms. Adams et al. (2023) see misinformation as a threat to both people and society. The unchecked and uncontrollable content flow in the digital sphere has multiplied the creation and dissemination of misleading information. Despite having varied standpoints, people are kept unified in the global context. They share information with no gatekeeping, which may sometimes prove harmful for both people and society, as the subjectivity of its disseminator often limits the information they share.

The magnitude of the issue could be understood through the example of 'Pizzagate,' a conspiracy theory that surfaced in the United States before the 2016 presidential elections, alleging top democratic party leaders, including Hillary Clinton and campaign manager Jhon podesta, to be involved in a pedophilia ring operated out of a Washington pizza restaurant, abusing and trafficking children. The 'Pizzagate' was extensively shared and debated on the internet, resulting in a huge political polarization (Bleakley, 2023). Another example is when a series of tweets turned out to be a riot full of chaos, resulting in some deaths and political havoc. BBC, (2023) reports that 'Capitol riots-2021' began with a tweet that came from the official handle of President Donald Trump on January 21, 2021, alleging vote fraud. Soon after the tweet, President Trump patriotically urged his followers during a speech in Washington to join on the Capitol. Within no time, the Capitol swelled with the angry mob protesting and chanting, 'Fight for Trump'. Considering the uncontrolled crowd, officials declared it an uprising. Officials reported chaos, and top officials and senators working in the Capitol complex had evacuated to safer places. A series of tweets from President Trump kept coming. To control the mob and the chaos, Trump had to appeal to the rioters to maintain peace and request that they go home.

Kashmir And The Rumormongering- A Regional Perspective

In the past, Kashmir has witnessed several incidents where fake information caused a sense of chaos and restlessness among the people. The series of past events covered by the news media is a witness to how rumormongering led to the dissemination of false information within the society. Many such accounts happened in the past when a rumor of some kind surfaced, irrespective of the use of the medium, and the same turned into chaos, thus panicking the common people in Kashmir. On January 17, 2016, a rumor regarding the death of infants due to polio vaccination triggered panic throughout Kashmir. The rumor began on social media and ended with public announcements from loudspeakers in the local mosques. Panic-stricken people came out hurriedly from every nook and corner of the valley, flooding the roads to rush to hospitals. The rumor not only created a psychological disturbance among parents but also turned hospitals into a massive crowd, with people manhandling hospital staff. Despite repeated attempts by the government and health authorities to clarify that the information spread was just a rumor, people could not stop themselves from rushing to hospitals in a dilemma (The Hindu, 2016).

In a similar incident, a mass hysteria gripped the valley of Kashmir in the year 2017 when the braid-chopping episodes spiked uncontrollably, leaving even the then government and Jammu and Kashmir Police clueless. As the confusion and fear grew among people, the hysteria turned ugly, and more braid-chopping episodes took place. People hit the roads for citizen patrolling across the valley to scare away the alleged braid-choppers. People suspect several, including some foreign tourists, as braid-choppers. Cases of thrashing and beating incidents of suspects by the vigilantes guarding and patrolling their surroundings took place. To de-escalate the panic, the then-government ministers and concerned officials termed it a "phobia and a kind of hysteria." A senior minister of the then government was quoted as saying that "it (braid-chopping) isn't true the way it is being circulated," and warned of strict action against rumor-mongers (Ahmad, 2017).

Mis/Disinformation & Infodemic

According to Zielinski, (2021), an infodemic is an enormous flow of information, whether correct or misleading. The same information, when shared through physical or digital spaces during times of disease outbreaks, has the potential to create

confusion among the public, leading them to behave in a risky with escalating their mistrust in health authorities, thus resulting in a harmful public health response. Researchers termed the infodemic an adversity that might result in perilous behavioral responses of its victims. Rovetta & Castaldo, (2022) mentions that tendencies like social, personal, professional or psychological levels of receiving, interpreting, validating, and sharing any sort of information, irrespective of the medium or platform, might stimulate an information epidemic termed as an infodemic and could have high-risk outcomes.

The Menace And Its Spread: Need For Fact-Checking

To address the issue of mis- and/or disinformation and cope with its spread, the relevant authorities must engage all stakeholders to develop a practical approach. Making the people literate enough and encouraging them to identify and reject the mis- and disinformation they receive would not only contribute to avoiding the spread of false information but also help to prevent false information disseminators from creating and spreading it. Stemming the spread of mis-and disinformation will further create better opportunities for engaging the public in democratic dialogue and boosting their trust in the government. Developing approaches to deal with misinformation and disinformation is a much-needed step with the rapid spread of misleading information (OECD, 2021). Ecker et al. (2014) believe that misinformation is any piece of information that the information consumers initially consider completely factual, but the same may prove false at a later stage, or there might be a need to correct or retract the same well ahead. It is the already existing belief of the people that affects the reliability of misinformation. The acceptance chances of specific information are high if the information aligns with people's attitudes. If that information proves false, it may have long-term effects on the capability and memory of people. As mentioned by Obadă & Dabija (2022), the amount of content disseminated via social media is not all factual, but some of its dissemination is intentional or unintentional with the purpose to mislead content consumers. Those who spread it intentionally hold the capacity to control and shape their attitude and behavior. They argue that the increasing content flow through digital spaces like social networking platforms for news consumption has not just transformed how information accessibility behaviors of people but also encourages them to share information about diverse aspects, including politics, business, environment, and other issues. Content creators or disseminators could utilize tactics like social bots and human resources to spread malicious and misleading information through social media sites.

Emphasizing the need for fact-checking, Vicol & Sippitt, (2019) stressed that believing in misleading information could only be tackled with fact-checking. The people exposed to fact-checks tend to track misleading information more swiftly and easily than those do unaware of verifying the authenticity of any content they receive. However, if any piece of information appears repeatedly, it has a high tendency to believe as one is acquainted with it. If the same information repeatedly appears false, it will make its consumers retain misleading perceptions. Correcting content or information at an early stage through fact checking is actually, what one needs to avoid perceiving false beliefs. According to Freeze et al., (2021) warning people rationally of the repercussions that any misleading information might have will encourage them to reject and disregard the false information they encounter daily. However, if the same warning is baseless, i.e., accurate information is characterized as wrong or misleading, it will obliterate their trust in authentic information.

Theoretical Perspective: Information Manipulation Theory

McCornack, (1992) in his Information Manipulation Theory (IMT), deliberates how distortion to a piece of information (message) occurs to intentionally to deceive the listeners or recipients by exploiting the ways to deliver the message. The deception may include manipulating the information quantity, i.e., the amount of information one intends to share or expects to receive, distorting its contents, creating information ambiguity, and/or diverting from the core concern. The theory argues that specific standards govern every conversation exchange, and violating any or all such standards amounts to information manipulation. The information could be political, social, or the information of any nature. If the influenced in such a way, misinformation and/or disinformation in political communication amounts to information manipulation. Here, the contents of political communication could be tempered, presented with ambiguity, and presented to distract the audience from the primary concern, and/or the information and audience does not receive such information, which they deserve. Citing an example of a deep-fake video that goes viral during Irish presidential election in which a candidate Catherine Connolly announces her withdrawal and publicizes that she ends her campaign for the election. Reports highlight the intention to behind sharing such Artificial Intelligence (AI) was to malign the image of a candidate the video. Meta later removes the video from social networking sites (Haeck, 2025). There are many such incidents where the possible and intentional sharing of manipulated or distorted information takes place. Adami, (2024) highlights an incident when AI generated audio communication faking a high profile politician and Joe Biden goes viral appealing people to stay away from voting in the New Hampshire primaries.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to explore the phenomenon of misinformation and disinformation in the political context of Jammu and Kashmir. The researchers seek to comprehend whether people are aware of any mechanism to single out the genuineness of the information they consume in their routine life. More importantly, researchers attempt to investigate whether people receiving any sort of information apparent to be non-factual act as receivers only or further circulate it to join the spiral misinformation. The following are the major objectives to guide the present study:

(1) To understand the media literacy among the people in Kashmir and their awareness about misinformation and/ or disinformation.

(2) To explore the means and approaches people use to combat political misinformation and/or disinformation in their routine media consumption.

(3) To find out whether people possess any technical skills to filter information in their daily lives.

In line of the objectives guiding the study, the researchers attempted to take the responses from the people through a survey based on the following research questions:

(1) Are people aware of the phenomenon of misinformation or disinformation?

(2) How do people deal with misinformation or disinformation content in their daily lives?

(3) Do people use any filters (manual or technical) to encounter misinformation and/ or disinformation in the political context?

(4) Do people make use of fact-checking tools or sites, or consult any fact-checking organizations to crosscheck the authenticity of any messages?

(5) Whether people act as receivers only, or share the unreliable content further in their groups or contacts.

Methodology

To assess the level of awareness regarding the phenomenon of misinformation and disinformation and the approaches people set out to counter the misinformation and disinformation in a geographically isolated place like Kashmir, a survey was conducted on a sample size of (N=100) selected using a simple random sampling method. The respondents were selected from both rural and urban areas in equal numbers to ensure the true representation of the population. Only the respondents above the age of 15 years were selected from a diverse group irrespective of their gender.

A questionnaire consisting of closed-ended questions aligned with the research questions was administered. The data collected during the survey were analysed using statistical software like Excel and SPSS. The results generated in percentages were presented in the form of graphs. A chi-square test of independence was used to examine the relationship between the categorical variables like age and gender in this study. The study is limited to the Kashmir division only.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Considering the research objectives, the researchers analyzed the data statistically to understand the respondents' literacy level regarding misinformation and/ or disinformation, fact checking, and debunking the misleading content they encounter in their routine lives. Further, the study intended to understand whether people employ any filters (manual or technical) to deal with the information people come across.

Demography of the Respondents

TABLE 1: Age-wise frequency of the respondents

Age	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percentage
15-24 years	48	48.0	48.0
25-34 years	45	45.0	93.0
35-44 years	7	7.0	100
Total	100	100.0	

Representation of Age-wise Participants

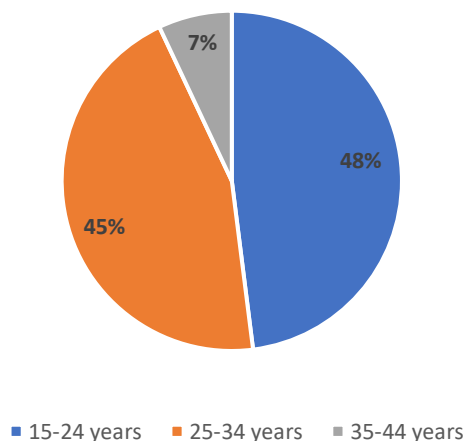


FIGURE 1: Age-wise representation of respondents

The data in as represented in the Figure 1 shows the number of respondents of different age groups who participated in the study. All the respondents who participated in the present study were above the age group of 15 years. According to data 48% of the respondents are of the age group of 15-24 years, 45% of respondents belong to 25-33 years, and 7% of respondents are of the age of 35-44 years. However, no respondent of 44 years and above participated in the study.

TABLE 2: Gender-wise frequency of the respondents

Gender	Frequency	Valid Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Male	47	47.0	47.0
Female	53	53.0	100.0
Total	100	100.0	

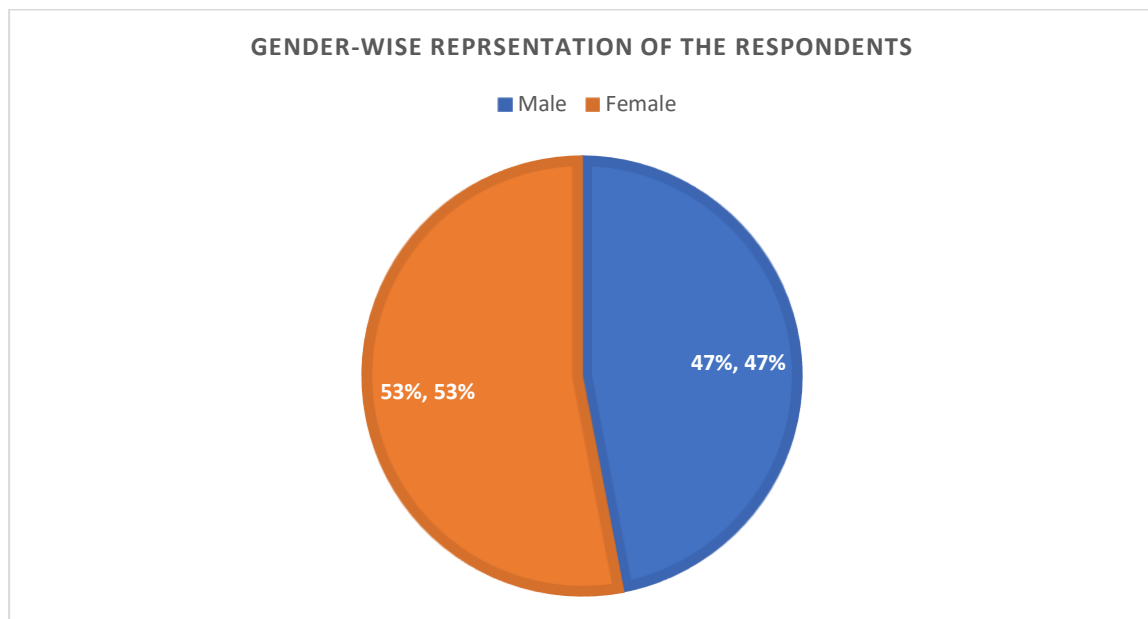


FIGURE 2: Gender-wise representation of respondents

The data in Figure 2 shows participants' classification based on gender. The data reflect that 47% of the respondents who took part in this study were males and 53% were females.

Familiarity Of Mis And/Or Disinformation Concepts

TABLE 3: Familiarity of mis-and/or disinformation concepts

Familiarity	Awareness of Misinformation		Awareness of Disinformation		Misinformation and Disinformation are similar concepts		Aware of fact-checking organisations		Aware of fact-checking tools	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Count	95	05	77	23	13	87	23	77	25	75
Percentage	95.0%	5.0%	77.0 %	23.0%	13.0%	87.0%	23.0 %	77.0 %	25.0%	75.0%

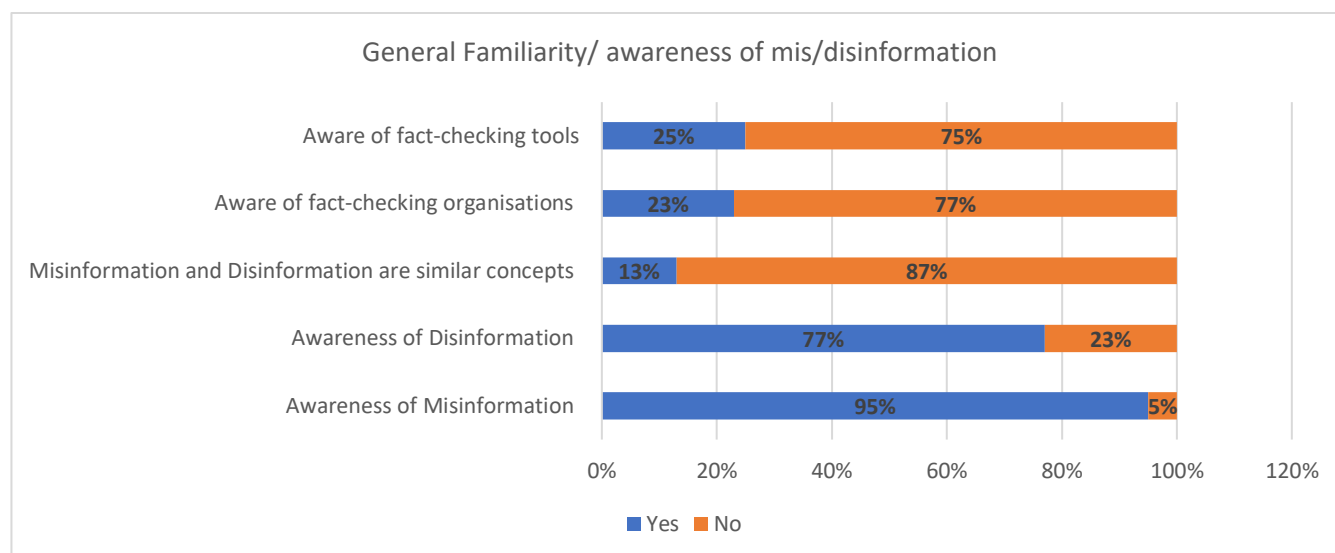


FIGURE 3: Representation of General Familiarity/ awareness of mis- and/or disinformation

From the data as represented in Figure 3 clearly emphasises that people have familiarity with the misinformation and disinformation concepts. Significant i.e., 95% of the respondents acknowledged that they are aware of the concept of misinformation, and 77% acknowledged that they familiar with the notion of disinformation. However, a smaller proportion of respondents, i.e., 13%, are of the view that misinformation and disinformation are similar concepts. Considering people's awareness of the fact-checking tools and organisations that work to debunk misinformation and disinformation. A few respondents, i.e., only 25%, say they are aware of the fact-checking tools and only 23% of respondents say they are familiar of any such organisations that work to debunk misleading information.

Verification of Fake Content on Social Media

TABLE 4: Verification of Fake Content on Social Media

	By reading comments		Through debunking tools		Cross-checking with multiple sources		Verifying with fact-checking websites/ organisations		Cross-checking with official websites		I don't cross check	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Count	39	61	3	97	81	19	31	69	58	42	7	93
%age	39.0%	61.0%	3.0%	97.0%	81.0%	19.0%	31.0%	69.0%	58.0%	42.0%	7.0%	93.0%

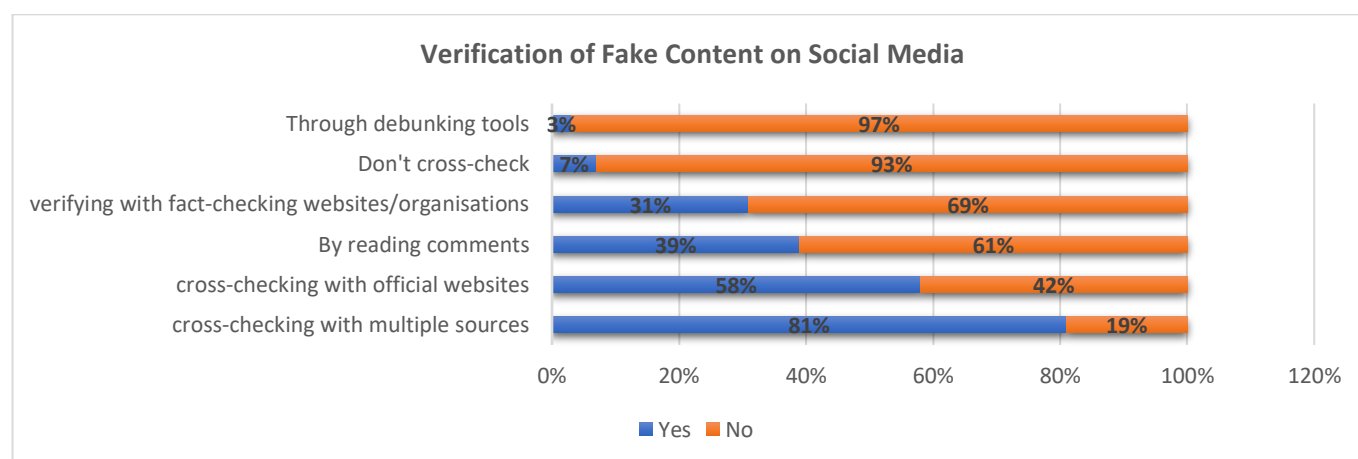


FIGURE 4: Representation of Verification of Fake Content on Social Media

When asked how respondents verify fake content on social media platforms, as shown in the Figure 4 the majority of them, i.e., 81%, say they crosscheck it with multiple sources, 58% of the participants acknowledge that they crosscheck it with official websites, and 39% survey takers say they prefer to verify by reading comments. The least number of respondents, i.e., 3%, asserted that they verify the social media content through debunking tools. The data emphasises that people undoubtedly attempt to verify the content or any sort of information from social media; however, people seem less involved in using technology for the same.

According to the chi-square test of independence, there is statistically a significant association between the gender and the cross checking information with multiple sources while verifying the fake content on social media, $\chi^2 (1, N=100) = 9.17, p=.002$. The chi-square test of independence shows statistically a significant association between age and cross-checking the information by reading comments while verifying the fake content on social media, $\chi^2 (2, N=100) = 12.43, p=.002$, indicating that the capability to authenticate information sources varies across the age groups. Further, the chi-square test of independence shows a significant association between age and verifying the fake content on social media through debunking tools, $\chi^2 (2, N=100) = 17.30, p=.000$, indicating that the capability to authenticate information sources varies across the age groups.

Self-Measures To Information Authentication

TABLE 5: Self-Measures People Take to Verify the Accuracy of Political Information

	Cross-checking with multiple sources		Cross-checking with official sources		Cross-checking with personal contacts		Verifying through fact-checking tools		Verifying with fact-checking websites/ organisations		Cross-checking with official websites	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Count	55	45	49	51	13	87	12	88	17	83	24	76
%age	55.0%	45.0%	49.0%	51.0%	13.0%	87.0%	12.0%	88.0%	17.0%	83.0%	24.0%	76.0%

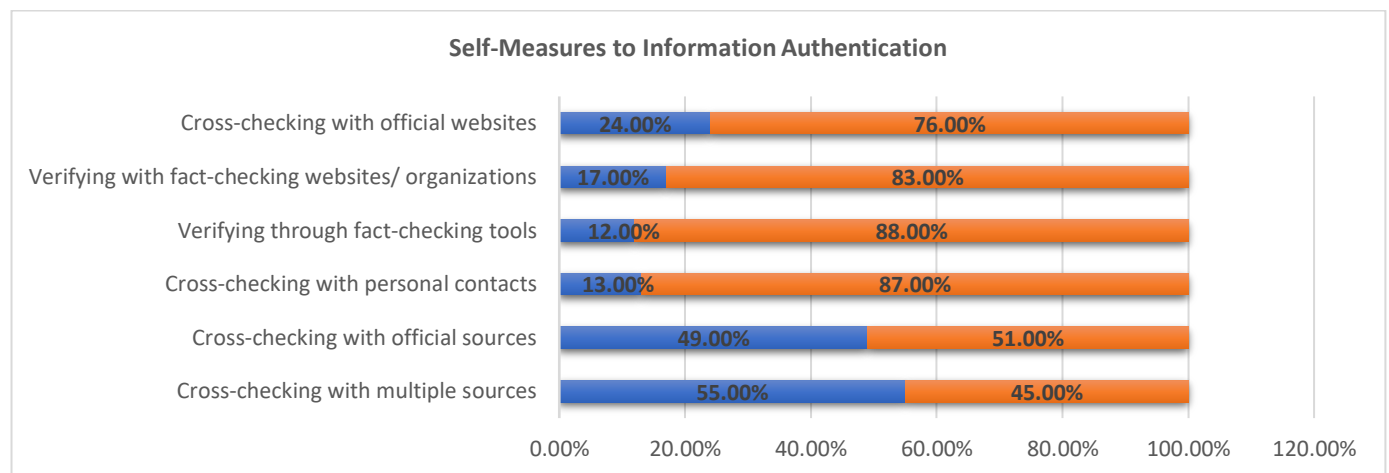


FIGURE 5: Graphical representation of Self-measures people take to verify the accuracy of political information

Based on the participant responses as reflected in Figure 5, a significant number of respondents, i.e., 55%, reveal that they verify the accuracy of political information by cross-checking it with multiple sources, and 49% of respondents say they cross-check it with official sources. Only 12% of the respondents admit they use fact-checking tools for verifying the authenticity of information concerning politics, 13% of the respondents noted that they verify through personal contacts, and 17% of the respondents asserted that they consult fact-checking websites/organisations to verify the accuracy of political information.

The chi-square test of independence shows there is no significant statistical association in view of age or gender with any queries of this section.

Media Literacy Of The Respondents
TABLE 6: Media Literacy of the respondents

		Count	%age
How would you rate your knowledge/ literacy about misinformation and/or disinformation?	Excellent	10	10.0%
	Good	39	39.0%
	Fair	37	37.0%
	Poor	13	13.0%
	Very Poor	1	1.0%
How capable are you in recognising the authenticity of information sources?	Excellent	16	16.0%
	Good	39	39.0%
	Fair	37	37.0%
	Poor	8	8.0%
	Very Poor	0	0.0%
How equipped/ able are you to identify/fact-check misinformation and/or disinformation?	Excellent	7	7.0%
	Good	42	42.0%
	Fair	34	34.0%
	Poor	15	15.0%
	Very Poor	2	2.0%
How much are you aware of the sources propagating fake information?	Excellent	8	8.0%
	Good	43	43.0%
	Fair	35	35.0%
	Poor	13	13.0%
	Very Poor	1	1.0%
How well do you think government/regulatory bodies are addressing the issue of political misinformation and/or disinformation?	Excellent	4	4.0%
	Good	25	25.0%
	Fair	25	25.0%
	Poor	35	35.0%
	Very Poor	11	11.0%
How well do you think fact-checking organisations are in combating political misinformation and/or disinformation?	Excellent	10	10.0%
	Good	28	28.0%
	Fair	37	37.0%
	Poor	21	21.0%
	Very Poor	4	4.0%

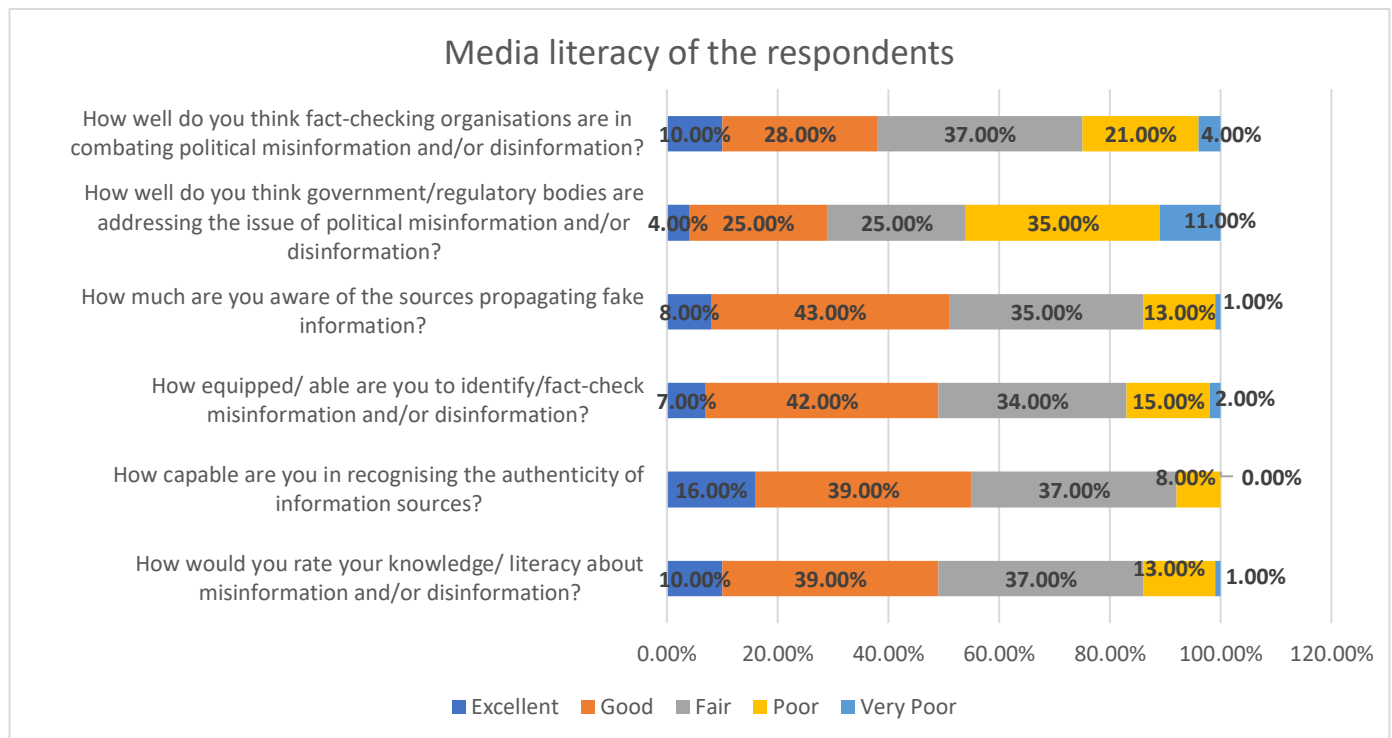


FIGURE 6: Graphical representation of Media literacy of the respondents

The data presented in figure 6 represents the media literacy level of the respondents in relation to their awareness about fake information, authenticity and information sources, role of government bodies in tackling any misleading information and the level of their skill set to deal with misinformation or disinformation. According to the data, 39% of respondents rate their level of knowledge about misinformation/ disinformation as good, 37% fair, 10% excellent, while 13% rate it poor and only 1% rate it very poor. When asked to rate their capability in recognizing the authenticity of information sources, the majority, i.e., 39%, rate it good, 39% fair, 16% excellent, and just 8% rate themselves poor. The data reflects that 42% of respondents see good ability in themselves to identify and fact-check misinformation/disinformation, 34% see their ability as fair, 7% excellent, 15% poor, and 2% very poor. When asked about the awareness of respondents regarding the sources propagating fake information, 43% rate themselves good, 34% fair, and 7% rate as excellent. While 15% rate themselves as poor and 2% as very poor. The data shows that 35% of respondents consider government bodies as poor in addressing the issue of political misinformation/disinformation. The number of 25% respondents consider good or fair. Only 4% of respondents consider excellent, and 11% consider government authorities as very poor in addressing the issue.

When respondents were asked to rate how well the fact-checking organizations are combating political misinformation/disinformation. The data shows that 37% rate fact-checking agencies in combating political misinformation or disinformation as fair, 28% rate them as good, and 10% rate them as excellent. However, 21% rate them poor and 4% as very poor.

As per the chi-square test of independence, there is a statistically significant association between age and the capability in recognizing the authenticity of information sources, $\chi^2 (6, N=100) = 12.81, p=.046$, indicating that the capability to authenticate information sources varies across the age groups. Further, the chi-square test of independence revealed a statistically significant relationship between age and the ability to identify and fact-check the misinformation and disinformation, $\chi^2 (8, N=100) = 18.72, p=.016$, indicating that the ability of people to identify and fact-check the misinformation and disinformation varies across the age groups. However, there is no such statistical significance concerning the remaining queries of this section in view of age or gender.

Dealing With Mis And/Or Disinformation

TABLE 7: Dealing with Misinformation and/or Disinformation

		Count	%age
How often do you trust the sources you seek information from?	Always	6	6.0%
	Often	47	47.0%

	Sometimes	35	35.0%
	Rarely	11	11.0%
	Never	1	1.0%
How often do you care for the authenticity of the information you receive in your daily life/ routine?	Always	33	33.0%
	Often	36	36.0%
	Sometimes	22	22.0%
	Rarely	8	8.0%
	Never	1	1.0%
How often do you encounter misleading information?	Always	7	7.0%
	Often	29	29.0%
	Sometimes	50	50.0%
	Rarely	12	12.0%
	Never	2	2.0%
How often do you share political information without fact-checking its authenticity?	Always	7	7.0%
	Often	5	5.0%
	Sometimes	15	15.0%
	Rarely	35	35.0%
	Never	38	38.0%
How often do you intentionally share the information to mislead?	Always	0	0.0%
	Often	1	1.0%
	Sometimes	5	5.0%
	Rarely	8	8.0%
	Never	86	86.0%
How often do you seek fact-checked information?	Always	20	20.0%
	Often	29	29.0%
	Sometimes	27	27.0%
	Rarely	17	17.0%
	Never	7	7.0%
How often do you manually filter/ fact-check the information without using any sort of technology?	Always	6	6.0%
	Often	14	14.0%
	Sometimes	30	30.0%
	Rarely	29	29.0%
	Never	21	21.0%
How often do you cross-check the information with multiple sources?	Always	23	23.0%
	Often	33	33.0%

	Sometimes	33	33.0%
	Rarely	7	7.0%
	Never	4	4.0%
How often do you cross-check the information from your personal contacts?	Always	10	10.0%
	Often	26	26.0%
	Sometimes	37	37.0%
	Rarely	20	20.0%
	Never	7	7.0%
How often do you cross-check the information with official sources?	Always	17	17.0%
	Often	23	23.0%
	Sometimes	31	31.0%
	Rarely	24	24.0%
	Never	5	5.0%
How often do you cross-check the information with official websites/webpages?	Always	17	17.0%
	Often	34	34.0%
	Sometimes	32	32.0%
	Rarely	13	13.0%
	Never	4	4.0%
How often do you use fact-checking/ debunking tools to verify the information you receive?	Always	9	9.0%
	Often	17	17.0%
	Sometimes	21	21.0%
	Rarely	26	26.0%
	Never	27	27.0%
How often do you use cross check the information from organisations working on debunking the misinformation and/or disinformation?	Always	7	7.0%
	Often	16	16.0%
	Sometimes	26	26.0%
	Rarely	30	30.0%
	Never	21	21.0%
How often do you personally confront someone who shares/spreads misinformation and/or disinformation?	Always	7	7.0%
	Often	17	17.0%
	Sometimes	26	26.0%
	Rarely	30	30.0%
	Never	20	20.0%

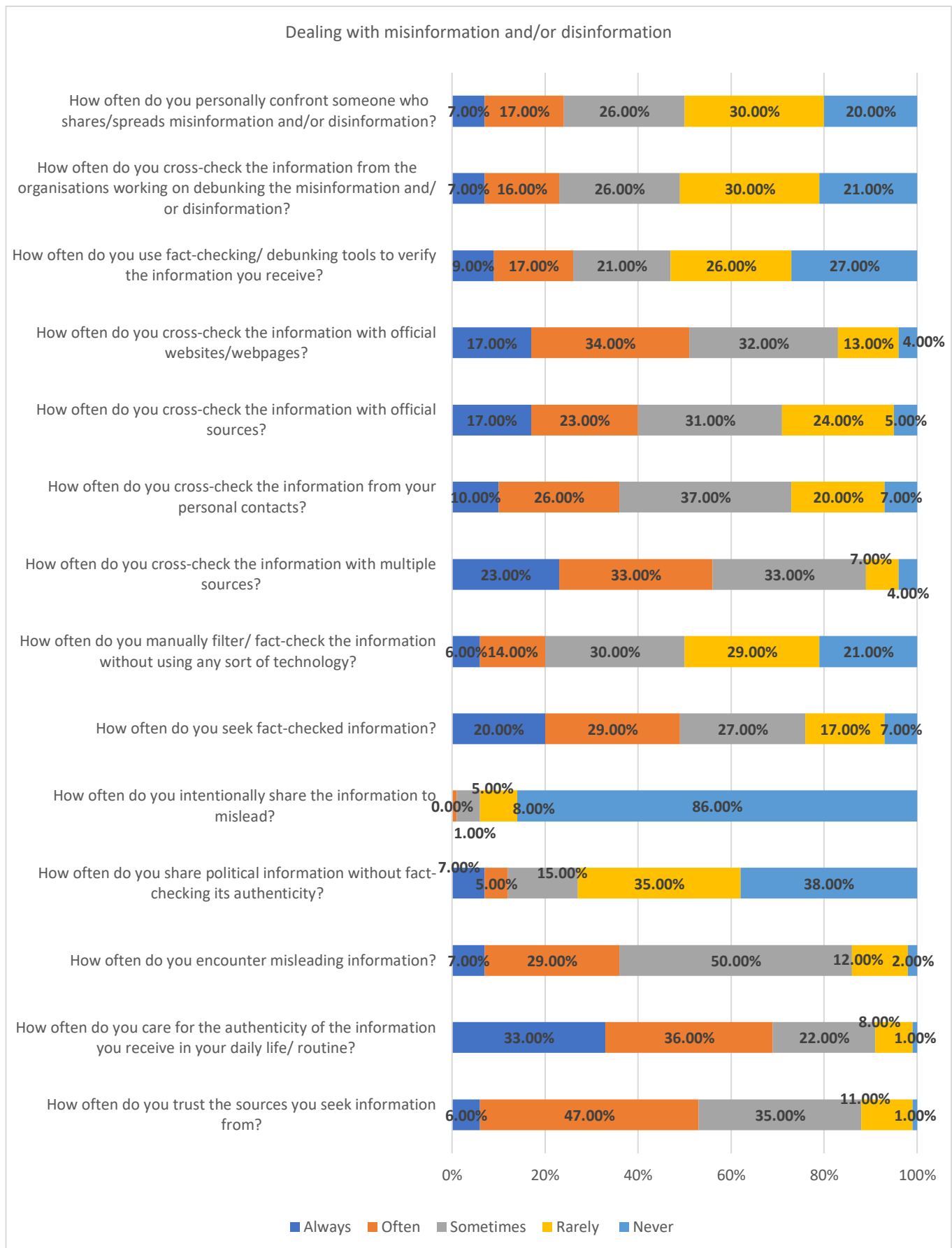


FIGURE 7: Representation of Dealing Misinformation and/or Disinformation

The data presented in figure 7 shows how people deal with misinformation and disinformation in their daily routine. According to the data, 47% of respondents say they often trust their sources of information, whereas 35% do it sometimes, 11% rarely, and 6% do it always, while just 1% of respondents say they never trust their information sources. The data reflects that 36% of respondents say they often care about the authenticity of information they come across in their daily life routine, 33% say they always, 22% sometimes, 8% rarely, and 1% say they never care about the legitimacy of information. Around 50% of the respondents say they sometimes encounter misleading information in their routine life, while 29% say they often, 12% rarely, 7% always, and 2% say never encountered.

When asked how frequently respondents share any political information without fact checking its authenticity. In response, 38% of respondents say they never share, 35% rarely, 15% sometimes, 7% always, and 5% say they often share political information prior to confirming its legitimacy. When it comes to intentional information sharing purposively to mislead others, the majority, i.e., 86%, say they never do it, 8% say they rarely do, 5% sometimes, and 1% say they often do intentionally share the information set out to mislead. The analysis shows that 29% of respondents often seek fact-checked information, 27% do it sometimes, 20% always, 17% rarely, and 7% never seek fact-checked information.

When asked the respondents that how frequently they manually filter and fact-check the information without using any sort of technology. In response, 30% say they sometimes do it, 29% say, they rarely do it, 24% often, 21% never, and 6% say they always do manual rather than technical filtration of the information they receive. According to the data, 33% of respondents say they often or sometimes cross-check the information from multiple sources, 23% say they always, 7% rarely, and 4% never cross-check the information from multiple sources. When it comes to cross-checking the information from personal contacts, 37% say they sometimes, 20% rarely, 26% often, 10% always, and 7% never opt for this manner of validating information. Many of the respondents, i.e., 31%, sometimes crosscheck the information from official sources, 24% do it rarely, and 23% say they often, 17% always, and 5% say they never crosscheck the information from official sources. However, 34% often cross-check with official websites or webpages, 32% do it sometimes, 13% rarely, 17% always, and 4% never do it.

When asked how frequently they use fact-checking or debunking tools to verify the information they come across, 27% of respondents say they never use them, 26% say they rarely use them, 21% say they sometimes, 17% often, and 7% say they always do while responding to this query. The data shows that 30% of respondents rarely consult the debunking agencies, 26% say they sometimes, 20% never, 17% often, and 7% say they always consult the organizations that work on debunking misinformation and disinformation. According to the data, 30% of respondents say they rarely confront those who spread misinformation or disinformation, 26%, say they sometimes, 20% never do it, 17% say they often, and 7% say they always personally confront those spreading the misinformation or disinformation.

According to the chi-square test results of independence, there is a statistically significant association between gender and the normal way of cross-checking the information from personal contacts, χ^2 (4, N=100) =10.53, $p=.032$, indicating that cross-checking information from personal contacts varies across gender. However, there is no such statistical significance concerning the remaining queries of this section in view of age or gender.

Discussion and Conclusion

Due to fast-emerging technology, information flow across groups has increased manifold; however, in this fast-changing media world, people must access the right information from the right sources. This paper attempted to investigate the media and information literacy levels of the people in Kashmir. From the results of data analysis, it is evident that there is no dearth of media literacy among the people. People are capable enough to differentiate the genuineness of information. The data clearly shows that a significant number of respondents are aware of misinformation and disinformation with varying degrees of awareness. People are not only able to recognize the genuineness of information but can differentiate the sources propagating such misleading information. The data also shows how people deal with misinformation and disinformation in their daily lives. Most of the people filter the information, manually or technically, either before believing or before sharing it further. For the information they receive on social media, they apply manual filters by reading comments, crosschecking with multiple sources, or consulting official websites. They also crosscheck the information, even if less in number, from debunking organisations that work on debunking false information. The use of debunking tools to authenticate the genuineness of information is minimal.

The data further reflects that people do care for the authenticity of the information they consume. The majority of the respondents have shown a positive response towards validating information they receive. The data reflects that people positively seek fact-checked information. According to the data, the majority of the respondents expressed a negative approach to sharing information without fact checking its authenticity, and their attitude is negative even towards sharing any misleading information with an intention to mislead. People tend to fact-check information they receive irrespective of any medium, be it traditional or digital; they manually filter without using any sort of technology; they consult multiple sources, even their peer groups and personal contacts, to crosscheck. They verify from official websites and at times consult fact-checking websites or organisations and debunking tools. However, the approach towards manual filtration of information is positive, and contrarily negative towards technical filtration.

The study also aimed to understand whether people know the fact-checking tools or sites that are useful for crosschecking the authenticity of the information. The data indicates that people are less aware of the tools and lack the technical skills needed for verifying the information by using techniques like Google reverse image search, video verification tools like InVID, YouTube Data Waiver, etc., and other websites beneficial for crosschecking information.

While concluding, it is striking to note that people's literacy level seems enough to track down whether the information they receive in their daily routine is genuine or misleading. The data indicates a positive response from respondents towards rating their knowledge or literacy regarding the phenomenon of misinformation and/or disinformation. To tackle the misleading information people encounter in their routine lives, they tend to filter information at their own personal level or local level. However, they seem to be unaware of the fact-checking tools and organizations that work to debunk the misleading information shared across various media platforms. It is worth mentioning that people positively seek fact-checked information and take self-measures to verify the information before believing or sharing it. They verify the information with multiple or official sources to validate its authenticity and even crosscheck the information with their peer groups. People do manual rather than technical filtration of the information they come across, as they seem less aware of technical filtration of the content, like using fact-checking tools and debunking organizations to verify its authenticity. Therefore, it is essential to continue promoting media literacy and effectively educate people on navigating authentic information in this digital age.

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