Original Article
ISSN (Online): 2582-7472

ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts
January-June 2024 5(1), 2187–2198

IMPACT OF FAKE NEWS ON THE CREDIBILITY OF NATIONAL HINDI NEWS CHANNELS: A STUDY OF VIEWER PERCEPTIONS IN UTTARAKHAND

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of fake news on the credibility of national Hindi news channels, focusing on viewer perceptions in Uttarakhand. As misinformation proliferates across media platforms, understanding its effects on audience trust and news consumption habits is crucial for maintaining an informed citizenry and a healthy media ecosystem.

The research uses a survey methodology to examine viewers' news consumption patterns, awareness and perception of fake news and the subsequent impact on channel credibility. Questions explore viewing frequency, preferred channels and perceived exposure to misinformation. The study assesses viewers' confidence in identifying fake news and investigates which news categories are most susceptible to false information.

Central to this investigation is how fake news affects trust in Hindi news channels. The survey measures changes in viewer trust levels and explores factors influencing news credibility judgments. It also examines whether fake news concerns have led viewers to abandon specific channels, providing insight into potential economic impacts on news organizations.

The study also explores viewers' perspectives on combating fake news, assessing the perceived importance of verifying news across multiple sources, interest in media literacy programs, and attitudes towards stricter regulations for news channels. By analyzing these aspects, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the fake news phenomenon in Hindi-language television news. The findings will offer valuable insights for news organizations, policymakers, and media literacy advocates, potentially informing strategies to enhance news credibility, combat misinformation, and restore viewer trust in an era of information overload and increasing media scepticism.

Keywords: Fake News, Media Credibility, Hindi News Channels, Viewer Perception, Media Literacy

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DOI
10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.2273

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly evolving landscape of media and information, the phenomenon of fake news has emerged as a significant challenge to the credibility and trustworthiness of news organizations worldwide. This issue is particularly pertinent in India, where the diverse linguistic and cultural fabric, coupled with a rapidly growing digital ecosystem, has created a fertile ground for the spread of misinformation (Chakrabarti et al., 2018). The proliferation of fake news has not only affected digital platforms but has also permeated traditional media outlets, including television news channels, which continue to be a primary source of information for a large segment of the Indian population (FICCI-EY, 2023).

The impact of fake news on national Hindi news channels is of particular interest, given the significant role these channels play in shaping public opinion and discourse across Hindi-speaking regions of India. Uttarakhand, a state in

northern India with a predominantly Hindi-speaking population, serves as an ideal microcosm for studying this phenomenon. The state's diverse demographic makeup, ranging from urban centres to remote rural areas, provides a comprehensive cross-section of viewers and their interactions with national Hindi news channels (Census of India, 2011).

The credibility of news media has long been recognized as a cornerstone of democratic societies, enabling informed citizen participation and holding power structures accountable (Kohring & Matthes, 2007). However, the rise of fake news threatens to erode this foundation, potentially leading to a misinformed populace and diminished trust in media institutions (Lazer et al., 2018). In the Indian context, where television news continues to wield significant influence, understanding the impact of fake news on viewer perceptions is crucial for safeguarding the integrity of the media ecosystem.

Recent studies have highlighted the growing concern over fake news in India. A survey by Microsoft (2019) found that 64% of Indians had encountered fake news online, higher than the global average. While much attention has been paid to the spread of misinformation on social media platforms, less research has focused on its presence and impact on traditional broadcast media, particularly in regional languages like Hindi.

The prevalence of fake news on television news channels can be attributed to various factors, including the intense competition for viewership, the 24/7 news cycle demanding constant content, and the blurring lines between news and opinion programming (Chakrabarti et al., 2018). National Hindi news channels, catering to a vast and diverse audience, face unique challenges in maintaining credibility while competing for viewership shares in a highly fragmented market (BARC India, 2023).

The impact of fake news on media credibility is multifaceted. Studies have shown that exposure to misinformation can lead to decreased trust in news sources, even when the fake news is subsequently corrected (Pennycook et al., 2018). This erosion of trust can have far-reaching consequences, potentially leading to a disengaged citizenry and weakened democratic processes (Van der Linden et al., 2020).

In the Indian context, the issue is further complicated by the country's vast linguistic diversity and varying levels of media literacy across different segments of the population. While urban, educated viewers might be more adept at critically evaluating news content, rural and less media-literate audiences may be more susceptible to misinformation (Neyazi et al., 2016). This disparity underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of how different viewer segments perceive and respond to fake news on national Hindi channels.

The present study aims to bridge the gap in existing literature by focusing specifically on the impact of fake news on the credibility of national Hindi news channels, as perceived by viewers in Uttarakhand. By examining viewers' news consumption habits, their awareness and perception of fake news, and the subsequent impact on channel credibility, this research seeks to provide valuable insights into the complex relationship between misinformation and media trust in the Hindi-language television news ecosystem.

This study explores potential solutions to combat the spread of fake news and restore viewer trust. By assessing viewers' attitudes towards media literacy initiatives and regulatory measures, the research aims to contribute to the on-going discourse on effective strategies for maintaining a healthy and credible media environment.

The findings of this study have significant implications for various stakeholders. For news organizations, understanding the impact of fake news on their credibility can inform strategies to enhance trust and maintain viewership. Policymakers can benefit from insights into viewer perceptions when formulating regulations to combat misinformation. Media literacy advocates can use the findings to tailor their programs to address the specific needs and challenges faced by viewers of Hindi news channels.

In an era where information integrity is increasingly under threat, this research contributes to the broader goal of fostering a well-informed society capable of critically engaging with news media. By shedding light on the complex dynamics between fake news, viewer perceptions, and channel credibility in the context of Hindi-language television news, this study aims to pave the way for a more resilient and trustworthy media ecosystem in India.

1.1. Research Objectives

1) To analyse the news consumption habits and preferences of viewers in Uttarakhand regarding national Hindi news channels.

2) To assess viewers' perceptions and awareness of fake news on national Hindi news channels, including their confidence in identifying misinformation.
3) To evaluate the impact of fake news on viewers' trust and credibility judgments of national Hindi news channels.
4) To explore viewers' attitudes towards potential measures and solutions for combating fake news in the media landscape.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) conducted a comprehensive study on the role of social media in the spread of fake news during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. Their research revealed that social media platforms facilitated the rapid dissemination of fake news, influencing political opinions and voter behavior. This study has become a cornerstone in understanding how fake news affects public perception and how digital media contributes to the misinformation crisis. The findings underscore the importance of verifying news sources, especially in an era where misinformation is rampant across platforms.

Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2018) provided a typology for defining fake news, categorizing it into different types based on intent and impact. They argue that fake news is not just limited to false information but also includes satire, misleading headlines, and biased reporting. Their research is crucial in distinguishing between different forms of misinformation and understanding how each form affects viewer trust in media. This study contributes to the broader debate on how fake news should be handled by journalists and media organizations.

Lazer et al. (2018) explored the science behind fake news, focusing on the psychological and social factors that make individuals susceptible to misinformation. The study highlighted how cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias, play a role in the spread and acceptance of fake news. Lazer et al.'s work is significant in understanding the human factors that contribute to the success of fake news and the challenges in combating it. They also emphasized the role of social networks in amplifying misinformation.

Rao (2021) focused on media literacy programs in rural India, analyzing the gap between media consumption and critical thinking. He found that while rural populations consume media, especially television news, in large quantities, they often lack the tools to critically analyze the information presented. This makes them particularly vulnerable to fake news. Rao's research is relevant to this study, as it highlights the need for media literacy initiatives to help viewers discern credible news from misinformation.

Gupta (2018) examined the competition for high Television Rating Points (TRP) among Indian news channels and how it drives sensationalism and misinformation. His study revealed that the pressure to generate higher TRP often leads to the prioritization of entertainment value over accuracy, contributing to the spread of fake news. This finding is critical for understanding the structural and commercial incentives behind fake news in Indian media, particularly on national Hindi news channels.

Thakurta (2012) explored media ethics in India, particularly focusing on the challenges faced by news organizations in maintaining truth, fairness, and objectivity. His research indicated that political and corporate pressures often lead to biased reporting and misinformation. Thakurta's work is foundational in understanding how external influences affect the credibility of news channels and how these pressures contribute to the public's perception of fake news in the media.

Bharali and Goswami (2021) investigated the role of media ownership in shaping the narrative and bias in news reporting. Their study found that corporate control over news channels often leads to selective reporting and the promotion of certain agendas, which can contribute to the spread of misinformation. This research is essential in understanding how ownership patterns in Indian media, particularly Hindi news channels, impact content and viewer trust.

Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) examined the broader ecosystem of misinformation, categorizing it into disinformation, misinformation, and malinformation. Their study highlighted how each form of information disorder impacts public trust in the media. They emphasized the importance of media literacy and regulatory measures to combat these issues. Wardle and Derakhshan's work is relevant in developing a framework for understanding the different types of fake news and their effects on viewer perception.

Fletcher and Nielsen (2018) explored the relationship between news consumption habits and trust in media. Their study found that viewers who consumed news from multiple sources were more likely to trust the media and discern between credible and fake news. This research supports the idea that cross-verifying information from different outlets is crucial for maintaining trust in news media, which has direct implications for the spread of fake news on Hindi news channels.

Bennett and Livingston (2018) examined the role of journalism in the post-truth era, focusing on how the rise of fake news has altered the responsibilities of journalists and media organizations. They argue that the traditional gatekeeping role of journalists has been eroded, making it easier for fake news to proliferate. Their research is vital for understanding the structural changes in the media landscape that have facilitated the spread of misinformation and how these changes impact public trust.

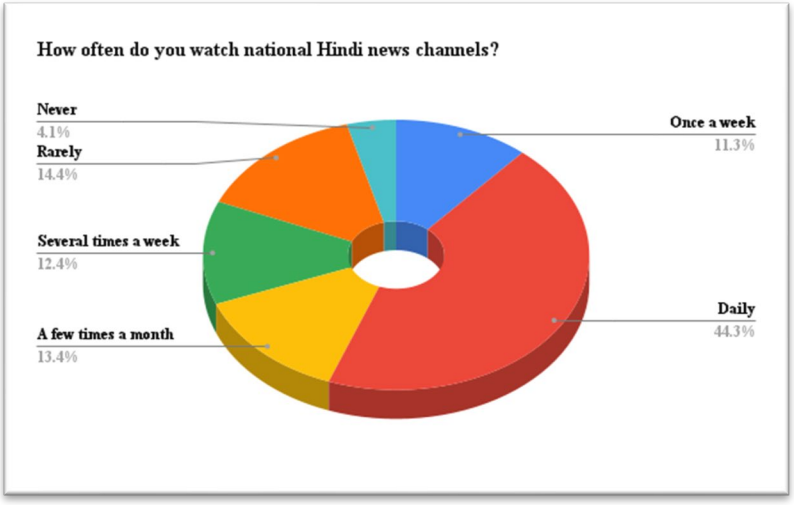
2.2. Research Mythology

This study, "Impact of Fake News on the Credibility of National Hindi News Channels: A Study of Viewer Perceptions in Uttarakhand," employed a descriptive survey design to assess how fake news affects viewers' trust in national Hindi news channels. A quantitative approach was utilized to gather numerical data, providing insights into news consumption patterns, perceptions of fake news, and its influence on credibility. The study focused on a sample of 102 respondents from Uttarakhand, aged 18 and above. A stratified random sampling technique ensured diverse representation across demographic groups. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire divided into sections covering news consumption habits, perceptions of fake news, and credibility. The questions included closed-ended and Likert-scale formats to ensure clarity and ease of response.

Data analysis was performed using Excel. In Excel, data was organized and cleaned for analysis. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize the responses. These analyses helped assess how frequently respondents encountered fake news and how it impacted their trust in national Hindi news channels. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent from participants and ensuring confidentiality. While the study provided valuable insights, limitations included the reliance on self-reported data and its geographical focus on Uttarakhand, which might limit broader applicability. Despite these limitations, the methodology effectively captured the impact of fake news on media credibility and offered insights for media professionals and policymakers on mitigating fake news and restoring public trust.

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

Q.1: How often do you watch national Hindi news channels?

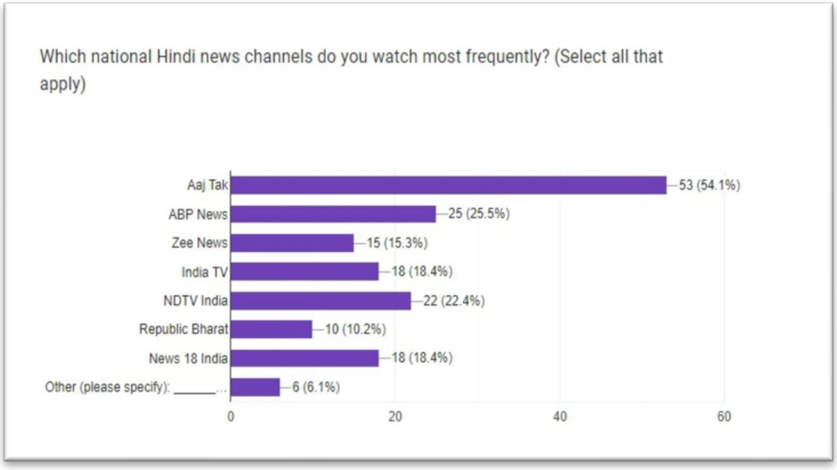


(Graph-1)

The pie chart displays respondents' viewing frequency of national Hindi news channels, revealing varied habits. The largest segment, 44.3%, reports watching daily, indicating a strong engagement among a significant portion of the audience. The second largest group, at 15.4%, watches several times a week, while 14.4% say they rarely watch, showing limited interaction. Additionally, 13.4% watch a few times a month, and 11.3% tune in once a week, reflecting moderate

engagement. The smallest segment, 4.1%, never watches these channels. Overall, 73% of respondents watch Hindi news channels regularly (daily to a few times a month), while 18.5% rarely or never engage, suggesting substantial viewership alongside a notable portion that seldom watches.

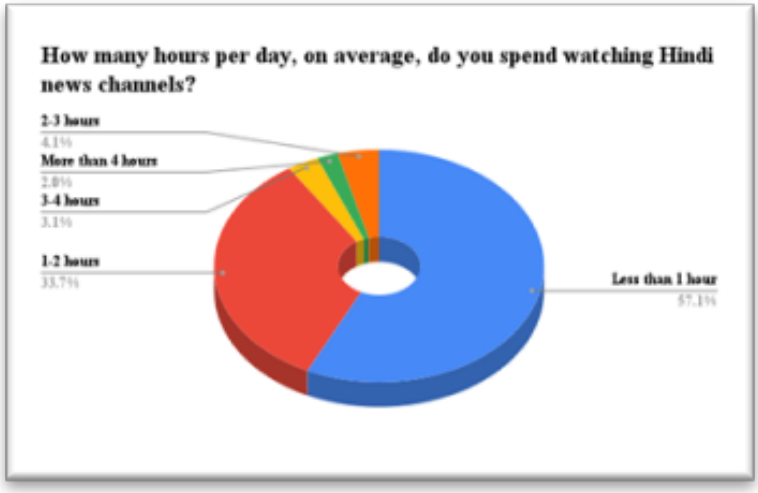
Q.2: Which national Hindi news channels do you watch most frequently?



(Graph-2)

The bar chart displays viewership preferences for national Hindi news channels among respondents. Aaj Tak is the most popular channel, chosen by 53 respondents (54.1%), indicating a significant lead in viewership. ABP News follows as the second most watched channel with 25 respondents (25.5%), while NDTV India ranks third with 22 respondents (22.4%). India TV and News 18 India share the fourth position, each selected by 18 respondents (18.4%). Zee News has 15 respondents (15.3%) choosing it, and Republic Bharat has a smaller audience of 10 respondents (10.2%). The "Other" category, selected by 6 respondents (6.1%), highlights that while the main channels dominate, some viewers prefer additional options. The data indicates that respondents can select multiple channels, leading to percentages exceeding 100%, reflecting a tendency among viewers to watch several news channels regularly. Overall, Aaj Tak clearly leads, followed by a group of moderately popular channels and a smaller cohort with loyal audiences.

Q.3: How many hours per day, on average, do you spend watching Hindi news channels?

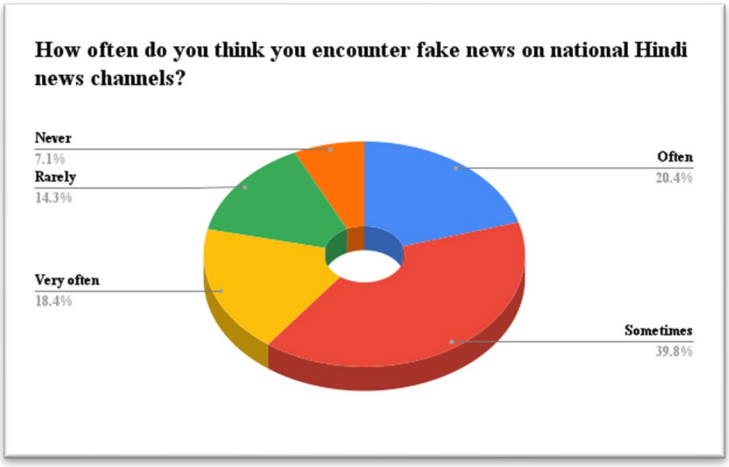


(Graph-3)

The pie chart shows the average daily time respondents spend watching Hindi news channels. A majority, 57.1%, watch for "Less than 1 hour," while 33.7% spend "1-2 hours" daily. Together, these categories represent 90.8% of viewers, indicating that most respondents consume Hindi news for two hours or less each day. The remaining viewers watch for longer durations: 4.1% for "2-3 hours," 3.1% for "3-4 hours," and only 2.0% for "More than 4 hours." This

distribution suggests that while Hindi news channels have a broad audience, most viewers engage with them for relatively short periods, which may influence content structure and advertising strategies.

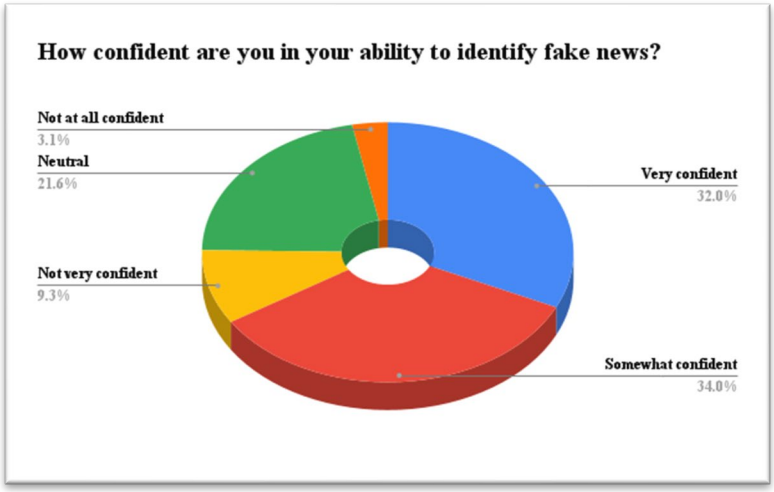
Q.4: How often do you think you encounter fake news on national Hindi news channels?



(Graph-4)

The pie chart illustrates respondents' perceptions of fake news frequency on national Hindi news channels. The largest group, 39.8%, reports encountering fake news "Sometimes," followed by 20.4% who say they "Often" do, and 18.4% who claim "Very often." Conversely, 14.3% say they "Rarely" encounter fake news, while only 7.1% state they "Never" encounter it. Overall, 78.6% of respondents perceive fake news regularly, indicating widespread skepticism about the reliability of information in Hindi national news media. This suggests a significant need for improved fact-checking and journalistic standards to enhance media trust.

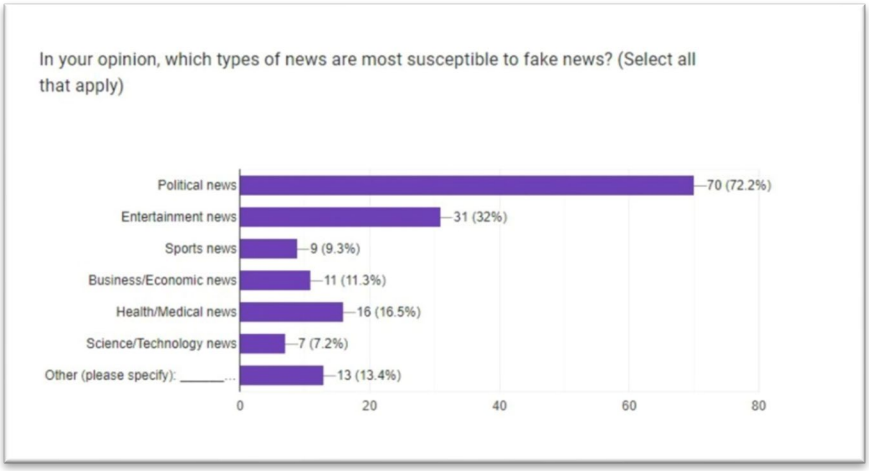
Q.5: How confident are you in your ability to identify fake news?



(Graph-5)

The pie chart shows varied levels of self-reported confidence in identifying fake news among respondents. The largest group, 34.0%, feels "Somewhat confident," followed closely by 32.0% who are "Very confident." A significant 21.6% expressed a "Neutral" stance, while 9.3% are "Not very confident," and 3.1% are "Not at all confident." Overall, 66% of respondents display some degree of confidence in their fake news detection skills, but a notable portion remains unsure or lacks confidence. This highlights the complexity of public perceptions of competence in fake news detection and underscores the need for enhanced media literacy education.

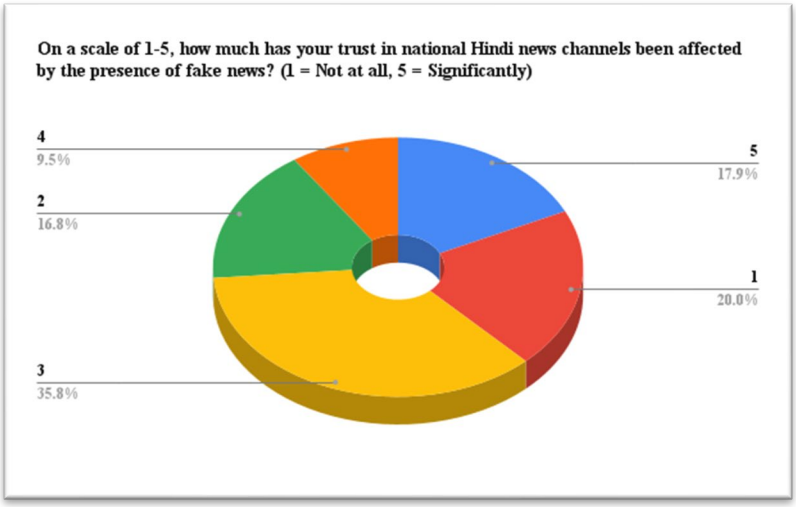
Q.6: In your opinion, which types of news are most susceptible to fake news?



(Graph-6)

The survey results indicate a strong perception of vulnerability to fake news, particularly in political news, which 72.2% of respondents identified as the most susceptible to misinformation. Entertainment news follows at 32%, reflecting moderate concern about reliability in celebrity and pop culture reporting. Health and medical news ranks third at 16.5%, highlighting growing awareness of false health information. Additionally, 13.4% chose "Other," suggesting other areas of concern. Business and economic news (11.3%), sports news (9.3%), and science/technology news (7.2%) were seen as less susceptible, with the latter perceived as the most trustworthy. Overall, the data illustrates a public view that regards political information as particularly vulnerable while generally placing more trust in scientific and technological reporting.

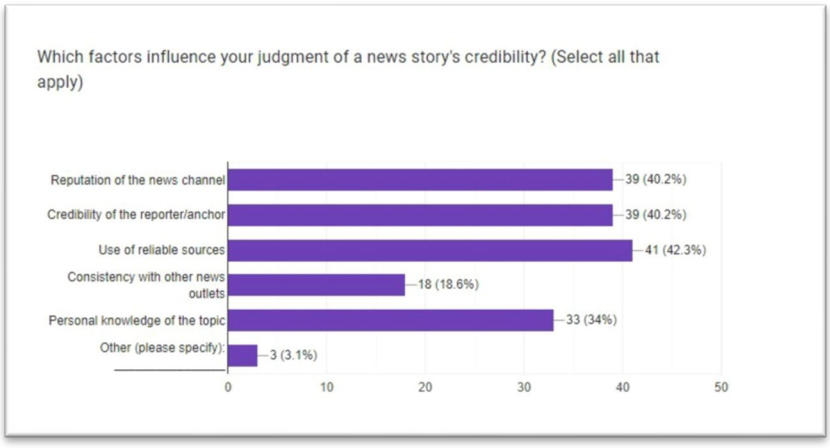
Q.7: On a scale of 1-5, how much has your trust in national Hindi news channels been affected by the presence of fake news? (1 = Not at all, 5 = Significantly)



(Graph-7)

The chart shows varying impacts of fake news on trust in national Hindi news channels. A moderate effect was reported by 35.8% of viewers, rating the impact at 3. A combined 27.4% (ratings 4 and 5) experienced high to significant trust erosion, with 17.9% selecting 5. Conversely, 36.8% (ratings 1 and 2) reported little to no impact, with 20% choosing 1. This distribution highlights diverse viewer responses, with fake news significantly affecting some while others remain unaffected. The findings emphasize the challenge for news channels to maintain credibility and address concerns across different viewer segments.

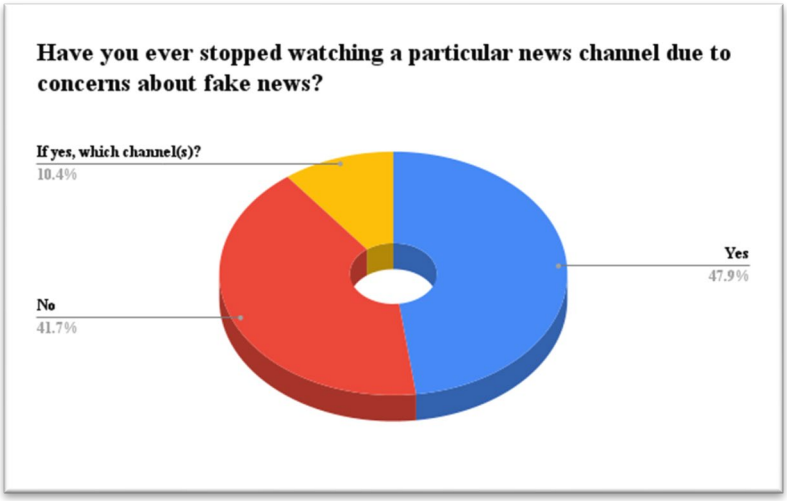
Q.8: Which factors influence your judgment of a news story's credibility?



(Graph-8)

The bar graph shows that 42.3% of respondents consider "Use of reliable sources" the most important factor in judging news story credibility, followed by "Reputation of the news channel" and "Credibility of the reporter/anchor," both at 40.2%. "Personal knowledge of the topic" influences 34%, while 18.6% value "Consistency with other news outlets." Only 3.1% selected "Other." These findings indicate that viewers assess credibility through a combination of source reliability, institutional reputation, individual credibility, and personal knowledge, emphasizing the need for news organizations to uphold high journalistic standards and credibility.

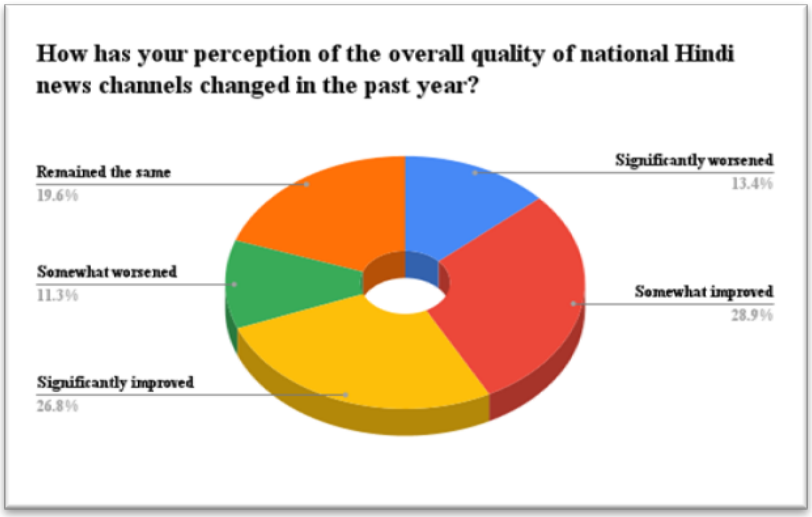
Q.9: Have you ever stopped watching a particular news channel due to concerns about fake news?



(Graph-9)

The chart shows that 47.9% of viewers have stopped watching a news channel due to fake news concerns, reflecting high awareness and action regarding news credibility. Meanwhile, 41.7% continue watching their chosen channels, indicating either satisfaction or a different approach to misinformation. Additionally, 10.4% of respondents identified specific channels they've stopped watching. These findings highlight the impact of fake news on viewer loyalty and emphasize the need for news outlets to maintain credibility. There's also a clear demand for transparent, fact-checked reporting, as viewers are willing to switch channels based on perceived authenticity.

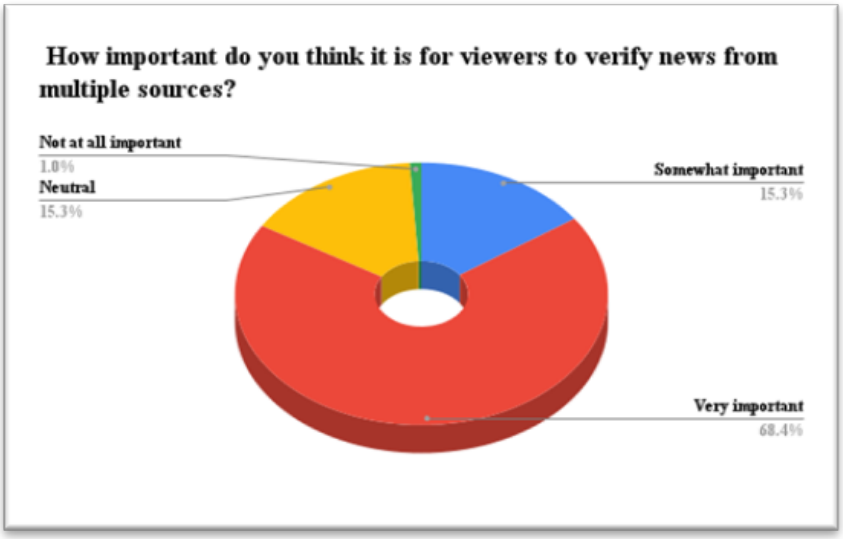
Q.10: How has your perception of the overall quality of national Hindi news channels changed in the past year?



(Graph-10)

The pie chart shows mixed perceptions of national Hindi news channels' quality over the past year. A majority (55.7%) believe the quality has improved, with 28.9% reporting it has "Somewhat improved" and 26.8% stating it has "Significantly improved." However, 24.7% perceive a decline, with 13.4% saying it has "Significantly worsened" and 11.3% reporting it has "Somewhat worsened." Additionally, 19.6% feel the quality has "Remained the same." These findings suggest a positive trend in perceived quality, but a notable portion of the audience still has concerns.

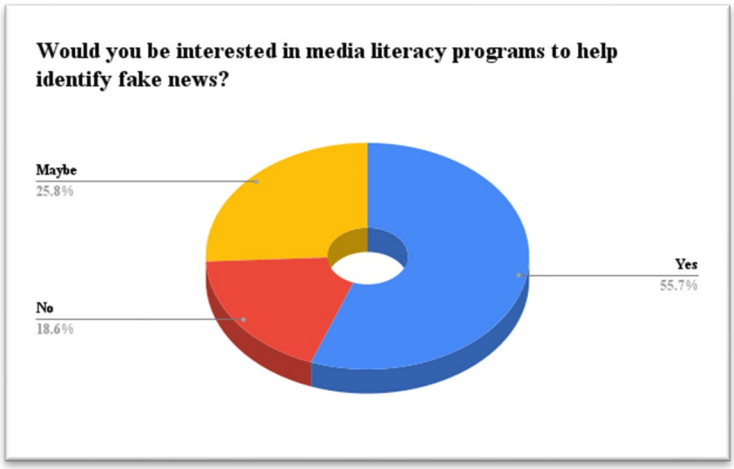
Q.11: How important do you think it is for viewers to verify news from multiple sources?



(Graph-11)

Above chart shows that 68.4% of respondents consider verifying news from multiple sources "Very important," while 15.3% find it "Somewhat important," totalling 83.7% in favour of news verification. This reflects strong public awareness of the need for critical media consumption. However, 15.3% are neutral, suggesting indifference or uncertainty, and only 1% dismisses verification as unimportant. These findings emphasize a positive attitude toward responsible news consumption, while also pointing to a need for further education to engage the neutral group in active verification practices.

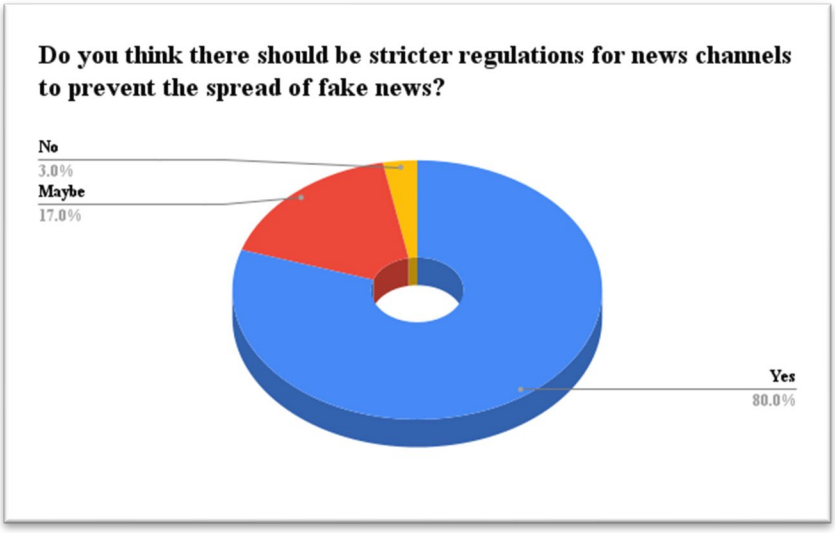
Q.12: Would you be interested in media literacy programs to help identify fake news?



(Graph-12)

The chart shows that 55.7% of respondents express interest in media literacy programs aimed at identifying fake news, reflecting strong support for such initiatives. 25.8% are undecided ("Maybe"), and 18.6% are not interested, indicating some uncertainty and resistance. While there is a generally positive reception to media literacy education, the 44.4% combined "Maybe" and "No" responses suggest potential barriers like time constraints, skepticism, or lack of awareness. Further research into the reasons behind these responses could help tailor media literacy efforts more effectively.

Q.13: Do you think there should be stricter regulations for news channels to prevent the spread of fake news?



(Graph-13)

The graph indicates that 80% of the public favor stricter regulations for news channels to prevent fake news, with only 3% opposed and 17% undecided. This strong majority reflects significant concern about misinformation in the media. The minimal opposition suggests little resistance to tighter controls, while the undecided group implies some view the issue as complex or need more information.

3. CONCLUSION

The paper result shows that Hindi news consumption and public attitudes toward fake news presents a complex and multifaceted picture of the media landscape in India. The data reveals that a substantial 73% of respondents engage with Hindi news channels regularly, with 44.3% tuning in daily. This high engagement underscores the significant role

these channels play in shaping public discourse and informing viewers about current events. However, the viewing duration paints a different picture; 90.8% of respondents watch for two hours or less each day. This suggests that while audiences are engaging with Hindi news media, their interaction may often be brief and not deeply analytical, which could impact their understanding and retention of critical information.

Within this landscape, Aaj Tak emerges as the dominant player, with 54.1% of respondents selecting it as their most frequently watched channel. Following Aaj Tak are ABP News and NDTV India, indicating a clear hierarchy in viewer preferences. This dominance of Aaj Tak not only reflects its popularity but also suggests its influence in setting the news agenda, shaping public perceptions, and guiding discourse on national issues. The implications of this hierarchy extend beyond mere viewership numbers, as these channels collectively contribute to the framing of news narratives and issues that resonate with the public.

However, the data reveals concerning trends regarding the perception of fake news. An overwhelming 78.6% of respondents believe they encounter fake news on these channels regularly, with responses ranging from "Sometimes" to "Very often." This widespread skepticism points to a growing awareness of misinformation, particularly in political news, which 72.2% of respondents identify as the most susceptible to fake news. This finding highlights the critical need for news organizations to enhance their fact-checking and journalistic standards, as public trust hinges on the reliability of information presented to viewers. Interestingly, despite the high perception of fake news, a significant portion of the audience exhibits confidence in their ability to identify misleading information. 66% of respondents express varying degrees of confidence in their fake news detection skills, but this leaves a substantial number who remain unsure or lack confidence altogether. This gap indicates an urgent need for enhanced media literacy education to empower viewers with the tools necessary to critically evaluate the information they consume. Given the complexity of media messages today, fostering media literacy can help bridge this gap and improve the overall quality of public discourse.

The impact of fake news on trust in national Hindi news channels presents a mixed picture. While 27.4% of viewers report a high to significant erosion of trust, 36.8% indicate that fake news has had little to no impact on their trust levels. This division suggests that audience engagement with news content varies significantly among viewers, with some adopting a more critical approach while others maintain a level of trust despite the prevalence of misinformation. This variability in trust levels emphasizes the challenges news organizations face in retaining credibility amid concerns about misinformation. The survey reveals a robust appetite for improved news quality and accuracy. A striking 80% of respondents support stricter regulations for news channels to mitigate the spread of fake news, indicating a strong public demand for accountability in journalism. Additionally, 83.7% of respondents believe it is essential to verify news from multiple sources, reflecting a proactive approach to media consumption. This inclination towards verification underscores a critical understanding among viewers of the need to cross-check information, particularly in an era characterized by information overload and rapid dissemination of news.

Encouragingly, 55.7% of respondents perceive an improvement in the overall quality of Hindi news channels over the past year. However, a notable 24.7% express concerns about declining quality, suggesting that while some channels are making strides in enhancing their content, significant challenges remain. This dichotomy points to the necessity for news organizations to continue evolving in response to audience feedback and changing media consumption patterns.

While Hindi news channels enjoy a broad and engaged viewership, they face substantial challenges related to credibility and the pervasive influence of fake news. The data suggests that viewers are becoming increasingly critical and discerning, demanding higher standards of journalism and accountability from news organizations. To address these concerns and maintain public trust, there is a clear opportunity and need for enhanced media literacy initiatives, improved self-regulation by news channels, and potentially stricter external oversight. By focusing on these areas, Hindi news channels can work towards building credibility, fostering informed citizenship, and ensuring that the public receives accurate and trustworthy information in an era fraught with misinformation.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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