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CAN YOU IDENTIFY FAKE NEWS? INVESTIGATING THE ELEMENTS OF FAKE
NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC USING THE
HEURISTIC-SYSTEMATIC MODEL

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DECLARATION

The researchers declare that the material contained in this paper is the end result of my own work and that due acknowledgement has been given in the bibliography and references to ALL sources be they printed, electronic or personal.

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This research paper attached hereto, entitled “Can you identify fake news? Investigating the elements of fake news on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic using the Heuristic-systematic model” prepared and submitted by Foo Yee Ting, Leong Jie Rou Sylvine, Liew Yong Qi, Lim Zhe Thung and Tan Suet Yi in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Communication (Hons) Public Relations is hereby accepted.

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Department of Public Relations
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FYP Title:

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Abstract

This study is to find out the elements of fake news on social media that persuade young adults to believe in it during the COVID 19 pandemic. The purpose of these findings is to help contribute to the practical and also theoretical significance of similar research to be carried out in the future. The method used for this research is the qualitative research method, where interviews using semi-structured questions will be carried out between the interviewer and the interviewee. A sample size of 25 young adults aged between 19-24 years old, Malaysian citizens and own social media accounts were involved in the current study to answer our research questions of what the elements of fake news on social media are as well as how the elements of fake new persuaded young adults to believe in it during COVID-19 by using purposive sampling method. The findings identified that the four main elements of fake news on social media are the interaction of social media users, visibility, content and influencer. Besides that, the research also revealed the way how the elements of fake news on social media persuade young adults to believe in it during COVID-19. The results showed that the interaction of social media users, visibility, and influencer were proved to confirm the Heuristic-Systematic Model, which states that some people make decisions solely based on non-verbal cues. Hence, this study aims to assist various parties in tackling the issues of fake news as well as educate them with the new knowledge and findings from our research.

Keywords: *Fake News, Social Media, Young Adult, Heuristic-Systematic Model*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This chapter is about the overview of the research which is about the elements of fake news that persuade people believe in it. This research aims to investigate the elements of fake news on social media during the COVID-19 Pandemic using the Heuristic-Systematic Model. This chapter consists of the background of the study, problem statement, research question, research objective, the significance of the study and research gap.

1.1 Background of Study

COVID-19 pandemic is the most severe communicable disease outbreak to have hit Malaysia. Since the implementation of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, social media plays a very important role in conveying information to the community. Due to today's era of globalization, social media's influence on the digital world has become an indispensable part of most people's daily lives (Gazi & Çetin, 2017). Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, social media has become the platform for Malaysians to get information and keep in touch with the newest status of the COVID-19 in Malaysia. Furthermore, social media contributes to making Malaysian society more aware of its surroundings and strengthening interpersonal relationships (Ngadiron et al., 2021). Even so, the community should exercise greater caution because there is a huge amount of information on social media, including fake news that is created only to attract the attention of the users of the internet by becoming a trending topic (Ngadiron et al., 2021).

Fake news is defined as information that is false or misleading and is presented as news (McGonagle, 2017). Whether or not fake news is spread intentionally, it will cause harm to

another entity (Balakrishnan et al., 2021). Today, the proliferation of news that appears to be a hoax or a scam has become a highly concerned issue globally (McGonagle, 2017). Although fake news is not a new issue, it has become more concerning in recent years because of the increasing use of social media which allows people to interact and exchange information with each other (Zhou & Zafarani, 2018). However, one of the most significant benefits and attractions of social media is the fact that it is both fast and free to use (Khan et al., 2021). The users of social media are allowed to share, like, and retweet to spread their ideas and news using the platform, so they might be exposed to an uncontrollable type of information, and this information may be fake news, particularly news that originates from independent authors (Apuke & Omar, 2021).

Since last year, COVID-19 has been collecting and generating false content at an alarming rate (Balakrishnan et al., 2021). Although the dissemination of false information is not unique to this epidemic, its impact is driving the general people to be apprehensive and afraid because of the situation (Ortutay & Klepper, 2020). According to the research, Malaysians are increasingly active on social media and nearly 70% of Malaysians obtain news from social media platforms, but at the same time, many young adults are confused and unable to differentiate between fake and real news (Moonyati Mohd Yatid, 2019). Young adults have a poor judgement on the authenticity of the messages they receive on social media, and often blindly believe that the information they receive is accurate (Pennycook et al, 2020). Therefore, this study aims to identify the elements of fake news on social media that persuades young adults to believe in it during COVID-19 so that the spreading of fake news on social media problems could be solved.

1.2 Problem Statement

Since the implementation of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, social media is the one of the widely used platform for people to obtain information and stay connected with others (Almomani & Al-Qu'ran, 2020). However, despite the fact that the media is critical in disseminating information during the pandemic, at the same time, it also becomes difficult for people to judge the credibility of any message (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

According to research by Glazzard and Stones (2019), the most active internet users are aged between 15 to 24 years old, which are exactly the users who would fall under the category of “teenagers” and “young adults”. However, 82.7% of users trusted health-related information that they obtained online without looking at the sources (Moonyati Mohd Yatid, 2019). Moreover, the majority of young adults are unable to differentiate the fake news (Veeriah, 2021). It had caused a series of cases like fake news that is affecting its' users during the COVID-19 pandemic (Tsao et al., 2021).

As people are often blindly consuming the fake news on social media (Pennycook et al, 2020), a higher percentage of them are using heuristic processing in processing the information that they get which is relying heavily on the heuristic cues such as the expert resources and they did not undergo the systematic processing which requires them to carefully research the content (Luo et al., 2012).

The statistics showed that 133 out of 270 investigation papers on cases of COVID-19 related fake news are further investigated by the police and the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC). It also reported that 35 people have been charged in court. Hence, the issue of spreading fake news on social media is also becoming more common during the pandemic (Ngadiron et al., 2021). According to Zainul and Said (2020), the most popular medium for people to spread fake news is WhatsApp, followed by Facebook.

Additionally, according to Pfordten (2021), the type of fake news being spread online includes the spike in the cases of COVID-19, COVID-19 MCO or SOP, COVID-19 government response, and so on. The unclarified source stated facts such as eating garlic could cure the COVID-19 virus, the virus cannot transmit through the hot and humid area, drinking alcohol could cure the virus and more had been spreading like wildfire during this pandemic (Phoong et al., 2021). Consequently, fake news may affect people's health and create confusion among the people.

The continuous spreading of fake news on social media could bring a negative impact on its users in terms of attitude or behavior. This results in a stir of public panic, insecurity, and other behavior change in society (Ngadiron et al., 2021). For example, fear and public panic could occur when the unclarified fake news of the spike in the cases of COVID-19 increases or the false information about the Movement Control Order (MCO) is spread amongst our community.

In order to solve this problem, MCMC had set up a portal named "sebenarnya.my" with the intention to help the people in verifying the truthfulness of news that was received on social media (Moonyati Mohd Yatid, 2019). Veeriah (2021) claimed that 352 cases of fake news denials and clarifications had been published through the portal during COVID-19. Malaysia had put efforts such as the fact-checking website, Anti-Fake News Act, and so on to help in solving the problem (Moonyati Mohd Yatid, 2019). However, it is important to find out and understand the elements of fake news on social media that persuades young adults to believe in it so that the problems can be solved more efficiently.

1.3 Research Objectives

Overall, this research identifies the elements of fake news on social media that persuades young adults to believe in it during COVID-19. Specifically, the research objectives are:

1.3.1 To explore what are the elements of fake news on social media that persuades young adults to believe in it during COVID-19.

1.3.2 To investigate the way on how the elements of fake news on social media persuade the young adults to believe in it during COVID-19.

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions which will be explored from this research:

1.4.1 What are the elements of fake news on social media that persuades young adults to believe in it during COVID-19?

1.4.2 How do the elements of fake news on social media persuade young adults to believe in it during COVID-19?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This research helps to contribute theoretical significance for academic researchers to understand the elements of fake news. According to the model framework that we have chosen for our research, external judgement cues that are not related to the message presented have an impact on the way people behave and react. This behaviour is known as heuristic, and it symbolises how people process the information in a simple and direct way. Thus, we intend to contribute to adding more of these cues that are related to the Heuristic-Systematic Model and help future researchers to identify these cues related to fake news while using this framework in more similar studies to come. With this study, it will benefit future researchers to come up

with more extensive research in this area. At the same time, provide recommendations for the related statutory bodies.

By conducting this research, we also contribute to the practical significance by providing insights for policymakers to understand the elements of fake news. The finding will be significant to be used as a starting point in developing a new education policy such as having professionals and well-trained teachers or lecturers to educate students to identify the elements of fake news and avoid the spread of unethical news.

This research proves the importance of educating the youngster to identify the element of fake news in social media. Our literature review shows that most of the studies conducted by local researchers are more focused on the motives of sharing fake news instead of analyzing the element of fake news. Therefore, it caused the young community to have a lack of knowledge in identifying the element of fake news. With proper education, this will increase the awareness of identifying the authenticity of the news before they share the information which ultimately avoids the youngster from blindly believing everything posted on social media.

1.6 Research Gap

There are several reasons that lead our team to decide on doing research on the elements of fake news that make that news believable, which causes people to spread the news like wildfire around the internet during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have scoured up data that indicates a rise in the cases of fake news during the pandemic, including data on what are the age range of the victims that have fallen into the deceits of the fake news, but none of these data and research ever indicates the elements that may result in the fake news to look believable.

To relate this research gap to our problem statement, we need to find the root of the issues that we have listed with statistics in our problem statement. Issues such as young adults

falling into the trap of fake news, issues of fake news kept arising during the COVID-19 period, and so on. Again, there is a variety of research that analyses how people react to fake news and what impact it has on these people, and yet little to no research has been done to identify the element that is fueling these behaviors. Thus, with this research, we intend to solve this gap and provide answers to our readers.

In order to understand the issue that is thwarting the safety of our society, we must first look into the root of the problem, which are questions that we often ask ourselves such as: why people think that fake news is true, and why are they sharing them? There must be some sort of element that appears to make the lie look believable, that serves as a driving force to motivate the ones who believed in them, to share them. This is where our research steps in, we wanted to analyze these said elements, and identify them by carrying out a qualitative research method among our community.

We also acknowledged the fact that some of the data acquired from our literature review might not be relevant to our local context, with that, our research would also aim to differentiate what sort of element only appears on the local fake news, and not on the international ones. We understand that if we do not limit our findings locally, our audiences might end up being confused by our findings which leads to no contribution whatsoever towards society.

1.7 Operational Definition

1.7.1 Fake News

Fake news is defined as information that is false or misleading and is presented as news (McGonagle, 2017). Articles that are purposely and verifiably untrue and have the potential to deceive readers by pretending to be fact-based news reports in order to influence public opinion are known as fake news (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Additionally, myths, rumors, conspiracy

theories, hoaxes, as well as deceptive or erroneous content posted on social media platforms, whether intentionally or unintentionally, are all considered to be fake news (Wang et al., 2019).

1.7.2 Social Media

Social media is an application program, which acts as an interface that allows users to engage with one another, while creating, updating, and sharing news, text, graphic and audio information, as well as classifying and promoting existing content (Selwyn, 2012). Social media application programs include Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube, and so on. It helps to spread the dialogue to a wider audience by using the “long tail” concept, this implies that the dialogues can be delivered in a variety of forums (Edosomwan, 2011). Although social media platforms were originally designed to establish contacts among people, they have evolved into a significant means of producing and exchanging information and news (Tandoc et al., 2017). Users of social media can share, like and forward ideas, as well as distribute news. Therefore, they always come into contact with uncontrollable information, especially news from independent authors (Apuke & Omar, 2020).

1.7.3. Young Adult

Young adulthood is a developmental stage that occurs between the ages of 18 and 25, when a person is transitioning from childhood to adulthood (Higley, 2019). This stage is marked by key and important developmental tasks that enable the young adult to engage in self-exploration in order to develop a self-identity and system of beliefs while achieving independence and autonomy (Higley, 2019). Due to today’s era of globalization, the development of science and technology is becoming more and more advanced, including the media. Internet, social media, and smart technologies have all risen to become social

phenomena, particularly among young adults (Rasi et al., 2020). Therefore, young people are considered to be the easiest to access digital media (Pérez-Escoda et al., 2021).

1.7.4 Heuristic-Systematic Model

The Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) was discovered and developed by Shelly Chaiken throughout the 1980s (Chaiken, 1980). The Heuristic-Systematic Model is a theory of persuasion that studies the attitudes' change (Bohner et al., 1995). This theory claims that people's attitudes can change in two different ways when people receive messages which are heuristic processing and systematic processing. Systematic processing is about people researching the related information content and consuming the relevant information to form their credibility judgements. On the other hand, heuristic processing is about processing information by using minimal cognitive effort and resources (Ratneshwar & Chaiken, 2016). Heuristic processing relies on heuristic cues such as sources, structure, length to make a credible judgement. Therefore, systematic processing requires more time in judging a message as compared to heuristic processing (Luo et al., 2012).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the previous findings related to the keywords of this research topic done by previous researchers. This chapter consists of social media use and young adults, , fake news and the COVID-19 pandemic, fake news and young adults, fake news and social media, impacts of fake news, the Heuristic-Systematic model and the conceptual framework.

2.1 Social Media Use and Young Adults

Consideration of shared content and the audience of shared content both impacts how people utilise social media. Individuals actively build their own social media ecologies and meet their needs based on related functions and communities in independent platforms (Zhao et al., 2016). At the same time, social media provides opportunities for young people to connect with friends and family and also solves key social development problems. Different social media sites allow users to have different usage methods and experiences. Facebook is commonly used to share social feeds with friends and family, while Twitter is used more on sharing common interests all around the world. Many other social media platforms do have their unique identities, for example, LinkedIn used for professional and social networking; Pinterest used for sharing skills, cooking, and other creative ideas; Tumblr as a social blog platform where sure can share can discuss various content; Snapchat used as a messaging application that allows users to send photographs and videos that will disappear once been viewed (Ilakkuvan et al., 2018).

Malaysia is one of the countries with the largest number of social media users in the Asia Pacific region (Statista, 2021). As of January 2021, the penetration rate of active social media users in Malaysia ranked second highest with a penetration rate of 86%. Compared to

2016, this figure has increased by 24% (Muller, 2021). Besides that, according to the Communications and Multimedia Ministry secretary general, which is Datuk Seri Mohammad Mentek has stated that as of January 2021, there are approximately 28million social media users in Malaysia (The Star, 2021). Moreover, according to data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia in 2020, approximately 15,248.8 billion, or 45% of the Malaysian population are young people (Nul Widaya Mohamed Nawawi et al., 2020). According to the MCMC's Internet Users Survey 2018, the Malaysian internet user demographic for young adults as of July 2018 would be 8.1% under the age of 20, with the largest number of 30% falling on the ages of 20 to 29 years old. (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission, 2018).

2.2 Fake News and COVID-19 Pandemic

According to Goh (2021), since COVID-19 was first discovered in Malaysia in January 2020, the coronavirus has infected more than 2 million people in the country. On January 24, 2020, three Chinese citizens infected by the coronavirus arrived in Malaysia who had close contact with a patient infected with coronavirus in Singapore (New Straits Times, 2020). Then, on 4th February 2020, a 41-year-old man who was the first Malaysian to be diagnosed by COVID-19, after returned from Singapore, he started to have a fever and cough, and lastly tested positive for the novel coronavirus which also brought the number of coronavirus cases in Malaysia to 10 (BERNAMA, 2020). Since then, the number of confirmed cases in Malaysia has gradually risen, although it is still under control.

The issue worsened until Brunei International Health Regulations informed the International Health Regulations Malaysia on March 11, 2020. One person from Brunei has been diagnosed as COVID-19 positive who attended a religious gathering in Selangor, Malaysia which consisted of more than 10,000 participants from different countries (Noor

Hisham Abdullah, 2020a). Since then, more than 100 cases have been recorded every day, and the majority of them have been participating in large public gatherings and contracted the disease from said gatherings (Noor Hisham Abdullah, 2020b). On March 18, 2020, a Movement Control Order (MCO) was ordered by the government to restrict the citizens' movement around the country. This is to assist the Ministry of Health in maximizing their efforts in stopping the spread of the virus (Ain Umaira Md Shah et al., 2020). Although the pandemic was once controlled to a single number of new cases every day, after the second wave of the pandemic, to date, the total number of coronavirus cases in Malaysia has exceeded 2.5 million so far (Noor Hisham Abdullah, 2021).

Similar to the COVID-19 pandemic, misinformation and false information including fake news related to the disease and a large number of conspiracy theories have occurred all over social media platforms (Goh, 2021). Examples of fake news which spread during the pandemic such as a government retiree, Aliuddin Amit who was a former employee of the Sabah State Railway Department before spreading fake news about COVID-19 through a social media platform, WhatsApp on January 23, 2020 (The Star, 2020). According to FMT News (2020), Aliuddin Amit propagated a rumor about a prisoner in Sandakan who died after eating oranges that had novel coronavirus and originally came from Wuhan, China. Although an officer of the Sandakan Prison realized the rumor on 24 January, the fake news was already spread on social media platforms widely and caused public panic. The fake news spread by Aliuddin Amit would cause public disorder, since the public will be concerned about food safety and may even refuse to purchase certain types of fruits, which will affect the business of connected sectors and worsen the economy. In light of the coronavirus's proliferation, it is natural to distribute such news and information, especially in the early phases when there's a dearth of scientific data and credible sources about what this virus is and how to cure and manage it or study its social and economic implications (Almomani & Al-Qur'an, 2020).

Due to the increase in internet traffic, people are used to seeking information on the internet. When the volume of false information occurs in the digital and physical environment, it has caused an “infodemic” (World Health Organization, 2020). The number of fake news being spread in the pandemic has greatly increased in Malaysia. The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) stated that they will the issue of dissemination of fake news or content through WhatsApp and other communication applications seriously, as this may cause fear, panic, and anxiety among the public and may bring harm to the country, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic (BERNAMA, 2021). According to an information portal “sebenarnya.my”, which was developed by MCMC, from its establishment to 31st May 2021, the portal website has received a total of 13,690 reports on fake news issues, of which 4,993 (36.5%) reports were on issues related to COVID-19 (Pfordten, 2021).

2.3 Fake News and Young Adults

Fake news is defined as articles that are purposefully and irrefutably false, and that have the possibility to mislead readers (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). However, the existence of the internet aids in the acceleration of the delivery of news and different types of information to the public, including fake news (Ngadiron et al., 2021). In the case of young adults, this is of particular concern because they are the most vulnerable and most exposed to social media platforms that the fake news can spread unchecked (Pérez-Escoda et al., 2021).

Most young adults have poor judgement when it comes to the authenticity of the messages they receive on social media, and they frequently believe that the information they receive is correct without checking the source (Pennycook et al., 2020). A study from Malaysia Communication and Multimedia Commission showed that many younger generation users who search for information on the internet and blindly believe what they read and 82.7% of users

trusted health-related content was obtained on social media (Moonyati Mohd Yatid, 2019). Therefore, the concept of media literacy has been included in social media as one of the main tools for young people to participate in society (Ragil Tri Atmi et al., 2018).

Media literacy is important for people of all ages who read or listen to the news because it allows people to make informed decisions. It enables young adults to correctly understand media content, to critically dissect media forms, and, as a result, to benefit from media in an informed and efficient manner (Šuminas & Jastramskis, 2020). Besides that, media literacy can be broken down into several different abilities, such as the ability to access media messages, evaluate media messages, analyse media messages, act on media messages, and communicate media messages, among other things (Livingstone, 2003). Thus, media literacy plays an important role between fake news and young adults.

2.4 Fake News and Social Media

Social media plays an important role in the community, especially during the pandemic. It allows people to share information and communicate with each other in an easy way (Burkhardt, 2017). Therefore, people are spending a great amount of time interacting with it and relying heavily on social media to get the information (Khan et al, 2021). The key motivations for the users to use social media are including the sharing of information, networking, and communication (Ahn et al., 2007). Hence, it does make social media play a role in the distribution of fake news (Mavridis, 2018).

The issue of spreading fake news on social media platforms has become a serious issue not only in Malaysia but globally (Talwar et al., 2020). It does become a global concern as fake news could mislead the audiences either intentionally or unintentionally (Mavridis, 2018). Social media is used to let everyone have the opportunity to share information with others. However, social media is offering a large and wider range of sources of information that are

not officially confirmed (Lee et al., 2021), and inaccurate information or fake news could also be published on social media which will then bring negative effects to the social media users (Kent, 2020 as cited in Ahmad & Murad, 2020). Consequently, it does cause people to face difficulty in determining the reliability of the message (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

According to Zainul and Said (2020), the social media platforms that the fake news circulated the most are WhatsApp and Facebook which consist of 73%. Fake news on social media can come in the form of text, audio, and photo (Md. Sayeed Al-Zaman, 2020). Social media overload and the trust toward the information shared on social media are the reasons that cause the cases of fake news sharing to increase (Laato et al., 2020). Additionally, fake news could be spread through the re-sharing behavior as this behavior is easy to be done as a single click can accomplish the task (Burkhardt, 2017) and this behavior will cause the information to disseminate more rapidly (Mavridis, 2018).

In short, fake news has been available since the old-time, but it has changed in terms of speed and the platforms which are social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and so on (Burkhardt, 2017). These social media platforms are contributing to the production and dissemination of fake news in different themes during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, health, politics, crime, entertainment, and so on (Md. Sayeed Al-Zaman, 2020). Most of the fake news related to COVID-19 is negative which might have developed a negative impact on society (Md. Sayeed Al-Zaman, 2021). Hence, the World Health Organization (WHO) has claimed that it is not only fighting with the worldwide pandemic but also the social media infodemic in which massive and rapid dissemination of fake news over the social media (Araz Ramazan Ahmad & Hersh Rasool Murad, 2020).

2.5 The Impact of Fake News

Nowadays, the spread of fake news is becoming one of the major concerns throughout the world (McGonagle, 2017). Since 2016, increasing numbers of Malaysians have fallen victim to internet fraud, including fake news (Malay Mail, 2019). 69% of Malaysians said that they have seen deliberately fabricated news reports in the media on a fairly regular basis (IPSOS, 2018). In addition, fake news has caused difficulties for people, groups, and even countries because fake news spread randomly and spread by irresponsible parties has the potential to cause large and catastrophic problems in the future (Ngadiron et al., 2021). Therefore, the rapid spread of fake news on the internet has the potential to have some significant impacts, such as causing people's distrust of the media, causing people to not be able to distinguish between true and false news, causing prejudice in society, and so on.

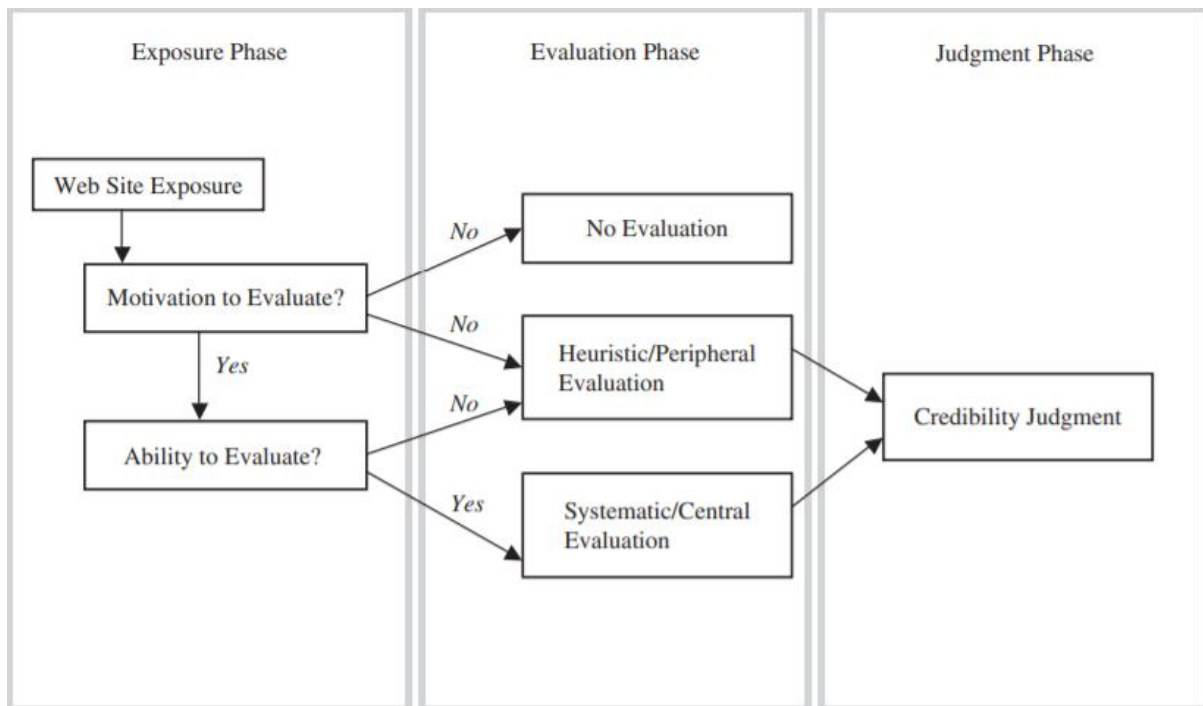
First of all, one of the impacts of fake news is causing people's distrust of the media. Fake news has the potential to cause incorrect public opinion orientation, which can result in social harm (Pennycook et al., 2020). The news reports on media have the impact of influencing public opinion (Kabha et al., 2020). However, the content of fake news reports will have an impact on the public's trust in the news media (Ognyanova et al., 2020). Therefore, if fake news appears in a news report from the media, it might not only waste people's time and money but also leave them more vulnerable when a disaster strikes. For example, the stall traders at the Kempas Community Center in Johor Bahru were slandered after being accused of being in the COVID-19 Red Zone, which was later proven to be untrue. However, the actions of some irresponsible parties in spreading fake news caused the visitors to be afraid to step foot in the vicinity, in order to have a negative impact on the income of traders in the area by up to 30% and caused people to distrust the media (Ngadiron et al., 2021).

Besides that, causing people to not be able to distinguish between true and false news is also an impact of fake news. When the world is grappling with the COVID-19, the

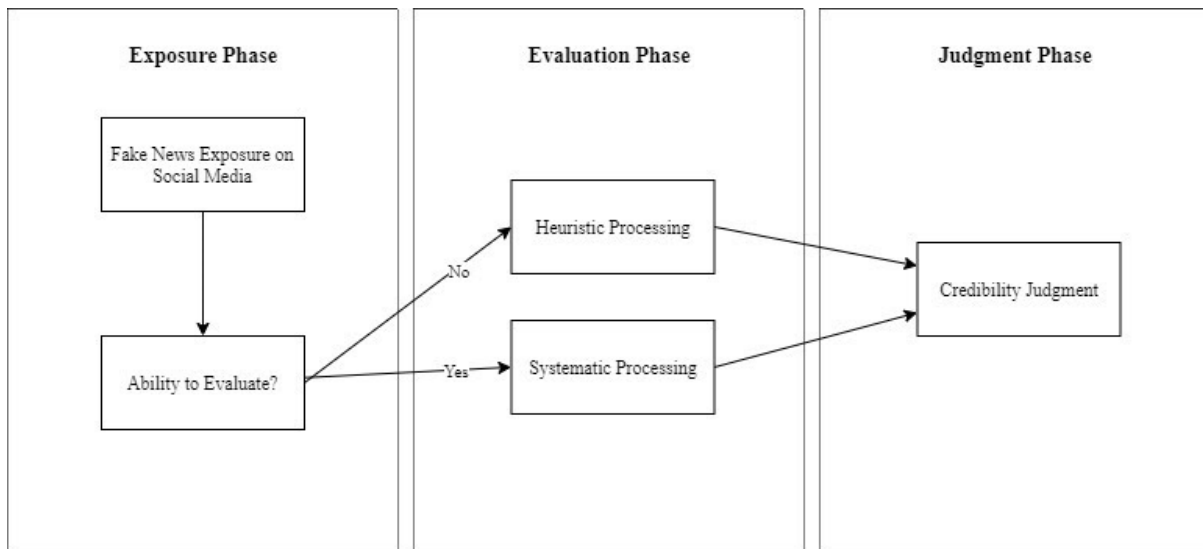
uncertainty about information has the effect of making one more susceptible to being influenced by false information which causes people to not distinguish between true and false news. In addition, people's safety could be jeopardized by the spread of fabricated health information, with the possibility that people will be provoked into taking some precautionary measure to overcome the false situation that results in serious health consequences (Pulido et al., 2020). For instance, in Iran, people believe fake news about drinking pure alcohol could kill all the COVID virus in the infected body, which killed approximately 800 people (Hassanian-Moghaddam et al. 2020).

Another impact that can be seen is causing prejudice in society. According to the research, the anti-Asian sentiment has risen drastically because the COVID-19 originated from Wuhan, China (Gover et al., 2020). Besides that, all kinds of false information exacerbated people's fears, and the fear caused by the spontaneous illogical thinking that people around them are carriers of the COVID-19 virus exacerbated this situation (Ngadiron, 2021). For example, people use hate speech, incitement, and violence against any group of people and ethnicity that is believed to be the 'carrier' of the epidemic, for example, blaming the Chinese for the outbreak. This situation may affect the bonds of unity that exist between multiracial and religious communities.

2.6 Theoretical Framework



Elements of dual processing model of website credibility judgement (Metzger, 2007)



Conceptual Framework for Investigating Element of Fake News on Social Media

2.6.1 The Heuristic-Systematic Model, an Introduction

The Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) is chosen to be the theoretical framework for the study.

The Heuristic-Systematic Model was discovered and developed by Shelly Chaiken throughout

the 1980s (Chaiken, 1980) and the word heuristic is said to be a simpler and more basic method of learning the way people process information (Chen & Chaiken, 1999). It is also said that these judgemental rules from the heuristic model are often picked up by individuals throughout their life and stored in memory (Chen & Chaiken, 1999). There are 2 types of information processing that aim to explain the attitude changes based on persuasive messages, which are systematic processing and heuristic processing (Chaiken & Ledgerwood, 2011). However, in order to discuss our study, which is the elements of fake news in social media that persuades young adults to believe in it, we are focusing more on the heuristic part of the Heuristic-Systematic Model.

According to the model, it shows that instead of making decisions through a cognitive thinking process, people are more likely to be agreeing on a matter based on external influences which serve as a motivation or persuasive element to the people (Zanna et al., 2014). For example, the heuristics cues such as the characteristic of the sources or simple judgemental rules such as the expert versus nonexpert (Hong & Kim, 2020). According to Chen & Chaiken (1999), several examples of heuristic knowledge may include thoughts such as “the experts are always right” or “longer paragraphs mean higher quality work”. In which examples like these are often picked up throughout the evolution of humanity and are seen as an easy way of judging certain messages without needing a long thought process. To summarize it all, the heuristic model states that there are external variables that have no relation to the messages whatsoever, which is affecting the audience’s train of thoughts (Dillard & Pfau, 2002).

2.6.2 The Development of the Heuristic-Systematic Model

Before this theory was fully discovered and named the Heuristic-Systematic Model, an experiment was carried out by a researcher written in the journal by Chaiken and Ledgerwood (2012) that involved three female respondents with photos of three men with different levels

of attractiveness. The end result of the experiment shows the women rating the men based solely on their level of attractiveness only, ignoring the other elements that are presented to them, which is one of the findings that would later be labeled as heuristic processing. However, when the researcher presented the women with consequences (which is making them believe that the men they were about to rate will be meeting with them afterward) then they were more careful and gave more critical comments on those three men instead of just their level of attractiveness (Chaiken & Ledgerwood, 2012).

With these findings in hand, the researcher named one of the results systematic thinking modes, and the other is named as the heuristic mode thanks to a certain mentor of the researcher who gave the idea for the name (Chaiken & Ledgerwood, 2012). Years passed after this theory was named, the researcher has tried expanding the theory by including several other cues to test its wide possibility, and once this expansion has begun, the researcher had discovered that accuracy (which is an original motive that the researcher thinks is fueling the use of heuristics and systematic thinking) might just not be the only thing that serves as a motivation for people to react to these judgement cues. (Chaiken & Ledgerwood, 2012). As time goes, this theory has expanded and developed widely with a lot of new decision-making rules that have been discovered and added. From an initial accuracy being the sole motivation for people to perform these cues, slowly to other concepts such as availability and accessibility (Chaiken & Ledgerwood, 2012).

2.6.3 Heuristic Processing

Heuristic processing is an information processing model that allows people to make decisions based on simple rules and cues that surround a message. It is also a simpler way for an individual to come up with a judgement without the need to go through a long process of

analyzing and thinking (Dillard & Pfau, 2002). Heuristic processing requires less cognitive effort as it only involves minimum processing of information (Bohner et al., 1995).

In order to minimize the process and effort of thinking deeply about the content, people are relying on the relatively shallow appraisal of the available information (Bohner et al., 1995). Even though people are not motivated and not able to think about a topic consciously, heuristic processing could happen automatically (Chaiken & Ledgerwood, 2012). People engaging in heuristics processing are most likely to be unaware that they are performing that method, some might even deny and state that they are focusing on cues that are irrelevant to the message, which is the point of heuristics processing (Dillard & Pfau, 2002).

To assess the authenticity of the information or message quickly, people who are going through the heuristic processing are using the heuristics cues (Luo et al., 2012). Some examples of heuristic cues that help with creating judgement, such as an expert's advice are always correct, a popular celebrity's favorite skin care is the best product to use, the more people talk about information the more likely it is to be true. These cues can also be known as persuasion cues, as it often motivates an individual to believe, or act based on these cues (Dillard & Pfau, 2002). It is because people typically like to exert minimal mental effort when it is unnecessary to do so (Bohner et al., 1995). However, the reliability of using heuristic processing will be reduced in the credibility judgement of a message (Chaiken, 1980).

2.6.4 Systematic Processing

Systematic processing is requiring more cognitive effort (Bohner et al., 1995) as people will collect most or all relevant information to build their credibility judgement (Ratneshwar & Chaiken, 2016). Systematic processing is the opposite of heuristic processing where it consists of a comprehensive analysis mode carried out by an individual when they intend to make decisions or create any sort of judgement (Dillard & Pfau, 2002).

Unlike heuristic processing which depends solely on the available cues in order for them to take any action or portray any sort of behavior, the systematic processing uses the available information and then tries to see if it possesses any sort of relevance to the message that is being presented (Dillard & Pfau, 2002). In other words, systematic processing requires a lot of thinking and thought analyzing before jumping to conclusions. Instead of believing that “Expert A said that this medicine can cure any infection, so it must be true”, individuals engaging in systematic processing would be more likely to carry their own research based on their understanding of: (1) the medicine and (2) the validity of expert A.

In the words of Dillard & Pfau (2002), systematic processing is defined as an information processing method that requires an extensive amount of processing of all the persuasion cues available to them, as well as their own cognitive resources for an individual to make a decision. Unlike the heuristic processing where people are highly unlikely to be aware of the heuristics being at work, people engaging in systematic processing might also be unaware of the method being carried out in the process, but they are at least very well aware of all the contents and the messages that are presented right in front of them (Dillard & Pfau, 2002).

The sufficiency principle states that when people have enough motivation, capabilities, and cognitive resources, they are more likely to execute systematic information processing (Chen & Chaiken, 1999). Therefore, it indicates that someone who is greatly driven is more likely to evaluate the message’s argument (Zhang et al., 2014). People will be putting a concerted effort to understand and evaluate the message’s arguments, at the same time also value their relevance to the message’s conclusion (Chaiken, 1980). By using systematic processing to evaluate the information, it requires people to pay close attention, to have a deep thought, and to have intensive reasoning in order to truly understand the information available

(Chaiken & Ledgerwood, 2012). Hence, people will only make decisions after reviewing all the related information (Tan et al., 2021).

2.6.5 Credibility Judgement

Definitions of credibility can be various from researcher to researcher. According to Tormala and Petty (2004), they defined credibility as accuracy and truthfulness, while Hu and Sundar (2010) defined credibility as accuracy and believability. The term “credibility” is widely applied to assessment objects, such as “source credibility”, “media credibility”, and “message credibility” which reflect the reality that people’s perspectives on these objects differ (Kiousis, 2001).

The credibility judgements can be based on a variety of different sorts of evaluations (Fogg, 2002; Tseng & Fogg, 1999). When evaluating information systems, there are four types of credibility to consider, which are presumed, reputed, surface, and experienced. Presumed credibility shows how much the person on the receiving end believes someone or something based on basic assumption of the perception; reputed credibility refers to the amount of trust the perceiver puts on someone or something solely based on what third parties have stated; surface credibility refers to the capacity to believe anything based on a cursory review; credibility based on first-hand experience is referred to experienced credibility, when people has been interacting for a longer period of time, their knowledge on a certain matter would differ, and their trustworthiness would also change (Tseng & Fogg, 1999).

Credibility can be explained in two dimensions of expertise and trustworthiness (Lim & Simon, 2011). Source credibility has long been regarded to include people’s opinions of a source’s trustworthiness and knowledge, and how they perceive health and risk information is heavily influenced by these impressions (Hocevar et al., 2017). Expertise carries the meaning where the person who voices out the facts has the ability to prove the validity of the statement

whereas trustworthiness is the level of confidence and the way of how the speaker conveys the message where he thinks is the most logical (Hovland et al., 1954).

Trustworthiness and expertise are not necessarily associated with one another. Objective and subjective aspects exist in certain information such as online health related information, according to Wang et al. (2008), friction may arise between the two components. For example, the dimension of expertise is crucial in determining the credibility of health-related websites, but the factor of trustworthiness has a significant impact on the credibility of online peer support groups. As a result, multiple strategies for assessing credibility may be used by internet users.

2.6.6 The Heuristic-Systematic Model and the Elements in Fake News

According to Dillard and Pfau (2002), there are variables that are completely not related to the messages perceived that influence a person's way of decision making. These variables are what persuaded the audiences to perform specific actions and they can trigger different sorts of information processing. It is also stated that although the audiences still have the ability to process the information shown to them logically, they can also be only processing the information briefly without depth, where they can be seen only taking note of all the notable variables that have nothing to do with the content of the message (Dillard & Pfau, 2002). Such variables could vary among the length of the message and the source of the message, which could be seen as some of the elements that fake news possesses which makes it highly believable by the public.

Since the problem of our research is that people believe in fake news due to certain elements implied in it, we can see this action as the rational error which is stated to be a "greater error" implied through the decision making using the heuristic model. (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011). The heuristic model is believed to be although simple but possess the ability

to cause people to make wrong decisions, thus, greater error (Gigerenzer & Gaissmaier, 2011). In our research, the external variables that are not related to the context of the information can also be known as the element of fake news. The elements of fake news are the ones that act as fuel for our target audience to take any action towards the fake news. With a minimal amount of thought processing, most of them would end up believing the news although it is fake, which shows the Heuristic-Systematic Model at work.

One element that may be relevant to our local audiences is the amount of persuasion. As an example, when certain news has millions of shares and likes on the internet despite the fact that it is not a confirmed source of information, there will be people who believe in this particular news. This theory suggests that people who saw this news would be more likely to believe in it, rather than giving it a second thought and double-checking the news due to it being highly agreed by the majority of the public. This phenomenon is known as the consensus heuristic, where we can observe people's beliefs or behavior and simply be affected when the amount of agreement and persuasion is high.

Another example that could be given is called the expert heuristic, where people with a certain amount of influence are involved. For example, two COVID-19 news has been posted on Facebook, where one of them is from an unconfirmed source but shared by a medical expert, while the other is vice versa. This heuristic explains that people would be more likely to believe in the fake source of information despite the fact that it is unconfirmed, just because a local popular medical expert has agreed to the information. These heuristic theories that we have mentioned are going to be used in analyzing the elements of fake news once we have gathered enough data from our interviewees. This model will be our guide and reference for us to understand the results obtained from our audience.

2.6.7 The Pros and Cons of the Heuristic-Systematic Model

While there are findings that state using the heuristic method in terms of processing information saves a lot of hassle in thought processing were processing information and making judgement is just with a blink of an eye, it is said that this particular model might be not as reliable as the traditional rules of systematic information processing (Zanna et al., 2014). This fact could be deduced by the fact that sometimes external cues could be not as reliable and truthful as it seems, but despite that, people might still fall into the trap of this information due to the heuristics being there to assist them in making their judgement.

To relate this matter to our topic, the elements of fake news could be categorized as one of the heuristics that affect an individual's judgement, and the latter of them believing in the fake news is the negativity that comes with it. On the other hand, this model is said to not be as reliable for another reason is that it can be affected if there is another external force influencing an individual, such as the motivation to think. Besides, it is also found out that motivation sometimes has an impact as well on the information dissecting process. According to Zanna et al., (2014), the persuasion cues from the heuristic model sometimes have a lesser impact on individuals when they are motivated. These motivated individuals would be prodded to think more systematically while ignoring obvious persuasion cues that help them simplify their train of thoughts. In this kind of situation, sometimes a parallel use of both heuristic and systematic information processing methods could be seen in action.

2.6.8 Heuristic-Systematic Model Application

The dual processing model is popular and widely used in the field of persuasion and the studies of attitude change (Samson & Voyer, 2012). The Heuristic- Systematic Model is one of the examples in the Dual processing theory (Chaiken, 1980). According to Metzger (2007), the dual processing model could be useful for taking motivation into account in developing a model

of credibility assessment. The emphasis on the importance of motivation and cognitive capacity in driving information assessment and decision making is general to all of the dual processing models such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) and Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM). These models suggest that when the desire or ability is low, the information will be processed and evaluated based on more surface area. Therefore, the decisions will be made based on the heuristic judgement, for example, the heuristic cues. Moreover, the motivation and ability to judge will become the key factor in credibility judgement in systematic processing (Metzger, 2007).

According to the conceptual framework, there are three steps in the heuristic model. The first step is known as the exposure phase which consists of fake news exposure on social media, where we see our audience interacting with the fake news and the users' ability to judge. As young adults are blindly trusted and follow false information (Veeriah, 2021), therefore, the research is using the Heuristic-Systematic Model to identify the element of fake news on social media that causes the young adult to believe in it. This model also suggests that there is a longer, more complicated way to analyze information which is called the systematic evaluation, where critical thinking is involved to understand the credibility of the source of information before taking any actions.

However, we are only looking at the simpler, more straightforward way of information dissemination which is the heuristic evaluation. This brings us to the second step of the model that is called the evaluation phase. Heuristic processing is our medium when we will be analyzing our data afterward. In heuristic processing, people have low or no ability to judge, they are making decisions based on the heuristic's cues. For example, "reputation heuristics" which the people are using the brand recognition of a website to serve as credibility cues (Hill, 2013). Besides that, the "endorsement heuristics" is referring to the people to trust the statement from the people they liked (Hill, 2013).

The third heuristic's cue is "consistency heuristic", which people tend to believe that it is more trustworthy when the information appears in more social media platforms (Hill, 2013). Additionally, "expectation violation heuristics" is about when the cues such as the poor grammar or spelling, inappropriate use of graphics and so on will also affect the credibility judgement (Metzger et al., 2010). Consequently, all of this might result in the lower credibility judgement of the message that they get from social media in the judgement phase. Moreover, the questions for the interviews are modified to fit into our framework to ensure our data can be as precise and as relatable to our framework as possible.

The Heuristic-Processing model has been used and applied in several published studies. The heuristic-processing model has been used in the marketing-related literature such as the factors that are affecting YouTube influencer marketing credibility (Xiao et al., 2018), the impact of heuristic and systematic cues towards brand awareness and purchase intention of a consumer (Tan et al., 2021), the factors that drive consumers to continue using online travel agencies (Lee & Chung, 2019) and so on.

Moreover, the computer and information- related field also had applied the heuristic-processing model. For example, the research study of identifying the profile of Twitter users have on the disaster tweet credibility. This study had implemented the Heuristic-Systematic Model to classify the tweet content as systematically processed information and Twitter user's profile as heuristically processed information so that a better understanding of how Twitter users make retweet judgements (Son et al., 2020).

Besides that, a research study of phishing victimization is also applying the Heuristic-Systematic model and this study is about the victims who undergo heuristic processing. They will be taking wrong decisions on the credibility judgement as they are making decisions on false cues. For people who have gone through sufficient systematic processing, the content with false information in the message of a phishing attack could be successfully identified.

According to Sundar (2008) who analyses the digital media credibility judgement of young people, has found proof that heuristic processing could have a direct relationship with quick decision making.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHOD

3.0 Introduction

This chapter had discussed qualitative research design, research sample, data collection, and data analysis. A semi-structured interview had been conducted to study our research topic and the research design was conducted to collect the data from 25 young adults in Malaysia.

3.1 Research Design

Qualitative research was chosen to conduct in this research to identify the elements of fake news on social media that persuades young adults to believe in it during COVID-19. Qualitative research is a research method that is used to explore and understand how people comprehend and interpret their experiences (Mohajan, 2018). Since there were various elements that lead young adults to believe in fake news, using qualitative research methods obtained more details and deeper answers from each young adult. With more detailed feedback, it was possible to gain a deeper understanding of the elements of fake news on social media that lead young adults to believe in it during COVID-19. Besides that, qualitative research is more adaptable to changes in the research environment and more flexible (Anderson, 2010).

The semi-structured interview is one of the approaches under qualitative data collection. The semi-structured interview is the instrument used as a data collection strategy in this research. This method enables the researcher to obtain open-ended data and investigate interviewee feelings and emotions about a relevant topic (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Besides that, semi-structured interviews are suitable for a variety of complex tasks, especially when plenty of the open-ended questions need follow-up responses (Newcomer, 2015). It is

open to the new ideas that may arise during the interview based on the responses from interviewees (Wageningen University and Research, n.d.).

A series of questionnaires created by the researchers had been used to interview the respondents, encourage them to share their own experiences or opinions, listen carefully to their responses, and provide follow-up questions and probes based on the feedback or comments. Given the fact that semi-structured interviews more often involve open-ended questions and discussions, which may deviate from the interview guide.

Therefore, we recorded the interview session, then afterwards transcribed them for analysis (Flick et al., 2004). Since the semi-structured interviews have involved the open-ended questions and discussions, yes, no, or rehearsed answers have been avoided. Due to different interviewees having their own opinions, the answers were all in subjective forms. In this study, we aimed to find out the elements of fake news on social media that persuades young adults to believe in it during COVID-19.

3.2 Sampling Procedure

For our research, we have been using the purposive sampling method that had fallen under the category of non-probability sampling as our research method. We selected 25 respondents from the young adult population and analyzed them by using this specific sampling method because we thought that it suited our research the best. These respondents that we selected were all derived from a similar group of people, who were all young adults that were constantly exposed to the online world regardless of the method they used to access it.

This type of sampling can also be known as Homogenous Sampling, where all our respondents shared similar traits and characteristics and were even using a similar socializing platform daily (Etikan, 2016). Another reason that led us to choose the purposive sampling method was also due to the fact that our research was to be done in a qualitative method.

Purposive sampling is said to have more freedom for the researchers when they are searching for respondents, and that the researchers get to be biased in picking and choosing their subjects (Etikan, 2016). In other words, the researcher possesses the power to decide on what kind of participant that they need in this research, and if they are able to provide the researchers with information that is relevant to the topic.

According to Dworkin (2012), a sample size of 25-30 people are the most recommended one because of three main specific reasons: one, because it is said that this certain amount of participants could give the researchers a thorough examination of the characteristics that is related to the question; two, it is said that with this amount of respondents, it maximizes the possibility that the data collected are enough to be relevant to the research topic and three, it gives more chance that the hypothetical cases to be explored and ruled out through the whole research. Thus, we have been going with 25 respondents for our research, to obtain the advantages stated above to ensure we could get an accurate amount of data for our research.

Before we conduct an interview with our respondents, we have obtained their consent and made sure that the data we acquired from them were truthful to ensure higher accuracy in our data. The reason that we sought the need to obtain consent was that our topic involved believing in fake news, and some may feel violated if they think we were accusing them of something, thus explaining the consent. These were three of the criteria that we sought in our respondents:

1. The respondents were young adults aged between 19-24 years old.
2. They are aware of the current COVID-19 pandemic.
3. They are users of social media (Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, and so on)

Since the pandemic has affected everyone in the country with the lockdown keeping people in their homes, young adults who are pursuing education were all forced to reside in

online learning instead of physical learning on campus (Selvanathan et al., 2020). With everything being changed to online, the amount of time these students have spent on the internet increases which as well maximizes their exposure to the negativity online such as fake news. In fact, a survey from a study by Farah Dina Yusop and Sumari (2013), has shown that almost 100% of the students from their sample research owns a laptop and that their findings have confirmed the fact that the surveyed groups are highly capable of handling technology.

Young adults who were not currently studying and working were also forced to reside in the working from home method due to the virus, which similarly increases their risk of being exposed to negativity online as much as the students do. It is also found out that one of the most common activities that young adults like to do on the internet is to socialize via various social media (Farah Dina Yusop & Sumari, 2013), where socializing includes social sharing, such as sharing of information on the internet regardless of it being truthful or not. Based on these criteria and findings we have obtained through researching for statistics, we confirmed that these groups of people were the perfect ones to serve as a respondent for our research.

3.3 Data Collection

After obtaining permission, recording face-to-face interviews' conversations between the interviewer and the interviewee will be carried out by using a digital voice recorder. If the interviewee refused to record the conversation, the responses also have been recorded in the questionnaire as a backup. All the data from 25 interviewees have been transferred into a computer document as a copy.

Besides that, all the interview questions were set based on the theory that was chosen to use in this research, which is the Heuristic-Systematic Model. Based on the Heuristic-Systematic Model, people are more likely to agree on a subject matter based on external influences, rather than making decisions through a cognitive thinking process (Zanna et al.,

2014). Besides that, the heuristic model states that there are external variables that have no relation to the messages whatsoever, for example, the length of the message and the source of the message might affect the audience's train of thought (Dillard & Pfau, 2002). Furthermore, we were focused more on the heuristic processing of the Heuristic-Systematic Model. In the heuristic-systematic model, heuristic processing involves processing information solely using external judgement cues that are easily understandable that activates the judgement shortcuts (Chaiken & Ledgerwood, 2011).

There are three elements under the Heuristic-Systematic Model that we used to create the interview questions, which are the consensus heuristic, the expert heuristic, and the rule of thumb. Consensus heuristic is a series of heuristics that persuades people to form their opinions (Darke, n.d.). When consensus heuristics is in use, people's action and decision are simply based on what the majority agrees upon (Darke, n.d.). For example, when there is a highly liked post on social media, other people will simply be affected by the consensus heuristic and believe the information from the highly liked post without processing the information on their own. Thus, we have created question number one to ask the interviewees regarding whether the number of likes is one of the elements that persuades them to believe in it.

In addition, even without considering the content of the message, the length of the message is said to be categorized under the rule of thumb (Darke, n.d.). For example, longer messages that appear to contain a lot of points, arguments or facts are seen to be more convincing, so if a post contains a lot of details and it is longer, people might think that the information is reasonable and persuade them to believe in it because a message's length implies that it is strong or correct. Hence, we have created question number three to determine the length and details of a post is one of the elements that persuade people to believe in it.

Moreover, the expert heuristic means that the advice and opinions of experts are known to be trustable and is highly effective in heuristic decision making (Darke, n.d.). For instance,

when media influencers or people of authority make or share a post, people might believe in it because the information is being made or shared by trusted and knowledgeable experts. Therefore, we have created question number four to identify whether people have the expert heuristic when they believe the information from the post that is made or shared by the media influencers or people of authority, in order to prove the expert heuristic is one of the elements that persuades people to believe in the fake news.

Below are the interview questions:

- 1) Between a lesser liked post on social media and a highly liked post on social media? Which one will be more likely to earn your trust? Why is that so?
- 2) If there is the logo or trademark of the government or official organization in the posts, will you believe the information that is on the post? Why do you trust/not trust the information with the logo or trademark?
- 3) If a post contains a lot of details, will it make you feel that the information is reasonable and lead you to believe in it? How does the number of details affect your decision?
- 4) When media influencers or people of authority make or share a post, will it be more believable to you? Can you elaborate more on that?
- 5) Is it easier for people who lack certain knowledge in a field to believe in the news in that field? Tell us why?
- 6) How do you think that people are willing to believe when they see information that fits their own opinions? Does information bias play a part in this?
- 7) Do you think people are constantly misinformed because they do not analyse the information carefully? Why do you think people do not analyse certain information in detail?

- 8) How do emotions lead people to believe in fake news or does emotion not really matter in this case?
- 9) In your opinion, what other elements will make you think the news is believable?

3.4 Data Analysis

After we carried out the interview with our 25 respondents, we transcribed the interview and analyze it using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis suits our research method which is qualitative research the best because it gives us a systematic way of identifying and analyzing our data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This method of data analysis is also known to be flexible as it does not have to be fitting with a certain type of data pattern, which suits our research topic as we need to identify a lot of different elements for our research.

There are six phases to this analyzing method where researchers commonly refer to. Following these six steps of analyzing methods helped us carry on with the whole data analyzing process easier, faster, and more accurately. These six steps helped us in developing an experience where we practice this method over and over again which will highly benefit us at the end of our analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). This starts from the familiarization process, where we familiarize ourselves with the data obtained from our respondents and after transcribing the data. Afterward moved on to the coding part of the analysis where we tried to pick on the data to see which element popped out the most and identified them. The coding process ended once the data were fully coded and the verification of the data relevant to each code has been done. Third, we generated the theme according to the data that we have decoded out and differentiate them into categories if necessary. Fourth we moved on to review the themes and followed by the fifth step which defined them and named them according to the objective of our research. Last but not least, we carried on with the write-up of the analysis that we have carried out.

Step one is the familiarization process. After transcribing the interview sessions that we have conducted with our respondents, we have spent time reading through and understanding every data that we have collected. It is important that we familiarize ourselves with all of the data acquired so that we do not end up confused when we are doing the analysis and writing the report afterward (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Step two is the decoding process. In this decoding process, we dissected the information obtained through our respondents and tried to recognize the pattern that was appearing among our data collected. It is during this part where we tried to identify what kind of element that popped out the most among all of our data and highlight them as they were very important for our writing afterward (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Step three is generated themes that would help in categorizing the elements that were obtained. We tried to come up with themes that suit our findings while trying to remain relevant to our theoretical model framework. Themes such as common heuristics, expert heuristics, and so on were what we considered when we were doing this step of the data analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

Step four is where we reviewed all of our data and the steps that we have carried above. Have we been focused on the correct point of the information? Were the themes generated really suit the data that we have collected? Once this is all reviewed and double confirmed, we move on to the fifth step which is naming them (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

The objective of our research is to identify the element of fake news through qualitative research, and this is where we began the process of naming the themes or categories that we have differentiated our data in with an appropriate label that suits our objectives. It is also important that we were to define them after we had named them, in order for people to understand what we intend to explain or present to them.

Last but not least, which is the sixth step, is to proceed with the write-up of our analysis. This step is the last time of our analyzing process, where we combined everything into a complete report that explained our overall findings.

3.5 Reliability and Validity

The reliability and validity of qualitative research are crucial elements in research. Qualitative research has long been criticized for a lack of clarity regarding how to determine its accuracy and reliability (Leung, 2015). Research without rigor becomes narrative and loses its effectiveness and value (Spiers et al, 2018). Hence, all research methods pay more attention to reliability and validity.

3.5.1 Reliability

Reliability is defined as the consistency or continuity of the measurement (Morse et al., 2002). Besides that, reliability can be easily described by classifying the methodology which is used to evaluate for consistency and stability (Mimi Mohaffyza Mohamad et al., 2015). It refers to the ability of a research method to generate consistent results over multiple testing periods. When the same method is continually used to achieve a consistent result, the measurement is deemed reliable. In this research, we transcribed the interviews and examined them meticulously. Moreover, we also kept comparing and analysing data to strengthen the reliability of this research.

3.5.2 Validity

Furthermore, validity and reliability are related. Validity refers to the eligibility of the research methods, values, and skills, which included the collection of data and verification (Mimi Mohaffyza Mohamad et al., 2015). In addition, validity represents the significance of the tools

for measurement. It enables the researcher to obtain accurate conclusions from the sample population (Creswell, 2012). In this research, we used a suitable research methodology and made sure that resources were available to conduct this research. Moreover, we also ensured that data were evaluated and analyzed in a reliable and consistent way. Lastly, the conclusions and explanations were based on data rather than assumptions.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are required in this research, according to Orb et al. (2001), the research process generates tension between the study's goals of developing generalizations for the benefit of others, and participants' rights to privacy. Because of the in-depth nature of qualitative research, ethical considerations resonate particularly strongly (Siti Roshaidai Mohd Arifin, 2018). When conducting face-to-face interviews with a vulnerable group of participants, ethical concerns were magnified since the participants may grow agitated when expressing their feelings or answering questions during the interview. The implementation of proper ethical standards helps to avoid or minimize harm, therefore human subjects or volunteers must be protected in every research study (Orb et al., 2001).

1. All interviews and observations have been conducted in the appropriate place and time suitable for the research participant.
2. Before conducting any data collection activities, a consent form and verbal consent have been sought from the research participants.
3. Before signing the consent form, it was informed to the participants that they reserved the right to withdraw from the interview anytime they like.
4. As evidence, the content of the interview was recorded by audio recording, and the interviewer took note of some important key points during the interview.

5. The consent form or any document which contained the personal details of participants were kept securely, no one had the right to access it except for the researchers in the team.
6. Research participants were guaranteed to keep confidential the data collected during the interviews and observations. However, they have been informed that their age will be used instead of their names to report the results of the interview.

3.7 The Pilot Study

The Pilot Study is the scaled-down version of a bigger study, and it is conducted to prepare for the study. Moreover, it is also used to test the research methods, data collection tools, sample recruitment strategies, and other research methodologies (Zailinawati Abu Hassan et al., 2006). The pilot study is essential as it could help to improve the main study's quality and efficiency (In, 2017). For example, the potential problem areas and errors in the research instrument and protocol will be able to detect by carrying out the pilot study before they are used in the full study (Zailinawati Abu Hassan et al., 2006). Apart from that, the pilot study also could help the researcher in learning the interviewing skills and conversation flow.

The respondents were selected based on the purposive sampling method and their willingness to participate in it. The pilot study is made by interviewing 3 participants and the demographic characteristics of the participants are as below:

No	Age	Gender	Job	Frequency of using social media (hour/per day)	Social media platform used the most
1.	23	Male	Unemployed	5 hours	Facebook, Instagram, YouTube
2	23	Female	Student	7 hours	Facebook, YouTube

3.	23	Male	Student	9 hours	Facebook, Instagram, YouTube
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To identify the elements of fake news on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic, a pilot study was conducted in February 2022. The interviews were conducted by using virtual calls and the interview session were recorded by using digital voice recording. Before the interview began, each of the respondents had been given a consent form to get approval from them to get their information. The same set of questions was asked to all the participants by using English as the language during the interview. Additionally, the time duration of the interview is around 10 to 20 minutes.

A total of 9 questions to be asked by the interviewer to the respondents. After completing the interviews with the respondents, we found out there are some errors in our questions and some potential problems arise after we completed the interview. For example, questions number 5 and onwards are inappropriate and might create a potential problem later on which ask about “is it easier for people who lack certain knowledge in a field to believe in the news in that field”, therefore, this question will be amended after that. Moreover, there is also a lack of the word “COVID-19” in the question and this may cause inaccurate results when we are collecting the data. Furthermore, a question such as the frequency of using social media accounts during the COVID-19 pandemic and ways to get the information about COVID-19 during the pandemic will be asked before starting to interview the respondent to ensure that the respondents are fulfilling our requirements. Therefore, the interview questions were amended as followed so that it is feasible:

Before the interview:

1. Are you aware of the current COVID-19 pandemic that is happening?
2. How frequently do you use social media accounts during the Covid-19 pandemic?
3. How do you get the information about the Covid-19 during the pandemic?

During the period of Covid-19 pandemic,

4. Between a lesser liked post on social media and a highly liked post on social media?
Which one will be more likely to earn your trust? Why is that so?
5. If there is the logo or trademark of the government or official organization in the posts, will you believe the information that is on the post? Why do you trust/not trust the information with the logo or trademark?
6. When the information is appearing in more social media platforms, will it make you feel that the information is more reliable and why is that so?
7. If a post contains a lot of details, will it make you feel that the information is reasonable and lead you to believe in it? How does the number of details affect your decision? What kind of details will make you feel that the information is reasonable and lead you to believe in it?
8. When media influencers or people of authority (*example: medical experts*) make or share a post, will it be more believable to you? Why and can you elaborate more on that?
9. Do you think that it is easier for you to believe in the news that you lack certain knowledge? Do you have related experience?
10. Are you more willing to believe the information that fits your opinions? Do you think that the information bias plays a part in this?
11. Had you been misinformed because you did not analyse the information carefully? Or any other reasons that cause you to get inaccurate information?
12. Do emotions lead you to believe in fake news or does emotion not really matter for you to justify the accuracy of the information?
13. In your opinion, what other elements will make you think the news is believable?

3.7.1 Problem Encountered When Carrying Out the Pilot Study

The first problem encountered in conducting the pilot study would be changing the methods of data collection. Initially, data should have been obtained through face-to-face interviews; however, due to the pandemic's recent deterioration, several face-to-face interviews were substituted by a telephone interview. Aside from that, some participants did not behave as predicted, for example, there have been instances where respondents have given an irrelevant response when answering questions. As a result, we may have difficulties in gathering and transcribing data.

3.7.2 Advantages of Telephone Interview

There are several advantages to conducting telephone interviews. The most obvious advantages are a reduction in both time and cost to researchers (Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004). By carrying out the telephone interview, it allows for more respondents to be questioned in a shorter time and lower budget (Trier-Bieniek, 2012). Telephone interviews enable the researchers to access a wide range of resources while reducing the cost and time spent travelling to different sites. Therefore, telephone interviews can be used to interview persons who are unable to attend the interview session owing to their location (Block & Erskine, 2012). Besides that, telephone interviews consume less time than face-to-face interviews (Sobo et al., 2003). In addition, instead of conducting a face-to-face interview, most of the interviewees prefer to conduct a telephone interview as they sense a higher level of secrecy and privacy (Carr & Worth, 2001). The interviewees who are shy will feel more at ease revealing their personal opinions (Chapple, 1999 as cited in Farooq & De Villiers, 2017). As a result, telephone interviews could help them to reduce social pressure and build rapport at the same time (Vogl, 2013).

3.7.3 Disadvantages of Telephone Interview

Since there are advantages to the telephone interview, the disadvantages should also be considered. The method of using telephone interviews could result in the reduction of social cues. Even though social cues such as voice and intonation are present during the communication process, however, nonverbal cues such as body language cannot be used as a source of further information as neither party sees the other (Opdenakker, 2006). Consequently, the researcher is unable to use body language as a natural tool for probing and seeking clarifications or elaborations to answers presented (Stephens, 2007). Moreover, it also forces both interviewer and interviewee to pay attention, as effective listening is important for a successful interview (Qu & Dumay, 2011). If effective listening is not practiced, hence, the quality of the communication process will be affected and thus misunderstanding may result (Farooq & De Villiers, 2017).

Furthermore, building trust is an important part of the interview process. When interviewing over the phone, the psychological distance, which is defined by a lack of affinity between people, increases. When the psychological distance between the interviewee and interviewer is increased, the levels of trust will be reduced, which will then reduce the willingness of the interviewee to share their information. (Block & Erskine, 2012). When compared to face-to-face interviews, interviewees are more tolerant of silence over the phone. Under this situation, some of the interviewees are providing the shorter answer and as a result, the amount and completeness of data acquired over the phone will be lowered (Groves, 1979).

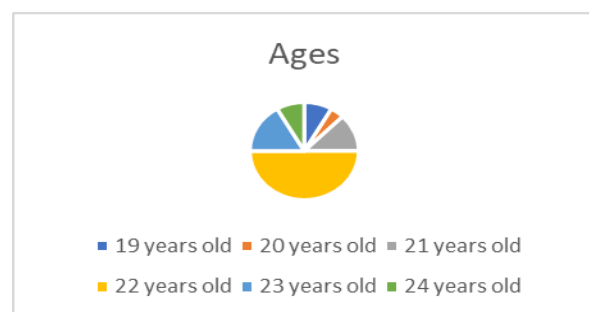
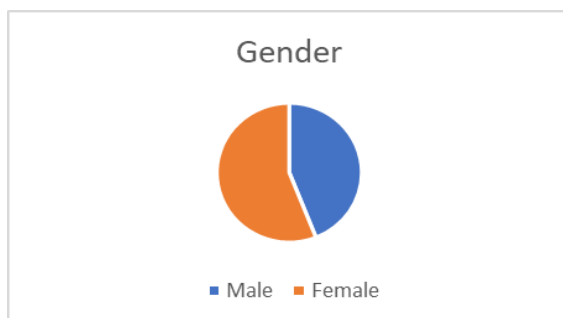
CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

Since the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown implementation, social media has been widely used by users to get information and stay connected with others. However, even with the convenience of spreading information during the pandemic, it has also become difficult for people to judge the credibility of any news on social media. According to Veeriah (2021), the majority of young adults are unable to distinguish fake news. It has given rise to a series of negative cases, such as fake news that caused unnecessary panic and anxiety among the public. This research aims to find out what are the elements of fake news and how the elements of fake news on social media persuade young adults to believe in it during COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter summarizes the research findings of the data collected from qualitative data collection methods by using semi-structured interviews. The characteristics of the research participants have been outlined in Chapter 3. The 25 informants are consisting of young adults aged between 19-24 years old, Malaysian citizens and they all own social media accounts of their own.

4.1 Demographics of the Informants



In total 25 informants had been interviewed, 14 of them were females and 11 of them were male. Half of the total informants are under the age of 22. All of the informants met our criteria: they were young adults aged between 19-24 years old, Malaysian citizens and had social media accounts. The demographic table of the informants is attached in Appendix A.

4.2 Stages of Thematic Analysis

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis can be divided into six phases: familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and write-ups. In the first stage of familiarizing ourselves with the data of this research, 25 sets of interviews have been converted into transcribed forms and the researcher had re-read the transcripts to become familiar with the entire data before going any further into the analysis. In the second stage of generating initial codes, the researchers started to organize the data systematically in this stage. By referring to the research questions, large amounts of data need to be coded into small pieces of meaning. Moreover, instead of coding every piece of text, the data that was relevant to our research questions have only been coded.

Going to stage three, where the researchers will be searching for themes. After the closing process, it was found that some codes could fit into the same theme. For example, several codes were found that were related to types of content that lead people to believe in fake news. Therefore, these codes were grouped into an initial theme called “content”. After searching for themes, themes that we identified in stage 3 were reviewed and enhanced by the researcher. Then, the researchers looked at the data associated with each theme to see if it supported the theme. After review, the code “content headline”, which was previously classed under “attention grabber”, was relocated to the theme “content”. In stage 5, we identified that the data can be classified into 4 themes which are “interaction of social media users' ,

“visibility”, “content”, and “influencer”. Last but not least, the researchers proceeded to the write-up of our analysis.

4.3 Interaction of Social Media Users

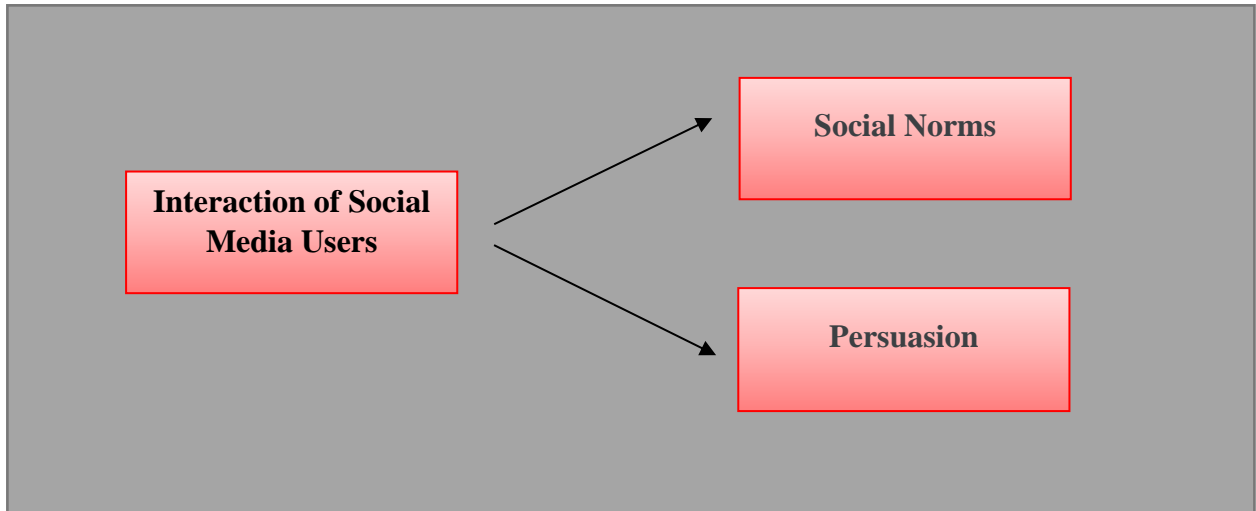


Figure 1: The influence of social norms and persuasion on the interaction of social media users

4.3.1. Social Norms

Social norms are referring to the unwritten standard that regulates behavior in groups and society (Bicchieri, 2018). The social norms that are affecting the interaction of social media users cause individuals to believe the fake news on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic. This could be supported by the view of Informant 1 and Informant 12.

On the other hand, Informant 1 believed in higher likes because she believes that people will only interact with a post by liking or sharing it if most people believe in the information. According to her, the fake post will not receive likes or shares, and it will be reported if the majority of people believe it is fake. Informant 1 stated that:

“... I think people will tend to share the news when they believe in it, or they think it is real. Also, if the majority think that the news is unbelievable or it’s fake, they may report the related post but not give it so much like and share it.” [Informant 1]

4.3.2 Persuasion

Persuasion is the purposeful attempt to persuade people to change their minds, feelings, or actions (Rocklage et al, 2018). The consensus heuristic is one of the heuristic cues within a persuasion context, and it is one of the elements of fake news that causes people to believe in it (Bohner et al., 1995). The Informant 12 is more likely to believe a post with a big number of likes because, in her opinion, higher likes mean that more people have seen the message and had believed in it. Due to the high likes which represent the higher the agreement of the people, the beliefs and behavior of the informant are being affected. As a result, the message will appear more authentic and cause the informant to think that the posts with the most likes as more trustworthy sources. The informant conceded that:

“... it has enough credibility for me to trust on that post as most of the people have seen it and believe it. So, it leads me to believe in it as well...” [Informant 12].

Besides that, this could be supported by the view of Informant 13 in which she believes the post with higher likes is more convincing and the post should have high accuracy and is more credible. In her opinion, the number of likes is playing a role in determining how we perceive the credibility of the social media post or account.

“... Because when many of the people liked something then people might infer that the post should be accurate or have higher credibility. Because we tend to let people, or a number of likes, determine what we want to perceive the credibility of the social media post or account...” [Informant 13]

4.4 Visibility

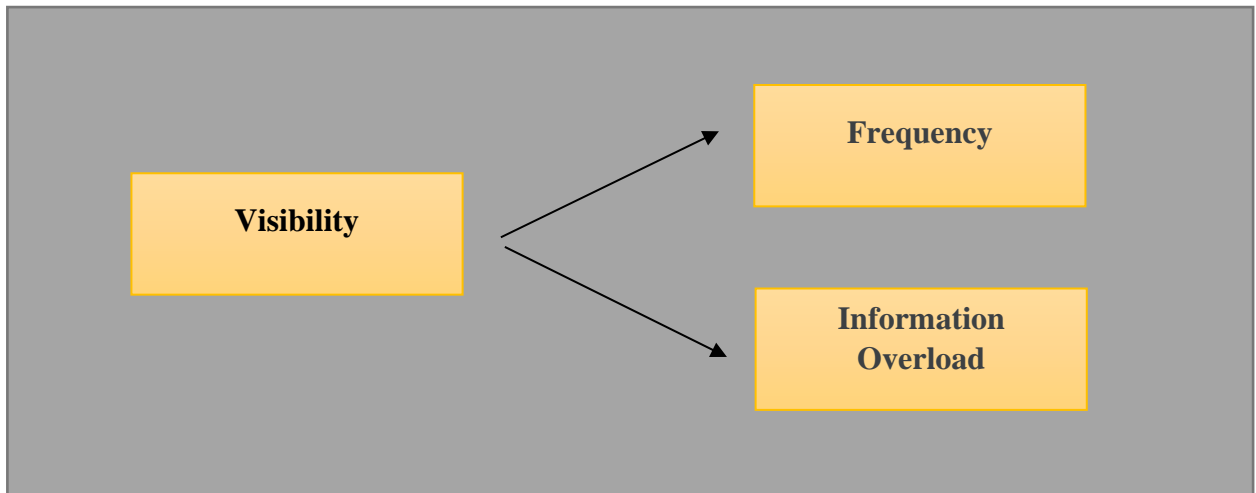


Figure 2: The relationship between the visibility of the post with frequency and information overload

4.4.1 Frequency

The code frequency refers to the number of times a post appears online. According to the data collected, it showed that this code has been surfacing quite frequently among the informants, where several of them have stated that the amount of frequency affects their decision to believe in a certain post. This could be supported by the claim of Informant 1.

“...When it appears on different social media platforms, people from different social media believe in the post. When the majority believe in the news, I think the news will be real and not fake...” (Informant 1)

Frequency of the post appearing on social media could have a significant impact on young adults. The informant was influenced by the frequency of the post appearing on social media to assume that the more a certain post appears on social media, the more people are sharing the news, thus the majority of them should believe in it, and implying that the news must be true.

Based on the findings, the information is more reliable when it has come across several social platforms. It is because people believed that the fake news will not be able to spread

across several platforms and have not taken any actions against it. This can be supported by Informant 11 and Informant 15:

“... it does make me feel more reliable. This is because if the information is able to spread that much but not being stopped or criticized by the users, it has the higher possibility that it is real.” [Informant 11]

“... everyone is posting the same things, meaning that many people agree with it. If it is frequently appearing on many social media platforms, the government surely will notice, and they will take action if it is fake news.” [Informant 15]

4.4.2: Information Overload

Information overload is stated when the information is overwhelmed by the volume of data when an individual accomplishes a task or makes a decision (Sadiku et al., 2016). When there was a lot of information available at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is easy to become confused, and it is also affecting the ability of an individual to make a judgement about whether or not to trust it. Informant 12 stated that:

“... When I am in the pandemic period, there is too much information online which I call as information overload. I can see many posts shared by people of authority and social media users. It makes me feel confused and does not understand what is actually going on” [Informant 12]

When a lot of information is disseminated across platforms, it causes confusion and leads to people to believe in fake news unintentionally. This also could be supported by Informant 5's point of view. When the different or similar information circulates widely on social media platforms, individuals are readily misled by the fake news and are more likely to believe in it. Informant 5 stated that:

“...everyone is using WhatsApp to forward the message somehow will cause me to get inaccurate information.” [Informant 5]

4.5 Content

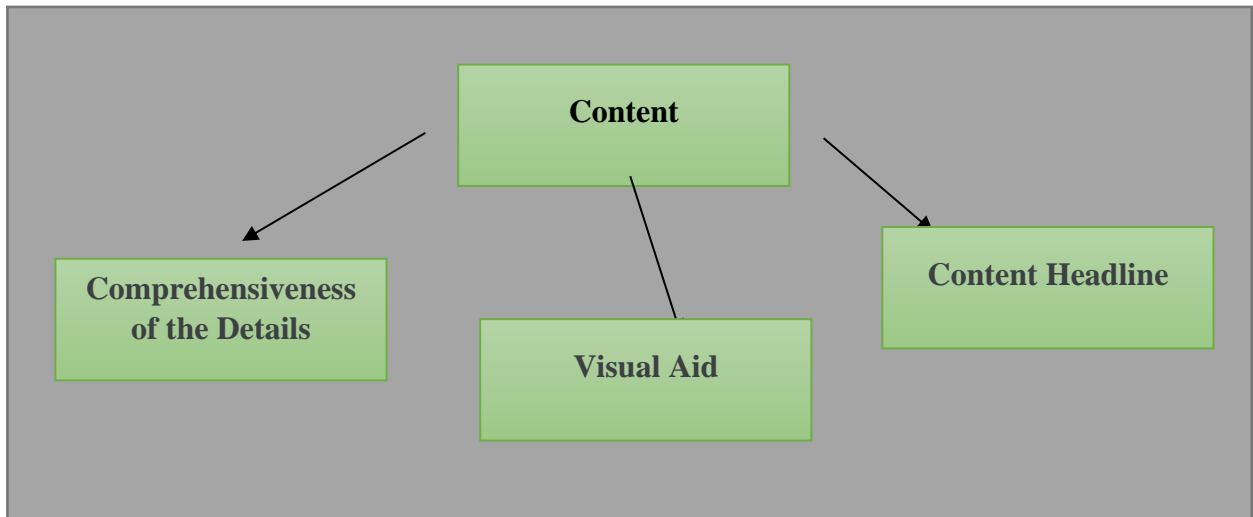


Figure 3: Types of content that lead people to believe in fake news

4.5.1 Comprehensiveness of the Details

With one of the interview questions being about the "number of details in a post" and whether the informants will believe it or not, several of the informants' responses were summarized with the label "believe in them when the content is reassuring". The informants went on to say that those who lack proper understanding are unable to offer a lot of specific details that make a post reassuring to the readers. Thus, more details in a post lead people to believe that it was written by a professional or an expert, and the young adult will choose to believe in it. Informant 1 could bolster this argument:

“...The more details it contains, the more professional its look. People who are not professional or do not have sufficient knowledge related to the information will be unable to provide so many details in the post...” (Informant 1)

Similarly, another informant has expressed her opinion on how the number of details in a post affects her. She also believes that content must be reassuring to the eye in order for

anyone to believe in it. To put Informant 22's words in a nutshell, a post must be able to avoid causing confusion and instead answer the reader's queries in order to be believable. This could be supported by Informant 22:

"...If the information contains who, when, where, how it will make me trust the post more. If the post contains details that answer my confusion, then I will believe in it..."
(Informant 22)

According to the finding, some informants also claimed that facts are more persuasive as compared to visuals. It was believed that the facts with scientific explanations were more likely to persuade people to believe in the news as Informant 19 stated:

"...I will prefer the details that are regarding more to the scientific explanations..."
(Informant 19)

4.5.2 Visual Aid

Since we live in a digital era, it is easy to include visual aids such as videos and photos in any post to make it look more credible. Posts on social media are typically accompanied by photos or videos that help to attract viewers' attention. It also might help to increase the level of credibility of certain news and even impact whether or not the viewers will believe in it. A number of the informants agreed with the idea as well and one of them mentioned that using visual aids will help her feel that the post is more reasonable and thus will believe in it. An excerpt from Informant 10 can support this theory:

"...If the post contained more details and information, I would think the post has conducted a survey thus it is more reliable. I think the post can contain some photos, videos, and data as well. It will make me feel more reasonable..." (Informant 10)

The data gathered also revealed that if the news was solely made up of words, it might not acquire the trust of the audience or readers. However, visual aids such as images and videos

might be easier for people to believe that the post has higher credibility. Informant 2 stated that:

“...if the news only consisted of words, I might think that it is not reliable. I think most of the news will come out with some pictures, videos so that it could have high credibility.”

[Informant 2]

According to the responses that had been collected, statistical data is one of the visual aids that can persuade or convince others to believe in the information. In contrast to previous informants, who emphasized photos and films as visual aids, Informant 18 and Informant 20 emphasized statistical data and graphs. This could be supported by Informant 18 and Informant 20:

“...if there are relevant pictures or the professional review or the statistical data in the information as proof, I will be more convinced...” (Informant 18)

“... Having the data, graph, or other things makes me feel that they are reliable data...” (Informant 20)

It could be said that the visual aid is frequently used in fake news related to the current pandemic in order to mislead people into believing it. The viewpoint of Informant 15 lends credibility to this assertion. Informant 15 stated that:

“...the images of the government or images related to the current pandemic situation will make me think that the news is believable.” [Informant 15]

4.5.3 Content Headline

An attention grabber is a tool that is used to draw people’s attention and get them to arouse interest in the content. Some organizations use phony words in the content to catch the audience’s attention. The majority of people were unlikely to conduct research on social media content. Therefore, the audience was into believing the phony news. Informant 6 stated that:

“...some of the media companies will use exaggerated content headlines to attract the audience's attention.” [Informant 6]

Besides that, people tend to be attracted by headlines because it is the first sentence they encountered before diving into the text. As a result, an attractive headline could be one of the elements that lead people to believe in fake news. According to the perspective of Informant 14, he stated that:

“...I think an attractive title since it will attract people's attention to look at it whether that information is correct or not.” [Informant 14]

4.6 Influencers

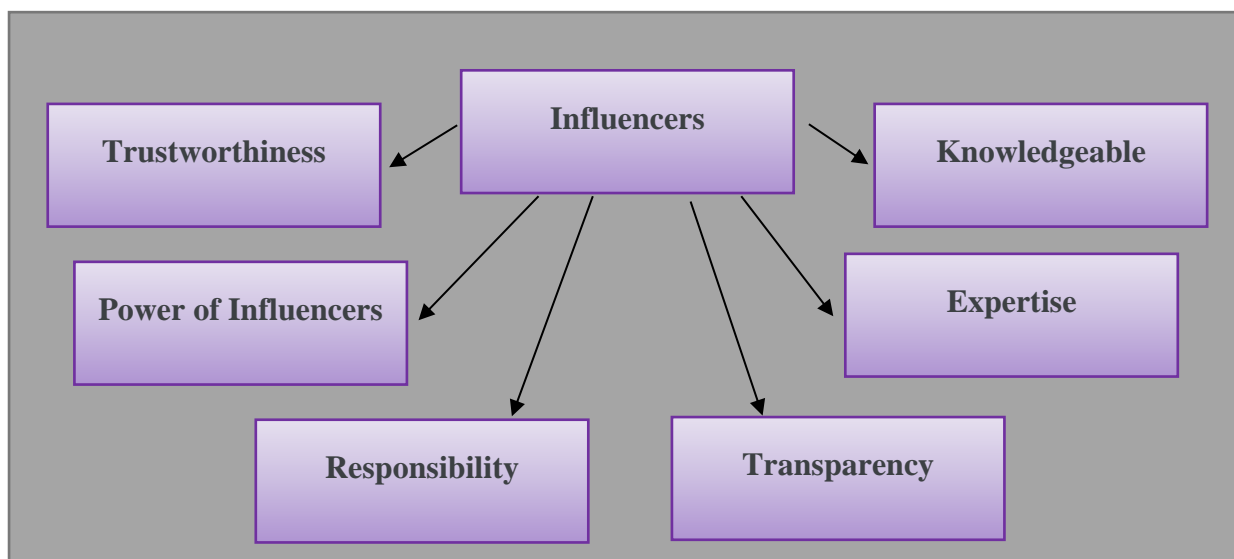


Figure 4: Traits of influencers that lead people to believe in fake news

4.6.1: Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is the quality of being deserving of trust or confidence from others (Elo et al., 2014). According to the findings from the interview, it showed that people would be affected by the trustworthiness of the identity of influencers. According to Informant 8, these persons who have gained a high level of public confidence appear to be less inclined to distribute fake news or false information to the public. Informant 8 stated that:

“...these people who have gained good public trust seem like they won't share fake news with the public.” [Informant 8]

4.6.2: Power of Influencers

Power influencers could have a significant impact on culture and groups. According to the interviews, we found out that people tend to be influenced by the power of influencers. From the findings of Informant 13, she stated that people tend to follow these influencers because they live a similar lifestyle to her and would share their daily activities on social media platforms. Informant 13 stated that:

“...people will tend to follow those influencers because they are more related to us in terms of their lifestyle of sharing their daily activity.” [Informant 13]

4.6.3: Responsibility

Responsibility means the specific burden of the obligation placed on the person who was responsible (Scheffler, 2016). Since the influencers have a certain ability to affect people's opinions and decisions, hence they have the responsibility to make sure they share the truthful information and not fake news. Based on the findings, we found that the responsibility of influencers would lead people to believe in fake news. Informant 6 believed that there must be some existing law that prohibits media influencers or people in positions of authority from spreading fake news. Informant 6 stated that:

“...I think media influencers or people of authority have the existing law which cannot spread fake news.” [Informant 6]

Besides that, this could be supported by the view of Informant 21 in which she mentioned that media influencers have a large number of followers, so it is important for them to share accurate information with them. Informant 21 stated that:

“...influencers, they have many followers and then they will share the information that is the correct information to their audience or their followers. So, they will be more trusted than normal people.” [Informant 21]

4.6.4: Transparency

The public release of information, deals, practices, and transactions that can be verified by anybody is defined as transparency (Fadhila, 2018). From the interview, we found out that people are more likely to believe the information shared by the media influencer because of the transparency. During the interview, Informant 13 claimed that social media influencers had gained greater recognition by demonstrating their genuineness on social media. Informant 13 stated that:

“...social media influencers have accomplished a higher recognition by showing their authenticity, somehow, they will have higher credibility and influence due to the high exposure of their daily activity.” [Informant 13]

4.6.5: Expertise

Expertise was defined as a high level of competence or understanding in a specific profession. Based on the findings of the interview, it was discovered that people were influenced by the expertise of influencers. Informant 19 claimed that he would believe in medical experts from medical societies or associations or groups, as well as more well-known facilities because the information they shared was verified by a variety of experts. Informant 19 stated that:

“...there are some from medical societies or associations and more famous hospitals because they are usually featured on official news, and they are verified by many different kinds of experts that are known and understand what the COVID-19 is since they have the most knowledge about it.” [Informant 19]

4.6.6: Knowledgeable

A knowledgeable person is someone who demonstrates knowledge or intelligence (Mohajan, 2016). According to the research, it was discovered that the knowledge of experts would lead people to believe in fake news. This could be supported by the view of Informant 1 and Informant 16. According to Informant 1, the professionals have done a lot of research in their field and thus, they have a lot more information than the general public. Informant 1 conceded that:

“...during the Covid-19 pandemic, the experts who have gone through different research about Covid-19 and read a lot of articles about it, will surely have more knowledge that is useful than us who do not know at all.” [Informant 1]

Moreover, according to the findings of Informant 16, he mentioned that he would believe in the information shared by the experts due to their knowledge and level of education. According to Informant 16:

“...those people have certified personnel to share these kinds of things and I will believe in them based on their level of education.” [Informant 16]

4.7 Conclusion

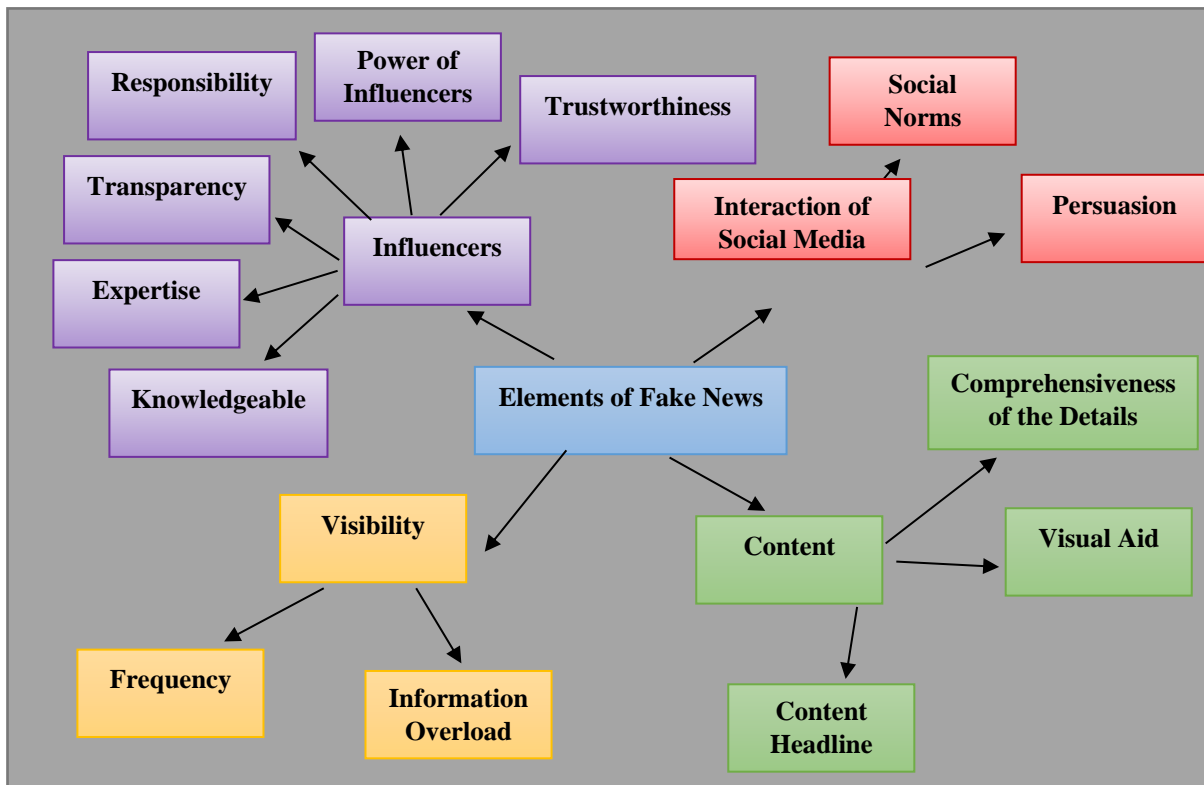


Figure 5: Elements of fake news on social media that lead young adults to believe in it

Based on the findings, the interaction of social media users, visibility, content and influencers are the elements of fake news on social media that lead young adults to believe in it during COVID-19 pandemic.

Interaction of social media users is supported by the code, “social norms” and “persuasion”, which explain how the elements of fake news on social media persuade young adults to believe in it during COVID-19 pandemic. Besides that, the codes “frequency” and “information overload” are affecting the visibility of the post, which is one of the elements of fake news that could cause people to believe in it. Moreover, content is also one of the elements of fake news that lead people to believe in it in a way that the content headline, visual aid, comprehensiveness of the details, misleading facts, and data influence the persuasiveness of the fake news. Last but not least, the influencer is also the element of fake news on social media

that persuades young adults to believe in it. The influencer is affecting the individual to believe in it through their power as an influencer, responsibility, transparency, expertise, knowledgeable, and trustworthiness.

In short, this section reported the findings of the study. The study identified four main themes that reflect elements of fake news on social media that lead young adults to believe in it during COVID-19 pandemic and the codes represent the ways how the elements of fake news on social media persuade the young adults to believe in it during COVID-19 pandemic. The theme and the code developed will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Discussion

5.0 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings of the research after data collection. This chapter discusses the 4 elements of fake news which are “interaction of social media users”, “visibility”, “content”, and “influencer”, and how these elements of fake news on social media persuade young adults to believe in it during COVID-19. The objective of this study is to explore what are the elements of fake news and how the elements of fake news on social media persuade young adults to believe in it during COVID-19, by summarizing and analyzing the findings of the 25 semi-structured interviews done based on the literature discussed. In addition to the discussion, this chapter will also consist of implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

5.1 Discussion

5.1.1 Interaction of Social Media Users

Based on the interviews that were conducted, it was found that one of the elements of fake news on social media that persuade young adults to believe in it is the interaction of social media users. Young adults aged between 19 to 24 years old were influenced by the social norms of posts on social media to justify the accuracy of the information and determine whether or not to believe in it. According to the Heuristic-Systematic Model, individuals are more likely to agree on a claim based on external factors that serve as an incentive or persuasive element to the people, rather than making judgements through a cognitive thinking process (Zanna et al., 2014). Like many other social phenomena, social norms are an unintended result of people's interactions (Bicchieri et al., 2018). On social media, every post will show its own user interaction such as the number of likes. When the number of likes got higher, it created a social

norm for the post which was affecting the interaction of social media users and caused people to believe the fake news on social media during the COVID-19 pandemic. People tend to follow the majority and believed in the post with high interaction because they firmly believed others will only interact with the post they believed in and think it is real. As humans, we use the determinations of others as a heuristic or conceptual shortcut to navigate our lives (Henderson, 2017).

Meanwhile, the interaction of social media users also created a sense of consensus heuristic which has a strong power of persuasion. According to Simons et al. (1976), persuasion, which is often described as "an activity of human communication intended to influence others' perceptions, attitudes, or behaviors," is widespread in human affairs. It's an attempt at influence in the sense that it sought to change how others think, feel, or act. A post with high interaction of social media users such as a big number of likes more likely to persuade people to believe in the post. This is because according to the interviews done, people were more likely to believe in a post with higher likes due to the strong persuasion as highly likes of a post represented the higher agreement of the other people. It was more convincing to young adults as in the credibility judgement stage, this kind of heuristic thinking fell under one of the credibility types which young adults tend to presume the post with high interaction of social media users should have high accuracy and high credibility as well.

5.1.2 Visibility

Apart from that, it was discovered that visibility is one of the elements of fake news on social media that lead young adults to believe in it during COVID-19. Visibility can be defined as the ability to be easily observed or noticed immediately (Frey-Heger & Barrett, 2021). Technology is rapidly evolving nowadays. Social media has become a necessity in most people's lives. It is because most people obtain and disseminate information through social media, hence the

visibility of the post will increase. Consequently, people are more easily exposed to all types of information, including fake news.

According to the findings, people tend to believe the information when the information appears on multiple social media platforms. In this situation, people undergo heuristic thinking, and they will believe in the information based on the consistency heuristic. According to the Heuristic-Systematic Model that had been discussed in Chapter 2, people believed in the information due to the frequency of the posts that are appearing on their social media platforms. The frequency with which posts emerge on social media platforms has the potential to boost their visibility. Consequently, people are more likely to believe in the information or the fake news. It was assumed that the frequency of the posts appearing on social media were interrelated to people who had shared the news. The higher the frequency of posts on social media means the more people who have spread the news. Therefore, it is believed that the majority of them believed in it and implied that the news is reliable. Moreover, when the news and information have come across several social platforms, people think that the information was more reliable because they believed that the fake news will not be able to spread on several platforms without being stopped or criticized by others.

Additionally, higher visibility might also result in the information overload. Information overload can refer to a situation that happens when there is excess information available, but it becomes a hindrance instead of useful information (Bawden & Robinson, 2021). The findings revealed that a great deal of information appears especially during the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Undeniably, an overabundance of information, both true and false, that people are exposed to on social media happened during the period of COVID-19 pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020), and this situation can be known as information overload. Information overload will affect their ability to make a judgement and causes people to confuse due to receiving information from different perspectives. This could

be supported by the study of Renjith (2017), which claims that the massive volume of information causes the brain to work in a stressed manner, and thus affect our thinking pattern. As a result, an individual's decision-making mechanism will be confused, preventing them from selecting the best alternative. In short, the visibility of the post is the element that leads the young adults to believe in the fake news on social media, and this could be explained by the consistency heuristic, which functions as the heuristic cue in this case.

5.1.3 Content

The content is one of the elements of fake news on social media that lead people to believe in it. The founder of Content Marketing Institute, Joe Pulizzi stated that content can be defined as what is inside or included in something, it is convincing information that informs, engages, or amuses the audience (Moutsos, 2018). It could be any materials, such as documents, images, videos, recordings, or other information and delivered through different media, such as social media, television, radio, books, magazines, events and so on. The widespread and rapid adoption of technology is altering the way people get news or information and how we find partners, (Ortiz-Ospina, 2019). In addition, more than 90 per cent of young adults today have smartphones, and most of them are using social media to get news and information (Ahmad Ghazali Akmar Hayati et al., 2012). Therefore, the content that spreads on social media is one of the elements of fake news that lead people to believe in it and it would affect people's opinions and decisions, especially young adults.

The rule of thumb is one of the elements under the Heuristic-Systematic Model. Even if the content of the message is not taken into consideration, the length of the message is said to be classified under the rule of thumb (Chen & Chaiken, 1999). If a post contains a lot of details and is longer than the rest of the posts on the same topic, people assumed that the information is reasonable and persuade them to believe in it because the message's length

implies that the message is strong or correct. For example, longer messages are seen as more convincing since they appear to contain a lot of points. Therefore, the length and the details of the content in a post would lead them to believe in it and make the post look more credible.

Moreover, the content is one of the elements of fake news on social media that lead people to believe in it when the content contains comprehensive details, such as what, who, when, where, and how or others. In general, people believed in a post that contains a lot of details and preferred scientific explanations. They claimed that it was posted by a professional because they believe that people who are not professional or do not have sufficient knowledge related to the information will be unable to provide so many details in the post (Pennycook & Rand, 2021). Besides that, comprehensiveness of the details would lead people to believe in fake news when the details of the content made people have a sense of reassurance in their eyes and contained detail that answers people's confusion. Thus, the more comprehensive details a post contains, the more plausible and credible people feel, and it finally leads people to believe in fake news.

Furthermore, the visual aid in the content of fake news would lead people to believe in it. Nowadays, visual aid has been found to play a key role in spreading fake news (Cao et al., 2020). It is common to see posts on social media that include different visual aids, and those visual aids can help to build trust (American Press Institute, 2016). Based on the findings, people believed in fake news when the content contained some visual aids, such as photos, videos, statistical data, and other visual aids. People have stated that visuals, data, and charts assist them in better understanding news and information (American Press Institute, 2016). Therefore, posts on social media were frequently accompanied by photos or videos, which aided in attracting the attention of viewers and might have contributed to increasing the level of credibility of certain news. Moreover, visual aids in the content of fake news would lead people to think that the post has conducted a survey because people could see the pictures,

videos, or statistical data in the information as proof. However, if certain news only consisted of words, it might not have gained people's trust.

In addition, the content headline in the content of fake news persuaded people to believe in it. The content headline can be defined as an attention grabber, and it is a tool that is used to catch the audience's attention and interest in the content. In general, people would be attracted to headlines since it was the first element they notice before diving into the text (Kuiken et al., 2017). From the findings, the vast majority of people were unlikely to conduct any additional research into the content on social media. Some content creators would employ exaggerated content headlines in order to capture the attention of their target audiences and people's attention would be drawn to the content headline at first, no matter whether the content news is correct or not. Thus, the content headline in the content of fake news would easily attract people and cause them to believe in it.

In short, the content is one of the elements that lead people to believe in fake news. People believed in the content of fake news that contained comprehensive details and visual aids like photos, videos, and statistical data. At the same time, the content headline would also attract people at first, making people feel it was credible and leading them to believe in fake news.

5.1.4 Influencers

Influencer is one of the elements in fake news on social media that lead young adults to believe in it. The influencer can be defined as an individual who could influence others' opinions and is able to facilitate the spread of information within a community (Liu & Park, 2015). Since people are more inclined to utilize social media to gather information and make decisions these days, a number of opinion leaders have become powerful members of online communities and have become a source of advice for other users (Thakur et al., 2016). The

term “influencer” refers to those who have a large number of loyal fans and audiences (Kolter et al., 2017). The influencers are also creating their own unique content in order to build their reputation and establish themselves as experts in their field (Babin & Hulland, 2019). Also, influencers can be understood in the way that influencers are opinion leaders, popular in a wider or higher group of regular recipients, with credible actions that were conducted more and more often on the Internet. Moreover, their action could inspire trust, engage and convince the social media users to make specific choices (Butora et al, 2019 as cited in Wielki, 2020).

People are normally processing the information and making decisions to decide whether to believe in the fake news through heuristic thinking, which means they tend to agree on a topic based on external factors (Zanna et al., 2014). People who go through heuristic processing use heuristic cues to make decisions, which aligns with the theoretical framework that had been discussed in Chapter 2 (Luo et al., 2012). Therefore, the influencer serves as a motivation or persuasive element to the people in this case. Influencers that act as one of the elements of fake news on social media are called expert heuristics, where people with a certain influence are involved. From the findings that had been generated, the influencers that were affecting the informants mostly were people who are recognized as authorities in a given field due to their knowledge or skills. For example, the industry specialists, consultants, reviewers and on (Wielki, 2020). Besides that, the digital influencers such as the YouTubers, Facebookers, Instagramers and TikTokers were also influencing the informants as well.

The influencer is one of the elements of fake news that leads people to believe in it since the influencer appears to be a reliable source. People believed the influencer based on the expertise of the traits of the influencer. According to the Heuristic-Systematic Model that had been outlined in Chapter 2, the component of expertise is important in determining the credibility of health-related information which can be proved by the data that had been collected. The medical experts from medical societies or associations were examples of

influencers who may promote community trust according to the data collected. This could be similar to the credibility judgement discussed before where the individual who had the expertise and the capacity to shout out the facts, had the power to prove the validity of the statement. As a result, if the influencer proves the facts incorrectly and shares the fake news on social media, people are more likely to trust it because of the influencer's expertise.

Apart from that, traits of knowledgeable occupied by the expert type of influencer increase the credibility of the source and also lead people to believe in fake news on social media. People always assume that the experts have more knowledge and have conducted more research in their specialty. For example, influencers are expected to go through COVID-19 related information and develop a better understanding than those who have no prior knowledge. People will be more likely to trust and follow the information supplied by the influencer without reason because the expert's type of influencer is assumed to be knowledgeable. When people just blindly trust the information that is provided by the expert without analyzing carefully, it is similar to the theoretical framework that we had discussed previously which is the Heuristic- Systematic model.

Moreover, the trustworthiness of the traits of the influencer had developed a greater impact on people to believe in fake news on social media. According to Bao and Chang (2014), influencers are considered to be a trustable source of helpful information. Typically, an influencer excels in one or a few specific sectors, resulting in a huge and loyal following. However, they are not qualified as medical professionals who are more knowledgeable in the COVID-19 related medical sector. Therefore, their referrals may still function successfully in sectors where they are not experts, but it is primarily due to the reputation or trust of their followers (Wiedmann et al., 2012). People are more likely to believe the word of the influencer due to the trustworthy traits of the influencers that they will not spread the fake news. Hence,

people who are subject to heuristic thinking will just believe in the fake news without making any judgement when the influencers share the information.

Additionally, the responsibility of influencers also leads people to believe in fake news. The term “responsibility” refers to taking accountability for one’s own actions (Neves, 2015). According to the findings, influencers are thought to have their own responsibility, and there is some existing legislation prohibiting media influencers from propagating false information. For example, the enactment of the Anti-Fake News Act 2018. It was possibly one of the most hastily enacted laws in Malaysia’s history. People who violate the Anti-Fake News Act 2018 shall face a penalty of up to RM500,000 in fines or ten years in prison. If a person is unaware that the information that he or she shares online is false, he or she may be charged under other sections of the act, excluding the section 4, which stated that any act of “creating, offering, publishing, printing, distributing, circulating or disseminating any fake news or publication containing fake news” (Mahyuddin Daud & Sonny Zulhuda, 2020). Consequently, it was assumed that the influencer would comply with their responsibilities and the law, rather than spread fake news. Also, it is considered that the media influencer is more trustable and will provide truthful information because they have a larger number of followers and thus, they have the responsibility to check before spreading any message.

Furthermore, people believed the information shared by the media influencer because of the transparency. According to Fadhila (2018), transparency can be defined as the public disclosure of agreements, dealings, practices, and transactions that can be verified by anybody. In this situation, transparency indicates that the influencers were open and honest about everything. Because of their genuineness and ability to share genuine thoughts, social media influencers were initially trusted. Social media influencers will have higher credibility and influence due to the tremendous visibility of their everyday activities. As a result, influencers

were an element of fake news, which led people to believe in it because of the transparency of the influencers, which makes people assume that they were credible sources.

Influencers are shown to have more power and have a higher impact on people believing the information they provided since individuals believed that they have formed similarities with the influencer. For example, people believed in the influencers since they are more closely tied to them in terms of their lifestyle of sharing their daily activities. According to Martensen et al. (2018), people will trust the influencers, since they are more likely to build interpersonal attraction, trust and understanding than those who are perceived as different. It is understandable that individuals were more likely to believe in fake news if the influencer appeared to be similar to them. As a result, it was concluded that the more similar one feels towards the influencer, the more trust they have in them. Hence, it causes influencers to become an element that leads people to believe in fake news on social media.

Therefore, even if an influencer possesses the favorable traits such as responsibility, expertise, knowledgeable and so on, they also could spread fake news whether knowingly or unconsciously. An incident that occurred in Malaysia in February 2022 could reinforce this argument. Social media influencers who have no background in the medical field are confusing the public by freely expressing their views about COVID-19 vaccines. Dr. Malina Osman claimed that the social media influencers pretend to be medical experts and spread the inaccurate message, despite the fact that they are not competent to speak on the COVID-19 vaccine, but they are influential on social media. As a result, they acted as if they are experts on everything (Yasmin Abdul Latif, 2022). In short, even if the influencer is having favorable traits, it also could be the elements that lead people to believe in fake news. This is consistent with the expert heuristic that was mentioned in the theoretical framework that had been generated previously.

5.2 Implication of Study

The informant's results were finalized and discussed in the previous chapter, and they were used to answer the research question about what are the elements that lead young adults to believe in fake news on social media during COVID-19 pandemic, as well as how those elements persuaded young adults to believe in the fake news. Statistics and data that show why fake news is a serious issue in our current lives were stated in the problem statement written in Chapter 1, and after doing some further research, it was discovered that research related to elements of fake news is almost non-existent, which is why we were unable to determine what exactly is causing more people to spread the fake news. Hence, research relating to this topic has been carried out, and found out that there are several practical as well as theoretical implications that could be derived from this topic.

5.2.1 Practical Implication

Since there have not been many studies related to the elements of fake news before, thus this study could benefit certain authorities when it comes to monitoring and investigating cases related to fake news. For example, Malaysia has been making several efforts in combating fake news cases, and some of these efforts include providing news verifying websites such as Anti-Fake News Act for people to go to whenever they doubt news (Moonyati Mohd Yatid, 2019). With the outcome of the findings, the researcher could coordinate with the authorities that are responsible for monitoring the fake news cases and enhance these fact-checking websites by providing sections for users to identify fake news according to the elements found in this study. Doing so, not only could increase the efficiency of detecting fake news among the community, but it could also serve as an educational purpose to those visiting the website. Those who surfed these fact-checking websites could then learn how to identify fake news through the elements that we have provided in this research.

Another practical implication that could come from this research was by implementing the research findings into the country's education system. Since the heaviest users of social media are young people aged between 19 to 24 years old (Glazzard & Stones, 2019), it was important to educate these people starting from a young age to help them understand these issues the earlier the better to help avoid them falling into the trap of fake news online. By cooperating with schools and educators in the country, it was also important to insert this into the syllabus and educate the younger generation about the importance of identifying fake news, as well as how to identify them. The knowledge of the elements of fake news from the findings could be passed on to these younger people in hopes that it could decrease the number of young people being a victim of fake news in the future.

5.2.2 Theoretical Implication

The theoretical framework that has been chosen for this research is called the Heuristic-Systematic processing model, which observes a person's behaviour in decision making. Since the topic was related to the targeted audience believing in fake news easily, the heuristic part of the framework was more in focus here. The findings confirmed the Heuristic-Systematic Model in which some people make decisions by merely judging on non-verbal cues. These non-verbal cues usually gave a major impact on the viewer's first impression, causing them to overlook the need to analyze the information they observed. Non-verbal cues like so include categories like expert heuristic, consensus heuristic and the rule of thumb. The elements that have been obtained from this research: influencer, the interaction of social media users, visibility and content can all be seen to belong under these categories of non-verbal cues.

An element identified from this research is said to affect people's judgement simply by the identity of the person who shared the news. This non-verbal cue has fallen under the element of influencers, and this element was highly related to the expert heuristic of the

heuristic model framework. Both of these cues worked in a similar way, where the element of influencer showed how people who are famous or people who have authority had a higher effect on people's belief in certain news, while the expert heuristic stated that people would easily believe in certain news if it was shared by an expert. Another example that showed how this research supports the idea of the Heuristic-Systematic Model was how the interaction of social media user elements was related closely to the non-verbal cue, consensus heuristic. The interaction of social media users' elements obtained from this research proved that there were people who would believe in certain news when many people liked or shared it. Likewise, for the consensus heuristic of the Heuristic-Systematic Model, it is said to prove the same behaviour in people where the more something was being talked about by people, the more it came off as believable to the person. Apart from that, the comprehensiveness of the details had confirmed with the element in the model, the rule of thumb, according to which individuals were more likely to believe in the information that was more detailed. Last but not least, the finding that showed visibility of the posts could induce individuals to believe in the fake news supported the consistency heuristic, which stated that people were more likely to believe in the news when the frequency of its appearance increased.

However, this research also expanded the theory used to support this research, in the aspect of "content". This framework had been mostly focused on non-verbal cues and people's behaviour, but none of the statements in the model has ever addressed anything about visuals or content headlines and how they might influence one's decision-making behaviour. As a result, this research added a whole new dimension in filling in the knowledge gap of the theory in exploring the elements of fake news on social media that lead young adults to believe in it.

5.3 Limitations

There were several limitations while conducting this research that might have affected the final outcome of the research. First, the period when conducting this research coincidentally met with the COVID-19 pandemic. With that being said, it was not able to conduct the interviews face-to-face with the respondents and was forced to resolve using virtual methods such as phone calls and online interviews. Virtual methods were obviously not as effective as physical methods, which caused the limitation of the interview. Several issues such as internet connectivity problems, bad phone call networks and so on have caused some problems while conducting the interview. Issues like these have been affecting the quality of the data and significantly decreased the efficiency of the interviews.

Second, by only implementing qualitative methods for this research, the data achieved could not be seen to represent the whole young adult population of Malaysia in terms of believing in fake news. With only 25 respondents in hand, it was hard to confirm that these 25 young adults' mindsets and answers could represent 100% of the Malaysian young adult population. It limited this research in terms of defining the data and interpreting them as could not surely confirm in the conclusion whether the research outcomes are valid enough to represent a larger number of young adults than just mere 25 respondents.

Last but not least, since the trend and the technology of social media kept drastically improving and changing by the day, it was undeniable that the research outcome would grow irrelevant as the days progress. With new technology, as well as new trends, flooding in the future, there would surely be changes to how the elements affect the viewers in believing fake news.

5.4 Recommendations

There are some recommendations for future researchers who might be interested in this similar topic. First and foremost, since the limitation in this research is due to the research method being solely limited to only qualitative methods, it resulted in data outcomes that are not so suitable in terms of defining them for the whole young adult population of Malaysia. As a recommendation, it is suggested that a mixed method in research could be implemented next time instead of just a qualitative method. By implementing both methods, the researchers could gain the benefits of both. Benefits from the qualitative method helps researchers to gain more constructing answers and responses from their respondents, while quantitative helps reach a larger amount of audience, while seemingly helping increase the level of accuracy in the research.

Secondly, in order to tackle the issue with the ever-changing trend and improvement in technology, future researchers should pay attention to the latest trend and modify their research questions accordingly to be as relevant as possible. Because outdated data is not very accurate and proceeding with such outdated data might result in a waste of time and resources.

5.5 Conclusion

Social media disseminates a huge amount of unproven information, many people get their news from social media, but they are unable to determine the authenticity of the news and information, therefore, misleading a large number of people, particularly young adults (Vimala Balakrishnan, 2022). The sample of this research were derived from the young adults aged between 19-24 years old, Malaysian citizens and had social media accounts. To this end, this study attempted to achieve the research objectives which is to find out and understand the elements of fake news on social media that persuades young adults to believe in it during COVID-19.

The findings of the data were collected through qualitative data collection methods by using semi-structured interviews. The study explored four elements of fake news on social media and how these elements of fake news on social media persuades young adults to believe in it during COVID-19 pandemic. From the research outcome, it showed that the four elements of fake news on social media that lead young adults to believe in it are “interaction of social media users”, “visibility”, “content”, and “influencer”.

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Appendix A

Informants' Demographic Table

No	Gender	Age	Aware of COVID-19 pandemic	Frequency of using social media per week during COVID-19 pandemic?	Ways to get the information about COVID-19?
1	Female	22	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social Media (Facebook & Instagram), WhatsApp, Wechat, parents and friends.
2	Male	22	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social media (mostly Facebook), MySejahtera application
3	Male	22	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social Media (Mostly Facebook & Instagram)
4	Male	22	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social media (Mostly Facebook)
5	Male	22	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social media (Mostly Facebook), Instagram, Twitter
6	Female	22	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, or YouTube), Newspaper
7	Female	22	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social Media (Facebook and Instagram), Newspaper
8	Female	22	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social Media (Facebook), Newspaper
9	Female	22	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social Media (Mostly Facebook and Instagram), Twitter, Newspaper
10	Female	22	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, and Tik Tok), Newspaper
11	Female	21	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Family or Friends, Social Media (Facebook & Instagram)
12	Female	21	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	News Channel (8tv and Astro news), Social Media (Facebook)
13	Female	24	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Official websites, Social Media (Facebook & Instagram)
14	Male	19	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	My Sejahtera app, Social Media (Facebook & Instagram)
15	Male	19	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social Media (Facebook & Instagram)

16	Male	23	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	News Official Website, Social Media
17	Male	23	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social Media, friends
18	Male	20	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), TV news, Newspapers
19	Male	23	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social Media (Mostly Facebook & Twitter), YouTube
20	Male	23	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social media (Mostly Facebook), MySejahtera App
21	Female	24	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social Media (Instagram and Facebook)
22	Female	22	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp)
23	Female	21	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social Media
24	Female	23	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social Media and E- newspaper
25	Female	22	Yes	7/7 (Everyday)	Social Media (Twitter) and MySejahtera App

Appendix B

Interview Transcript

1. Are you aware of the current COVID-19 pandemic that is happening?

Interviewee: Yes.

2. How frequent you use the social media account during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Interviewee: Everyday, 2 to 3 hours per day.

3. How do you get the information about the Covid-19 during the pandemic?

Interviewee: Most of the news that I get is from the official website, and some from social media like Facebook and Instagram.

During the period of Covid-19 pandemic,

4. Between a lesser liked post on social media and a highly liked post on social media?

Which one will be more likely to earn your trust? Why is that so?

Interviewee: Higher likes post. Because when many of the people liked something than people might infer that the post should be accurate or has a higher credibility. Because we tend to let people or number of likes to determine what we want to perceive the credibility of the social media post or account.

5. If there is the logo or trademark of the government or official organization in the posts, will you believe the information that is on the post? Why do you trust/not trust the information with the logo or trademark?

Interviewee: Not really. Usually, I will look also on the origin of the account that shared the news. Because these logo and trademark can be obtained very easily. So, people might use

these logo and trademark on some fake news to make people believe that their news is real. We can see a lot of post taking advantage now, like they use the logo or trademark to tend to let people believe that their news is real but actually it is fake news. It is quite important to check the origin of the news and the account who shared the news.

6. When the information is appearing in more social media platform, will it make you feel that the information is more reliable and why is that so?

Interviewee: Not really. Because social media is a very large platform, and it is very free which people can talk anything or share anything inside. So, any news that could appear in it without credibility because people can share anything they want. So, it will be less reliable for me.

7. If a post contains a lot of details, will it make you feel that the information is reasonable and lead you to believe in it? How does the number of details affect your decision? What kind of details will make you feel you that the information is reasonable and lead you to believe in it?

Interviewee: Yes, when a post contains of a lot of details will make me feel more reasonable because I can obtain more details and justify accuracy of that post. It does not depend on the number of details. We have to determine the details in their authentic and have to see that whether the details are logic enough for us to trust. So, I think most details important is the source and the actual date of the content, because these two will influence the content much.

Follow-up Question: What kind of details will make you feel like you can trust on it?

Interviewee: Actual details. For example, the number of deaths in an accident or the actual number of cases of Covid-19 which increasing everyday. The number can show that your detail is a fact.

8. When media influencers or people of authority (example: medical experts) make or share a post, will it be more believable to you? Why and can you elaborate more on that?

Interviewee: Yes. Nowadays influencers are the one who gain their public recognition through their talent or any action that helps to lead them popular. I think that social media influencers had accomplished a higher recognition by showing their authentic, somehow, they will have the higher credibility and influential due to the highly exposure of their daily activity. People will tend to believe them more because they are more authentic. For example, if we compare social media influencers with celebrities, people will tend to follow those influencers because they are more related to us in terms of their lifestyle of sharing their daily activity. It has created an actual connection and special relationship to the followers, so the content that they shared will be more persuasive to their audience.

Follow-up Question: How about the people of authority?

Interviewee: For those who are expert in specific field I think their content is more creditable because they have the knowledge of the facts. For us, we don't have the knowledge, so we tend to listen and will follow those who have the knowledge in that field. People will be more persuasive and more accomplish on the content that those experts shared it.

9. Do you think that it is easier for you to believe in the news that you lack the certain knowledge? Do you have related experience?

Interviewee: No. It will be harder for me to believe the news that wider than my existing knowledge. When I have a lack of knowledge of certain things, there might be a risk of perception on certain news. For example, when people say drink boiled water can kill the covid virus, this is something that out of my knowledge, I will not think that it is true. But someone

will actually trust on it, as it is out of my knowledge, I cannot confirm that this information is true or fake.

10. Are you more willing to believe the information that fits your opinions? Do you think that the information bias plays a part in this?

Interviewee: I will not believe the information that fits my opinions, because most of the information will follow the fact, and my opinion is only the thing that I thought. So, I am willing to believe the information that has fact. Those information bias tailoring message to people who decline to believe the fact that have. There might be some people will influence by the information bias but for me I will be more believe on the fact.

Follow-up Question: For you will be more believe on fact but you still think that information bias did plays a part in this because others might be influence by it.

Interviewee: Yes.

11. Had you been misinformed because you do not analyse the information carefully? Or any other reasons that causes you to get the inaccurate information?

Interviewee: Yes. When I just start using the social media, I did share few inaccurate posts without verify the accuracy of the posts. Because during that time I was the new user of that platform and not really aware of these misinformation things, so I just simply share it out without analyse it carefully and after just found out the posts that I shared was inaccurate.

12. Do emotions lead you to believe in fake news or does emotion not really matter for you to justify the accuracy of the information?

Interviewee: Emotions does not really lead me to believe in fake news. Information and emotions do not have a direct effect to justify the accuracy of information. We use emotions to react on certain things such as how you feel on certain news, but these emotions cannot change

the reality or the fact of the information. So, I don't think that emotions will lead us believe in fake news.

13. In your opinion, what other elements will make you think the news is believable?

Interviewee: A source is direct, clear and can be verified, we can generally it classify as trustworthy news.

Follow-up Question: Let's say the news is actually a fake news, what elements you think will make you believe in it?

Interviewee: Like what we mentioned before, the logo or trademark of government or official organization will influence people to believe the fake news is real.