

Fake News Gazette

College Students' Perceptions of Their Own Ability Versus Their Peers' Abilities to Identify Fake News on Agricultural Topics

Introduction

- Misinformation and the misunderstanding of information have long been a struggle for the agricultural industry.
- Fake news spreads both faster and farther than the truth on social media (Pierri & Ceri, 2019), and it takes six times as long for the truth to reach the same amount of people as fake news (Vosoughi et al., 2018).
- Fake news is “fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent” (Lazer et al., 2018, p. 1094).
- This study sought to discover how well college students felt they could identify fake news about agricultural topics on social media versus how well they felt their peers could perform at the same task.



Research Questions

- (RQ1) How well do college students think they can identify fake news on agricultural topics?
- (RQ2) How well do college students think the average college student can identify fake news on agricultural topics?

Framework

- People tend to overestimate their ability to perform tasks they are incompetent at (Kruger & Dunning, 1999).
- Social desirability bias is the “systematic error in self-report measures resulting from the desire of respondents to avoid embarrassment and project a favorable image to others” (Fisher, 1993, p. 303).
- People may be unwilling to admit, or be totally unaware of, their true level of susceptibility to fake news.
- The direct versus indirect questioning technique was used in this study to measure the differences between participants views about themselves and others.

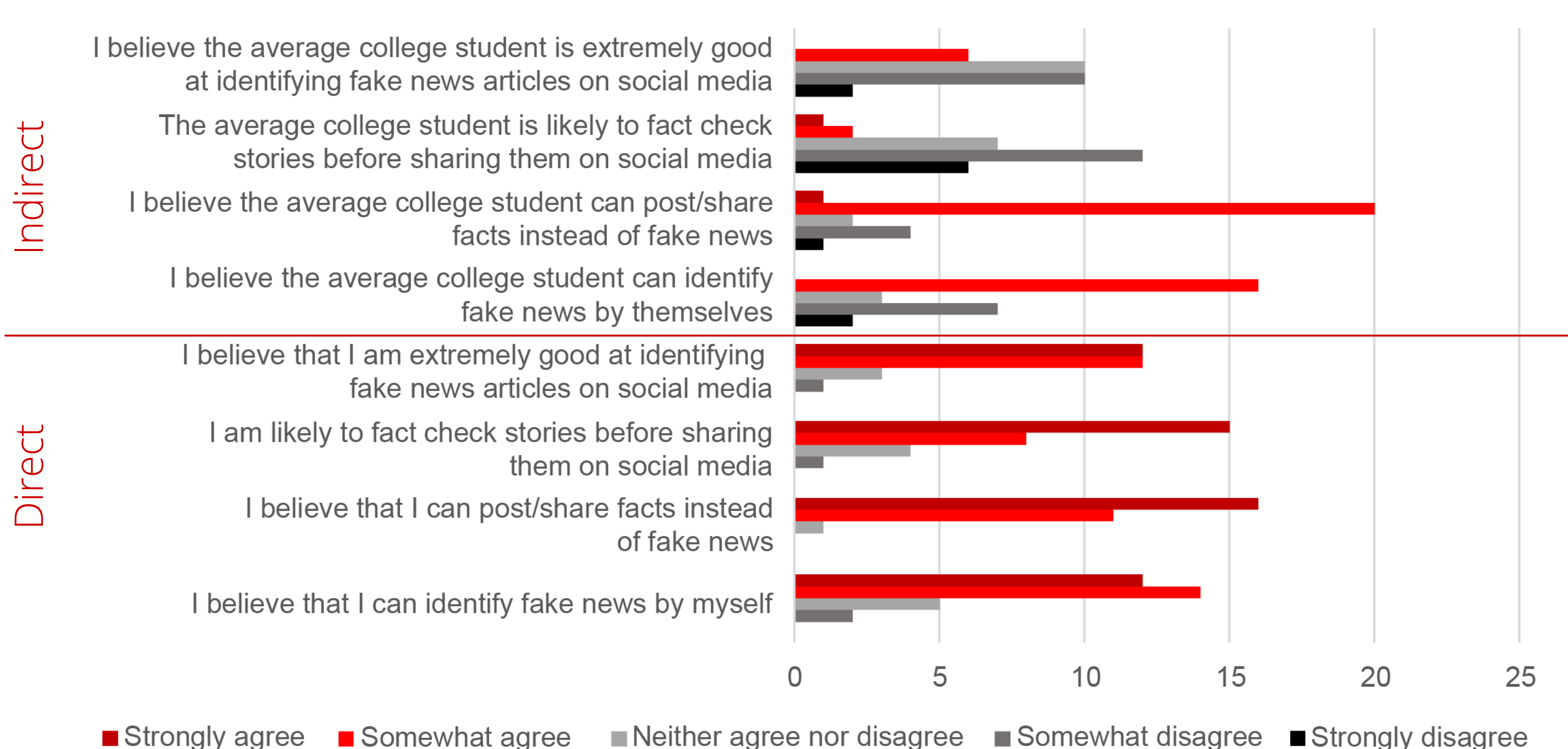
Methodology

- Participants were sampled from a population of 50 graduate students in the Department of Agricultural Education and Communications at Texas Tech University. Twenty-eight students participated (response rate = 56%).
- A Qualtrics survey questionnaire was sent via email, which asked four direct (Cronbach’s alpha = .73) and four indirect (Cronbach’s alpha = .84) questions adapted from Lusk and Norwood (2010) about how well the respondents felt they could identify fake news and how well they felt the average college student could identify fake news.
- The responses to these questions were measured using a Likert scale from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* and then compared using means, standard deviations and a paired samples t-test using SPSS 26.

Results

- There was a substantial difference between students’ perceptions of their own ability to identify fake news ($M = 4.35, SD = 0.57$) and their perceptions of others’ abilities ($M = 2.94, SD = 0.80$).
 - Because of this, we conducted a paired samples t-test, with an alpha level set *a priori* at .05.
- The paired samples t-test found a significant difference in these results ($t(27) = 8.08, p < .01, d = 2.03$).

Direct vs. Indirect Questions



Conclusions/Recommendations

- Participants consistently believed they were better than their peers at identifying fake news.
- We must adapt and learn if we want a better, more informed public opinion that is based on fact and not rumor.
- We may all be more susceptible to fake news than we think, and it is vital that we do a better job of training ourselves and others to recognize fake news in the future.
- Recommendations for future research include looking at how this belief that one is better than their peers at identifying fake news impacts their willingness to share fake news with others.
- For practitioners, it is recommended they keep in mind the power of social desirability bias and the Dunning-Kruger effect when reading the news and consider new information carefully.

References

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