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## “Share or Not”, The Relationship Between User Motivations and Fake News Sharing about Political Issues in Malaysia

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### Abstract

This research investigates the psychological motivations underlying the sharing of fake news on social media concerning political issues in Malaysia. Despite the growing concern about fake news on social media platforms, gaps in psychological research and the relationship between social media use and fake news sharing remain unattended within the Malaysian context. The study aims to identify the primary motivations driving social media users to share fake news on social media platforms concerning Malaysian political issues and explores potential gender differences. Using a quantitative research design, this study collected data through a questionnaire comprising 32 items distributed among social media users. Results indicate a significant relationship between psychological motivations and the sharing of fake news on social media. However, the study found no significant gender-based differences in this relationship. Findings suggest that respondents are moderately motivated by psychological factors to share fake news regarding Malaysian political issues on social media. In conclusion, this study emphasises the influence of psychological motivations on sharing fake news. It contributes to the broader understanding of the relationship between social media and fake news. Future research in this area can further explore the nuances of psychological motivations and their implications for combating the dissemination of fake news in the digital landscape.

**Keywords:** fake news sharing, politics, Malaysia

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## Introduction

Social media is not a new term in this currently developing digital age. It is a platform widely embraced by everyone in their daily lifestyle and recognisable as a form of new media, replacing the traditional, written media such as newspapers and physical letters (Kamboj, 2019). Social media is a platform that has dramatically received massive popularity for its fast response, connectivity, and attention from technology enthusiasts and developers, which has simultaneously re-define the method of engagement with other people by essentially connecting them into one mutual environment, an idea that Marshall McLuhan idolises as a 'global village' (Mohammad et al., 2022). The most remarkable contribution of social media to our daily lifestyle is its ability to completely change how we consume information around us and shape the content without the worry of limitations that could censor the information from people within and beyond the physical borders (Bezbaruah et al., 2021; Pundir et al., 2021; Sampat & Raj, 2022; Spradling & Straub, 2022; Xiao & Su, 2022; Zhao et al., 2020; Tandoc Jr et al., 2018). This radically persuades social media users to use it as an alternative platform to obtain news that is happening around them or beyond their physical restrictions around the clock, effectively making the social media platforms a more reliable, cheaper, and faster substitution to the newspaper which takes time to be compiled, printed, and sold to the population (Aladhadh et al., 2019; Aoun Barakat et al., 2021; Igwebuiké & Chimuanya, 2020; Mohammad et al., 2022; Shirsat et al., 2022; Su et al., 2019). However, users who consume news through social media usually cannot identify the credibility and knowledge of the news sharer and where the news came from. Since news is capable of changing one's beliefs through information processing, it can also provide a path of negative news consumption that can lead to unfortunate consequences and misguidance. Thus, this can lead to the massive spread of false information or fake information (Bezbaruah et al., 2021; Tandoc Jr et al., 2018)

Researchers who conducted a study on fake news have established different definitions of fake news but shared certain similarities (Kim & Kim, 2020). For this study, the definition of fake news will be based on the mutual properties of the established definitions. Therefore, fake news is defined as news that is misleading in terms of its context and has been verified to be false, often justified with fabricated facts and information. What can create confusion between fake news and real news is that fake news usually replicates the layout and the format of real news, thus mimicking the credibility of genuine news and its acceptance from the news consumers' perspective (Agarwal & Alsaeedi, 2021; Ali et al., 2021; Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Aoun Barakat et al., 2021; Balakrishnan et al., 2021; Bezbaruah et al., 2021; Daud, 2020; de Regt et al., 2019; *Defending Against Fake News: Using a Narrative Response to protect Brand Value*, 2019; Go & Lee, 2020; Horner et al., 2021; Luo et al., 2020; Mena, 2019; Mohammad et al., 2022; Neo, 2021; Paschen, 2019; Pundir et al., 2021; Sampat & Raj, 2022; Schuldt, 2021; Steinfield, 2022; Tandoc Jr et al., 2018; Vafeiadis et al., 2019; Wang et al., 2022; Weidner et al., 2019). The fabrication and the spreading of fake news are commonly known to misguide news consumers from information that is factual and applicable to their respective beliefs or to manipulate the news consumer into establishing false beliefs that may be able to inflict instability on society (Abu Seman et al., 2019; Buschman, 2019; Nanath et al., 2022; Petit et al., 2021; Spradling & Straub, 2022).

Thanks to the increased dissemination of fake news in many situations, social media users who get their news from digital sources find themselves in a worrying situation where they are struggling to differentiate between fake news and real news (Pundir et al., 2021). This is mainly because when they receive any news, they are unable to verify its content, especially news from social media where their attention is somewhat restricted in the social media platforms, and fake news is presented in another way that seeks to put interest and humour into the perspective of the consumers (Agarwal & Alsaeedi, 2021; Igwebuiké & Chimuanya, 2020). To make matters worse, most fake news is more attractive and tends to be consistent with the consumers' ideology and beliefs, thus increasing its credibility as reliable,

amplifying its consumption and the possibility to share it with other people, especially if it was endorsed by other people (Go & Lee, 2020; Igwebuike & Chimuanya, 2020; Nanath et al., 2022 ). This can be more worrying if this fake news includes visual representations such as "manipulated" imageries to justify the content it presented to the public since the inclusion of visual representation increases its content truthfulness (Weidner et al., 2019).

While there are numerous studies conducted about fake news, most of them are solely focused on human ability and technological factors, such as artificial intelligence algorithms for differentiating and validating between real or fake news, often through its appearance and content management (Berthon et al., 2019). This creates a psychological gap in identifying the factors leading to fake news sharing (Pundir et al., 2021). Additionally, this study is inspired by the research of Balakrishnan et al. (2021) and Apuke & Omar (2020) which suggested further elaboration on fake news sharing. Thus, the following research questions were established to address the aim of this study.

RQ1. What is the level of motivation for sharing fake news on social media?

RQ2. What are the differences in user motivation and sharing fake news on social media on Malaysian political issues based on gender?

## **Literature Review**

### **Application of Fake News on Politics**

Fake news has been widely used for political purposes and is commonly linked to rhetoric usage. After all, it was politics that started the use of fake news, and politics is the one that popularised its application to other sectors. Fake news is also widely used in major confrontations as a tactical move to topple the opposition (Jalli & Idris, 2019). Through its rhetorical power, fake news has been weaponised as a "political weapon" to manipulate and guide people's beliefs in a different direction by promoting an ideology or political individuals that often resulted in the staining of the reputation of other individuals and manipulating their public opinions (Igwebuike & Chimuanya, 2020; Nanath et al., 2022; Paschen, 2019; Schuldt, 2021; Steinfield, 2022; Tandoc Jr et al., 2018; Vafeiadis et al., 2019).

Social media can also be responsible for spreading fake news for political purposes. Social media actively attracts a massive number of users daily and is even shaped as part of everyone's daily life, thus making social media an effective and opportunistic communication channel to engage and influence other people without spending too much in engaging with the users who have the power to determine their voting behaviours, and this increases their political advantage (Abu Seman et al., 2019; Buchanan, 2020; Su et al., 2019). With the use of social media as their communication channel with their potential voters, the intentional use of fake news will not only reach a massive number of users but also limit their critical thinking ability and exposure to the necessary knowledge that they need to know about each of the political figures (Luo et al., 2020). On top of that, people who consume it may share it with other news consumers, increasing credibility, improving the acceptance of such ideology, and manipulating voting behaviours during the election process (Tandoc Jr et al., 2018; Xiao & Su, 2022). The ideology that has taken over their perspectives could reinforce such beliefs, and they may seek further information that aligns with their ideology and ignore any information they may feel clashes with their current perspectives (Jalli & Idris, 2019). This can be a concern if the false information is radical and can promote violence and instability in the social system. For example, back in 2016, during the period of the United States Presidential Election, a man armed with a rifle entered a pizzeria and opened fire inside the restaurant. Though no one was injured in the process, the suspect was apprehended. After interrogation by the local authority, it was found that he acted after believing that the restaurant was running a child prostitution

establishment funded by the opposition candidate for the White House. This incident was known as 'Pizzagate' (Michael & Breaux, 2021; Tandoc Jr et al., 2018).

In the Malaysian context, it was found that social media has become a more prominent tool for political parties to influence the public's voting behaviour, as demonstrated by the victory of *Pakatan Harapan's* shock victory over *Barisan Nasional* in the 14<sup>th</sup> General Election thanks to their aggressive usage of social media as part of their campaign (Mohd Nizah & Abu Bakar, 2021; Tapsell, 2018). This led to increased usage and credibility of social media as a form of political front, thus making social media a "political battleground" alongside the mainstream media. Unfortunately, social media's easy accessibility fosters the media to be the driving force for political agendas through misinformation and propaganda (Dwyer, 2019; Mamat & Mohammad, 2020). In the most recent 15<sup>th</sup> General Election, it was found that many social media users have deliberately shared fake news related to a particular political entity in an attempt to accuse the entity of promoting racial and religious division in the multiracial, multireligious country. The digital landscape has become a concerning environment for the democratic system, and it has garnered the attention of the local authorities (Hassan, 2022; Leong, 2022). This shows that fake news is very effective in the political sector, as Abu Seman et al. (2019) stated.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study uses the Uses & Gratification Theory (UGT) as the base theory for the framework of the study. Uses and Gratification Theory is a theory that attempts to understand the effect of the choice of communication technology with the intention of using the technology from the perspective of the users (Apuke & Omar, 2020). It studies how people can be affected by their usage of technology by measuring their psychological gratifications, motivation, and their consumption of the technology (Balakrishnan et al., 2021; Nachrin, 2019; Osokin, 2018; Shirsat et al., 2022). This goal-oriented theory believes that certain technology was selected and actively used to satisfy a specific need and intention depending on the individuals (Boudkouss & Djelassi, 2021; Hussain et al, 2020; Nachrin, 2019). This theory believes that different people have different needs for using technology, thus leading to different reactions or outcomes for everyone. Griffin et al. (2019) state that the technology introduced will give the reason and the motivation for people to use such technology and will later be adapted to their everyday lifestyle (Lin & Chu, 2021).

Therefore, this theory has been widely used for any research that is related to technology, especially social media. In the context of social media, many researchers have found that people use the platform for various reasons, such as to socialise, to seek information, to seek attention and to share information with other people (Apuke & Omar, 2020; Sampat & Raj, 2022; Shirsat et al., 2022; W.S. Lin et al., 2019). Other than socialisation, researchers have used this theory and reported that social media can also be used as a form of self-promoting, either for popularity or business purposes, especially among teenagers (Safari, 2018).

Even though communication-related researchers commonly use this theory to identify their motivations, researchers have found that it effectively identifies the negative usage of communication technology (Kambi, 2019). W. S. Lin et al. (2019) revealed that the gratifications the users sought could eventually attach too closely to the users and lead to problematic Internet usage, such as addiction to the Internet itself. In addition, the motivation for sharing news or information over social media has been linked to the psychology and emotional behaviour of the news sharer. It is found that the urge to share any information without verifying the credibility of the source of the news restricts the news sharer's ability to identify the validity of the news (Sampat & Raj, 2022). Therefore, this motivates people to share any news, either true or false, on social media without checking the validity of the news they were exposed

to (El Rayess et al., 2018). Even if social media users were able to verify its validity before giving their respective opinions and feedback, they could also unintentionally share it further into the platform (Phoong et al., 2021; Sampat & Raj, 2022).

In the context of this study, the Uses and Gratification Theory has tremendous significance to social media (Shirsat et al., 2022). Since this theory is more about individual evaluation, sharing fake news can be used to identify the reason and the motivation why users chose to share fake news with other people and whether it satisfied their gratification (Apuke & Omar, 2020; Sampat & Raj, 2022). According to Balakrishnan et al. (2021), the use of this theory in fake news sharing is considered appropriate as it has been widely demonstrated in its effectiveness in discovering everyone's motivation for their action. After all, people choose to use social media to engage with it, rather than consume it (Osokin, 2018).

Researchers such as Petit et al. (2021) and Sharma & Kapoor (2021) found that fake news tends to be less shared by social media users because it is less credible and less persuasive than real news. This shows that there is still conflicting information to understand why fake news has been widely shared in terms of psychology and emotional context. Therefore, this study formulates a theoretical framework which suggests that socialisation, altruism, self-promotion and fear of missing out are the main factors for fake news sharing on social media on political issues.

### **Socialisation**

Socialisation refers to maintaining or preserving a social relationship with other people by sharing information. The information that users share within social media tends to align with their mutual interests and views, which increases the credibility of the information and acts as a way to expand their respective community bubble (Sampat & Raj, 2022). Therefore, socialisation is commonly linked to the urge to connect with others (Apuke & Omar, 2020). The creation and sharing of information are considered a convenient method to seek the feeling of connectivity with others as the content that is shared can be gathered from many other sources or can be freely created by themselves, especially in this digital age of communication that motivates interaction with other people (Apuke & Omar, 2020; Phoong et al., 2021). Research by Sampat and Raj (2022) found that socialisation has a positive relationship with news sharing over social media. In addition, Mohammad et al. (2022) found that sharing fake news is linked to social gratification as it is believed that news shared on social media contains a high level of trust, regardless of its authenticity. On top of that, the effect can be amplified if the sender and the receiver share a mutual belief or a personal connection (Apuke & Omar, 2020; Go & Lee, 2020).

### **Altruism**

Altruism refers to sharing or giving something to other people without demanding anything in return. Interestingly, altruism has been widely shown by social media users in sharing information with other people, and they are usually unaware of their "charitable" behaviour (Apuke & Omar, 2020). In the context of fake news sharing, whenever people share information or news with others, they usually do not verify the validity and the accuracy of the information beforehand. This is because they are more concerned about informing other people about the news than verifying whether it is true or false (Balakrishnan et al., 2021). In other words, what is more important is that they do their deed to others, regardless of the context of the news itself.

### **Self-Promotion**

According to Apuke and Omar (2020), self-promotion is trying to outshine oneself against others. This can be easily seen in social media, where most users always engage with others to seek attention and gain positive recognition by sharing information. The information they share tends to make them more capable and knowledgeable about the idea, simultaneously making them more credible and establishing a more positive image for themselves. This also will allow them to gain more social approval and enhance their social status within the digital environment. Social media has provided numerous tools for users to establish a status foothold and social identity among other users in the digital demographics. Implemented publishing tools, such as the ability to post visual format media in the form of photos and videos, to help users make the first engagement with other people (Islam et al., 2019). Unfortunately, this does not concern them over the authenticity of the information they shared, as they are more concerned about their actions.

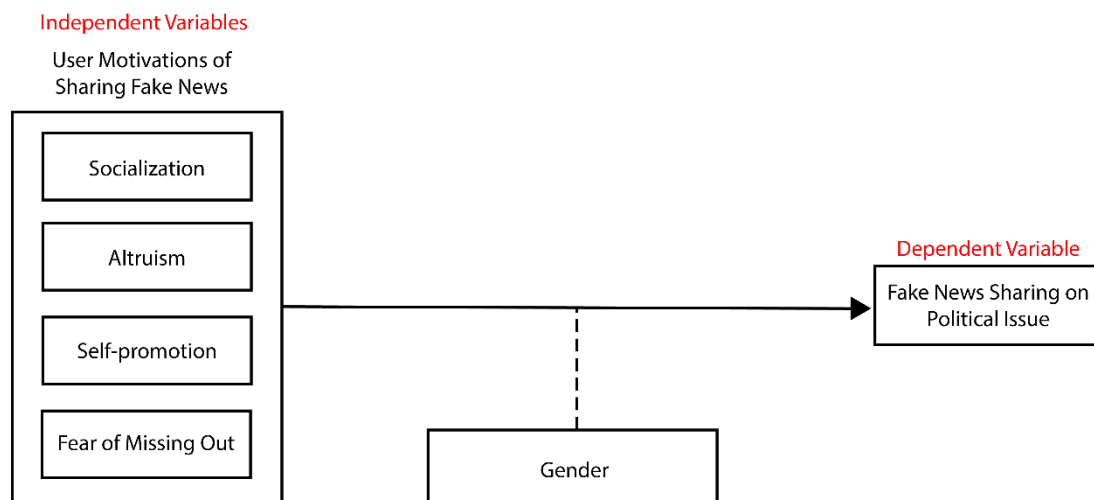
### Fear of Missing Out

Fear of missing out, commonly shortened as "FOMO", is a psychological reaction that exhibits the feeling of exclusion or being ignored by other people, mainly from peers (Pundir et al., 2021). This reaction usually occurs when one does not keep up with the constantly changing trend within an environment, such as social media (Phoong et al., 2021). This reaction can also be affected when one is not informed of other people's status, thus increasing their curiosity and tendency to make them acknowledged by others until they feel comfortably belonged to the digital environment (Balakrishnan et al., 2021). In the context of this study about fake news sharing, Pundir et al. (2021) theorised that continuous FOMO reactions can lead to the anxiety of being left out by other people. The further reaction could result in social media fatigue and depression. To avoid such behaviours, social media users will attempt to force themselves to be acknowledged by sharing information that other social media users can instantly receive. However, much like altruism, they could be unaware of the validity and the precision of the news they share if they share it with others. On top of that, social media platforms do not have strict regulations regarding the publication of fake news; therefore, this can result in a surge of fake news sharing (Phoong et al., 2021).

Figure 1 demonstrates the conceptual framework adopted for the study.

**Figure 1**

*Conceptual Framework*



## Hypotheses Development

Based on the research objectives and the associated variable used for the study, two sets of hypotheses are established and separated based on their objectives.

### Set 1

H<sub>10</sub>: There is no relationship between user motivation and sharing fake news on social media on Malaysian political issues.

H<sub>1a</sub>: There is a relationship between user motivation and sharing fake news on social media on Malaysian political issues.

### Set 2

H<sub>20</sub>: There is no difference in user motivation and sharing fake news on social media on Malaysian political issues based on gender.

H<sub>2a</sub>: There is a difference in user motivation and sharing fake news on social media on Malaysian political issues based on gender.

## Methodology

### Research Design and Data Collection

This study was conducted through a quantitative method. Therefore, a structured questionnaire was created through Google Forms and used to collect the information needed for this study. This type of research studies the relevancy of the hypotheses established through numerical data based on the respondent's perspective (Bhandari, 2022). In addition, quantitative data can be easily collected online, bypassing the physical and geographical boundaries to maximise respondent's exposure while reducing irritation (Apuke & Omar, 2020). Purposive sampling was used to qualify the respondents to participate in the study. This is because the only requirement to participate is that the respondents must be Malaysian social media users, though their involvement and knowledge of the concluded 15<sup>th</sup> General Election (GE15) is optional. The anonymous survey was shared through various social media platforms such as Facebook, Reddit and Discord to ensure respondents were social media users. Respondents were requested to complete the survey and share the link with other social media users. A sample of 219 responses was collected, and no issues arose from the respondents' feedback. Table 1 summarises the demography of respondents.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Profile of the Respondents (n = 219)*

| Variable | Category | Frequency | Percent (%) |
|----------|----------|-----------|-------------|
| Gender   | Male     | 66        | 30.1        |
|          | Female   | 153       | 69.9        |

|           |                    |     |      |
|-----------|--------------------|-----|------|
| Age Range | Below 20 years old | 5   | 2.3  |
|           | 21 – 30 years old  | 163 | 74.4 |
|           | 31 – 40 years old  | 19  | 8.7  |
|           | 41 – 50 years old  | 17  | 7.8  |
|           | Above 50 years old | 15  | 6.8  |

## Measurements

The measurement used for the research is a five-point Likert scale comprising five anchors (1= Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly Agree). This type of measurement has proved effective in multiple existing quantitative studies in producing a valid and reliable result (Abu Seman et al., 2019; Apuke & Omar, 2020; Bezbaruah et al., 2021; Camilleri & Falzon, 2020; Cheng & Luo, 2020; Lin & Chui, 2021; Pundir et al., 2021; Sampat & Raj, 2022; Safori, 2018; Shang et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2022).

During the data collection process, a pilot test was conducted with the first 30 respondents to identify any reliability flaws with the questionnaire. A quick reliability analysis with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software indicates that both the pilot test sample (n=30) and total sample (n=219) were valued at a power level above 0.7. This indicates that the questionnaire recorded high reliability and can be used for the study ( Abu Seman et al., 2019; Hussain et al., 2020; Lin & Chui, 2021; Mena, 2019).

## Data Analysis

### Descriptive Analysis – User Motivation

#### Research Objective 1

A descriptive analysis (One-Sample T-Test) was conducted to calculate the mean and the standard deviation of all the items for each independent variable used in the questionnaire for the research study. Table 2 shows the mean and the standard deviation values of the mentioned items. The test value of 3 is implemented for each item.

**Table 2**

#### *Descriptive Analysis of User Motivation*

| Items & Variables  | Mean   | Std. Deviation |
|--|--------|----------------|
| SOC1: I share news and information with other people to find out what is happening about Malaysian political issues.     | 3.2146 | 1.06425        |
| SOC2: I share news and information with other people to interact and engage with them about Malaysian political issues.  | 3.1735 | 1.13211        |
| SOC3: I share news and information with other people to exchange information and ideas about Malaysian political issues. | 3.1689 | 1.13483        |
| Mean (Socialisation)   | 3.1857 | 1.01518        |



|   |        |         |
|---|--------|---------|
| ALT1: I share any trending news with other people because I want to keep them informed about Malaysian political issues.      | 3.0868 | 1.21789 |
| ALT2: I share any trending news about Malaysian political issues with other people because it feels appropriate to help them. | 3.0594 | 1.24559 |
| ALT3: I share any trending news about Malaysian political issues with other people because I want to encourage them to do so. | 2.7534 | 1.22415 |
| Mean (Altruism)   | 2.9665 | 1.11239 |
| SP1: I share any trending news about Malaysian political issues to impress other people.                                      | 2.3288 | 1.20078 |
| SP2: I share any trending news about Malaysian political issues to express myself to other people.                            | 2.7123 | 1.26505 |
| SP3: Sharing any trending news about Malaysian political issues makes me feel important to other people.                      | 2.4429 | 1.20784 |
| Mean (Self-Promotion)   | 2.4947 | 1.07105 |
| FOMO1: I share any trending news about Malaysian political issues to make me feel acknowledged by other people.               | 2.4292 | 1.21091 |
| FOMO2: I share any trending news about Malaysian political issues to make me feel connected with other people.                | 2.9589 | 1.23524 |
| FOMO3: I share any trending news to stay up to date with other people about Malaysian political issues.                       | 3.2329 | 1.18307 |
| Mean (Fear of Missing Out)  | 2.8737 | 1.06169 |

The standard deviation (SD) values for all of the items and the variables used in the questionnaire are above the value of 1 but below the value of 1.3. Since the normal standard deviation range is between 0.6 to 1.3, the data is largely skewed to the right, suggesting that the respondents do mutually share the same opinion about the intentions of sharing fake news.

Since the hypothesis is made up of six different independent variables, and all six of them are significant in this research study, hypothesis H<sub>1a</sub> is accepted.

## **Inferential Analysis – Differences Between User Motivation and Fake News Sharing Based on Gender**

### **Research Objective 2**

An independent sample t-test was conducted to identify differences between gender groups and fake news sharing on the Malaysian political landscape. A total of 66 responses from male respondents and 153

responses from female respondents were used for the calculation. Table 3 and Table 4 show the results from the calculation conducted.

**Table 3**

*Group Statistics of Gender (n = 219)*

|                         | DM1: Gender | N   | Mean   | Std. Deviation |
|-------------------------|-------------|-----|--------|----------------|
| Fake News Sharing (FNS) | Male        | 66  | 2.2811 | 0.91919        |
|                         | Female      | 153 | 2.2062 | 0.95116        |

**Table 4**

*Independent Sample T-Test of Gender Comparison (Equal variance assumed)*

|     | F     | Sig.  | t    | df  | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference |
|-----|-------|-------|------|-----|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| FNS | 0.063 | 0.802 | 0.54 | 217 | 0.59            | 0.0749          | 0.13868               |

Table 3 and Table 4 show the results of the test conducted. Since the value of significance (two-tailed) is higher than  $p > 0.05$  ( $p = 0.59$ ), it is suggested that the comparison itself is not statistically significant. In addition, the test found that Males ( $M = 2.281$ ,  $SD = 0.919$ ) are somewhat similar to Females ( $M = 2.206$ ,  $SD = 0.951$ ) when sharing fake news on Malaysian political issues. Therefore, the test can assume that there is no difference in gender when it comes to fake news-sharing behaviour; thus, the null hypothesis is accepted for this variable.

## Discussion

This research study found that all of the independent variables used have a significant relationship with the behaviour of sharing fake news on political issues in Malaysia. Among these variables, self-promotion and fear of missing out recorded a positive value higher than the average value, while socialisation and altruism recorded a moderately positive value, which is considered positively significant in this study. Self-promotion (SP) has the strongest value ( $r = 0.582$ ,  $p = < 0.001$ ) in its relationship with respondents' intention to share fake news on Malaysian political issues. This is mainly because, with the increasing number of social media users, many users seek to emerge as "news reporters" by sharing news on the platform, mainly social media, and this can increase their social media reputation, footprint and approval from their followers, building their digital profile on social media (Islam et al., 2019). However, these attention-seeking social media users maintain a high level of caution when sharing their possible false information, as they could backfire their intention to promote themselves. It is undeniable that self-promotion can still motivate social media users to share fake news as they are unable to hold themselves from garnering approval cues such as likes, shares, or retweets from any information they could find and exploit, thus amplifying their behaviour of sharing fake news on social media (Sampat & Raj, 2022).

Fear of missing out (FOMO) has the second strongest value ( $r = 0.562$ ,  $p = < 0.001$ ) in its relationship with respondents' intention to share fake news on Malaysian political issues. This is mainly because people do not always connect to social media and the rapidly evolving information they offer (Phoong et al.,

2021). To help them maintain their presence with the rapid flow of information and position themselves with other social media users, these users may share any piece of information with other people, be it news that they have acknowledged beforehand, news that is old and forgotten, or news that they are unable to determine its credibility. This causes them to be unaware of the information they share. Their anxiety of being left behind among the digital population becomes the "main driver" of motivating them to share any information they can find (Pundir et al., 2021).

Altruism (ALT) has the third strongest relationship value ( $r = 0.492$ ,  $p = < 0.001$ ) with the intention of sharing fake news on Malaysian political issues. Even though the number of social media users is massive, many do not always connect to the platforms. Therefore, those who are connected always tend to share any news with the ones who are getting left behind, acting as a reminder to others without demanding anything in return. This is usually done by active social media users who do not hesitate to share information with other people to assist them in keeping up with the rapidly flowing stream of information and to keep them informed (Apuke & Omar, 2020; Xiao & Su, 2022). However, the news they share can be both true or false, or a combination of both, as they may not verify the news themselves before sharing it with others (Balakrishnan et al., 2021). As long as these active social media users are able to "assist" the users who are getting left behind in the current times, the interaction is established, and this fulfils the social gratification that they seek. This aligns with the study conducted by Apuke and Omar (2020) and Balakrishnan et al. (2021) who found altruism to have a significant predictor with the relationship of sharing fake news.

Socialisation (SOC) has the weakest correlation ( $r = 0.471$ ,  $p = < 0.001$ ) value among the six independent variables in its relationship with respondents' intention to share fake news on Malaysian political issues. Socialisation encourages social media users to actively interact with other users (Apuke & Omar, 2020). Sharing or exchanging news can be considered an act of socialising since there is an exchange of information between individuals, thus showing an interaction between each other. Information that is being shared is not necessarily being accounted. Therefore, any news – both genuine and fake – could be considered if the action of interaction exists. This effectively helps them to maintain social relationships with their online contacts on social media platforms, especially family members and friends. This supports the study by Sampat and Raj (2022) who found a positive relationship between socialisation and news sharing over social media among the Nigerian population on fake news related to COVID-19.

Based on the inferential analysis conducted on the socio-demographic factor of gender, this research study found no difference in the relationship between user motivation and fake news sharing about political issues in Malaysia. This opposes many previous studies conducted related to fake news in which gender was found to influence the differences in sharing fake news on social media (Alqahs et al., 2023; Balakrishnan et al., 2022; De Araújo et al., 2021). The main contributor to the conclusion is that the comparison used population groups with a huge number of differences among each other. This makes the comparison uneven, thus making it unreliable for fair comparison calculation. Should the population groups have equal numbers, the comparison will likely be significant enough to identify any difference and determine the result.

## **Conclusion**

### **Theoretical Implications**

This research study contributes to the literature on fake news sharing by identifying several key factors that act as motivators for sharing fake news from the perspective of social media users and news consumers. This research contributes to existing studies that identify socialisation, altruism, fear of

missing out, and self-promotion as factors that affect the behaviour of fake news sharing on social media. Therefore, these findings further extend the literature on fake news sharing (Ali et al., 2021; Apuke & Omar, 2020; Balakrishnan et al., 2021; Luo et al., 2020; Phoong et al., 2021; Sampat & Raj, 2022; Seo et al., 2019). We found that self-promotion and fear of missing out are the two most significant variables that are most likely to contribute to the action of fake news sharing on social media, suggesting that both variables may have a significant part in future studies related to user motivation and fake news sharing. From the context of political issues in Malaysia, the sharing of fake news is most likely to keep people informed and jeopardise the reputation of specific political organisations or figures, which influence the behaviour of political selection through rhetorical means in the event of an election such as Malaysia's General Election (GE). In addition, the behaviour of sharing fake news on this type of content is more likely to be widespread than other content as political issues generally affect every Malaysian population and easily catch their attention. The findings imply that people share fake news on political issues without verifying the news content themselves.

As opposed to many other studies conducted regarding the behaviour of sharing fake news, our study concluded that gender is not associated with the difference in the relationship between user motivation and sharing fake news on political issues. However, the comparison test was not significant and unreliable; therefore, it cannot be assumed that socio-demographic factors have no influence whatsoever. It can be implied that if the comparison is significant, the difference can be identified and further extended to other studies which found the socio-demographic factor influences the relationship between user motivation and fake news sharing (Alqahs et al., 2023; Balakrishnan et al., 2022; De Araújo et al., 2021; Jain & Pradhan, 2020; Rampersad & Althiyabi, 2019; Shahid et al., 2022).

This research study further extends the application of the Uses and Gratification Theory as a medium to determine the behaviour of social media usage and the behaviour of fake news sharing (Apuke & Omar, 2020). This is found by identifying the psychological motivation for using social media as motivation and justification for sharing fake news on social platforms. For example, this study found that self-promotion and fear of missing out help users to promote themselves as a credible source of information, which creates a sense of belonging on social media platforms and fulfils the gratification of attention from other social media users. Unfortunately, this will complicate countering the spread of fake news as the news is shared widely and drastically.

## **Practical Implications**

Based on our findings, we suggest prevention of sharing fake news on social media. First, regarding self-promotion, we should advise social media users to be aware and careful of the information they share on social media. While it is true that most social media users are aware of their actions and the information they share, there are still many users who disregard such awareness and blindly share any information – including fake news – to promote themselves as a credible source of information. Should they share falsified news, they would invoke negative perspectives towards the issue and trigger drastic polarisation of opinions among the population in the name of digital reputation. Second, our results show that socialisation and altruism have positive relations with fake news-sharing behaviour on political issues in Malaysia. This suggests that social media users do not bother with the information they share with others as long as they can assist people on the news and socialise with other users. Hence, we encourage social media users to be responsible for using social media platforms by sharing only genuine news with others during interactions to avoid misunderstandings and information catastrophes.

Overall, we suggest that government intervention be implemented to counter the circulation of fake news on social media. Such interventions may include cooperation between the Malaysian government and social media platforms. Theoretically, this allows both agencies to restrict any falsified information from reaching social media users, and this could improve the awareness and digital literacy of the users. This will reduce the circulation of fake news on political issues, such as believing in false opinions and creating stereotypes that will create division in the population's opinions, causing political instability, which can affect the overall country's image on the international stage. At the same time, this allows accurate information to be always available for news consumers and reduces the possibility of fake news circulation on social media in an information crisis.

### **Limitations and Suggestions for Further Studies**

This study has several limitations that affect the outcome of the research procedure. First, the research is limited to the Malaysian population. Future researchers could extend the study to other democratic countries such as Singapore or Indonesia to determine if fake news sharing on political issues in such demographics is also a concern. Second, the research used a small number of respondents and a general sampling technique to determine whether there is a difference in socio-demographic factors towards user behaviour of fake news sharing. Future researchers could instead use a larger number of responses and quota sampling during data collection to fairly distribute the population group according to the socio-demographic factors when analysing comparison tests. This should theoretically produce a more accurate result to identify differences based on socio-demographic factors. In addition, future researchers could consider using alternative socio-demographic factors such as occupation, social media platform preferences and political party preferences, as these factors have previously shown noticeable differences in fake news sharing behaviour, as suggested by Mena (2019) and Pundir et al. (2021).

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