

Beyond the Click: How Source Credibility Moderates the Impact of Informational and Social Needs on Fake News Sharing among Social Media Users in Malaysia

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Abstract

The proliferation of fake news on social media presents a significant threat to democratic integrity and public trust. This study examines the informational and social gratifications that drive fake news sharing, focusing on Malaysian social media users. Anchored in the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), the research investigates three predictors of social needs (homophily, status seeking, and socializing) and three predictors of informational needs, (altruism, information seeking, and information sharing) —and assesses the moderating role of perceived source credibility. A quantitative survey was conducted with 302 respondents selected via purposive and snowball sampling. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was employed to test the proposed relationships. The results show that homophily, status seeking, altruism, and information sharing significantly influence fake news sharing, while socialising and information seeking do not. Moreover, perceived source credibility moderates the impact of status seeking and information sharing, suggesting that trust in the source can mitigate some motivations behind fake news dissemination. The findings contribute to the growing body of misinformation research by extending UGT with the moderating effect of source credibility and contextualizing fake news behaviour within a Southeast Asian setting. This study provides practical implications for media literacy initiatives, platform design, and policy interventions aimed at reducing the spread of misinformation.

Keywords: fake news, social media, uses and gratifications theory, source credibility, Malaysia, misinformation

1. Introduction

The spread of fake news remains a global menace. The World Economic Forum continues to list misinformation as a top-tier global risk, with 51% of experts predicting further declines in information quality (World Economic Forum, 2024; Herrero-Diz et al., 2019). Users tend to share updates without confirming their authenticity, making platforms fertile grounds for the spread of fake news (Bondielli & Marcelloni, 2019; Zubiaga et al., 2018). Information seeking and information sharing are some of the core functions of social media engagement, or else these platforms will not be lively or survive. Studies show that information needs and social needs are the major activities that keep social media users active on the various platforms (Khan & Idris, 2019; Apuke & Omar, 2021; BalaChenet al., 2021). However, many still share unverified content, for instance, AI-generated fake news spreads with similar rapidity, even

when perceived accuracy differs (Bashardoust et al., 2024).

Like many other Southeast Asian countries, Malaysia's digital landscape is highly connected, with social media penetration reaching approximately 78.5%, 26.80 million users on platforms such as Facebook, X, Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp (Datareportal, 2024). These figures are no surprise due to the pandemic, which shows a significant rise since 2020. In Malaysia, circulation of fake news are thriving on daily basis through personal chatting app such as WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger (Yatid, 2010; Tobergte & Curtis, 2013). Although existing research has explored the causes, spread, and detection of fake news (Tandoc et al., 2018; Shu et al., 2019; Ahmed et al., 2022) and media literacy campaigns (Duffy et al., 2019; Creech et al., 2018; Nelson & Taneja, 2018), relatively few studies have investigated the information and social needs influence fake news sharing in multicultural, non-Western contexts, like Malaysia.

This paper explores the role of information needs (information sharing, homophily, and information seeking) and social needs (altruism, socializing, and status seeking) on fake news sharing with a full focus on the Malaysian context, because the data of the study were collected in Malaysia to fill the existing gap. Furthermore, to the best of our knowledge, no past study on fake news has employed structural equation modelling (SEM) to study the effects of social needs and information needs on the fake news sharing. Rooted in Uses and Gratification theory (U&G) (Blumler, 1979; Ruggiero, 2009), this study offers theoretical insight and practical guidance for policymakers, media professionals, and users navigating Malaysia's evolving digital media environment.

3.0. Research model and hypotheses

The focus of this research is to examine how social needs and information needs influence fake news sharing among social media users. while assessing the moderating role of perceived source credibility. The theoretical background for this study is designed on the assumptions of Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which asserts that audiences actively select media to fulfil specific psychological and social need (Ruggiero, 2000). UGT has been widely applied to empirical studies to explore media use motivations, including news sharing on social platforms e.g. (Fletcher & Park, 2017; Lee & Ma, 2022). UGT posits that people engage with media not passively but to satisfy needs such as identity expression, socialisation, information exchange, and personal enhancement (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch,

1974; Sundar & Limperos, 2013). They highlighted that UGT explains how individuals' needs are gratified by media and how gratifications reconstruct such individuals' needs.

Most recent scholarship (Omar et al., 2023) reaffirms UGT's relevance in the context of interactive new media in Malaysia, and found that intrinsic motivations (e.g. altruism, information sharing) and extrinsic factors (e.g. homophily, trust in network) significantly predict fake news sharing. Consequently, they also highlight altruism, status seeking, and homophily as especially potent drivers of misinformation, consistent with UGT that focus on user-centred motives. Furthermore, Zeng, Lo & Li (2023) show that source credibility moderates how people respond to corrective messages, demonstrating that perceived trustworthiness is a crucial filter in the sharing decision process.

However, this study applies UGT to explain not just why people share fake news, but when and under what conditions their motivations are tempered by trust considerations. This fills a literature gap, by incorporating the most well-known factors of Uses and Gratification Theory discussed and recognised by many scholars in various social media literature are information needs (homophily, information sharing and information seeking) and social needs (socializing, status seeking and altruism), and perceived source credibility,

3.1. Homophily gratification and fake news sharing

In this study, homophily is defined as the extent to which two or many individuals that who are socially connected and share similarity in some features, such as level of education, religion, status and ideology, in a situation where people are given freedom to relate with any one among

many individuals, there is no doubt they will choose to interact with anyone who is like them (Rogers et al., 2019). However, the similarity can be ascribed to various issues like attitudes, levels of education, type of business and status. In a homophilous relationship the interaction between similar people takes place at a higher rate than among people who are not similar in culture, faith, attitude and ideology (Ibarra, 2015). One of the consequences of homophily in social interaction is the sharing of false news (misleading information) and this affect the content and also lead to the partiality of the news disseminated on social media platforms (Abreu & Jeon, 2019). We thus hypothesised that:

H1: *Homophily gratification* is positively associated with fake news sharing on social

media. **3.2. Status seeking gratification need and fake news sharing**

Status seeking refers to how social media users are sharing information on social network platforms that enhances their social prestige or reputation among peers. Studies show that individuals actively disseminate information on social platforms to gain recognition and reinforce their self-image (Long Ma, 2014). For example, Thompson et al. (2020) found that users are drawn to share content they perceive will boost their credibility and status within their community. A recent study by Le Dinh and Xiao (2025) focusing on Gen Z's news sharing confirms that status-seeking is a major driver as participants reported sharing information to improve their fame and social reputation, thus enhancing self-esteem. Echoing this, Yang et al. (2022) demonstrated that during the COVID-19 pandemic, users were more likely to share health-related news to present themselves as informed and responsible. Similarly, Malik et al. (2021) observed that social media serves as a tool for self-enhancement where sharing takes place with the hope of peer approval and greater social influence. Social media users share news to gain social approval or boost social interconnection which in turn lead to fake news sharing at the same time (Bright, 2016). Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H2: *Status seeking gratification* is positively associated with fake news sharing on social media.

3.3. Socialising gratification and fake news sharing

The concept of socializing was defined by Thompson et al (2019) as the passion for interaction. However, socializing was also described as the need to communicate and interconnect with others, this could solve satisfy the need for belonging and fitting (Whiting & Williams, 2013). Social needs gratification refers to the desire of individuals to be accepted as a member of group or family (Lee & Ma, 2012). In study conducted by Ham et al (2019) it was discovered that individuals with high socializing attitude tend to share more information on social media.

However, socialising gratification was found as significant predictor of fake news on social media (Apuke & Omar, 2020a). In relation to this, we conclude that individuals that

were motivated to share information or news on social media in order to satisfy socializing gratification are fond of sharing of contents from unsubstantiated source. Hence the following hypothesis was proposed.

H3: *Socializing gratification* is positively associated with fake news sharing on social media.

3.4. Altruism need and fake news sharing

Altruism is described as a process of unrestricted kindness to others without expecting and hoping to get a return, it involves provision of help and attaining a sense of gratification from the act regardless of whether the action will be rewarded in return (Ma & Chan, 2014). Kankanhalli et al (2005) described altruism as an instinct of deriving enjoyment for helping others. In several instances, people help others without getting anything in return, and it was discovered that individuals who share concrete information may do so due to pro-social manners (Hung et al., 2011). However, Ma and Chan (2014) discovered that altruism as a significant factor that predict online gathering and distribution of news and information to other social network platforms users without expecting compensation. Furthermore, social media users are in the practice of sharing information to assist others without verifying the authenticity of the sources of what they are sharing, as far as they are convinced that the information is useful to the people (Apuke & Omar, 2020a). The relationship between altruism and fake news has been discovered by the recent study conducted by Apuke and Omar (2020b). This was the reason we proposed the following hypothesis.

H4: *Altruism need* is positively associated with fake news sharing on social media

3.5 Information seeking need and fake news sharing

Information searching refers to the degree to which social media outlets may provide users with facts and accurate information (Lee & Ma, 2012). Previous studies have shown that knowledge seeking satisfaction is linked to the media consumption behaviour of consumers. Li (2011) reported that the knowledge sought was the key promoter of web-based use in news consumption activities. In addition, the demand for information was substantially linked to the use of online news due to an individual's desire to track current issues (Lee et al., 2011). Information seeking is one of the factors that is strongly associated to news sharing from Uses

and Gratification lens. There are many studies that found significant relationship between information seeking and fake news sharing on social media (Apuke & Omar, 2020a). This is due unsubstantiated news and information that are shared and reshared on daily basis by anonymous persons and other social media users that are either desperately seeking for information or motivated to share news on social media to provide others with information, and this act is put into practice without looking at the veracity of the news or reliability of its sources (Duffy et al., 2019). Hence, we came up with the following hypothesis.

H5: *Information seeking* need is positively associated to fake news sharing on social

media. **3.6 Information sharing need and fake news sharing**

Information (cognitive) needs are the desire for increasing knowledge, information and understanding (Blumler, 1979). Social media users share news online in order to achieved certain gratifications motive by looking at the types of news content more likely to be circulated online such as news that arouses anxiety, fun, and anger or that contains harmful, controversial,

credible, and interesting content (Kim & Ihm, 2019). The needs for information sharing and seeking were found to be motive for news sharing on social media (Thompson et al., 2019). From the perspective of the previous studies, we proposed:

H6: *Information sharing need* is positively associated to fake news sharing on social media

3.7 The moderating effect of perceived source credibility

Source credibility in this study, is operationalized as the perceived believability of information which is contingent to the trustworthiness and expertise of the source by the receiver (Metzger & Flanagin, 2013). And Prihandini et al (2018) operationalized the concept of message (news) credibility by describing credibility of information with accurate, believable and authentic. Source credibility is a multi-dimensional concept with can refer to the source of the news or the medium. Furthermore, Hur et al (2017) defined Source credibility as “the extent to which information source is perceived to be believable, competent, and trustworthy by information recipients”. Previous study has found that perceived source credibility can change a reader’s attitude, and that news shared by a highly perceived trustworthy source will has a significant effect on the receiver (Luo et al., 2013). Therefore, the news consumers on social media are

more motivated to use, accept and implement the views of the information. From this perspective, we proposed that:

H7a: The higher the perceived source credibility, the less homophily predicts fake news sharing.

H7b: The higher the perceived source credibility, the less status seeking predicts fake news sharing.

H7c: The higher the perceived source credibility, the less socializing predicts fake news sharing.

H7d: The higher the perceived source credibility, the altruism predicts fake news sharing.

H7e: The higher the perceived source credibility, the less information seeking predicts fake news sharing.

H7f: The higher the perceived source credibility, the less information sharing predicts fake news sharing.

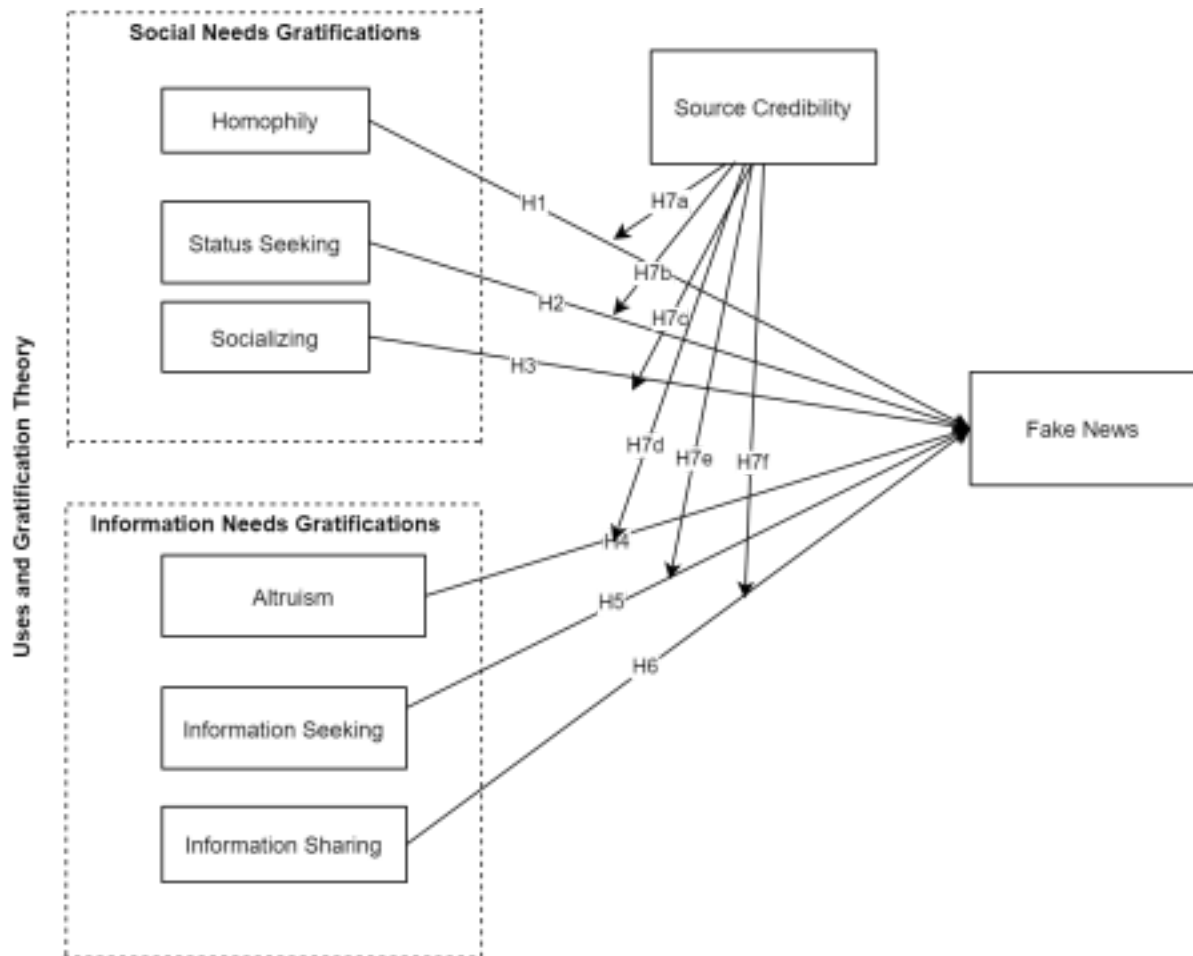


Figure1: Research Model

4.0. Methodology

This part describes the technique employed to achieve the objectives of this research and it also comprises the procedure used for gathering data, and sample we selected for the study. It however contains the construct of the measurements.

4.1. Collection of Data

The primary purpose of our research was to examine the factors that contribute to fake news sharing among social media users in Malaysia with a moderating role of perceived source credibility. Data for this study were collected through an online survey using Google form, which enabled the researcher to gather statistically significant responses from a large number of participants (Ochieng, 2009). The study employed two non-probability sampling technique: purposive sampling and snowball sampling. Purposive sampling is defined by Babbie (2012), involves selecting participants based on the researcher's judgement that they are well-suited to provide relevant information for addressing the study's research questions and achieving its objectives. We purposively selected the samples of the research by setting three different

criteria a respondent must fulfil before participating in the research such as he/she must be 18-year-old and above, must be Malaysian and must own a social media platform (s). The link and barcode of the questionnaire were posted on various social media platforms and were also share to some respondents that possess the criteria to participate in the survey via scanner and a page was created on Facebook for that purpose only.

The second sampling technique employed in order to attain the goals of the study was snowball sampling, which is also known as chain referral sampling (Babbie, 2010). Using the snowballing technique, this study selected a group of individuals who fit the criteria, and they were asked to refer the link or barcode of the questionnaire to their circle of social network who met the same participation criteria. The method is also used to study respondents that are hard to reach, and it can also expand the sample size, scope of the study, reduce costs, and time (Baltar & Brunet, 2012). Nevertheless, the online sampling technique was criticised for its inability to generalize the findings of the survey and the tendency to error in the judgment of the researcher, but still it is one of the least cost-effective and time-effective sampling methods available (Alvi, 2016). To reduce sampling bias in the sampling method, Kirchherr and Charles (2018) recommended for the increase of a sample in any online survey. The sample of this study was calculated using the G*power analysis, resulting in a sample of 302 respondents.

The results on demographic variables illustrate that the female respondents (52.1%) were slightly higher than the male respondents (47.5%). The slight gap between gender may reflect the uneven use of social media between genders which usually exist in South Asia and in Malaysia in particular (Hanafi, 2019). In terms of age, majority of the respondents (73.2%) were between the age of 26-35 years old (30.8%) and 18-25 years old (42.4%) categories, where a small number of the respondents (1.3%) reported to be between the ages 56 and above. Half of the respondents were degree holders (51.2%). Distribution of respondents according to races shows the maximum number of respondents were Malay (53.5%), followed by Chinese (29%) and Indians (17.2%). In relation to the time spend on social media per day, the findings reveal that more than a quarter of the respondents (42.1%) spent 10-12 hours on social media, while only a small number of respondents spent (11.9%) spent between 1 to 3 hours per day on social media.

Table 1: Results of sample demographics (n = 302)

Variables Frequency Percentage (%) Gender

Male 144 47.5

Female 158 52.1

Age

18-25years 93 30.8

26-35years 128 42.4

36-45years 61 20.2

46-55years 16 5.3

56 and above. 4 1.3

Education

Bachelor's degree 29 9.6

Diploma 86 28.4

Postgraduate 129 42.6

SPM and below 59 19.5

Races

Malay 162 53.5

Chinese 88 29.0

Indian 52 17.2

Time spent on social**media**

1-3hrs 36 11.9

4-6hrs 65 21.5

7-9hrs 74 24.5

10-12hrs 127 42.1

4.2. Measurements of Construct

This study had eight constructs, one (1) dependent variable, six (6) independents variables, and one (1) moderating variable. And the measures of the study were reflective while the items of this research were adapted from previous studies. The homophily gratification was adapted from the research of Long et al (2014). The items of socialising, status seeking, information sharing, fake news and perceived source credibility were all adapted from the

previous study of Thompson et al (2019). However, we adapted the items of altruism from two previous works (Thompson et al., 2019 & Ma & Chan, 2014). And information seeking items were adapted from the study of Khan (2017). The whole of the items was measured using 5-point Likert scale stating from 1= Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree. Furthermore, in order to reduce the ambiguity of the items, we did a pilot study with thirty (n = 30) samples prior to the real data collection and we also submitted the measurements to experienced experts for validation. Based on the result obtained from the pilot study, we rephrased some of the items to make them more precise and simpler.

5.0 Data analysis

We used structural equation modelling (SEM) to analyse the model of this and observed the two-step method for approximating the measurement and structural model suggested by experts (Hair et al., 2019).

5.1 The measurement model

The analysis of all constructs in our research model can be seen in Table 2. We studied two things in this model, which are convergent validity and discriminant validity. Convergent validity is used to measure the degree to which each measurement item is associated with its matching and they are all above the threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019). As can be seen in Table 2, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was above the threshold of 0.5, and the Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha exceeded (CA) 0.7 (Hair et al., 2017). However, Table 3 indicates the factor loading and cross-loading of all the constructs, and all the loadings of are more than the minimum standard of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2019). Therefore, these constructs indicate enough convergent and discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Therefore, the measurement model has attained the desired validity, and this implies we have no problems with discriminant validity at all.

Table 2: The result of convergent validity.

Constructs code Items *M SD* Outer loading

Cronbach Alpha

CR AVE VIF Source

Homophily HOM1 I share news with social media users because their interests are similar to mine

HOM2 I share news with social media users because they express attitude similar to mine.

HOM3 I share news with social media users that their backgrounds are similar to mine

HOM4 I share news on social media because most people I connect with in this platform have a lot in common.
3.62 0.90 0.83 0.85 0.94 0.691 1.696 Long et al., (2014)

3.57 0.93 0.85 2.151 3.51 1.03 0.89 2.574 3.49 0.99 0.81 1.835

Status seeking SS1 It helps me feel important 3.19 1.20 0.82 0.90 0.92 0.718 1.744 SS2 It helps me to gain status 3.33 1.10 0.89 3.21

SS3 It helps me to look good when sharing news.
3.53 1.11 0.84 2.423
Thompson et al., (2019)

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SS4 It helps me gain support and respect 3.33 1.10 0.85 2.518 SS5 I feel peer pressure to participate 3.53 1.11 0.87 2.784

Socializing SOC1 I can interact with others when sharing news.

SOC2 I can exchange ideas with others efficiently.
3.99 0.84 0.87 0.90 0.81 0.785 2.146 Thompson et al., (2019)

3.98 0.81 0.86 2.429

SOC3 It helps me keep in touch with others. 4.00 0.86 0.86 2.138 **Altruism** ALT1 It helps me to orient others 3.92 0.95 0.83 0.89 0.91 0.72 1.817 Thompson et al.

ALT2 I feel good to help others to solve their problems.
4.03 0.86 0.86 2.406 (2019)

ALT3 It helps me to inspire others 3.98 0.89 0.85 2.315

Ma and Chan

ALT4 It helps me to participate in tasks to help others.

3.92 0.97 0.83 2.193

(2014).

Information

INFS1 I tell others little bit about myself 4.29 0.92 0.87 0.89 0.91 0.76 1.395 Thompson et

sharing

I share personal information about myself

3.95 0.76 0.88 1.395 al.

INFS2 (2019)

Information Seeking

IS1 I get information about things that interest me.

3.99 0.81 0.79 0.87 0.91 0.86 2.008 (Khan, 2017)

IS2 I learn how to do things 3.92 0.87 0.83 2.017 IS3 I find out what is new out there 4.03

0.91 0.86 2.417

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Fake news sharing

FNS1 I share news stories on social media posted by netizens/other social media users

4.29 0.92 0.84 0.86 0.91 0.78 1.826 Thompson et al.

(2019) FNS2 I often share news stories without 2.33 1.06 0.91 2.807

paying attention to the sources

FNS3

I share news stories written by anonymous person on social media

3.32 1.08 0.89 2.550

Source

SC1 I think social media is trustworthy 4.01 0.88 0.87 0.91 0.78 0.71 1.628 Thompson et

Credibility

SC2 I think social media is believable 4.07 0.85 1.595

al.

(2019)

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Table 3: Discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker Criterion).

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	1	ALT			
2 FNS	0.766												
3 HOM	0.640	0.864											
4 INFS	0.732	0.800	0.829										
5 IS	0.834	0.610	0.552	0.796									
6 SC	0.039	0.067	0.082	0.085	0.95								
7 SOC	0.767	0.621	0.576	0.662	0.823	0.832	8	SS	0.681	0.829	0.527	0.806	0.623
0.100	0.794	Table shows loading or cross-loading > 0.3											

5.2 The structural model

5.2 Structural Model

To assess the structural model, path coefficients, effect sizes (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2) were examined. The significance of the path coefficients was determined using a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples, as recommended by Hair et al. (2019). The model's coefficient of determination (R^2) for fake news sharing was 0.73, indicating that 73% of the variance in fake news sharing behavior is explained by the predictor variables included in this study.

5.2.1 Direct Effects

Table 4 presents the direct effects of the six independent variables on fake news sharing. Among the social needs, homophily ($\beta = 0.174, t = 3.752, p < 0.001, f^2 = 0.153$) and status seeking ($\beta = 0.384, t = 6.232, p < 0.001, f^2 = 0.521$) had significant and positive effects on fake news sharing, supporting H1 and H2. In contrast, socializing was not significantly related to fake news sharing ($\beta = -0.056, t = 0.788, p > 0.05$), hence H3 was not supported.

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For the information needs, altruism showed a significant positive effect on fake news sharing ($\beta = 0.156, t = 2.118, p < 0.05, f^2 = 0.023$), supporting H4. Similarly, information sharing significantly predicted fake news sharing ($\beta = 0.308, t = 5.024, p < 0.001, f^2 = 0.003$), thus supporting H6. However, information seeking did not exhibit a significant relationship ($\beta = 0.033, t = 0.545, p > 0.05$), and H5 was not supported.

These results suggest that both social gratifications (homophily and status seeking) and informational gratifications (altruism and information sharing) are strong predictors of fake news dissemination, while socializing and active information seeking do not appear to influence this behavior significantly.

Direct effects

Hypothesis	β	T value	P Values	Confidence intervals		f^2	Q^2	Decision
				5.00%	95.00%			
HOM -> FNS	0.174	3.752**	0.000	0.104	0.255	0.153	0.3	Supported
SS -> FNS	0.384	6.232**	0.000	-0.194	0.219	0.521	1	Supported
SOC -> FNS	-	0.056	0.788	0.215	-0.186	0.046	0.019	Not Supported
ALT -> FNS	0.156	2.118**	0.033	0.017	0.272	0.023	0.474	Supported

					Not	
IS -> FNS	0.033	0.545	0.293	-0.127	0.185	Supported
	0.01	3				
INFS -> FNS		0.308	5.024* *			0.00
		0.000	-0.059	0.232		Supported

5.2.2 Interaction Effects: Moderating Role of Source Credibility

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The moderating effects of perceived source credibility on the relationships between the independent variables and fake news sharing were also tested. The interaction terms were computed using the two-stage approach, as recommended by Hair et al. (2017), and their significance was tested through bootstrapping.

Among the six hypothesized moderating relationships, only two were supported:

- Status seeking \times Source credibility significantly moderated fake news sharing ($\beta = 0.134$, $t = 1.521$, $p < 0.10$, $f^2 = 0.020$), supporting H7b. This indicates that for individuals who perceive the source to be credible, the effect of status seeking on fake news sharing is weaker.
- Information sharing \times Source credibility also showed a significant negative interaction ($\beta = -0.123$, $t = 1.664$, $p < 0.05$, $f^2 = 0.221$), supporting H7f. This suggests that source credibility buffers the likelihood of sharing fake news when driven by an intent to inform others.

The remaining moderation hypotheses (H7a, H7c, H7d, and H7e) were not supported, indicating that source credibility did not significantly moderate the effects of homophily, socializing, altruism, or information seeking on fake news sharing.

These findings point to the selective effectiveness of credibility-based interventions: individuals driven by altruism or social bonding may remain susceptible to misinformation even when the source appears trustworthy, while those motivated by status or cognitive intent

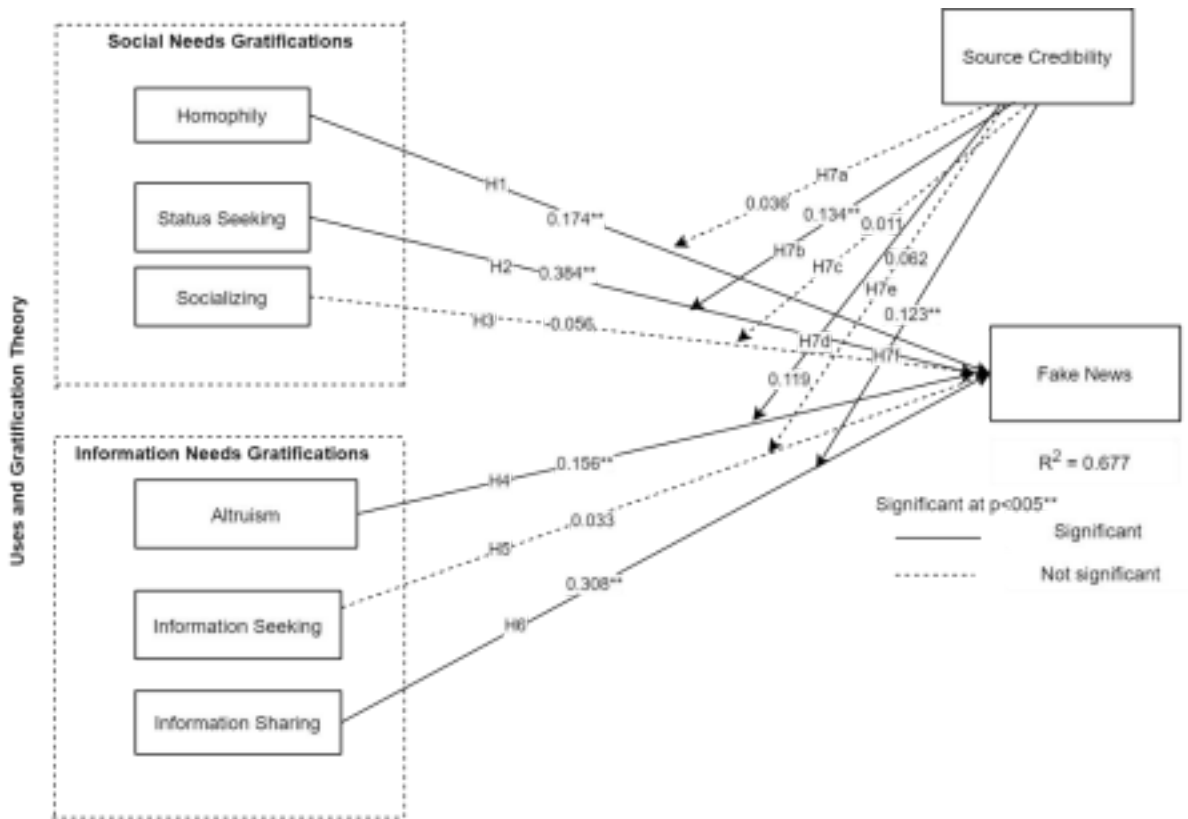
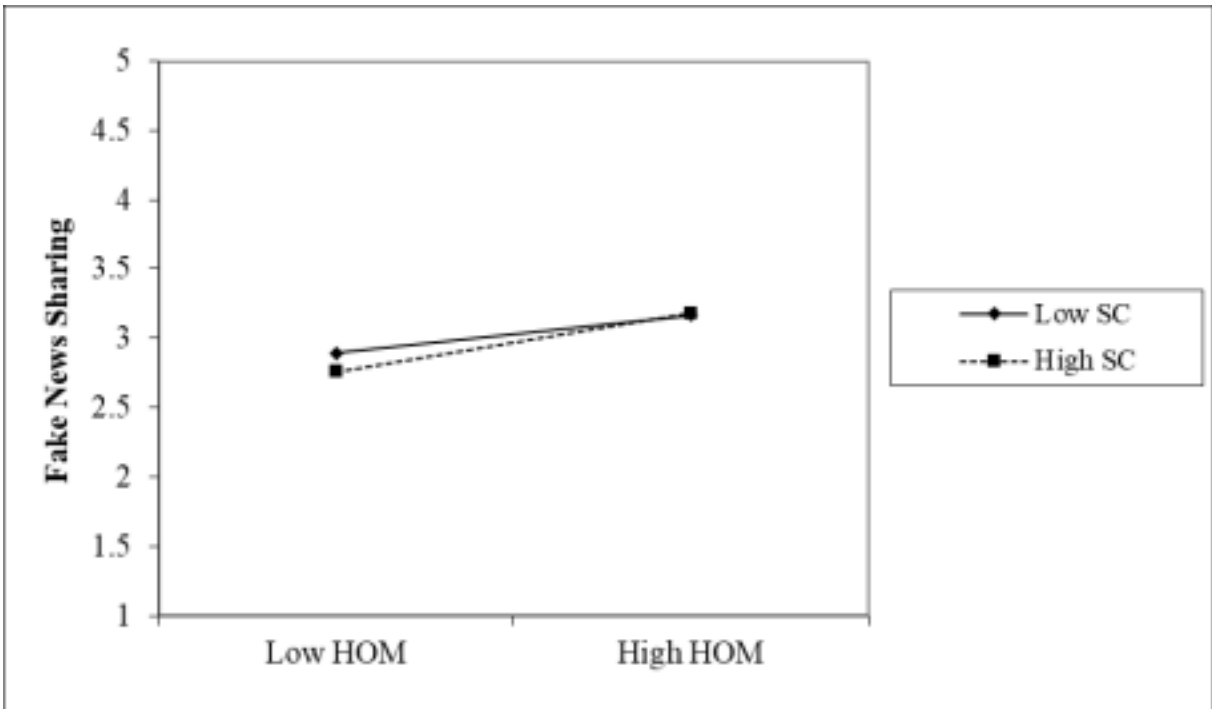
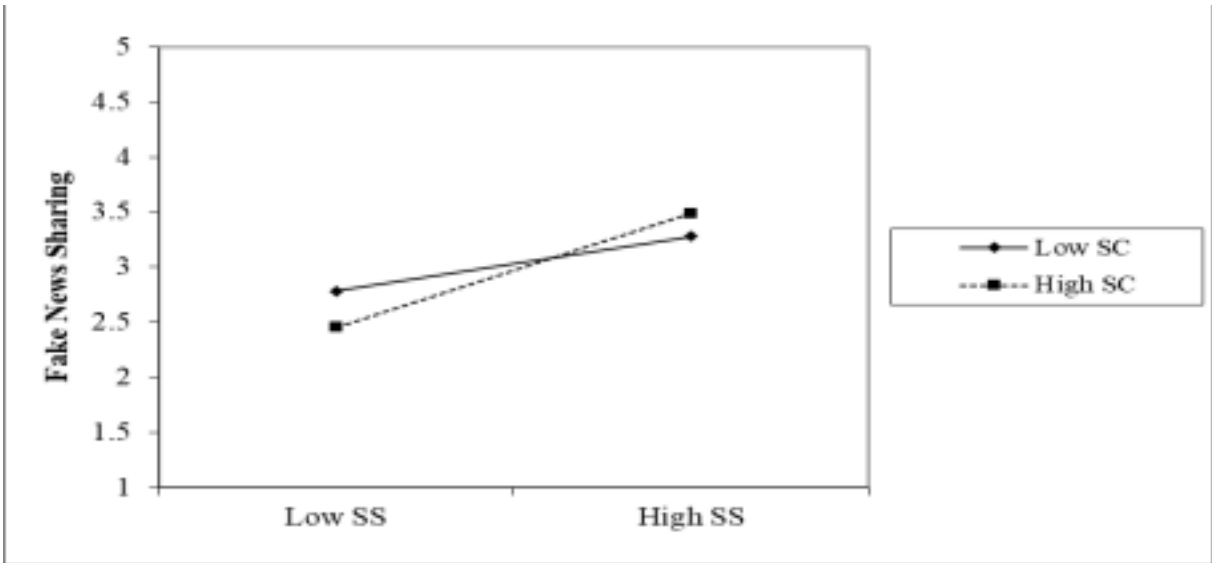


Figure 2: Result of the Structural Model

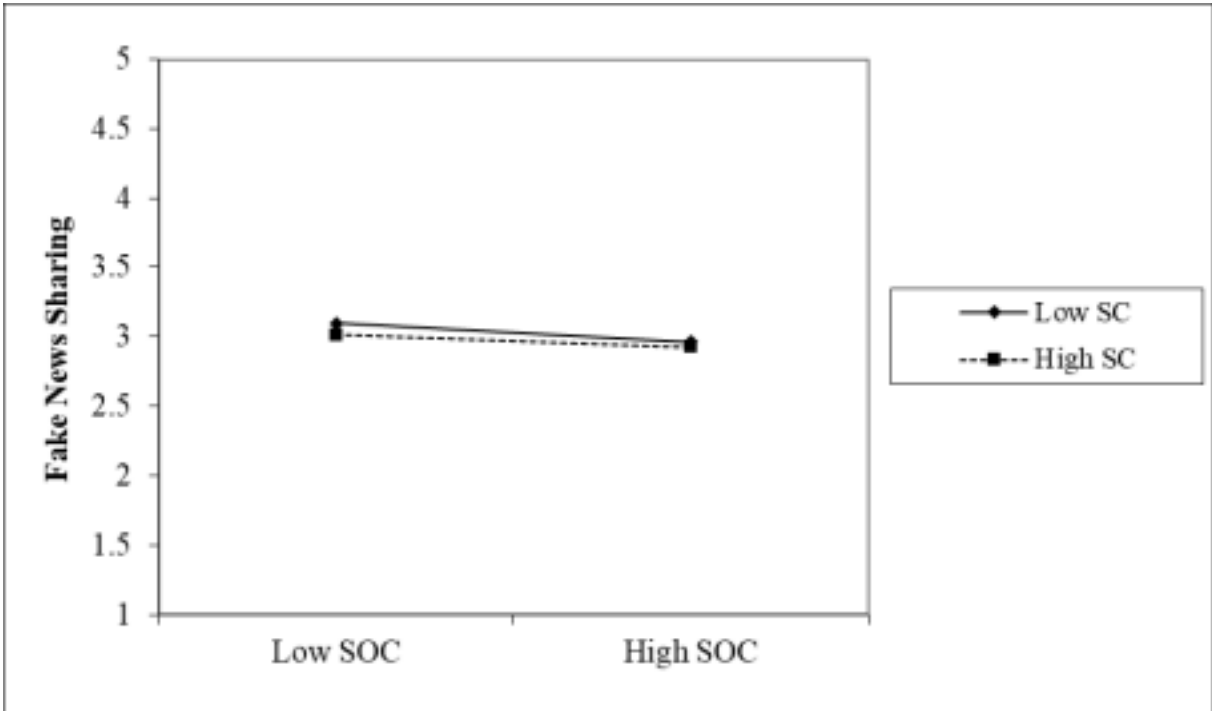
H7a: The higher the perceived source credibility, the less homophily predicts fake news sharing.



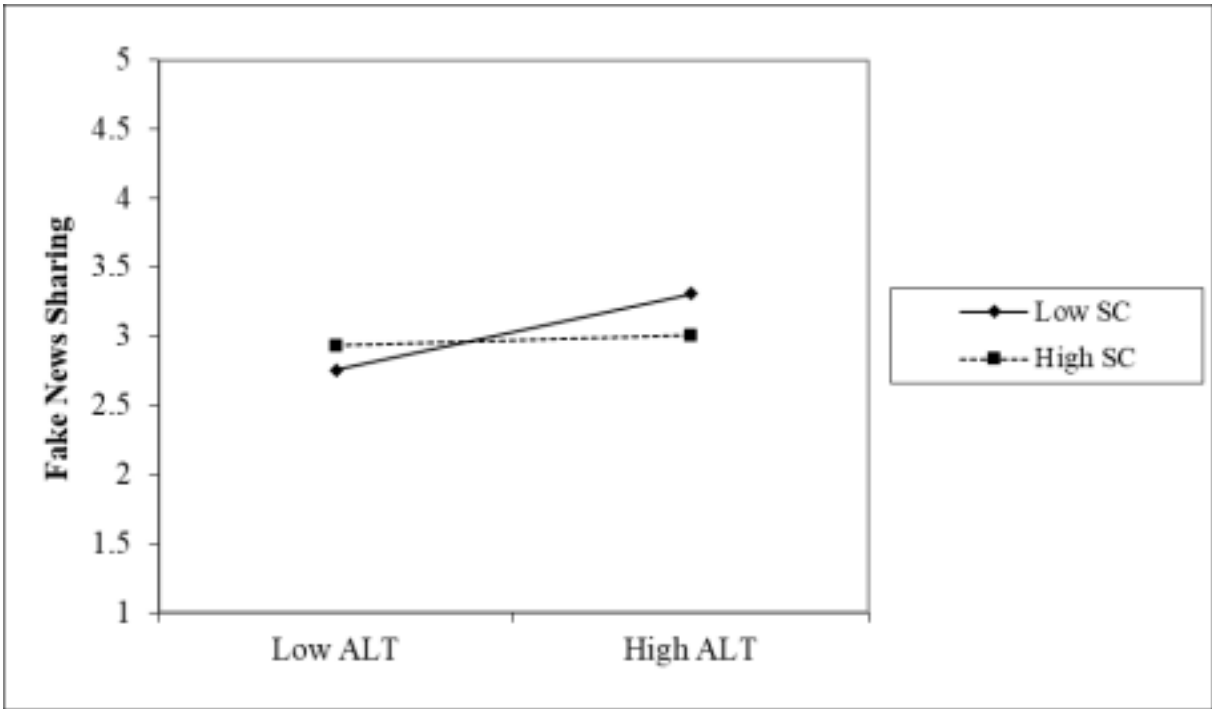
H7b: The higher the perceived source credibility, the less status seeking predicts fake news sharing.



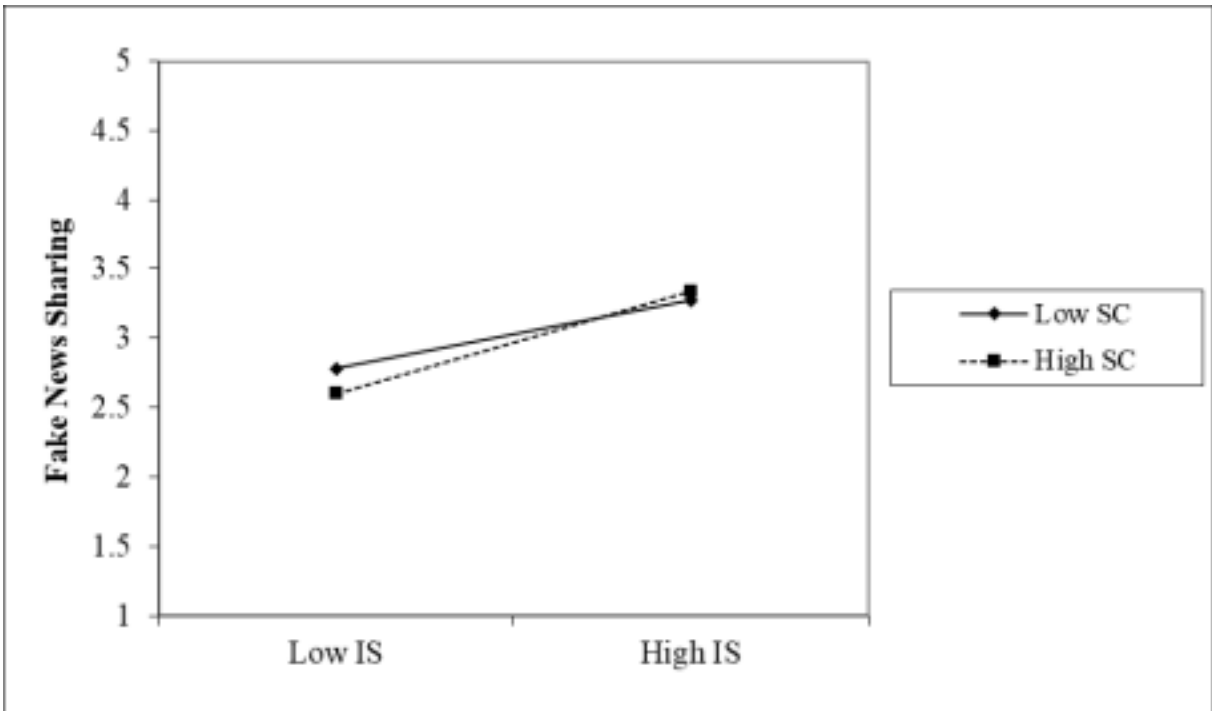
H7c: The higher the perceived source credibility, the less socializing predicts fake news sharing.



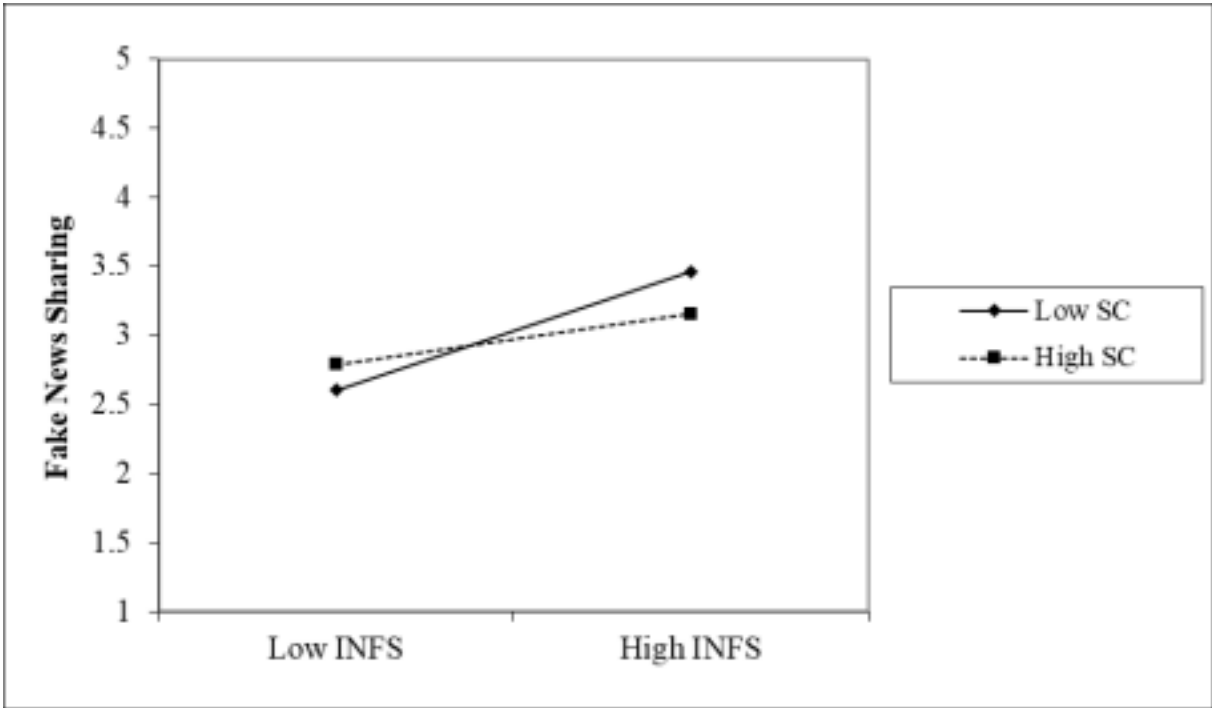
H7d: The higher the perceived source credibility, the altruism predicts fake news sharing.



H7e: The higher the perceived source credibility, the less information seeking predicts fake news sharing.



H7f: The higher the perceived source credibility, the less information sharing predicts fake news sharing.



6.0 Discussion

The current study investigated the predictors of fake news sharing among Malaysian social media users using the lens of Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), while examining the

moderating effect of perceived source credibility. Our findings yield several noteworthy insights into how specific social needs and information needs gratifications influence user behaviour in the Malaysia.

Among the social need gratifications, both **homophily** and **status seeking** significantly predicted users' tendency to share fake news. These findings reaffirm earlier studies by Halberstam and Knight (2016) and Abreu and Jeon (2019), who noted that people are more likely to accept and share information from others who share similar backgrounds or values. In Malaysian multicultural society, where ethnic and ideological groupings are prominent, such behaviour may reflect a desire to reinforce in-group identity and shared norms. Similarly, status-seeking individuals may share sensational news to gain attention or affirmation from their social circles (Apuke & Omar, 2020a).

Notably, **socializing**, did not emerge as a significant predictor, deviating from Ham et al.'s (2019) and Sun and Xie's (2024) findings. Both studies found that users often share content to maintain social relationships or foster online interaction. However, in the Malaysian context, our findings suggest that sharing misinformation may not necessarily stem from a desire for social interaction, but from more targeted motives like gaining recognition or asserting influence within social groups.

Among the information needs, **altruism** and **information sharing** were significant predictors of fake news behaviour. This affirms previous works that found pro-social intentions can unintentionally promote misinformation (Ma & Chan, 2014; Apuke & Omar, 2020b, Wan Abu Bakar et al., 2025). Meanwhile, **information seeking** did not predict fake news sharing, suggesting that users might be passive receivers rather than active searchers of content.

A key contribution of this study is the moderating effect of **perceived source credibility** that significantly weakened the effects of **status seeking** and **information sharing** on fake news dissemination. This suggests that when users perceive a source as trustworthy, they are more cautious and less likely to spread false information, especially when motivated by ego enhancing or altruistic gratifications. This supports Metzger and Flanagin's (2020) argument

that trust plays a vital gatekeeping role in digital information behaviours. As trust increases, users may feel more confident about the content accuracy and are more likely to pause before

acting on emotionally or socially driven motivations. This aligns with findings from Omar et al. (2023), who demonstrated that among Malaysian social media users, fake news awareness and credibility judgements significantly influence sharing behaviours. Taken together, these findings highlights the critical role of source credibility as a cognitive checkpoint that can override impulsive or well-meaning intentions, offering a valuable tool in curbing the spread of fake news.

7.0 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study contributes to the growing literature on digital misinformation by extending UGT with a source credibility framework. The integration of **credibility as a moderator** adds explanatory power to UGT in the context of misinformation—a dimension often overlooked in prior models. By testing social and information needs simultaneously, we advance a more comprehensive model of fake news behavior, especially within a Southeast Asian setting, which has been underrepresented in empirical misinformation research (Tandoc et al., 2018; Wasserman & Madrid-Morales, 2021).

Practically, the findings offer valuable guidance for misinformation interventions. Media literacy campaigns should target users driven by altruism or status motivations, helping them develop critical thinking skills and skepticism toward sensational content. Social media platforms could improve content verification systems and highlight source credibility cues more explicitly. Furthermore, policies addressing misinformation should be culturally contextualized, as motives and behaviors vary by region.

8.0 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study is not without limitations. First, the sample is limited to Malaysian social media users and may not generalize to other populations or cultural contexts. Second, the self-reported nature of the survey may introduce biases such as social desirability or recall errors. Third, we only examined source credibility as a moderator. Future studies should consider other potential

moderators, such as digital literacy, emotional reactivity, or political orientation (Pennycook & Rand, 2022).

Additionally, while our focus was on Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, platform-specific dynamics (e.g., algorithmic curation or content virality) were not considered. Future research could adopt multi-method approaches combining behavioral tracking with experimental manipulation to validate causality.

9.0 Conclusion

This study examined the effects of social and informational gratifications on fake news sharing in Malaysia and the moderating role of perceived source credibility. The results underscore that motives such as **status seeking**, **homophily**, **altruism**, and **information sharing** significantly drive fake news sharing behavior. More importantly, source credibility dampens some of these effects, suggesting a key leverage point for interventions. By situating this analysis in the Malaysian context and employing SEM, the study fills both theoretical and empirical gaps in fake news scholarship and offers pathways for targeted misinformation mitigation strategies.

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