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LIFESTYLE

Soc med 'narcissists' more likely to share fake news

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People with narcissistic tendencies and those suffering from "social media fatigue" are more susceptible to falling for and sharing "fake news," a recent study by Nanyang Technological University (NTU) in Singapore has found.

This study, which examined the connections between individuals' cognitive and personality traits and the surge of misinformation, collected data from 8,000 respondents across Singapore, the United States, Malaysia, China, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines. It also revealed that Filipinos were more inclined to perceive misinformation as accurate and share it on social media.

Assistant Professor Saifuddin Ahmed from NTU, one of the co-authors of the study, explained that the research aimed to highlight how "social media fatigue," characterised by exhaustion due to information overload from social media use, and traits like narcissism could inadvertently contribute to the spread of misinformation. Insights from this study could be used to shape preventive measures, emphasising the importance of social media literacy and initiatives to combat social media fatigue, Saifuddin added.

This research, published in the journal *Scientific Reports*, was conducted in collaboration with Muhammad Ehab Rasul, a PhD student at the University of California, Davis. The partnership addressed a gap in the current understanding of disinformation by examining how mental health factors can impact the information ecosystem.

Specifically, the study investigated how narcissism, often marked by a strong desire for attention, admiration, and feelings of uniqueness, could lead social media users to overestimate their ability to discern false information.

To assess social media fatigue, the study asked respondents to rate their agreement with five statements related to social media use, including whether they felt mentally exhausted or too tired to engage in other activities due to social media consumption.

The respondents were then asked to evaluate the accuracy of various false claims related to COVID-19, presented in a mock social media post format, and indicate their likelihood of sharing these claims.

Findings revealed that individuals with high levels of fatigue and narcissism were more prone to falling for and sharing misinformation. Surprisingly, this tendency also applied to individuals with both high cognitive skills and high levels of narcissism.

According to Saifuddin, individuals with high levels of fatigue may share misinformation as a way to seek attention and gain social influence without applying critical thinking.

This behavior is particularly relevant for misinformation characterised by sensational and controversial content that elicits strong emotional reactions. Additionally, excessive fatigue may amplify impulsiveness among individuals with low cognitive skills and narcissistic tendencies.

Given these findings, the researchers recommended that policymakers and social media companies adopt more targeted strategies to counter misinformation. These strategies should not only involve the regulation of fake news and the promotion of digital literacy but also include tailored approaches aimed at specific groups that are more susceptible to misinformation.