

The 6th Advances in Business Research International Conference 2024

DoubleTree Resort by Hilton Penang, Batu Ferringhi, Penang, Malaysia, 30 May 2024

Organised by: Faculty of Business and Management, UiTM Puncak Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

Exploring Fake News Sharing among Malaysian University Students: Role of Uses and Gratification Theory

**Wan Hashridz Rizal Wan Abu Bakar^{1*}, Abdul Rauf Ridzuan²,
Mohd Sufiean Hassan², Fahmi Zaidi Abd Razak³**

**Corresponding Author*

¹ Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia. ² Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Melaka Branch, Alor Gajah, Melaka, Malaysia, ³ Business Department, Faculty of Management & Informatics, Sultan Ahmad Shah Pahang Islamic University (UniPSAS) Kuantan, Pahang, Malaysia

hashridzrizal@gmail.com, abdulrauf@uitm.edu.my, mohdsufiean@uitm.edu.my, fahmizaidi@unipsas.edu.my
Tel: +6016-5531327

Abstract

Fake news, portrayed as accurate but actually false or misleading, spreads through fabricated stories, altered media, and automated programs. This study explores the dissemination of fake news among Malaysian university students using the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT). Data from 111 participants reveal how personal motivations, as identified by UGT, influence the spread of misinformation. The study highlights the link between individual motivations and fake news propagation by understanding students' media consumption reasons. These findings offer practical insights for policymakers and educators to develop strategies that combat misinformation and improve media literacy in academic settings.

Keywords: Fake news; Uses and Gratification Theory; Malaysian; universities student

eISSN: 2398-4287 © 2025. The Authors. Published for AMER by e-International Publishing House, Ltd., UK. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Peer-review under responsibility of AMER (Association of Malaysian Environment-Behaviour Researchers) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21834/e-bpj.v10iSI26.6788>

1.0 Introduction

Fake news denotes the propagation of inaccurate or deceptive information, whether contrived or factual, yet branded as false to undermine its credibility (Romaguera, 2023). It has historical origins and has progressed alongside technological progressions, emerging as a significant issue across various domains. The proliferation of fake news presents considerable obstacles in marketing, politics, journalism, and corporate data security, influencing consumer behaviour, reputations, and decision-making procedures (Arencibia et al., 2023). Proposed solutions encompass media literacy initiatives, technological interventions such as artificial intelligence, and recognizing individual vulnerability to misinformation based on personal characteristics and social impact (Morais da Silva et al., 2023). The distorted reality via fake news exposes underlying economic inconsistencies within capitalist frameworks, underscoring the necessity for critical examination and strategies to counteract its adverse impacts on society (Arencibia et al., 2023). A study by (Valencia-Arias et al., 2023) shows that disinformation greatly influences adolescents due to their restricted capacity for analytical thinking and frequent encounters with distorted content across various social platforms. Research indicates that teenagers frequently

eISSN: 2398-4287 © 2025. The Authors. Published for AMER and e-Bs by e-International Publishing House, Ltd., UK. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>). Peer-review under responsibility of AMER (Association of Malaysian Environment-Behaviour Researchers) DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21834/e-bpj.v10iSI26.6788>

exhibit a deficiency in discriminating genuine information from misinformation, resulting in a perception of being impervious to misleading data.

Moreover, according to Winiecki et al. (2023), adolescents tend to disseminate misinformation on online platforms due to various factors, including their inclination to increase consciousness within their social circle and the correspondence of the misinformation with their preconceived notions. Previous study by (Dulkiah, 2023), (Orhan, 2023), and (Pérez-Escoda, 2022) show that Higher education students are profoundly affected by the dissemination of inaccurate data on social networking sites. The findings from this study demonstrate that critical thinking dispositions and new media literacies are significantly influential in improving students' capacity to identify false information, with critical thinking exerting a more pronounced impact. A variety of research has delved into the motives for circulating fake news via the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), such as (Abu Bakar et al., 2022) (Sampat & Raj, 2022) and (Apuke & Omar, 2020).

The rapid proliferation of fake news is defined as disseminating inaccurate or deceptive information, whether fabricated or factual, but branded as false to undermine its credibility. It has become a critical issue in the digital age (Romaguera (2023). While fake news is not new, its impact has grown exponentially alongside technological advancements, becoming a pervasive problem across various domains, including marketing, politics, journalism, and corporate data security. The spread of fake news not only influences consumer behaviour and reputations but also disrupts decision-making processes, posing significant societal stability challenges (Arencibia et al., 2023).

In response to these challenges, scholars and practitioners have proposed several solutions. These include media literacy initiatives to enhance the public's ability to critically evaluate information, technological interventions such as artificial intelligence to detect and counteract misinformation, and understanding individual susceptibility to fake news based on personal characteristics and social influences (Morais da Silva et al., 2023). The distortion of reality through fake news also reveals underlying economic disparities within capitalist systems, emphasizing the need to critically examine the societal impacts of misinformation and develop effective strategies to mitigate its adverse effects (Arencibia et al., 2023).

A growing body of research highlights the particular vulnerability of adolescents to disinformation. For instance, Valencia-Arias et al. (2023) found that adolescents are significantly influenced by misinformation due to factors such as their limited capacity for critical thinking and their frequent exposure to distorted content across various social media platforms. Adolescents often struggle to distinguish between credible information and misinformation, which contributes to a false sense of immunity against misleading content. Moreover, Winiecki et al. (2023) observed that adolescents tend to spread misinformation online, driven by a desire to raise awareness within their social circles and the alignment of the misinformation with their pre-existing beliefs.

Similarly, studies have shown that higher education students are profoundly affected by the spread of inaccurate information on social networking sites. Research by (Dulkiah, 2023), (Orhan, 2023), and (Pérez-Escoda, 2022) indicates that critical thinking dispositions and new media literacies play a crucial role in enhancing students' ability to identify false information. Among these, critical thinking appears to have a more significant impact. This underscores the importance of fostering critical thinking and media literacy skills among students to combat the spread of fake news.

This study is grounded in the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) to better understand the motivations behind the dissemination of fake news. UGT posits that individuals actively seek out media to satisfy specific needs and desires, making it a suitable framework for exploring why people engage with and share misinformation. According to UGT, users are not passive consumers of media but are actively involved in the selection of content that fulfils their psychological and social needs.

Previous research has applied UGT to explore the motivations behind the sharing of fake news. For example, (Abu Bakar et al., 2022), (Sampat & Raj, 2022) and (Apuke & Omar, 2020) have identified various gratifications, such as the need for socialization, information sharing, and entertainment, as key drivers of fake news dissemination. This study explores the factors influencing the sharing of fake news among Malaysian university students using the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT). Specifically, it examines how different gratifications, such as pass time, information sharing and information seeking, motivate students to share fake news. By leveraging UGT, this research aims to provide a theoretical framework for understanding and mitigating the spread of misinformation in academic and digital environments.

2.0 Literature Review

The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) theory is centred around comprehending the reasons behind individuals' decisions to utilize media platforms and the specific gratifications they aim to attain from such usage. This theoretical framework represents a shift in perspective, moving away from the question of "How do the media influence individuals?" to the inquiry of "How do individuals engage with and utilize the media?" (Mutiara & Putri, 2023). Zhang (2023) stated that scholars have implemented this theoretical framework in diverse settings, including social media promotion on platforms like TikTok. Here, individuals aim to establish brand recognition by leveraging the gratifications afforded by the platform. Research by Abu Bakar et al. (2022) suggests that user-generated incentives, such as altruism, immediate news sharing, social interactions, and self-promotion, might serve as possible indicators for the propagation of misleading information concerning Covid-19 on social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. Studies indicate that user-driven incentives, including altruistic tendencies, immediate dissemination of news, social engagement, and self-advertisement, are predictors for the propagation of false information concerning COVID-19 across social networking sites like Facebook and WhatsApp.

Furthermore, Sommer (2019) detailed that the UGT emphasizes the proactive involvement of viewers in determining their media consumption patterns. This concept has evolved in the era of digital media, underscoring the importance of comprehending how individuals participate in and gain satisfaction from media materials. Passage time can impact the dynamic between users of social

media platforms and the spread of false information. Studies suggest that users' ideal engagement on social networking platforms may result in the propagation of misinformation regarding businesses, which can have ramifications on digital trust and the frequency of social media utilization (Shu et al., 2017). (Riskos et al., 2022) finding expose the phenomenon of time distortion encountered by individuals using social media platforms has been identified as having a beneficial impact on disseminating misinformation related to businesses during their engagement with Social Networking Sites (SNS). Study by Obadā & Dabija, (2022) reveals that The correlation between information sharing and the proliferation of misinformation is supported by numerous research findings. Users' engagement in circulating false information regarding businesses on social networking sites is impacted by their satisfaction levels, trust in online sources and frequency of social media interactions. Moreover, the significance individuals attribute to the pursuit of accurate information plays a crucial role in shaping the propagation of rumours. Suggestions advocate for implementing strategies such as providing incentives or removing barriers to access truthful information to combat the dissemination of damaging rumours (Hwang & Jeong, 2023).

Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

- H₁ Pass Time will be positively related with fake news sharing.
- H₂ Information Sharing will be positively related with fake news sharing.
- H₃ Information Seeking will be positively related with fake news sharing

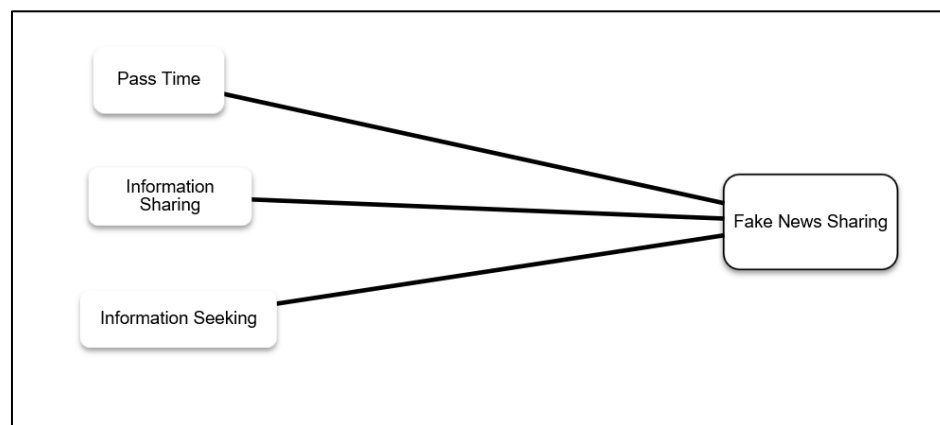


Fig. 1: Research Model

3.0 Methodology

The present study examines the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) and fake news sharing among University students in Malaysia. In line with the research conducted by Wang et al., (2020), if researchers opt to reach the research objective within a specific timeframe, it is crucial for them to utilize a cross-sectional survey design. This methodology enables a cost-effective and simultaneous evaluation of the study subjects' outcomes and exposures. As Chang et al., (2010) emphasized, to minimize common method bias, participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity to elicit honest responses. As recommended by Eichhorn (2014), respondents' willingness to respond may be impacted by encountering uncertainty while filling out the questionnaire, which is an unfavourable circumstance. The present study utilized a five-point Likert Scale to collect data by categorizing significant variables. Within this research project, the researcher employed a five-point Likert Scale to gather data, grouping objects of substantial importance. It is crucial to mention that within this scale, a rating of 1 denotes a substantial discrepancy in viewpoints, whereas a rating of 2 signifies opposition and a rating of 3 implies impartiality.

Conversely, a rating of 4 denotes accord with the presented viewpoint, and a rating of 5 denotes a powerful approval or agreement with the perspective under review. The lack of an accessible sampling frame for the researcher mainly influenced the selection of a non-probability sampling method. Additionally, obtaining a sampling frame for university students in Malaysia poses challenges. The chosen participants were invited to partake as respondents in this research project. Furthermore, in the context of G*Power analysis, specifically regarding the F-Test in Linear Multiple Regression: Fixed model with R² deviation from zero, it was determined that a minimum sample size of 119 was recommended for this particular study. It is essential to highlight that the researcher only managed to enlist a total of 111 participants for the study, thereby not reaching the minimum threshold. The data collection method employed was Google Forms, used to distribute the survey to the participants who then completed it in an excel spreadsheet, ensuring the exclusion of any erroneous data and upholding the accuracy and dependability of the data collected. For the present research endeavor, the dataset procured via Google Forms was subjected to rigorous analysis utilizing IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. This analytical procedure necessitated the evaluation of multivariate assumptions, including normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity, to validate the data for future advanced statistical analyses. Following this, hypothesis testing was executed to examine the connections between variables and

to appraise the relevance of the suggested theoretical models. The utilization of SPSS 26 facilitated meticulous data analysis, thereby empowering the study to derive dependable conclusions and to yield insights that are congruent with the overarching research aims.

4.0 Data Analysis

The multivariate assumption was assessed to ascertain the potential violation of underlying assumptions in multivariate analysis. Besides, the examination was aimed at the normal distribution of the data, the uniformity of variance, and the presence of linearity. The research model illuminates approximately 20% of the phenomenon of fake news dissemination among university students in Malaysia. The results of the hypotheses testing are presented in **Error! Reference source not found.**. The investigation carried out by H1 examined the relationship between Pass Time and sharing fake news, revealing a positive correlation ($\beta = 0.444$, $p < 0.001$). The study indicated that this particular factor significantly influenced the sharing of fake news. Conversely, H2 explored the association between Information Sharing and sharing fake news but did not find statistical significance ($\beta = 0.739$, $p > 0.5$). Similarly, H3's investigation into the relationship between Information Seeking and fake news sharing did not yield significant results ($\beta = -0.087$, $p > 0.5$). In conclusion, while H1's hypothesis is supported, H2 and H3's hypotheses are refuted.

Table 1. Multiple Linear Regression Result

Variable	Hypothesis	Beta value	T Statistics	P Values	R ²	Remark
Pass Time	H ₁ Pass Time will be positively related to fake news sharing.	.444	4.852	.000	0.201	Supported
Information Sharing	H ₂ Information Sharing will be positively related to fake news sharing.	.739	.739	.461		Not Supported
Information Seeking	H ₃ Information Seeking will be positively related to fake news sharing.	-.087	-.862	.391		Not Supported

5.0 Discussion

Numerous scholarly investigations have focused on exploring counterfeit news through the lens of the uses and gratification theory. This theoretical approach has been instrumental in uncovering the motivations behind the spread of misinformation across digital platforms. Among the variables examined in this study, one variable in particular—"Pass Time"—emerged with significant empirical backing.

Obadă and Dabija's investigation (2022) underscores a compelling relationship between the pastime factor and the dissemination of fake news on social networking sites. Their findings are congruent with the outcomes of the present study, which further validates the role of recreational activities in the spread of misinformation. Similarly, Sampat and Raj (2022) echo these findings, demonstrating that gratifications such as pastime, information sharing, and socialization are potent drivers that compel individuals to share news swiftly on social media platforms.

Furthermore, Lim et al. (2021) contribute to this discourse by revealing that the act of sharing fake news is not exclusively tied to the intent of disseminating information. The context of global crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, further complicates this nuanced understanding of motivation. For instance, Apuke and Omar (2021b) found that during the pandemic, information exchange was a negative predictor for spreading false information among social media users in Nigeria. This suggests that, contrary to traditional assumptions, the quest for information may inversely correlate with the propagation of fake news—a finding corroborated by various other studies.

In addition to these variables, other factors like cues of threat, cues of protection, perceived authenticity, and cognitive burden significantly influence the likelihood of sharing counterfeit news. The research conducted by Apuke and Omar (2021) and Valecha et al. (2021) provides a comprehensive view of how these elements shape user behaviour, reflecting the complexities of the current study's findings.

The empirical evidence gathered in this research notably highlights the "Pass Time" factor as a critical influence on disseminating false information among college students. This finding emphasizes the role of recreational and leisure pursuits in facilitating the spread of misinformation within academic environments. It underscores the importance of understanding how seemingly innocuous motivations, such as the desire for entertainment, can contribute to the broader issue of misinformation.

However, the hypotheses concerning "Information Sharing" and "Information Seeking" did not yield statistically significant results. This outcome suggests that the motives traditionally associated with the dissemination of information and the pursuit of knowledge may be less effective in predicting fake news propagation among university students in Malaysia. This insight invites a re-evaluation of existing theoretical models. It encourages further research to explore alternative factors that better capture the complexities of information-sharing behaviour in different cultural and educational contexts.

In conclusion, this study's findings contribute valuable insights to the ongoing discourse on misinformation. They highlight fake news dissemination's nuanced and multifaceted nature, particularly within academic settings. Future research should continue to build on these findings, expanding the scope to include qualitative analyses and cross-cultural comparisons that can deepen our understanding of this pervasive issue. By doing so, scholars can develop more targeted and effective strategies to combat the spread of misinformation in diverse contexts.

6.0 Conclusion

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the relatively small sample size of 111 participants may limit the generalizability of the results. A more extensive and diverse sample would be necessary to confirm these findings and provide a more representative understanding of the broader population.

Second, the study employed quantitative methods, relying primarily on self-reported data collected through questionnaires. Self-reported data are inherently subject to biases, including social desirability bias, recall bias, and response bias, which may affect the accuracy and reliability of the responses. These biases could skew the findings, and future research should consider incorporating methods to mitigate these effects.

Third, the theoretical framework guiding this study was limited in scope. While it provided a foundational basis for the research, a more comprehensive framework could offer deeper insights and a stronger foundation for analysis. Future research could expand the theoretical framework to include additional variables and perspectives.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this study contribute to our understanding of the mechanisms involved in disseminating fake news and highlight the importance of considering individual motivations when addressing the challenges posed by misinformation. There are numerous opportunities for future research to build on these findings. Augmenting quantitative results with qualitative analyses could provide deeper insights into the underlying motivations and perceptions that drive the propagation of misinformation among university students. Longitudinal studies could track changes in media consumption habits and fake news dissemination behaviours over time, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics involved. Additionally, comparing the outcomes of this study with those from different cultural contexts could reveal cross-cultural differences in the motivations behind fake news propagation.

Finally, integrating additional variables, such as online trust, socialization patterns, or social media fatigue, could further enhance our understanding of this complex phenomenon. This study makes theoretical and practical contributions to understanding fake news dissemination. Theoretically, it advances the application of UGT in the context of misinformation by identifying and analysing specific gratifications that motivate sharing fake news among university students. This adds to the body of knowledge by providing a more nuanced understanding of how different psychological and social needs drive the propagation of misinformation. Practically, the findings of this study have significant implications for educators, policymakers, and technology developers. By identifying the key factors that contribute to the spread of fake news, this research can inform the development of targeted interventions to reduce the impact of misinformation. For example, educational programs that enhance critical thinking and media literacy skills could be designed to address the gratifications identified in this study specifically.

Additionally, the insights gained from this research could be used to improve the design of social media platforms and algorithms to detect better and limit the spread of fake news. In conclusion, this study not only contributes to the theoretical understanding of fake news dissemination through the lens of UGT but also offers practical solutions to mitigate the spread of misinformation. By addressing both the psychological motivations and the technological aspects of fake news, this research provides a comprehensive approach to tackling one of the most pressing issues of the digital age.

Acknowledgement

This study has been granted by funds provided by the Sultan Ahmad Shah Pahang Islamic University (UnIPSAS), under grant RUG – UnIPSAS – 2024-12

Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This study explores the lack of information regarding the impact of personal motivations on fake news sharing by university students. It emphasizes the importance of “Pass Time” as a crucial element, questions conventional beliefs about information search and distribution, and suggests actionable strategies for enhancing media literacy and critical analysis skills. Additionally, it provides valuable perspectives for policymakers, educators, and social media platforms aimed at effectively tackling misinformation.

References

- Abu Bakar, W. H. R. bin W., Misaridin, N. A. F. binti, Ismail, R. N. H. binti R., & Rozali, W. N. A. W. binti. (2022). The Quality Criteria of Pahang Fake News Model during Covid-19 Pandemic: According to Uses and Gratification Theory. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarbss/v12-i12/15962>
- Apuke, O. D., & Omar, B. (2020). User motivation in fake news sharing during the COVID-19 pandemic: an application of the uses and gratification theory. *Online Information Review*, 45(1), 220–239. <https://doi.org/10.1108/OIR-03-2020-0116>
- Apuke, O. D., & Omar, B. (2021a). Social media affordances and information abundance: Enabling fake news sharing during the COVID-19 health crisis. *Health Informatics Journal*, 27(3), 14604582211021470.
- Apuke, O. D., & Omar, B. (2021b). User motivation in fake news sharing during the COVID-19 pandemic: an application of the uses and gratification theory. *Online Information Review*, 45(1), 220–239. <https://doi.org/10.1108/OIR-03-2020-0116>
- Arencibia, M. G., Corozo, E. H. V., & Cardero, D. M. (2023). Fake News: An Analysis from Political Economy. *Economics*, 12(2), 72–82.

- Chang, S.-J., Van Witteloostuijn, A., & Eden, L. (2010). *From the editors: Common method variance in international business research*. Springer.
- Dulkiah, M. (2023). Social Trust and Fake News: Study Among College Students in West Java, Indonesia. *JCIC: Jurnal CIC Lembaga Riset Dan Konsultan Sosial*, 5(1), 1–12.
- Eichhorn, B. R. (2014). Common method variance techniques. *Cleveland State University, Department of Operations & Supply Chain Management. Cleveland, OH: SAS Institute Inc*, 1(11).
- Hwang, Y., & Jeong, S.-H. (2023). Misinformation exposure and acceptance: The role of information seeking and processing. *Health Communication*, 38(3), 585–593.
- Lim, A. J., Tan, E., & Lim, T. (2021). Infodemic: the effect of death-related thoughts on news-sharing. *Cognitive Research: Principles and Implications*, 6(1), 39.
- Morais da Silva, J., Rosário, A. T., Gestoso, C. G., & Romana, F. A. (2023). *Fake News in Marketing*.
- Mutiara, P., & Putri, K. Y. S. (2023). Uses and Gratification Theory in TikTok as Social Media Marketing Platform: Seen from Market Player View. *Journal of Digital Marketing and Communication*, 3(1), 1–11.
- Obadã, D.-R., & Dabija, D.-C. (2022). *Can Fake News About Companies Lead to an Increased Social Media Usage? An Empirical Investigation*.
- Orhan, A. (2023). Fake news detection on social media: the predictive role of university students' critical thinking dispositions and new media literacy. *Smart Learning Environments*, 10(1), 29.
- Pérez-Escoda, A. (2022). Infodemic and fake news turning shift for media: Distrust among university students. *Information*, 13(11), 523.
- Riskos, K., Hatzithomas, L., Dekoulou, P., & Tsovrakas, G. (2022). The influence of entertainment, utility and pass time on consumer brand engagement for news media brands: A mediation model. *Journal of Media Business Studies*, 19(1), 1–28.
- Romaguera, O. G. (2023). *News (?) papers: A Typology of Fake News, 1880-1920*. Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College.
- Sampat, B., & Raj, S. (2022). Fake or real news? Understanding the gratifications and personality traits of individuals sharing fake news on social media platforms. *Aslib Journal of Information Management*.
- Shu, K., Wang, S., & Liu, H. (2017). Exploiting tri-relationship for fake news detection (2017). *ArXiv Preprint ArXiv:1712.07709*, 8.
- Sommer, D. (2019). *Uses and gratifications*. Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG.
- Valecha, R., Srinivasan, S. K., Voley, T., Kwon, K. H., Agrawal, M., & Rao, H. R. (2021). Fake news sharing: An investigation of threat and coping cues in the context of the Zika virus. *Digital Threats: Research and Practice*, 2(2), 1–16.
- Valencia-Arias, A., Arango-Botero, D. M., Cardona-Acevedo, S., Paredes Delgado, S. S., & Gallegos, A. (2023). Understanding the Spread of Fake News: An Approach from the Perspective of Young People. *Informatics*, 10(2), 38.
- Wang, D., Hu, B., Hu, C., Zhu, F., Liu, X., Zhang, J., Wang, B., Xiang, H., Cheng, Z., & Xiong, Y. (2020). Clinical characteristics of 138 hospitalized patients with 2019 novel coronavirus–infected pneumonia in Wuhan, China. *Jama*, 323(11), 1061–1069.
- Winiecki, D., Spezzano, F., & Underwood, C. (2023). Understanding Teenagers' Real and Fake News Sharing on Social Media. *Proceedings of the 22nd Annual ACM Interaction Design and Children Conference*, pp. 598–602.
- Zhang, F. (2023). Research on Audience Needs for Slow-Paced Amusement Shows from the Perspective of Uses and Gratification:--A Case Study of Back to Field. *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences*, 14, 529–538.