




What is Fake News? Perceptions, Definitions and Concerns by Gender and Political Orientation Among Israelis

Nili Steinfeld^(✉) 

Ariel University, Ariel, Israel
nilisteinfeld@gmail.com

Abstract. “Fake news” is a growing concern among scholars, policymakers and the public. The phenomenon has gained much scholarly attention in recent years, however, most research has been occupied with its manifestation in the United States. To complement on the global nature of the phenomenon, the study evaluates how Israelis perceive its sources and the responsibility of various institutions. The analysis compares trends related to gender gaps and political bias in fake news perception to studies from the US and Europe. Findings illustrate how political orientation correlates with perception of fake news and the main source of false information in the media landscape, such that conservatives associate fake news mostly with mainstream media and journalists, whereas liberals associate politicians and social network users with fake news. Additionally, men and women differ in perceptions, subjective experience of fake news and concerns over the implications of the phenomenon. These trends and their comparison to US and European research contribute to a more complete understanding of fake news as a universal phenomenon.

Keywords: Fake news · Conservatives · Liberals · Political orientation · Gender · Social media

1 Introduction

“Fake News” is a growing concern among scholars, policymakers and the public [38]. Its potential perceived implications include skewing electoral results [24], promoting postmodern relativism in which facts no longer matter as they once did [30], decreasing trust in institutions [24, 31], and even posing a serious threat to democratic systems [24, 28, 31, 37].

A wealth of solutions and proposals for combating fake news have recently been introduced, from educational through regulatory to algorithmic solutions. However, it seems that we are only getting farther away from a solution to this growing urging problem. Lack of a clear definition and understanding of how it is perceived and engaged with in so many different modes and contexts by a diversity of stakeholders hampers progress in definitively dealing with this phenomenon [34, 39].

Whereas the vast majority of research on fake news is concentrated on the United States, this study investigates how Israelis experience and define fake news, which factors Israelis perceive as responsible for its spread and prevention, ultimately relating the findings to US and European trends with the aim of characterizing and emphasizing the global nature and importance of fake news. Considering the importance of this phenomenon and its potentially far-reaching consequences, it is valuable to study its characteristics in regions outside the US and Europe. A comparison emphasizing similarities and unique characteristics of the phenomenon in different countries and cultures, under different political and/or social conditions, can shed light on the global nature of misinformation phenomena and external factors influencing and influenced by it.

2 Literature Review

2.1 What is Fake News?

Fake news is a debatable term, with no single, uniform, widely accepted definition [34, 39]. Although it is hardly a new concept, during the 2016 US presidential election it received global attention following then-candidate Donald Trump's continuous use of the term to describe unflattering mainstream media coverage [25, 26, 28].

A common definition of fake news, widely accepted in the research literature, relates it to fabricated information mimicking news media in form, but not in organizational processes or intent [22, 34]. Often, it incorporates spread of misinformation (false information spread unintentionally) and disinformation (intentional spread of false information [10, 22, 30], although broader definitions include hoaxes, hearsay, rumors [30], and satire [3]. In Tandoc Jr. et al. (2018) systematic fake news literature review, the authors found six types of operationalization: Satire, parody, fabrication, manipulation, propaganda, and advertising.

In the non-academic sphere, fake news is described less as strictly false information masked as news, and more as poor journalism, propaganda by politicians or hyper-partisan sources, and advertising [33]. Furthermore, politicians and authoritative public figures are increasingly using the term tactically to discredit mainstream news outlets [25–28, 34].

2.2 Imposing Responsibility

Different fake news definitions naturally lead to differing notions of liability. Often, liability is imposed on social media, criticized for its role in spreading and promoting fake news [8, 15, 26]. The structure of social media platforms, with their integration of news and personal stories, commentaries, and user engagement, in addition to very low gatekeeping, makes differentiating fact from fiction and reliable from misleading content a highly complex undertaking [1, 26]. In addition, tech-savvy users often manipulate social media platforms to promote biased and false content, providing fertile ground for the spread of fake news online [10, 22, 30].

Indeed, social media and messaging boards such as 4chan and 8chan are the main platforms used for spreading fake news and political manipulation [31]. Consequentially,

recent efforts have been made by social media companies to reduce the dissemination and visibility of fake news stories on their platforms. Facebook, for example, has flagged disputed posts for US users based on input from fact-checking organizations and tools to tackle the problem of fake news [31]. However, after a period of experimenting with the effectiveness of flagging disputed posts, the company concluded that the flagging might have led to an opposite outcome and directed more attention to such posts, therefore decided to stop flagging content as disputed [6].

But social media is not the only target for criticism. Mainstream media is also facing lower public trust, which can be seen both as cause and consequence of the increase in the spread of fake news [1, 22, 33]. Deeply engaged with social media content, media personalities on television and radio cite and comment on information originating on social media [10]. Additionally, they cover fake news that circulates online, often to debunk it, but in practice legitimating its existence [30].

Overall, the general public tends to perceive fake news as driven by a combination of news media, politicians, and social media platforms [4, 33].

2.3 Weaponization of Fake News

“Fake news” as a concept has been exploited as a political weapon [7]. Politicians around the world now use the term against their political enemies. For instance, they accuse journalists of spreading lies with the aim of discrediting individual journalists and news organizations [24, 25]. An example would be Donald Trump’s tweet responding to a poll showing worst early approval rating of the president in US history, stating: “Any negative polls are fake news, just like the CNN, ABC, NBC polls in the election” [5]. In more severe cases, they use the accusation of fake news as a pretence to censor media, shutter organizations, imprison reporters, and block public access to news and information [25]. In Tanzania, for example, four independent newspapers and two radio stations have been shut down or suspended during the year 2017 on account of “inaccuracies” in their reporting, according to President Magufuli. In the Philippines, similar accusations have been made as reason for revoking the operating license of the news site Rappler.com [25].

Social media is also weaponized by ideological groups and extremists, such as alt-right movements, and even terrorists, who use it to spread propaganda and disinformation [36, 40]. Its basic architecture enabling viral messaging, algorithmic targeting, automating and favoring of controversial and sensational content, and tools for simplifying mimicking and editing of content all lead to weaponization of false content for maximum impact [24]. Very accurately targeting receptive and pivotal audiences dramatically increases the effectiveness of commercial as well as political advertising in influencing user decisions and behaviors [32].

2.4 Implications of Fake News

Media experts are justifiably concerned with the potential of misinformation campaigns to manipulate actions and opinions [36], increase political inefficacy, alienation, and cynicism [3], even skewing electoral results [24]. The use of fake news by politicians to discredit legitimate media threatens freedom of expression [25] and may have serious

implications for public trust in established media [25–28]. Fake news may be circulated online with the aim to decrease trust in institutions [24, 31]. As a result, it can be viewed as promoting postmodern relativism, an increasingly prominent strain of thought that insists facts matter less today than in the past [30]. All these processes: Destabilizing the press, democracy’s “Watchdog”, as an institution; Flooding public discourse with false and misleading information making it difficult for citizens to make rational, educated decisions; Decreasing trust in public institutions which are the foundations of functioning democracies- can thus pose a serious threat to the democratic system in general [24, 28, 31, 37]. As such, governments are increasingly concerned with the implications of fake news, with legislative initiatives proposed in a variety of countries [31].

Less politically informed and engaged populations are at greater risk of fake news influence, and are more inclined to believe false political information [22], whereas individuals with higher levels of understanding of how the news media operates are more likely to suspect and counteract against fabricated headlines, and also more concerned with the chances of encountering disinformation [2]. Indeed, this concern over fake news is not limited to experts and scholars alone. Two thirds of Americans believe that fake news causes high levels of confusion in the general public, distorting perception of basic facts related to current issues [4].

2.5 Fake News and Political Orientation

Arguably, the definition, meaning, and perception of fake news depend on individual point of view [7]. Although some research has emphasized that false and misleading information is, and always has been, a weapon used by no single political party or side (28), a number of studies conducted mainly in the US point to a noteworthy ideological gap in definition, perception, and use of fake news. False political content spread online was found to be promoting mostly right ideologies [1, 26]. Correspondingly, conservative, right-wing voters tend to share fake news items more than liberal left-wing voters [16, 29]. This bias is probably linked to the growing distrust in mainstream media, especially among conservatives in the US [35]. In their view, mainstream media is untrustworthy, biased to the left, and responsible for creating and spreading fake news, rather than social media users [43].

2.6 Gender Differences in Perception, Opinion, and Identification of Fake News

Some gender differences have been reported regarding perception of fake news liability. Women tend to stress the obligation of the state in actively preventing the spread of fake news, whereas men tend to express more concern over the implications of such intervention leading to excessive state censorship [37]. However, previous research did not find gender differences in confidence [4] or in actual success [13] in identifying fake news, as well as in tendency to share fake news [16].

2.7 The Political Media Landscape, Fake News, and Distrust in Israel

As noted, most research on fake news has been conducted in the US [14, 42], largely focusing the US presidential campaign of 2016. However, the phenomenon is now

widespread and global [23]. A few recent studies concerned non-US populations such as Korea [42], Singapore [9], European countries [14, 33], and Lebanon [13]. However, little relevant research so far has been published on Israel, although the Israeli media has been excessively preoccupied with the issue of fake news. During three national political campaigns conducted within a year, followed by a political earthquake with the indictment of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [19] and continuous failing efforts to establish a new government [17], public discourse in Israel has become increasingly polarized [18]. Politicians of all sides accuse mainstream and social media of spreading fake news, although, in fact, they themselves are the agents spreading fake news with data pointing to 62% of opposition and 74% of coalition member posts containing false information during 2018 [20]. Trust in media, as well as in politicians, government and local authorities in Israel, is undergoing dramatic decline [18]. In addition, the PM is consistently attacking mainstream media outlets with accusations of leftist bias and false reporting [41]. All these processes share a resemblance to their fake news counterparts in Europe and the US involving polarized political debates and the rise of populist leaders promoting attacks meant to discredit legitimate mainstream media outlets [24, 25]. For these reasons, looking into how Israelis define, perceive, and engage with fake news offers a valuable contribution to the understanding of its global characteristics and importance, as well as relating Israeli fake news trends to similar reports from the US and other countries.

3 Research Questions

This study explores how Israelis define and perceive fake news. It looks at which institutions or factors are perceived as liable for fake news and how trends reported in US studies are reflected in Israeli populations. Therefore, the following research questions are asked:

RQ1. How concerned are Israelis about the fake news phenomenon?

H1. Consistent with Shin et al. (2018), a majority of Israelis are very concerned with the phenomenon of fake news and its possible implications.

RQ2. How do Israelis perceive fake news - what are the differences in perception between liberals and conservatives?

“Liberals” and “conservatives” in this context refer to political orientation, measured on a continuous scale between left-leaning to right-leaning, and religiosity, measured by a categorical variable of four categories: ultra-Orthodox (most conservative), Orthodox, traditional and secular (most liberal). Accordingly, this study hypothesizes:

H2a. Liberals (left-leaning voters, secular or traditional) tend to implicate politicians and social network users in the phenomenon of fake news, seeing them as responsible, while the mainstream media is relatively more reliable, consistent with Rainie et al. (2019).

H2b. Conservatives (right-leaning voters, Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox) tend to point to mainstream media as the main source of fake news, and, therefore, the most responsible for the phenomenon, in agreement with Tripodi (2018).

RQ3. What gender differences exist in perception of fake news and liability of institutions in preventing its spread?

H3a. In accordance with Reuter et al. (2019), women tend to impose responsibility on the state and public officials for preventing the spread of fake news, more so than men.
H3b. Women in general tend to perceive fake news as more severe than men.

4 Method

4.1 Questionnaire

A survey questionnaire measured definitions and perceptions of fake news (respondents were asked about “false messages”, or “false messages and fake news”, to emphasize the narrow definition of fake news as false information). The survey measured its sources, the liability of institutions in preventing its spread, and its implications and severity. In addition, the study assessed political interest, trust, and activism in relation to fake news perception. The questionnaire is composed of questions from several previous studies: [4, 12, 21]. See Appendix A for the complete questionnaire.

4.2 Participants

502 respondents (50% female), with ages from 18 to 70 ($M = 40.81$, $Mdn = 39$), participated in an online survey distributed by iPanel, a leading Israeli internet data collection service. 50.6% of respondents are secular, 31.7% define themselves as traditional (non-religious), 14.9% as religious (Orthodox) and 2.8% as ultra-Orthodox. In terms of political orientation, on a scale of 1 (most right-leaning) to 10 (most left-leaning), participant average was 4.31 ($Mdn = 4$, $SD = 2.09$).

5 Results

5.1 Concerns Over Fake News

The results of the survey indicate that Israelis are highly concerned over the fake news phenomenon: No less than 80.6% think that false messages leave the public confused about basic facts on topics and events to a large or very large extent. Furthermore, 89.8% think that the implications of the phenomenon are severe to a large or very large extent.

When it comes to responsibility, mainstream media is held most responsible for preventing the spread of false information, with 83.6% of respondents agreeing to a large or very large extent. Second to mainstream media are politicians: 77.8% of respondents impute responsibility to politicians to prevent the spread of false messages to a large or very large extent. They are followed by social networks (68%) and lastly the public (67.2%).

This descriptive data confirms hypothesis H1 and suggests that Israelis are indeed highly concerned with false messages and fake news, its implications, and the responsibility of a variety of stakeholders in combating its spread.

5.2 Liberals and Conservatives Define Fake News

Significant differences were found between religious and non-religious respondents, as well as correlations between political orientation and perceptions related to fake news, which suggest that conservatives associate fake news mostly with mainstream media and journalists, whereas liberals tend to associate politicians and social network users with fake news. Several questions measured respondent perceptions and definitions of fake news. Agreement with the statement claiming that a main reason for people's confusion and misperceptions about facts related to their country is politicians misleading the public correlates with political orientation, such that the more left-leaning respondents display greater agreement with the statement ($r = 0.18, p < .01$). Significant differences were also found when comparing mean agreement between secular and religious respondents ($F(3,482) = 7.39, p < .01$). LSD post-hoc tests reveal that secular ($M = 4.24, SD = 0.834$), traditional ($M = 4.06, SD = 0.780$), and religious ($M = 3.97, SD = 0.839$) respondents agree with the statement to a significantly larger degree than the ultra-Orthodox ($M = 3.29, SD = 1.267$).

The image is reversed with the statement that a main reason for people's confusion is that mainstream media is misleading the public. Here, political orientation correlates with agreement such that the more right-leaning the respondent, the greater the agreement with the statement ($r = -0.33, p < 0.01$). One-way ANOVA found significant differences in mean agreement with the statement by religiosity ($F(3,485) = 7.43, p < .01$). LSD post-hoc tests reveal significant differences between secular respondents ($M = 3.58, SD = 1.09$) who agree with the statement to a significantly less degree than traditional ($M = 3.87, SD = .92$) and Orthodox ($4.14, SD = .79$) respondents, who agree significantly more that mainstream media misleading the public is a main reason for people's confusion and misperceptions.

When respondents were asked to select the main source for spreading false messages, significant differences were found in political orientation of those who chose each of the sources ($F(2,486) = 47.281, p < .01$). Those who selected politicians and public figures as the main source for spreading false messages were the most left-leaning ($M = 5.47, SD = 2.09$), significantly more than those who chose users on social networks ($M = 4.25, SD = 1.93$) and those who chose journalists and media personas, who are the most right-leaning of respondents ($M = 3.26, SD = 1.77$). In a similar trend, significant differences between secular, traditional, and religious respondents were found on the question of the main source for spreading false messages ($\chi^2 = 44.5, \text{Cramer's } V = .17, p < .001$). Secular respondents perceive social media users (37.8%) and politicians (35.8%) as the main sources for spreading false messages, and less so journalists (22.4%). Traditional respondents mostly point to social media users (48.4%), then journalists (28.9%), and lastly politicians (21.4%), while Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox respondents point mostly to journalists (50.7% and 64.3%, respectively) then social media users (33.3% and 28.6%, respectively) and hardly to politicians (14.7% and 7.1% respectively).

Table 1. Results of one-way ANOVA tests for significant differences between liberals and conservatives in views of fake news sources

Variable	Group	Mean	SD	F	Traditional	Orthodox	Ultra-Orthodox
Politicians mislead the public	All	4.12	.85	7.39**			
	Secular	4.24	.83		.04*	.02*	.000***
	Traditional	4.06	.78			NS	.001**
	Orthodox	3.97	.84				.005**
	Ultra-Orthodox	3.29	1.27				
Mainstream media misleads the public	All	3.76	1.01	7.43**			
	Secular	3.58	1.09		.004**	.000***	NS
	Traditional	3.87	.92			NS	NS
	Orthodox	4.14	.79				NS
	Ultra-Orthodox	4.08	.86				
					Journalists and media personas	Politicians	None of the above
Political orientation (1 = most right to 10 = most left)	All	4.31	2.09	32.61			
	Users on social media	4.25	1.93		.000***	.000***	NS
	Journalists and media personas	3.26	1.77			.000***	.001**
	Politicians	5.47	2.09				NS
	None of the above	5.08	1.38				

These findings support hypotheses H2a and H2b and confirm that liberals (i.e. left-leaning, non-religious respondents) tend to associate politicians and social network users with the phenomenon of fake news, hold them responsible for it, and view the mainstream media as relatively more reliable. In contrast, conservatives (right-leaning, Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox respondents) tend to point to mainstream media and journalists as the primary source of fake news, bearing the most responsibility with hardly any notice of politicians.

Tables 1 and 2 summarize the differences in views of liberals and conservatives on fake news sources.

5.3 Gender, Definitions, and Perceptions of Fake News

Gender differences in relation to fake news were also noticeable: in perception, attribution of responsibility, sense of severity, and prior perceived exposure.

No gender differences were found in agreement with the role of politicians or the mainstream media in spreading false messages. However, men tend to agree with the

Table 2. Results of chi-square test for differences in view of main source for spreading false messages based on religiosity, $\chi^2 = 44.5$, Cramer's $V = .17$, $p < .001$

	Group	N	%
Users on social media	All	202	40.2
	Secular	96	37.8
	Traditional	77	48.4
	Orthodox	25	33.3
	Ultra-Orthodox	4	28.6
Journalists and media personas	All	150	29.9
	Secular	57	22.4
	Traditional	46	28.9
	Orthodox	38	50.7
	Ultra-Orthodox	9	64.3
Politicians	All	137	27.3
	Secular	91	35.8
	Traditional	34	21.4
	Orthodox	11	14.7
	Ultra-Orthodox	1	7.1

statement that social media is misleading the public as a source for false messages ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.96$) significantly more than women ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 0.99$) ($t(489) = 2.31$, $p < 0.05$).

Women agree more that the government, politicians, and public figures are responsible for preventing the spread of fake news ($M = 1.77$, $SD = 0.95$), significantly more than men ($M = 2.00$, $SD = 1.09$) ($t(494) = 2.59$, $p < 0.05$). Women also agree significantly more than men that social media is responsible for preventing the spread of false messages ($M = 1.97$, $SD = 1.00$ for women, $M = 2.37$, $SD = 1.22$ for men, $1 =$ to a very large extent, $5 =$ to a very small extent) ($t(471.02) = 4$, $p < 0.01$).

When requested to choose one main source for spreading false messages, women and men differ significantly ($\chi^2 = 8.88$, $p < .05$). Men slightly tend to point to social media users (35.5%) more than politicians (31.9%) and journalists (31.1%). For women, the culprits are more social media users (45%), journalists (28.7%), and to a lesser degree-politicians (22.7%).

Tables 3 and 4 summarize gender differences in perceptions of fake news sources and responsibility of various stakeholders in preventing the spread of fake news.

Table 3. Gender differences in views on sources for fake news and liability of stakeholders

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	t
Social media misleads the public	All	491	3.83	.97	$t_{(489)} = 2.31, p < 0.05$
	Men	248	3.93	.96	
	Women	243	3.73	.99	
Government, politicians, and public figures responsible for preventing spread of fake news	All	496	1.89	1.03	$t_{(494)} = 2.59, p < 0.05$
	Men	248	2.00	1.09	
	Women	248	1.77	.95	
Social media responsible for preventing spread of fake news	All	490	2.17	1.13	$t_{(471.02)} = 4, p < 0.01$
	Men	246	2.37	1.22	
	Women	244	1.97	1.00	
False messages leave the public confused	All	490	1.90	.90	$t_{(488)} = 2.46, p < .05$
	Men	248	2.00	.96	
	Women	242	1.80	.82	
The implications of false messages on society are severe	All	489	1.70	.79	$t_{(453.08)} = 2.61, p < .01$
	Men	245	1.80	.89	
	Women	244	1.61	.67	

(1 = to a very large extent, 5 = to a very small extent).

Men and women differ in their subjective experience of previously encountering inaccurate or false messages on mainstream media or the internet. Men consistently report encountering such messages more frequently: Men report more frequent prior encounters with inaccurate political messages on the internet ($M = 4.19, SD = 1.11$) compared to women ($M = 3.89, SD = 1.26$) ($t_{(500)} = 2.82, p < .01$), with false political messages on the internet ($M = 3.49, SD = 1.27$) compared to women ($M = 3.25, SD = 1.35$) ($t_{(500)} = 1.98, p < .05$), with inaccurate political messages on mainstream media ($M = 3.90, SD = 1.19$) compared to women ($M = 3.46, SD = 1.31$) ($t_{(495.43)} = 3.89, p < .001$), and with false political messages on mainstream media ($M = 3.20, SD = 1.28$) compared to women ($M = 2.94, SD = 1.42$) ($t_{(500)} = 2.15, p < .05$). Despite reporting less exposure to false messages, women perceive the phenomenon to be more severe than men. On a scale of 1 (to a very large extent) to 5 (to a very small extent), women significantly agree to a larger extent ($M = 1.8, SD = .82$) than men ($M = 2, SD = .96$) that false messages leave the public confused about basic facts on topics and events ($t_{(488)} = 2.46, p < .05$), and also significantly agree to a larger extent ($M = 1.61, SD = .67$) than men ($M = 1.8, SD = .89$) that the implications of false messages on society are severe ($t_{(453.08)} = 2.61, p < .01$).

These findings support hypotheses H3a and H3b and confirm that women tend to perceive the state as responsible for preventing the spread of fake news more than do men,

Table 4. Results of chi-square test for differences in view of main source for spreading false messages based on gender, $\chi^2 = 8.88$, $p < .05$.

	Group	N	%
Users on social media	All	202	40.2
	Men	89	35.5
	Women	113	45
Journalists and media personas	All	150	29.9
	Men	78	31.1
	Women	72	28.7
Politicians	All	137	27.3
	Men	80	31.9
	Women	57	22.7

although women also perceive social media as responsible more than men. In general, women perceive the phenomenon as severe more than men, although in their subjective experience they have previously encountered false political messages less than men (it is noteworthy that the questions regarding prior encounters with false political messages rely solely on the respondents' own assessments and are, therefore, markers only of respondent subjective experiences and assumptions).

6 Discussion and Conclusions

The research focuses on how Israelis perceive, define, and relate to the phenomenon of false information and fake news. Several trends corresponding with findings from previous research conducted mainly in the US, and some in Europe, were examined through an Israeli population.

Academic scholars, policymakers, and mainstream media are increasingly concerned with fake news and its possible implications [38]. These include skewing electoral results [24], promoting postmodern relativism among the public [30], decreasing trust in institutions [24, 31], and even undermining the foundations of democratic systems [24, 28, 31, 37].

Although fake news has been studied mainly in the context of US politics, it is increasingly described as a broader phenomenon on a global scale [23]. The Israeli context is similar to Europe and US, with a relatively unstable political system marked by three national elections in one year, following an unstable government which dissolved after a year. In addition, Israeli public discourse is highly polarized [18], politicians are taking very active roles in creating and pushing false information [20], and the PM is consistently attacking mainstream media outlets with accusations of leftist bias and false reporting [41]. Therefore, an inquiry of how Israelis perceive fake news and how these views relate to global trends is highly relevant.

Indeed, the findings suggest that public perception and conception of fake news in Israel resembles trends reported in previous research conducted in the US and in

Europe. Israelis are highly concerned over the phenomenon and its implications for society. Respondents point to several institutions as liable for preventing and combating fake news. Most liable is the mainstream media, with a solid consensus that it is their role to lead efforts in combating fake news. Politicians are also perceived as responsible, while social networks and the public are by no means “off the hook.” From this data emerges a view that fake news is perceived by Israelis as a serious problem with severe implications, and it is up to a variety of stakeholders to fight and contain it.

In Israel, liberals and conservatives differ in their views and perceptions of fake news in ways similar to what is reported in the US: Conservatives blame fake news on the mainstream media more so than social media and politicians. For them, the mainstream media, and hardly politicians, is liable. Liberals see politicians and social network users as responsible, with mainstream media relatively more reliable in their view.

Several gender differences were also found. Women tend to perceive the state and also social media as responsible for preventing the spread of fake news more than men. In general, women express more concern over fake news and its implications for society, although they report less previous encounters with it than men. These gender differences correspond with previous literature reporting similar gender differences on expression of concern over a variety of technological and environmental developments, with women expressing more concern than men [12].

To conclude, the results of this study suggest that fake news is imagined and perceived by Israelis in a manner similar to what is described in US and European-based studies. Israelis are highly concerned with fake news and its social implications, while similar gender and political orientation gaps were found in definition, perception, and concern. These similarities strengthen the claim that we are witnessing a growing global phenomenon.

Focusing research on a specific case, country, or population may be missing the greater picture. Looking at fake news as a global problem, highlighting similarities across cultures and political systems may be a most useful method in developing further understanding of this phenomenon, its trigger mechanisms, consequences, and dynamics. Furthermore, focusing on how politicians as well as citizens, political parties, media outlets, and other institutions around the world engage with fake news may inform and enhance useful tools to navigate, prevent, and combat this ever-growing global challenge.

Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire

Questions in this questionnaire were inspired, adapted and translated to Hebrew from various sources.

Q1 was adapted from [21].

Q3 was adapted from [12].

Questions Q4–Q12, were inspired by [4].

Q1. People often get lots of things wrong about their countries and how they’re changing, for example, what proportion of the population are immigrants, or whether crime is going up or down. Please indicate your agreement for each of the following if you think they are a main reason for this: (Answers are on a 5-point Likert scale, with the option to mark “don’t know”).

- Politicians mislead the public
- Mainstream media misleads the public
- People have biased views, for example, they tend to focus on negative things or think things are getting worse, or generalise from their own experience
- Social media misleads the public
- It's often the figures that are wrong, not people's views
- People are bad with numbers, so they struggle with trying to estimate such things

Q2. Recently, claims are made regarding the increase in the spread of “Fake News”. Of the following factors, which to your opinion is the main source for spreading false messages and fake news? (Choose one)

- Users on social media
- Journalists and media personas
- Politicians
- None of the above

Q3. In politics people sometimes define themselves as left or right. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 means right and 10 means left?

Q4. Over the past year, how often did you come across news stories about politics **online** that you think were not fully accurate?

Q5. Over the past year, how often did you come across news stories about politics **online** that you think were almost entirely made-up?

Q6. Over the past year, how often did you come across news stories about politics **on mainstream media** (TV, radio, newspapers) that you think were not fully accurate?

Q7. Over the past year, how often did you come across news stories about politics **on mainstream media** (TV, radio, newspapers) that you think were almost entirely made-up?

Answers for questions Q4-Q7 were:

1. Never
2. Seldom (once every few months)
3. Sometimes (about once a month)
4. Often (several times a month).

Q8. How much responsibility in your opinion do members of the public have in trying to prevent the spread of false messages?

Q9. How much responsibility in your opinion do the government, politicians, and elected officials have in trying to prevent the spread of false messages?

Q10. How much responsibility in your opinion do social networks and search engines have in trying to prevent the spread of false messages?

Q11. How much responsibility in your opinion do mainstream media outlets (TV, Radio, newspapers) have in trying to prevent the spread of false messages?

Q12. How much do you think false messages leave the public confused about the basic facts of current issues and events?

Q13. How severe are the social implications of the false messages phenomenon in your opinion?

Answers for questions Q8-Q13 were on a 5-point Likert scale.

References

- Allcott, H., Gentzkow, M.: Social media and fake news in the 2016 election. *J. Econ. Perspect.* **31**(2), 211–236 (2017)
- Amazeen, M.A., Bucy, E.P.: Conferring resistance to digital disinformation: the inoculating influence of procedural news knowledge. *J. Broadcast. Electron. Media* **63**(3), 415–432 (2019)
- Balmas, M.: When fake news becomes real: combined exposure to multiple news sources and political attitudes of inefficacy, alienation, and cynicism. *Commun. Res.* **41**(3), 430–454 (2014)
- Barthel, M., Mitchell, A., Holcomb, J.: Many Americans believe fake news is sowing confusion. Pew Research Center <https://www.journalism.org/2016/12/15/many-americans-believe-fake-news-is-sowing-confusion/>
- Batchelor, T.: Donald Trump says all negative polls about him are fake news. *Independent* (2017). <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/donald-trump-negative-polls-fake-news-twitter-cnn-abc-nbc-a7564951.html>
- BBC.: Facebook ditches fake news warning flag. BBC (2017). <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-42438750>
- Berghel, H.: Alt-News and Post-Truths in the “Fake News” Era. *Computer* **50**(4), 110–114 (2017)
- Chadwick, A., Vaccari, C., O’Loughlin, B.: Do tabloids poison the well of social media? Explaining democratically dysfunctional news sharing. *New Media Soc.* **20**(11), 4255–4274 (2018)
- Chen, X., Sin, S.C.J., Theng, Y.L., Lee, C.S.: Why students share misinformation on social media: motivation, gender, and study-level differences. *J. Acad. Librariansh.* **41**, 1–10 (2015)
- Cooke, N. A.: Fake News and Alternative Facts: Information Literacy in a Post-truth Era. American Library Association, Atlanta, GA (2018)
- Curtice, J., Bryson, C., Schwartz, S., Thomassen, J., van Kersbergen, K., van Waarden, F.: People’s underlying value orientations. Chapter 5, 176 (2003). http://www.europeansocialsurvey.org/docs/methodology/core_ess_questionnaire/ESS_core_questionnaire_political_issues.pdf
- Davidson, D.J., Freudenburg, W.R.: Gender and environmental risk concerns: a review and analysis of available research. *Environ. Behav.* **28**(3), 302–339 (1996)
- El Rayess, M., Chebl, C., Mhanna, J., Hage, R.M.: Fake news judgement: the case of undergraduate students at Notre Dame University-Louaize. Lebanon. *Ref. Serv. Rev.* **46**(1), 146–149 (2018)
- Fletcher, R., Cornia, A., Graves, L., Nielsen, R. K.: Measuring the reach of “fake news” and online disinformation in Europe. Reuters institute factsheet (2018)
- Gil de Zúñiga, H., Chen, H.T.: Digital media and politics effects of the great information and communication divides. *J. Broadcast. Electron. Media.* **63**(3), 365–373 (2019)
- Guess, A., Nagler, J., Tucker, J.: Less than you think: prevalence and predictors of fake news dissemination on Facebook. *Sci. Adv.* **5**(1), 1–8 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aau4586>

17. Heller, J., Farrell, S.: Third Israeli election looms after Netanyahu and challenger fail to form government. Reuters (2019). <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-politics/third-israeli-election-looms-after-netanyahu-and-challenger-fail-to-form-government-idUSKBN1XU1OC>
18. Herman, T., Anabi, O., Heller, E., Omar, F.: The Israeli Democracy Index 2018. The Israeli Institute for Democracy, Jerusalem (2018)
19. Holmes, O.: Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu indicted for bribery and fraud. The Guardian (2019). <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/nov/21/israeli-prime-minister-benjamin-netanyahu-indicted-for-bribery-and>
20. Ifat media research. Fact or fiction: A study of the factorial discourse in Israel's mainstream media (2019). <http://ifat.com/marcom/fairy.pdf>
21. IPSOS: Fake news, filter bubbles, post-truth and trust; A study across 27 countries (2018). <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/news/documents/2018-09/fake-news-filter-bubbles-post-truth-and-trust.pdf>
22. Lazer, D.M.J., et al.: The science of fake news. *Science* **359**(6380), 1094–1096 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aao2998>
23. Lees, C.: Fake news: the global silencer: the term has become a useful weapon in the dictator's toolkit against the media. Just look at the Philippines. *Index Censorsh.* **47**(1), 88–91 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0306422018769578>
24. Levi, L.: Real fake news and fake news. *First Amend. Law Rev.* **16**, 232 (2017)
25. Levinson, P.: Turning the tables: how trump turned fake news from a weapon of deception to a weapon of mass destruction of legitimate news. In: Happer, C., Hoskins, A., Merrin, W. (eds.) *Trump's Media War*, pp. 33–46. Springer, Cham (2019). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-94069-4_3
26. Marwick, A.E.: Why do people share fake news? A sociotechnical model of media effects. *Georgetown Law Technol. Rev.* **2**(2), 474–512 (2018)
27. McGonagle, T.: "Fake news" false fears or real concerns? *Netherlands Q. Human Rights* **35**(4), 203–209 (2017)
28. McNair, B.: *Fake news: Falsehood Fabrication and Fantasy in Journalism*. Routledge, Milton Park (2017)
29. Mele, N., et al.: *Combating fake news: An agenda for research and action* (2017). <https://www.hks.harvard.edu/publications/combating-fake-new-agenda-research-and-action>. Accessed 17 Oct 2018
30. Mihailidis, P., Viotto, S.: Spreadable spectacle in digital culture: civic expression, fake news, and the role of media literacies in "post-fact" society. *Am. Behav. Sci.* **61**(4), 441–454 (2017)
31. Morgan, S.: Fake news, disinformation, manipulation and online tactics to undermine democracy. *J. Cyber Policy* **3**(1), 39–43 (2018)
32. Nadler, A., Crain, M., Donovan, J.: *Weaponizing the Digital Influence Machine*. Data & Society Research Institute (2018). <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2018/10/apo-nid197676-1225751.pdf>
33. Nielsen, R.K., Graves, L.: "News you don't believe": Audience perspectives on fake news. Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2017). https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2017-10/Nielsen&Graves_factsheet_1710v3_FINAL_download.pdf
34. Quandt, T., Frischlich, L., Boberg, S., Schatto-Eckrodt, T.: Fake news. In: Vos, T.P., Hanusch, F., Dimitrakopoulou, D., Geertsema-Sligh, M., Sehl, A. (eds.) *The International Encyclopaedia of Journalism Studies*, pp. 1–6. Wiley, Hoboken (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118841570.iejs0128>
35. Rainie, L., Keeter, S., Perrin, A.: *Trust and Distrust in America* (2019). <https://www.people-press.org/2019/07/22/trust-and-distrust-in-america/>
36. Rainie, H., Anderson, J.Q., Albright, J.: *The Future of Free Speech, Trolls, Anonymity and Fake News Online*. Pew Research Center, Washington, DC (2017)

37. Reuter, C., Hartwig, K., Kirchner, J., Schlegel, N.: Fake news perception in Germany: a representative study of people's attitudes and approaches to counteract disinformation. In: Proceedings of the International Conference on Wirtschaftsinformatik (WI) (2019)
38. Shin, J., Jian, L., Driscoll, K., Bar, F.: The diffusion of misinformation on social media: temporal pattern, message, and source. *Comput. Hum. Behav.* **83**, 278–287 (2018)
39. Shu, K., Sliva, A., Wang, S., Tang, J., Liu, H.: Fake news detection on social media: a data mining perspective. *ACM SIGKDD Explor. Newsl.* **19**(1), 22–36 (2017)
40. Smith, C.A.: Weaponized iconoclasm in Internet memes featuring the expression 'Fake News.' *Discourse Commun.* **13**(3), 303–319 (2019)
41. Stern, I.: Netanyahu Ratchets Up Attack on Production Company, Journalist Reporting His Corruption Probes. *Haaretz* (2019). <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-netanyahu-lashes-out-at-news-company-they-re-doing-harm-to-democracy-1.7772714>
42. Tandoc, E.C., Jr., Lim, Z.W., Ling, R.: Defining “fake news” a typology of scholarly definitions. *Digit. J.* **6**(2), 137–153 (2018)
43. Tripodi, F.: Searching for Alternative Facts: Analyzing Scriptural Inference in Conservative News Practices. Data & Society report (2018)