



**ANALYSING ATTITUDE, INTERACTION AND COUNTERACTION
TOWARDS FAKE NEWS ON TWITTER OF INTERNATIONAL
RELATION REALMS**



MASTER OF SCIENCE IN TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

2022



Institute of Technology Management and Entrepreneurship



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Shaikha Mohammed Ali Bin Helal AlKhateri

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**ANALYSING ATTITUDE, INTERACTION AND COUNTERACTION TOWARDS
FAKE NEWS ON TWITTER OF INTERNATIONAL RELATION REALMS**

SHAIKHA MOHAMMED ALI BIN HELAL ALKHATERI

**A thesis submitted
in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science
in Technical Communication**



اونيورسيتي تيكنيكل مليسيا ملاك

Institute of Technology Management and Entrepreneurship

UNIVERSITI TEKNIKAL MALAYSIA MELAKA

2022

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis entitled “Analysing Attitude, Interaction and Counteraction Towards Fake News on Twitter of International Relation Realms” is the result of my own research except as cited in the references. The thesis has not been accepted for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature of any other degree.

Signature

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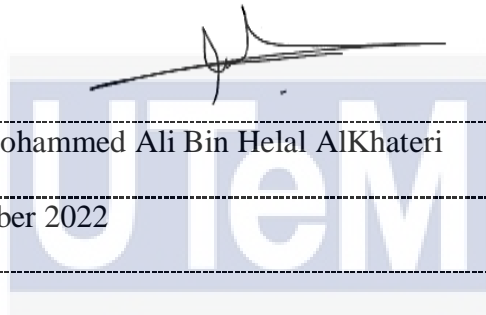
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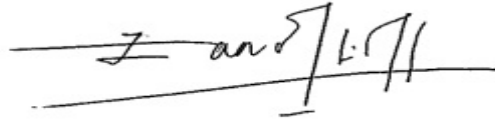


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APPROVAL

I hereby declare that I have read this thesis and in my opinion, this thesis is sufficient in term of scope and quality for the award of Master of Science in Technical Communication.



Signature :

Supervisor Name : Dr. Zanariah binti Jano

Date : 23 November 2022



DEDICATION

It is with genuine gratitude that I dedicate my dissertation to the Almighty Creator and my parents.



ABSTRACT

Social media is increasingly popular globally, and in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Twitter, in particular, is used to follow and share news. This has created new areas of risk, as the spread of fake news has led to new and previously unknown threats to international relations and public diplomacy. The UAE has developed a number of initiatives to combat the threat of fake news, however, there is limited formal research into these efforts, particularly from the government perspective. This research represents an initial, explorative look into the issue of fake news on Twitter in relation to international relations from the UAE government perspective. The research objectives included: to analyse the government attitude towards Twitter and fake news in terms of international relations, to investigate the government interaction with Twitter regarding the measures taken in combating the fake news spread in terms of international relations, and to investigate the effectiveness of the measures taken to combat the spread of fake news in terms of international relations. The research used an exploratory, descriptive quantitative method, including a secondary literature review. The survey was developed considering the variables of attitude, interaction and counteraction; and was administered online towards selected top officials of a range of public organizations. A secondary literature review pillared the survey, and also included data from government publications regarding laws or entities that address fake news which was used to help answer the research questions. The collected data was statistically analyzed, with results indicating that Twitter plays an important role in the UAE government and fake news; that the government has instituted legal penalties as well as created dedicated agencies or departments to combat the spread of fake news; and that such efforts have been effective, in particular, the penal provisions imposed on offenders. Recommended future efforts include the establishment of gatekeepers and other systems to monitor and detect fake news, the development of awareness campaigns, and other legislative means such as increased fines and imprisonment to limit the creation and/or spread of fake news. The phenomenon of fake news in relation to international relations is relatively new, and there is a gap in the literature on this topic particularly in the UAE context and from the government perspective. Therefore, this research offers an important contribution as it gives a preliminary view from the main stakeholder (government) in the research into social media, fake news, governance and international relations, which is under-represented in the literature.

**MENGANALISIS SIKAP, INTERAKSI DAN TINDAK BALAS TERHADAP
BERITA PALSU DI TWITTER DALAM BIDANG HUBUNGAN
ANTARABANGSA**

ABSTRAK

Media sosial semakin popular di seluruh dunia, dan di Emiriah Arab Bersatu (UAE), Twitter khususnya, digunakan untuk mengikuti dan berkongsi berita. Ini telah mewujudkan bidang risiko baru, kerana penyebaran berita palsu telah membawa kepada ancaman baru dan terdahulu yang tidak diketahui kepada hubungan antarabangsa dan diplomasi awam. UAE telah membangunkan beberapa inisiatif untuk memerangi ancaman berita palsu, namun terdapat penyelidikan formal yang terhad ke atas usaha ini, terutamanya dari perspektif kerajaan. Penyelidikan ini mewakili pandangan awal yang meneroka isu berita palsu di Twitter berkaitan hubungan antarabangsa dari perspektif kerajaan UAE. Objektif penyelidikan ini termasuk: untuk menganalisis sikap kerajaan terhadap Twitter dan berita palsu dari sudut hubungan antarabangsa, untuk menyiasat interaksi kerajaan dengan Twitter mengenai langkah-langkah yang diambil dalam memerangi penyebaran berita palsu dari sudut hubungan antarabangsa, dan untuk menyiasat keberkesanan langkah-langkah yang diambil untuk memerangi penyebaran berita palsu dari sudut hubungan antarabangsa. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan kaedah kuantitatif penerokaan, deskriptif, termasuk tinjauan literatur sekunder. Tinjauan ini dibangunkan dengan mengambil kira pembolehubah sikap, interaksi dan tindak balas; dan telah ditadbir secara talian kepada pengurus tertinggi terpilih di pelbagai organisasi awam. Kajian literatur sekunder menyokong tinjauan ini, dan juga termasuk data daripada penerbitan kerajaan mengenai undang-undang atau entiti yang menangani berita palsu yang digunakan untuk membantu menjawab soalan penyelidikan. Data yang dikumpul telah dianalisis secara statistik, hasil menunjukkan bahawa Twitter memainkan peranan penting dalam kerajaan UAE dan berita palsu; bahawa kerajaan telah melaksanakan hukuman undang-undang serta mewujudkan agensi atau jabatan khusus untuk memerangi penyebaran berita palsu; dan usaha sedemikian adalah berkesan, khususnya peruntukan kesalahan yang dikenakan ke atas pesalah. Usaha masa hadapan yang disyorkan termasuk penubuhan penjaga pintu dan sistem lain untuk memantau dan mengesan berita palsu, pembangunan kempen kesedaran, dan cara perundangan lain seperti peningkatan denda dan penjara untuk membatasi penciptaan dan/atau penyebaran berita palsu. Fenomena berita palsu berkaitan hubungan antarabangsa adalah agak baharu, dan terdapat jurang dalam literatur mengenai topik ini terutamanya dalam konteks UAE dan dari perspektif kerajaan. Oleh itu penyelidikan ini menawarkan sumbangan penting kerana ia memberi pandangan awal daripada pemegang taruh utama (kerajaan) dalam penyelidikan media sosial, berita palsu, tadbir urus dan hubungan antarabangsa, yang kurang diwakili dalam literatur.

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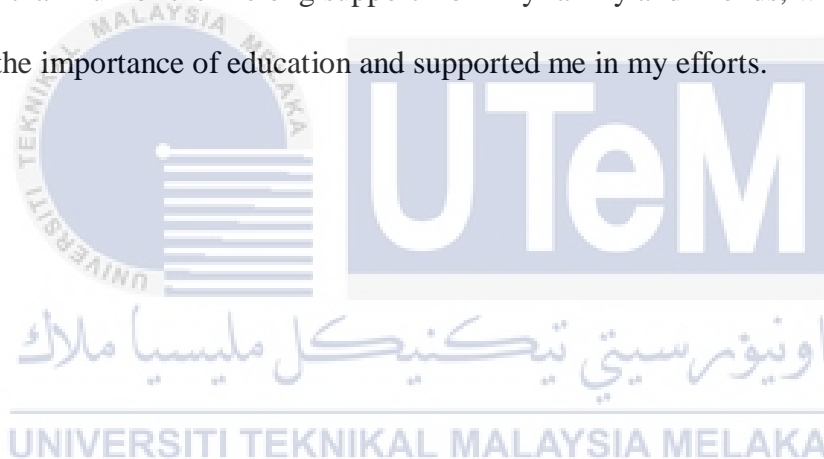


TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
DECLARATION	
APPROVAL	
DEDICATIONS	
ABSTRACT	i
ABSTRAK	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
LIST OF SYMBOLS	x
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xi
LIST OF APPENDICES	xii
LIST OF PUBLICATION	xiii

CHAPTER

1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of Research	1
1.2.1 Social Media and Twitter	2
1.2.2 The Growing Threat of Fake News	3
1.2.3 Efforts to Combat Fake News	4
1.3 Project Research Aim	6
1.4 Problem Statement	6
1.5 Research Objectives and Research Questions	9
1.6 Research Scope	9
1.7 Research Contribution	10
1.8 Definition of Terms	10
1.9 Organization of the Research	11
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	12
2.1 Introduction	12
2.2 The Rise of Social Media and Twitter	12
2.3 Twitter and International Relations	15
2.4 Fake News	17
2.4.1 History of Fake News	17
2.4.2 Fake News and International Relations	18
2.4.3 Fake News in the UAE	20
2.5 Efforts to Combat Fake News Spread	20
2.6 Prior Research	23
2.7 Theoretical Framework	24
2.8 Research Model	26
2.8.1 Attitude	27
2.8.2 Interaction	28
2.8.3 Counteraction	28
2.9 Conclusion	29

3. METHODOLOGY	30
3.1 Introduction	30
3.2 Research Philosophy	30
3.3 Research Typology	32
3.3.1 Research Design	33
3.3.2 Descriptive Quantitative Research	34
3.3.3 Data Sources	34
3.3.4 Sample Size and Population	36
3.3.5 Research Location	36
3.3.6 Unit of Analysis	37
3.3.7 Time Horizon	37
3.3.8 Data Collection and Sampling Method	38
3.4 Research Instrument	39
3.5 Pilot Test	43
3.6 Data Analysis	45
3.6.1 Reliability	46
3.6.2 Frequency Distribution	48
3.6.3 Descriptive Analysis	48
3.6.4 Textual Analysis	49
3.6.5 Secondary Documentary Analysis	49
3.7 Limitations	50
3.8 Ethical Considerations	50
3.9 Conclusion	50
4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS	52
4.1 Introduction	52
4.2 Participant Response	53
4.3 Demographic Data	54
4.4 Attitude towards Twitter and Fake News	59
4.4.1 Descriptive Analysis	60
4.5 Interaction and Countraction with Twitter and Fake News	62
4.5.1 Descriptive Analysis, Likert-Type Questions	63
4.5.2 Descriptive Analysis, Multiple Choice Questions	65
4.5.3 Textual Analysis	67
4.6 Documentary Review	74
4.6.1 Federal Law No. 3 Article 197	74
4.6.2 Federal Law No. 3 Article 198	74
4.6.3 Federal Law No. 5 Article 29	75
4.6.4 Federal Law No. 5 Article 38	76
4.6.5 National Media Council	76
4.6.6 MOI Telecommunications and Digital Government Regulatory Authority	77
4.6.7 Sawab Center	78
4.6.8 Cybersecurity Council	79
4.6.9 Analysis	79
4.7 Conclusion	80
5. DISCUSSION	81
5.1 Introduction	81
5.2 Demographics	82

5.3	Research Question 1	82
5.4	Research Question 2	83
5.5	Research Question 3	84
5.6	Conclusion	85
6.	CONCLUSION	86
6.1	Introduction	86
6.2	Meeting the Research Objectives	86
6.2.1	Research Objective I	87
6.2.2	Research Objective II	88
6.2.3	Research Objective III	89
6.3	Limitations	90
6.4	Recommendations	91
	REFERENCES	93
	APPENDICES	104



LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	TITLE	PAGE
Table 2.1	Conclusions of Prior Rersearch	24
Table 2.2	Research Aspects/Variables, Definitions and References	28
Table 3.1	Sources for the research instrument survey questions	41
Table 3.2	Survey Question Adjustment After Pilot Test	46
Table 3.3	Table 3.3: Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Ranges, adapted from Arof et al. (2018)	48
Table 4.1	Survey Questions, Section 1 – Demographics	55
Table 4.2	Survey Questions, Section 2 – Attitude	60
Table 4.3	Survey Section 2 – Attitude, Mean And Standard Derivation	61
Table 4.4	Survey Questions, Section 3 – Interaction And Counteraction	64
Table 4.5	Survey Section 3 – Interaction and Counteraction, Mean and Standard Deviation	65
Table 4.6	Legal Provisions Enacted by the Government to Combat Fake News	69
Table 4.7	Agencies Created by the Government to Combat Fake News	70
Table 4.8	Additional Solutions	74
Table 4.9	UAE Government Initiatives against Fake News	81

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	TITLE	PAGE
Figure 2.1	Internet Usage (Mideast Media, 2016)	15
Figure 2.2	Mobile and Smartphone Usage (Mideast Media, 2016)	15
Figure 2.3	Uses of Social Media Platforms (Mideast Media, 2016b)	16
Figure 2.4	Systemization of Fake News (Quandt et al., 2019)	20
Figure 2.5	Efforts to Combat Fake News (developed from Reuter et al., 2019 and Kaufhold and Reuter, 2019)	26
Figure 3.1	Framework for Research Study (Thota et al., 2012)	32
Figure 3.2	Quantitative Research Methods (Kuluchumila, 2018)	34
Figure 3.3	Research Sample	37
Figure 3.4	Cronbach's Alpha, Pilot Test	45
Figure 3.5	Cronbach's Alpha, Survey Section 2 – Attitude, 15 Items	48
Figure 3.6	Cronbach's Alpha, Survey Section 3 – Interaction and Counteraction, 11 items	49
Figure 4.1	Survey Respondent Demographic Data – Gender	56
Figure 4.2	Survey Respondent Demographic Data – Age	56
Figure 4.3	Percentage Distribution of Employed Emiratis by Age (data from UAE Stat, 2019)	57
Figure 4.4	Survey Respondent Demographic Data – Education Level	58
Figure 4.5	Survey Respondent Demographic Data – Employment Sector	59
Figure 4.6	Survey Respondent Demographic Data – Length Of Employment	59
Figure 4.7	Stakeholder Most Responsible for Preventing Fake News	67
Figure 4.8	Government Agencies Most Responsible for Combating Fake News	67

Figure 4.9	Most Effective Government Initiative to Combat Fake News	71
Figure 4.10	Least Effective Government Initiative to Combat Fake News	72
Figure 4.11	Potential Next Steps, Ranked	73



LIST OF SYMBOLS

α - Cronbach's alpha



LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ARSIWA	-	Articles of Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts
CI	-	Causal Inference
CIIP	-	Critical Information Infrastructure Protection
CMO	-	Context Mechanism Outcome
CMV	-	Common Method Variance
ECSSR	-	Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research
FCC	-	Federal Communications Commission
GCC	-	Gulf Cooperation Council
ICT	-	Information and Communications Technology
MENA	-	Middle East and North Africa
MOFAIC	-	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation
MOJ	-	Ministry of Justice
NGO	-	Non-Government Organization
NMC	-	National Media Council
TDRA	-	Telecommunications and Digital Government Regulatory Authority
TRA	-	Telecommunications Regulatory Authority
UAE	-	United Arab Emirates
UN	-	United Nations
US	-	United States

LIST OF APPENDICES

APPENDIX	TITLE	PAGE
A	Questionnaire	108
B	Pilot Test Data	118
C	Survey Data	121



LIST OF PUBLICATION

The following is the list of publication related to the work of this thesis:

1. Alkhateri, S., Devi, S., Jano, Z., Al-shami, S., 2021. Attitudes towards Fake News: A Systematic Literature Review. *Webology*, 18(3), pp.368-376.



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Social media has forced governments to develop innovative approaches to interact with multiple stakeholders, as they are increasingly required to establish and maintain an online presence in part to facilitate relationships including with international governments and entities (Okazaki and Taylor, 2013; Asongu and Odhiambo, 2019; Kreps, 2020). The innovative technologies seen in social media offer opportunities but also increased risks. One of these risks is the rise of fake news, which has created new and unanticipated threats to several areas but specifically to international relations.

The importance of a strong social media presence is increasingly weighed against this growing threat of fake news. Governments are extensively tasked with addressing the potential threats and at times realize the influence of fake news on relationships with foreign governments, which can have a negative influence on national security (Hacıyakupoglu et al., 2018). This research investigates social media, specifically Twitter, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) government, focusing on the effectiveness of measures adopted to combat fake news and their negative effects on international relations.

1.2 Background of Research

The increasing popularity of Twitter has provided an easy means for the spread of fake news, accompanied with the overwhelming need for a social media presence by governments.

This has led to a new threat to the government's stability and public diplomacy. Recent efforts have been made by governments, including the UAE, to combat the threat of fake news. However, there is limited formal research into these efforts, particularly from the government perspective.

1.2.1 Social Media and Twitter

Social media is best understood as a group of new kind of online media, which shares most or all of the following characteristics: Participation, Openness, Conversation, Community, and Connectedness (Mayfield, 2008). Originally, the primary purpose behind Twitter was to share status updates (MacArthur, 2019). However, since its creation in 2006, Twitter has grown and developed into something much greater, with 330 million active monthly users who send 500 million tweets each day worldwide (Aslam, 2020).

Twitter in the UAE has likewise seen a dramatic rise. For example, in a single quarter in 2009 Twitter usage grew from 100% to 300% in the Middle East and North Africa (The National, 2009). In the UAE specifically, Twitter is reported as the platform most social media users use for news (Mideast Media, 2016). The rise in popularity of Twitter among individuals has been followed by a rise in Twitter activity by governments, which have recognized the importance of social media. Domestic and global public opinion have become key factors in the formulation of international relations (Goodman and Wang, 2006). Before, international politics were carried out mostly behind closed doors in secrecy and covert maneuverings, however, increasingly, political maneuverings are done in the public sphere on social media outlets such as Twitter (McNair, 1998).

Among the social media outlets that have grown dramatically over recent years, Twitter stands unique in the UAE in particular, both in its popularity and in the fact that it is mainly used – above all the other platforms – as a method for finding and sharing news.

When considering the rise in importance of social media in government and international relations, it becomes clear that Twitter is a particularly vulnerable point. The fact that in the UAE people primarily use Twitter for reading and sharing news makes fake news on Twitter additionally susceptible to having a negative influence from on international relations.

1.2.2 The Growing Threat of Fake News

Developments in technology are usually celebrated as being positive steps of advancement, however there must always be consideration of potential negative effects. A primary concern in the discussion of social media and Twitter is fake news. Fake news is the modern version of propaganda, defined as “fabricated information that mimics news media content in form but not in organizational process or intent” (Lazer et al., 2018). The deliberate creation and spread of fake news is motivated by politics, money, social advancement, subversion and even purely just for entertainment (Haciyakupoglu et al., 2018).

Reuter et al. (2019) trace the origins of fake news to satirical shows, which used fake news in a limited manner and were originally seen as harmless. As social media developed further, fake news grew and spread to a larger scale where it began having a broader (and increasingly negative) influence. Fake news as a phenomenon has come to represent false information that is deliberately spread in order to mislead people and harm businesses, governments and/or individuals (Allcott et al., 2019).

Fake news can threaten international relations. In December 2019, the UAE announced that an Emirati-owned business operating out of the Jebel Ali Free Zone had been the target of a smear campaign, designed to harm its performance in exporting goods to Saudi Arabia by spreading misinformation as to the quality of its products (Gibbon, 2019). Investigations showed that social media rumors were started from outside both Saudi Arabia

and the UAE, by groups hostile to both, with the goal of negatively influencing the international relationship between the two countries (Gibbon, 2019). Politically, such activity has an effect on international relations as mentioned by Baade (2019), where international law prohibits the deliberate use of fake news to influence, intervene or coerce foreign governments. Fake news can be used to foment distrust between countries, cause distrust of products which leads to a negative economic effect on the exporting country, and coerce societies to develop a negative opinion of a foreign country, thus leading to economic and political fallouts. This has a direct and negative effect on international relations.

The spread of fake news is achieved mainly by three methods: platforms or websites that are cheaply created to look legitimate and fool visitors into accepting fake news as real; artificial intelligence (AI) agents, bots that are created and programmed to spread fake news; and social media, where individual users either intentionally or unintentionally read and/or share fake news with others (Haciyakupoglu, 2018; Lazer et al., 2018).

It is important to consider the means of spreading fake news, as they provide insight to governments and enable them to create effective action plans targeting the safe use of social media and protect themselves against the risks of fake news. The spread of fake news, whether deliberate or not, has a direct effect on international relations and national security.

1.2.3 Efforts to Combat Fake News

Just as there are several ways that fake news can be spread and influence government and international relations, the methods to combat its influence are also varied. Haciyakupoglu et al. (2018) divide government efforts into two areas, legislative and non-legislative. Legislative methods involve the creation of laws holding individuals and businesses responsible for spreading fake news, and laws requiring businesses to monitor their social media, particularly technology based companies. Non-legislative methods are

also used to stop the creation and spread of fake news, and include issue-specific initiatives (such as guarding against fake news spread during an election), enacting fact-checking measures, and conducting education campaigns to raise awareness (Haciyakupoglu et al., 2018).

Social media platforms themselves are wrestling with the best way to deal with the problems of fake news. Twitter has pledged to put more technological safeguards in place to detect and remove fake news, while updating and improving community guidelines targeting their users (Haciyakupoglu et al., 2018).

However, when considering the threat to community stability and international relations particularly, it is a greater obligation on governments to be aware of fake news and its risks, and to safeguard their interests from the threat of fake news by actively considering it as part of their risk management efforts. Internationally, only a few governments have taken direct steps to combat fake news, including Malaysia and Germany (Claussen, 2018; Daud and Zulhuda, 2020).

In the UAE, the government has issued warnings to the public about their Twitter usage and that it must comply both with Twitter's rules of use and UAE government laws and regulations against "potentially inflammatory content" (Carroll, 2014). Fake news is specifically addressed in that "sharing rumours and other false statements is a criminal offence that is punishable by law with a fine of up to Dh1 million" (Agarib, 2018). Instances of the appearance of fake news stories in UAE social media have resulted in the government issuing repeated warnings against the spread of fake news and the potential legal consequences to offenders (Sebugwaawo, 2020; Zaatari, 2020; Al Serkal, 2021).

As a part of social media, Twitter usage continues to grow and the phenomenon of fake news spreading increases. The conducting of research in the awareness of the threat of fake news and initiatives that are being taken to prevent its spread is critical in order to