

Title: Tabloids, Fake News, and the Overton Window: The COP Model on News Consumption in Uncertain Times

Abstract:

This study examines fake news consumption beyond confirmation bias, focusing on how readers respond to identifiable fake news in situations without predefined beliefs, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. While misinformation, satire, and parody are often discussed, IS research has largely overlooked their distinction from long-standing forms like tabloid journalism. We propose the COP (Content Dimensions–Overton Window–Perceived Utility) model to explain acceptance or rejection of fake news under uncertainty, using social media data from the 2020 pandemic. Applying Multi-Attribute Utility Theory and the Overton window, we identify factors influencing these decisions and compare them to responses to tabloid news. Findings reveal that tone and emotional appeal strongly affect acceptance or rejection, while truthfulness plays a lesser role for identifiable fake news in uncertain contexts than for tabloid journalism.