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Fake News and Youth Perceptions: The Third-Person Effect, Locus of Control, and Fact-Checking Among Selangor's Young Generation

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ABSTRACT

The third-person effect (TPE) is a psychological occurrence where individuals perceive that mass media influences others more than it influence them. This perception can lead people to believe that they are more capable of detecting fake news, and consequently may be reluctant to fact-check any news on social media. This study investigated the relationship between the third-person effect (TPE) and individuals' fact-checking behaviour in the context of fake health news, with locus of control serving as a moderator. A survey was conducted among 325 youth aged 15 to 30 in Selangor. Findings indicate that the third-person effect of fake news is stronger on others than on oneself. Notably, there is also a negative association between TPE on self and individuals' fact-checking behaviour, with locus of control acting as a moderator. Furthermore, the study reveals that the internal locus of control moderates the relationship between self-perceived TPE and fact-checking behaviour. These findings have significant implications for policymakers, educators, and the public in combatting misinformation. By promoting self-awareness and encouraging fact-checking practices, efforts can be taken to mitigate the impact of TPE on individuals' susceptibility of fake health news. Additionally, the study expands the understanding of the TPE theory by exploring its relevance to fake news detection in the realm of health in Malaysia.

Keywords: *Fact-checking behaviour, fake news, health news, locus of control, third-person effect (TPE).*

INTRODUCTION

In this technological age, social media completely changed how we communicate, collect and share information. Nevertheless, along with its transformative impact, social media has also promoted to a concerning phenomenon known as the fake news.

Fake news, which refers to intentionally false news articles that can mislead readers, has become a pervasive issue globally (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). As stated by Zhu et al. (2021, p. 477), fake news is the "inaccurate or sensational news had spread together with beneficial information" and has "major implications in various areas of the everyday life of consumers" (Pelau et al., 2023, p2). Hence, it is reasonable to be concerned about the proliferation of fake news. Consequently, social media emerged as the ultimate source of information and fake news transmission (He & Sannusi, 2024).

Sometimes referred to as misinformation, fake news are misleading contents which mimics mainstream news and circulates with the intention to benefit particular communities or groups (Shin et al., 2018). Influentially misleading, fake news can be used to sway people's view for social, political or financial benefit. It can bring harmful impacts to the public and society. In simple term, the dissemination of misinformation may have significant

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consequences. For instance, it could disrupt the news ecosystem's credibility, damage any individual or organization's reputation, or cause social panic (Mahid et al., 2018), impact the nation's political landscape (Sabri, 2019). and "undermine the implementation of evidence-based interventions and weaken the credibility of scientific expertise" (Gagnon-Dufresne et al., 2023. p1).

According to Rocha et al. (2021), fake news, is said to be a form of information overload, dominating traditional and social media platforms and becoming a significant part of daily life. The impact of misinformation particularly on health related news are more common during epidemics and disasters as highlighted by a news release from the World Health Organization (WHO). The organization also stated that this might delay the delivery of medical care, have a detrimental effect on people's mental health, and raise vaccine hesitancy (WHO, 2022). This could be due to the fact that accessing real and accurate news was a challenge throughout the pandemic (Uran et al., 2022). For instance, Lieneck et al. (2022) who conducted a systematic review to examine the facilitators and barriers related with vaccine promotion using social media found that the spread of misinformation was a component of the identified barriers vaccine promotion. This aligns with the study by Muhammed, and Mathew (2022) who noted that fake news on health matters may cause a delay in treating the patients, which in turn can worse their condition. The researchers further added that people often trust health-related information posted online by others, including their treatment experiences and traditional solutions. Similarly, Duplaga (2020) added that the spread of conspiracy theories and misinformation has the potential for the society to reject any rational prevention measures.

In another study in Bahrain to determine the sources of online information about prescription drugs, Al Khaja et al. (2018) found slightly more than half of the messages analysed displayed potentially misleading claims, and exaggeration without any supporting proof. Loeb et al. (2020) in examining the spread of fake news about urological health conditions, found a significant amount of the circulating information is commercial, biased or fake. Researchers Pian et al. (2021), Duplaga (2020) with Paakkari and Okan (2020) stated that one of the main reasons for infodemic to spread is the low level of ehealth literacy. For instance, in a study on the relationship between Covid-19 fake news exposure and belief with Covid-19 knowledge and preventive behaviours among South Korean adults, researchers Lee et al. (2020) said, in spite of the young people's proficiency with technology, effective interventions are needed to improve their digital health literacy. This aligns with the study by Vrdelja et al. (2021) university students in Slovenia, who concluded that interventions are needed to improve health literacy.

Closer to home, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) had received 1,837 complaints of fake news about the Covid-19 vaccine at the time when the nation was battling the pandemic (Bernama, 2023). The news article quoted MCMC Network Security Division chief Harme Mohamed who had said that "The spread of fake news online will not only cause panic but can also disrupt the stability and security of the country" (Bernama, 2023, para.3). As researcher, Li et al. (2023) put it;

> The common narrative implies that the Internet and social media, by facilitating the production and diffusion of information, have weakened the role of traditional gatekeepers and exacerbated current forms information disorder (p.467).

Earlier, a 2019 survey by Ruder Finn revealed that 60% of respondents were concerned about false information on social media (ASEAN Post, 2019). For example, in Malaysia, fake news claiming that the coronavirus would cause people to be zombielike had raised concerns among medical experts (Jalli & Idris, 2019). The researcher also noted that numerous hoaxes in Indonesia have been circulated online, claiming that some patients died due to the pathogen's effects. Another fake news that circulated in Indonesia was on the treatment, suggesting that the herbal blend of curcumin and ginger, which are the main ingredients of a Jamu drink, can be used to treat Covid-19 (Wijaya, 2020).

More recently, it was reported that an old voice recording that circulated in 2021 made a comeback, claiming that hospital beds were full and the death toll in cases of 'brought in dead' (BID) is increasing (Sinar Daily, 2023). In a study on the fake news sharing behaviour during the Covid-19 pandemic, Balakrishnan et al. (2021) said that fake news sharing behaviour is determined by different motives such as altruism, ignorance and entertainment as the predicting behaviours. In fact, a news report by The Star had quoted Health Ministry's deputy director for the Non-Communicable Disease Section, Dr Feisul Idzwan Mustapha who stated that "Malaysians' health literacy is predicted to worse, given the amount of misinformation being spread on social media" (The Star, 2022, para.1).

This is despite the fact that Malaysia has an information verification website, namely "sebenarnya.my" that used to counter fake news. Malaysians were encouraged to check the facts of the news at the information verification website. Besides that, Malaysia also has MyCheck Malaysia, which started in March 2020 (Bernama, 2023).

> …fact-checking initiative that operates with editorial independence to fight misinformation that was widespread in the country in accordance with international standards set by the International Fact Checking Network (IFCN) (Bernama, 2023, para.12).

Furthermore, it can be seen that the action of combating fake news started early even before the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, some social media companies like X (Twitter), Google, and Facebook have taken action to draft policy initiatives to combat fake news as early as the U.S. election 2017 (Corbu et al., 2020). As an example, the Facebook company added a feature to their software to detect fake news and delete the fake accounts. However, although the government and organizations active in combating fake news, one concern remains unanswered which is to what level do young generation in Selangor think they are able to distinguish between real and fake news when ingesting news on various internet platform.

Understanding the effects of fake news extends beyond assessing whether individuals believe it to be true; it also involves examining how disinformation influences people's perception of credible news (Guo & Vargo, 2018). In fact, the dissemination of fake news not only impacts individuals' beliefs but also affects their behavioural intentions, which are influenced by their perceptions of news credibility (Visentin et al., 2019). Considering this, addressing the challenge of fake news requires collective responsibility from the public to combat inaccurate information (Kanekar & Thombre, 2019). Individuals need to develop essential skills to evaluate information critically and determine its validity, emphasizing the importance of new media literacy in the 21st century (Lee et al., 2015; Yusof et al., 2020). Melchior and Oliveira (2022) in their study suggested that new tools and strategies to stop

fake news sharing should be developed, and further studies on the credibility of health information is also needed.

One critical factor influencing individuals' perception of fake news and their response to it is the third-person effect (TPE). This psychological phenomenon where individuals believe that others are more susceptible to media influence than they are themselves (Davison, 1983). Despite the lack of data indicating that social media users are skilled at spotting fake news, reports do suggest that they often feel it is a problem for the 'other' social media users (Yang & Horning, 2020). This effect is particularly evident in the context of fake news, where people tend to assume that misinformation will mislead others but not themselves (Jang & Kim, 2018).

Given the third-person effect's influence on fake news perceptions, fact-checking plays a crucial role in combating misinformation. Fact-checking, also known as 'verification' or 'authentification' (Tandoc Jr. et al., 2018; Vraga et al., 2020) is described as "individual's behaviours of determining whether a piece of information exists or is true" (Yu & Shen, 2021, p. 86). However, previous research indicates that many individuals, particularly Malaysian youth, struggle to differentiate reliable information from misleading content, for example during critical political events (Maryam et al., 2018; McGrew et al., 2017). According to Su (2021), there has been a lack of institutional gatekeepers within social media platforms, and comprehensive strategies for effective fact-checking have not been fully established. The potential consequences of falling victim to misleading information highlight the urgent need to enhance media literacy skills among the youth.

Another psychological factor that may impact fact-checking behavior is locus of control (LOC), which influences how individuals perceive their ability to control situations and outcomes (Petterson, 1987). For example, Lake (2020) stated that those who have a strong internal locus of control believe their actions and abilities will influence the outcomes. However, it is important to consider the potential risks associated with overconfidence and overestimation of skills or abilities, as demonstrated in previous studies (Arthur & Doverspike, 1992).

Moreover, individuals tend to perceive that social media has a greater impact on others than on themselves—a phenomenon known as the third-person effect (TPE) (Corbu et al., 2020; Jang & Kim, 2018). This effect is particularly pronounced when comparing individuals' fake news detection literacy to that of distant others, suggesting that people anticipate the greatest impact of media on others rather than themselves (Corbu et al., 2020). Understanding this perception is crucial in exploring individuals' fact-checking behaviour, new media literacy, and internal locus of control.

The primary objective of this research is to examine the relationships between TPE perceptions, fact checking behaviour and internal LOC on Selangor's young generations' susceptibility to the influence of fake news on health information. Thus, building upon the theoretical framework of the third-person effect, this research aims to investigate whether Selangor youth perceive greater effects of fake news on others compared to themselves, with a specific focus on third person effect on themselves, fact-checking behaviour, and internal locus of control in the context of fake news on health. By examining these factors, this study will provide valuable insights into the psychological and cognitive mechanisms that influence their engagement with fake news and inform interventions aimed at promoting media literacy and combating misinformation.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

a. TPE and Fact-Checking Behaviour

The third-person effect (TPE) posits that individuals generally believe that others are more susceptible to the effect of media messages than on themselves. Essentially, people think that the most significant impact of media messages will be on others rather than on themselves or those close to them (Davison, 1983). However, according to a behavioural hypothesis, when individuals perceive others as being more influenced by media messages, they are likely to express support for imposing restrictions on such messages (Salwen & Dupagne, 1999).

TPE involves assessing both the influence on oneself and others. It is a concept frequently used in the study of public opinion, particularly when a person considers themselves immune to the influences they believe affect others (Davison, 1983; Perloff, 1993). Scholars such as Chapin (2002, 2013) and Cohen and Davis (1991) have emphasized that messages with negative or controversial content are perceived to have a stronger influence on others. This has been supported by studies conducted by Jang and Kim (2018), Lim (2017), Lovejoy et al. (2010), and Pham et al. (2019), which showed that TPE became more prominent whenever messages like fake news or behaviours such as excessive posting and discussing on Facebook were considered socially undesirable.

According to Stefăniță et al. (2018), the theory suggests that due to the overestimation of media influence on others, people will try to limit messages they perceive as harmful to others. Thus, TPE comprises both perceptual and behavioural components (Perloff, 2002). The perceptual component refers to the difference in assessing the influence of media on others versus oneself, while the behavioural component implies that individuals will take action to restrict or censor media messages they believe have a negative and extensive influence on others (Davison, 1996). Gibbon and Durkin (1995) reported that TPE increased as the perceived social distance between individuals and others grew, including family members, neighbours, members of the state, and the general public.

Over the years, research has shown the TPE works in many situations including social media use (Schweisberger et al., 2014), online games (Zhong, 2009), political campaigns (Wei et al., 2017) and pornography (Gunther, 1995). Furthermore, Miller (1987) noted that media messages have long been perceived to have significant and predominantly negative impacts towards the attitudes and behaviour of audiences who are vulnerable and easily fooled. According to a research by Jang and Kim (2018), while Americans were generally confident in their ability to identify false political information, they believed that fake news had a big impact on other voters.

Stefăniță et al. (2018) stated that the people often believe that distant individuals are more impacted by fake news than themselves or those in their immediate circle like family and friend, which makes the TPE theory applicable to the new and highly debated digital environment. In a 2020 survey of 511 Chinese respondents, researchers Liu and Huang reported that individuals tended to perceive themselves as less vulnerable to the impact of Covid-19 digital disinformation compared to close and distant others. These findings align with Davison's TPE theory, which indicates that a number of people often believe that they are less susceptible to the influence of media messages compared to others.

It is important to note that digital media was a convenient way for individuals to acquire information about the Covid-19 pandemic during the lockdown (Liu & Lo, 2014). In Malaysia, the Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) established the information verification portal “sebenarnya.my” to help people verify news received

through social media. Apart from the variety digital platforms that disseminate fake news, it is imperative to acknowledge that audiences are more selective in how they accept it due to the low quality and lack of credibility (Lee & Choi, 2018). Misinformation has been proved empirically to influence our thoughts and attitudes (Wood & Porter, 2018). Studies have also revealed that how people assess the information source affects how much of a TPE occurs (Lee & Park, 2016).

Studies have shown a positive correlation between knowledge about a specific subject and TPE. As one's expertise on a subject improves, so does their perception of how influential media messages are (Chapin, 2002; Wei et al., 2008). Therefore, individuals who actively engage in fact-checking tend to perceive themselves as less susceptible (Liu & Huang, 2020). However, people tend to stay away from fact-checkers who contradict their preconceived beliefs (Hameleers & Van der Meer, 2019), despite the fact that fact-checkers can help correct misinformation. Based on the literature, the following hypotheses are put forth:

Hypothesis 1: The perceived effect of the fake news in the context of health information on others is greater than the perceived effect of the fake news on the self.

Hypothesis 2: There is a significant negative relationship between the third-person effect on self and fact-checking behaviour.

b. Moderation of Internal Locus of Control

One prominent personality trait, known as locus of control, refers to the general belief that an individual's behaviour can influence their environment and that they have the capability to control outcomes through their own actions (Maddux, 1995, p. 22). According to Cunningham (2012), individuals with internal locus of control are also referred to as 'internals' and would believe that they are in control of their actions and its results. Conversely, those who exhibit an external locus of control – also known as 'externals' would have the opposite perspective. Author Lake (2020) stated that there are regional variances in locus of control with geographical playing a significant role in shaping how populations from diverse regions cope with natural disasters and other emergencies. Additionally, Johnson (2018) reported that while many individuals generally find high self-esteem to be beneficial, the desirability of an internal locus of control varies depending on the specific circumstances. The researcher added that it would be harmful to a person's self-esteem to encounter unfavourable consequences when they believe they have control over their surroundings (Johnson, 2018).

In a study investigating the relationship between the locus of control and cell phone usage, it was observed that individuals with an internal locus of control are more capable of controlling their cell phone use during inappropriate times (Li et al., 2015). The researchers suggested that "psychotherapy interventions targeting the locus of control can enhance internal control, empowering individuals to utilize cell phone technology to their advantage while avoiding negative outcomes" (p. 456). Similarly, internal locus of control is said to be connected with positive attitudes toward text messaging (Mahatanankoon & O'Sullivan, 2008). Additionally, Haridakis and Rubin's (2005) findings indicate that individuals with a high internal locus of control tend to underestimate the personal impact of exposure to negative media content while expressing concerns about its effects on others. In another study, Walsh (2010) reported that individuals with a stronger feeling of locus of control were more proactive in avoiding online advertisements.

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Numerous studies have demonstrated that individuals who believe they have personal control over their actions tend to exhibit more critical perspectives (Saracaloğlu & Yılmaz, 2011). This includes their ability to influence the effects of media content. Essentially, for these individuals, possessing a personal locus comprising their needs, motivations, and intellectual abilities assists them in effectively processing and interpreting the information they encounter (Truman et al., 2020). Further, Rasheed et al. (2019) stated that internal locus of control can lead individuals to exhibit increased overconfidence, thus potentially serving as a moderating factor. In line with these considerations, the next hypothesis posits that:

Hypothesis 3: The internal locus of control moderates the negative relationship between the third-person effect on self and fact-checking behaviour.

METHODOLOGY

a. Participants and Data Collection

A self-administered survey was conducted with 365 youth in Selangor using a convenience sampling method. Participants' interest and consent were sought prior to the survey. Questionnaires with incomplete responses were dropped. Based on these, 325 responses were included in the analysis. The sample population (n=325) consisted of 117 (36.0%) males and 208 (64.0%) females, with the majority of them aged between 18 and 20 years (45.8%). The demographic profile of the participants is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1**:** Demographic profile of respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	117	36.0
	Female	208	64.0
Age group	15-17	33	10.2
	18-20	149	45.8
	21-23	81	24.9
	24-26	47	14.5
	27-29	12	3.7
	≥30	3	0.9

As shown in Table 2, a significant number of respondents (39.4%) reported that they spend about 3 to 4 hours daily checking their social media, while 33.5% spend 5 to 6 hours a day on social networks. About 16.6% said they spend more than six on a daily basis, while 10.5% spend between an hour to 2.

Table 2: Hours spend on social media in a day

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Time spent on social media in a day	1-2 hours	34	10.5
	3-4 hours	128	39.4
	5-6 hours	109	33.5
	> 6hours	54	16.6

b. Measures

i. Third-person Effect

This study used a multi-item scale consisting of 6 items to measure the perceived impact of fake news on self (3 items) and others (3 items) and was adapted from the study by Stefăniță et al. (2018). Using a 5-point Likert scale, respondents rated their level of agreement for each statement from from "1 = strongly disagree" to "5 = strongly agree." Following the past

research, the third-person effects for self and others was calculated by subtracting the mean scores on the self-scale from the mean scores on the others scale (Liu & Huang, 2020; Stefăniță et al., 2018).

ii. Internal Locus of Control

The LOC was measured using the 9-item scale that covers powerful other control, chance control, and internal control (Rubin, 1993). Following past studies (Haridakis & Rubin, 2003; Rubin, 1993), responses were recorded to the powerful others and chance control items; where higher scores indicated more internal control. Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The level of internal consistency obtained in this study was acceptable (α = .757).

iii. Fact-checking Behaviour

Fact-checking behaviour was measured using a scale adapted from previous researches (Liu & Huang, 2020; Stefăniță et al., 2018), on a 5-point Likert type scale. Two sub-dimensions include active fact-checking habits (e.g., ''When in doubt, I check sites specialized in detecting incorrect information''), and passive fact evaluation habits (e.g., ''I rely on the source's reputation'').

c. Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS software version 26 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA). The perceived effect of fake news in the context of fake news on health on others is greater than the perceived effect of fake news on the self (H1) was tested using a paired samples t-test. To investigate the relationship between the third-person effect on self and fact-checking behaviour (Hypothesis 2), Pearson correlation was employed. Hypothesis 3 proposed that the internal locus of control acts as a moderator in the negative relationship between the third-person effect on self and fact-checking behaviour. The moderation model (Model 1) of the SPSS PROCESS macro was utilized to test this hypothesis.

RESULTS

Based on the survey findings, it can be inferred that the prevalence of fake news is a noteworthy issue for the young adults in Selangor. The results indicate that a substantial proportion (46.5%) of the participants frequently encountered false news stories within the last six months.

To assess the third-person effect of fake news, respondents were asked how they saw its impact on them and others. The paired-sample T-tests indicated that respondents believed fake news had a greater impact on others when it comes to health information ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 0.46$) compared to themselves ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 0.81$, $t(324) = 27.68$, $p < .001$), supporting Hypothesis 1. This finding suggests that individuals are increasingly conscious of the impact and potential risks of fake news when it directly concerns them.

In order to examine the relationship between the third-person effect on self and fact-checking behaviour, Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed. The third-person effect on self was found to have a significant negative relationship with fact-checking behaviour which supported Hypothesis 2, where $r = -0.20$, $p < 0.001$. The negative correlation coefficient suggests that as the perception on the third-person effect on self-increases their fact-checking behaviour tends to decrease. In other words, those who perceive themselves

as less susceptible to the influence of fake news are less likely to engage in fact-checking behaviour.

The moderating effect of internal locus of control on the negative relationship between third-person effect on self and fact-checking behaviour (H3) was examined using PROCESS macro Model 1. As shown in Table 3, third-person effect on self significantly predict fact-checking behaviour (B = −0.65, SE = .17, t = −3.83, p < 0.01), while internal locus of control significantly predicts fact-checking behaviour (B = −0.73, SE = .22, t = −3.25, p < 0.01). The overall model was significant, R2 = .07, F(3, 361) = 9.6, p < .001, which explained 7.4 per cent of the variance in fact-checking behaviour. The interaction effect between third-person effect on self and internal locus of control was statistically significant (B = −.02, SE = .01, t = 3.11, p < 0.01). The interaction model was ΔR2 = .020, F(1, 361) = 9.65, p < 0.01, which explained 2 per cent of the variance in fact-checking behaviour. Based on the conditional effects, the association between third-person effect on self and fact-checking behaviour was found significant for low and moderate internal locus of control, but not significant for participants with high internal locus of control. Participants with low, where B = −0.23, SE = 0.04, 95% CI (-0.31, −0.14), and moderate internal locus of control, where B = −0.15, SE = 0.03, 95% CI (−0.21, −0.09), are more likely to have a higher fact-checking behaviour when third-person effect on self is low.

Table 3: *Moderation of Internal Locus of Control*

Variables	**β**	**SE**	***t***	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
Constant	32.32	4.98	6.49	22.52	42.12
TPE	-0.65**	0.171	-3.83	-0.99	-0.32
ILOC	-0.73**	0.22	-3.25	-1.17	-0.29
TPE x ILOC	0.02**	0.01	3.12	.009	0.04
Conditional effect:					
Low	-0.23***	0.04	-5.24	-0.31	-0.14
Moderate	-0.15***	0.03	-4.84	-0.21	-0.09
High	-0.06^{ns}	0.04	-1.57	-0.14	0.01

Note. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000. TPE = third-person effect on self; ILOC: moderate internal locus of control; *CI* = Confidence interval; *LL* = Lower limit; *UL* = Upper limit

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The objectives of this study were to examine if (1) the perceived effect of the fake news in the context of health information on others is greater than the perceived effect of the fake news on the self; (2) the relationship between the third-person effect on self and fact-checking behaviour; (3) the moderation effect of internal locus of control between the third-person effect on self and fact-checking behaviour.

As postulated in H1, the result show that the perceived effect of fake news in the context of health information on others is greater than the perceived effect of the fake news on the self. There are a number of possible explanations for the third-person effect in relations to fake news. One possibility is that individuals may underestimate their own susceptibility to fake news because they believe that they are more knowledgeable and discerning than others. This finding concurs with past studies by Altay and Acerbi (2023), Corbu et al. (2020), Cheng and Chen (2020), together with Yoo et al. (2022) who have emphasized that messages with negative or controversial content are perceived to have a stronger influence on others. Similarly, the result also corroborates with the study by Jang and Kim (2018) who found that Americans thought fake news on political communication had

a big effect on other voters, but they were confident in their own ability to spot it. Further, the study by Zhang and Lee (2021) concluded that people feel they are less susceptible to the influence of online misinformation than others.

This study also provide support for Stefăniță et al.'s (2018) findings which suggested that the TPE theory is relevant to the digital environment, as people tend to think that fake news has greater impact on distant individuals. The results of this study are consistent with Davison's TPE theory, which posits that many individuals believe they are less influenced by the messages they received from media sources compares to others. However, this observed tendency may have implications for how individuals process and respond to fake news content. When people believe that they are less affected by misinformation, they may be less motivated to critically assess the accuracy of news they encounter. Consequently, they may be more likely to accept and share misinformation without engaging in fact-checking.

The study also indicated that the third-person effect on self was negatively associated with fact-checking behaviour (H2), suggesting that individuals who perceive themselves as less susceptible to the influence of fake news are less inclined to engage in fact-checking behaviour. This means that when individuals perceive that they are less affected by fake news than others (third-person effect on self), this perception might lead to a decreased motivation to fact-check the information they encounter. This supports previous studies that concluded that those who engage in active fact-checking view themselves as less vulnerable (Chung & Kim, 2020; Tang et al., 2021). The present study also substantiates that when individuals are exposed to fake news, they are more inclined to engage in fact-checking behaviour. As a result of fact-checking, they may become more conscious of the prevalence of false information and its potential impact on others. This awareness leads them to think that fake news affects other people more than it does them directly. In essence, fact-checking increases their perception on the impact fake news has on others. However, the results of this study contradict the findings of the study conducted by Iftikhar et al. in year 2022. In their research, the researchers came to the conclusion that "fact-checking habits, whether active or passive, do not influence the intensity of Third-Person Effect (TPE)" (p. 8171). The disparity in these studies' findings suggests a difference in how fact-checking behaviour relates to individuals' perception of the Third-Person Effect.

The present study also confirmed that internal locus of control moderates the negative relationship between the third-person effect on self and fact-checking behaviour (H3). Internal locus of control is a personality trait that refers to the extent to which people believe that they have control over their own lives (Rotter, 1966). This means that individuals' internal locus of control plays a role in determining their fact-checking behaviour. Specifically, individuals with low to moderate internal locus of control are more likely to fact-check when they perceive the third-person effect on self as low. Conversely, individuals with high internal locus of control may not be influenced by this perception. The overall model was significant, indicating that the variables included in the analysis explained a portion of the variance in fact-checking behaviour (about 7.4%). This study, however, does not concur with past research which showed that media viewers high on internal locus of control reported lower levels of vulnerabilities to media content (Hoffman et al., 2016). This is because they believe that they have the ability to identify and evaluate information critically, and they are therefore more likely to be sceptical of information that they encounter online. In other words, people with a high internal locus of control believe that they are capable of protecting themselves from misinformation, even if others are not. As stated by Park et al. (2021), fact-

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checking is perceived as a crucial and effective strategy to combat online fake news. Therefore, it is important to study further on this aspect.

Findings of this study yield several interestingly theoretical contributions. Firstly, this study contributed to the literature by elucidating the moderation of the internal locus of control on the relationship between third-person effect and fact-checking behavior. This finding may support the concept of "naive realism," where individuals tend to believe that their own perceptions and judgments are unbiased and accurate, while others are more influenced by external factors like fake news. Secondly, the third-person effect also describes people's tendency to think that media messages affect others more than themselves.

This implies that those who think they are less prone to media influence might be less motivated to fact-check information before sharing it. It raises questions about the cognitive biases that might be at play, such as the "optimistic bias," where people believe they are less likely to fall victim to misinformation. Finally, the moderation role of internal locus of control indicates that individuals who have a strong belief in their ability to control events and outcomes are more likely to engage in fact-checking behaviour even if they believe they are less prone to media impact. It, therefore, highlights the importance of individual differences in shaping media behaviour and responses to misinformation.

In terms of practical implications, understanding that individuals perceive the influence of fake news is more significant on others compared to oneself can provide valuable insights for shaping communication strategies and campaigns. Messages could be crafted to emphasize the potential negative consequences of sharing or believing fake news, thereby encouraging responsible sharing behaviour. Further, fact-checking efforts and media literacy campaigns can be targeted not only towards individuals but also towards creating a collective sense of responsibility for verifying information before sharing it. More importantly, these fact-checking initiatives should target individuals who exhibit a strong third-person effect on self, emphasizing the importance of verifying information regardless of personal perceived immunity to misinformation. Additionally, media literacy programs could address cognitive biases and encourage critical thinking skills to counteract the negative impact of the third-person effect on fact-checking behaviour. These programs can focus on fostering an internal locus of control, encouraging individuals to take responsibility for their media consumption habits and critically evaluate information before accepting and sharing it. Overall, these research findings shed light on the complex interplay of social perception, cognitive biases, and individual characteristics in shaping responses to fake news and misinformation. Understanding these implications can guide policymakers, educators, and media professionals in designing more effective interventions to combat misinformation and promote media literacy.

The study exploring the perceived effect of fake news in the context of health information on individuals yielded insightful findings, but it also had some limitations. One of the key limitations pertains to the sample used for the study, which might not be fully representative of the broader population. If the participants were predominantly from a particular age group, ethnicity, or socioeconomic background, the generalizability of the findings could be limited. Additionally, data collection relied heavily on self-report measures which is the survey, which could have introduced self-report bias. Participants might have responded in a socially desirable manner, affecting the accuracy of their reported attitudes and behaviours. Furthermore, temporal factors must be taken into considerations. The study's cross-sectional design only captured data at one point in time, which prevents the

establishment of causality or tracking changes in attitudes over time. Therefore, given the rapidly evolving landscape of media and technology, the findings might not remain applicable over time, as new platforms and forms of misinformation emerge. These limitations should be carefully considered when interpreting the study's results and suggest potential areas for improvement in future research on media effects and misinformation.

Overall, this finding emphasizes the importance of considering individuals' beliefs in their own control over information processing and decision-making when studying the relationship between media effects and fact-checking behaviour. It suggests that interventions aimed at promoting fact-checking behaviour could potentially benefit from fostering a sense of internal control and responsibility among individuals in their information consumption practices.

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