

An analysis of Misinformation on X during the U.S. elections

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Introduction

There is fake news/ misinformation on social media platforms (fill in information from academic papers/ newspaper articles).

Scholars have defined fake news as fabrication or manipulation of information that might sound like news media content and distorts true information (Aïmeur et. al., 2023; Lazer et. al., 2018).

The National Academy of Sciences President Marcia McNutt has remarked that misinformation spreads at the speed of light, it can be deadly when it impacts personal bias, and trustworthy evidence; and this makes it worse than an epidemic

(<https://www.nationalacademies.org/news/2021/07/as-surgeon-general-urges-whole-of-society-effort-to-fight-health-misinformation-the-work-of-the-national-academies-helps-foster-an-evidence-based-information-environment>). Literature on misinformation defines fake news as manipulating information by production of false information or distorting true information (Fake news, disinformation and misinformation in social media: a review Esma Aïmeur1 · Sabrina Amri1 · Gilles Brassard1).

“Misinformation is worse than an epidemic: It spreads at the speed of light throughout the globe, and can prove deadly when it reinforces misplaced personal bias against all trustworthy evidence,” added National Academy of Sciences President Marcia McNutt. “Research is helping us combat this ‘misinfodemic’ through understanding its origins and the aspects of human nature that make it so transmittable.”

The US elections is a good case study for analysing any misinformation on platforms like X, Facebook, and Instagram (when did the elections take place, who were contesting the elections, and any other information about the US elections).The US elections primaries started in January 2024 . The Democratic National Convention and the Republican National Convention was held in July/August 2024 where the candidates for both the parties were announce.It was then

followed upon by heated rallies and debates for the candidates of both the parties . The Republican candidate was Donald Trump(the 45th President of the United States of America and the current President - Elect with J.D. Vance as The Vice President . The Democratic candidate initially was Joe Biden (the 46th President of the United States of America) who was later replaced by the team of Kamala Harris and Tim Walz.

This research aims to explore potential differences and biases in how two major social media platforms, X (formerly Twitter) and Meta (Facebook and Instagram), influence discourse, dissemination of information, and public opinion regarding the USA elections. Specifically, the study seeks to address the following key questions:

How do user engagement patterns vary between X and Meta when interacting with political content during election periods?

What is the role of platform policies (e.g., fact-checking and misinformation controls) in shaping election-related narratives on X and Meta?

By examining these questions, the research aims to uncover platform-specific impacts on voter perceptions, polarization, and the broader democratic process

Questions

The 2024 United States presidential election was marked by extreme differences between the two major nominees, Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump. The campaign focused on several major themes that illuminated their contrasting visions for the nation ahead. Here's a look at some of the main reasons that shaped the election:

Economy

The economy was to the fore of voters' minds, with concerns about inflation and the cost of living dominating their concerns. Harris promoted a set of policies designed to lower prescription drug prices, extend the Affordable Care Act and protect renters. Trump, meanwhile, called for dramatic tax cuts -- including ending income taxes on gratuities -- and tariffs on imports, including a 100% tariff on cars manufactured outside the U.S. Opponents warned that Trump's protectionist policies might raise inflation and increase household expenses.

Healthcare

Healthcare reform was less of an issue in 2024 compared to previous elections. Harris emphasized protecting and building on the Affordable Care Act, underscoring that she would cap seniors' out-of-pocket costs for prescription drugs. Trump, in releasing a new health care

plan, indicated there could be cuts to entitlement programs such as Social Security and Medicare. His governance has also been criticized for slashing a great deal of public health funding, including for services such as vaccination programs and efforts to contain the spread of diseases.

Immigration

Immigration was a divider. Trump promised to pursue the most extensive domestic deportation sweep in the nation's history, resurrect divisive policies from his first term and intensify the crackdown on immigration. He also proposed ending birthright citizenship and instituting "ideological screenings" for immigrants. Harris, for her part, backed comprehensive immigration reform, one with any path to citizenship and border security. The discourse grew heated with Trump's rhetoric, which detractors said inflamed fear and division.

Foreign Policy

Foreign policy was another source of divergence. Harris stressed preserving alliances, siding with Ukraine in its struggle against Russia and countering China's rise. She called for "de-risking" from China and for deeper ties in Asia and the Pacific. Trump's "America First" approach emphasized a drawdown of U.S. commitment to international organizations, reassessment of U.S. obligations to NATO and cuts to foreign aid. He also withdrew the United States from the Paris Agreement and the World Health Organization during his first term.

Social Issues

Social issues, especially abortion rights, loomed large. In the wake of the Supreme Court overturning *Roe v. Wade*, a handful of states have enacted near-total abortion bans. Harris backed abortion rights and attempted to encode protections for abortion. Trump's position was murkier, with the records and plans of some Republican candidates coming under scrutiny on abortion. Climate Change

Climate change was still a top concern, particularly among younger voters. Harris called for an aggressive approach to reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and in renewable energy. Trump played down the urgency of broad environmental regulations and sought energy independence by boosting oil and gas production.

Literature Review

Visual content on social media has become increasingly influential in shaping political discourse and civic engagement. Using a dataset of 239,526 Instagram images, deep learning, and LLM-based workflows, Chang et al. (2024) examine the impact of different content types on user engagement during the 2024 US presidential Elections, with a focus on synthetic visuals. Results

show while synthetic content may not increase engagement alone, it mediates how political information is created through highly effective, often absurd, political memes. We define the notion of "generative memetic weaponization..."

Research Statement

How do the algorithms of X and Meta differ in amplifying political content related to the USA elections?

To what extent do these platforms exhibit partisan biases in content recommendation, moderation, or removal?

Methodology

To collect data on misinformation during the 2024 US elections, this research analyzed public posts on the platform X (formerly Twitter). An advanced search was conducted using specific keywords and hashtags such as "US Elections 2024", "Trump misinformation", "Kamala Harris election", and "voter fraud 2024". Hashtags like #USElections2024 and #ElectionDisinformation were also included. The search was filtered by time period (January 2024 to June 2024) and by engagement (likes, retweets) to prioritize content with high visibility. Posts were manually reviewed and categorized by theme to identify patterns in misinformation and bias.

Findings

The 2024 United States presidential election showcased stark contrasts between the two leading candidates, Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump. The campaign revolved around several critical themes that highlighted their divergent visions for the country.

Economy: Voters were primarily concerned with inflation and cost of living. Harris supported measures like lowering drug prices and expanding the ACA. Trump proposed tax cuts and tariffs.

Healthcare: Harris emphasized protecting the ACA, while Trump's proposals included possible cuts to Social Security and Medicare.

Immigration: Trump proposed sweeping deportations and policies like ending birthright citizenship. Harris backed comprehensive reform and a path to citizenship.

Foreign Policy: Harris focused on international alliances and countering China. Trump promoted an 'America First' strategy, reducing international commitments.

Social Issues: Abortion rights became central after *Roe v. Wade* was overturned. Harris defended abortion rights; Trump's stance remained less defined.

Climate Change: Harris pushed for net-zero emissions by 2050. Trump favored fossil fuel production and minimal environmental regulation.

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