



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>



<https://doi.org/10.53032/tvcr/2024.v6n4.08>

The Tirupati Laddu Controversy: Fake News, Political Fallout, and the Role of Misinformation

Nelson Mandela

*Department of Animation & Virtual Reality,
School of Computer Science & IT, Jain (Deemed-to-be University), Bangalore, Karnataka, India,*

Poovarasana G

*Department of Animation & Virtual Reality,
School of Computer Science & IT, Jain (Deemed-to-be University), Bangalore, Karnataka, India,*

Suneesh KS

*Department of Animation & Virtual Reality,
School of Computer Science & IT, Jain (Deemed-to-be University), Bangalore, Karnataka, India,*

Broskhan

*Department of Animation & Virtual Reality,
School of Computer Science & IT, Jain (Deemed-to-be University), Bangalore, Karnataka, India*

Abstract

This courtier, falsehood about some animal fat contained in the holy prasadam, has been put in public light by its effect on devotees and, to some extent, the general public. An in-depth investigation reveals that the viral spread of fake news across social media platforms did much to send the entire issue into overdrive. This study takes the Tirupati Laddu case as an example to analyze the genesis and propagation of fake news, exploring reasoning's underpinning its emergence. Content analysis and social media analytics shall address the study on the distribution mechanisms for online disinformation along with an analysis of social media's role in diffusing misinformation in terms of impact on cultural and religious communities. Also, this study delineates how temple administrations, government agencies, and media institutions respond to disinformation in seeking to restore public faith. This would provide an insight into how to deal with fake news and erudition towards supporting social and religious cohesion in the digital age, with emphasis on the need for collaborative information distribution and effective fact-checking processes.



Keywords: Controversy, Misinformation, Religious, Digital age, Fact-checking

Introduction

Digital War on Facts: The Spread of Fake News in the Information Age

Social media is impacting the way information is disseminated-providing a higher leverage for knowledge and misinformation. Although Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter all provide easier, instant access to news, they have become ever more conducive to propaganda and fake news. With misinformation tending to gain momentum rapidly, associated consequences on cultural and social matters have also risen. An apt example is the Tirupati Laddu controversy-a faux pas where unchecked, misguided information engendered public outcry and misinformation alike. While misinformation has been a concern among actors in political discourse, it has now intensified Social media, which is becoming the preferred stage for pushing politically motivated agenda and lies. The emotional characteristic of modern fake news enhances the rate of its spread. Research suggests that emotional misinformation is often spread by users, which in turn influences both public opinion and social behavior. Fake news spreads faster than actual news, which really alters the public political discussion. There are issues verifying facts and restraining the spread of falsehoods because it can be disseminated quickly.

The Tirupati Laddu Story: History and Preparation

The Tirupati Laddu consecrated brahmin in the Tirumala temple, revered by millions of devotees, has taken on its present form only after centuries. According to Dr. V. Thimmappa, head of the department of philosophy and Religionists of Sri Venkateswara University, bringing food offerings to the deities goes as far back as the time of the Pallava dynasty. Initially, offerings consisted of cooked rice and other sweet items before taking on the modern form of laddus. Despite the fact that several historical documents, including those authored by Saint Annamacharya, mention about laddus, their importance as an offering grew later on as time passed.

The preparation is being strictly followed in the kitchen of the Temple, popularly known as "Potu." The cooking project is authorized under the traditional list of ingredients supplied in the Agama Sastra called Dittam. Presently, an estimated 250,000 laddus are prepared at the temple daily. The ingredients include an enormous quantity of Bengal gram flour, sugar, ghee, cashew nuts, cardamom, sugar candy, and raisins. Around 600 people are engaged in the preparation, and there is some measure of industrial involution, which hastens the production process, but the traditional methods were retained. In the year 2008, the Tirupati Laddu was conferred a Geographical Indication (GI) tag, as a safeguard to establish it against imitations.

The Tirupati Laddu Controversy: A Cultural Flashpoint

Controversy regarding the Tirupati Laddu broke out a few years back, when social media rumors alleged that the holy offering contained pig fat instead of the traditional ghee. Some people took offense at the suggestion, which spun into angry political and religious debates. After the appointment of a new TTD president, the controversy escalated in light of the political tussle in Andhra Pradesh.



Various political and religious organizations called for autonomy for temples, arguing against the State controlling religious institutions.

Impact of Misinformation and Countermeasures

Poor publicity campaigns, like the Laddu case, can damage value. The problem started after someone posted an untrue story that led to the legal actions, among which was an FIR against Amul for false claims about adulterated ghee supplied to the temple. It showed how a false piece of news or a flaw in public sentiment. The research suggested that misinformation is doing well in times of emotional engagement. Studies indicate that false news spreads faster than verified information, aided in its propagation by the algorithmic amplification on social media platforms. This had therefore become a serious problem requiring trifold approaches, such as:

- Generating digital literacy programs so that users can become aware of how to ascertain the news sources.
- Developing the specific fact-checking mechanisms within the social media platforms.
- Promoting responsible sharing of content and public awareness initiatives.
- Coming up with a legal means to put controls against the spread of misinformation news.

The Tirupati Laddu fiasco is another exciting case study in the role misinformation plays on shaping public perception. While digital media has been evolving, the challenge of tackling fake news continues to thrive amongst the great unparsed, requiring measures that put them on guard for the dignity of truth and authenticity in the digital age.

Research Methodology

This study utilizes qualitative research techniques to approximate the spread and influence of certain misinformation regarding the Tirupati Laddu controversy. The methodology is centered on content analysis and social media analysis to embody the systematic understanding of how fake news propagates and influences others.

Content Analysis

A representative sample of viral posts from social media, news articles, and fact-checks related to the controversy has been collected. The selection of the sample was drawn based on engagement levels, virality and relevance to the controversy. The content is classified based on sentiment positive, neutral, or negative and is assessed for misinformation indicating whether something is true, partly true, or false. A coding framework will help identify key themes and misinformation patterns from platforms like Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube.

Social Media Analysis

To assess the spread and impact of misinformation, engagement metrics such as shares, likes, and comments on various posts connected to the discourse are being tracked. Hashtags like #TirupatiLaddu, #PrasadamScam and #FakeNewsAlertare monitored for assessing the trends of discussion. The spread of misinformation is analyzed based on the frequency of posts, sharing interval among platforms, and the amplification within user influence circles. Additionally, a network analysis adds value to the study by helping identify important players in the misinformation cycle. This research



provides the quality of a rigorous empirical study, with details of collection methods, coding procedures, and analysis, of the functions of social media forming public discourse.

Theoretical Framework

The agenda-setting theory states the media do not analyze or dictate to others how to think but tell them what to think about. That makes the media act as a key agenda-forger, putting certain issues on the public agenda while sidelining others. The Tirupati Laddu controversy escalated due to electronic amplification through social media and regular media coverage that created lots of public awareness. The viral spread of misinformation dominated discussions on social media, partly thanks to the way algorithms prioritized viral, emotionally charged content over other facts. Besides, some politically motivated actors and the media themselves manipulated public perception by ensuring that the controversy had an ever-present place on the news agenda. This analysis will evaluate how news coverage and social media debates contributed toward public concern regarding the alleged contamination of Tirupati Laddu. Based on engagement rates and trending hashtags, the research aims to find out which aspects of the controversy attracted the most attention. The role of political actors and influencers in hijacking the public agenda using misinformation will also be examined.

Data Analysis

1. Kerala Congress's Satirical Take on the Tirupati Laddu Controversy

Recently, this Kerala Congress mocked the Tirupati Laddu fiasco and the associated viral Twitter rage with the catchphrase "One Nation, One Mom." Their tweets comically illustrated mothers alerting their households about laddus' safety, only to have their appeals dismissed as overreactions concerning hygiene. But the matter took a serious turn after lab tests showed the ghee used in the laddus contained animal fats including beef and fish oil. A wave of outrage from the public and political leaders followed; even BJP leaders called for a Central Bureau of Investigation into the matter.

One viral post read:

"For 2-3 years, the mother would feel unwell after tasting the laddu and would warn her family not to eat too much of it. They dismissed her concerns as typical overreactions about hygiene. However, now they wonder if she had sensed something was truly wrong with the laddu."

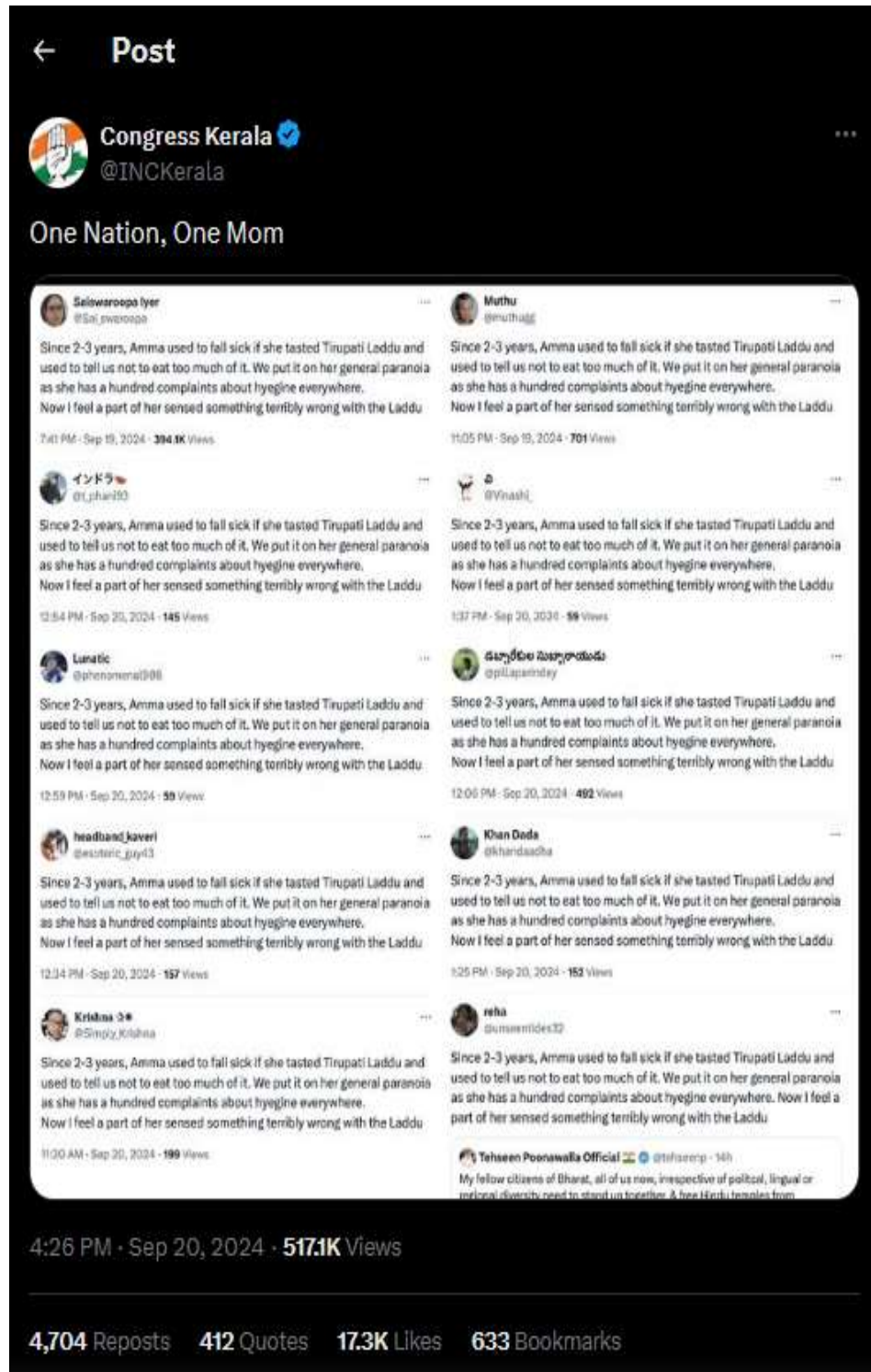


Fig 1: The viral tweets, which appeared to replicate each other, all claimed to recount a personal family experience with the Tirupati Laddu.

The tweet caught traction, buoyed by hashtags like #TirupatiLaddu, #PrasadControversy, and #OneNationOneMom. Initially, the satirical comments from the Kerala Congress were taken as humorous in nature regarding hygiene-related issues. Yet, with serious allegations surfacing, the debate morphed into a much more serious and contentious matter. (TOI News Desk, 2024)

2. Amul's Battle against Misinformation

India's largest dairy company, Amul, was embroiled in controversy after social media users mistakenly implicated it in the supposed adulteration of ghee in the Tirupati Laddu. The misinformation spread like wildfire, alleging that Amul had given tainted ghee that had animal fats such as cow fat and pig fat. The baseless charges incited rage among religious devotees, who considered such adulteration an affront to religious observance.

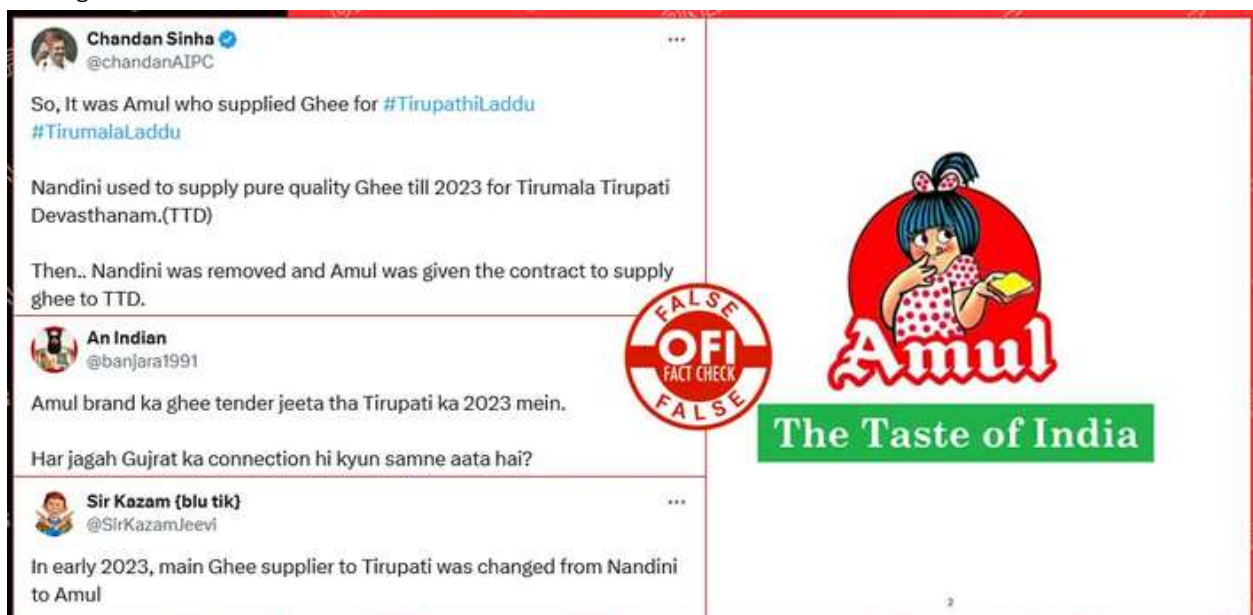


Fig 2: A false tweet linking Amul to the Tirupati Laddu controversy.

Disinformation and Legal Action

The Gujarat Cooperative Milk Marketing Federation (GCMMF), which markets Amul products, immediately filed a First Information Report (FIR) against some social media user propagating false claims. Amul stated it has never supplied ghee to the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) and initiated legal action against all those propagating misinformation. Scandalous stories suggested that it was supplying low-grade ghee. This grain-of-reply was hijacked, subsequently: the real supplier of the adulterated ghee was AR Dairy from Tamil Nadu. Amemnoned on the non-edited social media, this approach outlined the serious detrimental impact viral fake news thus wielded.

Brand Integrity and Crisis Management

The company, which enjoys a reputation for giving some of the best witty and quick responses on social media, took a different approach during this controversy, with an aim to be serious and transparent. The brand reaffirmed its quality commitment and denounced the misinformation that hurt its reputation. This example shows how fake news, when combined with religious sentiments, can escalate quickly and highly impact businesses, communities, and public trust. (Singh, 2024)



3. Political and Religious Implications: Chandrababu Naidu's Controversial Allegations

Former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh Chandrababu Naidu further stirred the controversy by alleging that the holy Tirupati Laddu was made of animal fats, such as pork and beef oil. His remarks attracted widespread ire from religious leaders and political opponents, who found his comments reckless and unfounded.

A widely shared tweet summarized the controversy:

"Chandrababu Naidu's reckless allegations of animal fat in Tirupati Laddu have been shown false following tests. Religious leaders and political opponents denounced baseless claims and warned of the harm caused by misinformation. #TirupatiLaddu #ReligiousIntegrity #Misinformation."

Testing and Rebuttals

After Naidu's allegations were made, external laboratory tests verified the ingredients used in laddu. These results authenticated that animal fats were not present and the TTD authorities strongly rejected the allegations. Religious leaders condemned Naidu for his inflammatory and disrespectful statements about Hindu traditions.

Popular Summation of Political Wrangling

Naidu's statement was more widely read as part of a political pandering to smear the ruling YSRCP led by Jagan Mohan Reddy. However, the allegations boomeranged as opposition parties and clergymen condemned him for heightening communal tensions. This incident pulled back the veil on political discourses being manipulated by misinformation, deepening the process of social and religious divides.

The Tirupati Laddu controversy presents what is possible in the realm of misinformation during the digital age. Misinformation rides high into the sky of the digital world and spreads like wildfire, oftentimes faster than fact-checking efforts. As a consequence, public perception became distorted.

Some of the major impacts would include:

- **Panic and Religious Fury:** Devotees were extremely irked by the thought that a sacred offering was contaminated; protests and boycotts ensued.
- **Corporate Damage:** An attack on Amul would be an apt example; while it did not connect with the whole controversy, the existence of misinformation to the detriment of a business cannot be overlooked.
- **Political Manipulation:** Political battles have leveled threats with fake news claims raising communal tension, further eroding reasoned discourse.
- **Difficulty Level for the Administration:** Despite TTD administration refuting the allegations, its coming too late to the party dulled their impact, thus making damage control difficult.
- **This case is a great reminder of the need for responsible journalism, digital literacy, and timely fact-checking to contain information disseminated about very sensitive matters such as religion, business, and politics.**



Conclusion

The Need for Stronger Digital Literacy and Fact-Checking

The case of the Tirupati Laddu serves as a quintessential instance of misinformation in undermining religious harmony and disrupting social order. To address the scourge of fake news, especially in culturally sensitive situations, social media companies must maximize their algorithms to detect and act upon misinformation with all seriousness. Furthermore, awareness-raising campaigns help citizens nurture responsible sharing of information that can dampen sensational news. Quick legal and institutional mechanisms such as those exemplified by Amul's response can provide a great disincentive to fight against misinformation campaigns. Beyond this, proactive engagement from religious institutions and governments is also essential as investment in early response mechanisms could assist in arresting the spread of alternative narratives. The Tirupati Laddu case points to the need for information verification before passing on, especially when it relates to religious sentiments. Also, social media users must accept the responsibility of preserving the truth and between misinformation from cascading into related dangers.

References

- Anderson, & Rainie. (2017). *The future of truth and misinformation online*.
- Apparasu, S. R. (2024). Tirupati laddu: A centuries-old tradition in the eye of the storm. *Hindustan Times*.
- Chadwick, A., Vaccari, C., & Kaiser, J. (2022). The Amplification of Exaggerated and False News on Social Media: The Roles of Platform Use, Motivations, Affect, and Ideology. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 000276422211182. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00027642221118264>
- Flynn, D. J., Nyhan, B., & Reifler, J. (2017). The Nature and Origins of Misperceptions: Understanding False and Unsupported Beliefs About Politics. *Political Psychology*, 38(S1), 127–150. <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12394>
- Ghosh, D. (2018). Disinformation Is Becoming Unstoppable. *Public Interest Technology*.
- Guess, A., Nagler, J., & Tucker, J. (2019). Less than you think: Prevalence and predictors of fake news dissemination on Facebook. *Science Advances*, 5(1), eaau4586. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aau4586>
- Ha, L., Andreu Perez, L., & Ray, R. (2021). Mapping Recent Development in Scholarship on Fake News and Misinformation, 2008 to 2017: Disciplinary Contribution, Topics, and Impact. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 65(2), 290–315. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764219869402>
- Hindus for Human Rights. (2024). The Tirumala Tirupati Laddu Controversy: Faith, Food, and Political Maneuvering. In *Hindus for Human Rights*.
- Kim, J., Tabibian, B., Oh, A., Schölkopf, B., & Gomez-Rodriguez, M. (2018). Leveraging the Crowd to Detect and Reduce the Spread of Fake News and Misinformation. *Proceedings of the Eleventh ACM International Conference on Web Search and Data Mining*, 324–332. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3159652.3159734>
- Kümpel, A. S., Karnowski, V., & Keyling, T. (2015). News Sharing in Social Media: A Review of Current Research on News Sharing Users, Content, and Networks. *Social Media + Society*, 1(2), 2056305115610141. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305115610141>



- Lazer, D. M. J., Baum, M. A., Benkler, Y., Berinsky, A. J., Greenhill, K. M., Menczer, F., Metzger, M. J., Nyhan, B., Pennycook, G., Rothschild, D., Schudson, M., Sloman, S. A., Sunstein, C. R., Thorson, E. A., Watts, D. J., & Zittrain, J. L. (2018). The science of fake news. *Science*, 359(6380), 1094–1096. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aao2998>
- Levin, S. (2017). Facebook promised to tackle fake news. But the evidence shows it's not working. *Support the Guardian*.
https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/may/16/facebook-fake-news-tools-not-working?MPA_Daily_News_Roundup
- Lewandowsky, S., & Van Der Linden, S. (2021). Countering Misinformation and Fake News Through Inoculation and Prebunking. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 32(2), 348–384. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10463283.2021.1876983>
- Mark Zuckerberg, & Sam. (2017). I regret ridiculing fears over Facebook's effect on election | technology | the guardian. *Huffpost*.
- Miró-Llinares, F., & Aguerri, J. C. (2023). Misinformation about fake news: A systematic critical review of empirical studies on the phenomenon and its status as a 'threat.' *European Journal of Criminology*, 20(1), 356–374. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1477370821994059>
- Molina, M. D., Sundar, S. S., Le, T., & Lee, D. (2021). "Fake News" Is Not Simply False Information: A Concept Explication and Taxonomy of Online Content. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 65(2), 180–212. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764219878224>
- Mrah, I. (2017). Developing Higher Order Thinking Skills: Towards a Rethinking of EFL Coursebooks in Moroccan High Schools. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Linguistics*, 2(3), 225. <https://doi.org/10.21462/jeltl.v2i3.79>
- Orlando. (2017). *How to Help Kids Navigate Fake News and Misinformation Online. The Conversation*. <http://theconversation.com>
- O'Sullivan, D. (2005). *Cultural politics and Irish education since the 1950's: Policy paradigms and power*. Institute of Public Administration.
- Patnaik, N. (2021). Geographical Indications Protection In India: Case Study Analysis On 'Tirupati Laddu.' *Indian Journal of Law and Legal Research*, 3(1).
- Pennycook, G., Binnendyk, J., Newton, C., & Rand, D. G. (2021). A Practical Guide to Doing Behavioral Research on Fake News and Misinformation. *Collabra: Psychology*, 7(1), 25293. <https://doi.org/10.1525/collabra.25293>
- Petersen, Osmundsen, & Arceneaux. (2020). *The "need for chaos" and motivations to share hostile political rumors*.
- Scheufele, D. A., & Krause, N. M. (2019). Science audiences, misinformation, and fake news. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 116(16), 7662–7669. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1805871115>
- Scott, B. (2018). Disinformation Is Becoming Unstoppable. *The Center for Internet and Society (CIS)*. <https://cyberlaw.stanford.edu/publications/disinformation-becoming-unstoppable/>



- Singh, V. (2024). Tamil Nadu's AR Dairy, Not Amul Supplied Adulterated Ghee to Tirupati Temple. In *ONLY FACT*. <https://onlyfact.in/tamil-nadus-ar-dairy-not-amul-supplied-adulterated-ghee-to-tirupati-temple/>
- TOI News Desk. (2024). One nation, One mom: Congress takes dig at viral Tirupati Laddu tweets amid prasad row. *TIMES OF INDIA*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/one-nation-one-mom-congress-takes-dig-at-viral-tirupati-laddu-tweets-amid-prasad-row/articleshow/113541886.cms>
- Vicario, M. D., Quattrocioni, W., Scala, A., & Zollo, F. (2019). Polarization and Fake News: Early Warning of Potential Misinformation Targets. *ACM Transactions on the Web*, 13(2), 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3316809>
- Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science*, 359(6380), 1146–1151. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559>
- WEF: *Global Risks 2013*. (2013). [Online post]. World Economic Forum.