# Systematic review of academic production on the impact of fake news between 2020 and 2025

## Revisión sistemática de la producción académica sobre el impacto de las *fake news* entre los años 2020–2025

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**Abstract**
Fake news represents a significant challenge to public opinion, as it can be completely fabricated or based on manipulated truths. The main objective of this study is to conduct a systematic review to identify research trends on the impact of fake news between 2020 and 2025. Databases such as WoS, Scopus, and SciELO were used. The results revealed that fake news has significant effects in key areas such as public health, democracy, and the economy. It was concluded that this phenomenon constitutes a multidimensional problem with profound social implications. Its influence highlights the need to strengthen media literacy and develop effective information verification strategies to mitigate its negative impacts.

**Keywords**: fake news, credibility, manipulation, news, public opinion.

## Resumen

Las noticias falsas o *fake news* representan un desafío significativo para la opinión pública, ya que pueden ser completamente inventadas o basarse en verdades manipuladas. Este estudio tiene como objetivo principal realizar una revisión sistemática para identificar las tendencias de investigación sobre el impacto de las *fake news* entre 2020 y 2025. Para ello, se emplearon bases de datos como WoS, Scopus y SciELO. Los resultados revelaron que las *fake news* tienen efectos importantes en áreas clave como la salud pública, la democracia y la economía. Se concluyó que este fenómeno constituye una problemática multidimensional con implicaciones sociales profundas. Su influencia destaca la necesidad de fortalecer la alfabetización mediática y desarrollar estrategias efectivas de verificación de información para mitigar sus impactos negativos.

**Palabras clave**: *fake news,* credibilidad, manipulación, noticia, opinión pública.

## Introduction

Fake news represents a significant problem by undermining information flows in society globally, with far-reaching social and political consequences. Examples such as the COVID-19 pandemic and presidential elections in various countries illustrate their impact (Figueira & Santos, 2019). Institutions like the United Nations (UN) have indicated that this phenomenon may be subject to sensible regulations to prevent its misuse (Baade, 2018). In this context, there is a need to adopt a multifaceted approach that combines diverse strategies to mitigate its impact. The coordinated intervention of countries and institutions is crucial for implementing preventive solutions (Eisemann & Pimmer, 2020).

In response to this issue, recommendations have been issued aimed at strengthening institutional and policy measures. These include enhancing legislation and regulation in each country, identifying risk factors, and educating the public on how to critically evaluate misinformation. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the growth of fake news exacerbated the health crisis by spreading erroneous information about the virus and vaccines, which prompted a significant increase in scientific production on the topic (Kong et al., 2023).

To address this situation, academic publishers such as Elsevier, Springer Nature, Wiley-Blackwell, Taylor & Francis, Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, SAGE Publications, IEEE Xplore, American Chemical Society (ACS), Public Library of Science (PLOS), among others, have offered open access to research related to fake news. This initiative aims to accelerate the dissemination of effective solutions through optimized access to new studies (Marques et al., 2023).

Research on fake news has revealed significant trends in global scientific production, highlighting countries such as Brazil, Australia, Singapore, the United States, and Spain (Gagnon-Dufresne et al., 2023; Tay, 2021; Darendeli et al., 2024). The United States leads in scientific production on this topic, according to data from Scopus and WoS, followed by China, the United Kingdom, Germany, and India (Righetti, 2021; Shueb et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2025). Furthermore, recent studies have examined the role of government agencies, organizations, and technology companies, as well as recurring themes related to misinformation, such as health, religion, politics, crime, and entertainment (Petsuwan & Naranong, 2023; Al-Zaman, 2021; Greifeneder et al., 2020). Cultural and emotional characteristics influencing the spread of fake news on social media and strategies to combat them have also been investigated (Armeen et al., 2024; Pothitou et al., 2025).

In this context, there is a need to conduct a descriptive study on academic production related to fake news between the years 2020 and 2025. This systematic analysis focuses on identifying global trends and themes using major databases such as WoS, Scopus, and SciELO. Through quantitative and qualitative data, it aims to better understand the behavior of fake news and provide valuable insights for future research. Similar to recent studies, such as those by H. Wang & Ge (2024), which explored global research trends on fake news, and Raman et al. (2024), which linked media misinformation with generative artificial intelligence and sustainable development goals on social media (Pari Tito et al., 2022), this study aims to contribute to the understanding and control of this phenomenon.

Thus, the research poses the main question: What are the primary trends in scientific production regarding the impact of fake news between the years 2020-2025? Accordingly, the general objective of this study is to conduct a systematic descriptive review that contributes to guiding future research and strategies for controlling this global phenomenon.

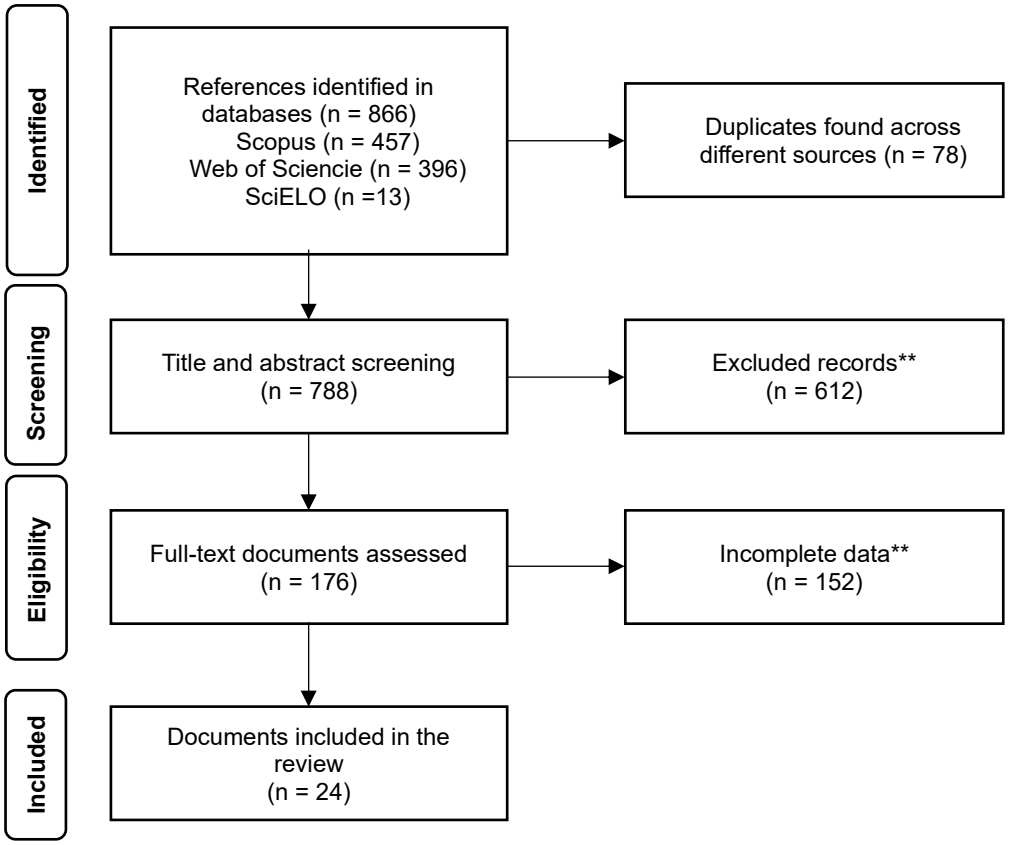
## Methodology

To carry out the systematic review, the databases WoS, Scopus, and SciELO were utilized, with a search date of December 15, 2024. The search string used was: ("*fake news*" *OR* "*disinformation*" *OR* "*misinformation*"

*OR* "*false information*") *AND* ("*impact*" *OR* "*effect*" *OR* "*influence*" *OR* "*consequence*") *AND* ("*media*" *OR* "*social media*" *OR* "*journalism*" *OR* "*communication*") *AND* ("*public opinion*" *OR* "*perception*" *OR* "*trust*" *OR* "*credibility*") *AND* ("*politics*" *OR* "*elections*" *OR* "*society*" OR "*health*"). Data were extracted in several fields, including citation information (author/s, document title, year, electronic ID, source title, volume, issue, pages, citation count, sources, document type, publication stage, and language designation), bibliographic information (affiliation, series identifiers, PubMed ID, publisher, language of original document, corresponding address, and abbreviated title), abstract and keywords (abstract, author keywords, and indexed keywords), as well as funding details (number, acronym, sponsor, and funding text). This data was fundamental for conducting a comprehensive analysis.

Through this strategy, 866 documents were retrieved: 396 from WoS, 457 from Scopus, and 13 from SciELO. After removing 78 duplicates, 188 unique references were evaluated, excluding 612 for not meeting selection criteria. Subsequently, 176 full documents were assessed, discarding 152 for lack of relevance. Finally, after a rigorous selection based on the PRISMA method, 24 relevant articles were processed. This methodology allowed for the normalization of data and generated a comprehensive analysis of the impact of fake news.

**Figure 1**
*PRISMA diagram*



## Results and discussion

**Table 1**
*Systematic review of academic production on the impact of fake news between 2020-2025*

| No. | Author | Year | Language | Document Type | Database | Findings |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | (Flostrand et al., 2020) | 2020 | English | Article | Web of Sciencie | This article provides a broad exploratory overview of the professional opinions of an international panel of academics specializing in brand management regarding how the recent emergence of the fake news industry is impacting and will continue to impact this field. |
| **2** | (Teo, 2021) | 2022 | English | Article | Web of Sciencie | This study argues that this new form of censorship is likely to have consequences that are more far-reaching than traditional censorship, warranting deeper investigation. |
| **3** | (Tunez-Lopez et al., 2021) | 2021 | English | Article | Web of Sciencie | It concludes that AI will transform the production and consumption of news, expanding the use of automated content (text, audio, and video), promoting nonlinear consumption, changing business models, and redefining the role of journalists, who will contribute more cognitive value to the process. |
| **4** | (Taddeo et al., 2022) | 2022 | English | Article | Web of Sciencie | It evidences that greater trust in sources found on social media identifies an active profile, while distrust is associated with viewers. |
| **5** | (Penafiel-Saiz et al., 2024) | 2024 | English | Article | Web of Sciencie | This study demonstrates that, across all analyzed communities, there is a relationship between the production of medical content and social media, linked to issues such as vaccine aversion, misinformation about COVID-19, and conspiracy theories. The analysis reveals a common factor: cognitive bias in the dissemination of these topics. |
| **6** | (Matich et al., 2025) | 2025 | English | Article | Web of Sciencie | The study identifies that the threats posed by generative AI to visual journalism are a combination of new risks and pre-existing risks already present in previous debates about journalism, amplified by this technology. |

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| **7** | (Pineiro-Naval et al., 2022) | 2022 | English | Article | Web of Sciencie | The study shows that since 2016, scientific production on fake news has increased, led by Spanish journals and authors. The studies are mostly empirical, based on observation and content analysis of press and social media, with low budgets. The most recurring topic is political marketing, campaigns, and electoral debates. |
| **8** | (Bhagabati, 2024) | 2024 | English | Article | Web of Sciencie | This article states that media literacy is key to strengthening citizen participation in a healthy democracy by promoting awareness of media bias, manipulation, and misinformation, thus opening a new field of study to understand the socio-political fabric and other attributes of the nation. |
| **9** | (Cerovac & Drmić, 2023), | 2023 | English | Article | Scopus | A key finding of this study is that fake news negatively affects individual well-being by undermining people's ability to develop and maintain their personal health, an essential dimension according to Martha Nussbaum's capabilities theory. |
| **10** | (Kong et al., 2023) | 2023 | English | Article | Scopus | The study demonstrates that the proliferation of fake news about COVID-19 on social media was driven by individual motivations such as socialization, altruism, and self-promotion, as well as cognitive and emotional factors, such as trust in online information and information overload. |
| **11** | (Chang, 2024) | 2024 | English | Article | Scopus | It concludes that the spread of fake news negatively impacts multiple areas, from health and finance to policy-making and consumption. |
| **12** | (Stachofsky et al., 2023) | 2023 | English | Article | Scopus | The study evidences that political alignment and news consumption habits significantly influence trust in electoral processes. It also demonstrates that Facebook users are more exposed to fake and hyper-partisan news, while those accessing news sites directly primarily consume conventional information. |
| **13** | (Gupta et al., 2023) | 2023 | English | Article | Scopus | It points out that the credibility assigned to fake news is influenced by individuals' political orientation and cultural values. Moreover, it states that conservatives and individuals with collectivist tendencies are more likely to believe in fake news. |

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| **14** | (Gjerazi & Skana, 2023) | 2023 | English | Article | Scopus | It concludes that politically motivated fake news not only influences public opinion but also generates increased communicative aggression and deepens social polarization. |
| **15** | (DSouza & French, 2022) | 2022 | English | Article | Scopus | It states that adversarial attacks can manipulate online information systems to propagate misinformation for social, economic, and political purposes. |
| **16** | (Obadă & Dabija, 2022) | 2022 | English | Article | Scopus | The study notes that social media flow influences the dissemination of fake news about environmentally friendly brands, acting as a mediator in this process. This suggests that immersion and enjoyable experiences on social media may lead users to share information without questioning its veracity. |
| **17** | (Lu et al., 2024) | 2024 | English | Article | Scopus | The study's results suggest that interactive and gamified approaches can be key tools for strengthening critical thinking and reducing vulnerability to misinformation. |
| **18** | (Malviya & Dwivedi, 2022) | 2022 | English | Article | Scopus | The study demonstrates that the logistic regression algorithm has greater accuracy in detecting fake news compared to other machine learning models. |
| **19** | (Bukhari et al., 2021) | 2021 | English | Article | Scopus | It shows that the stacked bidirectional LSTM-based model achieves 95% accuracy in classifying fake and genuine news. |
| **20** | (Munusamy et al., 2024) | 2024 | English | Article | Scopus | It concludes that the creation and dissemination of fake news on social media are influenced by five main psychological factors: personal factors, ignorance, social factors, biological processes, and cognitive processes. |
| **21** | (Kloss Medina et al., 2024) | 2024 | Spanish | Article | SciELO | It points out that sharing fake news is a dangerous action, as it can alter political and social thinking. |
| **22** | (Mollo-Torrico, 2023) | 2023 | Spanish | Article | SciELO | The study evidences that the dissemination of fake news during the pandemic had a negative impact on individuals' mental health, increasing levels of anxiety, depression, and stress. |
| **23** | (Galarza-Molina et al., 2021) | 2021 | Spanish | Article | SciELO | It concludes that belief in fake news about COVID-19, fostered by both social media and traditional media usage, is associated with lower compliance with preventive measures. |

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| **24** | (Nieves-Cuervo et al., 2021) | 2021 | Spanish | Article | SciELO | This study shows that in countries with lower use of social media as a primary source of information and lower trust in its content, mortality rates are also lower. |

**Impact on public health**

Fake news has had significant negative consequences on public health, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Penafiel-Saiz et al. (2024), the production of medical content on social media has been closely linked to misinformation about vaccines and conspiracy theories, affecting public perception and health behavior. Additionally, Kong et al. (2023) identified that the spread of fake news about COVID-19 is driven by cognitive and emotional factors, such as excessive trust in online information and information overload. In this regard, Galarza-Molina et al. (2021) found that belief in fake news about COVID-19 is associated with lower compliance with preventive measures. Furthermore, Mollo-Torrico (2023) warns that constant exposure to fake news during the pandemic has increased levels of anxiety, depression, and stress in the population, negatively impacting their emotional well-being.

**Impact on democracy and public opinion**

As indicated in the analyzed articles, fake news affects democratic stability by distorting information and manipulating public opinion. According to Stachofsky et al. (2023), the consumption of fake news on social media, particularly on platforms like Facebook, negatively influences trust in electoral processes, as users are more exposed to hyper-partisan content than those accessing conventional news sites. Moreover, Gupta et al. (2023) found that political orientation and cultural values influence the credibility assigned to fake news, with conservatives and individuals with collectivist tendencies being more susceptible to believing in it.

On another note, Gjerazi & Skana (2023) indicate that politically motivated fake news not only shapes public opinion but also increases communicative aggression and deepens social polarization. Finally, Bhagabati (2024) emphasizes the importance of media literacy in strengthening citizen participation and countering informational manipulation, which is crucial for preserving the integrity of democratic processes. In this sense, fake news represents a significant challenge to democratic stability, as it undermines trust in institutions and fosters political disaffection.

**Impact on the economy and journalism**

The economic sector and journalism have also been profoundly affected by the spread of fake news. According to Tunez-Lopez et al. (2021), artificial intelligence has transformed the production and consumption of news, promoting automated content and redefining the role of journalists. In this context, Matich et al. (2025) warn that generative AI poses a significant risk to visual journalism by amplifying pre-existing issues in media misinformation. Additionally, Flostrand et al. (2020) highlight that the fake news industry has a considerable impact on brand management, affecting consumer perception and corporate reputation.

Moreover, Chang (2024) notes that misinformation has significant economic repercussions, influencing financial decision-making and public policy formulation. On the other hand, Obadă & Dabija (2022) point out that the flow of fake news on social media influences the perception of environmentally friendly brands, which can distort company images and affect their credibility. These findings demonstrate that fake news is not only an informational problem but also affects multiple dimensions of society, including health, politics, economy, and journalism.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, fake news has proven to be a multidimensional issue with significant impacts on public health, democracy, and the economy. Misinformation in health topics, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, has negatively affected public perception and behavior, reducing compliance with preventive measures and generating adverse effects on mental health. In the political realm, informational manipulation has eroded trust in democratic processes, exacerbating social polarization and fostering communicative aggression. Likewise, in the economic and journalistic sectors, the proliferation of false content has altered brand reputations, distorted consumer perceptions, and generated challenges for the sustainability of traditional journalism in the face of the rise of artificial intelligence.

Against this backdrop, it is essential to strengthen media and informational literacy and develop effective information verification strategies to mitigate the impact of misinformation on society. This will enhance citizens' ability to discern between true and false information, which is crucial for preserving the integrity of democratic processes and promoting a more informed and critical society.

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