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Sharing Fake News about Brands on Social Media: a New Conceptual Model Based on Flow Theory¹

Abstract: The growing importance of Social Networking Sites (SNS) in today's information economy has generated significant interest for understanding and managing shared fake news about brands on social media among academia and industry worldwide. In this context, we consider it is important to discuss the role of flow, also called *optimal experience*, in sharing fake news about brands on social media. Firstly, we will critically analyze the conceptualizations of the umbrella term ‘fake news’ in the so-called ‘post-truth’ era and assume a narrow definition from literature. Secondly, we will review different theories from literature (i.e., selective exposure theory, uses and gratifications theory, social comparison theory, rational choice theory and self-determination theory) in order to explain why users share fake news. Furthermore, we will refer to *flow theory* proposed by Csikszentmihalyi (1975), which could be used as a framework to better the understanding of the user's behavior regarding the sharing of fake news about brands on social media. Flow is a hedonistic construct whose importance is widely recognized as having a major impact on the user's behavior in relation to information systems. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1975, 1988), flow is a “crucial component of enjoyment” and is “the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement”. In a flow state, the consumer perceives an effortless action, loss of time and a sense that the experience stands out as being exceptional compared to daily activities (Csikszentmihalyi 1997). Flow is a continuous variable that can occur on different levels, ranging from none to an intense (or complete) state (Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi 1988). Flow experience has been studied as an independent variable, as a dependent

¹**Acknowledgement:** This work was supported by a grant of the “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iasi, within the Research Grants program, Grant UAIC, code GI-UAIC-2018-09.

variable, and lately, as a mediator variable. In this paper we propose a new conceptual model containing 3 variables: (1) fake news spread about brands in SNS, (2) flow state experienced by SNS human users (i.e., *optimal experience*), and (3) sharing fake news about brands on social media by SNS human users (i.e., social media behavior). We conclude by outlining the need to empirically test the new conceptual model proposed in this paper.

Keywords: fake news, conceptual model, flow theory, social media, brand