Journal of Communication and Management

ISSN: 2583-617X (Online)

Journal home page: https://jcoma.com

Research Article

DOI: 10.58966/JCM20265201

Digital Literacy and Immigration Misinformation on X: Youth Engagement Analysis

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received: 30 March, 2026
Revised: 22 April, 2026
Accepted: 02 June, 2026
Published: 23 June, 2026

Keywords:
Digital Literacy, Misinformation, Social Media, X (Twitter), Youth Engagement, Immigration News.

ABSTRACT

Social media platforms increasingly influence public understanding of immigration-related issues while also enabling the rapid spread of misinformation. X (formerly Twitter) has emerged as a major platform where misleading immigration-related content circulates widely. This study examines the nature of immigration-related misinformation on X and explores the role of digital literacy in shaping youth engagement with such content. A mixed-method approach was adopted, combining content analysis of immigration-related posts shared on X over a two-month period with a survey of young social media users. The content analysis identified dominant themes, narratives, and framing patterns associated with misinformation, while the survey assessed digital literacy skills and engagement behaviour. The findings indicate that immigration-related misinformation is often emotionally framed and gains higher visibility through user interactions such as likes, reposts, and comments. The study highlights the importance of strengthening digital literacy to help youth critically evaluate misleading information and engage more responsibly with immigration-related news on social media.

Introduction

The rapid expansion of social media platforms has significantly transformed how news is produced, distributed, and consumed. Digital platforms have increasingly become the primary source of information for large segments of the population, particularly young users. While social media enhances access to information and encourages participation in political and social discussions, it also facilitates the rapid spread of misinformation, which can distort the public's understanding of complex issues (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Immigration-related news on social media is often framed through narratives of illegality, economic burdens, security threats, and loss of national identity. Such framing frequently relies on selective data, exaggerated claims, or outdated information presented as current events, thereby contributing to the circulation of misleading narratives (Entman 1993). Exposure to such content can shape public attitudes, reinforce stereotypes and intensify social polarization (Eberl et al., 2018).

X (formerly Twitter) has assumed an essential position in the realm of political communication because of its timely flow of information and the considerable visibility of political actors. Debates on immigration on X also tend to receive considerable attention through likes, shares, and comments. Past research has revealed that misinformation tends to spread more quickly and reach more people than true and accurate information, especially if it is emotionally framed and linked to political actors (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018; Guess, Nyhan, & Reifler, 2020). Youth users represent one of the most active social media user groups on social media platforms

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Relevant conflicts of interest/financial disclosures: The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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and tend to play an important role in amplifying online content through their engagement activities. Therefore, youth tend to be exposed to misinformation, especially on political issues such as immigration (Carballo & Parducci, 2020; López-Martín et al., 2022). As social media platforms such as WhatsApp, TikTok, and X increasingly act as important sources of news for the youth, further increasing their exposure to misinformation (Maryani & Wulandari, 2025), digital literacy becomes an important factor in the way users engage with and act on online content. Digital literacy entails various skills, including source analysis, fact-checking, contextual analysis, and critical thinking (Hobbs, 2010). Past research has revealed that youth tend to possess basic digital literacy skills. However, various studies have revealed that youth tend to lack the confidence and critical thinking skills to evaluate the credibility of the source and the accuracy of the content (Luthfia et al., 2023; Maryani & Wulandari, 2025). Although various studies have explored the concepts of misinformation and digital literacy in the past few years, only a handful of research studies have explored the role of misinformation on immigration on X and its association with youth users. Much of the existing literature focuses on general misinformation patterns or broader social media discourse without examining the thematic characteristics and framing patterns of immigration-related misinformation. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by analyzing the characteristics of immigration-related misinformation on X and examining how digital literacy influences youth engagement with this content.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the dominant themes of immigration-related misinformation on X?
RQ2: What narrative and framing patterns are used in immigration-related misinformation on X?
RQ3: How does digital literacy influence youth engagement with immigration-related misinformation?

Review Literature

Social Media and Immigration Discourse

Several studies have examined how immigration is discussed and framed on social media. Nulty (2014) analysed the framing of European Union immigration in the United Kingdom during the European Parliament elections, finding that immigration debates were largely framed in cultural and economic terms during a period of economic crisis and increasing Euroscepticism. This study highlights the crucial role of both traditional and social media in shaping public perceptions of immigration. Building on the concept of social media as a gauge for public sentiment, Bartlett and Norrie (2015) explored the use of Twitter as a research tool to analyse attitudes toward immigration in the UK Their study revealed that social media makes it possible for real-time expression of public opinion beyond the structural limitations of traditional media, while also posing some ethical and methodological issues for those who study it. Previous studies have traditionally focused on measuring public opinion, while Dombrowski et al. (2018) investigated the active use of social media by immigrant support organizations in relation to the 2016 United States presidential election. The results revealed a number of important communication practices, such as information sharing, mobilization, and cooperation with political actors. The results indicate that social media are not only used to measure public opinion but also to actively participate in it. Another relevant study is that of Iskakova and Islam (2020), in which they investigated British immigration discourse on social media from a cognitive-pragmatic perspective with regard to discourse mechanisms. The results revealed that British immigration discourse on social media used negative evaluative strategies such as accusation, discrediting, and doubting, which altogether resulted in negative perceptions.

Misinformation and Framing of Immigration on Social Media

Research on the effect of misinformation and framing on the discussion of immigration on social media has been conducted. Aswad et al. (2020) investigated the gap between what people say on social media and the real data on immigration statistics. They found that people tend to overstate the importance of migration on social media and that these overstatements are intentionally used as rhetorical devices. Another research conducted by Conrad (2021) investigated the politicization of the Global Compact on Migration and found that social media, particularly that of right-wing populist groups, contained misinformation and portrayed migration as a cultural and economic threat. The success of threat narratives depends on how they are constructed. Various research studies found that people frame immigration in different ways on social media, and political and identity-based framing tends to be more shared. The importance of threat narratives and their success, particularly in the case of immigration, was proven in more recent research studies. Ahmed et al. (2024) investigated the comments of users on YouTube and found that the discussion of immigration on social media portrayed migrants as an economic and security threat. Building on the concept of framing and its effect on people, Sazzed and Ullah (2024) used the integrated threat theory and found that there is an alarming correlation between the time spent on social media and the perception of immigration as an economic and security threat.

Social Media Engagement and Public Attitudes toward Immigration

Beyond the question of framing and misinformation, researchers have examined how social media engagement affects political behaviour and public attitudes. For example, De Coninck et al. (2023) examined the interactions of Belgian voters with political parties online. They found a significant relationship between following these parties on social media and a person's wider attitudes towards migration, which affects their voting behaviour. Interestingly, the role of social media is also complex in the eyes of migrants. Furxhi (2024) conducted a systematic review of the impact of digital platforms on the entire migration process, from the decision to migrate to the daily experiences of integration and the maintenance of transnational relationships. Reinforcing this supportive role, Erdem (2024) discussed immigrant assimilation in the United States and discovered that social media serves as a key instrument in language learning, cultural adaptation, and the formation of community networks. However, when starting to bring the focus is shifted back to the discourse of the general public, the online landscape is seen as extremely fractured. By analysing numerous Twitter data in the United Kingdom on a large scale, Nasuto and Rowe (2024) discovered a deep polarization in immigration conversations. The results show that, despite the fact that the number of anti-immigration groups was smaller, these groups showed greater activity and influence in creating the narrative than pro-immigration groups. This is in line with Ismail et al. 's (2024) research, who noted that, in both social and traditional media, the discourse on immigration is mainly influenced by security and economic factors rather than humanitarian concerns.

Emotional Narratives and Online Communities in Immigration Discourse

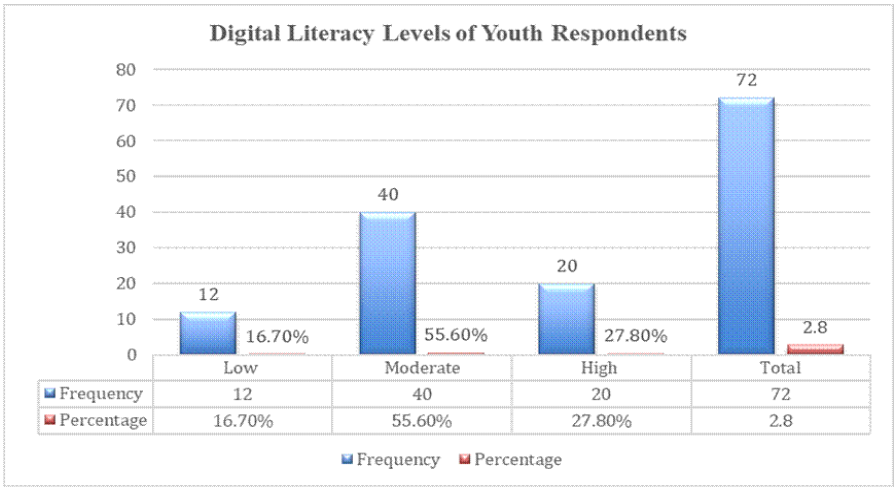
However, recent research has increasingly sought to address the affective and ideological facets of immigration discourse in digital media. Saglik (2025) explored the convergence of migration and national identity through an analysis of Turkish YouTube comments. The author revealed that discourses on the platform frequently incorporated nationalist and conservative ideologies on migration. Such an ideological construct generally impacts linguistic choices on the platform. Through an analysis of Twitter discourses on the same topic, Wahrer et al. (2025) explored the use of dehumanizing language in discourses on immigration. The authors proposed that the use of such language could incrementally contribute to shaping public opinion on the topic. Reinforcing the linguistic choices on the same platform (now referred to as X), Indelicato et al. (2025) explored discourses on immigration in the context of Italy. The authors revealed that irregular migration, security, and economic factors were the most dominant and emotionally charged discourse on the topic. The convergence of negative discourses and linguistic choices on immigration generally creates isolated digital environments. Figenschou and Thorbjørnsrud (2025)

Table 1: Dominant Themes Identified in Immigration-Related Misinformation on X

Theme	*Level of presence*	*Description*
Illegal Immigration	Very High	Focus on unauthorized border entry, undocumented migrants, and alleged legal violations. Frequently linked with economic burden and social disruption narratives.
Immigration Policy & Governance	High	Discussions of laws, deportation policies, citizenship, and border regulations, often presented with partial or misleading interpretations.
Security & Public Order	High	Immigration framed as a threat to national safety, border control, and social stability, commonly supported by exaggerated or unverified claims.
Economic Impact	Moderate	Emphasis on job competition, use of public resources, and economic strain, usually lacking credible statistical evidence.
Political Rhetoric & Debate	Moderate	Ideological positioning, sensational assertions, and blame-oriented political messaging related to immigration.
Misinformation & False Claims	Moderate- Low	Explicit rumour circulation, fabricated statistics, or misleading visuals without verification.
Humanitarian & Refugee Issues	Low	Limited attention to refugee protection, humanitarian crises, and empathy-based perspectives.
Human Rights & Legal Protection	Low	Sparse focus on migrant rights, legal safeguards, or justice-oriented narratives.
Social & Cultural Integration	Very Low	Minimal discourse on multiculturalism, inclusion, or integration challenges.

Source (Authors compilation)

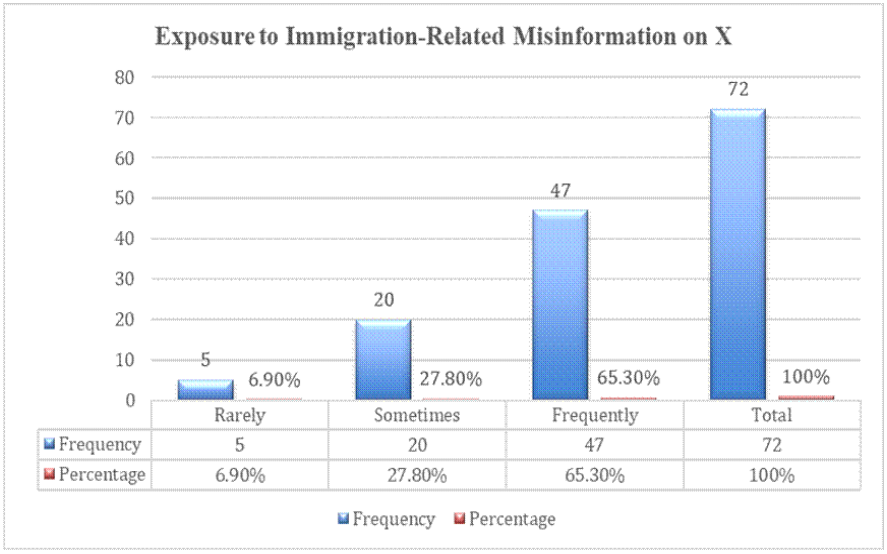
Overall, the content analysis shows that immigration-related misinformation on X is highly visible, emotionally driven, and predominantly framed through legal, security, and threat-oriented perspectives. The dominance of fear-based narratives and high engagement levels indicates that misinformation gains traction by appealing to emotions rather than verified information.



Source: (Authors compilation)

The digital literacy levels of youth respondents are presented in Figure 1. The results show that most respondents had moderate digital literacy skills (55.60%), followed by a significant number of respondents who had high digital literacy skills (27.80%). Few respondents had low digital literacy skills as well (16.70%). The results show that 27.80% of young people are more inclined to scrutinize immigration news on X compared to others.

Figure 1: Digital Literacy levels of youth Respondents



Source: (Authors compilation)

The exposure of respondents towards immigration-related misinformation on X is presented in Figure 2. The results suggest that the majority of respondents (65.30%) were familiar with immigration-related misinformation on X, with one-third (27.80%) being occasionally exposed and a small percentage (6.90%) being very little exposed. This shows that there is an abundance and extensive spread of immigration-related misinformation on the platform, suggesting that youth on the platform are constantly exposed to immigration-related misinformation.

Figure 2: Exposure to Immigration Related Misinformation on X

explored the nature of the digital environment on the topic of immigration through an analysis of anti-immigration online communities. The authors revealed that the digital environment on the topic of immigration was an area of "counter public." Within the digital environment on the topic of immigration, members of the online community continually reinforce their collective identity and perspective on the topic.

Research Gap

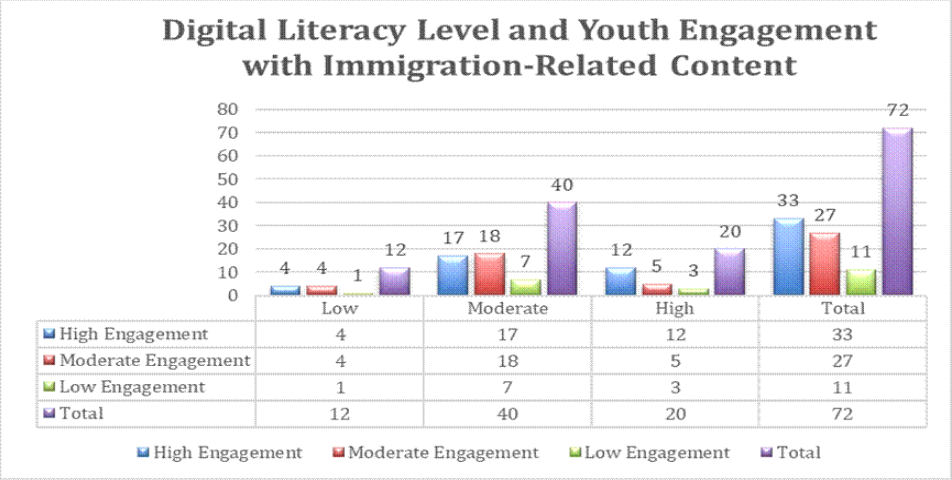
This study examines immigration misinformation on X (formerly Twitter) and youth engagement with such content. Most research on immigration talks, social media misinformation, and digital literacy has been conducted individually, and no research has been conducted on how these concepts interact with one another. Many studies

Table 2: Codebook for Content Analysis of Immigration-Related Misinformation on X

A. Identification Variables		
Variable	*Definition*	*Categories*
Post ID	Unique identification number assigned to each post	Unique Number for each post
Post Date	Date on which the post was published	Date
Language	Primary language used in the post	1 - English 2 - Hindi 3 - Mixed 4 - Other
Account Type	Type of account sharing the post	1 - Individual 2 -Media organization 3 - Political 4 - Influencer 5 - Other
B. Misinformation Characteristics		
Presence of Misinformation	Whether the post contains false, misleading, or unverified information	1- No 2 -Yes
Type of Misinformation	Dominant form of misinformation in the post	1 - False information 2- Misleading/exaggerated 3 - Out of context 4 - Unverified
Source Attribution	Presence and clarity of source citation	1 - No source 2 - Unclear source 3- Credible source
C. Content Themes		
Dominant Theme	Main issue addressed in the post	1 - Illegal immigration 2- Immigration Policy and Governance 3- Economic Dimensions of Migration 4- Security and Public Order Discourse 5- Humanitarian and Refugee Issues 6 - Human Rights and Legal Protection 7- Social and Cultural Integration 8- Political Rhetoric and Public Debate 9- Misinformation and False Claims about Immigration 10- Identity
Tone of Content	Overall tone toward immigration	1 - Positive 2 - Negative 3 - Neutral
D. Narrative and Emotional Appeal		
Narrative Type	Dominant narrative style used in the post	1 - Fear-based 2- Humanitarian 3 - Nationalist 4- Blame-oriented 5 - Informative
Emotional Appeal	Use of emotional language or imagery	1 - No 2- Yes
E. Framing Patterns		
Framing Pattern	Primary frame used to present immigration	1 - Threat and Risk Frame 2 - Humanitarian Crisis Frame 3 - Policy and Governance Frame 4 - Economic Impact Frame 5 - Rights and Justice Frame 6 - Social Integration Frame 7 - Political Strategy and Blame Frame 8 - Misinformation and Rumour Frame
F. Engagement Indicators		

Cont...

Likes	Number of likes received by the post	Numeric
Share	Number of shares	Numeric
Post	Number of Posts	Numeric
Repost	Number of reposts	Numeric
Replies	Number of replies	Numeric
Engagement level	Overall intensity of user engagement	1 - Low 2 - Medium 3 – High 4- very high
Comment	Number of comments	Numeric
G. Digital Literacy Indicators		
Blind Engagement		1 - No 2 - Yes
Corrective Response	Presence of correction or challenge to misinformation	1 - No 2 - Yes
Fact-check Mention	Reference to fact-checking sources	1 - No 2 - Yes
Critical Comment		1 - No 2 - Yes
H. Impact Assessment		
Potential to Misguide Youth	Likelihood of misleading youth audiences	1 - Low 2 - Moderate 3 - High



Source: (Authors compilation)

The relationship between digital literacy level and youth engagement with immigration-related content is shown in Figure 3. The findings show that there is an association between digital literacy and engagement. Participants who showed higher digital literacy showed higher levels of engagement. There were no participants who showed low levels of engagement. On the other hand, participants who showed low digital literacy were more likely to show low or moderate levels of engagement. This suggests that digital literacy might have an effect on how youth engage with immigration content on X.

Table 3: Digital Literacy Level and Youth Engagement with Immigration Related Content

on misinformation or immigration talks tend to be broad and do not consider specific information or perspectives used in misinformation about immigration. There is a major gap in the research regarding how digital literacy influences youth interaction with such content. To bridge this gap, this study examines immigration misinformation on X and how digital literacy influences youth interactions with such content.

Significance of the Study

The importance of this research is based on its exploration of the nature of the dissemination of immigration-related misinformation on X, which impacts youth engagement. Through the identification of key themes, stories, and ways of presenting information, this study contributes to the research on misinformation from the perspective of media and communication studies. It also contributes to the study of digital literacy in helping young people think critically about misinformation.

Objective

- To examine the nature, frequency, and dominant themes of immigration-related misinformation shared on X.
- To analyses the narratives and framing patterns used in immigration-related news on X.
- To examine how digital literacy affects youth's ability to identify misinformation and their engagement with immigration-related content on X.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining content analysis and survey methods, to examine immigration-related misinformation on X (formerly Twitter) and the role of digital literacy in shaping youth engagement with this content.

Content Analysis

In analysing the content, immigration-related content was obtained from X over a period of two months (November-December 2025) with the use of specific keywords such as immigration, immigrants, illegal immigration, and immigration control. Out of what we obtained, 100 content items were sampled purposively based on their relevance to the content and the number of engagement responses such as likes, reposts, and comments. The researcher created a codebook to be used for content analysis. The content items were coded based on a set coding scheme. The coding framework developed for analysing immigration-related misinformation content is presented in Table 2.

Survey of Youth Users

The research conducted on the subject involved an assessment of the influence of digital literacy on the consumption of immigration information by the youth on X. The research employed convenience sampling, where 90 questionnaires were sent online, and 72 were returned, representing an 80% response rate. The questionnaires were sent to the 20-30-year-old youth, who are active on social media. The questionnaires tested the basic digital literacy skills and the respondents' consumption activities.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the survey was analysed by using descriptive statistical analysis tools, and the results are presented as percentage values to identify the patterns with respect to digital literacy and exposure to immigration-related misinformation. To provide a holistic understanding of the results with respect to the relationship between misinformation narratives and engagement on X, the results obtained from the quantitative survey are considered along with the results obtained from the qualitative analysis.

Limitation of the Study

This study is limited to immigration-related content on X and is based on data collected over two months. Therefore, the findings may not reflect misinformation patterns on other social-media platforms.

Data Analysis

- Content Analysis of Immigration-Related Misinformation on X
- Nature and Presence of Immigration-Related Misinformation

The analysis suggests that immigration discourse on X is marked by misleading, exaggerated, and unverified information. A significant number of examined posts were based on unattributed claims or employed data out of context to disseminate misinformation. Specifically, the examined posts without verifiable sources were likely to contain incorrect information regarding immigration policy, the number of migrants, and border management. The presence of unconfirmed claims is also an indication of poor online verification practices and the challenges that users face in separating fact from fiction. Most importantly, the analysis meets the research's first objective by revealing the nature and characteristics of misinformation on X regarding immigration.

Dominant Themes in Immigration-Related Misinformation

Content analysis revealed recurring themes within the collected dataset. First, narratives on "illegal immigration" were found to be dominant within the collected data. Within this category, narratives on "illegal border crossing" and "illegal immigrants/migrants" were found to recur. Within these narratives, "immigration" was found to be related to "economic costs" and "causes of social unrest," particularly in relation to "jobs," "housing," and "public resources." Second, narratives on "immigration policy and governance" were found to recur within the collected data. Within this category, narratives on "immigration policies," "deportation policies," "border control policies," and "citizenship policies" were recurring. Within these narratives, "immigration policies" were found to be misrepresented, thereby creating "structural misinformation." Third, narratives on "immigration security and public order" were found to be critical within

the collected data. Within this category, "immigration" was found to be related to "public safety threats" and "national security threats," with narratives built on "exaggerations and unverified claims" to portray "immigrants/migrants" as an "inherent threat to public safety and national security." In contrast, narratives on "immigration related to humanitarian concerns," "refugee protection," and "immigration related to social integration" were found to be under-represented within the collected data. This indicates that narratives on "immigration" on X are more likely to be dominated by "threat-based narratives" over "immigration rights-based narratives." By delineating these narratives on "immigration," the present analysis has been able to fulfil its primary objective of identifying the dominant frameworks through which "immigration misinformation is constructed and disseminated on X."

Narrative Patterns and Emotional Appeal

The analysis shows that on X, some immigration-related posts use fear, nationalism, and blame. For instance, immigration is seen as a threat to security, the economy, and social harmony. These posts are written in a way that uses strong emotions to make people feel threatened by immigration. Other posts argue that immigration is the reason why our country is in trouble, and immigrants are to blame. These are blame narratives. There are also narratives that immigration is not an issue and that immigrants are not to blame. However, these narratives were very few. This could indicate that immigration discourse on X is not balanced and evidence-based. Instead, emotional and political storytelling seems to dominate. This completed the second objective of this study. It has been shown that there are narratives about immigration on X that use emotionally charged storytelling, and that these narratives are likely how misinformation about immigration spreads and stays on the platform.

Framing Patterns in Immigration-Related Content

The analysis also examined the manner in which the stories were presented. This indicates that the Threat and Risk Frame is used most in X, with a wide margin. Within this framework, the platform presents immigration as a direct threat to national security, the economy, and law and order. It does so use selective data or false claims of a specific nature. The second most used frame on the platform is the Policy and Governance Frame. It presents ideas related to government regulations, border control, and laws. However, these ideas may be presented in an oversimplified or partial manner, leading to misinformation regarding these ideas. It also presents the Economic Impact Frame in a manner that highlights ideas related to competition in the labour force, financial burden on the economy, and strain on public resources. These ideas are presented without substantial statistics and are based on vague guesses. However, there were very few ideas presented regarding humanitarian issues, human rights, and social integration. This indicates that the platform presents far more ideas related to security and finance than human rights. This indicates that misinformation on the platform regarding immigration is based on ideas related to risk, control, and security. These findings successfully address the second research objective of the study in mapping the particular framing patterns used to construct and disseminate immigration-related misinformation in the platform.

Engagement Patterns with Immigration-Related Misinformation

The analysis further shows that posts that contain immigration-related misinformation generate disproportionately high levels of user engagement (both through likes, reposts, and comments. In particular, content framing immigration through emotionally-charged narratives and threat-oriented viewpoints received significantly greater interaction than neutral and/or factual reporting. This pattern implies that emotional framing acts as a catalyst for user attention making such misinformation so highly contagious in the platform's ecosystem. As a result, the algorithmic engagement mechanisms on X seem to reward and unintentionally reward and amplify misrepresenting stories. By showing how user interaction enables the rapid and widespread dissemination of fear-based content, these results are directly related to the objective of the study of exploring the role of misinformation narratives in the patterns of user engagement. The dominant themes identified through content analysis are presented in Table 1.

Discussion

The findings of this study shows that immigration-related misinformation on X is widely spread and strategically framed in order to attract attention and engagement. The rise of illegal immigration as one of the major themes in the debate, as well as the fear-based, nationalist, and blame-oriented narratives suggests that misinformation is able to rise due to its appeal to emotions, rather than its appeal to verified facts. This pattern is especially applicable to young users, who are among the most engaged users of social media platforms and are exposed to this content relatively frequently. The findings reveal that misinformation frequently occurs as a result of the re-use and manipulation of existing information, such as outdated news reports, previous political statements and old policy regulations being presented as current developments. Identifying such manipulation requires the digital literacy skills such as source verification, context understanding, and ability to evaluate the temporal relevance of the information. Youth users with low digital literacy skills may not be able to differentiate between

original news content and misinformation presented in a different form. It is also worth noting that this research highlights the role of political discourse in the dissemination of misinformation related to immigration. For example, quotes from prominent political figures may be used without adequate consideration of the context or verification. These quotes may be used to disseminate misinformation. Among the youth audience, political authority may be used to boost the credibility of misinformation. Other findings and additional observations include the role of platform features and engagement in disseminating misinformation. For example, the high number of likes, reposts, and comments related to misinformation content among the youth audience indicates the significant role of youth engagement in the dissemination of misinformation. Although most of the audience indicated awareness of misinformation through questioning or ignoring content without verification, a portion of the younger audience indicated a lack of digital literacy skills through uncritical engagement in the dissemination of misinformation content. It should also be noted that the use of paid verification on X complicates content credibility assessment. For example, the use of visual content, such as a blue tick verification mark, may not be used as an indicator of content credibility. Based on the findings of this research, it is clear that developments in digital literacy play a crucial role in the understanding of youth related to immigration content on social media platforms.

Conclusion

The results show that discussions about immigration on the platform are influenced in most cases by false and misleading information. More specifically, the content analysis results show that false information related to the issue of immigration is mostly grouped under the following categories: illegal immigration, Immigration Policy and Governance, and Security and Public Order. These categories of false information are mostly presented through fear-based narratives that promote nationalist and blame attitudes and behaviours. It should also be noted that the results of the analysis show how the mechanics of the platform work in a manner that amplifies false information. The results of the analysis show that false information presented through a few sources on the platform is presented in a manner that amplifies it through user engagement mechanisms. It should also be noted that the results of the analysis show that false information presented by political actors or verified accounts on the platform is mostly treated in a manner that gives it unwarranted legitimacy by the users of the platform, despite the fact that there is no factual evidence supporting these claims. It should also be noted that the results of the analysis show the importance of digital literacy in helping young users navigate complex platforms.

Implications for Future Research

Further research can expand on this foundation by tracking immigration-related disinformation across multiple social platforms and using larger datasets to track the whole period of such misinformation in online contexts.

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HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE: Ravinder,. Kaushik, V. (2026). Digital Literacy and Immigration Misinformation on X: Youth Engagement Analysis. *Journal of Communication and Management*, 5(2), 1-10. DOI: 10.58966/JCM20265201