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**Vulnerability to Fake News: The Case of the Overseas Filipino Workers in
Taiwan**

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Vulnerability to Fake News: The Case of the Overseas Filipino Workers in Taiwan

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Acceptance Page

This paper, prepared by **Francis Albert D. Eugenio** with the title: “**Vulnerability to Fake News: The Case of Overseas Filipino Workers in Taiwan,**” is hereby accepted by the Faculty of Information and Communication Studies, U.P. Open University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Master of Development Communication.

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Biographical Sketch

Francis Albert D. Eugenio is a Finance Staff Officer II at the Manila Economic and Cultural Office (MECO) – Kaohsiung Extension Office in Taiwan. In his role, he manages financial operations, prepares budget and disbursement reports, and attends to and provides services for MECO’s programs and consular outreach activities for Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in southern Taiwan.

He earned his Bachelor of Science in Accountancy from the University of Pangasinan. His career in public service reflects his commitment to financial transparency, accountability, and institutional efficiency.

Mr. Eugenio completed his Master of Development Communication (MDC) at the University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU). His research, titled “Vulnerability to Fake News: The Case of the Overseas Filipino Workers in Taiwan,” examines the factors influencing digital information behavior among OFWs and proposes a communication model to strengthen media literacy and resilience against misinformation.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to my beloved wife, Sabrina P. Aaron, whose unwavering love, patience, and support have been my greatest source of strength throughout this academic journey.

To my family, for their constant encouragement and faith in my abilities.

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Abstract

This study examines the vulnerability of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Taiwan to fake news circulating on social media. Using a qualitative, thematic analysis grounded in the Uses and Gratifications framework and elements of Grounded Theory, the research explores OFWs' information-seeking behavior, levels of awareness and understanding of fake news, social media habits, and cues that shape truth judgments.

Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed via iterative coding, theme development, and constant comparison. Findings point to the roles of habitual social media use, heuristic processing, media trust, and confirmation bias in misperception. The study proposes a communication model and programmatic recommendations for MECO and partner agencies that emphasize digital/media literacy, lateral reading, fact-checking routines, and transparent communication. Implications for policy and practice are discussed.

Keywords: Fake News; Digital Literacy; Media Trust; Social Media; OFWs in Taiwan

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

There was no doubt that the fact-checking community had experienced a notable increase over the last decade. Questions such as: "How was fake news defined?" Why had it become so prevalent? Was it truly new? Emerged as scholars and media practitioners attempted to understand the phenomenon of misinformation and explore ways to curb it. Fake news served as a metaphor with different meanings for different people. At its core, fake news is the presentation of false narratives or claims without solid evidence or verifiable references. These reports were often published with the intent to mislead readers or to gain economic rewards through clickbait.

Over the past few years, the ease and speed of online posting have enabled fake news to spread rapidly through social media platforms. However, false or misleading reports were not entirely new. Fake news had existed for as long as news itself, both deliberately and unintentionally. Since the invention of the printing press, it has been part of media culture long before the emergence of social media. During the late nineteenth century, particularly in the era of "yellow journalism," sensationalized and exaggerated stories pushed the United States toward war with Spain in 1898, an early example of the destructive potential of fabricated news.

The spread of fake news relies on three essential components, collectively known as the False News Triangle: means and agendas, social media, and online platforms and services. These elements formed the foundation of how disinformation campaigns reached and influenced audiences. Scholars observed that fake news was

not merely about facts but about stories, narratives designed to evoke emotion, influence belief, and shape perception.

Disinformation was a global phenomenon that posed new risks for many individuals, including Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). This study aimed to identify how vulnerable OFWs are to fake news and determine the types of false information most frequently circulated. A primary concern was the intentional dissemination of fake information on social media, which damaged the credibility and online reputations of OFWs.

The growth of internet technology has significantly influenced the lives of OFWs, who rely heavily on it for communication and daily activities. Social media allowed users to instantly share, comment on, and discuss information. Despite these advantages, the quality of news disseminated on social media was often lower than that of news distributed through traditional media because social media platforms had a vast number of users and low access costs, and news with harmful or misleading content spread quickly.

As social media platforms continuously increased their number of active users, they became essential instruments of communication. This growth sparked scholarly and professional interest, highlighting both the benefits and dangers of these tools. One of the most pressing concerns was their potential to spread fake news. Tantau et al. (2018) noted that fake news was often distributed to gain economic benefits, which affected critical sectors such as healthcare, finance, and energy. In response to public pressure, most platforms implemented measures to combat disinformation; however, this damaging phenomenon continued to evolve and influence social discourse.

Fake news refers to false information disguised as credible journalism. Its underlying motives included media manipulation, social impact, and political or economic gain. Malicious individuals and organizations created fake news to influence opinions and shape global issues. The rapid development of communication technologies further amplified both the positive and harmful use of social media. While technological progress enabled connectivity, it also led to the rise of malicious users, phishing scams, and disinformation networks.

Consequently, the misuse of social media affected all levels of society, from individuals to governments, by influencing perceptions and behaviors through globally accessible platforms. Sites like Facebook and Twitter, once celebrated for democratizing information, had also become tools for manipulation and the spread of fake news. These same platforms, alongside mainstream media outlets, propagated stories that shaped the attitudes and beliefs of OFWs in Taiwan.

This study examined the extent to which OFWs' cognitive tendencies and psychological predispositions contributed to their susceptibility to false online content. It sought to trace the cognitive roots of their exposure to misinformation, exploring their fact-checking behaviors and belief systems in relation to digital disinformation.

Earlier studies suggested that susceptibility to false online information was stronger when the content aligned with an individual's existing beliefs or preferences. This research aimed to deepen understanding of OFWs' vulnerability to such influences and how these influences affect their digital information behavior.

Furthermore, previous investigations (Basel, 2021) showed that while education and gender did not significantly affect the motivation to change one's beliefs, age played an important role; younger individuals were often more willing to alter their behaviors and beliefs than older ones. However, personal psychological and social

factors influenced belief in fake news differently for everyone, depending on one's predisposition to change. Those who sought lifestyle changes tended to be more active information seekers but were also more vulnerable to misinformation.

This phenomenon suggested that psychological readiness to change could make individuals more open to influence, even from unreliable sources. Conversely, with proper guidance, this openness could be turned into an educational opportunity. For example, assessing OFWs' readiness to change their digital and media habits could help agencies design appropriate interventions and media literacy training. Philippine institutions, including MECO and public agencies, could use these insights to establish dialogue and promote responsible information behavior, strengthening a trusted communication ecosystem among OFWs.

Rationale of the Study

In a globalized society, the spread of fake news on social media warrants in-depth examination. Misinformation and disinformation, whether through inaccuracies, deliberate manipulation, or automated accounts, were created and spread by malicious actors for various motives. This study addressed the need to detect and filter fake news sites, helping OFWs in Taiwan avoid clickbait and deceptive online content.

It also aimed to identify strategies that could help readers and technology companies address the issue. Fake news played an increasingly dominant role in influencing perceptions, deceiving audiences, and undermining decision-making among OFWs. The rise of social media and online discussions contributed to this rapid blending of truth and falsehood.

By generating relevant data, this study intended to design effective programs that would help OFWs develop criteria to verify information reliability, strengthen accountability, and promote transparent communication.

Fake news has been defined as the deliberate online publication of knowingly false statements presented as fact (Klein & Wueller, 2017). It thrived on rumors, hoaxes, sensationalism, and scandal, aiming to generate viral attention (Fisher, 2014). While some disseminated fake news for monetary or political gain, others did so for social or ideological reasons.

The results of this research were expected to inform the creation of communication models and program plans for MECO and the Philippine government's overseas offices. These initiatives could integrate media and information literacy exercises into their programs, enabling OFWs to acquire skills and attitudes necessary to critically evaluate digital content.

Through this process, OFWs could strengthen their critical thinking, discern credible sources, and develop openness to diverse viewpoints. Philippine government representatives in Taiwan could then guide OFWs in valuing truth, ethics, and information integrity, promoting a culture of responsible digital citizenship.

The Research Problem

A crucial step in addressing fake news involved understanding why individuals believed it from a psychological standpoint. Examining how memory and cognition function could offer insights into the persistence of misinformation. These mental processes, which develop early in life, might explain why specific individuals remain vulnerable to false narratives that offer comfort in the face of uncertainty.

Given that nearly all OFWs had access to the internet and social media through their mobile phones, they were especially susceptible to fake news dissemination. While these platforms empowered OFWs in Taiwan to express themselves freely, they also provided a convenient channel for the rapid and harmful spread of disinformation.

General Problem

How vulnerable were the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) to fake news?

Specific Research Questions:

1. What was the information-seeking behavior of OFWs?
2. What was their level of awareness and understanding of fake news?
3. What were their social media habits and practices?
4. How vulnerable were the OFWs to fake news?
5. What factors made news or information appear genuine to OFWs?
6. What communication model could be applied to address OFWs' vulnerability to fake news and combat misinformation?
7. What programs and strategies could provide OFWs with an ecosystem for secure, accountable, and transparent communication?

Research Objectives

The goal of this study was to provide data on OFWs' vulnerability to fake news and misinformation. The findings were expected to contribute to the development of effective programs that would promote media and information literacy, equipping OFWs with the skills and attitudes needed to resist disinformation.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Describe the information-seeking behavior of OFWs.

2. Determine the level of awareness and understanding of fake news among OFWs.
3. Identify the social media habits and practices of OFWs.
4. Assess how vulnerable OFWs were to fake news.
5. Identify the factors that made information appear true to OFWs and propose recommendations to reduce their susceptibility.
6. Propose a communication model to address OFWs' vulnerability to fake news and to develop concrete initiatives for combating misinformation and improving media literacy.
7. Recommend programs and strategies that could provide OFWs with a secure, accountable, and transparent communication ecosystem.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter reviewed existing studies, theories, and empirical findings related to fake news, misinformation, and digital literacy, focusing on their relevance to Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Taiwan. It synthesized global and regional research, integrating insights from the study's interview participants to contextualize how digital behaviors, emotional factors, and institutional gaps shape OFWs' vulnerability to misinformation.

Fake News and Misinformation in the Digital Age

The phenomenon of fake news has evolved from isolated, print-based misinformation to a digitally accelerated, algorithm-driven ecosystem. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) argued that misinformation functioned as a "disinformation architecture," amplified through social media, where emotional triggers outperformed factual accuracy. Tandoc et al. (2021) observed that false content spread rapidly because users shared information based on emotional appeal and peer endorsement rather than verification.

The rise of platform-based communication shifted responsibility for information filtering from journalists to ordinary users whose habits were shaped by algorithms, influencers, and personalized feeds (Guess et al., 2020). Without the institutional gatekeeping of traditional media, users were more exposed to fabricated content (Pennycook & Rand, 2022). Chen and Cheng (2023) noted that social-media logic,

likes, shares, and virality created an environment in which misinformation circulated faster than factual news, particularly during crises.

In Southeast Asia, misinformation intersected with political and cultural narratives. Ong and Cabañes (2019) described fake news in the Philippines as part of a “networked propaganda system” involving influencers and partisan actors, rendering Filipino audiences highly vulnerable, especially those dependent on Facebook for news. Serrano (2022) added that dependency increased when formal news channels were limited or less trusted.

In Taiwan, high digital connectivity and multilingual information flows heightened exposure to misinformation. Huang et al. (2023) found that migrant workers, including Filipinos, were among the most at-risk groups because they relied heavily on mobile-mediated communication and lacked access to localized media-literacy materials. These findings aligned with several interview responses from the present study, in which participants admitted obtaining most of their information from Facebook or TikTok “*kabayan* pages” without confirming accuracy.

Vulnerability Factors in Fake News Consumption

Research showed that susceptibility to misinformation resulted from interacting cognitive, emotional, and sociocultural factors. Pennycook and Rand (2019) argued that individuals were more likely to believe false content when it aligned with their existing worldviews, a process of motivated reasoning. Stanovich (2020) added that users who relied on heuristics rather than analytical reasoning were more vulnerable.

Metzger and Flanagin (2021) explained that information overload led people to “satisfice” rather than verify, a behavior amplified among migrant workers juggling

multiple responsibilities (Li & Wong, 2022). Participants in the present study echoed this: one caregiver admitted, “I usually just read headlines because I’m tired after work.”

Social validation further shaped belief. Information shared by trusted peers, family, religious groups, or co-workers acquired legitimacy (Cabañes & Uy-Tioco, 2021). Soriano (2022) described this dynamic as a relational credibility loop, in which truth was socially constructed through relationships rather than through evidence. Interview data supported this: OFWs explained that posts from fellow Filipinos felt “safe” or “more believable.”

Emotional vulnerability also played a role. Kim (2023) demonstrated that emotionally charged misinformation, health cures, miracle jobs, and immigration rumors spread easily among migrants seeking comfort or hope. Participants similarly admitted sharing content “just in case it helps someone,” reflecting belief through empathy rather than verification.

Pertierra (2020) concluded that among Filipinos abroad, low digital literacy, limited access to reliable news, and reliance on social media for national identity all reinforced vulnerability. These observations mirrored the present findings of habitual “scrolling without evaluating” among OFWs in Taiwan.

Media Use and Information-Seeking Behaviors of OFWs and Migrants

OFWs had relied heavily on social media for information, connection, and emotional support (Soriano, 2019; Cabañes & Uy-Tioco, 2021). Facebook and Messenger functioned as an “information lifeline” maintaining cultural belonging (Lorenzo-Hall, 2020). Choi and Chen (2022) found that migrant workers in Taiwan primarily accessed news through peer networks, thereby increasing exposure to unverified content.

According to the Bureau of Labor Affairs Taiwan (2023), migrant workers depended on TikTok, Facebook Groups, and livestream pages far more than on formal news apps used by locals. This platform divide produced unequal levels of media literacy. Soriano (2019) described Facebook as a “digital plaza” where migrants consumed news, gossip, and political commentary. Baltazar (2022) observed that OFWs in Hong Kong shared viral posts reflexively, treating verification as optional when content came from fellow Filipinos.

Interviews from this study confirmed similar patterns. Respondents frequently cited Facebook groups, TikTok videos, and Messenger chats as their primary sources of information. Verification was rarely practiced because posts were deemed credible when circulated by other Filipinos.

Digital and Media Literacy as a Protective Factor

Media and Information Literacy (MIL) has been recognized globally as a defense against misinformation. UNESCO (2021) defined digital literacy as a combination of technical and critical competencies, including the ability to assess credibility and detect manipulation. Pangrazio and Selwyn (2020) argued that individuals lacking these skills were more likely to believe and share false content.

However, MIL access for migrant workers remained limited. Most initiatives targeted school-aged learners rather than adult or overseas populations (Lim, 2022). Consequently, OFWs relied on informal, peer-based learning networks (Cabañes & Uy-Tioco, 2021). Government programs acknowledging the need for digital literacy among overseas Filipinos were sporadic and lacked sustained implementation (DFA-OVS, 2023). NGO-led workshops, such as those of the Digital Rights Foundation, had limited reach due to resource and language barriers (Ortega, 2023).

Lorenzo-Hall (2023) found that migrants with higher digital literacy displayed stronger fact-checking habits and lower rates of misinformation sharing. Yet even literate users were influenced by emotionally resonant or identity-affirming content. Interview participants demonstrated this tendency; they described verifying information only when it “sounded political” but not when it “felt helpful.”

Institutional and Community-Based Approaches to Digital Literacy

Scholars emphasized that digital-literacy promotion should not be confined to individual skill-building but should also involve institutional and community participation. UNESCO (2021) advocated culturally responsive and context-specific frameworks for digital literacy that recognize local information practices. Lim (2022) and Ortega (2023) highlighted that institutional involvement, especially by government agencies, consulates, and non-government organizations, enhanced program sustainability and credibility among migrants.

Cabañes and Uy-Tioco (2021) observed that digital-literacy interventions were more effective when facilitated through trusted community figures such as association leaders, faith-based volunteers, or workplace representatives. These peer-champion models created a multiplier effect, with trained migrants sharing verification techniques with their networks. Similarly, NGO experiences in Southeast Asia showed that partnerships between local authorities and migrant organizations promoted trust and higher participation rates (Ortega, 2023).

In the Philippine context, institutions like the Manila Economic and Cultural Office (MECO) could play a strategic role in supporting overseas communities. Embedding short, scenario-based information-verification modules in orientation programs, organizing periodic fact-checking campaigns, and providing multilingual

infographics aligned with best practices identified in global research (UNESCO, 2021; Lorenzo-Hall, 2023). Such institutional initiatives not only strengthened technical skills but also addressed the emotional and relational dimensions of misinformation vulnerability.

Communication Practices of the Filipino Diaspora

Overseas Filipinos engaged in what Soriano (2022) termed digital *bayanihan*, the collective use of digital tools for connection and care. Messenger group chats, Facebook pages, Viber clusters, and TikTok communities functioned as extensions of physical social networks (Uy-Tioco, 2021). While these platforms fostered solidarity, they also became vectors for misinformation circulated in private spaces (Ong & Cabañes, 2019).

Because trust within migrant communities was relational, alarming or comforting information spread quickly, whether election rumors, COVID-19 cures, or remittance scams (David et al., 2020). Lin and Chiu (2023) found that migrant workers' information choices in Taiwan were guided more by emotional reassurance and identity reinforcement than by credibility. Participants of this study confirmed sharing posts "just in case it's true," viewing it as an act of concern rather than irresponsibility.

Three dominant communication behaviors emerged from interview data:

1. Reliance on Filipino peer networks for updates;
2. Selective trust in Philippine agencies based on responsiveness;
- and
3. Passive scrolling and screenshot-sharing instead of source verification.

These practices underscored that diasporic communication was primarily relational and emotion-driven. Therefore, interventions such as MECO's proposed digital-literacy programs must engage with social trust mechanisms rather than merely individual cognition.

Theoretical Anchors in Fake News Vulnerability Research

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) posited that audiences actively selected media to fulfill personal or social needs (Katz et al., 1973). Later studies indicated that misinformation persisted because it satisfied emotional and identity needs (Bode & Vraga, 2021). This perspective explained why OFWs continued engaging with familiar yet unreliable content.

Heuristic Processing Theory held that, under cognitive overload, individuals rely on mental shortcuts to judge credibility (Todorov, 2020). For OFWs balancing work and communication demands, such shortcuts included trusting posts shared by "*kabayan*" peers.

Finally, Cognitive Bias Frameworks, particularly confirmation bias and social proof, clarified why misinformation seemed "true" when it aligned with pre-existing beliefs (Pennycook & Rand, 2019). Pertierra (2020) emphasized that Filipino migrants' interpretations of truth were intertwined with cultural and religious narratives, reinforcing the relational nature of credibility.

Summary of the Review of Related Literature

The literature demonstrated that fake news evolved through socio-technical systems that exploited emotional and relational trust. Migrant workers, including OFWs in Taiwan, were especially vulnerable because of linguistic barriers, social-media

dependence, and limited institutional guidance. Studies underscore that misinformation thrives within networks of empathy, not malice, mirroring this study's participants' testimonies.

Collectively, the reviewed works highlighted that strengthening digital literacy required more than teaching technical verification skills; it demanded culturally grounded, community-based communication programs. Hence, MECO's potential role as a trusted digital-literacy facilitator was critical in bridging the gap between institutional credibility and the relational trust that defined OFW information ecosystems.

Chapter III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Why a Dual-Theory Framework Was Necessary

This study integrated the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and Grounded Theory (GT) to explain not only why Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Taiwan used social media in particular ways, but also how their lived experiences and sense-making generated patterns that made them vulnerable to, or resilient against, fake news. UGT accounted for motivations and gratifications such as connection, convenience, emotional reassurance, and identity work that drove platform choice and sharing behavior (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973; Rubin, 1983).

However, motivations alone could not fully explain the emergent rules of trust, the role of peer-anchored credibility, and the practical logics OFWs employed when information was scarce or overwhelming. GT contributed by allowing theory to emerge inductively from interview data, so that analytic categories, such as relational trust, “share-first verify-later” habits, screenshot circulation, and reliance on *kababayan* pages, were grounded in participants’ own words and routines (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014).

In other words, UGT framed the why (needs, gratifications, dependencies), while GT uncovered the how (processes, conditions, and social mechanisms by which those needs translated into day-to-day practices). The combination was essential because fake-news vulnerability was not only a cognitive issue but also a socially organized practice sustained by emotional gratifications and community norms (Pennycook & Rand, 2019; Serrano, 2022; Soriano, 2022).

Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT): What It Explained in This Study

UGT posited that audiences were active participants who chose media to satisfy specific needs such as information, social connection, entertainment, and identity affirmation (Katz et al., 1973; Rubin, 1983). In the interviews, OFWs consistently reported using Facebook, Messenger, TikTok, and YouTube as primary information lifelines to the Philippines and to Filipino communities in Taiwan.

Participants described several gratifications:

- Convenience and speed: platforms were “always on” and mobile-friendly (Li & Wong, 2022);
- Belonging and emotional support: through *kababayan* groups (Soriano, 2019; Cabañes & Uy-Tioco, 2021);
- Practical updates: related to work, immigration, health, and remittances; and
- Identity and participation: feeling “in the loop” on homeland issues (Pertierra, 2020; Uy-Tioco, 2021).

UGT clarified why OFWs relied heavily on social media and why emotionally or socially resonant content was compelling. It is also anticipated that users sometimes satisfice, choosing fast, “good-enough” information under time pressure or overload (Metzger & Flanagin, 2021), helping explain low-effort verification in fast-paced feeds. Finally, UGT interpreted sharing as a social and affective act, an effort to care for others, maintain bonds, or signal membership beyond purely informational motives (Bode & Vraga, 2021).

Grounded Theory (GT): What It Contributed and Why It Was Needed

Where UGT provided a motivational lens, GT offered a systematic way to derive categories and processes from data through coding, constant comparison, and memoing (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014; Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Applied in this study, GT procedures surfaced recurrent processes across participants, including:

1. **Relational credibility loops:** information gained “truth value” when shared by trusted *kababayan*, church groups, or co-workers;
2. **Share-first, verify-later heuristics:** under overload or urgency, particularly for warnings, promotions, or emotionally charged posts;
3. **Platform-shaped practices:** such as screenshotting or forwarding in closed chats that insulated claims from external fact-checks; and
4. **Contextual constraints:** language barriers, fatigue, or distance from official sources that increased reliance on peer-circulated content (Lin & Chiu, 2023; Choi & Chen, 2022; Huang, Li, & Yeh, 2023).

GT was necessary because local logics of trust and sharing among OFWs in Taiwan could not have been predetermined solely by UGT. Instead, categories emerged inductively and were refined against existing literature (e.g., Soriano’s relational credibility, 2022; Pennycook & Rand’s low-effort reasoning, 2019; Metzger & Flanagin’s satisficing under overload, 2021).

How UGT and GT Worked Together in This Study

The framework operated in three iterative layers:

Layer 1 – UGT (motivations and needs):

OFWs depended on social platforms for information, connection, reassurance, and identity maintenance (Katz et al., 1973; Rubin, 1983; Soriano, 2019; Cabañes & Uy-Tioco, 2021). These gratifications primed habits such as constant checking, following *kababayan* pages, and rapid forwarding to help others.

Layer 2 – GT (processes and practices):

From interviews, the study modeled how these motivations translated into practice, who was trusted, how a post traveled (page → share → screenshot → chat), when verification was deferred, and what triggered belief (e.g., urgency, alignment with expectations, social proof). These were data-derived mechanisms rather than imposed categories (Charmaz, 2014).

Layer 3 – Integrative explanation:

- Motivations (UGT) explained why channels were used and why emotionally resonant items spread;
- Data-derived mechanisms (GT) explained how credibility was collectively built and how sharing routines sustained vulnerability;
- Combined, the two theories predicted when a claim was likely to be believed or shared (e.g., high emotional value + trusted sender + time pressure) and where interventions should target (e.g., relational nodes, forwarding behaviors, screenshot norms).

This integration aligned with cognitive shortcuts and social proof documented in literature (Pennycook & Rand, 2019; Todorov, 2020; Stanovich, 2020), while

grounding these mechanisms in OFWs' contextual realities such as work schedules, linguistic barriers, and diaspora identity.

Direct Links to the Research Objectives

- **RO1:** Describe media use and information-seeking behaviors.

UGT explained why specific platforms were preferred and what gratifications were sought. GT illustrated how these motives manifested in practice (e.g., group chats as “first alerts,” reliance on *kababayan* administrators).

- **RO2:** Identify factors and situations associated with vulnerability to fake news.

UGT anticipated affective and social gratifications that made content attractive, while GT specified situational triggers, urgency, homophily, or perceived authority of sharers that increased susceptibility.

- **RO3:** Explain the role of trust and verification.

UGT framed trust-seeking as a gratification, and GT showed how trust was relationally constructed within peer, faith, and workplace networks, where verification was often postponed due to overload.

- **RO4:** Inform a communication model and interventions.

The integrated framework revealed leverage points such as strengthening relational verification within trusted networks, embedding media-literacy cues into forwarding practices, and using MECO-anchored channels as credible hubs (UNESCO, 2021; Lorenzo-Hall, 2023; DFA-OVS, 2023).

Evidence from Interviews and Literature (Mini-Synthesis)

Interview findings indicated that social media had served as the default news environment for most participants, with Facebook and Messenger acting as the “first

stop” for public issues and community updates. This pattern was consistent with regional studies on migrant media reliance (Soriano, 2019; Lin & Chiu, 2023; Choi & Chen, 2022).

Participants often described reposting content “to help others” or “just in case it was true,” a care-driven yet verification-light logic that the literature associated with affective gratifications and low-effort reasoning in high-tempo feeds (Bode & Vraga, 2021; Pennycook & Rand, 2019; Metzger & Flanagin, 2021). Several respondents also emphasized trust in familiar senders, co-workers, *kababayan* group administrators, or family members, supporting Soriano’s (2022) concept of relational credibility and confirming previous findings on migrant peer networks as primary information conduits (Cabañes & Uy-Tioco, 2021; Pertierra, 2020).

These convergences justified using UGT for the motivational layer and GT for the process layer, producing a coherent explanation of when and why OFWs became vulnerable and how practical interventions could be designed around the networks they already trusted (UNESCO, 2021; DFA-OVS, 2023).

Summary of the Theoretical Framework

This chapter established a dual-theory framework integrating UGT and GT to explain the motivations and mechanisms behind OFWs’ engagement with misinformation. UGT clarified the gratifications that made social platforms indispensable for information, connection, and identity expression, while GT uncovered the contextual and relational processes that shaped trust, verification, and sharing behaviors.

Together, these theories illuminated the multi-layered nature of fake-news vulnerability rooted in emotional needs, social validation, and structural constraints,

and provided a conceptual basis for the communication model and media-literacy interventions proposed later in this study.

Concluding Transition to Methodology

In conclusion, the integration of UGT and GT addressed all research objectives: it described media use (RO1), explained mechanisms of vulnerability (RO2–RO3), and informed the communication model and intervention strategies (RO4). The following chapter discusses the qualitative methodology and GT-informed analysis that produced these theoretical categories and their interrelationships.

Chapter IV

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative thematic analysis anchored in Grounded Theory to explore the phenomenon of fake news vulnerability among Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Taiwan. As defined by Flick (2014), qualitative research is a scientific approach that seeks to describe events and experiences realistically and holistically through methods such as document analysis, observation, or interviews. It emphasized understanding meanings and social processes as they naturally occurred.

While quantitative methods are often used in educational or behavioral sciences, qualitative research was deemed more suitable for this inquiry because the goal was to capture the subjective meanings and experiences of OFWs in their natural communication environments. The scientific process followed in this study included problem identification, literature review, participant selection, instrument design, data collection, data analysis, and results presentation.

Following Charmaz (2015), Grounded Theory was chosen for its inductive nature, which allowed theory to emerge from the data rather than imposing pre-existing frameworks. Coding and memo-writing were employed to generate themes grounded in actual participant experiences, encouraging the researcher's active engagement with the data and fostering deeper reflection on the phenomenon.

Research Participants

The study's participants consisted of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) residing in Taiwan, particularly those employed in factories, caregiving, construction, and professional sectors. According to Taiwan's Bureau of Labor Affairs (2023), Filipinos were among the largest foreign worker groups, accounting for approximately one-fifth of Taiwan's migrant workforce.

A total of nine (9) participants were selected using purposive convenience sampling to ensure that respondents were knowledgeable and experienced regarding the phenomenon of fake news. They included individuals from diverse occupational backgrounds, including a factory worker, a caretaker, an engineer, a household worker, and a Filipino-Taiwanese spouse.

Eligibility criteria required participants to be at least 18 years old and active users of at least one social-media platform (e.g., Facebook, Messenger, TikTok, or YouTube). Basic demographic data, such as age, gender, occupation, educational level, and length of stay in Taiwan, were also gathered to provide contextual understanding.

Data Gathering Procedure

Primary data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews, designed to elicit participants' experiences and interpretations regarding fake news on social media. Each interview lasted approximately 15–30 minutes and was conducted in person from March 18 to September 20, 2022.

The convenience sampling method (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016) was employed to access OFWs within southern Taiwan who met the inclusion criteria and

were willing to participate. This sampling technique was appropriate given the dispersed OFW population and the exploratory nature of the study.

All interviews were video-recorded with consent, and notes were taken during the conversations to ensure accuracy. Each participant was asked a series of open-ended questions (see Appendix) that explored their media habits, perceptions of fake news, verification behavior, and suggestions for intervention.

The researcher personally conducted the interviews to build rapport and to ensure the confidentiality and comfort of each participant. Each conversation was transcribed verbatim shortly after completion to preserve the nuances of speech, tone, and meaning.

Data Analysis

The study applied thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The open-ended interview responses served as the primary data corpus, which were coded manually using a constant-comparison approach.

The analysis followed these six stages:

1. **Familiarization with the data** – listening to recordings and reading transcripts multiple times;
2. **Generating initial codes** – highlighting phrases that captured participants' experiences;
3. **Searching for themes** – grouping codes into broader categories (e.g., trust, emotion, verification);
4. **Reviewing themes** – refining categories by comparing across participants;

5. **Defining and naming themes** – identifying the conceptual meanings and relationships; and

6. **Producing the report** – linking themes to existing theories and literature.

To interpret the data holistically, Van Manen's (2003) three complementary approaches were also adopted:

- The holistic approach, to capture the overall meaning of participants' lived experiences;
- The selective approach to identify key statements that revealed essential aspects of fake news vulnerability, and
- The detailed approach is to analyze each sentence for insight into meaning and relevance.

These approaches were combined to deepen understanding of how OFWs experienced, interpreted, and acted upon misinformation. The coding process used Saldana's (2013) cyclical method, generating descriptive codes from the participants' own words. These were then clustered into higher-order categories such as relational trust, share-first behavior, and peer validation, concepts supported by previous studies (Soriano, 2022; Cabañes & Uy-Tioco, 2021).

Ensuring Trustworthiness and Validity

To establish rigor, the study followed Creswell's (2007) and Gibbs's (2007) guidelines for ensuring credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

- **Credibility:** Ensured through verbatim transcription of the interviews, prolonged engagement with the data, and peer debriefing with the thesis adviser. These strategies helped clarify interpretations, reduce researcher bias, and strengthen the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings.

- **Dependability:** The researcher maintained detailed field notes and analytic memos throughout the process to ensure an audit trail of decisions.
- **Confirmability:** Themes were derived directly from the participants' words and verified against the data. Peer consultation with the thesis adviser also enhanced objectivity.
- **Transferability:** Thick descriptions were provided to help readers determine the relevance of the findings to similar OFW contexts.

Prolonged engagement in the research field also enhanced trustworthiness. The researcher, himself immersed in the OFW community in Taiwan, spent significant time observing online behavior and social media interactions, which deepened his contextual understanding of the phenomenon.

To ensure qualitative reliability, all transcripts were checked multiple times for transcription errors. Coding was reviewed and refined to maintain consistency. The process emphasized transparency, accuracy, and alignment with established qualitative standards (Creswell, 2007; Gibbs, 2007).

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical standards of confidentiality, voluntary participation, and informed consent. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time, and how their data would be used exclusively for academic purposes. Personal identifiers were removed from transcripts to protect anonymity. Video files and transcriptions were stored securely, accessible only to the researcher.

Summary of the Methodology

This chapter presented the methodological framework used to investigate OFWs' vulnerability to fake news in Taiwan. The study adopted a qualitative, grounded theory-informed thematic analysis to understand both the motivations and processes underlying information behavior.

Data gathered from in-depth interviews with nine OFWs revealed patterns that connected with existing literature on media gratifications, emotional engagement, and relational credibility (Soriano, 2019; Bode & Vraga, 2021; Metzger & Flanagin, 2021). These empirical insights provided the foundation for interpreting the findings in the succeeding chapter.

The next chapter discusses the results and thematic patterns that emerged from the participants' narratives, highlighting how digital practices, trust, and community interactions shaped their susceptibility or resilience to misinformation.

Chapter V

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Overview

This chapter presents the study's findings from a qualitative thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with 9 Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Taiwan. The results were organized into five major sections: (1) Overview of Participants, (2) Expanded Participant Profiles, (3) Emergent Themes and Thick Descriptions, (4) Cross-Theme Patterns, and (5) Integrated Discussion Anchored in Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and cognitive-behavioral perspectives on fake-news vulnerability. All excerpts were quoted verbatim and were edited only for grammar and clarity.

5.1 Overview of Participants

A total of nine (9) OFWs participated in the study, representing a variety of occupations, including factory work, caregiving, household service, office-based employment (engineers), beauty/wellness workers, and Filipino spouses residing in Taiwan. Participants' length of stay in Taiwan ranged from three to twenty-five years, reflecting diverse levels of digital adaptation and exposure to migrant community information networks.

All respondents actively used social media as their primary source of news, communication, and emotional support. Facebook, Messenger, TikTok, and YouTube were consistently mentioned as dominant platforms.

5.2 Expanded Participant Profiles

Table 1. Participant Overview

Participant Code	Role / Occupation	Gender	Years in Taiwan	Primary Information Sources	Notes on Media Habits
P01	Factory Worker	Male	3 years	Facebook, YouTube	Scrolled passively during breaks; followed Filipino vloggers
P02	Filipino Spouse (Housewife)	Female	10 years	TikTok, Facebook	Relied on TikTok for “quick updates”; shared content with relatives
P03	Office Worker/ Engineer	Male	25 years	Facebook, Google	Checked Google only when doubtful; relied on PH news pages
P04	Caregiver	Female	6 years	Facebook, Messenger	Shared posts in group chats “para aware ang iba.”
P05	Factory Worker	Male	7 years	Facebook, YouTube	Watched “FB live news”; followed Taiwan Pinoy community pages
P06	Beauty / Wellness Worker	Female	4 years	TikTok, Facebook	Responded to “health and warning” posts quickly
P07	Migrant/ Worker (Housewife)	Female	18 years	Facebook, TikTok	Believed the content more when shared by church group members
P08	Factory Worker	Male	13 years	Facebook, YouTube	Preferred screenshots more than links; “easier to resend.”
P09	Caregiver	Male	15 years	Facebook, News Sites	Sometimes checked Rappler, but forwarded Messenger posts first

All participants depended primarily on social media, and none cited official government or institutional websites as their initial information source. Even those who occasionally cross-checked information (P03, P09) admitted that social media remained their “starting point” of belief formation.

5.3 Emergent Themes

Using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase process, four dominant themes emerged from the analysis. Each theme reflected how OFWs engaged with social media, constructed credibility, and responded to misinformation.

Theme 1: Social Media as the Default Information Ecosystem

All participants described relying on social media multiple times daily for both Philippine and Taiwan-related news. Facebook and TikTok were perceived as real-time, accessible, and automatic, especially compared with Philippine TV or print outlets that were unavailable in Taiwan.

“Almost every morning pag-gising, Facebook agad. Diyan ko nalalaman kung may bagyo, may issue sa Pilipinas, pati tungkol sa Taiwan rules.” (P01)

“Dito sa Taiwan wala namang Philippine news channel na regular, kaya FB na lang talaga. Mabilis pa, may video, may post, may comments.” (P05)

Participants engaged in automatic, habitual consumption rather than deliberate information-seeking.

“Minsan hindi ko naman kailangan ng news, pero pag may lumabas sa feed, nababasa ko pa rin.” (P06)

This behavior supported the UGT concept of surveillance and convenience gratifications: users simultaneously fulfilled informational, emotional, and social needs through continuous scrolling.

Key pattern: Social media functioned not just as a news source but as the entire information environment, making it indispensable yet unfiltered.

Theme 2: Peer-Based Verification and Relational Trust

Rather than consulting official sources, participants relied on peers, co-workers, church leaders, family members, or administrators of Filipino community groups for verification. Credibility was relational rather than institutional.

“Kapag may nakita ako sa FB, hindi ako nag-Google agad. Tatanungin ko muna mga kasama ko sa trabaho, sila yung mabilis mag-confirm.” (P03)

“Kung galing sa group ng church o sa mga ate/kuya na matagal na dito sa Taiwan, mas naniniwala ako. Kasi tested na sila.” (P07)

Even when aware of fake news, participants still trusted emotionally close sources.

“Pag family ang nag-share, parang totoo agad. Hindi ko na chine-check.” (P02)

This supported Soriano’s (2022) relational credibility loop, where OFWs collectively constructed truth through peer validation rather than factual evidence.

Implication: Anti-misinformation programs must engage, not bypass, these peer-trust networks.

Theme 3: Emotional and Situational Triggers

Participants became most vulnerable when content elicited fear, urgency, or moral concern, particularly regarding disasters, safety, health, or political issues.

“Nang lumabas yung balita na may earthquake tsunami sa Taiwan, pati ako nagulat, share agad para mag-ingat sila.” (P06)

“Medyo natakot ako sa ‘China invasion’ news noon kaya agad akong nag-message sa family.” (P04)

In nearly all cases, emotional intensity outweighed rational verification. Sharing was often justified as better safe than sorry:

“Kahit fake minsan, ishe-share mo pa rin para warning lang. Wala namang mawawala.” (P08)

These findings by Pennycook and Rand (2019) and Vosoughi et al. (2018) show that emotionally charged misinformation spreads faster and is more readily believed.

Key insight: Misinformation was not spread with malicious intent but as an expression of care or concern.

Theme 4: Media Literacy Awareness but Limited Verification Skills

While all participants acknowledged that fake news existed, most lacked structured skills to evaluate authenticity. They relied on screenshots, comment sections, or visual cues rather than official fact-checking methods.

“Alam kong may fake news talaga... pero minsan hindi ko alam paano mag-check ng legit source.” (P09)

“Pag maraming comments na ‘fake’ doon lang ako maniniwala.” (P01)

Only one participant (P03) mentioned searching Google to verify alarming information. Awareness did not translate into ability, a gap supported by Jeong et al. (2012) and UNESCO (2021), who emphasized that media literacy must be explicitly

taught, especially among adult and migrant populations outside formal education systems.

Summary insight: Knowledge of fake news alone did not prevent belief in it; without critical literacy, participants relied on instinct and social validation.

5.4 Cross-Theme Patterns

Table 2. Factors Contributing to OFWs' Vulnerability to Fake News in Taiwan

Factor	How It Increased Vulnerability
Daily dependence on social media	Absence of an external comparison source
Peer-based trust > institutional trust	Truth equated with "shared by <i>kabayan</i> ," not verified
Emotion-driven sharing habits	Accelerated spread of misinformation
Limited verification skills	Inability to distinguish manipulated from factual content

Across themes, the pattern was circular: emotional reliance on social media reinforced relational trust, which, combined with limited verification, amplified vulnerability.

5.5 Integrated Discussion

The findings revealed that OFWs in Taiwan were not passive consumers of misinformation but active media users whose vulnerability stemmed from functional dependence, emotional triggers, peer-based trust, and weak verification skills. These patterns were interpreted through the combined lenses of UGT and cognitive-behavioral theory.

a. Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

UGT explained why OFWs gravitated toward social media; it fulfilled multiple needs at once: information, connection, identity, convenience, and emotional reassurance. Platforms such as Facebook and TikTok satisfied these gratifications faster than verified outlets could deliver accurate information.

“Facebook kasi lahat nandiyan na, news, family, community, trabaho, isang app lang.” (P04)

Continuous reliance led to habitual, low-effort consumption, particularly after work hours, when analytical engagement was lowest.

b. Cognitive Heuristics and Low-Effort Processing

Participants depended on mental shortcuts such as:

- “If many shared it, it must be true.”
- “If it came from someone I know, it is trustworthy.”
- “If it looks alarming, it must be real.”

This echoed Pennycook and Rand’s (2019) argument that belief in fake news often arose from unreflective thinking rather than ignorance.

c. Relational Credibility Loop

Truth was socially constructed within migrant networks. Messages from trusted peers, church leaders, co-workers, and family carried more weight than those from official institutions, confirming Soriano’s (2022) concept of relational credibility.

d. Emotional Contagion and Urgency Logic

Participants shared information rapidly when posts involved danger, moral alarm, or health risks. Emotion acted as a belief accelerator, bypassing critical reasoning (Kim, 2023).

“I-share agad para warning lang, mabuti na yung ready kahit fake pala.” (P06)

e. Media Literacy Gaps and Structural Barriers

Although aware of misinformation, OFWs lacked access to media literacy training. Their vulnerability reflected not only cognitive bias but also access inequity, aligning with UNESCO’s (2021) call for informal, community-based learning initiatives.

5.6 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter highlighted four interrelated findings:

1. **Social media dominance:** OFWs relied almost exclusively on social platforms for daily information.
2. **Relational verification:** Credibility was defined by social trust, not institutional authority.
3. **Emotional triggers:** Fear, urgency, and moral concern accelerated sharing behavior.
4. **Limited verification skills:** Awareness existed without analytical evaluation.

These factors interacted to create a cycle of rapid consumption, rapid sharing, and delayed verification, deepening exposure to misinformation.

The findings validated the theoretical integration of UGT and Grounded Theory by demonstrating how needs for connection and reassurance translated into habitual, relational, and emotional practices. They also underscored the importance of community-anchored interventions, as current institutional campaigns failed to reach OFWs effectively.

5.7 Transition to the Proposed Communication Model

The evidence indicated that existing anti-fake news strategies, such as fact-checking websites and official advisories, did not reach OFWs effectively because these initiatives did not operate within the actual trust networks and digital spaces OFWs used. Therefore, the succeeding chapter presents a MECO-anchored Proposed Communication Model designed to strengthen digital literacy through peer-based trust channels, emotional resonance, and structured information support systems.

Chapter VI

PROPOSED COMMUNICATION MODEL

Overview

The results and discussion in the preceding chapter revealed that Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Taiwan relied primarily on social media for information, depended on peers for verification, and were influenced by emotional triggers and limited media literacy. These patterns heightened their vulnerability to misinformation.

To address these realities, this chapter presents a Proposed Communication Model designed to strengthen the information environment of OFWs through digital literacy, transparency, collaboration, and critical thinking. The model builds upon the principles of Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), which explains how individuals actively seek media for specific needs and applies them within a development communication framework that encourages participatory and ethical information sharing.

6.1 Overview of the Model

The Proposed Communication Model for MECO-Led Digital Awareness and Fake-News Resilience aims to help OFWs recognize, evaluate, and share online information responsibly. It positions the Manila Economic and Cultural Office (MECO) as the central, trusted information hub that collaborates with institutional and community partners to create a digitally resilient Filipino migrant community in Taiwan.

The framework aligns with Koltay (2011), who emphasized that media literacy should integrate access, evaluation, and creation skills; and with Mihailidis and Thevenin (2013), who argued that participatory media practices empower citizens to

navigate misinformation responsibly. These ideas provide the scholarly basis for designing a community-based model rooted in both theory and practical implementation.

6.2 Core Components of the Model

a. Digital Literacy, Transparency, and Critical Thinking

The foundation of the model is digital literacy, defined as the ability to access, evaluate, and ethically use information (Hobbs, 2010). It promotes transparency and critical thinking as core defenses against misinformation.

MECO can develop short online modules, infographics, and explainer videos that illustrate how to detect manipulated content, identify clickbait headlines, and verify official sources. These activities foster awareness and responsible digital behavior, building informed, reflective media users among OFWs.

b. MECO-Led Information Sessions on Media Verification and Ethics

MECO should conduct regular information sessions either in person or via Facebook Live and Zoom that focus on fact-checking techniques, verification tools, and digital ethics.

Such initiatives reflect Freire's (1970) principle of dialogic education, where learners critically engage with their environment rather than passively consume information. These sessions allow OFWs to share experiences of encountering misinformation and co-create practical countermeasures, strengthening both confidence and community solidarity.

c. Collaboration with DFA-OVS, NGOs, Filipino Scholars, and Technology

Platforms

Sustainability depends on collaboration among institutions and stakeholders.

The model encourages the establishment of multi-sector partnerships, wherein:

- The Department of Foreign Affairs – Overseas Voting Secretariat (DFA-OVS) integrates digital literacy components into overseas voter education.
- Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and Filipino scholars in Taiwan provide training, mentorship, and research-based guidance.
- Technology companies such as Meta and Google Philippines support workshops on recognizing disinformation and algorithmic manipulation.

As Narayan et al. (2018) emphasized, collaboration across organizations expands the social infrastructure necessary for long-term digital resilience.

d. Community-Driven Verification and Awareness

The model underscores the importance of community-based verification. It adopts Caulfield's (2017) concept of lateral reading, in which users verify information by checking multiple sources rather than relying on a single post or page.

Encouraging Filipino community groups, church organizations, and dormitory associations to form peer verification teams fosters collective responsibility. Posters, infographics, and social media reminders that encourage users to “verify before sharing” can transform verification into a shared social norm.

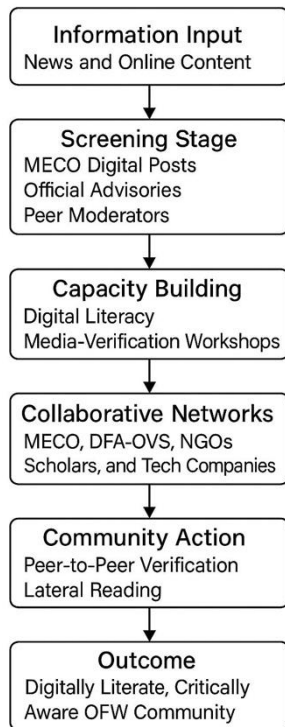
Through this approach, the OFW community becomes an active participant in truth promotion rather than a passive recipient of information.

6.3 Operational Framework of the Model

The proposed model follows six operational stages that define how information flows from input to outcome:

1. **Information Input** – News and digital content consumed daily by OFWs.
2. **Screening Stage** – MECO's official posts and peer moderators filter questionable or viral content for verification.
3. **Capacity Building** – Digital literacy and fact-checking workshops equip OFWs with critical thinking and technical skills.
4. **Collaborative Networks** – Inter-agency and institutional partnerships reinforce continuous learning.
5. **Community Action** – Peer-to-peer verification and ethical sharing become normalized within Filipino online groups.
6. **Outcome** – A digitally literate, critically aware, and misinformation-resilient OFW community emerges in Taiwan.

Figure 1. Operational Framework of the MECO-Led Communication Model for Digital Awareness and Fake News Resilience



(Illustrated as a cyclical model connecting MECO, institutional partners, and OFW community networks.)

6.4 Scholarly Basis and Integration

The proposed model draws from several established frameworks that inform both its structure and application:

Table 3. Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks Supporting the Proposed Communication Model

Framework	Contribution to the Model
Digital Literacy Framework (Koltay, 2011; Hobbs, 2010)	Integrates access, evaluation, and creation skills essential for identifying misinformation.
Critical Media Education (Freire, 1970; Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013)	Emphasizes empowerment through reflection, dialogue, and participatory learning.
Lateral Reading Model (Caulfield, 2017)	Promotes verification across multiple sources to enhance critical evaluation.
Uses and Gratifications Theory (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974)	Recognizes OFWs as active media users whose motivations shape their vulnerability patterns.

Together, these frameworks justify MECO’s dual role as both a communication gatekeeper and a capacity builder, aligned with its developmental mission to empower Filipino workers through credible, participatory communication.

6.5 Implementation and Sustainability

The model's long-term success depends on continuous education, monitoring, and inter-agency coordination. The following strategies are recommended:

1. **Training Modules** – Develop short, multilingual (English, Tagalog, and Chinese) learning materials explaining misinformation patterns and practical verification tools.
2. **Digital Ambassadors Program** – Designate trained OFW representatives in major communities to cascade verified content and model responsible information-sharing behavior.
3. **Monitoring and Feedback** – Use surveys and feedback mechanisms to assess awareness levels and program effectiveness.
4. **Integration with Consular Services** – Include verification reminders and media literacy messages in MECO's daily services, advisories, and outreach activities.

These steps ensure program continuity despite staff rotation or changing digital platforms. Sustained partnerships and regular evaluation strengthen MECO's institutional role as a credible communication authority.

6.6 Summary of the Chapter

This chapter outlined the Proposed MECO-Led Communication Model for Digital Awareness and Fake-News Resilience, a theory-based and practical framework developed from the study's findings.

The model integrates digital literacy, ethical awareness, institutional collaboration, and community participation into a unified communication strategy that empowers OFWs to discern credible information and resist misinformation.

By implementing this framework, MECO can enhance its role not only as a consular and service institution but also as a trusted source of verified information and a partner in building digital resilience among overseas Filipinos.

Ultimately, the model transforms information sharing from a personal routine into a collective civic responsibility, strengthening the culture of truth, discernment, and participatory communication within the Filipino migrant community in Taiwan.

Chapter VII

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Summary of the Study

This study examined the vulnerability of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Taiwan to fake news and online misinformation. Guided by the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) and a Grounded Theory-based qualitative thematic analysis, the research explored how OFWs used social media, evaluated credibility, and interpreted online content in their everyday lives.

Through in-depth interviews with nine participants representing diverse occupations, factory workers, caregivers, household service workers, office employees/ engineers, and Taiwanese spouses. The study revealed distinct behavioral and emotional patterns shaping their information practices. Social media platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, and Messenger emerged as primary sources of news, connection, and emotional reassurance.

The findings showed four dominant behavioral tendencies:

1. **Convenience-driven media use**, where social media served as both an information source and a daily routine;
2. **Reliance on peer validation**, in which credibility depended on who shared the post rather than its factual basis;
3. **Emotionally triggered sharing**, where fear, empathy, and urgency often overrode verification; and
4. **Limited verification skills**, where awareness of fake news did not translate into consistent fact-checking behavior.

These themes were analyzed through UGT and cognitive-behavioral lenses, revealing that vulnerability stemmed not from ignorance but from social trust structures, emotional cues, and low-effort reasoning amplified by digital environments.

The study further integrated both theoretical and empirical insights to explain the “why” and “how” behind OFWs’ susceptibility to misinformation. UGT explained the psychological and social gratifications that motivated media use, while Grounded Theory identified the processes through which relational credibility and emotional validation shaped information behavior.

7.2 Conclusion

This research answered all four research objectives as follows:

1. To describe the media use and information-seeking behavior of OFWs in Taiwan.

The study found that OFWs primarily relied on social media for both Philippine- and Taiwan-related news, driven by accessibility and immediacy. Facebook and TikTok served as central spaces for communication, information, and identity maintenance.

2. To identify the factors and situations associated with vulnerability to fake news.

Findings showed that susceptibility increased when information triggered emotional reactions, appeared frequently in peer groups, or aligned with personal beliefs. Overexposure to emotionally charged content encouraged fast, uncritical sharing.

3. To explain the role of trust and verification in shaping beliefs and information-sharing.

Trust was constructed relationally rather than institutionally. OFWs believed information shared by relatives, friends, or church members, reflecting Soriano's concept of relational credibility loops. Verification was often deferred, relying instead on popularity cues or peer affirmation.

4. To inform a communication model and interventions for digital literacy.

The study developed a Proposed MECO-Led Communication Model for Digital Awareness and Fake-News Resilience, integrating digital literacy, participatory communication, and cross-sector collaboration. The model highlighted the importance of community-based verification and emotional awareness as pillars of digital resilience.

7.3 Key Insights and Theoretical Implications

The study contributed to understanding the vulnerability to fake news among migrant populations by emphasizing that misinformation spread was relational and emotional, not merely cognitive. UGT clarified why OFWs used social media to meet informational, emotional, and identity needs, while Grounded Theory revealed how everyday communication practices sustained both vulnerability and resilience.

The integration of these frameworks offered a coherent explanation of how migrant digital habits, community ties, and emotional gratifications interacted to shape belief formation. The study affirmed that addressing misinformation required a development communication approach, one that empowered, rather than merely informed, audiences.

7.4 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings and theoretical integration, the following recommendations were proposed to guide MECO's development communication programs and to enhance the digital literacy of OFWs in Taiwan.

A. For MECO's Digital Literacy and Awareness Programs

1. Launch an OFW Digital and Media Literacy Micro-Course

MECO should develop a short, modular program (four lessons, 15 minutes each) focusing on:

- Lateral reading techniques (comparing multiple sources)
- Source tracing and URL verification
- Recognizing manipulated media and clickbait patterns
- Emotional awareness in sharing decisions

These bite-sized lessons can be delivered via Facebook, YouTube, or MECO's online portal to ensure accessibility for workers on varying schedules.

2. Establish a MECO-Verified Information Hub

A single, multilingual online portal should aggregate official advisories, myth-busting posts, and FAQs verified by Philippine and Taiwanese authorities. This centralized hub would reduce confusion and misinformation spread within migrant social groups.

3. Create a Community Fact-Check Network

MECO can train volunteer "digital ambassadors" or focal persons within factories, dormitories, and Filipino associations to flag viral claims, route them to official channels for verification, and disseminate corrected information in community chats.

4. Promote ‘Stop-Read-Check-Share’ Cues

Simple visual prompts, infographics, posters, and pinned group reminders should encourage responsible sharing practices in Facebook and Viber groups. This behavioral nudge translates verification into a daily habit.

5. Collaborate with Academic and NGO Partners

MECO may partner with universities, non-profit organizations, and fact-checking institutions to conduct quarterly webinars or interactive workshops featuring scenario-based drills (e.g., spotting fake headlines, identifying bot posts, and detecting deepfakes).

6. Monitor and Evaluate Progress

Periodic surveys and engagement analytics should assess improvements in awareness, accuracy of information sharing, and reduction of rumor-driven incidents. Feedback mechanisms will ensure that training programs remain responsive to OFWs’ evolving media practices.

B. For Policy and Future Research

1. Institutionalize Digital Literacy in Migrant Welfare Policies.

Findings support embedding digital and media literacy modules within labor and welfare programs managed by MECO, DMW, OWWA, POEA, and DFA-OVS.

2. Conduct Comparative Studies Across Host Countries.

Future research may explore how cultural and platform-specific differences influence Filipino workers’ information behaviors in other destinations such as Hong Kong, Japan, or the Middle East.

3. Develop a Cross-Cultural Model of Relational Credibility.

Building on this study, future investigations can refine the concept of trust-based verification among diasporic communities in multilingual digital spaces.

7.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter synthesized the study's key results, demonstrated how each research question was addressed, and proposed targeted actions for MECO and related agencies. The findings affirmed that fake news vulnerability among OFWs stemmed from emotional engagement, peer validation, and limited verification opportunities rather than from apathy or ignorance.

By developing a community-based digital literacy framework, this research bridged theory and practice using UGT and Grounded Theory not only to explain behavior but also to design solutions. The recommendations translated these insights into actionable programs that could strengthen MECO's role as both a trusted information hub and a catalyst for critical digital citizenship among overseas Filipinos.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

Research Question 1: Information-Seeking Behavior of OFWs

- What are your sources of information?
- What information are you usually looking for?

Research Question 2: Awareness and Understanding of Fake News

- What to you is fake news?
- How do you check if the one you are reading/receiving is fake news?
- What is your level of awareness about fake news?
- What is your understanding of fake news?

Research Question 3: Social Media Habits and Practices

- How frequently do you use social media, and what is your purpose for using it?
- Do you verify something you read before believing or sharing it?
- What do you do when you find out something is fake news?
- As an OFW, what are your ways to avoid becoming a victim of false information?

Research Question 4: Vulnerability to Fake News

- What makes news shared on social media believable to you?
- Why did you believe or become easily lured into such fake news?

- Do you have any experience believing in fake news?

Research Question 5: What Makes News True for OFWs

- How can you say or prove that the information being shared is true?

Research Question 6: Communication Model Recommendations

- How can you help fellow OFWs distinguish fake from real news?
- What programs or services can MECO/Philippine embassies implement?

Research Question 7: Strategies to Ensure a Safe Digital Environment

- What strategies can the government implement to secure OFWs against cyberbullying?

APPENDIX B

Statement on the Administration of Verbal Informed Consent

In adherence to ethical standards for qualitative research and in line with the flexible ethnographic practices standard in Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) studies, verbal informed consent was obtained from all nine (9) participants prior to each interview.

Before each interview session, the researcher briefly introduced the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, the right to decline or withdraw at any point, and the assurance that all information shared would remain confidential and used solely for academic purposes. Participants were also informed that pseudonyms or anonymous participant codes would be used in the final thesis.

The researcher confirmed the participant's willingness to proceed by asking a direct consent question (e.g., "Are you willing to participate in this interview?"). Only upon receiving a clear verbal yes did the interview begin.

No identifying details unrelated to the research were collected. Video recordings were stored securely and used exclusively for data analysis. All participants expressed willingness and understanding, and none withdrew from the study at any point.

This statement serves as documentation of the ethical process undertaken, rather than a signed written consent form.

APPENDIX C

Participant Profiles

Table C1. Demographic Profile of Research Participants

Code	Occupation/ Role	Age	Gender	Years in Taiwan	Primary Information Sources
P01	Factory Worker	32 y/o	Male	3 years	Facebook, YouTube, mainstream Taiwan news
P02	Taiwanese Spouse (Housewife)	55 y/o	Female	10 years	Facebook, TV, Internet, Instagram
P03	Engineer/ Office Worker	67 y/o	Male	25 years	Facebook, Google
P04	Caretaker	41 y/o	Female	6 years	Facebook, Messenger
P05	Factory Worker	33 y/o	Male	7 years	Facebook, YouTube
P06	Beauty/ Wellness Worker	34 y/o	Female	4 years	TikTok, Facebook
P07	Migrant Worker / Housewife	53 y/o	Female	18 years	TikTok, Facebook
P08	Factory Worker	49 y/o	Male	13 years	Facebook, YouTube
P09	Engineer	42 y/o	Male	15 years	Social media, news websites

APPENDIX M

Coding Matrix / Thematic Analysis Table

This appendix presents the coding process used to analyze the narratives of the nine Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) participants. Initial codes were generated through in-vivo and descriptive coding. Similar patterns were grouped into categories and organized into broader themes aligned with the research questions.

Table M1. Coding Matrix Based on Participant Narratives

Theme 1: Convenience-Driven Information Seeking and Heavy Reliance on Social Media

(RQ1 – Information-seeking behavior)

Initial Codes	Category / Subtheme	Major Theme	Representative Excerpts
“90% from social media”; “Facebook everyday”; “TikTok and YouTube”; “Source ko Facebook lang”; “Pag break time lang ako nag-check”	Social media as a primary news source	Convenience-driven social media dependence	“For me, 90% of my sources of information are social media.” (P08) • “Mostly every day I browse YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook.” (P07)
“Wala kaming newspaper dito”; “Hindi ko mabasa Taiwan news kasi Chinese”; “No time to watch TV”	Limited access to traditional news		“Because I’m living in Taiwan, reading the newspaper is not an option.” (P04)
“Check ko agad weather, COVID updates”; “Updates sa Pinas at Taiwan”	Habitual information checking		“I recently browsed information about COVID-19... I get paranoid, so I always check updates.” (P01)

Theme 2: Varied but Generally High Awareness of Fake News

(RQ2 – Awareness & understanding)

Initial Codes	Subtheme	Major Theme	Excerpts
“Misconception”; “Wrong information”; “Gossip”; “Fabricated to destroy someone”; “Maling paniniwala”	Understanding fake news	High awareness but uneven interpretation	“Fake news is to get attention... wrong beliefs and wrong information.” (P09)
“Alam kong maraming fake news, lalo na politics”; “Very aware... rampant”	Awareness of fake news prevalence		“I’m very aware that fake news is rampant, especially on social media.” (P08)
“Nabibiktima pa rin minsan dahil believable.”	Awareness does not prevent vulnerability		“To be honest, they are believable... if you’re not keen on details, you will believe.” (P08)

Theme 3: Emotion-Driven Believability of Content

(RQ4 – Vulnerability to fake news)

Initial Codes	Subtheme	Major Theme	Excerpts
“Trending kasi”; “Hot topic”; “Sikat sa social media”; “Maraming nag-share”	Social validation/popularity bias	Emotion-triggered susceptibility	“A news becomes believable because it’s trending and discussed by many people.” (P09)
“Pag may video at comments”; “To see is to believe”; “Pag may ebidensya.”	Visual cues & perceived evidence		“There’s proof— videos and photos that make information believable.” (P09)

“Dahil ayoko yung kandidato”; “Hatred in politics”	Confirmation bias		“Because of hatred... sometimes when we don’t like the candidate, we easily believe rumors.” (P07)
“Naiimpluwensyahan ng friends and relatives”; “Pag sinabi ng kaibigan ko, naniniwala ako”	Peer influence		“It’s because sometimes close friends or relatives are sharing it.” (P05)

Theme 4: Peer Consultation and Cross-Checking as Verification Practices

(RQ2 & RQ3 – Verification habits)

Initial Codes	Subtheme	Major Theme	Excerpts
“Tatanungin ko asawa ko”; “Ask supervisor”; “Ask a reliable person sa church.”	Reliance on interpersonal verification	Interpersonal and multi-source verification	“I ask my husband... he is more knowledgeable on trusted websites.” (P01)
“Check other sites”; “Google ko muna”; “Compare with other news outlets.”	Multi-source checking		“I need to have many sources first before I conclude.” (P08)
“Wait for several days bago mag-react”; “I don’t rely on one source.”	Delayed judgment / cautious verification		“I wait for several days and look at both sides.” (P04)

Theme 5: Past Negative Experiences Reinforcing Critical Behavior

(RQ4 – Vulnerability & resilience)

Initial Codes	Subtheme	Major Theme	Excerpts
“Na-scam sa beauty product”; “Naniwala sa death hoax”; “Nagpanic kami sa dorm”	Personal encounters with fake news	Experience-based resilience	“I was scammed by a beauty product—fake news.” (P09)
“Naniwala ako, but I did not share.” “Lesson learned”	Learning through consequences		“There are many... I believed but did not share.” (P08)

Theme 6: Social Responsibility and Desire to Prevent Harm

(RQ5 – How OFWs aim to help others)

Initial Codes	Subtheme	Major Theme	Excerpts
“Tell them to delete the post. “I advise them to check first.”	Peer correction	Collective responsibility in mitigating fake news	“I tell them to delete their post and teach them how to check sources.” (P01)
“I will help them by showing step-by-step how to verify.”	Teaching verification skills		“By showing them how to do it step by step.” (P09)
“Private message ko sila pag mali yung sinare nila”	Discreet correction		“I normally send them a private message... ‘that news is fake.’” (P04)

Theme 7: Need for Institutional Support, MECO Interventions, and Government Safeguards

(RQ6 & RQ7 – Recommended programs)

Initial Codes	Subtheme	Major Theme	Excerpts
“Hotline for OFWs”; “Helpdesk”; “Immediate response”; “Counselling”	Service accessibility	Demand for structured digital literacy and support systems	“To have a helpdesk that OFWs can easily visit or call whenever there are issues.” (P09)
“MECO should post media literacy videos”; “Seminars on fake news.”	Media literacy programs		“MECO can create videos on how to spot fake news.” (P01)
“Protection against defamation”; “Punishment for cyberbullies”	Cyberbullying protection		“Government should protect OFWs from cyberbullying and provide justice.” (P09)

Narrative Summary of Coding Process

The coding process began with repeated readings of the nine interview transcripts, allowing familiarization with participants’ stories. In-vivo codes were first generated to preserve the participants’ own language (“*trending*”, “*to see is to believe*”, “*I ask my husband*”, “*Google ko muna*”, “*hot topic*”), ensuring their lived experiences shaped the early analysis.

Next, similar codes were clustered into categories such as trend-based believability, peer influence, verification habits, emotional triggers, and interpersonal fact-checking. These categories were further reorganized into major themes reflecting broader socio-digital patterns among OFWs in Taiwan.

The themes were then aligned with the study's research questions, ensuring coherence between raw data and the final interpretation. The thematic structure highlights the interplay of convenience, emotional influence, social dynamics, and institutional gaps that shape OFWs' vulnerability to misinformation.

This matrix demonstrates a grounded, systematic, and human-centered analysis consistent with UPOU's qualitative research standards.

APPENDIX N

Research Timeline / Gantt Chart

Table N1. Research Timeline (January 2019 – November 2025)

Research Activity	Jan–Dec 2019	Jan–Dec 2020	Jan–Dec 2021	Jan–Dec 2022	Jan–Dec 2023	Jan–Dec 2024	Jan–Apr 2025	May-Aug 2025	Sept-Nov 2025
Topic Exploration & Identification	✓ (April 2019)								
Review of Related Literature (Initial)	✓ (May 2019)								
Development of Conceptual Framework	✓ (May 2019)								
Drafting of Research Proposal	✓ (July 2019)								
Proposal Defense Preparation		✓ (Feb 2020)							
Proposal Defense		✓ (Mar. 24, 2020)							
Revisions Based on Panel Comments			✓ (Jan 2021)						
Ethical Compliance (Verbal Consent)				✓ (Feb 2022)					

Development of Interview Guide				✓ (Jan 2022)					
Participant Recruitment				✓ (Feb 2022)					
Data Gathering (Interviews)				✓ (Mar-Sept 2022)					
Transcript Preparation				✓ (Nov 2022)					
Initial Coding & Thematic Analysis						✓ (July 2024)			
Expanded Thematic Development									✓ (Sept 2025)
Drafting of Chapter IV (Results)									✓ (Oct 2025)
Drafting of Chapter V (Discussion)									✓ (Oct 2025)
Manuscript Refinement									✓ (Oct 2025)
Continuous RRL Updating									✓ (Oct 2025)
Submission of Full Draft to Adviser									✓ (Oct 2025)
Adviser Review & Corrections									✓ (Oct 2025)
Finalization of Thesis for Defense									✓ (Oct 2025)

Final Oral Defense									✓ (Nov 4, 2025)
Post-Defense Revisions									✓ (Nov 2025)
Final Manuscript Preparation									✓ (Nov 2025)

Narrative Description of Research Timeline

The research began in early 2019 when the researcher identified misinformation affecting OFWs during the Philippine national election season. From January to April 2019, the researcher developed the topic, conducted an initial literature review, and crafted the conceptual framework that anchored the investigation.

The proposal defense was completed in March 2020, followed by revisions and alignment with panel recommendations. Participant recruitment and instrument refinement occurred from January to February 2022, ensuring that the interview guide captured digital habits, vulnerability patterns, and participant interpretations of misinformation.

The data collection phase took place between March and September 2022, with interviews completed face-to-face in Kaohsiung and nearby areas. Transcription and verification of interview content were conducted immediately after.

The initial coding and thematic analysis started in mid-2024 and continued through September 2025, allowing deeper immersion in the data. Chapters IV (Results) and V (Discussion) were written iteratively, incorporating updated literature from September to October 2025 to strengthen the narrative and theoretical grounding.

By 2025, major chapters were refined and aligned with academic requirements. The full manuscript underwent extensive revisions from 2023 to 2024, culminating in the preparation for defense and the submission of the final draft to the adviser.

The Final Oral Defense was completed on November 4, 2025, followed by post-defense corrections and the preparation of the final version of the manuscript.