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ARTICLE

Misinformation in WhatsApp Family Groups: Generational Perceptions and Correction Considerations in a Meso-News Space

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how extended family group chats on WhatsApp operate as meso-news spaces, focusing on how misinformation is negotiated within these spaces. Through interviews with urban Indian young adults ($N = 26$), it finds that these spaces are characterized by a mix of interpersonal interaction and news, including misinformation. The findings suggest that young Indians believe that older generations are more susceptible to believing such misinformation, reflecting third-person perceptions regarding susceptibility to misinformation. The participants view misinformation correction as something one ought to do but state that it is not a widespread practice among their peers. Furthermore, various considerations shape their own decision to correct or not correct older relatives who share misinformation. They consider the misinformation topic and refrain from correcting misinformation on politics or religion; the potential consequences of correction, as they avoid correcting if it may lead to conflict; and their relationship with the misinformation sharer, as a greater sense of closeness, history, and rapport makes correction easier. They view WhatsApp as a suitable space for correction as it is associated with a known audience. Thus, this study reveals how relational, cultural, and technological factors inform responses to misinformation within meso-news spaces.

KEYWORDS

India; meso-news spaces; misinformation; misinformation correction; WhatsApp

Mobile instant messaging services (MIMS) like WhatsApp facilitate the sharing of text messages, images, videos, and audio in both one-to-one conversations as well as multi-sided group chats (Ling and Lai 2016). Engagement with news is a part of the flow of interactions that occur within such group chats (Goh et al. 2019). Mitchelstein et al. (2020) note that factors operating at a micro, meso, and macro level impact an individual's access to news, with such group chats representing the meso level as they consist of family, friends, and/or acquaintances, reflecting how one's social environment shapes news access. Indeed, these group chats have been described as meso-news spaces, which are online spaces that occur "between the private and public realms" and are associated with "news-related processes" (Tenenboim and

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Kligler-Vilenchik 2020, 2). Tenenboim and Kligler-Vilenchik contend that meso-news spaces provide sociability and intimacy that is genuinely changing news engagement.

This study focuses on WhatsApp extended family group chats in urban India and how these operate as meso-news spaces. Through in-depth interviews ($N = 26$) with young adults in Delhi, it presents findings about news and information sharing and discussion within such chats, including how misinformation is negotiated. Although meso-news spaces are typically associated with relationships beyond the familial sphere (Tenenboim and Kligler-Vilenchik 2020), undoubtedly news-related content is shared and discussed within family group chats. Learning about news from friends and family is common on MIMS (Mitchelstein et al. 2020), as is news-related discussion (Masip et al. 2021; Valenzuela, Bachmann, and Bargsted 2021). As Tenenboim and Kligler-Vilenchik (2020) note, people within a meso-news space need to be involved in at least one stage of the news production process and discussing a news story is one such stage. Moreover, family group chats further blur what is considered public and private because they can be large and even consist of over a hundred extended family members, especially in a cultural context like India (Dixit 2018). As such, it is important to consider extended family group chats as part of the meso-news space ecology. Additionally, the intimacy afforded by meso-news spaces has been shown to increase trust in information and possibly contributes to the spread of misinformation within such spaces (Masip et al. 2021), further justifying the importance of including these group chats as meso-news spaces and examining how misinformation is negotiated within these spaces.

In considering how extended family group chats operate as meso-news spaces, this study focuses on how misinformation is negotiated within these spaces. Specifically, it examines the factors that inform the interview participants' decision to correct or not correct their older relatives who share misinformation. Here, it is important to clarify two aspects associated with the central focus of this study. First, correction alone cannot mitigate misinformation and is one of many overlapping interventions to address this issue (Bode and Vraga 2021a). However, while some interventions require digital platforms and institutions like public health bodies to act, correction is embedded in everyday interpersonal interactions and is therefore a relevant intervention to examine within the context of extended family group chats. Second, in focusing on older people sharing misinformation, this study does not intend to reinforce any stereotypes regarding older generations being more susceptible to misinformation. Indeed, evidence regarding this perception is mixed as some studies suggest that older people are more likely to consume and share misinformation (Allen et al. 2020; Guess, Nagler, and Tucker 2019), while others find that the opposite is true (Roozenbeek et al. 2020). This study instead examines the interview participants' third-person perceptions (TPP) regarding their older relatives' susceptibility to misinformation. Extant research finds that TPP, which is the idea that individuals perceive others as being more susceptible to persuasive communication than them, are associated with intention to correct misinformation (Jang and Kim 2018). Thus, this study examines TPP across generations by focusing on the younger group's perceptions. In addition to TPP, it also examines how perceived social norms associated with correction inform intention to correct (Koo et al. 2021). Furthermore, beyond these perceptions, as Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2020) note, how relevant the misinformation content

is to the corrector, the nature of the relationship between the corrector and the misinformation sharer, and the perceived efficacy of correction are also important factors. Thus, this study utilizes Tandoc et al.'s insights as a framework and applies it to a specific relational, cultural, and technological context. Moreover, while Tandoc et al. examined correction on social media in general, this study focuses on WhatsApp group chats, specifically.

This study focuses on India and WhatsApp specifically to add to the growing body of research on misinformation and its correction. First, a majority of this research focuses on the United States, with other parts of the world underrepresented (Seo and Faris 2021). Second, scholars who have focused on people's intention to correct misinformation have primarily asked participants about their correction intentions and experiences on social media in general (Bode and Vraga 2021b; Chadwick and Vaccari 2019; Koo et al. 2021; Tandoc, Lim, and Ling 2020). However, the communicative dynamics associated with a specific online space like WhatsApp group chats may also influence correction intentions. Third, focusing on WhatsApp is important because much of what we know about misinformation and social media is from studies that focus on platforms like Facebook and Twitter (Rossini et al. 2021). Yet, WhatsApp is a prominent vector for misinformation in India and many other countries (Badrinathan 2021). Studying correction in relation to meso-news spaces like WhatsApp group chats is also vital because their encrypted nature makes content moderation difficult, resulting in a greater onus on users to correct each other (Resende et al. 2019). Fourth, India is a fruitful context to study correction within intergenerational relationships as cultural norms emphasizing respect and deference to elders are salient and may be a consideration when young Indians decide whether or not to correct an older relative (Saavala 2010). Within the Indian cultural context, face or "izzat" is associated with reputation, honor, and respect, and is an especially salient concern in relation to communicating with elders (Baig, Ting-Toomey, and Dorjee 2014).

Literature Review

Meso-News Spaces on MIMS and Misinformation

Recent scholarship suggests that people are increasingly engaging with news through MIMS like WhatsApp. As Valenzuela, Bachmann, and Bargsted (2021) contend, "there is growing evidence that the widespread use of MIMs not only makes them one of the most universal communication technologies, but also one that is exerting a unique influence on the conduit of news and political information" (168). This involves discussion and interpretation of news, which is a process associated with meso-news spaces (Tenenboim and Kligler-Vilenchik 2020). While this process is viewed as more personalized and private on MIMS compared to more public online spaces (Reuters 2018), this does not mean that it is restricted to the private and intimate sphere; rather, users also share and discuss news with weak ties through large group chats (Swart, Peters, and Broersma 2019). As group chats enable users to "set clear community boundaries," people feel comfortable engaging with and discussing news (Swart, Peters, and Broersma 2019, 200). This

demonstrates how large group chats on MIMS operate as meso-news spaces, occurring somewhere between private and public domains (Tenenboim and Kligler-Vilenchik 2020).

This blurring of the public and private is reflected in how news sharing and discussion on WhatsApp group chats is described as occurring alongside quotidian social interactions (Masip et al. 2021). News is part of the flow of interpersonal interaction and reciprocal news sharing is often directed toward helping people maintain social relationships (Goh et al. 2019).

However, the expectation to constantly engage in such reciprocal news sharing can also lead to people spreading misinformation (Duffy, Tandoc, and Ling 2020), defined "as constituting a claim that contradicts or distorts common understandings of verifiable facts" (Guess and Lyons 2020, 10). Moreover, the intimacy, trust, and reciprocity associated with WhatsApp group chats is viewed as a potential reason for people to share misinformation and not critically evaluate news (Masip et al. 2021). Within India, WhatsApp group chats have been linked to the spread of misinformation, particularly rumors and conspiracy theories that malign the Muslim community (Akbar et al. 2021). Thus, this study specifically focuses on extended family group chats in India and how misinformation is negotiated within these spaces. In doing so, it asks the following research question (RQ1): *How do Indian extended family group chats on WhatsApp operate as meso-news spaces and what role does misinformation play within these spaces?*

Misinformation Correction

Given that the spread of misinformation is associated with harmful outcomes like violence (Aswani 2021), scholars and practitioners have focused on remedies to stop its spread. One area that has received attention is misinformation correction. The correction of misinformation is a suggested way of diminishing the impact of that misinformation, typically with the goal of persuading someone to not believe it (Wang and Song 2015). Although much attention has been paid to the effectiveness of various correction strategies, less is known about the factors that influence people to correct others (Sun et al. 2022a). The studies that do examine this issue draw on theoretical approaches tied to how perceptions predict people's intention to engage in certain behaviors.

Third-Person Perceptions

Third-person perceptions (TPP) refers to the phenomenon that people perceive persuasive communication as affecting others to a greater degree than it affects them (Davison 1983), especially when the communication is associated with undesirable outcomes (Gunther and Mundy 1993). Furthermore, this perceptual gap grows with an increase in social distance, which refers to how broadly "others" are defined (Cohen et al. 1988). Simply put, this gap is amplified when the "others" are more distant from one's immediate community.

While TPP refers to the perceptual gap between self and others, the third-person effect (TPE) denotes the actions people take in response to this gap (Sun, Shen, and

Pan 2008). This includes corrective actions, which are defined as "individuals' engagement in reactive action against potentially harmful influence" (Lim 2017, 978). In the context of misinformation, people perceive others as being more susceptible to falsehoods and this perceptual gap predicts their intention to engage in misinformation correction (Koo et al. 2021). Sun et al. (2022a) find evidence for TPP in relation to susceptibility to vaccine-related misinformation. However, they find that this perceptual gap is linked to support for regulation of misinformation and not intention to engage in correction. Meanwhile, Jang and Kim (2018) discover that Americans believe that people belonging to their political out-group are more vulnerable to misinformation than them and those belonging to their political in-group, demonstrating how this perceptual gap is amplified with an increase in social distance. They also find that this gap predicts people's support for media literacy education interventions associated with misinformation.

Since this study focuses on misinformation correction intentions among a group of young Indians, it is important to examine whether this perceptual gap is apparent in their views regarding misinformation on WhatsApp. To be sure, TPP can reflect people's reliance on stereotypes (McLeod, Detenber, and Eveland 2001); thus, interview participants may perpetuate unfair generalizations regarding older relatives' susceptibility to misinformation. This study solely focuses on their perceptions and how they relate to correction intentions rather than making claims about the extent to which older people believe misinformation. Thus, the second research question (RQ2) this study addresses is: *What are young Indians' perceptions regarding their older relatives' susceptibility to believing misinformation on WhatsApp compared to their self-perception of susceptibility?*

Social Norms Approach

Another related approach to understanding what motivates people to engage in behavior such as correction is the social norms approach, which posits that people's behavior is influenced by their perception of the social norms associated with the behavior (Berkowitz 1972; Perkins and Berkowitz 1986). Scholars typically distinguish between two types of norms: Descriptive norms, which are "norms that characterize the perception of what most people do," and injunctive norms, which are "norms that characterize the perception of what most people approve or disapprove" (Cialdini, Kallgren, and Reno 1991, 203). Thus, researchers who adopt the social norms approach contend that when people believe that a certain behavior is typical and/or what one ought to do, they are more likely to engage in it.

Within the context of misinformation correction, Koo et al. (2021) find that there is a positive association between the perception that misinformation correction is commonplace (i.e. it is a descriptive norm) and people's intention to engage in correction. Similarly, focusing on misinformation associated with COVID-19, Bode and Vraga (2021b) discover that Americans view misinformation correction as a public responsibility and often observe social media users correcting each other, which they label as observational correction. Thus, they state that "both injunctive (you *should* correct) and descriptive (people *do* correct) norms may be emerging that support observational correction" (14). Since this study focuses on correction

intentions, it examines perceptions regarding the norms surrounding misinformation correction and asks the following research question (RQ3): *What are young Indians' perceptions regarding descriptive and injunctive norms associated with misinformation correction?*

Misinformation Correction Considerations

Even as the TPP and social norms literature demonstrates how certain perceptions can predict people's intention to correct misinformation, the decision to correct or not correct someone is also informed by a number of contextual and relational considerations. Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2020) identify three such considerations in their study situated in Singapore. First, they find that the misinformation topic plays an important role. People are more likely to correct when the misinformation is associated with severe consequences or an issue that is personally relevant to them or the misinformation sharer. Indeed, Sun et al. (2022b) find that there is a positive association between people's intention to correct COVID-19 misinformation and the perceived negative consequences associated with belief in the misinformation. Second, the nature of the interpersonal relationship between the misinformation corrector and sharer is an important consideration, with people more likely to correct close ties compared to strangers. Within the misinformation correction literature, there is a paucity of studies that examine how relational factors influence the correction process (Malhotra 2020). In addition to relational closeness, factors like interpersonal power relations and cultural norms regarding respect and deference may be important relational considerations. Third, the perceived efficacy of the correction impacts intention to correct. When people believe that their correction will not change the mind of the misinformation sharer, they are less likely to correct.

For this study, these considerations may be informed by contextual factors specific to the population examined. In terms of misinformation topic or content, as noted above, misinformation in India is often informed by communal prejudice toward Muslims and it is therefore important to examine how people respond when their interpersonal relations share such falsehoods. Furthermore, Indian cultural norms associated with respecting elders may inform the perceived consequences of engaging in such corrections (Baig, Ting-Toomey, and Dorjee 2014; Saavala 2010). Finally, considerations specifically associated with WhatsApp group chats may influence intention to correct. Rossini et al. (2021) find that users are more likely to witness, engage in, and experience misinformation corrections on WhatsApp compared to Facebook. They speculate that this may be due to the greater sense of privacy afforded by WhatsApp. Yet, misinformation correction may also be hindered by other aspects associated with WhatsApp like the difficulty in keeping up with messages on busy group chats (Ling and Lai 2016). Thus, this study also examines how platform-related considerations associated with WhatsApp may influence interview participants' intention to engage in misinformation correction. It addresses the following research question (RQ4): *How do content, relationship, correction outcome, and platform-related considerations influence young Indians' intention to correct older relatives for sharing misinformation on WhatsApp?*

Method

Recruitment and Sampling

To answer these research questions, this study utilizes data from in-depth interviews. As part of a broader project focusing on intergenerational misinformation correction and WhatsApp, between June and August of 2020, Zoom interviews were conducted with 26 participants in Delhi, aged between 18 and 26. All study materials and procedures were approved by the university Human Subjects Division. A snowball sampling approach was adopted as the author reached out to personal contacts in Delhi, who referred participants that belonged to this age range and were users of social media, including WhatsApp. Being vouched by someone can help convince participants to join a study but can also restrict the sample to a specific social network (Weiss 1994). Moreover, being referred by personal contacts can result in people feeling obligated to participate due to interpersonal considerations, creating a power imbalance. To ensure heterogeneity in the sample, efforts were made to reach out to contacts belonging to different networks. This involved initially reaching out to people with diverse professions and living in different regions of Delhi. However, it is important to note that participants were from middle and upper-middle-class families and many were university students or young professionals (see Appendix for participant details). Their insights are therefore informed by their education level and class position. Participants received a Rupees 500 (7 USD) e-gift card as compensation.

Interviews

Participants were informed that they would participate in a study on how urban Indian families communicate via WhatsApp and gave verbal consent before the interview. They were assured of anonymity and therefore pseudonyms are used throughout this study. The interviews lasted an average of 51 minutes and were mainly conducted in English, with some occasional Hindi. The interview protocol was semi-structured and included questions on topics like participants' engagement with family WhatsApp groups, misinformation on WhatsApp, and the extent to which they engage in misinformation correction.

Analysis

The interviews were transcribed and the parts in Hindi were translated into English by the author. Following this, the transcripts were analyzed using the technique of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). After engaging in initial coding, relevant theoretical frameworks were identified and a theoretical thematic analysis was conducted for each RQ. For RQ1, participants' accounts of news engagement within their extended family group chats were identified and analyzed to understand how these chats operate as meso-news spaces. For RQ2, instances where participants spoke about the older generations' engagement with misinformation were identified and coded for the presence of TPP. For RQ3, answers to questions about participants'

general views regarding misinformation correction and their peers' engagement in correction were identified to understand perceived injunctive and descriptive norms regarding misinformation correction. For RQ4, participants' answers to questions asking them to walk through the experience of viewing misinformation on a family group chat and questions on how the correction experience on WhatsApp compares to other social media platforms were analyzed. Within the excerpts coded for RQ4, there were four main themes: Topic, correction outcome, relationship, and platform-related considerations. Copious notes were taken throughout the process to maintain an audit trail (Lincoln and Guba 1985), and suitable exemplars were chosen to represent each theme.

Findings

RQ1: Extended Family Group Chats as Meso-News Spaces

Participants revealed that their extended family group chats often consisted of multiple distant relatives and could have anywhere between 30 and 100 members. For example, Rushil said: "I have 60 people on my paternal group and on the maternal one, we have approximately 30 people." On the higher end of the scale, Raj said his paternal extended family group had "95 to 100 people."

Reflecting extant scholarship on MIMS and news engagement, participants stated that the content shared within these groups was a mix of interpersonal expressive interaction and news content. This demonstrates how these groups operate as meso-news spaces, where news-related processes occur "between the private and public realms" (Tenenboim and Kligler-Vilenchik 2020, 2). As Pradhyuman noted, "it's about holidays, what's going on with work, something notable which has come up and general news which we'd want to share with each other, something that is going on locally and nationally, internationally." Similarly, Raj encapsulated the mix of expressive interaction and political news, stating that "any WhatsApp group in India has two things for sure: One, news about BJP versus Congress [major political parties] and the second are forwarded WhatsApp jokes." Similarly, Neha said "[family WhatsApp groups] are always active, like I get good morning, good night messages, and everything about the news, forwarded messages." Here, forwarded messages refers to the phenomenon of the same messages being forwarded to multiple chats on WhatsApp. These forwarded messages were of great concern to the participants, who stated that they often contained misinformation.

Indeed, participants highlighted how misinformation was shared within extended family groups. For instance, Virat mentioned misinformation associated with COVID-19: "A lot of fake news is here, like alcohol is a cure for the disease." Similarly, Vidhi stated that she had noticed misinformation about lockdowns being imposed in the area she stayed in, revealing how a message was being forwarded that there was "a lockdown in the entire area, but this wasn't true." When asked about who shared such false information on the groups, the participants pointed toward their older relatives, who were described as being generally more active within these group chats. Nidhi encapsulated this issue, stating that "mostly the older generation is more active on that

group, our generation is not that active on the group. And such information [misinformation], forwards and everything, are shared by that generation only." This link between older generations and misinformation is further discussed in the next section.

RQ2: Third-Person Perceptions

When asked about misinformation on WhatsApp, many participants stated that while it was a big issue for everyone, they thought that it was primarily the older generation that believed and propagated misinformation. Vani noted that "I think it is a problem of the older generation only, where they believe the WhatsApp forwards." Nalin similarly stated that such forwards were mainly sent by "all the oldies, like my grandmothers and grandfathers," followed by "the dad generation." Comparing this to his own generation, Nalin stressed that his "cousins don't forward such messages at all." As noted above, the perceptual gap that characterizes TPP is amplified with an increase in social distance. This was reflected in the participants' comments as they believed that people belonging to older generations were more vulnerable to misinformation compared to them and their generational peers. Thus, while scholars have detailed how this perceptual gap is amplified across different political groups (Jang and Kim 2018), social distance across generational groups may have a similar effect.

When asked to explain why they believed that older generations are more vulnerable to misinformation, many participants mentioned generational differences in digital literacy, experience with technology, and credibility evaluation practices. For example, Zoya said: "We [younger people] have all these platforms that we get our information from and we're well-versed with that sort of environment, but I think our parents or the older generation are certainly not." Similarly, Sidhant argued that the younger generation's experience with technology made them more aware of the potential harms caused by misinformation: "Because younger generation is more aware and into technology, they know what false information can do." He added that, on the other hand, "the older generation does not think that much" about these harms and simply forwards information regardless of its facticity, "very casually." Meanwhile, others stressed that the younger generation adopted a more critical approach while evaluating the credibility of online information compared to the older generation. As Rahat stated, "we as Gen Z believe that we need to question everything." He believed the older generations did not adopt the same approach and "trust easily because the source they're getting it from is most likely to be their friend."

Thus, overall, participants believed that the older generation was susceptible to misinformation on WhatsApp, especially compared to their own generation, reflecting third-person perceptions.

RQ3: Social Norms

As participants believed that their generation was better at recognizing misinformation, this led some to conclude that they had an obligation to correct those who shared it. For example, Vandana said "I feel that sense of responsibility and sometimes I think it is important to correct them [older relatives]." Neha also felt responsible,

stating "we should correct if we know the truth." In framing misinformation correction as a responsibility, the participants indicated that they viewed correction as something one ought to do, reflecting how injunctive norms have emerged in relation to correction. Udita echoed these sentiments but also highlighted how this responsibility extended beyond what is typically labelled as misinformation and included responding to older relatives' prejudiced views toward Muslims. Referring to her grandparents, she stated that "Even on moral grounds, if they're again and again saying something about one particular community, you feel the urge or sense of responsibility to correct them, or at least try to correct them." This is important because, as noted above, communal prejudice often underlies misinformation in India. Further, this demonstrates how participants define misinformation more broadly than typical scholarly definitions as they view prejudice as a form of misinformation that needs to be addressed.

Although participants clearly indicated that injunctive norms surrounding correction had emerged, the same was not true for descriptive norms. When asked about how common it was for their peers to engage in correction, participants indicated that they rarely saw them correcting others and provided a few reasons for why they believed this was the case. First, many emphasized how it was difficult to find time to spot and correct misinformation on large family WhatsApp groups. As Vidhi stated, "with the fast-paced life that everybody has, barely anybody gets to know that there is some misinformation being forwarded on WhatsApp unless it catches your eye." She said that she believed that this was the case for "most of the people who are my generation." Second, others stressed that their peers did not want to engage in correction because it was a futile endeavor and could result in confrontations with family members. Virat reflected on this and stated that, "they [younger people] know that it is like hitting the arrow in the dark, it might not hit the target. It is just a waste of your time, your energy, and unnecessarily spoils the atmosphere." Here, it is important to consider how the interview situation may have informed participants' views regarding the descriptive norms associated with correction. Impression management concerns may have contributed to them positioning their own misinformation correction experiences as unique. Regardless, it is important to note that participants did also discuss situations where they too refrained from correction. The subsequent sections outline the considerations that inform their choice to correct or not correct.

RQ4: Correction Considerations

As noted above, Tandoc, Lim, and Ling's (2020) findings were utilized as a framework to understand the participants' accounts regarding the considerations that influence their intention to correct older relatives for sharing misinformation on WhatsApp. As is detailed below, these accounts were informed by the participants' cultural, relational, and technological context.

Topic-Related Considerations

Participants stated that a key consideration was the misinformation topic. This included considering the potential harm caused by the misinformation as they would not correct someone for sharing misinformation they evaluated as harmless. As Abhishek

stated, "if it's not something that is harmful or affecting somebody's time or money, I would just let it go." Similarly, Sidhant reflected on how he refrained from correcting superstitions that did not cause harm as belief in them may even be beneficial: "If it [the belief in a superstition] is giving them more confidence that we can stay strong in the times of coronavirus, then why correct them?" Shubham provided a specific example of what was considered harmful misinformation and what was viewed as harmless. Referring to misinformation related to COVID-19, he stated that it was harmful if someone shared falsehoods like "masks are very bad for corona" and in such cases, he would "definitely" correct. However, he would "let them be" if they shared harmless misinformation like "some made up historical event." This aligns with Tandoc, Lim, and Ling's (2020) observation that people are more likely to correct misinformation that if shared, may have serious consequences. This was particularly salient because interviews were conducted at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (June–August 2020) and participants recognized the potential for misinformation to cause serious public health issues.

Participants also stated that they were more likely to correct misinformation on a topic they possessed expertise in. For example, Pradhyuman stated that being a lawyer meant that "a lot of issues that come up in fake forwards are issues which we [lawyers] are engaging with in the court." In such cases, he was motivated to correct. Similarly, Vidhi described how her degree in Psychology motivated her to correct those sharing misinformation on mental health in relation to a Bollywood actor committing suicide. She stated that "after doing psychology honors, it struck me that it's not right, what people are spreading." This parallels Tandoc, Lim, and Ling's (2020) observation that people correct misinformation on topics relevant to them.

A content-related consideration that Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2020) did not discuss was how people respond to misinformation associated with ideologically-charged subjects like politics and religion. Participants stressed that they were less likely to correct older relatives when they shared such misinformation. As Shubham noted, "I won't argue with them about religious and political beliefs." Meanwhile, Karan provided an example of a time when he decided not to correct his uncle for sharing such misinformation. He recounted how his uncle had shared a message claiming that Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's appeal to light candles to show support to healthcare workers was in fact directed toward eradicating COVID-19. He stated that the message claimed that "there will be a beam [of light] and that beam will kill corona." He refrained from correcting his uncle because "it is something very political, something related to religion, and I shouldn't be interfering in it." Karan's example demonstrates how religion is implicated in many discussions on Indian politics due to the Hindu nationalist orientation of the ruling party (Anand 2005). Vani described how this link between ideology, religion, and politics in India is what made correcting misinformation on these topics difficult, stating that correction is "easier if it's not political or religious" because then you are not touching on "something on which their belief system is based." Thus, to avoid engaging in ideological arguments, participants often refrained from correcting misinformation even tangentially associated with politics or religion.

Correction Outcome-Related Considerations

Just as Tandoc, Lim, and Ling (2020) found, participants also considered the potential outcome of a correction. When they felt like their correction would not change the misinformation sharer's belief in the falsehood, they were less likely to correct. As Vidhi stated, "I personally wouldn't engage in something which I feel that the other person wouldn't listen to." Similarly, Neha stressed that she decided not to correct when she felt that "it's in vain and would not result in people changing their beliefs." As is detailed in the answer to RQ3, participants believed that their peers did not correct misinformation because they thought it was a futile endeavor. These comments indicate that they possessed similar beliefs regarding their own correction experiences.

As was noted in the previous section, participants particularly emphasized futility in relation to correcting political and religious misinformation. Simi hinted at this when she described how she would avoid correcting family members who "will not listen" to her because they have a "pre-formed opinion about something." Participants also stressed that, in some cases, older relatives would not accept their corrections because they believed that their age granted them greater knowledge and authority. For instance, Vandana recounted how her corrections were met with the response "you are too young to understand this right now." She stated this had led her to often avoid correcting as "even if I point it out, I know they will say you're too young to comment on it." This indicates that intergenerational power relations can provide a barrier to correction and result in young adults perceiving that their corrections will be ineffective. As is detailed in the next section, this was especially relevant in situations where misinformation was shared by distant relatives.

Relationship-Related Considerations

Participants revealed that relatives they did not share a close relationship with would view corrections as offensive since questioning an elder transgresses cultural norms regarding deference toward elders. For example, in reflecting on why she often avoided correcting relatives belonging to her extended family, Aditi stated that they "might take offense." Moreover, she was worried that news of her transgression would reach her parents because "you know how word spreads in Indian families." She believed that this would "ultimately upset" her parents, indicating that she had to consider how engaging in correction would not only affect her relationship with the misinformation sharer but also other family members. This demonstrates the interdependent nature of relationships within Indian families (Baig, Ting-Toomey, and Dorjee 2014). However, these issues were not as salient when participants had to correct people belonging to their immediate family. Referring to correcting her parents as well as aunts and uncles she was close with, Vidhi stated that "even if I do correct them, they would not take it in a bad way," She believed that in these cases, she would not have to deal with someone telling her that "you're not supposed to say something to someone elder than you." By emphasizing how she wanted to avoid the relational conflict that would arise from defying cultural norms, Vidhi demonstrated that outcome and relationship-related considerations can intersect to inform correction intentions.

In addition to relational closeness, participants highlighted the importance of considering relational history and rapport. They revealed that even with some distant

relatives, rapport can override norms. For example, while discussing correcting certain members of his extended family, Vivek stated: "Some distant relative might take strong offense to what you say. But if you share some good rapport with your extended family, like in my case, with my maternal uncles, I've had discussions with them." The frequency of communication between the corrector and misinformation sharer also mattered. As Abhishek stated, for family members he regularly talked to, a correction "won't come out of the blue." However, he was reluctant to correct those he was not in regular contact with because he did not want to come across "as a person who is just there on that group to put out corrective facts and actually not engage in any other conversation with the family." Thus, Abhishek indicated that he was more likely to correct those close to him because correction was part of their ongoing regular conversations.

Finally, some participants also viewed correction as an act of care and emphasized that they were only motivated to correct family members they genuinely cared about. For instance, Nidhi revealed that if people outside of her immediate family shared misinformation, she "wouldn't really care that much." However, she did care about her immediate family and "would be on the lookout that they're not consuming any such information which is false and might harm them in any way." Thus, overall, participants provided a variety of reasons for why people are more likely to correct close relations.

Platform-Related Considerations

To understand how platform-related considerations may influence correction intentions, participants were asked about how their experience on WhatsApp compared to their use of other social media platforms. Echoing extant research on WhatsApp, which finds that people view it as more private and intimate compared to platforms like Facebook and Instagram (Valeriani and Vaccari 2018), participants emphasized that they primarily viewed WhatsApp as a space with a smaller and known audience. Udant encapsulated this idea by comparing WhatsApp to other social media platforms, saying that WhatsApp is "not everybody you know. Facebook and Instagram is everybody you know." Participants acknowledged that it is easier to correct close ties and WhatsApp facilitated such corrections due to the lack of a broader audience. Referencing the different audience sizes on Facebook and WhatsApp, Rushil linked this to the association between correction and care mentioned above, stating that "you can't care about a thousand people, but you can care about a few." Rushil's comment also demonstrates how relationship-related considerations intersect with platform-related considerations to influence correction intentions. Further, some participants also believed that the smaller audience on WhatsApp meant that correction was less likely to lead to arguments between multiple people, as opposed to Facebook where "it devolves into a slugfest very, very fast. Because there is this level of impersonality, people really don't know where to draw the line and mudslinging starts, personal allegations, accusations, abuses and all of that," according to Pradhyuman.

Some participants also highlighted aspects associated with WhatsApp that hindered correction. They primarily discussed how it was difficult to spot misinformation within larger WhatsApp group chats due to the sheer volume of messages. As Abhishek put it, "a lot of messages come through on WhatsApp and half the time you even miss

a lot of messages." This echoes Ling and Lai's (2016) observation that group chats on MIMS are often characterized by disrupted turn adjacency, where the conversation thread can be challenging to follow due to the volume of messages. Participants revealed that this resulted in them not actively participating in certain extended family group chats, making it difficult for them to be aware of misinformation shared within these chats. Raj blamed this for his lack of misinformation correction experience, stating that "I don't have an experience of correcting my elders because I am generally a silent member of that group."

Discussion and Conclusion

This study finds that extended family group chats on WhatsApp can operate as meso-news spaces, containing a mix of expressive interpersonal interaction and news and information, including misinformation. Interview participants believe that older generations share such misinformation and are more susceptible to believing it than them, reflecting third-person perceptions. They also view misinformation correction as something one ought to do but state that it is not a widespread practice among their peers, indicating the presence of injunctive norms and the absence of descriptive norms associated with correction. Furthermore, various considerations shape their own decision to correct or not correct an older relative who shares misinformation. They consider the misinformation topic and refrain from correcting misinformation on politics or religion; the potential consequences of correction, as they are more likely to correct if they believe that their correction will be accepted and not result in conflict caused by transgressing cultural norms; and their relationship with the misinformation sharer, as a greater sense of closeness, history, and rapport makes correction easier. Finally, they view WhatsApp as a suitable space for correction as it facilitates connections with a known audience and is not associated with post-correction conflicts.

This study adds to the literature on news engagement on MIMS, illustrating how interpersonal interactions and news sharing and discussion coexist within group chats on these services. This reflects the combination of private (interpersonal interaction) and public (news) aspects within these meso-news spaces (Tenenboim and Kligler-Vilenchik 2020). Further, as Tenenboim and Kligler-Vilenchik note, the dynamics of these spaces are influenced by the actors and platform involved. This is reflected in participants' emphasis on the active role played by older generations in sharing and discussing news as well as their accounts regarding how aspects specifically associated with WhatsApp impact their intention to correct misinformation. These insights also illustrate why it is important to consider groups like extended family group chats as meso-news spaces since focusing on the combination of public and private aspects can help us understand how misinformation is shared, corrected, and/or ignored amidst the flow of quotidian interactions. This can help scholars move beyond exclusively viewing misinformation as an individual psychological or structural issue and understand how relationality impacts misinformation sharing and correction.

These findings also add to the nascent literature on what shapes people's intention to engage in misinformation correction. Much of this research has adopted a

quantitative approach and outlined the relationship between TPP, perceived social norms, and correction intentions. Although this study focuses on these perceptual factors as well, it utilizes in-depth interviews and also highlights the important role played by topic, correction outcome, relationship and platform-related considerations. Thus, future research on correction intentions may consider how the relationship between perceptual factors and correction intention is mediated by aspects like the misinformation topic or the identity of the misinformation sharer. More qualitative and contextually-grounded research is also required to understand how these as well as other aspects inform correction intentions within different contexts. For instance, this study finds that people may make cultural evaluations of appropriate/inappropriate topics for misinformation correction. Researchers can examine how these differ across various cultures. Furthermore, they can also compare correction intentions across different social media platforms.

The disjuncture between injunctive and descriptive norms found in this study also bears further examination. When asked about misinformation correction, participants were quick to emphasize how it was something one ought to do. Yet, when asked about their peers and their own correction experiences, many discussed aspects that hindered correction, including the risk of relational strife and conflict. This indicates that despite the normative value ascribed to misinformation correction, it remains difficult to engage in it within interpersonal relationships. This also has methodological implications since many studies that focus on the extent to which people engage in misinformation correction rely on self-reports (Bode and Vraga 2021b). Thus, it may be possible that the extent to which individuals engage in correction gets overstated due to impression management motivations.

In addition to these theoretical and methodological contributions, this study also has practical implications. There has been much discussion on possible interventions to combat misinformation; however, given that misinformation topics and contexts vary across the globe, there is no silver bullet intervention. To be sure, correction is not a panacea, but understanding when people are more or less likely to correct others can help in designing different interventions for different situations. For instance, for misinformation topics that people are more likely to correct, organizations can provide resources like infographics that can easily be shared in meso-news spaces. Meanwhile, for misinformation on subjects like religion and politics, broader and more public-facing educative interventions may be more suitable. Further, the insights presented in this study can also inform potential design changes to WhatsApp. Many participants indicated that one of the main barriers to correcting misinformation on WhatsApp was the sheer volume of messages on large group chats. A feature that allows multiple users to flag a message so that it rises to the top of the chat may be helpful as it would enable people to spot misinformation within these chats more easily. This would also allow people within a group chat to collectively contribute to the correction process (Kligler-Vilenchik 2022).

As with any study, there are limitations. First, as this study relies on self-reports, it is difficult to verify whether the misinformation the participants discussed was factually inaccurate. Indeed, while participants highlighted their ability to identify misinformation compared to their older counterparts, such third-person perceptions are often underpinned by cognitive biases (Shen, Sun, and Pan 2018). Relatedly, in

presenting these third-person perceptions and not interviewing the participant' older relatives, this study highlights only one perspective and risks perpetuating stereotypes regarding older people's susceptibility to misinformation. Throughout this paper, best efforts have been made to clarify that rather than making any claims about older adults' belief in misinformation, this study only focuses on younger people's third-person perceptions and how they inform correction intentions. Furthermore, the sample for this study is limited to urban middle and upper middle-class participants with unfettered access to technology. Given the heterogeneity that characterizes Indian society and culture, the study does not make any claims regarding broader generalization. Rather, the findings should be viewed within the context of the nature of this sample, which is characterized by high education levels and privileged class positions.

Despite these limitations, this study enhances our understanding of how misinformation is negotiated within extended family group chats, which operate as meso-news spaces. More research that considers diverse relational, cultural, and technological contexts is needed to broaden our understanding of meso-news spaces and the role that misinformation plays within them.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Appendix: Participant demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Status
Abhishek	20	M	Student
Aditi	24	F	Student
Jane	23	F	Student
Dina	18	F	Student
Karan	25	M	Marketer
Mahima	25	F	Teacher
Nalin	21	M	Student
Neha	24	F	Student
Nidhi	20	F	Student
Pradhyuman	26	M	Lawyer
Rahat	21	M	Student
Raj	25	M	Accountant
Rushil	24	M	Finance
Shubham	22	M	Student
Sidhant	21	M	Student
Simi	26	F	Lawyer
Sonam	18	F	Student
Surya	19	M	Student
Udant	22	M	Student
Udita	23	F	Student
Vandana	25	F	Lawyer
Vani	24	F	Student
Vidhi	21	F	Student
Virat	24	M	Engineer
Vivek	23	M	Engineer
Zoya	25	F	Media professional