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A REVIEW OF TEMPORAL MISINFORMATION SPREAD FORECASTING IN ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORKS USING GRAPH-STRUCTURED DEEP LEARNING MODELS

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Abstract - *The rapid proliferation of misinformation in online social networks has emerged as a critical societal challenge, influencing public opinion, electoral processes, and public health responses. Accurate forecasting of temporal misinformation spread is therefore essential for early intervention and mitigation strategies. Recent advances in graph-structured deep learning have provided powerful tools for modeling the complex interplay between network topology and temporal dynamics inherent in information diffusion. This review systematically synthesizes existing research on temporal misinformation spread forecasting using graph-based deep learning models. We present a structured taxonomy covering static graph neural networks with temporal features, dynamic graph neural networks, hybrid GNN–sequence architectures, and spatio-temporal graph models. The review critically examines methodological designs, benchmark datasets, evaluation protocols, and reported performance trends. Furthermore, we analyze key challenges, including scalability to large-scale networks, handling temporal irregularity, data imbalance, robustness against adversarial manipulation, and model interpretability. By consolidating fragmented research across diffusion modeling and graph representation learning, this review highlights emerging directions such as multimodal fusion, cross-platform forecasting, and explainable graph intelligence. The paper aims to provide researchers and practitioners with a comprehensive understanding of current capabilities, limitations, and future opportunities in temporal misinformation spread forecasting.*

Key Words: Temporal Misinformation Forecasting; Graph Neural Networks; Dynamic Social Networks; Information Diffusion Modeling; Spatio-Temporal Deep Learning; Online Social Media Analytics

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background on Misinformation in Online Social Networks

Online social networks (OSNs) such as Twitter, Facebook, and Weibo have fundamentally transformed the mechanisms of information production and dissemination. While these platforms enable rapid communication and democratized content creation, they also facilitate the large-scale propagation of misinformation—defined as false or misleading information shared irrespective of intent to deceive. Empirical studies demonstrate that misinformation spreads faster and reaches broader audiences than factual information due to novelty effects, emotional appeal, and algorithmic amplification (Vosoughi, Roy and Aral, 2018). The structural characteristics of OSNs, including scale-free connectivity and community clustering, further accelerate cascade formation and viral diffusion processes (Barabási and Albert, 1999). Consequently, misinformation diffusion has become a critical interdisciplinary research problem spanning computer science, sociology, and information systems.

1.1.1 Impact on Society, Politics, and Public Health

The societal consequences of misinformation are substantial and multidimensional. In political contexts, coordinated misinformation campaigns have been linked to electoral manipulation and polarization (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017). During public health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, misinformation undermined trust in scientific guidance and vaccination programs, exacerbating global health risks (Cinelli et al., 2020). The rapid online amplification of rumors and conspiracy theories has also been associated with social unrest and economic instability. These impacts underscore the need not only for detection but also for proactive forecasting mechanisms capable of anticipating diffusion trajectories before misinformation reaches critical mass.

1.1.2 Relevance of Forecasting Misinformation Spread

Traditional misinformation research has focused primarily on classification and detection after dissemination has occurred. However, early-stage forecasting offers a preventive paradigm by predicting cascade growth, diffusion speed, and eventual reach. Forecasting enables platform moderators and policymakers to allocate intervention resources efficiently and implement timely countermeasures. From a computational perspective, misinformation spread forecasting is inherently a spatio-temporal prediction problem, where future cascade states must be inferred from evolving network interactions and historical propagation patterns (Cheng et al., 2014).

Therefore, robust predictive modeling is essential for mitigating downstream societal harm.

1.2 Challenges in Forecasting Misinformation

Forecasting misinformation diffusion presents significant methodological and computational challenges due to the dynamic, heterogeneous, and large-scale nature of social networks.

1.2.1 Complex Temporal Dynamics

Information cascades in OSNs exhibit non-linear temporal characteristics, including burstiness, rapid early growth, decay phases, and periodic resurgence. These patterns often violate stationarity assumptions underlying classical time-series models. Moreover, diffusion processes may be influenced by exogenous events such as breaking news or offline incidents, introducing abrupt shifts in propagation rates. Modeling such irregular temporal dependencies requires architectures capable of capturing long-range dependencies and time-varying intensities, beyond simple autoregressive frameworks.

1.2.2 Influence of Network Topology

The structural configuration of social networks significantly shapes diffusion outcomes. Centrality measures, community structures, and hub nodes influence exposure probabilities and cascade amplification. Empirical evidence from network science indicates that heterogeneous degree distributions and small-world properties enhance viral spread (Newman, 2010). Therefore, forecasting models must integrate topological information rather than relying solely on aggregate temporal features. Ignoring graph structure can lead to oversimplified predictions that fail to account for structural contagion effects.

1.2.3 User Behavior Heterogeneity

User-level variability further complicates forecasting. Individuals differ in susceptibility, influence, credibility perception, and activity patterns. Behavioral heterogeneity affects both the likelihood of resharing misinformation and the temporal spacing of interactions. Cognitive biases such as confirmation bias and echo chamber dynamics amplify selective exposure, reinforcing polarized communities (Del Vicario et al., 2016). Consequently, predictive models must account for node-level heterogeneity and evolving user interactions within the network.

1.3 Role of Graph-Structured Deep Learning

The limitations of traditional diffusion and statistical models have led to increasing adoption of graph-structured deep learning approaches for misinformation forecasting.

1.3.1 Suitability of Graph Models

Social networks are inherently relational data structures best represented as graphs, where nodes correspond to users or content items and edges represent interactions such as follows, mentions, or reposts. Graph Neural Networks (GNNs) extend deep learning to non-Euclidean domains by enabling localized message passing and neighborhood aggregation (Kipf and Welling, 2017). These architectures capture higher-order dependencies and structural patterns that are difficult to model using conventional machine learning techniques. Furthermore, temporal graph models allow dynamic edge evolution and time-aware representation learning, which are crucial for modeling evolving misinformation cascades (Rossi et al., 2020).

1.3.2 Shift from Statistical Models to Deep Learning

Early diffusion modeling relied on epidemiological frameworks such as the Susceptible–Infected (SI) and Independent Cascade models, which assume simplified probabilistic transmission mechanisms. While analytically tractable, these approaches struggle to accommodate high-dimensional features and non-linear propagation dynamics. The emergence of deep learning, particularly recurrent neural networks and attention mechanisms, enabled more expressive modeling of sequential and contextual information. The integration of graph representation learning with temporal architectures has further enhanced predictive performance, marking a paradigm shift toward end-to-end spatio-temporal modeling of misinformation spread.

1.4 Paper Objectives and Contributions

This review aims to systematically synthesize research on temporal misinformation spread forecasting using graph-structured deep learning models. First, it provides a comprehensive examination of temporal forecasting methodologies applied to information diffusion in online social networks. Second, it proposes a structured taxonomy of graph-based deep learning approaches, including static graph models with temporal encoding, dynamic graph neural networks, hybrid GNN–sequence architectures, and spatio-temporal frameworks. Third, it critically analyzes benchmark datasets, evaluation practices, scalability considerations, and robustness issues. Finally, the review identifies open research challenges and emerging directions to guide future investigations in predictive misinformation analytics.

2. FOUNDATIONS

2.1 Misinformation Spread in Social Networks

The study of misinformation diffusion builds upon interdisciplinary foundations from network science, communication theory, and computational social science. Understanding conceptual distinctions and propagation mechanisms is essential before examining predictive modeling approaches.

2.1.1 Definitions: Misinformation, Disinformation, Rumors, and Fake News

Misinformation generally refers to false or inaccurate information shared without necessarily intending harm, whereas disinformation involves deliberate dissemination of falsehoods to deceive audiences (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017). Rumors are unverified pieces of information that circulate in uncertain contexts and may later be validated or debunked. Fake news is a narrower construct typically describing fabricated news articles designed to mimic journalistic formats while promoting false claims for ideological or financial gain (Lazer et al., 2018). These distinctions are analytically important because propagation dynamics may vary depending on intent, credibility signals, and contextual framing. For instance, politically motivated disinformation campaigns often involve coordinated behavior, while rumors may spread organically due to ambiguity and emotional triggers.

2.1.2 Key Mechanisms of Spread

Misinformation diffusion in online social networks is shaped by structural, cognitive, and algorithmic mechanisms. Structurally, scale-free and small-world properties facilitate rapid cascade growth through highly connected hubs. Cognitively, novelty and emotional valence significantly increase resharing probabilities, contributing to deeper and faster cascades (Vosoughi, Roy and Aral, 2018). Algorithmic curation systems further amplify engaging or polarizing content, unintentionally reinforcing misinformation visibility. Additionally, homophily and echo chambers promote selective exposure, increasing within-community diffusion while limiting cross-community correction (Del Vicario et al., 2016). These interacting mechanisms create complex, non-linear propagation patterns that challenge predictive modeling.

2.1.3 Typical Datasets

Empirical research relies heavily on large-scale social media datasets. Twitter datasets are widely used due to accessible APIs and retweet cascade structures, enabling fine-grained temporal analysis. Weibo datasets provide comparable large-scale rumor propagation traces within Chinese social media ecosystems. Reddit-based corpora offer threaded discussion structures that capture conversational diffusion. Curated benchmarks such as FakeNewsNet integrate social context, user profiles, and content features to support multimodal analysis (Shu et al., 2020). Despite their utility, these datasets often suffer from annotation inconsistencies, class imbalance, and limited cross-platform generalizability.

2.2 Temporal Dynamics of Information Diffusion

Temporal modeling is central to forecasting because misinformation cascades evolve continuously rather than statically.

2.2.1 Temporal Properties: Burstiness and Diurnal Patterns

Information diffusion exhibits bursty behavior characterized by rapid spikes in activity followed by decay phases. Human communication patterns are inherently heavy-tailed and non-Poissonian, leading to irregular inter-event times (Barabási, 2005). Diurnal and weekly cycles further influence engagement levels, reflecting collective behavioral rhythms. External shocks—such as breaking news events—can reactivate dormant cascades, producing secondary peaks. These properties imply that diffusion processes are non-stationary and require time-aware modeling capable of capturing long-range dependencies and variable intensities.

2.2.2 Static vs. Dynamic Forecasting

Static forecasting approaches assume fixed network topology and aggregate temporal features, often predicting final cascade size based on early diffusion statistics. While computationally efficient, such models overlook evolving interactions and structural changes. Dynamic forecasting, in contrast, incorporates time-varying edges and sequential dependencies, enabling step-wise prediction of cascade growth. Dynamic methods better reflect real-world scenarios where user engagement and network connectivity shift over time. The transition from static regression-based prediction to dynamic sequence modeling has significantly improved temporal forecasting fidelity in complex networks.

2.3 Graph-Structured Representation of Social Networks

Graph-based representations provide a principled framework for modeling relational dependencies in misinformation spread.

2.3.1 Nodes, Edges, and Edge Weights

In graph formulations, nodes typically represent users, posts, or content items, while edges encode interactions such as follows, mentions, replies, or reposts. Edge weights may capture interaction frequency, trust levels, or temporal recency. Directed graphs are often used to reflect asymmetric influence relationships. Incorporating node attributes—such as user credibility scores or textual embeddings—enhances representational richness. This structured representation enables modeling of relational inductive biases absent in Euclidean feature spaces.

2.3.2 Temporal Graphs and Dynamic Networks

Real-world social networks evolve continuously as new edges form and interactions unfold. Temporal graphs extend static representations by associating timestamps with edges or nodes, producing time-indexed adjacency structures. Dynamic network modeling allows representation learning frameworks to update embeddings incrementally as new events occur. Such representations are particularly important for misinformation forecasting, where early-stage diffusion signals must be integrated with ongoing structural evolution.

2.3.3 Information Cascades and Their Representation

An information cascade can be represented as a propagation tree or directed acyclic graph tracing the sequence of reshares from an initial source. Cascade-based modeling focuses on structural growth patterns, depth, breadth, and temporal intervals between events. Tree-structured encodings have been widely used to capture hierarchical diffusion paths, enabling structured learning over propagation trajectories. These representations form the backbone for graph-based temporal prediction models.

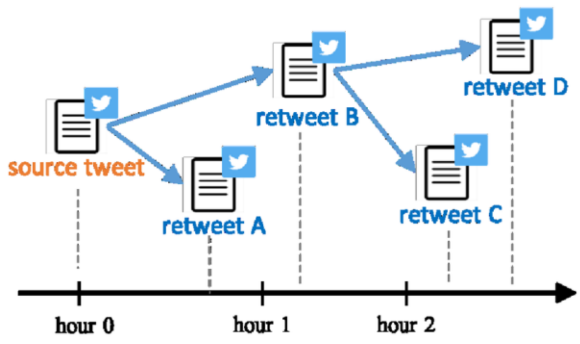

Figure-1: Information Cascade Diagram in Social Networks

2.4 Deep Learning for Temporal Prediction

Deep learning architectures have substantially advanced sequential modeling capabilities, enabling more accurate temporal forecasting in complex networks.

2.4.1 Recurrent Models: RNN, LSTM, and GRU

Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) model sequential dependencies by maintaining hidden states across time steps. However, standard RNNs suffer from vanishing gradient issues when modeling long-term dependencies. Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM) networks and Gated Recurrent Units (GRUs) address this limitation through gating mechanisms that regulate information flow (Hochreiter and Schmidhuber, 1997). These architectures have been widely applied to cascade growth prediction by encoding temporal event sequences and inter-event intervals.

2.4.2 Sequence-to-Sequence Models

Sequence-to-sequence (Seq2Seq) frameworks extend recurrent modeling to map input sequences to future output trajectories. Originally developed for machine translation, Seq2Seq models have been adapted for time-series forecasting, enabling multi-step prediction of cascade evolution. Encoder–decoder structures capture historical propagation features, while decoders generate predicted diffusion states for defined forecasting horizons. Such models support flexible temporal granularity and multi-step prediction tasks.

2.4.3 Attention Mechanisms and Transformers

Attention mechanisms allow models to selectively focus on relevant time steps or nodes when generating predictions, improving interpretability and performance. Transformer architectures eliminate recurrent structures and rely entirely on self-attention to model long-range dependencies efficiently (Vaswani et al., 2017). In diffusion forecasting, attention-based models capture complex interactions between temporal signals and structural embeddings, offering scalability advantages for large-scale networks. Their parallelizable architecture also reduces training time compared to sequential recurrent models.

3. TAXONOMY OF METHODS

The methodological landscape of temporal misinformation spread forecasting can be systematically organized based on how models integrate graph structure and temporal dynamics. Broadly, existing approaches fall into four categories: (i) static graph models augmented with temporal features, (ii) dynamic graph neural networks, (iii) hybrid architectures combining graph learning with temporal sequence models, and (iv) fully integrated spatio-temporal graph frameworks. This taxonomy reflects increasing modeling sophistication in capturing evolving diffusion processes.

3.1 Static Graph Models with Temporal Features

Early graph-based deep learning approaches for misinformation forecasting typically rely on static network representations while incorporating temporal attributes as auxiliary features.

3.1.1 GCN with Temporal Feature Encoding

Graph Convolutional Networks (GCNs) extend spectral graph theory to deep learning by aggregating information from local neighborhoods in a fixed adjacency matrix (Kipf and Welling, 2017). In misinformation diffusion tasks, static GCNs are often applied to user interaction graphs or propagation trees, where node embeddings encode structural influence. Temporal information—such as time since publication, early cascade growth rate, or posting frequency—is appended as node-level or global features. These hybrid representations allow models to approximate spatio-temporal dependencies while maintaining computational simplicity. Empirical studies demonstrate that integrating early diffusion statistics with graph embeddings improves cascade size prediction compared to purely temporal regression baselines (Cheng et al., 2014).

3.1.2 Limitations of Static Topology

Despite their effectiveness, static graph models assume fixed network connectivity, which is unrealistic in dynamic social platforms. Edge formation and interaction intensity evolve continuously, especially during viral misinformation events. Static adjacency matrices cannot capture temporal edge appearance, deletion, or varying interaction strength. Consequently, such models may misrepresent exposure pathways and fail to adapt to structural shifts during cascade evolution. Additionally, static models often rely on snapshot-based training, limiting their capacity for real-time forecasting.

3.2 Dynamic Graph Neural Networks

To address structural evolution, dynamic graph neural networks (DGNNs) incorporate time-aware representations that update as new interactions occur.

3.2.1 Temporal Graph Attention Networks (TGAT) and EvolveGCN

Temporal Graph Attention Networks (TGAT) introduce functional time encoding to model continuous-time dynamic graphs, enabling attention-based aggregation over temporally indexed neighbors (Xu et al., 2020). This design captures both structural proximity and temporal recency. Similarly, EvolveGCN updates GCN parameters through recurrent mechanisms, allowing model weights themselves to evolve alongside network structure (Pareja et al., 2020). These architectures eliminate the need for static snapshots by learning representations directly from event streams. In misinformation forecasting, such models better capture shifting interaction patterns and influence dynamics during cascade growth.

3.2.2 Edge Evolution Modeling

A core component of dynamic GNNs is explicit modeling of edge evolution. Event-based frameworks represent interactions as time-stamped edges, allowing continuous embedding updates through message passing mechanisms. This approach aligns with temporal point process theory, where future interactions depend on historical events. By learning temporal decay functions or attention weights, DGNNs quantify the diminishing or reinforcing influence of past exposures. Such modeling is particularly important for misinformation spread, where rapid bursts of engagement can significantly alter future propagation trajectories.

3.3 Graph Neural Networks with Temporal Sequence Learning

Hybrid architectures integrate graph representation learning with sequential models to jointly capture structural and temporal dependencies.

3.3.1 GNN + RNN/GRU Hybrids

In these architectures, graph neural networks first compute node or cascade embeddings based on structural information. The resulting embeddings are then fed into recurrent units such as LSTMs or GRUs to model temporal evolution. This two-stage design leverages spatial aggregation for relational context and recurrent gating for sequential dynamics. Such frameworks have been widely applied in cascade prediction tasks, where early-stage structural embeddings inform future growth estimation. The recurrent component enables modeling of non-linear temporal dependencies and variable forecasting horizons (Hochreiter and Schmidhuber, 1997).

3.3.2 GNN + Attention/Transformer Frameworks

Recent approaches replace recurrent modules with attention-based architectures. Transformers employ self-attention to capture long-range dependencies without sequential processing constraints (Vaswani et al., 2017). When combined with graph embeddings, attention mechanisms selectively emphasize influential nodes or critical time steps during prediction. This improves scalability and parallelization, particularly for large misinformation cascades. Attention weights also provide partial interpretability by highlighting influential propagation paths.

3.3.3 Summary of Model Architectures

Hybrid models typically follow one of three architectural paradigms: (i) graph-first, sequence-second pipelines; (ii) jointly trained spatio-temporal layers; or (iii) attention-driven fusion modules integrating structural and temporal signals simultaneously. The choice depends on dataset scale, temporal granularity, and computational constraints. While hybrid approaches offer improved flexibility, they may introduce increased parameter complexity and training instability, particularly in long cascade sequences.

3.4 Spatio-Temporal Graph Models

Spatio-temporal graph models unify spatial (structural) and temporal modeling within a single integrated architecture.

3.4.1 Spatial Graph Structures with Temporal Dependencies

Spatio-temporal Graph Neural Networks (ST-GNNs) extend graph convolution operations across both node neighborhoods and time steps. Instead of separating spatial and temporal modules, these models apply convolution or attention mechanisms along the temporal dimension simultaneously with spatial aggregation. Originally developed for traffic forecasting and sensor networks, ST-GNN frameworks have been adapted for social network diffusion modeling (Yu, Yin and Zhu, 2018). This joint modeling captures correlations between neighboring nodes across consecutive time intervals.

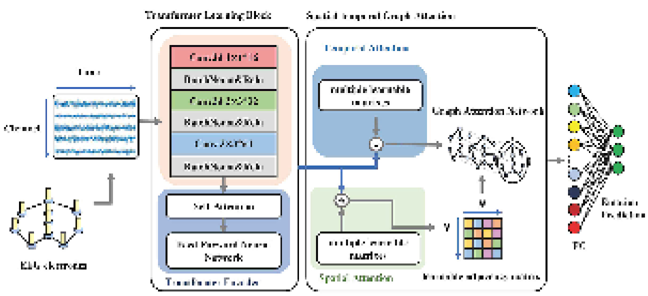

Figure-2: Temporal Graph Neural Network Architecture

3.4.2 ST-GNN Variants for Diffusion Forecasting

In misinformation spread forecasting, ST-GNN architectures model cascade growth as a sequence of evolving graph states. Temporal convolutions capture short-term burst patterns, while graph convolutions encode structural dependencies among users. Compared to hybrid pipelines, fully integrated spatio-temporal models reduce modular fragmentation and allow end-to-end optimization. However, they often require high computational resources and carefully designed time discretization strategies.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides a structured and critical synthesis of existing studies on temporal misinformation spread forecasting using graph-structured deep learning. The discussion is organized according to the taxonomy established in Section 3, enabling systematic comparison of modeling paradigms, datasets, and empirical findings.

4.1 Static Graph Models in Forecasting

Static graph-based approaches represent early efforts to incorporate relational structure into diffusion forecasting tasks.

4.1.1 Key Works

Initial predictive studies focused on cascade size estimation using early-stage diffusion features combined with network topology descriptors. Cheng et al. (2014) demonstrated that early structural growth patterns strongly correlate with eventual cascade magnitude. Subsequent work employed Graph Convolutional Networks to encode propagation trees and user interaction graphs for rumor detection and early prediction tasks (Monti et al., 2019). These models typically operate on fixed snapshots of the network, leveraging node embeddings derived from adjacency matrices.

4.1.2 Data Sources and Evaluation Metrics

Most static graph models rely on Twitter and Weibo datasets containing labeled rumor or fake news cascades. Evaluation protocols frequently include accuracy and F1-score for classification-oriented forecasting, as well as regression metrics such as RMSE for cascade size prediction. Public benchmarks such as FakeNewsNet provide multimodal signals, enabling integration of textual and social context features (Shu et al., 2020). However, many studies evaluate on platform-specific datasets, limiting cross-domain generalization.

4.1.3 Major Findings

Empirical evidence suggests that incorporating structural features improves early-stage forecasting compared to purely temporal baselines. Graph embeddings capture influence concentration and community clustering effects that correlate with viral growth. Nevertheless, static models struggle to represent evolving interactions, resulting in degraded performance for long-horizon predictions.

4.2 Dynamic GNNs for Temporal Forecasting

Dynamic Graph Neural Networks (DGNNs) address structural evolution by modeling time-stamped interactions directly.

4.2.1 Techniques for Dynamic Edge Modeling

Dynamic models often treat interactions as event streams rather than discrete snapshots. Temporal Graph Networks employ memory modules that update node embeddings incrementally upon each new interaction (Rossi et al., 2020). Continuous-time attention mechanisms allow models to weigh neighbors based on recency and interaction frequency (Xu et al., 2020). Other frameworks evolve convolutional parameters through recurrent structures, enabling adaptability to structural shifts (Pareja et al., 2020). These techniques enhance representational fidelity in rapidly changing misinformation cascades.

4.2.2 Case Studies in Misinformation Forecasting

Dynamic GNNs have demonstrated improved performance in early rumor growth prediction on Weibo and Twitter datasets. Studies applying time-aware graph attention mechanisms report superior forecasting accuracy in capturing burst phases and decay trends. By explicitly modeling interaction sequences, DGNNs outperform static counterparts in scenarios where exposure pathways shift significantly over time. However, increased computational overhead remains a concern in large-scale networks.

4.3 Hybrid GNN and Temporal Sequence Learning

Hybrid architectures combine graph-based structural encoding with sequential deep learning models to capture temporal evolution.

4.3.1 Effective Combinations

A common design pattern involves generating structural embeddings via GCNs and feeding them into recurrent networks for time-series forecasting. For example, recurrent rumor detection frameworks incorporate GRU modules to process time-ordered propagation features, achieving improved early prediction performance (Ma et al., 2016).

Such architectures decouple spatial and temporal learning, enabling modular optimization.

4.3.2 RNN versus Transformer-Based Approaches

Recurrent networks such as LSTM and GRU are effective for modeling short- to medium-term dependencies but may struggle with very long cascades due to sequential processing constraints. Transformer-based models address this limitation through self-attention mechanisms that remind long-range relationships and enable parallel training (Vaswani et al., 2017). In misinformation forecasting tasks, attention-enhanced architectures demonstrate improved stability and scalability. Nevertheless, transformers typically require larger datasets and higher computational resources for effective training.

4.4 Spatio-Temporal GNN Models

Spatio-temporal Graph Neural Networks (ST-GNNs) integrate structural and temporal modeling within unified architectures.

4.4.1 Joint Spatial and Temporal Modeling

ST-GNN frameworks apply graph convolutions across node neighborhoods while simultaneously incorporating temporal convolutions or attention across time steps. Originally introduced for traffic and sensor forecasting (Yu, Yin and Zhu, 2018), these models have been adapted to capture misinformation cascade evolution. By jointly optimizing spatial and temporal dependencies, ST-GNNs reduce information loss associated with modular hybrid pipelines.

4.4.2 Use Cases and Performance Trends

Empirical evaluations indicate that spatio-temporal models outperform separated graph-then-sequence approaches in multi-step forecasting tasks. Their integrated design better captures correlations between neighboring users across consecutive time intervals. However, these models demand substantial computational resources and often require discretization of continuous time into fixed intervals, potentially affecting temporal precision.

4.5 Cross-Method Comparisons

A comparative assessment across modeling paradigms highlights trade-offs in predictive performance, scalability, and interpretability.

4.5.1 Strengths and Weaknesses

Static graph models are computationally efficient and easier to train but lack adaptability to structural evolution. Dynamic GNNs offer higher representational fidelity yet introduce increased memory and computational demands. Hybrid architectures balance flexibility and performance but may suffer from architectural complexity. Fully integrated spatio-temporal models provide end-to-end optimization at the cost of scalability challenges.

4.5.2 Computational Complexity

Static GCN-based approaches generally scale with the number of edges in a considered snapshot. Dynamic models incur additional overhead from time encoding and incremental embedding updates. Transformer-based hybrids introduce quadratic complexity with respect to sequence length due to self-attention operations. Consequently, practical deployment requires careful trade-offs between accuracy and efficiency.

4.5.3 Scalability to Large Networks

Large-scale online social networks pose significant scalability constraints due to millions of nodes and high-frequency interactions. Sampling strategies, mini-batch training, and neighborhood truncation are frequently adopted to manage memory usage. Distributed training frameworks and graph partitioning techniques are emerging to address industrial-scale misinformation monitoring.

5. DATASETS AND EVALUATION PROTOCOLS

Robust evaluation of temporal misinformation spread forecasting models depends critically on dataset quality, temporal annotation strategies, and appropriate performance metrics. Variations in benchmark construction and evaluation design significantly influence reported outcomes, making standardized assessment practices essential for meaningful comparison.

5.1 Benchmark Datasets

Benchmark datasets form the empirical foundation for model development and validation in misinformation forecasting research.

5.1.1 Twitter, Weibo, FakeNewsNet, and PolitiFact Datasets

Twitter-based datasets are widely used due to the platform's retweet structure, which naturally forms propagation trees suitable for cascade modeling. These datasets typically include timestamps, user interactions, and labeled rumor or fake news instances. Weibo datasets provide analogous large-scale rumor propagation data within Chinese social media ecosystems, enabling cross-cultural comparative analysis.

FakeNewsNet integrates news content, user profiles, social engagement data, and fact-checking annotations from sources such as PolitiFact and GossipCop, offering a multimodal benchmark for misinformation detection and forecasting (Shu et al., 2020). PolitiFact datasets, derived from professional fact-checking organizations, supply verified labels for political misinformation and are often linked with corresponding social media propagation traces. While these datasets are valuable, their construction methodologies differ substantially, leading to inconsistencies in network scale, class distribution, and annotation granularity.

5.1.2 Temporal Annotation Strategies

Temporal annotation plays a crucial role in forecasting tasks. Most datasets record timestamps at the level of posts, retweets, or replies, enabling reconstruction of cascade evolution sequences. Some studies discretize continuous time into fixed intervals (e.g., hourly or daily bins) to facilitate temporal modeling, whereas others adopt event-driven continuous-time representations. The choice of annotation strategy directly affects forecasting granularity and model design. Event-based annotation preserves fine-grained temporal dependencies, while interval-based aggregation simplifies computation but may obscure burst dynamics. Consequently, evaluation results must be interpreted in light of these temporal design decisions.

5.2 Evaluation Metrics

Performance evaluation in misinformation forecasting varies depending on whether the task is framed as classification, regression, or multi-step time-series prediction.

5.2.1 Accuracy, F1-Score, RMSE, and MAPE

For classification-oriented forecasting (e.g., predicting whether a cascade will exceed a predefined size threshold), commonly reported metrics include Accuracy, Precision, Recall, and F1-score. F1-score is particularly important in imbalanced datasets where positive misinformation instances are underrepresented. For regression-based forecasting tasks, such as predicting final cascade size or growth rate, Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) and Mean Absolute Percentage Error (MAPE) are frequently employed. RMSE penalizes large deviations more strongly, while MAPE provides scale-invariant interpretability in percentage terms. Selection of appropriate metrics should align with the forecasting objective and the distributional characteristics of cascade sizes.

5.2.2 Graph Structural Metrics

Beyond predictive accuracy, some studies evaluate how well models capture structural diffusion properties. Metrics such as cascade depth, structural virality, and reproduction ratio provide insight into predicted propagation patterns (Goel et al., 2016). Structural virality, for example, quantifies whether diffusion resembles a broadcast pattern or a multi-generational branching process. Incorporating structural metrics enables more nuanced assessment of whether predicted cascades reflect realistic network behavior.

5.2.3 Forecasting Horizon Definitions

Forecasting horizon specification significantly influences model evaluation. Short-term forecasting may involve predicting cascade growth within the next few hours, while long-term forecasting targets final cascade size. Some studies adopt rolling prediction windows, updating forecasts as new interactions occur. Others define early prediction tasks, where only initial diffusion stages (e.g., first 10% of cascade events) are observable. Differences in forecasting horizons complicate cross-study comparison and highlight the need for standardized benchmarking protocols.

5.3 Challenges in Evaluation

Despite progress in benchmark development, several methodological challenges persist.

5.3.1 Dataset Imbalance

Misinformation datasets often exhibit severe class imbalance, where true news cascades significantly outnumber false ones or vice versa. This imbalance can bias models toward majority classes and inflate accuracy metrics without reflecting real predictive capability. Techniques such as resampling, cost-sensitive learning, and metric selection (e.g., macro-averaged F1) are commonly employed to mitigate this issue. However, inconsistent handling of imbalance across studies reduces comparability of reported results.

5.3.2 Defining Ground Truth for Misinformation

Establishing reliable ground truth labels remains a fundamental challenge. Fact-checking organizations provide authoritative labels, but verification processes are time-consuming and often limited to high-profile cases (Lazer et al., 2018). Additionally, misinformation may evolve over time as new evidence emerges, complicating static labeling. In some datasets, rumor veracity is inferred indirectly from user reports or platform moderation decisions, which may introduce annotation noise. Such uncertainties directly affect training stability and evaluation validity.

5.3.3 Temporal Fragmentation

Temporal fragmentation arises when datasets capture incomplete cascade histories due to API limitations, deleted content, or restricted data access. Missing early-stage interactions can distort diffusion patterns and bias forecasting models. Furthermore, cross-platform misinformation propagation—where content migrates between networks—is rarely captured comprehensively. These limitations constrain ecological validity and highlight the importance of transparent reporting of data collection procedures.

6. CHALLENGES AND OPEN ISSUES

Despite significant progress in graph-structured deep learning for temporal misinformation spread forecasting, several technical and methodological challenges remain unresolved. These issues affect model scalability, temporal reliability, interpretability, robustness, and real-world applicability.

6.1 Graph Scalability and Efficiency

Forecasting misinformation spread in real-world online social networks requires handling graphs with millions of nodes and high-frequency interactions.

6.1.1 Large Network Modeling Constraints

Graph Neural Networks (GNNs) typically rely on neighborhood aggregation mechanisms whose computational complexity grows with node degree and graph size. In large-scale social platforms, full-batch training becomes infeasible due to memory limitations and message-passing overhead. Sampling-based techniques such as neighborhood sampling mitigate this challenge but may introduce representation bias (Hamilton, Ying and Leskovec, 2017). Additionally, dynamic graph models incur extra computational costs for maintaining temporal embeddings and updating representations with each event. These constraints hinder deployment in real-time misinformation monitoring systems where latency and throughput are critical.

6.2 Temporal Heterogeneity

Temporal irregularities present fundamental modeling challenges in diffusion forecasting.

6.2.1 Irregular Intervals

Social interactions occur asynchronously, resulting in non-uniform time intervals between events. Traditional discrete-time models assume regular sampling, which may distort real-world dynamics. Continuous-time dynamic graph frameworks address this by encoding timestamps directly into embedding functions (Xu et al., 2020). However, such models require careful design to prevent overfitting to high-frequency bursts while preserving meaningful long-range dependencies. Balancing temporal precision with computational efficiency remains an open research problem.

6.2.2 Non-Stationary Patterns

Misinformation diffusion processes are inherently non-stationary. External shocks, policy interventions, trending topics, and algorithmic changes can alter propagation dynamics abruptly. Models trained on historical cascades may fail to generalize when underlying diffusion mechanisms shift. Non-stationarity challenges assumptions of stable data distributions commonly required in supervised learning. Adaptive learning strategies and online updating mechanisms are therefore necessary to maintain forecasting reliability over time.

6.3 Explain ability and Interpretability

As forecasting models become more complex, interpretability becomes critical for accountability and policy deployment.

6.3.1 Interpreting GNN Predictions

Graph neural networks aggregate multi-hop relational signals, making prediction pathways difficult to interpret. Post-hoc explanation methods such as GNNExplainer attempt to identify influential subgraphs and node features contributing to predictions (Ying et al., 2019). However, explanation fidelity in dynamic diffusion settings remains limited. In misinformation forecasting, stakeholders require interpretable justifications to understand why certain cascades are predicted to become viral. Without transparent reasoning, model outputs may lack credibility in regulatory or platform moderation contexts.

6.3.2 Social Impact Considerations

Forecasting misinformation spread raises ethical concerns related to censorship, free speech, and algorithmic bias. Predictive systems may disproportionately target specific communities if training data reflect existing societal biases. Furthermore, automated early-warning systems could inadvertently suppress legitimate discourse if false positives occur. Responsible deployment requires fairness-aware evaluation and transparent reporting of model limitations.

6.4 Data Quality and Noise

The reliability of forecasting models is closely tied to the quality of misinformation datasets.

6.4.1 Label Noise in Misinformation Datasets

Ground truth labels in misinformation datasets often originate from fact-checking organizations or manual annotation processes. However, labeling can be subjective, delayed, or incomplete. Weak supervision may introduce noisy labels that degrade model performance and distort evaluation results (Northcutt, Jiang and Chuang, 2021). Moreover, misinformation narratives may evolve, rendering static labels outdated. Addressing label noise through robust learning techniques remains an active area of research.

6.4.2 Missing Temporal Data

Data collection limitations frequently result in incomplete cascade histories. API rate limits, deleted posts, and privacy restrictions create gaps in interaction sequences. Missing early-stage events can significantly bias temporal modeling, as early diffusion signals are often most predictive of future growth. Imputation strategies and uncertainty-aware modeling approaches are needed to mitigate the impact of temporal incompleteness.

6.5 Attack Robustness

Misinformation ecosystems involve adversarial actors who actively manipulate propagation dynamics.

6.5.1 Adversarial Behaviors

Coordinated bot networks and malicious users may artificially amplify misinformation through synchronized reposting or strategic timing. Such adversarial behaviors distort organic diffusion patterns and can mislead forecasting models. Graph-based deep learning models are particularly vulnerable to adversarial perturbations in node features or edge structures (Zügner, Akbarnejad and Günnemann, 2018). Robust training methods and anomaly detection mechanisms are therefore critical for secure deployment.

6.5.2 Robust Forecasting Under Manipulation

Ensuring robustness requires designing models resilient to structural noise and adversarial attacks. Techniques such as adversarial training, graph regularization, and anomaly-aware embedding updates have shown promise in improving stability. However, balancing robustness with computational efficiency remains challenging, especially in real-time monitoring scenarios. Future research must address the co-evolution of forecasting systems and adversarial misinformation strategies.

7. CONCLUSION

This review systematically examined the evolving landscape of temporal misinformation spread forecasting in online social networks through the lens of graph-structured deep learning. By organizing existing studies into static graph models, dynamic graph neural networks, hybrid graph–sequence architectures, and fully integrated spatio-temporal frameworks, the paper highlighted the methodological progression from snapshot-based structural encoding to continuous-time adaptive modeling. The synthesis demonstrates that incorporating relational inductive biases through graph representations substantially improves forecasting fidelity compared to purely temporal or statistical baselines. Dynamic and attention-based architectures further enhance the ability to capture bursty, non-stationary diffusion patterns characteristic of misinformation cascades.

However, the review also underscores persistent challenges, including scalability to large-scale networks, temporal heterogeneity, data noise, adversarial manipulation, and limited interpretability. Benchmark inconsistencies and variations in evaluation protocols hinder rigorous cross-study comparison. Emerging directions such as multimodal fusion, explainable graph intelligence, online adaptation, and robustness-aware training present promising avenues for advancing predictive misinformation analytics. Overall, graph-structured deep learning offers a powerful yet still maturing paradigm for proactive misinformation mitigation, requiring continued interdisciplinary collaboration to bridge methodological innovation with responsible real-world deployment.

7.1.Limitations of the Review

This review is limited by its reliance on publicly available benchmark studies and peer-reviewed publications, potentially overlooking proprietary or industrial systems deployed by social media platforms. Variations in dataset construction and evaluation metrics across studies restrict direct quantitative comparison. Additionally, the rapidly evolving nature of graph learning and misinformation research means that newly proposed models may not be comprehensively covered. The review emphasizes methodological synthesis rather than empirical meta-analysis, and therefore does not provide standardized performance benchmarking across models.

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