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Levels of Awareness about Fake Social Media Content among the General Public in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

The rapidly growing social media landscape in Pakistan has brought many benefits, including improved communication and access to information. However, it has also led to the spread of fake content, a significant threat to public trust and the authenticity of information. This study seeks to investigate levels of awareness among Pakistani citizens regarding the dissemination of false information on social media and the effectiveness of existing measures to counter it. Based on an analysis of social media sites, the factors contributing to the production and dissemination of misinformation, and public awareness, this study reveals crucial gaps in media literacy among ordinary people in Pakistan. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used in this research study, with surveys and interviews providing data on public awareness and the dissemination of fake news. The study also investigates government and non-government initiatives aimed at raising awareness and combating fake news. The research study underscores the importance of further enhancing media literacy awareness, strengthening regulatory frameworks, and implementing grassroots-level measures to counter the spread of misinformation. Lastly, this research study provides potential inputs for better awareness and an informed public in Pakistan.

Keywords: Fake content, social media, misinformation, media literacy, Pakistan, public awareness, fake news, social media regulation, public trust.

INTRODUCTION

Social media has dramatically changed the way people communicate globally, and Pakistan is no exception. Because of the drastic rise in internet users, especially in terms of internet accessibility through mobile phones, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, and other sites like WhatsApp, have turned out to be essential sources of information for millions of people in Pakistan (Khan et al., 2020). However, the rapid spread of misinformation through such platforms has raised serious concerns about the authenticity of information, public trust, and its impact on decision-making in society (Ali & Javed, 2019). Fake information and propaganda materials are not new in modern societies. However, due to the widespread use of social media platforms, this phenomenon is increasing and is even more difficult to control (Groshek & Al-Rawi, 2019). There is, therefore, an emerging need to raise awareness of the potential damage caused by such misinformation and propaganda on social media and to promote critical thinking in this regard.

Fake social media content can range from light rumors to satirical posts to menacing information that enforces political opinion, spews hate speech, or incites violence (Pennycook & Rand, 2018). Fake news on Pakistani media usually has a political application in the form of using it for political intent during elections or a crisis. It can lead to further division of Pakistani society along existing gaps in social issues (Khan, 2020) that involve health issues like vaccines and pandemics. The nature of social media helps create viral sensations in a couple of hours for these postings, without much fact-checking (Tandoc et al., 2018).

The levels of awareness of disinformation's presence and effects on social media among the Pakistani public are disturbingly low (Ahmed & Ahmad, 2021). A large percentage of social media users in rural areas tend to lack the tools or information needed to analyze content critically for authenticity (Bakhshi et al., 2020). The insufficiency of media literacy is then compounded by the lack of robust fact-checking mechanisms or transparent regulations that require social networking sites to be responsible for disseminating false news (Silverman, 2016). According to a study by Qureshi et al. (2020), most users in Pakistan do not know what "fake news" is and cannot distinguish between fact and fake. The government and non-governmental agencies have tried to raise awareness, but in a disorganized manner and without any plan to address the extensive issue of misinformation on online platforms.

Among the major contributory factors, media literacy is reported to be quite limited, especially among the younger generation, who are more hooked on social media platforms. Media literacy is defined by Levitin (2020) as a critical skill involving competent people's access to, analysis, evaluation, and production of media in text, images, audio, or video. It separates credible information from non-credible information. In Pakistan, media literacy is not part of the curriculum at any level in formal education. At the same time, most people are exposed to media content through informal channels, with social media dominating. For this reason, social media exposes people to both authentic and false information. Thus, the public stands ill-prepared to withstand the tides of information in the digital space.

Also, the responsibility of the social media platforms themselves cannot be

sidestepped. Sites like Facebook and Twitter have come under attack for not doing enough to curb the spread of fake content and for failing to be proactive in regulating (Gillespie, 2018). Though fact-checking mechanisms and the deletion of false information have been implemented to some degree, these sites tend to struggle to balance free expression with the obligation to regulate objectionable or deceptive content (Zeng et al., 2020). Also, algorithms on these sites are designed to favor material that gets people talking, thereby amplifying sensational or provocative posts that are more likely to be fake (Friggeri et al., 2014). This allows for a condition in which false content receives more views, more sharing, and is disseminated more widely.

In this connection, it is important to note that a national strategy is mandatory to raise awareness of the fake content available on social media platforms. The digital landscape in Pakistan is progressing rapidly, but this is not matched by an awareness initiative that keeps pace with the rate at which fake content is circulated (Khan et al., 2020). There is an imperative need to use both online and offline platforms to raise awareness of the hazards of fake content, differentiate it, and use authenticated sources of information (Tufekci, 2015).

It is also the case that such initiatives require the government, particularly the Pakistani government, to play a role in making them happen. Its close liaison with social media, fact-checking units, and civil society is essential for building a system that ensures what is shared on social media is accurate and reliable. Improved media literacy, fact-checking, and sensitization on using social media responsibly would go a long way toward reducing the adverse effects of fake content on Pakistani society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The rapid expansion of social media and its widespread use have reshaped communication patterns in Pakistan. With millions of users across the country, social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp have become essential sources of information and community engagement (Khan et al., 2020). However, with the advantages of social media, the spread of fake content, such as misinformation, rumors, and hoaxes, has posed a significant challenge for society, governments, and media institutions. Spreading of fake content on social media has had broad implications, ranging from political manipulation to public health emergencies (Pennycook & Rand, 2018). This literature review considers the effects of fake content on social media, with a special focus on Pakistan. It also explores the function of media literacy in the fight against disinformation and the theoretical framework of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), which outlines how people learn and acquire behaviors, such as critical thinking and skepticism, when exposed to media content.

The Emergence of Social Media Fake Content

The dissemination of fake content on social media is not a one-off event. The growing use of digital platforms has created fertile ground for the spread of misinformation and disinformation. As Tandoc et al. (2018) note, the ease with which news can be produced and spread via social media has blurred the distinction between

factual reporting and sensationalism. In Pakistan, the most common types of false content are political propaganda, sensationalized news, and false health tips, which spread misinformation and mistrust among the public (Khan, 2020; Ifedayo, Olugbade, & Hamid, 2025).

There are several reasons why social media contributes to the spread of misinformation. To begin with, social media platforms use algorithms to circulate feeds that are most likely to elicit reactions, often encouraging people to post controversial news (Friggeri et al., 2014). This ultimately leads to the spread of misinformation and fake news, which has a greater potential to attract attention because it can evoke emotions in people (Pennycook & Rand, 2018). Moreover, the lack of proper content moderation, especially on platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp, can further aggravate this issue by allowing misinformation to spread freely (Gillespie, 2018).

A study found that the impact of fake social content is wide-reaching among the general public. For instance, fake news has been used to promote violence, influence political beliefs, and spark societal separateness in the Pakistani community. The use of fake content in elections, specifically in the 2018 Pakistani general elections, is a case in point (Ahmed & Ahmad, 2021). Political stakeholders and groups have consequently been using fake content to influence voters' behavior, shape public opinion, and tarnish the image of political rivals (Ali & Javed, 2019). Under such conditions, social platforms have been actively promoting fake content orchestrated by political stakeholders, often resulting in chaos for the general public.

Media Literacy as a Countermeasure to Fake Content

One of the most important methods to fight against social media fake content is media literacy—the skill to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in different formats (Levitin, 2020). Media literacy enables people to consume content critically, helping them distinguish between credible and untrustworthy sources. Media literacy is critical in social media, where the quick sharing of unverified content has become the norm.

Available literature on media literacy among Pakistani nationals indicates a disparity in the population's ability to critically scrutinize media information. According to Qureshi et al. (2020), the majority of the Pakistani population, including those in rural areas, cannot scrutinize the validity of information on social media. The Pakistani education system's curriculum lacks media literacy textbooks, leaving the population susceptible to misleading information (Ali & Javed, 2019). Bakhshi et al. (2020) conducted an analysis showing that media literacy was low among youth, who receive the majority of their information from social media platforms. This segment of the population is susceptible due to a lack of the acumen needed to interpret media information, leading to the dissemination of misinformation.

Various scholars suggest that including media literacy education in the curriculum could help students learn to resist the effects of misinformation. According to Ahmed & Ahmad (2021), the inclusion of media literacy lessons in school and university curricula would equip students in Pakistani schools to navigate cyberspace effectively. Raising awareness among the general public about the dangers of fake

news and the importance of fact-checking would be essential to fostering a knowledgeable community.

The Role of Government and Social Media Platforms

The government and social media platforms are also to blame and play significant roles in containing the spread of fake content. While the Pakistani government has undertaken some efforts to regulate social media use, these have mainly been reactive rather than proactive. In 2020, for example, the PTA issued new rules requiring social media platforms to remove offending content within a specified time (Khan et al., 2020). These rules, however, have been criticized for being too broad and capable of infringing on freedom of expression (Gillespie, 2018). What is more, the lack of a clear legal framework outlining how social media platforms can be identified and penalized for facilitating the spread of false content has hampered efforts to address the phenomenon effectively (Tufekci, 2015; Hamid, 2025).

On the other hand, social networking sites have been under tremendous pressure for failing to stop the spread of hoaxes. While companies like Facebook and Twitter have initiated fact-checking mechanisms and removed several misleading messages, they have been criticized for not doing enough to remove the sources of misinformation from their platforms (Silverman, 2016). Second, since social media sites thrive on profits, sensational posts, including fake news, are more likely to be preferred because they can drive high engagement and advertising dollars (Friggeri et al., 2014). This, therefore, results in a conflict of interest, in which the different platforms are inclined to allow fake content rather than take active steps to suppress it.

Theoretical Framework: Social Cognitive Theory (SCT)

To understand how people react to manipulated content on social media and how to raise awareness, the present research uses Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) as a theoretical framework. SCT, introduced by Albert Bandura (1986), posits that learning occurs in a social environment and is influenced by observation, imitation, and modeling. Bandura believes that people learn not only from direct experience but also from observing others and the outcomes of others' actions.

In the context of social media, individuals learn how to interact with information through the content they consume and the behaviors they observe. Bandura's theory emphasizes the importance of self-regulation and critical thinking in navigating the digital environment (Bandura, 2004). The concept of self-efficacy— one's belief in one's ability to perform specific tasks—is central to SCT. In this regard, media literacy can be understood as increasing people's self-efficacy in distinguishing between real and false content. The moment people have the necessary skills and information to assess media critically, they are more likely to discard false content and move towards authentic information (Levitin, 2020).

Additionally, SCT argues that there is strong evidence that social influence is a key factor in behavior change. This is because people behave similarly on social platforms by imitating others' behavior, such as sharing a post, liking a page, or being persuaded by a particular story. As people observe, they tend to imitate the behavior and attitudes of the media and their peers. This is significant because people use

positive examples, such as trustworthy media and people, to raise awareness of the dangers of fake news and promote healthy behavior on social platforms (Pennycook & Rand, 2018).

METHODOLOGY

The research employs a mixed-methods design that combines qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate ordinary citizens' awareness of fake news in Pakistan. The rationale for choosing this approach is to gain a comprehensive insight into the development and impacts of this false information, as well as the levels of literacy among citizens. The mixed-methods approach allows triangulation, combining results from both qualitative and quantitative research to obtain more accurate findings. The research delves into sources and development, as well as diffusion and citizen interaction with information presented as false.

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive-exploratory method to understand the phenomenon of social media fake content in Pakistan. This method enables describing and exploring the extent to which fake content is shared, viewed, and understood by social media users, as well as the potential harm it can cause. This study also assesses the current effectiveness of awareness efforts and the role of media literacy in addressing fake content.

The research work is divided into two broad sections: the first involves analyzing findings from the qualitative process of conducting focus group and interview analyses, while the other involves analyzing survey data using a quantitative technique. The latter can be employed to gauge awareness among the throngs.

Qualitative Method: Interviews and Focus Groups

The qualitative component of the study involves a focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews with a sample of Pakistani social media users. The methods used will allow for scrutiny of individual experiences with fake content on social media and responses to it. The semi-structured interview will allow for some flexibility during the conversations while also covering pertinent topics.

Interview Sample:

20 participants were chosen for individual semi-structured interviews. The sample was purposively selected to be diverse in terms of age, education level, and geographical area (urban and rural communities). This ensured that insight into demographic factors affecting awareness and media literacy about fake content could be gained.

Focus Group Sample:

In addition to the interviews, four focus group discussions were conducted with 6 to 8 participants each. The discussions created a forum where participants could express their experiences and opinions on social media, false information, and how they judge the authenticity of online information. Focus groups facilitated group interaction and provided participants with opportunities to engage, exchange ideas, and question one another's assumptions about false information.

In fact, during these focus group and interview sessions, participants were

asked about their personal engagement with misleading online content, their methods for identifying it, and whether they used any fact-checking services. In addition, participants were asked whether they were aware of the implications of sharing misleading information online and whether they were familiar with social awareness campaigns.

Interview and focus group responses were transcribed and qualitatively thematically analyzed. Thematic analysis was conducted by coding key client responses on fake information, media literacy, and awareness. Themes such as “trust on social media,” “sources of misinformation,” “fact-checking,” and “media literacy initiatives” that appeared repeatedly during the analysis were coded and organized using manual techniques as well as software (e.g., NVivo), which helped to classify the data into important themes based on the responses.

Quantitative Approach: Surveys

The quantitative element comprised a structured questionnaire to evaluate awareness of the existence of fake content and the general public’s media literacy. The questionnaire was meant to quantify the extent to which the public was aware of the kind of fake content, frequency of exposure to fake content, and whether they could spot misinformation. The questionnaire also explored the efficacy of ongoing awareness campaigns and their penetrability across various socio-demographic groups.

Survey Sample:

A total of 500 people responded to the survey. These respondents were randomly selected from various urban and rural areas in Pakistan to ensure a good mix. These respondents span a wide age range and educational levels to ensure diverse opinions on spurious content.

Survey Instrument:

The survey had both closed and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions on the frequency of seeing fake news on social media, the ability of respondents to recognize fake information, and fact-checking practices. For instance, the respondents were asked to score how frequently they encounter fake content on sites such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter on a scale of 1 to 5. The other questions evaluated whether respondents have ever engaged in fact-checking and whether they are subscribed to any dedicated fact-checking social media pages.

Open-ended questions probed respondents’ awareness of the role of fake content and their views on how to enhance media literacy. Questions on the perceived trustworthiness of various social media and how fake content has affected their opinions and behavior were also included in the survey.

Data Analysis

The survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to provide summary information on the frequency and distribution of responses. Statistical software such as SPSS was used to calculate percentages, mean scores, and cross-tabulations to identify trends in the data.

Integration of Qualitative and Quantitative Data

The mixed-methods approach helps triangulate findings from qualitative and quantitative research to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the issue at hand. Qualitative findings, such as those derived from interviews and focus groups, can provide deeper insight into human motivation and perception. Conversely, quantitative findings obtained from the survey can point to trends that go beyond a more narrowly focused study. The complementary findings from these two methods helped identify convergent themes and discrepancies, thereby verifying their validity.

For example, if qualitative analysis shows that many respondents feel it is primarily the responsibility of social networking websites to distribute firm news, then quantitative data can be used to determine whether this is a good general impression. Similarly, if a prominent theme is found that people have inadequate knowledge of media, it is possible to identify how aware people are of fact-checking websites and of how to identify misinformation.

Ethical Aspects

The research is based on ethical principles throughout the research process. Participants provided informed consent and were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. The participants were informed of the research's intended purpose and that they could withdraw at any time without adverse effects. In addition, the researchers ensured that the interview and survey information were used solely for research and that all personal identifiers were removed to protect privacy.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The research findings offer a comprehensive overview of the general public's awareness of fraudulent content on social media in Pakistan. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, such as interviews, focus groups, and surveys, the research captures the significant trends in perception, identification, and response to fake content. The results identify the extensive presence of deceptive material on social media platforms, differences in media literacy levels among users in Pakistan, and gaps in public knowledge about the risks of misinformation.

Qualitative information from interviews and focus groups provides a deeper understanding of the experiences and perceptions of people who use social media. The thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews and the focus group discussions highlighted several key themes:

1. Prevalence of Fake Content:

All participants concurred that there is a significant issue of fake content on social media in Pakistan. Most participants characterized fake content as very widespread, with rumour, political disinformation, and sensationalized news most prevalent.

Quote from Interviewee (Focus Group):

“Each time I scroll through Facebook or WhatsApp, I come across at least one post that seems too good to be true. Moreover, unfortunately, most people share such posts without verifying them.” Focus Group Participant.

2. Sources of Fake Content:

Respondents listed many sources of false content, such as social media (Facebook, WhatsApp), news outlets, and political parties. WhatsApp was mentioned as the principal platform for quickly disseminating false content via forwarded messages.

Quote from Interviewee (Focus Group):

“Most of this ‘fake news’ comes to us through WhatsApp groups. People share things without even checking them out. Even my family shares things like this without thinking twice about it.” Focus Group Participant

3. Lack of Media Literacy:

One of the most important themes that came up was that Pakistani social media users do not practice media literacy. Almost all participants admitted they were not, or could not be, able to distinguish between actual and forged content, especially when the content seemed to come from reputable sources.

Quote from Interviewee (Interview):

“I do not know how to check everything I see. If a mate puts something up, I tend to think it is true, but I have learned to be more careful recently.” Interviewee.

4. Perceived impact of Fake Content:

Dissemination of false content was regarded as harmful to individuals and society at large. Most participants emphasized how false content had caused confusion, fear, and even violence. Political disinformation was most commonly cited as a weapon parties use to influence voter behavior and fuel public discord.

Quote from Interviewee (Focus Group):

“Fake news about politicians circulated like wildfire during the elections. It made me not trust what I read on the internet.” Focus Group Participant.

5. Efforts to Combat Fake Content:

Although some participants were familiar with fact-checking websites such as FactCheck.pk, there was an overwhelming consensus that efforts should be increased. Numerous participants felt that more needed to be done to raise awareness of fake news and its impact.

Quote from Interviewee (Focus Group):

“Have heard of fact-checking websites, but never utilized them. Believe the government must do more to educate people in identifying fake news.” Focus Group Participant.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative survey data were examined to assess the overall public recognition of false content and media literacy. The survey involved 500 participants from diverse urban and rural areas of Pakistan. The survey data analysis yielded several significant results.

Table 1: Frequency of Encountering Fake Content on Social Media

Frequency of Encountering Fake Content	Percentage (%)
Always	22%
Frequently	39%

Frequency of Encountering Fake Content	Percentage (%)
Occasionally	25%
Rarely	9%
Never	5%

The data in Table 1 indicates that a considerable percentage of respondents frequently encounter false content. 61% of respondents reported encountering fake content “always” or “often” on social media, reflecting the prevalence of misinformation on platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp.

Table 2: Ability to Identify Fake Content

Ability to Identify Fake Content	Percentage (%)
Very Able	10%
Somewhat Able	40%
Not Able at All	50%

Table 2 presents the respondents’ self-reported capacity to spot false content. An astonishing 50% of participants admitted they could not spot any false content. Just 10% indicated they were very confident they could distinguish between fake and genuine content, while 40% said they were somewhat capable. This points to a significant lack of media literacy skills among the general public, especially in recognizing misinformation.

Table 3: Exposure to Media Literacy Campaigns

Exposure to Media Literacy Campaigns	Percentage (%)
Yes	30%
No	70%

As shown in Table 3, 70% of interviewees reported never having encountered any media literacy campaigns. Despite some awareness initiatives by non-governmental organizations and the media, the lack of large-scale, easily accessible campaigns points to a significant problem in addressing fake content in Pakistan.

Table 4: Trust in Social Media Platforms

Social Media Platform Trust Level	Percentage (%)
Very Trustworthy	5%
Somewhat Trustworthy	25%
Not Trustworthy	60%
Not Sure	10%

Table 4 shows public trust in social media. 60% of respondents indicated they do not trust social media sites, reflecting growing concern about the validity of information posted there. The lack of trust is key to understanding how fake content is contributing to the public's loss of confidence in social media.

Interpretation of Findings

Qualitative and quantitative outcomes support each other in establishing the extent of the problem of fake content in Pakistan. The data in Table 1 indicate exposure to fake content on social networking sites, underscoring the problem users face while navigating the information available on these platforms. Their unawareness of the deceptive content available on these sites (as indicated by the data in Table 2), along with low media literacy skills, indicates that the populace is not prepared to consume the content they access with a critical approach.

The poor exposure to media literacy campaigns (Table 3) indicates that previous efforts have been limited in scope and effect. The evidence from both interviews and the survey indicates a significant gap in efforts to enhance media literacy nationwide. Respondents in the focus groups complained about the lack of training on identifying false news, suggesting that stronger, national-level efforts are necessary to counter this problem.

Finally, distrust in social media platforms (Table 4) underscores the need for a comprehensive strategy to address the spread of false content. The fact that 60% of the people surveyed distrust social media platforms indicates that the public is losing confidence in them as providers of accurate information. It not only propagates fake content but also creates doubt about platforms' role in stopping misinformation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of this research, therefore, point to the seriousness of the problem of false content on social media in Pakistan, outlining what it is and the extent of the challenge in raising awareness. Indeed, the all-pervasive nature of the problem with social media platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter can be inferred from the qualitative data and the survey. More than 60 percent of participants have witnessed fake content on social media 'always' or 'often', which affirms that misinformation in the online world is not a sporadic issue but a regular occurrence. This corroborates previous studies that noted the ease with which fake content circulates, especially on platforms with weak content moderation infrastructure (Pennycook & Rand, 2018; Friggeri et al., 2014). As algorithms underlying social media sites often amplify sensational, emotive content, the situation has been worsened by the spread of misinformation to an even larger audience.

Perhaps the most intriguing result of this research is the lack of media literacy among Pakistanis. About 50% of respondents admitted they were unable to distinguish between true and false information, while 40% confessed their knowledge of how to do so is limited. These results provide evidence of a crucial deficiency in public knowledge about how to cope with the much more complex information environment on social networking sites. Without proper knowledge of how to critically assess information on these sites, most users are prone to being misled by

false information, whether it is tied to political agendas, health information, or societal issues. The lack of such knowledge in educational institutions in Pakistan makes it even more problematic for the population to know how to appropriately respond to information they receive from these sites (Ali & Javed, 2019; Qureshi et al., 2020; Abbasi et al., 2025).

The limited exposure to media literacy campaigns was also identified as a significant challenge in the study. Although a few organizations and news agencies have already launched campaigns to raise awareness of the existence of fake content, the survey reveals that 70% of respondents are not exposed to such campaigns. This indicates that attempts at media literacy are not sufficiently effective, especially in rural areas where internet penetration and digital literacy may be low. The absence of mass campaigns means most of the population lacks the tools to detect misinformation, so individuals cannot critically analyze online information or resist its effects.

Another significant theme from the study is distrust of social media. Over 60% of survey participants said they do not trust social media as a source of information. This discovery comes as concerns about the credibility of information relayed on these platforms have been on the rise, since social media has become firmly linked to the dissemination of false news and manipulation (Gillespie, 2018; Silverman, 2016). Although these platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, have made efforts to introduce fact-checking systems, the absence of a uniform regulatory framework to hold them accountable has led to public trust eroding (Gillespie, 2018; Silverman, 2016). Without intervention by regulators or intensified efforts to stem the proliferation of false content, users are left in doubt about the veracity of the content they view, which contributes to further disengagement and mistrust of social media.

False content impact is one of the major themes in the study. Disinformation was found to impact political beliefs, health issues, and interpersonal relationships, primarily by creating confusion and terror. Political false information was found to impact political behaviors in voters, while health false information, like disinformation regarding vaccination, can jeopardize health efforts in the community. Findings in the current study resonate with those of Khan (2020), who found that false news in Pakistan influenced political choices and undermined societal harmony. Impacts associated with the spread of false content include a breakdown in community trust with institutions and societal polarization.

Given the evidence, it is apparent that media literacy is at the forefront of combating the dissemination of disinformation. There is a need for educational programs to be implemented at every level, primary, secondary, and tertiary, to empower the populace with the skills necessary to view messages delivered via the media critically. In addition, public awareness campaigns need to be initiated to teach people how to recognize manipulated content, authenticate information, and flag suspicious content. The Pakistani government, in partnership with civil society actors, has the potential to fund and implement these initiatives. Fact-checking services such as FactCheck.pk must also be promoted to encourage users to authenticate information before sharing it.

In addition, social media sites must take greater responsibility for the content

they host. Social media sites have to invest in advanced algorithms and employee resources to help stop the spread of misinformative data. Harsher measures must be implemented alongside collaborations with fact-checking organizations to help ensure social media platforms take a positive step towards mitigating the spread of disinformation.

Ultimately, a responsibly informed and protected citizenry in the digital world can be achieved in Pakistan through critical thinking and media literacy. The help of the Pakistani government, educational institutions, media channels, and online platforms shall be imperative in formulating a common approach to effectively counter the danger posed by fake news in the country. A common approach to tackling fake news is realistic and achievable for mitigating its dangers and fostering a more considered, well-informed citizenry in a country like Pakistan.

Recommendations

Considering this study's findings, the following recommendations are presented to combat the increasing issue of disinformation on social media in Pakistan and promote increased public awareness:

Incorporate Media Literacy into Education:

Media literacy should be part of the school curriculum at all levels. This needs to begin from a primary school level. Teach students to evaluate media creatively and decode misinformation on social platforms. Online platforms are where youngsters get most of their information.

Launch National Media Literacy Campaigns:

Government departments and non-governmental organizations need to join hands and initiate countrywide media literacy campaigns. These campaigns need to be shown on television, social media, and in public service messages, focusing on the risks of disinformation and offering actionable guidelines for checking content before it is shared. Top priority must be given to reaching rural communities and less educated groups by initiating localized campaigns.

Encourage Fact-Checking Sites:

Fact-checking websites such as FactCheck.pk should be broadcast extensively. People should be encouraged to use such websites to check the accuracy of any claims they come across, rather than falling for them or sharing them further. Linking fact-checking websites to social media websites may also help suppress such misinformation.

Strengthening Social Media Platform Accountability

Social media platforms should employ more effective tools and systems to eliminate the spread of imitation content, leveraging sophisticated software and human manual review. They should also work with governments to adhere to the laws of that place regarding the treatment of misinformation.

Public Awareness and Engagement

A heightened awareness of the public impact of false information should be created. This is achieved through public awareness campaigns that highlight personal responsibility for mitigating the spread of false information by encouraging users to query, report, and verify the information they encounter. Personal responsibility for

false information can thus foster a culture of responsibility on the internet.

With these tools available, a more controlled spread of counterfeit information and a higher level of digital literacy among Pakistani citizens could finally create a wiser online community.

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