

Disinformation and Public Skepticism: Evaluating the Role of the Fake News on Trust in Pakistan Digital News Sphere

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: This paper discusses the question of what proportion of users recognize the fact that fake news has been distributed through digital media news services. It also examines the influence of exposure on the degree of their confidence in new sources of digital media, how they use them to check suspicious information, and how often they do it.

Methodology: Based on a quantitative research design, a survey was administered to study a sample size of 420 respondents that cut across all areas in Pakistan to investigate three key areas; the awareness that users have about fake news, the correlation between exposure to fake news and the level of trust individuals have on digital news sources, and measures used by users to authenticate online content.

Findings: The results indicate that the general awareness by participants about the existence and effects of disinformation is higher. Nevertheless, although respondents are often exposed to false news, the research did not reveal any statistically significant factors that the exposure to fake news directly reduces the trust in all digital news sources. Rather, verification of content in search engines, verification of original sources, and consultation with peers active among users.

Conclusion: These actions are signifiers of an increase in digital responsibility of the users. The research claims that awareness and verification practices are the major determinants of upholding trust as even in high-exposure settings. These results also support the Media Dependency Theory that upon using digital sources to gather news, the users also become active in critical thinking to overall drive the influence of disinformation down.

Keywords: Fake News, Media Dependency Theory, Disinformation, Verification Strategies, Digital Media, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, WhatsApp.

1. INTRODUCTION

People of all walks of life prefer digital media as the most obvious source of information (West, 2025). Some research-grounded articles suggest that, due to the freedom of expression and free flow of

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information, social media has become a trusted source of information compared to other media (Ajegbomogun & Popoola, 2014). This age of information has revolutionized communication, journalism, and even discourse in general due to the circulation of information through online media. But this revolution has also resulted in the rampant rise of fake news and disinformation that presents a major challenge to societies across the globe. Nearly 58 % of the Pakistani individuals think that the issue of fake news is a significant problem (Haque, 2017).

Although social media reliability is getting increasingly doubtful, social media is getting more and more traffic (Mohsin, 2023). Pakistan is now at the center of this crisis, as its digital media sector and the number of internet users rapidly increase. Unrestricted proliferation of false or misinforming content has not just left citizens misinformed on some of the most important issues but also caused an overall crisis of trust, whereby the media, political leaders, and even democracy itself are no longer credible.

Digital media in Pakistan has also provided the liberty to the users to share out the content, on the one hand, whereas the same is a dual ended sword as well. Although it has enhanced access to information, it has also made it easy to spread unverified information virally on social media sites, messaging applications, and news handling websites. The efficient control policies are usually absent on such platforms, which is fertile ground to deliberately create and manipulate information strategically. Politically influential, and in some cases state-sponsored and even ideologically driven disinformation campaigns have become more sophisticated, and often it has become difficult to distinguish between fiction and fact.

The effect of fake news is especially sharp in the circumstances of Pakistan, where the level of literacy, digital literacy, and media control is highly differentiated. This is compounded by a lack of fact-checking system, polarization of media, and deployment of digital outlets by influential actors. In addition, Pakistan's society has its socio-political situation where disinformation will be further increased with sectarianism, ethnicity, and political instability. The propagation of fake stories not only misinforms the masses but also generates violence and kills national integrity and demoralizes democratic dispensation.

At the center of this problem is the public trust in media, which is the root of democratic accountability. With the media being full of information bombarding the citizens every day and not knowing what is true and what is not, the trust towards the traditional sources of the news and official communication pathways is slowly but surely getting lost. The betrayal is such a massive problem that will last long-term: it destroys civic action, makes people unable to obtain informed decisions, and feeds power populism and authoritarianism. The crisis of credibility in Pakistani online media then carries a grave danger not just to the media but to the democratic fabric of the nation as a whole.

It has been assumed, after the public discourse and also based on scholarly material that media trust is declining in almost every place. Trust in news media itself has become an even more important topic to research and to comprehend, as to whether, how, and to what extent it may influence the level of trust when they encounter fake news on digital platforms (Strömbäck, et al., 2020). This survey study attempts to look critically at how aware and informed people are about fake news and disinformation, and whether it has a significant impact on degree of trust in Pakistani digital media. It has also inquired about how frequently people verify the news and what methods they usually use for the verification of suspicious content on digital media.

1.1 Problem Statement

Although digital media is booming in Pakistan, the nation is experiencing a crisis of credibility due to the ongoing uninterrupted distribution of fake news and fake information on the most popular platforms, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Tik Tok, and YouTube. Whereas millions of people have already turned to social media as their main source of news, the threat of fake information being easily spread casts severe doubts on whether social media is eroding people trust in digital news outlets. What adds to this problem is the absence of any significant statistics on the Pakistani users, their perception of, reaction to, and trust

in online news materials. Available studies have completely or mostly ignored regional variations and site-specific patterns, resulting in a knowledge gap in the intricate nature of the interconnection between exposure to fake news, media belief, and fact-checking tendencies users engage in. This paper focuses on the same gap to examine levels of awareness, trust levels, and verification methods of social media users in Pakistan with respect to digital disinformation.

1.2 Significance

The research is important because it offers empirical understanding of something that Pakistani social media users are facing and need to deal with increasing threats of fake news and disinformation in an extremely fast-changing digital world. The research will help understand more about how people interact with and evaluate the credibility of online material by looking into user awareness and trust in the source of news, and fact-checking practices. It provides a localized version of the Media Dependency Theory as well, which points at the dependency of users on such services as WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok as a factor that leads to the development and maintenance of given perceptions of information and the resulting actions towards it. The research also indicates the relationship between the trust that people have in the news on the extent to which they rely on the medium. These findings can guide the educators, media professionals, and the government to have more factual strategies to educate the population to identify the misleading news and pursue more sensible utilization of the online media.

1.3 Study Objectives

- To analyze the social awareness and experience regarding fake news and disinformation over the digital media in Pakistan.
- To study the effects of fake news exposure and disinformation on the overall trust of people in online broadcasting media and the news.
- To focus on the coping and verification practices of the users of the digital media in response to suspicious or misleading information.

1.4 Research Questions

RQ1: To what extent are Pakistani Digital media users knowledgeable about fake news or disinformation?

RQ2: How does exposure to fake news affect the degree of trust in Pakistani users of the digital media sources of news?

RQ3: What are the strategies that are adopted by the Pakistani digital media users to ascertain the validity of online news, and how frequently are they being performed?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Inquiry into the media has recorded the spread of misinformation throughout the world. In one such case, Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) discovered that fake news was facilitated by social media networks during the 2016 elections in the United States, and it convinced many people to vote (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Another empirical study had identified the same by Vosoughi et al. (2018) who confirmed that, falsehood spread further, faster and broader than truth in Twitter (Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, 2018). Fake news has also been associated with falling media trust: when exposed to fake news, a randomized in-vitro study in the U.S. showed that people who read fake news are significantly less likely to trust mainstream news outlets (Ognyanova, Lazer, Robertson, & Wilson, 2020).

Digital misinformation has started to be studied in Pakistan. The research conducted by Rehman, Hussain, and Dureshehwar (2020) examined the Pakistani social media content and found many fake news reports carrying a political agenda to flood the online space. They observed fake news on such platforms as Facebook and Twitter on the national problems and political aspects. Just like qualitative studies suggest,

a recent content analysis suggests that fake stories tend to focus on religion, ethnic tensions, and policy disagreements, where the sensational material received huge attention even after being fact-checked (Rehman, Hussain, & Durrshahwar, 2020). Similar conclusions are reached by Nasir Khan et al. (2024), who, mentioning this disinformation, state that it has dented Pakistani democracy, spread hatred, and fostered distrust in the society (Khan, Sattar, & Zaman, 2024).

In recent years, a vast literature has been created on how fake news is increasingly becoming prevalent and influencing Pakistani society. According to many studies, disinformation in nature on social networks has eroded confidence and led to a social split in society. As an illustration, Ahmed et al. (2021) examined the fake news in WhatsApp concerning COVID-19 complicit in mass panic in Pakistan, as even un-banned misinformation news was transmitted to users in large volumes (Ahmad & Asghar, 2021). In a similar study, Khan, Sattar, & Zaman (2024) collected expert interviews and noted how social media fake news in Pakistan had promoted anti-democratic views, boosted enmity, and propagated mistrust among citizens. These writers emphasized that nowadays Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and other platforms can reach huge quantities of Pakistanis, and tools like this can easily spread misinformation (Khan, Sattar, & Zaman, 2024).

According to Hussain et al. (2024), news credibility in this era of abundance of information online has contributed to concerns regarding the credibility of news; fake news on social media has been directly shown to erode the trust of people in news media (Hussain, Adnan, & Sohail, 2024). Likewise, the research on the use of WhatsApp in the context of the crises has revealed that rumors that are not controlled may lead to the level of panic and confusion (Ahmad & Asghar, 2021).

A case study was published in The Express Tribune (Zaheer & Siddiqui, 2017), where an artificial post in WhatsApp appeared under the guise of a company notice about a Chinese acquisition and shook investors, and orchestrated a stock price. It is known on social media. And this is how it resulted in the bad turn of affairs when one of the largest cement-makers become a listed company in Pakistan, no less, had to scramble to publish a rebuttal explaining that indeed, no Chinese company was interested in taking a share in it (Zaheer & Siddiqui, 2017). The practical implications of disinformation to people can be seen through such instances as the level of discredit and action.

These tendencies have certainly had an impact on media credibility. As Safdar and Fatima (2024) demonstrated in their surveys conducted in Islamabad/Rawalpindi, exposure to fake news led to a significant decrease in the levels of trust in the new media reported by the respondents. They also discovered in their survey that more than half of the Pakistanis expressed full support for the means of education and media literacy as critical instruments against misinformation (Safdar & Fatima, 2024). On the same note, Media Support Pakistan (2023) asserts that disinformation erodes the confidence that audiences have in the news media and operates to discredit fine journalism (Naeem & Rehmat, 2022).

By individual factors, these effects are mediated. Ali and Qazi (2022) identified that the user of the Pakistani Facebook who demonstrates low digital literacy values is more likely to share and believe untrue information and has a lower capacity for discerning the truth (Ali & Qazi, 2022). Altogether, reputable research, local and international, indicates that fake news is dominant in online conditions and poisons the credibility of the media (Rehman, Hussain, & Durrshahwar, 2020). Pakistani studies that have been conducted so far, although in small numbers, demonstrate comparable trends of concern and distrust (Safdar & Fatima, 2024).

Idiongo (2024) emphasized that media literacy programs are important and that there should be transparency as far as the practices of reporting are concerned. To the policymakers, it recommended sound regulatory systems and efforts towards international coordination to counter misinformation. Another proposal was the adoption of technological solutions such as AI in identifying fake news by the traditional media and reaching out in a more active way to the people to restore its trust (Idiongo, 2024). This literature provides us with these insights, and we use these and tabulate our survey data on exposure and levels of trust, and draw an apparent connection to the Media Dependence theory.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Media Dependency Theory (MDT), first proposed by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur in 1976, is given as an explanation of how persons become dependent on media to comprehend the environment in which he/she live, to make decisions making and to satisfy social or emotional needs. The theory postulates that the higher the reliance of people on media, particularly when they have to face some social insecurity in their lives, the higher will be the power of media in affecting their beliefs, attitudes, as well as behaviors (Ball-Rokeach, 1998).

The conditions of the fake news, disinformation, and the trust of the population in the digital media of Pakistan provide an appropriate context in which Media Dependency Theory can be used to investigate the impact of digital media on the psyche of the population. With censorship, limited access, or diminishing levels of trust in traditional news sources in Pakistan, a significant part of the population is going to social media to use Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, and TikTok as a source of news. This transition has raised the dependency on digital media, especially among young people and the people living in the countryside. This makes individuals more vulnerable to misinformation whenever the content they read appeals to their personal philosophy or emotional priorities, including political insecurity, inflation, or religion.

In a survey study that uses Media Dependency Theory, the connection between the varying degrees of media dependency and the belief in fake news and the faith of people can be measured. The questions were focused on how often the people consume digital content, on which platforms they rely on, on what they think of the credibility of content, whether they verify the authenticity of news, and share it. It is indicated that the theory implies that a higher level of media dependency in users increases the chances of being exposed to disinformation and the possibility of feeling distrust toward the digital media.

3. METHODOLOGY

The third step in the process of conducting research, designing the methodology of the research study, and making a proper selection of a method of data collection is important (Creswell, 2009). The research design used in this study is a quantitative research design, whereby it is a survey research study that requires the collection of data on a sample of Pakistani users of digital media. The goal was to evaluate how people are familiar with fake news, how it affects their trust in online media, and how people can endure it time after time to check the information on the internet. The survey methodology has been selected based on its effectiveness in compiling standardized, quantifiable information of high number of respondents.

It involved a non-probability purposive sampling that guaranteed that the respondents are users of digital media. A survey of 420 respondents from age 18 onwards of diverse backgrounds (e.g., age, gender, education level, and region) was carried out to offer maximum insight into the state of perceptions based on varied groups in society.

The data was collected online through a structured questionnaire created on the basis of the given study. The research design was also checked with a pilot study undertaken on 25 respondents. After conducting a pilot study, the sentence structure of a few questions was restructured in such a way that it is comprehensible to audiences. The questionnaire will be premised on closed-ended questions without which include some of the following: Multiple-choice questions, Likert statements (1: Strongly Disagree-5: Strongly Agree), and frequency statements (Often, Sometimes, Rarely, Never). The use of statistical tools entailed the use of descriptive statistics and inferential statistics involving the use of statistical programs such as SPSS or Excel in the process of processing the collected data. The frequencies, percentages, and means were used as descriptive statistics of the data on the demographic and answer patterns. Regression tests and t-tests were used to study relationships, such as between exposure to fake news and trust, or to understand the significance of other patterns of the study.

The study was voluntary, and all respondents signed the informed consent. The participants were promised anonymity and confidentiality, and none of their personal information will be gathered.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

An online questionnaire was distributed among the participants. The questionnaire was divided into five sections: demographical information, awareness and exposure to fake news, trust in digital media, verification behavior and coping strategies, and the last section was an open-ended optional feedback regarding what could be done to reduce the spread of fake news. After collecting the desired number of responses, the Excel sheet of online responses was downloaded, coded, and further decoded in SPSS for detailed analysis.

Table 1: Demographics of Respondents (N=420)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18-24 years	186	44.3%
	25-34 years	176	41.9%
	35-44 years	32	7.6%
	45 years and above	26	6.2%
Gender	Male	201	47.9%
	Female	219	52.1%
Level of Education	Matric	6	1.4%
	Intermediate	38	9.0%
	Bachelor's Degree	267	63.6%
	Master's Degree	97	23.1%
Province	PhD and Above	12	21.9%
	Federal	120	28.6%
	Punjab	242	57.6%
	KPK	30	7.1%
	Sindh	14	3.3%
	Baluchistan	14	3.3%

The majority of research participants belonged to the age group of 18-24 years (43.3%), 41.9% belonged to the 25-34 years, 7.6% belonged to the 35-44 years, and 6.2% respondents were 45 years or above age category. 47.9% percent of participants were males and 52.1% were females. Nine percent of participants had done Intermediate, 1.4% Matric, 63.6% Bachelor's, 23.1% Master's, and 2.9 had PhD or above level of education. The sample size covered all the provinces of Pakistan, with the majority of respondents from Punjab (57.6%), 28.6% from the Federal, 7.1% from KPK, 3.3% from Sindh, and 3.3% from Baluchistan.

Table 2: Awareness Regarding Fake News (N=420)

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Awareness of Fake News or Disinformation	High (usually identify)	182	43.3%
	Moderate (Aware but sometimes unsure)	223	53.1%
	Low (difficulty in identifying)	15	3.6%

The respondents were asked about their level of awareness regarding fake news and disinformation on digital media platforms. Very few respondents with 3.6% reported that they face difficulty in identifying fake news, 43.3% reported that they usually identify fake news and disinformation, whereas, majority of respondents (53.1%) reported they are aware of fake news, but sometimes when they are exposed to such content, they feel unsure if it is accurate or not.

Table 3: T-test of Awareness Regarding Fake News

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Awareness of Fake News and Disinformation	22.112	419	.000	.602	.55	.66

In order to examine whether the mean level of awareness of fake news and disinformation among the participants was significantly high or not, t-test of one sample was used. The result has pointed to a statistically significant difference, $t(419) = 22.112$, $p < .001$, which is that the mean awareness score is significantly bigger than zero. The difference mean was 0.602, and the confidence interval was 0.55 to 0.66 at 95 percent. These findings indicate that the respondents showed a remarkable degree of knowledge about fake news and disinformation.

Table 4: Effects of Being Exposed to Fake News on the Level of Trust (N=420)

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Level of Exposure to Fake News	Low	103	24.5%
	Moderate	223	53.1%
	High	94	22.4%
Level of Trust in Digital News Sources	Low	149	35.5%
	Moderate	255	60.7%
	High	16	3.8%

The respondents were asked about their level of exposure to fake news. The majority of the respondents (53.1%) reported their exposure to fake news is moderate or normal, whereas 24.5% had low, and 22.4% had high exposure to fake news. The participants were also asked regarding their degree of trust in sources of digital news. Again, the majority of respondents (60.7%) reported their level of trust in digital news sources is moderate or normal, whereas 35.5% had low, and 3.8% respondents had high trust in digital news sources.

Table 5: Regression Coefficient of Exposure to Fake News on Level of Trust in Digital News Sources

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.698	.046		15.114	.000
	Level of Exposure to Fake News	-.014	.039	-.018	-.375	.708

a. Dependent Variable: Level of Trust in Digital News Sources

The relation between the level of exposure to fake news and the level of trust in digital news sources was analyzed using a simple linear regression in order to observe whether the level of exposure to fake news represents a significant predictor of the level of trust in digital news sources. The findings revealed that the exposure to fake news was not a strong indicator of trust, $B = -.014$, $t(418) = -.375$, $p = .708$. Though the coefficient was negative, indicating that higher exposure might be correlated with relatively low trust, the correlation was low and not statistically significant. Intercept of the model was significant ($B = 0.698$, $p < .001$), and it showed the level of trust when exposure is less. On the whole, the provided findings would indicate that if the exposure to fake news is high, the level of trust is relatively low on the digital platforms, and the level of trust is high when the exposure to fake news is less.

Table 6: Determining the Authenticity of News and Frequency of Practicing (N=420)

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Verifying the Accuracy of News	Always	159	37.9%
	Often	131	31.2%
	Sometimes	97	23.1%
	Rarely	28	6.7%
	Never	5	1.2%
Methods of Verifying Suspicious Content	Use a Search Engine	97	23.1%
	Cross-check with News Sources	206	49.0%
	Read Comments on Posts	81	19.3%
	Ask Friends/Family	25	6.0%
	Don't Verify	11	2.6%

The respondents were inquired on the attention they gave to ensuring the accuracy of the news they checked on the digital media. The majority of the respondents (37.9%) reported they always verify the information, 31.2% often, 23.1% sometimes, 6.7% rarely verify the accuracy of news, whereas 1.2% of respondents have never verified the accuracy of content on digital media platforms. They were also asked about methods of verifying the suspicious content on digital platforms. Majority of respondents (49.0%) reported they always cross-check the suspicious content with other news sources, 23.1% reported they use search engine such as Google, 19.3% reads comments on the social media posts, 6.0% ask friends and family members for verification of suspicious content, whereas 2.6% reported don't verify the suspicious content they see on digital platforms.

Table 7: T-test regarding verifying the Accuracy of News

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Verifying the Accuracy of News	21.089	419	.000	1.021	.93	1.12

The difference is also very strong with a positive value ($p < .001$), which implies that participants, on average, agree to a very large degree that they verify the truthfulness of news they find online (mean 1.02 on the scale). It means that the issue of participation in ensuring the correctness of news cannot only be discovered, but it is also relevant in its implementation or awareness.

Table 8: T-test regarding verifying the Suspicious Content

	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Method of Verifying Suspicious Content	25.415	419	.000	1.160	1.07	1.25

The value of positive difference is considerable, so ($p < .001$), meaning that the sample of participants does follow some ways of verifying suspicious content on the web. The average score (1.16) is an indicator of a substantial amount of activity or consciousness concerning content verification.

Table 9: Other Findings

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Platforms where People Encounter Fake News	Facebook	204	48.6%
	YouTube	76	18.1%
	TikTok	56	13.3%
	Twitter/X	17	4.0%
	WhatsApp	27	6.4%
	Online News Websites	20	4.8%
	All of the Above	20	4.8%
Shared Fake News Without Realizing It	Yes	129	30.7%
	No	195	46.4%
	Not Sure	96	22.9%
Effect of Fake News on People's Opinion and Behavior	Agree	395	94.0%
	Neutral	21	5.0%
	Disagree	4	1.0%

Respondents were requested to answer the question of the platform where they predominantly see fake news. Facebook was on the top of list with 48.6% respondents, 18.1% reported YouTube, 13.3% reported TikTok, 6.4% reported WhatsApp, 4.8% reported online news websites and all of the above categories, and 4.0% reported Twitter/X the platform where they mostly encounter the fake news.

To see whether the respondents shared fake news unknowingly, they were questioned on whether they shared such fake news. The majority of respondents (46.4%) disagreed, 30.7% agreed, and 22.9% reported they are not sure whether they shared fake news unknowingly or not.

Lastly, people were asked about the impact of fake news on their opinions and behavior. The majority of respondents (94.0%) agreed that fake news affects the opinions and behavior of people, whereas 5.0% reported a neutral response, and 1.0% of the participants disagreed with this notion.

5. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that the level of awareness of Pakistani social media users about fake news and disinformation is rather high, which means that a big proportion of the population is not only informed about this phenomenon but also actively concerned about checking online information. The findings also demonstrate that there is a distinct connection between exposure to fake news and the trust in online systems: the higher the exposure to this news, the less trust a person has in online platforms, and vice versa, having lower exposure leads to having higher trust levels. This negative correlation confirms the findings of other researchers, such as (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017), who claimed that exposure to disinformation too many times decreases the trust towards information in digital news.

The Media Dependency Theory can also be applied effectively in analyzing these outcomes by saying that the fact that individuals depend on the media in issues of information and orientation increases the role of the media in the minds and attitudes of the individuals. Platform users in Pakistani institutions may depend on the usage of news like WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube, but, based on the findings, that dependence does not necessarily result in passive usage. Instead, it is a remarkable impact of critical involvement because consumers themselves are busy verifying the validity of news and information dissemination trends that indicate the mindful media consumption behavior. This serves as an indication that media dependency, in case it is accompanied by the behavior of awareness and verification, might actually be the strength rather than a weakness.

Further, the research draws our attention to the issue of user role in ensuring high quality and accuracy of digital information. The engagement that the users are taking in verifying the content before sharing is not only a personal responsibility but also a developing culture of digital responsibility. Such results indicate

the necessity to intensify media literacy initiatives, fact-checking, and healthy digital habits that would be able to protect citizens and their faith in a richer media environment.

5.1 Recommendations

According to the results of the research and feedback of respondents under the optional feedback section regarding what measures can be taken to reduce the spread of disinformation, the following are some of the main recommendations that can be used to overcome the issue of fake news and disinformation on online engines in Pakistan:

First, the media literacy initiatives ought to be created and promoted both institutionally and communally. Given the fact that the audience has been demonstrated to have a good understanding of fake news and participate in verifying the content, it is possible to reinforce the observed habits through official training. There should be short-term courses or awareness programs in schools, universities, and community facilities that aim at teaching how to check news data, which sources should be trusted, and how sharing misinformation can lead to negative outcomes. It is important that these programs adopt real-life scenarios provided on platforms such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and TikTok in order to contextualize learning to make it more practical.

Second, online platforms are supposed to partner with national fact-checking agencies and civic establishments to enhance app-based functions that foster verification. As an example, Facebook and WhatsApp social networks can bring automatic warnings whenever posts get flagged as possibly false or unverifiable. Cooperation with local fact-checkers like “Soch Fact Check” can be used to develop regionally and culturally specific alerts that would appeal to Pakistani audiences. Such partnerships are also likely to result in greater territoriality of content moderation and more effective management of viral disinformation.

Thirdly, public enlightenment programs are to be initiated through the traditional and digital media with the aim that people should be responsible in the content of sharing. These campaigns are to be aimed at the most popular misinformation patterns and encourage the participation of easy but practical steps, such as checking the source of the news, searching with the help of search engine in case of doubts, or consulting a reliable person prior to re-transmission of information. They should also include the social responsibility of the users in the campaigns against the spreading of harmful or misleading information. Inclusion and use of influencers, educators, and community leaders as the vehicles of these messages would go a long way in making them reach much wider and be more credible.

Lastly, government and media regulation authorities must assist in crafting of policies which would promote transparency and accountability on online platforms uninhibited by the freedom of expression. An example is how the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) and PEMRA can collaborate with technology firms to make sure that users can utilize technologies that aid them in evaluating the authenticity of content. Such policies must be based on the fact that the users cannot be simply regarded as consumers of digital news but also contribute to the digital news environment.

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