

Disinformation in Digital Era

Recent violent riots in the UK, which were prompted by a series of falsely disseminated news across media platforms are a clear indication of the power these platforms hold in inciting violence and manipulating narratives. The dark side of digital media has manifested itself back-to-back in this decade with recurrent reports of disinformation leading to polarization, clashes and kinetic conflicts. Nonetheless, being a source of information and earning, digital platforms have emerged as an instrument for the propagandist to play with narratives for the sake of achieving their strategic goals. This peril is not only individual's life and stakes rather it also pose formidable threat to national security. Crushing disinformation requires nuanced approach, a shift in legislation and an advocacy for digital literacy.

With the advent of the Internet, the means of communication have experienced unprecedented revolution. This revolution has in turn transformed the very method through which information can be accessed and shared. Communication has become easier more than ever with everyone being a click away from each other. People have started capitalizing social-media digital platforms. Youtube Partner Program alone has distributed \$30 billion in revenue to creators since inception. The fruits of digitization are numerous however one can not turn a blind eye to its misuse in the realm of propaganda. Increasing disinformation calls for stringent legislation

and punishment. The concept and process of disinformation is not new in those bygone days, gossip was largely transmitted via people. Busybodies would dish the dirt on a person, they perceived to be true with lies, would reach every corner of the polity. These Busybodies had their own agenda or were working on the behalf of someone. In either case they were used for what the digital media is used today, to spread disinformation so as to achieve a predetermined objective. Both digital platforms and those people were means to achieving certain ends. The means, undoubtedly, uses all the tools at disposal ranging from vilification, lies, deceptions to organized smear campaigns and deepfakes. There is hardly any day where we not hear or read the word 'disinformation'. One may simply define it as the use of wrong information yet the important aspect of term is not in its misuse but rather the intent with which narratives are propagated. and Dera Ghoshan defines disinformation as the deliberate dissemination of false information with the intent to deceive, mislead or astray people. It is brought into action so as to persuade people to believe falsehoods. This is what differentiates misinformation from disinformation. The former lacks the deliberate intent whereas the latter is accompanied with a predetermined and calculated purpose. Though the word may not sound frightening, it has wreaked a havoc in the digital era we live in today. According to 2023 research article published in New Media and Society, disinformation circulates on social media through deception campaigns implemented in various ways which include astroturfing, conspiracy theories, clickbait, cultural wars, echo

chambers, hoaxes, fake news, propaganda, pseudoscience, and rumors.

Disinformation adversely impacts democracy by paving way for unwarranted censorship. Social media is something which can not be caged, hence left with no other choice but to curtail it.

The rising menace of disinformation has forced multiple governments to regulate the access of internet and subsequently increase surveillance regarding the type of content being posted and viewed.

It is worth mentioning that the blurred line between freedom of speech and disinformation has already worsened digital milieu. The rise in surveillance methods in Pakistan is indicative of how the state is forced to invest both mind and treasures, to curb falsehoods on the internet.

In this war of information, governments not only face the challenge of regulating the content on the digital world rather they often face the precarious issue of an increasing gap between it and the people within. Public trust on government and its institutes, including on media and electoral process, evaporates leading to mass unrest, skepticism and public agitation. In such circumstances, even the slightest trigger can pull the country at its seams.

State - people confrontation aside, the propagation of extreme narratives can also bring people face to face. Ultimately damaging the very fabric and harmony of society. The means of communication are accessible by everyone and therefore anyone can use it in a

devilish manner. False claims regarding attacks, the manner of the city of the UK lead to the

to deadliest riots the island has experienced in the 21st century. A planned and organized attempt was made to defame a particular community causing deadly people-to-people confrontation.

The use of combative rhetoric by opposing ideological, cultural and religious groups on digital platforms as polarizes a society leaving little to no room for tolerance and constructive criticism. Constant spats, suppresses ^{human} rationality and of making space for emotional verdicts rather than logical ones. An emotional and intolerant society pushes the country on the brink of uncertainty.

Manipulating public opinion by publishing fake information, ~~starting~~ vilification campaigns and misleading is another developing norm in the domain of disinformation. A large number of voters were subjected to ^{wrong} fake news, facts and figures, and ^{untrue} misleading voters in the UK to vote in favour of Brexit. They were wrongly informed about the benefit and hence they suffer.

The implications of disinformation are not limited to democracy alone. It can act as a precursor to ethnic violence, pushing the country in an ^{un}ending cycle of ^{violence war}. Amnesty International reported that the spread of Anti-Rohingya propaganda on Facebook significantly contributed to ethnic violence and humanitarian crisis exacerbating tensions leading to widespread loss of lives. Therefore one can not ignore the ills of the binary world and the active role it can play ⁱⁿ sparking conflicts.

Another looming threat in ~~add~~ the world of technology is the increase in the

21" media and other digital platforms have become a hub for militants to carry out their illicit activities and propagate their viewpoints. Their presence on the digital world has made it an extremely dangerous place. FBI conceded that terrorists have unprecedented virtual access to locals and uses the internet for recruiting and inciting masses. Pakistan also faces the challenge of disinformation by ^{the} TTP, a banned militant organization. TTP operates via various digital channels under the name of Umar Media to spread disinformation against Pakistan and its institutions. Pakistan therefore faces the acute challenge of detecting TTP on ground and on the internet.

The ills of disinformation are not limited to the political and social sphere rather it also negatively impact the economy by scaring away investors. A safe environment and stable socio-political fabric of the society ensures the inflow of FDI. Disinformation halts economic progress by spreading lies leading to conflict which gives birth to ambiguities and uneasiness. Investors always rely on true information and ~~the~~ a pool of opposite contradictory and fake information may scare them away. In Nigeria, disinformation campaigns about corruption and instability in the oil sector have reduced the flow of dollars to the sector. ^{Disinformation} can also manipulate consumer behaviour causing disruptions in supply chain and disturbing the flow of economy. Covid-19 era ^{underwent} saw a plethora of disinformation being which led to panic buying. False information about supply chain disruptions and the availability of products in

markets negatively impacted businesses. False claims about 5G technology causing COVID-19 led to vandalism of telecom infrastructure and impacted the tech industry's operation. Thus an increase in the use of deliberate fake news has led to a dwindling economy.

Economics may be at the mercy of disinformation around the world but the constant flow of fake news and clickbait regarding pertaining to every minor and major incident remains a headache. For instance, after the Kargaz incident videos and photos of the offender Natasha Danish, who killed a young girl and her father ~~was~~ in an accident, made rounds on social media where the culprit could be seen without any remorse. Another video went viral where ~~and~~ Natasha Danish was seen recklessly driving however upon being investigated it came to light that all the content was fake, the picture was AI generated and the video was of an Indian and not of Natasha. This underscores the dangers of disinformation can pose in triggering class war. The Kargaz incident has already sparked a discussion among the different classes and fake news could further undermine the situation.

All these drawbacks calls ~~for~~ ^{into} ~~action~~ ^{action} stringent measures and a nuanced approach to dealing with the cancer of disinformation. The Governments need to adopt a holistic, comprehensive and inclusive approach in combat disinformation. It needs to adopt stringent law ^{and} ensure these laws are thoroughly executed. The ~~problem~~ ^{is} threat is only

Building and this indeed is the most accurate time to fight disinformation. Many states have emerged successful in passing these laws e.g Germany's Network Enforcement Act requires social media companies to remove hate speech and illegal content within 24 hrs or face fines. Similarly Singapore has enacted POFMA empowers authority to issue penalty for disseminating false news. ^{Similar} Laws needed are should be adopted by all other countries and should ensure they are enacted and acted upon.

Country laws however at the national level, we can curb news disinformation but this threat is not faced by a single polity rather by all the states of the world and therefore collective efforts are required to combat this threat.

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This is my 1st attempt kindly comment which areas need improvement.

Avoid frequent cutting/over-writing
Send clear picture (it was too difficult to read)
Make outline of the essay as well