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Article:	**Information Vs. Misinformation on Digital Media: A Study on the Youth of Lahore, Pakistan**
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ABSTRACT

The usage of digital media is tremendously increasing with time in Pakistan. According to the latest stats, in 2021 there were 46 million digital media users in Pakistan. The number of digital media users in Pakistan increased by 9.0 million between 2020 and 2021 and in January 2022 there were 71.70 million digital media users in Pakistan. Although digital media has played an important role in Pakistan in recent years on the other hand it is a double-edged sword. On one side it is providing information, awareness, and entertainment at ease and at low cost but on the other hand, due to lack of gatekeeping it is also acting as a source of fake news and misinformation. To study the problem of fake news on digital media platforms the researchers surveyed 200 respondents and analyze the data through SPSS. This study concluded that whether intentionally or unintentionally, people spread fake news on all major digital media platforms in Pakistan.

Keywords: Digital media, new media, Fake news, misinformation, disinformation, youth

INTRODUCTION

With the development of means of communication, the world has become a global village. Human beings witnessed the knowledge explosion at the global level. The convergence of digital and traditional media provides an excellent platform for inclusion, participation, and transparency; which are, however, coupled with challenges previously unseen like misinformation, disinformation, and exposure to harmful content. The uses of digital media have also blurred the offline and online spaces. It has negative impacts on human digital and political lives in the form of fake news and misleading information.

Fake news is a piece of information that consists of planned misinformation, and it is circulated through some medium. The spread of fake news is not new and this term was coined in 1925. However, the growth of the internet has increased the spread of fake news. Media is considered the fourth pillar of society. It is often credited to unite and build national integrity and harmony in any society. But in this digital era, the accuracy and objectivity of information got compromised which is a serious threat to the social system.

Nevertheless, in the last decade, the massive communication boom starts because of the appearance of popular digital media tools like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram YouTube. Millions of people are brought together through digital media which provides a platform to guide people freely about politics and other segments of lives.

Misinformation is a growing concern in developing countries due to low-cost mobile phones and cheap internet packages. Everyone with a smartphone has access to digital media platforms for digital and political activities. Due to this a large number of new users comes online including those with little digital literacy. Also, these people with no digital literacy are an easy target for those who spread misinformation online.

Pakistani society is also facing the challenges of the information explosion and the digital media revolution. Following telecommunication ability, millions of people use digital media tools and the internet in the 2018 elections in Pakistan. According to some studies nowadays the most popular mediums are digital media. many researchers highlighted the uses of these digital mediums by the youth of Pakistan but there is little literature available on the perception of youth about these medium's credibility. Therefore, this research paper through a survey of the youth aims to highlight the perception of youth about these digital media platforms in Lahore, Pakistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital media includes many mediums such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and WhatsApp. These new mediums make communication fast, interesting and effective (Valente, 2010). The Digital era is the era of technological advancement. It overcomes the shortcomings of traditional mediums such as newspapers, books, magazines, and electronic mediums such as TV and Radio (Ch, Mahmood, & Rasool, 2015) Digital media is encompassing people's everyday life. However, due to ample information and a different opinion on the same subject, it is difficult to believe the online news. When unprecedented

information surrounds an individual, assuredly it is difficult to believe and one needs to struggle to find out the right one (Al-Zaman, 2019).

Besides providing information and entertainment the digital media played an important role in political campaigns in Pakistan. For instance, in the 2018 election Twitter users were inclined toward PTI and they use this medium for political purposes. Similarly, all the political parties use social media for getting attention and to present their opinion (Muzaffar, Yaseen, & Safdar, 2020). However, along with politics, it is also used for propagating hate speeches and sectarian-related issues as well. Many incidents were reported in recent years where digital media is used to promote violence. (Abid, Shami, & Ashfaq, 2021).

Similarly, (Tariq, Mehboob, Khan, & Ullah, 2012). stated that the impact of social media can be good on students. But nowadays addictive social media websites and entertainment stuff is ruining the student's academics. The main focus of students should be on studies but they spend several hours online. Likewise, studies show that Journalists and reporters use WhatsApp because of its extraordinary features to enhance their reporting magnitude. This study also found that journalists and reporters ignore ethical rules and regulations during the reporting and in the field even though they are aware of the rules and regulations of journalism (Zulqarnain, Hashmi, & Zulqarnain, 2020). The problem of fake news is not new. Misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda have been features of human communication since at least Roman times (Posetti & Matthews, 2018). Fake news is not only a problem in Pakistan but it is a growing problem in developing countries with far-reaching consequences. This research also suggested that media literacy can play a role in countering misinformation (Ali & Qazi, 2021).

Similarly (Wang, McKee, Torbica, & Stuckler, 2019) Stated that Social media platforms, providing immense opportunities for people to engage with each other in beneficial ways, also allow misinformation to flourish. Therefore, the current era is considered "an era of fake news" in which misinformation, generated intentionally or unintentionally, spreads rapidly. Although affecting all areas of life, it poses particular problems to health-related issues. Social media also spread disinformation which not only affects health and politics but it is a challenge to democracy (Terzis, Kloza, Kużelewska, Trottier, & Konstantinou, 2020). Digital media is also used for propaganda and misinformation in the form of Tweets. During Pakistan and India conflict on the Pulwama attack in the Kashmir region, a total of 2000 tweets were studied that were posted in the support of their countries (Hussain, Shahzad, & Saud, 2021). However, on the positive side governments on the national level can be held accountable by the people because of mass media platforms that are used for interaction and getting information. Now people access information and share opinions with the help of social media accounts and they are aware of their rights and obligations (Khan, Hussain, Khalid, & Khan, 2021). However, researchers who studied the role of media and hybrid ware fare stated that university students are being exposed to propaganda messages. University students are active users of social media. Therefore, this situation demands the enhancement of digital media skills among the students of higher education through proper training and education (Aslam, Hayat, & Ali, 2020). In the recent Covid-19 pandemic one of the reasons behind vaccine hesitancy regarding Covid-19 was the prevailing misinformation about its origin. While the vaccine

acceptance rate increased when people believed that this virus is dangerous and natural (Kanozia & Arya, 2021).

A researcher surveyed 200 respondents and concluded that the majority of the respondents check the authenticity of the social media news. But due to a lack of professional gatekeeping, it is difficult to control it. The fake news created a distorted image of the situation during the prevailing Covid-19 situation (Ahmed, Qamar, & Asghar, 2021). The fake news and prevailing myths about polio vaccination are the biggest barriers to eliminating polio from Pakistan. There is a large number of irrelevant and fake news regarding the effects of polio vaccination that lead to people's hesitancy and ultimately increases the number of polio cases. A large number of myths are found on social media that are not true or unverified (Ittefaq, Abwao, & Rafique, 2021). Misinformation is a serious problem that is not only associated with Covid-19 but includes political, social, and religious aspects. Due to fake news on social media, many people were attacked on religious issues (Ittefaq et al., 2021).

Digital media played an important role in giving news, information, and surveillance. But now there are some issues of concern such as cybercrime attacks, fake news, and disinformation. Now it has negative effects not only on the individuals but on the entire communities and nation (McKee, van Schalkwyk, & Stuckler, 2019). Digital media which was once considered a force of freedom and democracy has come under increasing scrutiny for its role in spreading disinformation and fake news. Digital media is deliberately used by different organizations to manufacture consensus. Different techniques such as robots, big data, and algorithm automation are used to shape public opinion (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019). Now fake news is a common issue and facts should be checked before drafting an opinion (Akhtar, Khan, & Hanif, 2020).

Pakistan is at high risk due to fake news because Pakistan does not have advanced technology to counter fake news regarding health, religion, and political issues (Ittefaq, Hussain, & Fatima, 2020). A country like Pakistan needs to take immediate steps in the right direction to address the problem of fake news. And it is not possible without having the creation of a strategic body to monitor content for its integrity and authenticity (Farooq & Raza, 2022). However, through training and media literacy, students can be trained to distinguish between fake and authentic news (Reem, 2022). The verses of the Holy Quran and the Prophet's instructions also prohibited the spread of false information. A true Muslim will never spread fake news and Islam also instructs us to verify every news before believing in it (Rahman, Begum, & Begum, 2021).

Research questions:

Q1. In which digital media platforms does fake news circulate more frequently?

Q2. Does the youth identify true and false news presented on digital media in Pakistan?

Q3. Whether people share fake news intentionally or unintentionally on digital media in Pakistan?

Method

This research paper utilized a quantitative method in the form of a survey questionnaire to highlight the perception of youth about fake news on digital media. For this research, the population is the youth (ranging from 15 to 29 years) living in Lahore, Pakistan. For this purpose, the researchers choose two public universities for the collection of data i.e. Punjab University and the National University of Modern Languages, Lahore. The respondest were selected through a random sampling technique from the students of mass communication departments of both the universities. The mass communication department was selected because the researchers believed that they will be more familiar with and would be able to identify fake news. So this will help us to understand if there is how much fake news on the digital media. Thus we surveyed 200 respondents and analyzed the data through SPSS.

Results

Table 1: Demographics of the respondents

		Frequency	Percentage
1. Gender	Male	42.7	42
	Female	56.5	56
2. Locale			
	Rural	26.0	26
	Urban	74.0	74
3. Age	18-22	84.0	84
	23- 27	16.0	16
3. Qualification			
	Bachelor	94.7	94
	Master	3.1	3
	MPhil	0	0

Table 1 shows that (42.7) percent of the respondents are male and 56.5 percent are female. The majority of the respondents (74.0) percent belong to urban whereas 26.0 belong to rural areas. The table also shows that majority of the respondents' age is between 18-22 years

and (94.7 %) of the respondent's qualification is bachelor's while 3.1 percent have an MPhil qualification.

Table 2: Digital media usage

		Frequency	**Percentage**
1. Account on social media			
	No	2.3	2
	Yes	96.2	96
2. Medium for getting news			
	Facebook	9.2	9
	Instagram	26.0	26
	Youtube	7.6	7
	Twitter	57.3	57
3.Access to social media accounts	Own smartphone	98.5	98
	Parents smartphone	1.5	1
4.Frequency of checking accounts			
	Several times a day	87.8	87
	About once a day	6.9	6
	Every few days	1.5	1
	Once a week	1.5	1
	Do not check at all	2.3	2

Table 2 highlight the usage of digital media. The table shows that the majority of the respondents (96.2 percent) have active social media accounts. A large number of the respondents (57. percent) are getting news from Twitter, 26.0 percent from Instagram, and 9.2 percent from Facebook. The respondents were also inquired about their access to digital media sites. The table shows that 98.5 percent of the respondents have their smartphones for accessing these websites. Finally, they were asked about the frequency of accessing these digital media

accounts and 87.8 percent of the respondents stated that they access their digital media accounts several times a day.

Table 3: Purpose of usage

		Frequency	Percentage
1. Purpose of use			
	Highlighting political issues	24.4	24
	Academics	8.4	8
	Making new friends	.8	8
	Time pass	66.4	66
2. Authentic medium for information			
	Newspaper	26.7	26
	TV	16.0	16
	Digital media	56.5	56
3. Usage for news			
	Neutral	24.4	24
	Agree	56.5	56
	Strongly Agree	14.5	14
	Strongly Disagree	4.6	4

Table 3 highlights the purpose of digital media usage of the respondents. The table shows that the majority of the respondents (66.4 %) are using digital media for time pass and (24.4 %) are using it for highlighting political issues. Only 8.4 percent are using it for academics while 8 percent are using digital media for making new friends. The respondents were also asked about the authenticity of different digital mediums. The majority of the respondents (56.5) stated that digital media is the most authentic medium for getting

information. Likewise, 26.7 believed that newspapers while 16.0 stated that TV broadcast authentic information. Finally, they were asked about the usage of digital media for getting the news. 71 percent of the respondents stated that they use digital media for news consumption, 24.4 percent are neutral and only 4.6 percent stated that they do not use digital media for news.

Table 4: Fake news on digital mediums

		Frequency	**Percentage**
1. Fake news on Instagram			
	Neutral	14.5	14
	Agree	65.6	65
	Strongly Agree	19.8	19
2. Fake news on Facebook			
	Neutral	12.2	12
	Agree	51.9	51
	Strongly Agree	35.9	35
3. Fake news on YouTube			
	Neutral	11.5	11
	Agree	39.7	39
	Strongly Agree	48.1	48
	Strongly Disagree	.8	8
4. Fake news on Twitter			
	Neutral	45.0	45
	Agree	49.6	49
	Strongly Agree	4.6	4

Strongly Disagree		.8	8

Table 4 highlight the perception of the respondents about fake news on digital media. The respondents were first asked about fake news on Instagram. The majority of the respondents (85.4 percent) of the respondent stated that there is fake news on Instagram while no one disagrees with this statement. Secondly, they were asked about fake news on Facebook. The majority of the respondents (87.8 percent) of the respondents stated that Facebook spread fake news, only 12.2 were neutral and no one disagree with the statement. Similarly, the respondents were asked about fake news on YouTube. 87.8 percent of the respondents agree that fake news exists on YouTube, and 11.5 percent are neutral while.8 percent disagree with this statement. Finally, they were asked about fake news on Twitter. Again, the majority of the respondent 54.2 percent stated that there is fake news on Twitter, and 45.0 are neutral while.8 percent disagree with this statement.

Table 5: Fake news identification

		Frequency	Percentage
1. Can you spot fake news			
	Neutral	24.4	24
	Agree	59.5	59
	Strongly Agree	11.5	11
	Strongly Disagree	4.6	4
2. Others can spot fake news			
	Neutral	31.3	31
	Agree	60.3	60
	Strongly Agree	6.1	6
	Strongly Disagree	2.3	2
3. People intentionally spread fake news			

	Neutral	15.3	15
	Agree	51.9	51
	Strongly Agree	30.5	30
	Strongly Disagree	2.3	2
4. People unintentionally spread fake news			
	Neutral	22.9	22
	Agree	61.1	61
	Strongly Agree	8.4	8
	Strongly Disagree	7.6	7

Table 5 highlight the perception of the respondents about fake news identification in digital media. 71 percent of the respondents stated that they can spot fake news online, 24.4 percent were not sure if they can identify fake news or not while 4.6 stated that they cannot identify between real and fake news. They were also asked if others can spot fake news or not. The table shows that 66.4 percent stated that others can also identify fake news while 31.3 percent are not sure while only 2.3 percent disagree with it. The respondents were asked if people intentionally spread fake news on the digital medium. 82.4 percent of the respondents stated that people intentionally spread fake news on digital media, 22.9 percent are neutral while 7.6 disagree with this statement. Finally, they were asked if people unintentionally spread fake news on digital media. 69.5 percent stated that people unintentionally spread fake news, 22.9 percent had no idea while 7.6 percent disagreed with this statement.

Discussion

According to the latest stats, there are 22 million internet users in Pakistan. around 36.5 percent are using the internet while 43.55 percent of the people have active digital media accounts. The usage of digital media is tremendously increasing with time in Pakistan. Digital media is a double-edged sword. On one side it is providing information but on the other hand, it is also acting as a source of misinformation and disinformation. Through this research, we surveyed 200 respondents to highlight the perception of youth about digital media usage, fake news spread on digital mediums, and its identification. The results show that majority of the respondents have active digital media accounts and they are using Twitter and Facebook for getting information. They access their digital media accounts several times a day to keep

connected and receive the latest updates. The main purpose behind digital media usage is to time pass and to highlight political issues. However, they also use it for getting the news. The respondents agreed that all major digital media forums such as Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter spread fake news. However, like the previous studies (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019). they stated that they can spot between real and fake news. As highlighted by the previous studies (Al-Zaman, 2019). They also confirmed that there are both misinformation and disinformation on these digital media sites.

Conclusion:

This research concluded that the digital mediums dominated the traditional mediums of news consumption. Now a day's majority of the youth is using digital media accounts to spend time and get information. However, due to a lack of gatekeeping, there are misinformation and disinformation along with true information. As highlighted by (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019), digital media has a strong role in politics and making a public opinion. Therefore, it is suggested to verify the news before crafting any opinion. Fake news is a serious issue and can be countered through media literacy and education.

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