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Disinformation and Social Order: The Impact of Fake News on Collective Security and National Integration

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ABSTRACT

The present research was initiated in order to determine the effects of misinformation on social order, collective security, and unity in Pakistan. The key point in the study was to investigate how individuals acquire fake news and share them with others. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were the methods used to collect the qualitative data to understand the phenomena of disinformation and its effects on social order and collective security. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data revealed four thematically related areas of inquiry that include the daily social construction of truth in the midst of the information uncertainty, the deterioration of social trust and social cohesion, the perceived threats to the collective security and national unity, and the new coping mechanisms that help to build social resilience within the community. The results suggested that the study participants felt confused over the issue of credibility, polarisation, and fear of social stability. In the paper, it was established that misinformation is a complicated social phenomenon, which, in turn, makes trust less worthy, re-establishes the common meaning, and poses serious obstacles in social integration. The study provided measures to alleviate the consequences of fake news, which comprised media literacy improvement, enabling the truthful institutional communication process, and the amplified participation of the community. Keywords: disinformation, fake news, social order, media literacy, social cohesiveness, and collective security

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Introduction

The modern world of the digital era has made disinformation a major problem. The growth of social media networks, web-based news outlets and mobile social messaging services have radically changed how individuals obtain as well as distribute information. Although modern technologies can now facilitate access to information, they have also facilitated the cross-border transmission of false information and fake news. Disinformation is a term used to define specially designed and distributed false information that is aimed at deceiving a group of people. Disinformation is a multidimensional social construct that changes the perception of the truth in the society, erodes civic confidence in institutions, and threatens the stability of society (Selakovic et al., 2025; KaabOmeir, et al., 2024).

Not only is disinformation a communication challenge, but a major social issue that has dire consequences to social order. The aspects of social order are based on the major social values, including common opinion, confidence, and collaboration. The fast diffusion of fake news brings confusion and promotes rival versions of the truth. Consequently, citizens do not trust official sources and rely more on rumours circulating on social networks. Research indicates that when individuals are exposed to misinformation, they tend to distrust the government and other institutions. (Larisu & Rudi, 2025; Izmerov, 2024). With diminishing trust, it becomes harder to come up with joint decisions, and the process of social cohesion can be undermined.

The increasing correlation between fake news and social instability is a significant issue within the contemporary societies. Fake news has become one of the most effective tools in various psychological operations and information warfare to influence the opinion of the population and discredit social integrity (Peshev, 2023; Prasoj, et al., 2024). It is also applied to divide various groups of socioeconomic and ethnic groups. Due to this, the social security and social order within a country is at risk (Sharma, 2025). Research indicates that effectively crafted fake news campaigns cause intolerance and economic inequalities among various social groups and motivate them to act upon false information, leading to segregation and discord between groups of people in the society (Wintterlin et al., 2023).

The case of Pakistan is an excellent place to study the critical problem of disinformation and fake news. Pakistan is actively experiencing the struggle with the national security, domestic internalization, and social assimilation. Research indicates that Pakistan is still struggling to fight disinformation because of the lack of national security measures (Rehman et al., 2025; Saad, 2023). Disinformation has an influence to the democratic process and distorts the way people view government. False news corrupts the truth and builds antagonistic connections among humans and government agencies (Amin & Hong, 2025).

A sense of belonging and a shared identity is the only way that people can remain connected to a certain nation. The digital media can be instrumental in uniting people on a similar social perspective. Online environments occasionally form disjointed information environments, and this causes individuals to largely interact with organizations that think similarly to them. Such fragmentation may result in conspiracy theories that only have effects of further separating the society (Mir & Siddiqui, 2024). Historical conflicts, such as that between India and Pakistan, are much more problematic due to the presence of Online Propaganda and fake news (Freedman & Williams, 2023; Murtaza et al., 2022). It is more difficult to have a national perspective when one hears various, even conflicting, accounts of events. Psychological and cultural consequences of misinformation are one of the topics of considerable scholarly interest. Exposure to misinformation can have quantifiable effects on mental health e.g., anxiety and emotional discomfort, particularly when facing a health crisis (Tahir, 2023). Cognitive biases can affect the consideration of the credibility of information in the judgment of people, as they tend to believe a story that aligns with their existing beliefs (French et al., 2023). Besides, personality traits, linguistic skills, and media literacy also have a significant impact on the interaction of individuals with misinformation (Miller et al., 2023). The high proliferation of deepfakes and sophisticated digital manipulation among the youth in Pakistan has raised the issue of the accuracy of information and public trust (Imran et al., 2025). The issue of fake knowledge has become even more difficult to address due to the technological progress. The latest artificial intelligence and generative media technologies have resulted in the possibility of creating highly realistic fake content. There are two purposes of large language models and generative AI: they may distribute false information and assist in its detection (Sallami et al., 2024; Loth et al., 2024). The systems that are being developed by researchers are based on machine learning, blockchain, and explainable AI to combat fake news (Kondamudia et al., 2023; Sharma & Singh, 2024; Rani & Shokeen, 2024; Yigezu et al., 2024). Pakistan is gaining popularity in the use of digital media and AI as a tool that transforms the ways people think and fight misinformation (Uddin et al., 2025). However, technological answers are not sufficient to address the broader social implications of disinformation.

In terms of sociology, misinformation seems to be a great obstacle to the principles of social discipline, power, and political governance (Neo & Yin, 2023). Showing false information is being suppressed by governments and digital platforms, yet they also lead to issues regarding freedom of speech and methods to manage society (Tan, 2022). The independent media institutions play a crucial role in restoring the trust of people and fighting misinformation (Olefirenko & Soloviova, 2025). According to the recent bibliometric evaluations, the number of studies devoted to this topic rises rapidly, which means that false news is becoming a more significant issue in the global society (Giordano et al., 2024).

Although the study of disinformation is growing, the qualitative research is still lacking to relate it with daily life experience of social order. Most of the existing studies focus on technical detection or political regulation, and very few studies focus on how people perceive fake news and how these perceptions affect the collective security and national cohesion. To grasp the effects of disinformation on the

relationship and the lack of trust in institutions, it is critical to investigate the lived experiences of these two factors.

This paper uses qualitative methodologies to investigate the influence of disinformation on social order in Pakistan. It examines how people and groups interpret disinformation and its impact on their perceptions of security and national unity. The emphasis on meaning-making and social interaction substantiates the research, demonstrating that fake news is both an informational and a social phenomenon that shapes trust, identity, and cohesion. The results are utilized in bigger discussions on how to keep society stable and united in a time when technology is changing quickly.

Objectives of study

1. To examine the ways in which individuals and communities perceive and interpret disinformation and fake news in the context of social order, collective security, and national integration.
2. To analyze the impact of fake news circulation on social trust, social cohesion, and intergroup relations within society.
3. To investigate the strategies employed by individuals and communities to address and manage perceived threats posed by disinformation to collective security and national unity.

Literature review

Due to the very fast spread of digital communication technologies, the information environment of the world has been changed, and the issue of misinformation and disinformation has been aggravated. Researchers have acknowledged that fake news has been a complex social issue with dire consequences in terms of trust, security, and social cohesion as a problem and as opposed to a technological problem. According to the historical and conceptual studies, disinformation has undergone changes together with the media systems, including the element of traditional propaganda accelerated by digital platforms (Selakovic et al., 2025). According to bibliometric studies, the interest in misinformation in the academic environment has increased several times over the last decades, which highlights the increasing role of misinformation in social and scientific discourse (KaabOmeir et al., 2024; Giordano et al., 2024). The researchers stress the necessity to differentiate between similar terms misinformation, disinformation, fake news, and deepfakes to be able to evaluate their social consequences (Iufereva, 2025).

The literature has always focused on the connection between disinformation and social trust. The institution trust is inherent in the existence of social order, and various works state that the exposure to fake news damages the social trust towards governments and other authorities. The studies of the post-truth period prove that social media platforms play an important role in the perception of the institutional legitimacy (Larisu & Rudi, 2025). According to the empirical data, people with a lower level of institutional trust have a greater predisposition to misinformation and are more likely than others to share it (Izmerov, 2024; Lukavska et al., 2025). In Pakistan, it has been evident through research that misinformation can corrupt the process of democracy and influence the opinion of the people about the government (Shah, 2025). Misinformation spread analysis in Pakistan also shows that the phenomenon of digital media has an attractive-diffusive nature that promotes squandering information and adds to the social divide (Haroon et al., 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the close relationship between information management and social stability concerning the effectiveness of official corrections closely associated with the interaction with the population and trust (Amin & Hong, 2025).

The available literature has associated disinformation with nationalism and collective identity. Research proves that conspiracy theories and fake accounts strengthen the borders of groups and shape the view of national status (Mir & Siddiqui, 2024). Propaganda and digital misinformation campaigns tend to increase the level of historical and geopolitical tensions, particularly between India and Pakistan (Freedman & Williams, 2023; Murtaza et al., 2022). Disinformation has been defined by wider literature as a modern-day security threat, which overlaps with the field of psychological operations and information warfare (Peshev, 2023; Prasojo et al., 2024). It has been highlighted by authors that one of the significant domains of national security in Pakistan is social media, where fake news interferes with internal stability (Saad, 2023; Rehman et al., 2025).

The social and psychological aspects of fake news represent a large field of research. Misinformation has been linked to emotional health and anxiety, especially during prevalence of a health crisis in the society

(Tahir, 2023). According to cognitive research, biases such as confirmation bias influence the way people evaluate the validity of the information (French, Storey, and Wallace, 2023). There are also the effects of media literacy, linguistic fluency, and personality traits, which influence the consumption of fake news (Miller et al., 2023). Collectively, disinformation may organize populist movements and contribute to the in-group and out-group segregations (Wintterlin et al., 2023). There is also empirical research that fake news is associated with a rise in intolerance between socioeconomic groups (Sharma, 2025). The spreading of the deepfake technologies among Pakistani young people has burdened the issue of information integrity and social trust (Imran et al., 2025). In totality, these results show that disinformation influences personal cognition and the general trend of social interaction.

Fake news technological solutions represent a rapidly expanding discipline. Recent surveys have brought out the application of machine learning, network analysis, and blockchain to identify and combat fake information (Kondamudia et al., 2023; Sharma & Singh, 2024; Rani & Shokeen, 2024). The need to have explainable artificial intelligence to address language misinformation is highlighted by the studies centred on under-resourced languages (Yigezu et al., 2024). In the meantime, generative AI creates new challenges with new developments. Big language models can contribute to the distribution and detection of fake news, causing a quandary in digital society (Sallami et al., 2024). It is also mentioned in the reviews that although generative AI can enhance detection, it also enables convincing fake content (Loth et al., 2024). In Pakistan, researchers are experimenting with AI-based techniques to deal with fake news and shape the popular opinion, yet the long-term consequences are not known (Uddin et al., 2025).

Besides the solutions based on technology, the researchers consider the regulatory and institutional solutions to the problem of disinformation. Legally, the studies are an overview of the attempts to regulate fake news in the largest social media platforms and indicate the conflict between censorship and the principle of freedom of speech (Tan, 2022). It is perceived that independent media groups are the solution of rebuilding the trust of the population and combating misleading reports (Olefirenko & Soloviova, 2025). The higher influence of disinformation on society and the necessity to display responsible leadership are emphasized by ethical and human rights perspectives (Battista, 2024). It has been stated in reviews that mixed responses such as new technology and education and policy changes are the best (Nallasamy et al., 2024). There are also some professionals who observe that fake news may destroy cultural unity and values in the long term (Boronov, 2025).

Methodology

The present study was aimed at using a qualitative research approach to investigate the effects of disinformation and fake news on social order, collective security, and national integration. It is this qualitative methodology that was considered suitable in offering a more in-depth understanding of the perceptions and experiences of the participants as opposed to analysing the cause-effect of the variables. The study was carried out in Pakistan during urban and semi-urban areas where the population is considered very exposed to digital media. The sampling technique applied was purposive and the participants selected were individuals who were actively involved with the social media. The participants were chosen so that they were representative of a wide age range, gender, educational level and social-economic groups. The data were gathered with the help of 20 in-depth interviews and 6 focus group discussions where the number of participants was 8.

The tools used to conduct the semi-structured interviews and the focus group discussions included open-ended questions which were used to investigate the experiences of the participants with fake news and its implications on social trust and social cohesion. The research participants were asked to provide their consent on the data collection process, which was recorded in the language they favoured best. The analysis of data was done rigorously through thematic analysis which consists of familiarization, coding and identification of themes. The researcher has also made sure that he or she is reflexively aware of his or her positionality. The approach to methodology allowed the exploration of different facets of disinformation in an ethical way in a thorough, comprehensive manner.

Data Analysis and Results

Based on the thematic analysis of the interviews and the focus group discussions, a number of themes were identified, and they focused on how the fake news affects the social perceptions, relationships, and

security. In most situations, fake news was seen to be not only a phenomenon associated with the media. It was seen as a social problem that altered the perceptions and relations. Based on the analysis, there were four significant themes.

Theme 1: Social Construction and Everyday Interpretation of Disinformation

The discussion has shown that respondents consider fake news as a kind of reality that goes beyond false information. Moreover, the amount of those who reported the information uncertainty was substantial. This means that the participants cannot tell the truth clearly.

Another important feature of this theme is the naturalization of skepticism. The participants were likely to question news authorship and are doubtful of the information depicted by the government. The media is not the only source of this kind of skepticism but other institutions show this as well. This results in disjointed common sense of the truth. Sociologically, the disintegration of common meanings is a menace to social order.

There was also confusion of the participants when there were major events in society and politics. Also, the participants showed heated conversations with their relatives regarding the type of the news. This shows that fake news influences the manner in which people come to an agreement on the meaning of truth. When the truth is relative, it is hard to make people feel unified and a part of something.

Theme 2: Disinformation and Social Trust and Cohesion.

In many cases, participants anticipated misinformation to be one of the factors that contributed to the rise in societal divisions. Many people claimed that misinformation is a factor that fosters suspicion among social, political, and ethnic communities. They have seen that online stories can be used to aggravate the differences and create a us and them attitude. This relationship undermines interpersonal trust and eliminates the willingness to communicate with individuals who have another point of view.

One of the main results is the diminishing of the interpersonal as well as institutional trust. The participants reported that they tend to lose trust in the opinion of people around them when they are exposed to conflicting messages too often. This mistrust is directed towards the institutions, media organizations and the leaders of the community. Sociologically, decreasing the level of trust compromises social capital, which is essential to teamwork and social action.

Respondents had mentioned internet fights that had transferred into their personal lives where friendships were strained due to political misinformation and avoiding sensitive conversations so as to avoid fights. These stories show that fake news demeans ordinary social co-existence and interpersonal societal relations needed to sustain national cohesion.

Theme 3: A Threat to Collective Security and National Integration.

The participants were aware of the risk of misinformation towards national security and stability. The spread of fear, panic, and social conflicts were related to disinformation. Many participants claimed that rumours can become a reason to get people agitated and damage the reputation of the country.

The emergence of social anxiety is one of the particular peculiarities of the problem. The participants described that the dissemination of fake and exaggerated information raises the level of concern regarding national and personal security. The outcome of the anxiety is the influence on the way people perceive social events and the national identity. Fear formation results in the undermining of social cohesion and individuals adopt more assertive and hard position. The respondents were emotionally responsive to the proliferation of fake rumours, such as discomfort about the exaggeration of risks and the generational effects on the young generation. These instances depict the factual and emotional repercussions of spreading falsehood.

Theme 4: Social Resilience and Community Coping Mechanisms.

The participants were aware of the negative impacts of misinformation and took the initiative to cope with it. There are those participants who gave out the different procedures that people undergo to deal with misinformation such as checking information out. Moreover, it could be seen in the opinions of a considerable number of respondents that the strength of discussions within the family and social networks was relevant to deal with misinformation.

Shared accountability is one of the main elements of the model. The respondents concurred that the society could be a truth arbiter by ensuring that it did not spread false information. These behaviours represent the initial traits of social resilience, which ensure social cohesion.

The participants have cited several cases of how family members warned people against misinformation, talked about the reliability of the media, and how people should be responsible in sharing information. All these examples indicate that even though disinformation has a destabilizing effect on the social order, there is an opportunity to adjust to it.

Discussion

The study gives a detailed examination of how disinformation affects social perceptions, relationships, and stability. The findings demonstrate the commonness of fake news in social relationships and its considerable effects on the social order and national integration.

The results show that fake news proliferation causes uncertainty. They have problems with differentiating between truth and lie and become mistrustful of the media sources and institutions. This puts doubt on the meaning systems required to bring social stability. Lack of consent on simple facts leads to an incoherent communication, which brings about social unrest. As a sociological phenomenon, the disinformation propagation brings the question of how to construct the truth that is needed to foster social order.

As an example, the participants are confused during significant events or even reluctant to share the information because of the dissemination of disinformation.

The results indicate that fake news increases social divisions. False information tends to augment polarization and lead to doubt among populations. Social cohesion or trust is a vital element that was always reported to be on the decrease. The repetition of fake news lowered the level of confidence in human relationships and the government. Such loss of trust destroys teamwork and reinforces the separations of groups, which prevents social assimilation. The fact that there are reports of online conflicts on offline relationships and evading sensitive matters shows that disinformation does have social real-life effects other than on digital platforms.

The results indicate that the subjects considered fake news as a source of fear and instability, and it can even escalate into the danger of taking the life of the population. Misleading and sensational news was discovered to cause anxiety among people in groups and create feelings of insecurity. Such emotional reactions affect how people interpret the social events and their belonging to the national community. When the fear and suspicion spread, the social solidarity fades away and the unity of the identity is becoming weaker. The perceived interconnection between information disorder and national stability is pointed out by the concerns of the participants in regard to the likelihood of public unrest and social harm in the long-term.

The research discovered that people and societies are putting efforts into counteracting disinformation. According to the participants, they developed such negative habits as verifying the source and chat about suspect material with close circles. These acts create some kind of unofficial social controls that regulate the misinformation dissemination. The collective responsibility suggests that communities can be used to enhance resiliency, which can be supported with the help of awareness and responsible communication. The implication of such findings is that disinformation is a social phenomenon with many dimensions. It distorts the truth telling process, erodes the credibility and social harmony, fosters insecurity and instils defensive response of the societies. The complexity of the connexion between the environment of information and social order is on the one hand supported by the interrelation of these processes; on the other hand, it is evident.

Conclusion

The researchers conclude that fake news can have a significant impact on the social order, national integration, and collective security as it alters the perceptions of the people of the truth, and the ways in which they relate to others. Disinformation leads to confusion, disaggregation of shared meaning and mistrust. Such mistrust further separates people and renders them less united. Falsehoods may put individuals in a feeling of insecurity, and this may jeopardise the integrity of the group.

Meanwhile, civilizations demonstrate that they possess powerful and flexible ideology by the way of critical thinking and societal discussion. According to these coping strategies, society resilience is strengthened when social responsibility of telling the truth is taken by the individuals in a given society. In this study, the authors claim that proper means of misinformation response should go beyond technical or regulation steps to incorporate the sociocultural actions that lead to trust, discussion, and mutual values.

Recommendations

The results of this study mean that the effects of disinformation in society should be mitigated through concerted efforts in the educational, communal and institutional spheres. The most significant proposals are to educate people about media literacy and make people more critical of the information in order to distinguish between real and fake sources. The project should not only be school based but also must cover community forums and awareness gathering. It must educate everyone irrespective of their age and social backgrounds on how they can use digital information safely.

In order to address false information, we should improve conversations and social interaction in the society. Community-based discussions can be protected to support open-ended discussions and provoke people to tell how they can verify their facts. Such a dialogue makes people believe in one another once more and promotes communication among disparate social groups, that is, both essential in uniting the countries as well as amalgamating them. There is also the culture of shared responsibility that develops when the members of the community share responsibilities in fighting the disinformation and encouraging responsible communication.

It is also proposed in the study that government institutions and news organisations be more open and more open in terms of how they communicate with one another. With timely, reliable, and consistent sources of information, one will minimise uncertainty and prevent rumours. The involved institutions should be instructed to adopt an open communications strategy and engage people in a meaningful manner to make them trust. In order to combat fake news, the collaboration of legislators, teachers, the general population, and media specialists is all needed. The understanding of the tendencies of disinformation and constant research and monitoring of it allow societies to alter their strategies and address the challenges emerging in the realm of digital information.

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