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SPREADING OF FAKE NEWS AMONG THE STUDENTS OF JAHANGIRNAGAR UNIVERSITY: ORIGIN, SHARING AND CONSEQUENCES

Sayed Ibrahim Rifat[1*], Ameena Islam[2]

[1] Faculty Member, Department of Journalism, Communication and Media Studies, Varendra University, Rajshahi ,Bangladesh

[2] Faculty Member, Department of Journalism and Media Studies, Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

[*]Corresponding author, saeedibrahim.ju47@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study looks into how fast fake news is spreading and its social impact on the students of Jahangirnagar University, Bangladesh. This specifically looks at the main sources of fake news and the behaviour of people who share it. Moreover, it also looks at the sociological effects of fake news. Using a survey (N=282), interviews (N=18), and case study analysis of three cases of misinformation (BRAC University ranking, Chandrayaan-3 images, and the Bangabandhu Tunnel), the study maps the ecosystem of misinformation in a polarized media environment. The investigation establishes that students spend an average of 2.99 hours a day using social media, mostly on Facebook. Nevertheless, the relationship between their usage and willingness to fact-check shows a weak association (r=0.03). This shows that students check information wrongly. The study finds that confirmation bias is the most important cognitive driver. Users preferred to share content they agree with, even if they contradict themselves. The case studies show us how, in instances where old media effectively legitimize false claims, the digital platforms combine algorithmic amplification with an erosion of institutional trust to accelerate the spread of misinformation. The results of the thematic analysis illustrated that the pursuit of social validation (e.g. likes and shares), and reactive rather than proactive detection are important mechanisms.

Through a cognitive-ecological approach, this study studying misinformation in the Global South proposes potential interventions. There are media literacy programs to recognize biases and develop prebunking strategies. They also present policy proposals on platform-level "friction-in-sharing" features and educational reforms that should help build critical digital engagement. It provides a roadmap to counter disinformation in scenarios of development.

Keywords: Fake news, Misinformation, Disinformation, Social media, Cognitive bias, Bangladesh, Jahangirnagar University

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INTRODUCTION

THE PROBLEM OF FAKE NEWS IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Fake news is a persistent problem around the world. It can have dire consequences for public discourse and social cohesion. It can disrupt political stability as well (Allcott & Gentzkow 2017). In Bangladesh, the rise of social media has made this phenomenon more acute with misinformation, disinformation and mal-information being propagated (Rahman & Jahan, 2020). Though Bangladesh has successfully launched its "Digital Bangladesh" programme and made impressive strides in digital infrastructure and digital inclusion, Bangladesh is vulnerable to digitally-activated misinformation.

These campaigns have caused real-world effects, including intermittent socio-political and inter-religious clashes and incidents of the Ramu violence (2012), Nasirnagar attacks (2016), and lynching linked to child-lifting rumors (2019).

THE RESEARCH GAP AND STUDY RATIONALE

While everyone is aware of the threat fake news, it's time to take a closer look at the way specific, highly-connected demographics—like university students—consume and disseminate misinformation. University students are among the most active social media users, yet we know very little about their fact-checking behaviour and cognitive biases in this context (Pennycook & Rand, 2021). Previous studies in Bangladesh have captured the national level phenomenon. But they have hardly touched upon its origin, sharing and consequence related micro level processes at a university level. Thus, this study chose the students of Jahangirnagar University (JU) to fill this gap. It provides a specific case study of fake news inside a relatively small group.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study is guided by the following specific objectives.

To find out what JU students do when they come across news on social media, that is, if they confirm the news and how do they do that.

We aim to examine how cognitive biases, especially confirmation bias, influence students when deciding to share things that may be regarded as fake news.

To look at how sharing fake news affects students' social relationships, academic environment, and individual well-being.

STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

In the following, we present a thematic review of the literature on fake news, cognitive biases, and media consumption. Next, the methodology section discusses the mixed-methods approach used in the study. The study presents quantitative and qualitative findings, followed by a discussion in which the results are interpreted the implications for theory and practice traces, future research directions are suggested and a summary conclusion is presented.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This review is structured around four key themes relevant to the spread of fake news among university students: (1) conceptualizing fake news, (2) the role of social media platforms, (3) psychological and behavioral drivers of sharing, and (4) the specific context of university students' media consumption. The review concludes by identifying the specific research gap this study aims to fill.

CONCEPTUALIZING "FAKE NEWS"

The term “fake news” has undergone a shift in meaning since its earliest appearance in 1925 (McKernon, 1925). In the modern digital age, it includes various falsehoods and misrepresentation. Academic perspective today would emphasize specific categories of intent, risk, and mechanisms. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) defines misinformation as false information that is created or shared without malicious intent. In contrast, disinformation is false information that is created or shared with malicious intent.

The taxonomy includes seven categories, building on this, including (1) satire or parody, (2) false connection, (3) misleading content, (4) false context, (5) imposter content, (6) manipulated content and (7) fabricated content (De Miguel Molina et al., 2019). Many of these forms have been referred to as “digital wildfires (World Economic Forum Report, 2013). They have been ‘weaponized’ for the purposes of ideological argumentation or profit-making through the architecture of social media (Baptista & Gradim, 2020; Smith, 2019; Guess et al., 2020; Jones & Lee, 2021)). This clarity is important when examining the origin and perception of different types of false content.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

Social media platforms shape the way news reaches specific users, according to UN experts. Misinformation travels faster on social media because their design principles—algorithmic curation, engagement metrics, and network structures—facilitate it (Vosoughi et al. 2018).

Users often engage with disinformation that evokes a strong emotional response, is novel, or is otherwise an unusual claim. Because of the way algorithms work, this can lead to the creation of “echo chambers” and “filter bubbles.”

Platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp have been amongst the main drivers of misinformation in the electoral processes in Brazil and India and with COVID-19 (Gragnani, 2018; Sulaiman et al., 2021). Young adults mostly get their news from social media (Newman et al., 2023). The very features that boost engagement levels and information sharing on platforms (buttons to easily share a news story, a feed largely based on user preferences) help lower the cognitive and effort costs to share unverified information (Bovet & Makse, 2019). Social bots enhance this phenomenon by emulating human users to target influencers and perpetuate messaging (Shao et al., 2017).

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND BEHAVIORAL DRIVERS OF SHARING

The spread of misinformation is a human problem, not just a technology problem. It is driven by things like how human brains work. A person with confirmation bias tends to look at things that support their existing views only. They tend not to look at things that counter those views.

This is aggravated by other heuristics, like the availability heuristic, where readily accessible examples (e.g., a supposed vivid fake story) are thought to be more frequent, and the illusory heuristic truth effect where the more false one is exposed to something, the more likely one is to think it is true (Hasher et al. 1977; Pennycook et al. 2021).

People are much more likely to share things that make them angry or outraged. Moreover, social influences including fear of missing out (FoMO) and the need for social validation can motivate sharing without checking facts (Talwar et al., 2019). In the end, sharing is a complicated process that involves verification (or not), decisiveness, and reflection after the act of sharing itself, and can often be affected by psychological and social pressures (Wang & Fussell, 2020).

THE SPECIFIC CONTEXT OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' MEDIA CONSUMPTION

University students are a key group to study misinformation. They are digital natives use social media to maintain interpersonal communication and to seek information and entertainment (Pempek et al. 2009 and Junco 2013). But, high connectivity does not mean high media literacy. Research regularly shows us that students (even in Bangladesh) tend to overestimate their ability to identify fake news. Additionally, they are often exposed to and share misinformation (Leeder, 2019; Atikuzzaman, 2022).

Teens are forming their worldviews and are sensitive to peers are particularly vulnerable to cognitive biases (i.e. confirmation bias; Pennycook & Rand 2019). Though prior research does exist on media habits in general, there is insufficient research on how platform algorithms, cognitive biases, and fact-checking behaviour interact with each other within the context of a university based in Bangladesh.

RESEARCH GAPS

Though there is a growing body of literature on fake news, major gaps exist in terms of the understanding of the origin, sharing and effects of fake news at the micro-level in specific and closed communities like universities in the Global South. Previous studies in Bangladesh indicated a national prevalence of misinformation (Rahman & Jahan, 2020). However, cognitive and behavioral mechanisms involved among students have not been extensively studied. This study will utilize a mixed-method approach to examine the interaction of Jahangirnagar University students with fake news by focusing on cognitive biases, platform-specific engagement and fact-checking behaviours. The understanding that it will bring will be crucial in developing effective localized interventions.

These lead to our research questions,

- What is the relationship between social media usage and students' fact-checking habits?

 How do cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias, influence students' sharing behavior of fake news on social media?

 How do social media platforms, particularly Facebook, contribute to the spread of fake news among university students?

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METHODOLOGY

The study primarily focused on analyzing the propagation of fake news through social media, particularly in terms of Jahangirnagar University's social media usage, news consumption and fact-checking. It combined the quantitative method and qualitative research methodologies in the study. The data collected through surveys and interviews offered a deeper understanding of the factors through which misinformation on social media, in this case facebook, is circulated amongst university students.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017) to investigate the spread of fake news among students at Jahangirnagar University. The quantitative phase (a survey) identified patterns and relationships between key variables, while the subsequent qualitative phase (interviews and case studies) provided depth and context to explain the quantitative findings.

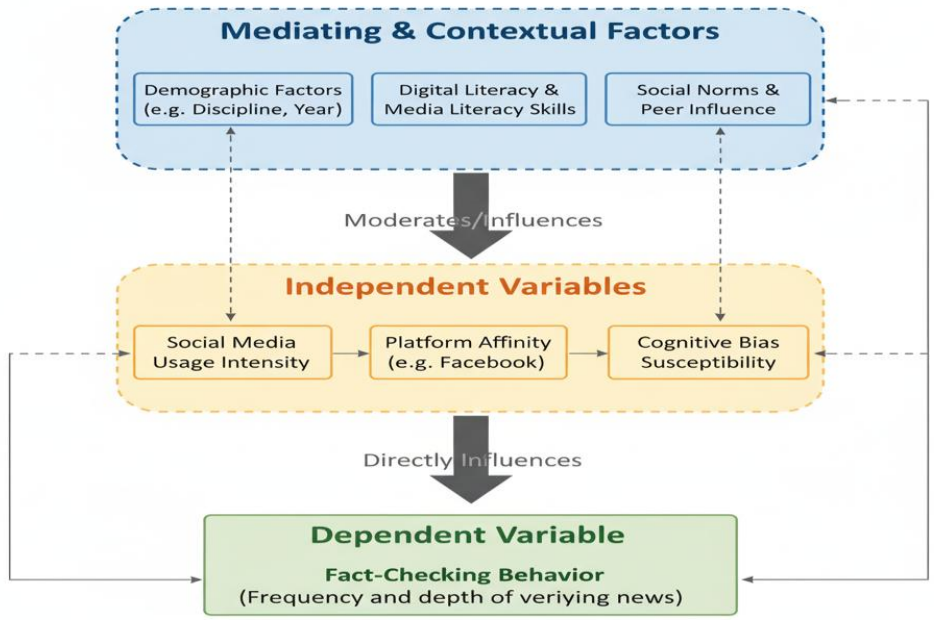


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Spreading of Fake News

The framework that guided the research was informed by the Cognitive-Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and studies on digital media.

The social media usage intensity, the usage of specific platforms and cognition bias.

Dependent Variable: Fact-Checking Behavior.

Demographic variables (discipline, year of study), social norms, and digital literacy are contextual factors.

According to this framework, the outcome which is an individual's fact-checking behavior is influenced by their social media usage (amount and type), and cognitive biases, within the overall ecology of the university.

PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING

The convenience sampling method was used to recruit a total of 282 students from Jahangirnagar University to do the quantitative survey from various disciplines.

After the analysis of the survey, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 18 students over 6 different faculties. Researchers chose these participants to get rich, explanatory data that represents a range of survey responses (e.g., high vs. low fact-checkers).

QUANTITATIVE DATA COLLECTION: SURVEY INSTRUMENT AND MEASURES

The survey was developed to measure the key constructs in the conceptual framework. The survey items were adapted from existing scales in the literature to ensure content validity, since no validated instruments were available.

The social media (Facebook) usage intensity scale is adapted from Facebook Intensity Scale, Ellison et al. (2007). It measures the amount of time spent, emotional connectedness and integration in everyday life. Cronbach's a for the current study .84

We used the items from Pennycook and Rand (2021) to develop a short scale that measures the extent of one's agreement with items such as "I trust news that is consistent with my opinions." The items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. (Cronbach's a = .79).

To measure the frequency with which people engaged in behaviours such as "I check the source of a news story before sharing", adapted from the News Media Literacy Scale (Ashley et al., 2013), on a 5-point frequency scale (1=Never, 5=Always) (Cronbach's a = .81).

Usage of Platforms and News Attitude of Participants: where do participants most liked to get news and share content (Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.)?

The survey was administered online via Google Forms.

Every one of the participants gave their informed consent and data was collected in anonymity.

QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analyzed using SPSS (Version 28). Means, standard deviations, and frequencies were calculated for all variables. Pearson correlation analysis was run on social media use, cognitive bias and fact-checking to see the relationships. Next, we conducted a multiple linear regression to see if social media use and susceptibility to cognitive bias significantly predicted participants' fact-checking behavior.

QUALITATIVE DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

In order to fill out the quantitative findings, qualitative data were collected via two methods.

Semi-structured interviews: The 18 interviews followed a protocol designed to elicit themes of motivation, cognitive biases in action, and platform dynamics. The interviews were all recorded, transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Three recent cases of viral fake news in Bangladesh (BRAC University Ranking, Chandrayaan 3 Photo, Bangabandhu Tunnel Image) were selected from the fact-checking website Rumor Scanner based on the criteria of virality (high social media engagement), relevance to student discourse, and diversity of topic. The analysis of the posts and the debunking reports helped trace the origin, spread and the rhetoric of information.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

All ethical aspects were prioritized in this research. The purpose of the research was explained to the participants, and informed consent was obtained from them prior to their participation. During the process of this survey, given that all answers, both from the survey and the interviews, were recorded and stored securely and were only used for the purpose of this research, anonymity and confidentiality were maintained. All experiments were performed in accordance with relevant guidelines and regulations; the study was ethical with human participants.

RESULTS

In this section, the findings of the study are presented. First, there will be a layout of the quantitative findings obtained from the survey, and later a layout of the qualitative findings obtained from the interviews and case studies.

QUANTITATIVE SURVEY RESULTS

A survey of 282 respondents offers an insight into the correlation between social media use, news reading habits, and fact-checking. The survey results were examined using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, chi-square tests, and regression analysis. Below is an expanded description of the findings.

Table 1.Descriptive Statistics for Key Study Variables

Variable	*M*	*SD*
Social Media Usage (Hours)	2.99	1.42
Primary News Platform	2.99	1.46
Attention Capturing Event	2.00	0.82
Sharing Platform	3.04	1.41

Variable	*M*	*SD*
Reaction Type	2.45	1.12
Bias Tendency	1.97	0.81
Fact-Checking Habits	2.53	1.14

Note. *N* = 282. All variables were measured on a 5-point scale. *M* and *SD* represent mean and standard deviation, respectively.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS INTERPRETATION:

Average Usage Per Day of Social Media by Students (Hours): Based on days students spend on social media with a mean of 2.99 hours a. day, it indicates students' average is in usage of social media is ranged between 2 and 4 hours.

According to the primary news platform variable with a mean of 2.99, students predominantly use social media platforms for news purposes for similar reasons.

Social media facilitates the dissemination of risk-related information within a specific geographical area. The mean is 3.04, which show that the excess of information does spread on social media platforms like the Facebook, also misinformation.

Students are found to be not too biased in their news consumption and dampens frequency of fact-checking with two mean scores lower than the latter's mean scores.

CORRELATION ANALYSIS

A correlation analysis was carried out to comprehend the links among key variables. The table below shows the relationship between social media use, news platform, attention event, sharing platform, reaction type, bias tendency, and fact-checking.

Table 2. Correlation Analysis Intercorrelations Among Major Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Social Media Usage	—						
2. News Platform	.03	—					
3. Attention Event	.11	.03	—				
4. Sharing Platform	.05	.09	-.03	—			
5. Reaction Type	-.02	-.04	.02	.01	—		

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Bias Tendency	.02	-.01	.02	.05	-.01	—	
7. Fact Checking	.03	-.01	.01	.02	.00	.02	—

Note. N=282*N*=282. Decimal points are omitted for correlations. All correlations were negligible and none were statistically significant (p>.05*p*>.05), indicating no substantive linear relationships among the variables.

The analysis demonstrates that most variables are negatively correlated. Those who use social media typically engage in fact-checking, however there is only a slight correlation or relationship with such phenomena. In other words, the more one uses social media, the less they decide to check the facts.

In the same vein, the relationship between attention events and bias tendency is weak and positive (r = 0.02). This means that something which grabs attention might show a slight correlation with something that is biased. Still, this is weakly correlated and should be understood with care.

CHI-SQUARE TEST

We conducted a Chi-Square test of independence to test an association between social media usage and bias tendency. The research indicated no marked relationship between the variables (p = 0.249). Social media usage does not seem to relate to students' tendencies to be biased when consuming the news.

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Statistical regression analyses were performed to evaluate the predictive power of social media usage and bias tendency on fact-checking. The results of the regression analysis are shown below.

Table 3.Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Fact-Checking Habits

Predictor	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
Constant	2.43	0.17	14.07	< .001
Social Media Usage	0.02	0.04	0.55	.584
Bias Tendency	0.02	0.06	0.33	.740

Note. The regression model was non-significant, $F(2, 279) = 0.18$, *p* = .811, and accounted for a negligible proportion of variance ($R^2 = .001$). $N = 282$.

The R-squared value of 0.001 indicates that the model's explanatory power is very limited, suggesting that social media usage and bias tendency are not significant predictors of fact-

checking habits in this sample. This strongly indicates that other factors beyond those measured in this model are likely more influential in determining fact-checking behavior.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

The content analysis explored real-world cases of misinformation on social media, studying how false narratives spread, their origins and eventual negative consequences.

Case 1 - BRAC University's Misleading Ranking Claim:

On September 27, 2023, BRAC University claimed in a Facebook post that it had been ranked no 1 university in Bangladesh by Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2024. The claim was misleading since the 801-1000 range has been mentioned alphabetically and not ranked.

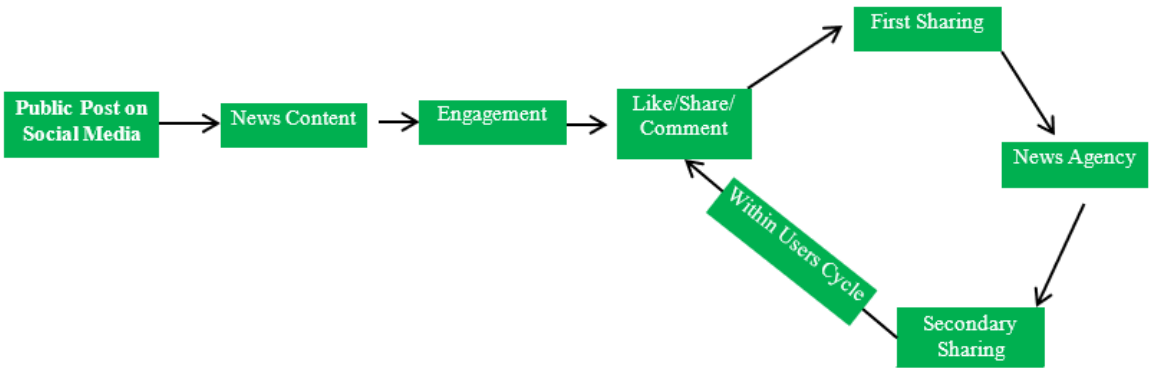


Figure 2: Travel route of Case 1

Origin of Misinformation: BRAC university's own post misinterpreted the ranking methodology and thus the misinformation began.

Spread Dynamics: Prothom Alo and Channel i are two popular Bangladeshi media channels that made that claim without verification.

Consequences: The misinformation impacted the public's perception of the university's prestige and highlighted the risks of unverified reporting in mainstream media.

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Case 2 - Misuse of Foreign Image for Bangabandhu Tunnel:

A **2014 image** from **Bosnia's "March 1st Tunnel"** was used by several Bangladeshi news outlets as an image of the **Bangabandhu Tunnel**. The image was misleading, as it was not related to the actual infrastructure project.

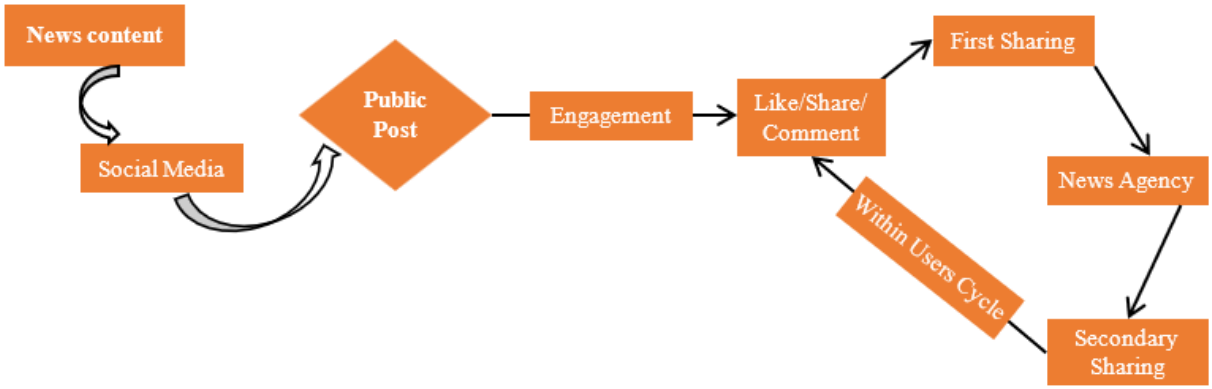


Figure 3: Travel route of Case 2

Origin of Misinformation: The image was initially posted by a **Belgian lighting company** but was misappropriated by local media outlets.

Spread Dynamics: The image was widely shared by both social media influencers and 97 media outlets, such as **BSS**, **Channel 24**, and **UNB**.

Consequences: The spread of this misinformation led to confusion about the government's infrastructure projects and diminished trust in the media.

Case 3 - Misleading Chandrayaan-3 Celebration Image:

In 2014, an image of Indian women scientists celebrating the Mars Orbiter Mission (MoM) was wrongly portrayed as a celebration of the Chandrayaan-3 moon landing in 2023.

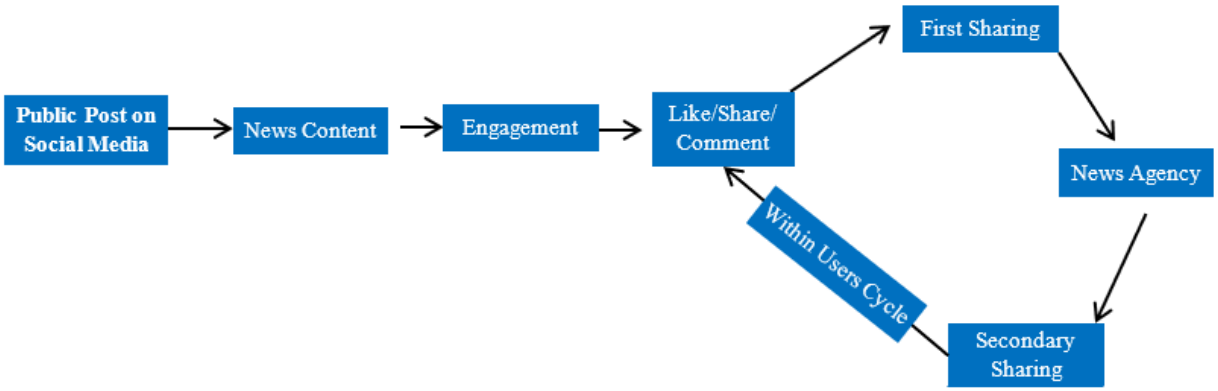


Figure 4: Travel route of case 3

Origin of Misinformation: The photo is from an AFP picture for BBC, used in a false context.

Spread Dynamics: The photo has gone viral on Facebook. Many newspaper houses, including Daily Janakantha, published it without verifying the source.

Consequences: The distribution of this image distorted the narrative of woman's contribution to space science and weakened faith in the media.

Recommendations for Addressing Misinformation:

1. **Enhanced Media Literacy:** We need public education campaigns that improve people's abilities to spot misinformation, especially in both text and visuals.
2. **Accountability in Journalism:** Media outlets must enhance editorial guidelines to confirm accuracy and veracity before allowing publication.
3. **Social Media Platform Responsibility:** Platforms like **Facebook** should prioritize verified content and introduce stronger measures to detect and flag misleading images and news articles.

RESULTS OF QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

An analysis of the in-depth Jahangirnagar University students' interviews has shown that students experience on how fake news spreads on social media fall under three broad themes. The three themes are Motivations and Cognitive Bias, Platform Dynamics and Social Validation and Awareness and Response to Fake News. A good grasp of these themes can aid a rich understanding of the psychological, social and behavioural factors that underlie the spread of misinformation on Facebook and other platforms.

CONFIRMATION BIAS AND ALIGNED CONTENT

In our interviews, we learned that the main reason why users didn't share content was due to confirmation bias, i.e., they tend to share posts which aligned with their beliefs. As Participant 8 noted.

"I do monitor certain content that interests me. This is where I share news that is topical and is usually factual."

This shows people leak factually unfounded material with emotional investment.

Participant 2 noted the cycle.

"Sometimes we post things because they are amusing or distracting to us without fact-checking. We all have biases and post things that reinforce what we already think."

The outcomes of which exhibition or the outcome of which is.

Curated sharing of worldview-affirming content.

Becoming aware of trust belief-relevant information

Peer validation loops resulting in echo chambers.

The data suggest that, contrary to claims to the contrary, participants engaged in behaviors that perpetuated misinformation cycles, prioritizing confirmation over accuracy.

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THEORIES OF COMPETITION FOR ATTENTION ECONOMICS OR FILTERING CHALLENGES

The second major theme concerns the role of social media platforms, such as Facebook – which are now not only a leading source of news consumption but also a sharing site. Facebook was free and easy to get; and, that's at least partially why it was the go-to site for students. Some participants also briefly spoke about Facebook's algorithmic design that will always feed you more of what you're already into, locked in a preference and extending how long you stay. As one participant pointed out.

"I find it easier to use Facebook as a habit than other social media. The blessings of WHO are human and divine, and you have them even in abundance. Your peers, your friends, your colleagues are so easily available to you that you won't even need to look for them. You cannot blame people nowadays as that have so much utility out of it. Clearly, it's number one." – Participant 7.

This comment back and forth cycle is a constant cycle of social validation reinforcement. When students publish public content on Facebook, they are rewarded with likes, comments, and shares that boost their social image and social identity. According to this, sharing external validation motivates makers in order to stay productive or, as said, "crank out content, truth be damned." Participant 16 pointed to the social aspects of sharing.

Posting something on Facebook feels like a thumbs up from everybody in your social network, right? There's this validating, proxy-like feel about this. When friends and family like, comment or share your post, it's almost as if they are giving you a personal recommendation, "Hey, this is good.

Participant 16 states that most people want to get noticed in their social circles. Public posts help amplify the reach of the content and increase the chances that it will get shared secondarily, meaning that close friends and peers will share the content further on private message on social-networking applications like Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp. It is this behavior which imparts the viral nature of misinformation, meaning that the message is being propagated from an individual human to others without much scrutiny. As one of the players observed, "The more the rumor is circulated, the more believable it is, whether or not it is true." Despite the availability of private sharing channels, most of the misinformation propagation takes place at the public sharing level. In addition, social media has become a platform to promote personal values and social belongingness, further increasing the cycle of misinformation.

AWARENESS AND RESPONSE TO FAKE NEWS

Participants tended to react to fake news rather than engage with it according to interviews. The realization that my research made them aware of false content usually had to do with any experiment with the faked content. For instance, Participant 8 described coming to know about falsification of the status of the university: "When I came to know what the rankings were getting distorted into I was like wow, some part here must be broken. We must be critical of any content we see on social media." This surprising response serves to underline a clear lack of pre-emptive content criticality, and one that is particularly concerning at a time of algorithmic content auto-magnification that rewards lucent miscontentmentirect.

Participants understood the social impact of fake news. For example, Participant 13 argued that fake news "creates anarchy and destroys the trust of the people" in society. The misleading content has an emotional angle which is going to be less effective. This was observed by one of the participants, who also mentioned that the diversified tactics are so convincing these days that this a lot of people leave themselves at the end to the seduction of attractive fake news. The day to day evolution of suspecting looks convincing. This implies

the filing of cases but the counterarguments, which are also based on disbelief, leave us at an impasse with the only upshot being no further prosecutions.

The capacity of perception's power – One message that came up at least once was the idea that we now think things are more believable and true than they actually are. There seems to be some recognition of the importance of checking the truth of a declared fact. However, many students reported not checking the veracity of news, not feeling the need to do so. Some students like P2 reported to have developed better habit 'I've learnt that not everything you see online is real. I check news from lot of outlets now before I believe it. It's like getting a second opinion.'.

Inherent contradiction of continued trust in these perceived credible sources— be it the media, or the informant in one's own personal network. While it could be a defence against flag.

DISCUSSION

The study investigates how the engagement of university students with social media, their psychological disposition and the architecture of social media help spread misinformation in Bangladesh. Using several different methods, it was found that, in the Bangladeshi internet ecosystem, socio-technical dynamics are essential.

THE PARADOX OF PASSIVE CONSUMPTION AND INSTITUTIONAL TRUST

Students spend almost 3 hours a day on social media, with Facebook being their primary source of news, the study caps. This is consistent with trends in developing nations, where Facebook doubles as a public information infrastructure (Guess et al., 2020). The issue is how the social media use ($r = 0.03$) and factchecking of the users has low correlation. This is an example of a paradox which can be explained with the attention economy theory (Wu, 2017). Under this theory, the architecture of the platforms are built in such a way that priority is given to engagement not information. As per Pennycook et al. (2021), algorithms that curate information, enabling passive consumption, can oftentimes oversaturate users, thereby discouraging scrutiny. This became apparent in the case of the BRAC University ranking where the institutional provenance of the misinformation endowed it a credibility that disincentivised interrogative engagement.

The media paradox legacy specific to Bangladesh adds a layer of complexity. Even after incidents of established media organizations, like Prothom Alo and Channel i, misleading the public with unsubstantiated claims, students claimed to still trust them.

This shows that people rely on institutions like the media to evaluate information even when they can't trust them on the Internet.

THE GAP BETWEEN PERCEIVED AND ACTUAL CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

It is found that students' think and their actual information behaviours vary.

Most of the survey respondents indicated that they thought they had little personal bias (Mean 1.97). However, qualitative research showed that they were confirmation biased. Interviewees mostly offered us content that already confirmed their beliefs. The gap shows the Dunning-Kruger effect. People who cannot evaluate critical things think they can spot false information (Dunning, 2011). The quick spread of the fake Chandrayaan-3 image (Case 3) further implies that in collectivist cultures social and emotional power of content can sometimes trump cynical scrutiny (Hogg, 2016). Hearing a lie over and over again can almost make it seem true because of social media and algorithms (Hasher et al., 1977). The repeated claims that the BRAC University rankings are fake will lessen skepticism.

PLATFORM ARCHITECTURE AS AN AMPLIFIER

Facebook's dominance emerges as a critical amplifier. The engagement based ranking algorithms of the platform (Bakshy et al 2015) provides perverse incentives that favour sensational content. This was seen in all three case studies. This study identifies two interconnected mechanisms at the level of the platform. The first is the act of sharing that serves a social signaling function. Thus, disseminating information becomes a showing of who we are and of the group we belong to. As a second point, the combination of public post and private messaging app (Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp) creates hybrid distribution. This architecture facilitates "second-order virality," where public posts trigger long, murky chains of private sharing: a pattern that was evident in the misleading Bangabandhu Tunnel image (Case 2). Containing the virus is difficult since a lot of this happens invisibly.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Fake news dissemination theories have been developed to suit a cognitive-ecological perspective and the media environment of the Global South. It explains how the "institutional trust paradox" and polarized media in Bangladesh affect the sharing and reception of misinformation.

Results are in place: the new findings exemplify two classical theories of cognitive bias, namely, the confirmation bias and the illusory truth, as they operate in an East Asian context with low media accountability and high social dependency. Further, it is evident from the research that platform-specific dynamics like algorithmic amplification and social validation loops will accelerate the spread of misinformation in developing economies.

This research adds on to the growing literature on digital literacy. Also it calls for Southern epistemologies to be included in global media studies. Cognitive and ecological factors must be analyzed in their own unique sociocultural and infrastructural settings.

CONCLUSION

To sum everything up, this survey conducting showed that the device of fake news by university students in Bangladesh is a problem arising from a combination of cognitive biases, platform architectures and institutional trust. According to the findings, there is a huge gap between student confidence in spotting misinformation and their actual fact-checking behaviour. This gap has been worsened by passive consumption and algorithmic amplification on social media. A more resilient information ecosystem will require coordinated efforts to strengthen critical digital literacy, hold the media accountable, and reform platform design, while future research can further guide these efforts through comparative and longitudinal studies.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The research covers essential ideas regarding the spread of fake news among the students of Jahangirnagar University, but still, it is a fact that there are some limitations.

To begin with the research only concentrates on the JU students. Due to this reason, the generalizability of the result is limited. It can be also compared with the findings of other universities in Global South or Bangladesh.

Also, the self-reported data may lead to possible biases such as the social desirability bias where the respondents may not give the actual numbers. For example, they may lower their sharing metrics of fake news or inflate their fact-checking metrics.

A big limitation for the interview part is the sample size (N=18) as it suppresses broader representatives.

There could've been more case incidents instead of only three, in this case study approache.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

This study significantly improves the theory of fake news dissemination by bridging cognitive-ecological frameworks with media of the Global South. This shows that the polarized media of Bangladesh and the institutional trust paradox really matter for sharing but also how sharing is aberrant behaviour for worse misinformation models.

This study demonstrates how and why cognitive bias theories such as confirmation bias and the illusory truth effect are relevant in non-Western contexts while social media platform-specific mechanisms such as algorithmic amplification and social validation accelerate the misinformation phenomenon in developing economies. The Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council (Council) is required to develop a comprehensive program that supports ecosystem restoration and protection, economic recovery, and the enhancement of the livelihoods of the Gulf Coast residents. This work contributes to digital literacy scholarship and calls for greater recognition of Southern epistemologies in media studies. Theoretical C

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings necessitate urgent action from educators, policymakers, and platform designers:

1. **Media Literacy Integration**: Universities should embed fact-checking modules and cognitive bias training into curricula, emphasizing proactive verification techniques like lateral reading (Wineburg et al., 2022).
2. **Platform Reforms**: Facebook and other social media platforms must prioritize algorithmic transparency and introduce "friction" features (e.g., sharing prompts that encourage source evaluation) to disrupt viral misinformation chains.
3. **Institutional Partnerships**: Collaboration between universities and fact-checking organizations (e.g., Rumor Scanner Bangladesh) can establish rapid-response systems to debunk trending falsehoods.
4. **Student-Led Initiatives**: Peer-to-peer awareness campaigns, leveraging student's trust in social networks, can promote critical engagement with content.

CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 16 (SDG16)

This study directly contributes to SDG16's target of "promoting peaceful and inclusive societies" which talks about misinformation that threatens social cohesion. The research helps the youth of Bangladesh, who are going to be an important part of a future digital Bangladesh, not spread fake news. The recommended actions comply with SDG 16.10, which emphasizes on the public's right to reliable information, thus strengthening democratic resilience in the digital space.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that misinformation in Bangladesh flourishes at the intersection of cognitive biases, platform architectures, and erosion of institutions. Global framework give us leads but ultimately every solution has to contend with local fault lines — from infrastructure vanity to journalistic sloth.

If Bangladesh can work on media literacy, regulatory innovation, and community-led verification, it can model resilience in the Global South.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors have no conflict of interest.

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