

Manipulation of Thoughts through Social Media

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ABSTRACT

Social media interferes with our independent thinking and sometimes kills our original thoughts. Fake and unverified information creates a wrong impression on the thought process of common man, which is ultimately dangerous for a democratic society. There should be legislation to discourage fake or fabricated news and punishment or penalty should be imposed by specific legislation enacted by parliament in this behalf because the law being the instrument of social engineering may play a vital role to curb down the circulation of unverified and fake news. The legislation must create strict liability of the person who is originating or circulating/forwarding fake or unverified news in order to deter those people who forward any message negligently or recklessly. Freedom of speech and expression does not extend to create or forward fake news in irresponsible manner. Freedom of speech and expression does not permit anyone to circulate unverified news because it may create rumors, dissatisfaction and discontentment amongst common man which may ultimately be dangerous to society and Nation, therefore, there is dire need of a legislation to prevent and regulate a circulation of information which are fake.

Keyword: Social Media, Misinformation, Disinformation, Democracy

As the fourth estate of democracy in our nation, the media plays a crucial role in upholding moral principles and bringing up social issues by speaking out for the odds and weaker members of society. But another aspect of the media is that, frequently as a result of fierce competition among media, they over-sensitize the negative and untruthful aspects of any incident, which causes a lot of issues. A pure and healthy society can be maintained by public opinion alone.

The way we perceive something is really important to how we live. Depending on the information our senses provide, we may have a favourable or unfavourable perception of the object. Today's common men rely too heavily on social media and electronic media for information, which is a double-edged sword because it offers quick information for business transactions but also has the potential to spread rumours that could seriously disrupt law and order in the community (for example, different news during pandemics). The truth of any fake news that circulates on social media has not been independently checked by any authority, nor is it practical for regular people to do so.

To comprehend the difference between misinformation, disinformation, and mal-information in the context of incorrect information, as well as its impact and significance, is required. Misinformation is defined as misleading information that is spread accidentally or without malicious intent, such as

when satire is taken seriously or when dates, statistics, or photo captions are incorrect. Disinformation is the purposeful and frequently clandestine dissemination of misleading information to sway public opinion or obfuscate the truth.¹ These false and purposefully altered audio and visual elements are intentionally disseminated to spread rumors or conspiracies. When information is disseminated with the goal to do harm by purposefully altering the context, date, or time of true contents, it is considered malicious information. This includes material that is real but private in nature and intended for personal or corporate use rather than the public interest.²

According to the Army, just 66 out of 1,736 allegations of human rights violations against the armed services have been proven genuine since 1994. Of those, 150 troops have received punishment, and 49 cases have resulted in compensation being given. A senior Army official stated that the country's record on human rights "is one of the best in the world, which is appreciated globally." The "human shield" incident, in which Major Leetul Gogoi controversially trussed up a civilian on his jeep's bonnet to rescue over a dozen security and election staff from a stone-throwing crowd in Kashmir, has drawn harsh criticism in the background. Social media was used to disseminate this information in an effort to tarnish or obscure the image of the Indian Army.

While the media criticizes Major Leetul Gogoi's novel notion, Additional Protocol I places limitations on the methods and techniques used by security personnel to combat terrorism. It serves as a reminder that the Security forces cannot employ all available tools to prevent terrorism because doing so increases the likelihood of pain rather than safety. The employment of such methods that could indiscriminately harm and destroy the civilian population is prohibited by this policy.³

The former British prime minister once said that "media is oxygen to terrorism"; the same is true for social media. Disinformation on social media may feed terrorist action.⁴ Human psychology states that people are impacted by anything they have been exposed to, and as a result, anything they have been exposed to has the ability to sway or control the view of the average person.

Social media obstructs our independent minds and occasionally stifles fresh ideas. False and unreliable information gives an ordinary individual the wrong impression, which is ultimately harmful to

¹ Merriam Webster Dictionary, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/disinformation>.

² Dr. Clarie Wardle, Classification of Misinformation and Disinformation, NT Center (12 Jul 2018), <https://www.ntcenter.bg/en/classification-of-misinformation-and-disinformation/>.

³ Editorial, The Hindu, May 25, 2017, <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/the-commendation/article18572957.ece>

⁴ Margaret Thatcher, The New York Times, July 16, 1985, <http://www.nytimes.com/1985/07/16/world/thatcher-urges-the-press-to-help-starve-terrorists.html>

a democratic society. Legislation should be passed by the parliament that specifically addresses this issue in order to penalize or punish fake or fabricated news and discourage its spread. Because the law can be used as a tool for social engineering, it can be very effective in reducing the spread of unverified and fake news. The legislation must provide strict accountability for anyone who creates, disseminates, or forwards false or unverified news in order to deter those who negligently or recklessly spread any information. The right to free speech and expression does not include the ability to spread false information in an unsafe way. Freedom of speech and expression prohibits the dissemination of unverified news because it can lead to rumors, public unrest, and discontentment, all of which can be harmful to society and the nation. As a result, legislation is urgently needed to prevent and control the spread of false information.

The practise of using false information to achieve a specific goal is not new; for example, the Pakistani Army used false reports that they had invaded and taken control of Mogadishu during the war of 1971 to demoralise their troops by broadcasting them on their Pakistani Radio Network. There is always a real concern that hostile nations could utilise social media as a tactic of psychological warfare.

According to a study by the Oxford Institute of Internet, corporations, political organizations, and political parties use this false information on a large scale for their own gain and for certain reasons. There was a 15% increase in the activities of social media manipulation by various nations in 2019. Misinformation has been included into their common approach, which has climbed to 93%, and political parties are now using it in their political communications.⁵

There is no law to address bogus news, There is a lack of particular legislation to address false or fake news in India. The laws pertaining to defamation under the IPC or the tort law are neither adequate nor effective to control the dissemination of fake news and to have a different impact on persons who are engaged in such a company.

During the "silent period" of 48 hours before to the end of voting, the Election Commission of India forbids political parties and electronic media from promoting any one candidate or party. There are no such limitations, guidelines, or regulations on a person's use of social media for political campaigning.

⁵Professor Philip Howard, Oxford Internet Institute, Jan 13 2021, <https://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/news/releases/social-media-manipulation-by-political-actors-now-an-industrial-scale-problem-prevalent-in-over-80-countries-annual-oxford-report/>
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Social media is a useful tool but a terrible master. Social media manipulation of public opinion will undermine democracy as we know it. Through verifiable data, information, and films, the electronic, print, and social media are responsible for influencing public opinion. However, the word "manipulation of the opinion" has drawn criticism for its unfavorable connotations. This is accomplished by transmitting false news, information, and statements that are spoken by the authorities in one context but displayed in another totally.

It is ironic that social media, which was intended to play a key role in enlightening and uniting people, is now being abused as a tool to sway public opinion with misleading or manufactured material and to foment division or hostility among various sects of the populace. Public opinion is a complex phenomena that supports democracy in many different ways. It shows the general preference of the populace on issues of politics, social issues, and economic issues. 'Democracy' refers to a system of government that is run by, for, and on behalf of the people. The phrase "of the people" in this context denotes the importance of the public's voice in determining how the government will be run "for the people." Article 19(1)(a) of the Indian Constitution defines everyone's access to the freedoms of speech and expression as a basic right. People have the fundamental right to express their opinions and so participate in the decision-making process. However, this freedom to express one's opinions is not unrestricted and is subject to the restrictions set forth in the aforementioned clause. According to a study by the Oxford Internet Institute, there has been a 150% increase in the number of countries using social media to begin campaigns to sway public opinion using data and algorithms by different governments around the world in the previous two years.⁶

There were numerous messages during the Covid-19 epidemic concerning the illness, its treatment, its cause, and ways to stop the virus's spread. These statements might have racial or religious repercussions.⁷

According to the University of Oxford Computational Data Research Project, there have been numerous instances of organised political parties and governments using social media to spread false information or disinformation in an effort to sway the opinions of the general public. It was argued that there is abundant evidence to show that social media is being used to sway public opinion, voters' choices, and everyday citizens, eroding democracy and degrading public life. In other nations, like Brazil, professional trolls and bots (a computer programme) have been used frequently and aggressively

⁶ ibid

⁷ Murli Krishna, The Hindustan Times, May 31 2020, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/mindless-forwarding-of-whatsapp-texts-leading-to-fake-news-menace-says-sc-judge-justice-sanjay-kishan-kaul/story-3UGy2Z14ynZnbT0wy1QE3I.html>.

to drown out minority and defending opinions during the presidential campaign. other nations use highly automated accounts that deliberately shape internet discourses.⁸

The media is an effective tool for shaping or influencing public opinion. Prior to the invention of the internet, print media and electronic media had some responsibility for the veracity of their contents because the source of such news could be easily identified and held accountable in the event of fake news. However, in the current social media environment, it is very difficult to identify the source of any information and we are unable to confirm the veracity of the news or information shared on social media. The target audience for such news is the average person, who is encouraged to read it, form opinions about it, and cause the desired side effect for the news's creator.

CONCLUSION:

In order to preserve a democratic system and maintain peace and order in a nation, it is imperative that appropriate rules be made to govern messages that spread misinformation. Sending information via social media has become a way of life. In order to raise user understanding of the difference between fact and fake news on social media, mandatory courses must also be introduced at the school level. Universities, educational institutions, and government agencies should cooperate to address this issue.

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⁸Samantha Bradshaw, Oxford Internet Research Institute, University of Oxford, Oct, 2018 <https://demtech.oii.ox.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/93/2018/07/ct2018.pdf>

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