**Information Disorder**

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Information disorder is a wider explanation of fake news because researchers believe that deceit, lies, conspiracy theories, deliberate assertions, unintentional and intentional involvement of individuals and response by the state do not cover it all in the word “fake news.” It needed a phrase, which could cover a wider scope of information irregularity and “information disorder” to fulfil that requirement. Information is as old as human history, but its abstract use came into play 5000 years ago. It started with symbols and pictures on stone pieces and leather parts and took another 4000 years before it evolved into the next level of abstract reality. In the city of Lyon, France, Joseph Jacquard invented punching cards in the early nineteenth century that enabled unskilled workers to weave complex patterns in silk. This was the first major representation of human ideas into a meaningful abstract reality.

In the recent past, we have witnessed chaos more often than in the distant past and it is because of vertical and horizontal manipulation of information through an organized infrastructure by states like India against adversaries to create unrest among the public. It is a new kind of war, which can be termed a globe-spanning information conflict, fought by hundreds of millions of people across dozens of social media platforms. It is not only political battles but insurgencies, conflicts, human rights, marketing and branding being managed through digital platforms.

In the evolution of information, the telegraph was the first long distant communication, which was invented by Samuel Morse in the early 19th century to transfer information quickly through electric wires. It was a coded system, but it efficiently served the purpose of conveying information quickly.

Alan Turing was the first person who harnessed abstract symbols in 1940 by inventing “bits” which are being used today in computers in an advanced form called “algorithms.”

The last twenty years have witnessed revolutionary development in digital technology which has converted billions of billions of bits into useful data which is being used worldwide in the whole range of operations for global development and management of societies. Social media platforms like Youtube, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Zoom are an extension of the same development. These platforms are the biggest source of information sharing and social networking.

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Our political environment is highly charged for the last couple of years. Political news remains a dominant discourse in Pakistan. Various political stakeholders are 24/7 busy in political expediencies and their social media teams try through social media platforms to dominate the narrative. In any intense situation, the information cloud becomes so dense in a flash of time that it is difficult to make sense of anything.

Deliberate use of fabricated information is termed ‘disinformation’. The unintentional proliferation of fabricated news has been called ‘misinformation’. ‘Mal-information’ is correct information but only used when intended to harm an adversary. The mix of dis, mis and mal-information is called information disorder.

Actors use various techniques to inflict harm, for political advantages and for earning money. Disinformation is the most harmful way of achieving end objectives. Fabricated news is floated on any social media platform through unknown sources, which is proliferated by troll farms. Factious hashtags (#) are made to malign individuals, organisations and political opponents. Local television reported a few days ago that during the last two months 4.86 million tweets originated for twenty-one hashtags against the military and seven were exclusively against the military leadership of Pakistan. Similarly, social media trolls from Afghanistan and India join the bandwagon and fuel poison in society. It has resulted in a dangerous polarization of the whole society. This unrest is indirectly a big hazard to the development of the country.

On August 3, a military helicopter crashed near Lasbella, Balochistan. All passengers onboard embraced shahadat including Corps Commander Quetta and another Maj General. An embarrassing flow of tweets was witnessed on social media. Meanwhile, news appeared that Aimun Zawahri was killed in Afghanistan and news of a helicopter crash was linked with a drone strike through a fabricated tweet attributed to an embassy of a foreign country in Islamabad.

There are numerous examples of misuse of digital platforms by states, political parties and business rivals. In the 2016 US Presidential elections, the use of an email by Russia made a decisive turn for the win of President Trump. Indian Chronicles were exposed by EU Disinfo Lab in Brussels in 2020. It was a state-sponsored propaganda network established across the globe by India against states not in conformation with Indian policies. The network of fake websites, NGOs, and news agencies has been operating since 2005 and it continues. Indian chronicles have been termed the biggest promoter of organised fake news in the world.

Algorithms are a new language. Data mining and analytics set the tone of business and markets. Digital World has empowered citizens beyond imagination. Working from home is a new norm. Earning through freelancing has enhanced the opportunities for youth. New ways of using digital technology are being introduced every day. Online shopping, food delivery, ticketing, and booking has eased human in multifarious ways. Millions of rupees transactions are being made through a single click on your mobile phone. Digital development is benefitting humanity beyond imagination. But it has also armed the countries and societies to influence the public mind for their vested interests. Yuval Noah Harari in his book 21 lessons for the 21st century has predicted the highly dangerous outcome of artificial intelligence and advances in biotech, which will overpower the human mind in the coming decades. This development to overpower the human mind does not align with political and social realities.

Twitter is the most effective and quickest way to inform and comment. It is also the quickest way to proliferate disinformation and misinformation. A retweet is the biggest example of misinformation. The orthodox political slogans like “Roti Kapra or Makan” have been overtaken by digital hashtags #ImportedHakumatNamanzoor, #votekoizzatdo, #merepasstumho #Danishmargaya. These hashtags are like football matches. The more you score, the earlier you win.

Disinformation, misinformation and mal-information are reaching over 14 million users in the country including officials, it is surely an indication of the evolution of a dangerous information environment. It has been calculated that an average Pakistani spends 6-10 hours daily on the internet. This is a big ratio. This haze in the environment due to information disorder is detrimental to national security. It directly affects the political, economic, social and military security of a country.

For the betterment of the country, the culture of disinformation, misinformation and mal-information needs to be handled through a well-thought-out strategy and the best way is to strengthen the mainstream media.

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