**The art of deception**

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Fake news has become a pervasive and dangerous problem in Pakistan, with the widespread dissemination of false information on social media platforms and other channels of information. The increasing spread of fake news in Pakistan is not just a nuisance, but a serious threat to public safety, political stability, and social cohesion. Even external enemies have jumped on the bandwagon and are utilizing disinformation as a tool against Pakistan. The rise of fake news in Pakistan became apparent during the Covid-19 pandemic. Fake news regarding the pandemic’s origin, government policies to combat it, and especially its cure, spread like wildfire across online platforms. A particularly damaging example of this phenomenon is that during the pandemic, WhatsApp groups were aflame with messages proclaiming that the leaves of the senna plant acted as a panacea for the virus.

One of the biggest challenges in combating fake news is that it is often deliberately spread by individuals and groups with a vested interest in manipulating public opinion. This can be seen in the way that political parties and extremist groups use social media to promote their agendas and spread misinformation about their opponents. In addition, fake news often plays on peoples’ fears and prejudices, which can make it more difficult to correct the record and convince people to accept the truth. In this scenario, it becomes necessary to set the record straight and keep the spread of disinformation to a minimum. According to Internet World Stats estimates, 49.8 percent of people in Pakistan have access to the Internet, with 23.9 percent of the population being users of Facebook. This illustrates that a large segment of the population has online connectivity and is thus vulnerable to disinformation.

[Four rescue workers die due to collapse of factory building](https://www.nation.com.pk/13-Apr-2023/four-rescue-workers-die-due-to-collapse-of-factory-building)

The consequences of fake news can be severe, particularly in a country like Pakistan, where sectarian tensions and political violence are already major concerns. False information about sectarian and religious issues can inflame tensions and lead to violence, while misinformation about elections can undermine the legitimacy of the democratic process. Moreover, the spread of fake news can erode trust in public institutions and create a sense of cynicism and despair among the population. To combat this growing problem, the government and civil society organizations must take a multi-faceted approach. One key strategy is to educate the public about the dangers of fake news and teach critical thinking skills that can help people evaluate the veracity of the information they encounter online. This could involve campaigns to promote media literacy and the responsible use of social media.

Another important step is to enforce existing laws and regulations that prohibit the spread of false information. Pakistan’s primary law against disinformation is the Pakistan Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), which criminalizes cyberstalking, hate speech and the spreading of false information. However, critics argue that rather than enforcing the law in its spirit, the government utilizes it to target political opponents. It is the need of the hour that our leadership fully implements this law in a nonpartisan manner. At the same time, efforts should be made to promote transparency and accountability in public institutions, to counteract the sense of mistrust and cynicism that can make people more susceptible to fake news. This could include measures to increase access to information and strengthen the independence of the media. The increasing spread of fake news in the country is a grave threat to the very existence of Pakistan. It is up to all of us—individuals, civil society, and the government—to take action to combat this problem and protect the functional integrity of society. We must work together to promote transparency, accountability, and critical thinking, and to uphold the values of truth and justice that are essential for a healthy democracy.