

“UNVEILING THE EPIDEMIC OF FAKE NEWS IN PAKISTAN: A FRAMING THEORY ANALYSIS USING SKETCH ENGINE AND VOYANT TOOLS”

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Abstract

Fake news has emerged as a widespread concern in Pakistan, affecting opinions of public, driving political clashes, and increasing propaganda on fundamental topics that range from healthcare to social issues. This article focuses on various samples of fake news that are collected from different social media platforms and search engines, emphasizing on how the misinformation is created and its impacts on Pakistani society. With the help of two different tools i.e. Sketch Engine and Voyant Tool, the paper identifies the most common themes, different strategies and tactics that are used in the fake news. The results highlight the need for fact-checking and various media literacy startups to fight the spread of misinformation.

Keywords: Fake news, Social media, Sketch Engine, Voyant Tool, Misinformation, Pakistani Society¹.

Introduction:

Misinformation is not a new trend; it is more than one hundred years old but has evolved to become one of the significant global issues of today with the social media platforms emerging (Malik, Bashir, & Mehmood, 2023). In any case, one can trace a much earlier inception of the expression "fake news" in broader spheres of society early in 2016 when an ex-President of the United States employed it towards his political aim to denounce unfavorable media releases and alter popular opinion (Jahangir, 2020). Scientific studies have indicated repeatedly that lower-income nations or poor citizens suffer more than other groups from false information (Ali et al., 2020).

Social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp have emerged as powerful instruments for spreading misinformation in Pakistan. False information tends to be more believable as it resurfaces supporting popular narratives or because it is aligned with widely recognized public figures, making it seem real (Jahangir, 2020). The impact of such fake news can be extreme as it manipulates public opinion, creates a polarization climate in the political world, and provokes social unrest.

This paper explores the phenomenon of fake news in Pakistan through selected case studies, especially the techniques employed in formulating and disseminating misinformation. Advanced linguistic tools like Sketch Engine and Voyant Tools can be utilised to analyse framing strategies deeply embedded within narratives of fake news. It uses framing theory to reveal how language has been used for perception manipulation and cognitive bias exploitation in creating believable and ubiquitous fake news. In doing so, this research raises an urgent concern about the development of critical literacy and effective countermeasures against the mushrooming epidemic of misinformation in Pakistan.

2. Research Questions:

This study aims to address the following key research questions:

- Which themes and topics are most commonly targeted by fake news in Pakistan and what are its impacts on Pakistani society?
- How do fake news stories utilize linguistic and rhetorical strategies to gain traction on social media platforms?

3. Objectives:

The main objectives of this study are:

- To identify and categorize the most prevalent themes and narratives within fake news content in Pakistan and assess impacts of misinformation on Pakistani society.
- To analyze the linguistic and rhetorical patterns that make fake news stories effective in influencing public opinion.

4. Literature Review:

The phenomenon of fake news has been studied extensively in different contexts, especially in the last few years with the proliferation of digital and social media into the heart of news consumption. According to Allcott and Gentzkow (2017), fake news is described as the willful spreading of false information, typically for political, economic, or ideological purposes. This is also consistent with findings in Pakistan, where fake news frequently aims to influence political sentiment and incite social unrest.

According to Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), three types of misinformation have been identified: misinformation, disinformation, and misinformation, each with its own motivations and effects. This framework is helpful in understanding the diverse forms of fake news seen in Pakistan, including fabricated health scares or manipulated political stories, which may vary in their intent but often share similar methods of dissemination.

Studies focusing on the impact of fake news in developing countries (Ahmad & Sheikh, 2020) highlight the role of digital illiteracy and lack of regulatory oversight in amplifying the spread of misinformation. In Pakistan, low levels of media literacy, coupled with the rapid spread of unverified information on platforms like WhatsApp, create an environment where fake news can flourish unchecked. This environment, according to Saeed (2019), makes the population prone to politically charged or sensational narratives that they are prone to escalate into real-world consequences such as protests or violence.

With regards to tools for detecting and analyzing fake news, researchers like DiFranzo and Gloria-Garcia (2020) note the effectiveness of textual analysis software like Voyant Tool and Sketch Engine. These tools help determine patterns, common linguistic markers, and recurring themes in fake news content to help develop strategies against misinformation.

Earlier research studies conducted in Pakistan, for example, Ali & Naseer (2021), utilized computational tools to map the linguistic and thematic elements of disinformation. Such research found that political topics were the most frequently targeted followed by social and health-related issues. The results are a great foundational understanding for this study that takes it one step further and uses Voyant Tool and Sketch Engine to apply these to a newer and more holistic set of examples of fake news.

5. Theoretical Framework:

This study makes use of the framework theory presented by Erving Goffman in 1974 to see how information can be framed and hence influence audience's perception, attitude, and response. This powerful tool of communication emphasizes some elements of a story and suppresses others, therefore leading to how the interpretation and responses are made regarding that information. The theory underlines the fact that information presentation is never a neutral event but rather an event designed to

provoke certain perceptions and emotions. It becomes even more relevant in the world of social media, where posts are short and competitions for attention generate headlines or text in emotionally charged language and spectacular visuals aimed to maximize engagement.

Framing Theory has offered a very crucial lens with which to see the dynamics of fake news in a Pakistani context, especially considering how public opinion and even behavior can change with such misleading information. Now, with respect to social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp, the arenas are open for strategically framing fake news for emotional purposes. For example, the language used is often emotive, using words that evoke fear, outrage, or sympathy, in order to create a sense of urgency or moral alignment. Dramatic visuals, such as manipulated images or staged videos, are used to give it credibility and visceral reactions. These elements are deliberately curated to align with cultural narratives, political ideologies, or societal biases, which makes the fake news resonate more strongly with the target audience.

Polarizing language is also employed to create further divisions in society in the framing of fake news. The victim versus oppressor is also a method employed to further create divisions. Such manipulation does not only change public opinion but also creates the mentality of "us versus them" in the context of social and political unrest. For example, political fake news frames may take issues such as so-called corruption scandals or controversies to negatively frame opponents while the followers are portrayed as champions of justice and reform. On the other hand, health-related misinformation regarding exaggerated claims on the efficacy or dangers of vaccines is spread rapidly among communities with previous doubts or mistrust through the use of frames that are emotion-provoking and fear-stimulating. The present study based on the framework of framing research uncovers a story about framing fake news discourse in Pakistan. The present paper makes use of advanced text-analysis techniques with help from Sketch Engine and Voyant Tools to surface the word patterns, collocates, and semantic associations with respect to false news. The tools help identify how emotional framing - fear, hope, or anger - is pervasive and how particular narratives are calibrated to fit existing biases or beliefs.

This study is aimed at unearthing not only the structural elements of these frames but also their impact on society. Framing Theory unveils how fake news distorts perceptions, shifts political discourse, and amplifies social divides. Understanding such framing strategies is thus an objective of this study to contribute to the development of media literacy programs and policy interventions to mitigate the spread of misinformation. This framework emphasizes the importance of critical engagement with digital content and underlines the role of media education in empowering individuals to resist manipulation through framed narratives.

6. Recurring Themes in Pakistani Fake News:

Through a close reading of the narratives above, some general themes and patterns recur in the instances of fake news in Pakistan. These tend to be strategic for exploiting societal vulnerabilities and influencing opinion. Such themes typically are deployed to achieve political, social, or cultural agendas, often invoking emotions to gain momentum for faster transmission.

1. Political Manipulation and Propaganda:

The bulk of Pakistani fake news stories falls under a broad rubric that relates political narratives to attack enemies or buttress friends. For example, false reports of violent clashes between security forces and political factions in Karachi are spread to create fear and an impression of instability. Similar to this, doctored pictures and out-of-context videos regarding exaggerated support or opposition for a political figure like Imran Khan, are also popularly used in order to create influence over political discourse. In this way, such tactics go a long way in creating and driving polarization with public opinion behind certain political interests.

2. Health Misinformation:

Health crises are one of the hotbeds for fake news in Pakistan. False claims, which may include false claims of transmitting HIV through fruits or scandals relating to vaccines, lead to widespread panics and misleading information. One example is overblown and exaggerated rumors in relation to DPT vaccines: this has made the public doubtful and even had diplomatic disputes where the Chinese government responded to a claim about malfunctioning vaccines. Such narratives exploit the public's limited access to verified health information, amplifying fear and undermining trust in medical authorities.

3. Cultural and Social Misinformation:

This also deals with cultural and social themes, which include emotional stories to attract people. Fake reports about the death of the daughter of cricketer Shahid Afridi or wrong reports regarding celebrities like Hania Amir are presented in a manner that provokes sympathy and anger. Most fake news deals with social issues. For example, it may invent stories of gun attacks in Karachi or attack polio vaccination teams. These 'narratives' exploit societal tensions and prejudices, further deteriorating divisions and undermining real issues.

4. Misinformation Tactics and Strategies:

Fake news in Pakistan is spread through cunning tactics and strategies that affect the maximum number with wide circulation. These exploit technology, emotional triggers, and societal biases to create impressive yet false narratives. This further spreads false news disseminated in Pakistan through AI and manipulated media. Advanced technologies, including AI-generated images and deep fake videos, have become critical tools for the production of fake news. Manipulations are used in the production of real-looking visuals, as in edited pictures of PTI demonstrations or spliced political figures' videos, making it difficult to discern between real and fake content. These are very effective methods for winning people's trust and spreading false news fast.

5. Hyperbole and Sensationalism:

For example, fake news uses sensationalist headlines and over-the-top claims to evoke extreme emotions. Stories such as an alleged "civil war" in Karachi or fake encounters by gunmen with civilians are spun for fear, anger, or sympathy, and when these emotions burn within readers, there is a rush to share the news without verifying it. The dramatic tone and urgency create viral sensations.

6. Appeals to Authority and Misleading Attribution:

Another tactic is false attribution of fabricated news pieces to credible sources, including newspapers like Dawn. An example of such a manipulation could be an invented report blaming floods on religious neglect, ascribed to Dawn to lend credibility to its claims. Misinformation using authoritative figures or organizations increases its ability to deceive.

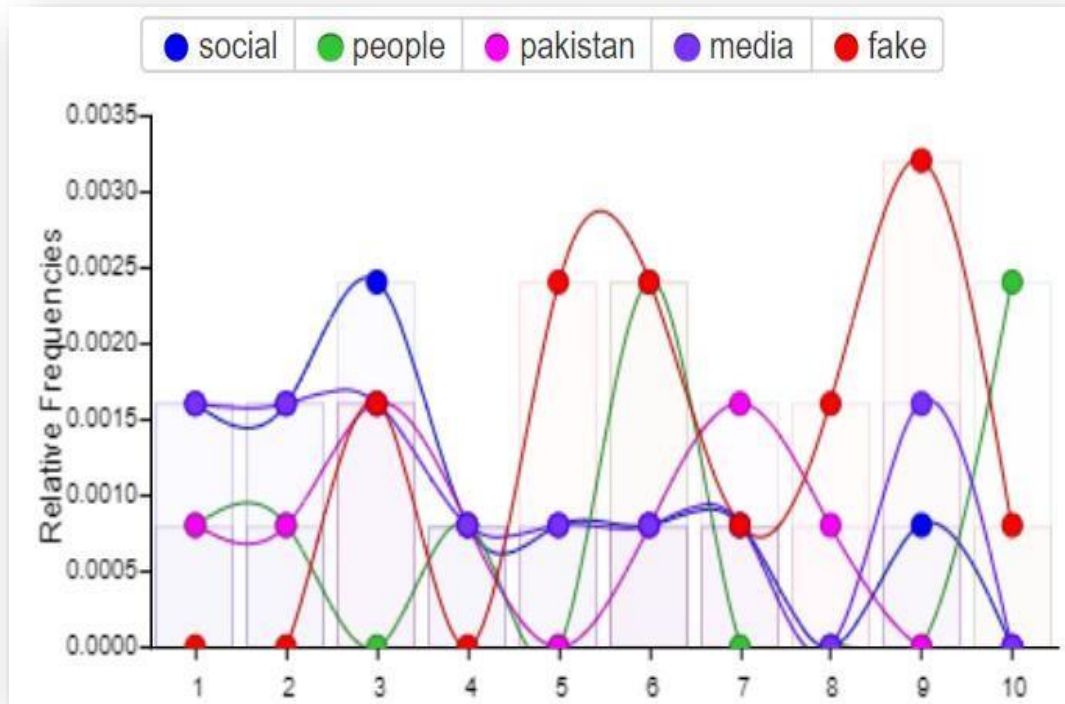
This section reveals the planned and strategic attempts at spreading false information in Pakistan. By understanding these themes and strategies, this study aims to contribute to furthering knowledge of how misinformation is constructed and dispersed and to a greater awareness of its societal impacts.

7. Analysis:

By using two Corpus analysis tools Voyant Tool and Sketch Engine the data collected was analyzed to understand the purpose and use of the fake news by delving deep into it. One of the main tasks when looking into the false news is to categorize it (Jahangir, 2020). The tools used provided a very prolonged analysis of the different linguistics strategies, the major themes and common strategies used for spreading false news in Pakistan.

- **Voyant Tool Analysis:**

- **Sentiment Analysis:** Different types of negative sentiments and emotions were prevailed



in the stories and that were related to any type of violence or conflict. The tool showed that how the false news is crafted to increase the anger or fear, using different types of emotions, sentiments that increases their chances of being shared.

- **Thematic Clustering:** The Voyant tool made a cluster of the stories with common themes such as Voyant Tool grouped stories around common topics such as fake, news, media people etc. This grouping assisted to find out different patterns representing the sources



of the fake news that often focuses on the divisive topics.

• **Sketch Engine Analysis:**

- **Rhetorical Devices:** It was analyzed that most of the fake news stories often used rhetorical queries and the hyperbolic declarations to amplify the things. Expressions like

Term	Term
1 fake news ...	11 social media post ...
2 glass train ...	12 media post ...
3 glass train project ...	13 account of khyber ...
4 vaccine scandal ...	14 gunmen opening fire ...
5 sindh police ...	15 check bust ...
6 pakistani team ...	16 ashiana housing scam ...
7 fake image ...	17 huge slogan ...
8 train project ...	18 gunmen open ...
9 pak army ...	19 external land attack ...
10 devastating flood ...	20 fake degree scandal ...

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"huge slogan" and "devastative flood" were used in the news to increase the impact of mundane incidents.

Term	Term	Term
1 fake news ...	18 general election in pakistan ...	35 massive outrage on social media ...
2 glass train project ...	19 custody of a superintendent ...	36 ali amin gandapur ...
3 glass train ...	20 attributing devastating flood ...	37 fact check busting popular myth ...
4 vaccine scandal ...	21 concering new medical college ...	38 azam test ...
5 sindh police ...	22 adam gilchirst ...	39 first external land ...
6 pakistani team ...	23 allegation on the pakistani team ...	40 azam test retirement ...
7 fake image ...	24 local polio ...	41 correct number of information ...
8 train project ...	25 khyber paktonkha ...	42 azam test retirement announcement ...
9 pak army ...	26 heavy handed power ...	43 media rubbish ...
10 devastating flood ...	27 fake propaganda piece ...	44 fake vedio ...
11 social media post ...	28 aim of killing millions ...	45 false qouta ...
12 media post ...	29 caught drinking human blood ...	46 crossed moral line ...
13 account of khyber ...	30 acquried such degree ...	47 first external land attack ...
14 given threatening email ...	31 handed power grab ...	48 local polio vaccination team ...
15 dpt vaccine scandal ...	32 ali amin ...	49 industrial growth claim ...

- **Modality and Authority Phrasing:** The analysis revealed that fake news frequently used modal verbs like must and should and different types of authoritative phrasing (eg. Citing fake government or famous personalities) like Ali Amin Gandapur, Babar Azam, and Shahid Afridi to increase the validity and credibility. Different stories frequently use international references that forces the reader to accept the news.

- **Discourse Structures:** This analysis tool figured out that the fake news is bombarded with



many news stories that have familiar structure i.e. quick action, an alarming headline, or emotional appeal. This increases the public engagement especially on social media, where mostly users often react without verification of the news.

8. Discussion:

- **Impact on society due to fake news:**

The fake news has emerged to become a problem of the day. The researchers and the government have tried to figure out its implications over public opinion as well as behavioral change in societies (Khan et al., 2023). During the course of this research, the author has found that the implications of fake news are at immense levels against societal stability and public trust besides their well-being in Pakistan especially through social media platforms. It does not single out a specific area but affects the political, social, and health sectors, making it hard to manage.

- **Political Polarization:**

Most importantly, fake news increases political polarizations especially during sensitive time, like elections. Wrong pieces of information, in this case fake allegations against politicians like Javed Latif opposing the current set of politicians handling the affairs for the 2024 general election alter opinion and reignite fiercer political rivalries (Ahmed et al., 2022). These tricks are eroding democratic institutions and nurturing electoral mistrust through a polarizing society. Such false information manipulates the public psyche in spreading sensational stories about politicians or events and gives rise to antagonism and suspicion.

- **Health Risk and Public Suspicions:**

Health-related fake news poses a significant risk to public well-being. The most common misinformation includes rumors that associate HIV with the consumption of fruits and false claims about the DPT vaccine as a dangerous product (Khan et al., 2023). Such narratives have a tendency to destroy trust in health care institutions and professionals, which complicates the process of implementing public health initiatives. For example, fake news-driven vaccine hesitancy has derailed immunization campaigns, exposing vulnerable populations to preventable diseases. A

more general implication is a decline in overall public health and a reduced ability to respond and recover from crisis situations.

- **Social Insecurity:**

Spreading misinformation that there are shootings or attacks triggers more anxiety and insecurity. A report about men armed to the teeth killing people or fabricated news of riots creates immediate actual world impacts in terms of lynching, hysteria, and the breakdown of the relationship between law and citizens (Malik et al., 2021). These stories tap into societal tensions, making unrest worse and further eroding social cohesion. In extreme cases, they lead to retaliatory actions or vigilantism, which further destabilizes communities and challenges the authority of state institutions.

- **Youth Vulnerability:**

Fake news impacts the youth most because they are very active on social media and lack critical media literacy to distinguish fact from fiction (Khan et al., 2023). False information exposure impacts their vision world: This affects how they see the political, cultural, and social worlds. This population of people is more vulnerable and digital active. Disinformation campaigns focus on such demographics to sway their decisions, hence getting manipulation done on their minds and making them cynical about institutions.

- **Erosion of public trust:**

At a macro level, fake news undermines the very fabric of people's trust in media, the government, or other institutions. People become repeatedly exposed to competing or false stories and begin doubting any kind of information they receive, no matter how correct it might actually be (Ali et al., 2020). Such diminution of trust weakens these societal frameworks that make collective problem-solving even tougher.

9. Recommendations for Tackling Fake News in Pakistan:

To curb the rise of fake news in Pakistan, it is crucial to implement several key strategies:

- **Media Literacy Programs:** Educating the public about recognizing fake news and verifying information sources is vital. Programs should focus on critical thinking skills and the responsible use of social media.
- **Collaboration with Fact-Checking Organizations:** Partnerships between tech companies, media organizations, and fact-checkers can help debunk fake news more quickly and efficiently, reducing its spread.
- **Regulatory Measures:** The government could consider regulations that hold individuals or groups accountable for knowingly spreading disinformation, while ensuring that such measures do not infringe on freedom of speech.

10. Conclusion:

The proliferation of fake news in Pakistan puts political stability, public health, and social cohesion under challenge in general. The influence is now reaching more people because social media has made it easier for information to spread quickly among the masses, causing bigger social disturbances. The consequential effects of fake news include the inability to rely on institutions, the intensification of politically polarized attitudes, and misguidance of public opinion with resultant social unrest. Understanding the scale and strategy of disinformation development and dispersion is important in the solution of challenges to such a country.

The most powerful tool to conquer fake news lies within its critical analysis. Advanced tools such as Voyant Tool and Sketch Engine offer deep insights into the linguistic and structural patterns of fake news. Voyant Tool enables the detection of word frequency patterns, sentiment analyses, and explores contexts that let the researcher get insight into language manipulation for stirring emotional responses within readers, thus arousing reactions like fear or sympathy or simply provoking someone. This further

brings fake news narratives into human eyesight-when such narrations are further scrutinized about disinformation strategically being framed towards the reader or user. In a similar manner, Sketch Engine allows the recognition of linguistic patterns, collocations, and semantic structures applied to create false narratives. With their analysis, one can follow the techniques and means used for spreading false news and understand how this phenomenon influences the various layers of society.

Dealing with the problem of false news demands an integrated approach. One key aspect is public education, which empowers individuals with the tools to critically evaluate information. Media literacy campaigns should be prioritized to educate the public—especially younger generations—about the dangers of fake news and the importance of verifying information before accepting it as truth. Teaching people not to believe the sensational headlines, but to check the sources and cross-reference news on different media would help reduce the spread of misinformation. In fact, incorporating media literacy into school curriculums would make sure that the next generations grow up with critical thinking skills for navigating the digital world safely and intelligently.

Alongside public education, the government must take the central role of controlling and regulating the spread of disinformation. It has to strengthen laws and regulations that put the creators and spreaders of fake news behind bars. Social media sites, who are the most prime movers of disinformation, have to be responsible for the content being placed on their websites. Governments and tech companies must collaborate and design more powerful systems that identify manipulated media, such as AI-generated pictures and deepfake videos. These should flag the false information before it spreads widely to be corrected. Governments must initiate transparency measures about political advertisements and sponsored content where public opinion is not allowed to be manipulated especially for sensitive political events like elections.

However, arresting the diffusion of misinformation and its makers should not depend merely on governmental intervention. Old and new media organizations are very influential actors in the said concern. This would necessitate campaigning to rebuild ethical journalistic standards of inquiry, fact-finders, and responsible sources on reports in building people's confidence back again. The media and journalists should be trained to identify and uncover fake news, and editorial standards of media houses need to be tightened up so that they deliver correct information. One way the media can fight this tide of misinformation is by supporting independent, fact-based journalism.

In the same vein, the fight against fake news should be multi-stakeholder in nature, with the government, civil society, educational institutions, media organizations, and technology companies all coming together to craft integrated strategies targeting the causes and consequences of disinformation. Research and policy collaboration with the establishment of independent fact-checking bodies will ensure a common approach to combating fake news and its impact on society. International cooperation can also be helpful in combating cross-border disinformation campaigns, which amplify the reach and influence of fake news.

The effect of not appropriately identifying the problem of fake news is dire. Some of the results drawn include political instability, social unrest, public health crises, and broken trust in the institution itself, which are a few of the dire consequences arising from the unregulated spreading of false information. For instance, fake health-related news might cause panic within the public about health issues; for example, spreading false rumors about vaccines is a clear-cut example. Healthcare control of health crises is negatively impacted by this behavior. Political fake news divides and fosters intolerance, creating room for its effect in undermining democratic action through manipulated voting behavior and skewed public opinion.

Pakistan needs to fight against false news for maintaining the stability and integrity of society. Advanced analytic tools like Voyant Tool, Sketch Engine besides public education, regulatory steps, and

reformation in the media will allow building an informative and resilient society. The fight against disinformation is not only about stopping the spread of false news but also about protecting democratic values, public health, and social trust. Coordinated multi-stakeholder action will enable Pakistan to minimize the damage of fake news and lead a society more adept at facing the challenges of the digital age.

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