MS Thesis

MOTIVES BEHIND THE SPREAD OF FAKE NEWS ON SOCIAL MEDIA: EXPLORING THE USERS' PERSPECTIVE

Researcher

Zaid Hussain

507-FSS/MSMC/F21

Supervisor

Dr. Syed Inam ur Rehman

DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERISTY ISLAMABAD PAKISTAN

(April 2025)

International Islamic University Islamabad
Faculty of Social Sciences
Department of Media and Communication Studies

Dated:__/__/____

CERTIFICATE

It is certified that we have read this thesis entitled "Motives Behind the Spread of Fake News on Social Media: Exploring the Users' Perspective" submitted by Zaid Hussain (507-FSS/MSMC/F-21). It is our judgement that this thesis is of sufficient standard to warrantee acceptance by the International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan for the award of MS Degree in Media and Communication Studies.

COMMITTEE

Supervisor
Dr. Syed Inam ur Rehman   …………………………………
Assistant Professor DMCS, IIUI

Internal Examiner
Dr. Muhammad Tariq Awan   …………………………………
Lecturer DMCS, IIUI

External Examiner
Dr. Shabir Hussain   …………………………………
Professor DMCS, Bahria University Islamabad.

Dr. Rooh ul Amin Khan   …………….....…………………
Chairman DMCS

Dr. Manzoor Khan Afridi   …..…………………………….
Dean FSS

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم
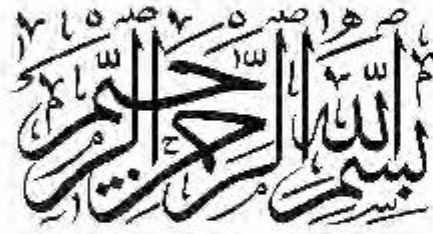
In the name of ALLAH, the most merciful and beneficent

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis, neither as a -whole nor as a part thereof, has been copied out from any source. It is further declared that I have prepared this thesis entirely on the basis of my personal effort made under the sincere guidance of my supervisor and colleagues. No portion of work presented in this thesis has been submitted in support of any application for any degree or qualification of this or any other university or institute of learning.

<div align="right">

Zaid Hussain
507-FSS/MSMC/F-21

</div>

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, my wife and sisters and also my mentor whose support has enabled me to complete this research study successfully.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF APPENDICES

ABSTRACT

In the digital age, the rapid rise of social media platforms has significantly altered the way individuals consume and share news. However, alongside the benefits of instant connectivity and information access, social media has also facilitated the unchecked spread of fake news. In a culturally and politically sensitive country like Pakistan, this phenomenon can have serious consequences, from promoting misinformation to inciting social unrest. University students, as active users of social media, play a critical role in the creation and dissemination of online content, including unverified information. Despite their educational exposure, many students still engage in fake news sharing, often influenced by personal, ideological, or social motivations. This study aims to examine the psychological and social factors that contribute to fake news sharing behavior among university students in Islamabad. Specifically, it investigates the influence of five independent variables namely religiosity, altruism, political biasness, trust in media, and socialization on the dependent variable: fake news sharing behavior. The research is grounded in Affordance Theory, which explains how the features of social media platforms enable and shape user behavior. A quantitative methodology was employed using an online survey, with data collected from 135 university students. The responses were analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS SEM modeling. The findings revealed that religiosity was the most significant and dominant factor influencing fake news sharing, followed by trust in media. Political biasness showed marginal significance, while altruism and socialization were not statistically significant. Based on these results, the study recommends the development of targeted digital media literacy programs, particularly those that address belief-driven motivations and promote critical content evaluation. The research contributes to understanding misinformation behavior in the Pakistani context and offers valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and digital platform stakeholders aiming to combat the spread of fake news.

Keywords: Fake news, social media, misinformation, false information, news sharing behavior

CHAPTER – 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses a brief introduction to this study. First, background of the study is discussed in which a case is made against the proliferation of fake news on new media and behaviors related to such activity. Later in this chapter, the problem statement and significance of this study is discussed along with the objectives of the study and research questions and lastly delimitations of the study are discussed at the end of this chapter.

1.1 Background of the Study

The rapid growth of digital technologies and social media platforms has transformed the way people access, consume, and share information. In today's interconnected world, individuals are no longer passive receivers of news, they are also active producers and sharers of content, particularly through platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and Instagram. While this digital empowerment has made communication more democratic, it has also opened the door to one of the most pressing challenges of our time: the spread of fake news. Fake news—deliberately misleading or false information presented as legitimate news is not a new phenomenon. However, its scale, speed, and impact have multiplied with the rise of social media (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). In countries like Pakistan, where social media use is increasing rapidly among the youth, the consequences of spreading fake news can be even more significant due to the political, religious, and cultural sensitivity of the population (Rehman & Hussain, 2020).

Social media platforms, while useful for rapid communication, often lack effective fact-checking and moderation mechanisms, making them fertile ground for misinformation to spread unchecked (Tandoc et al., 2018). A major concern is that users frequently share content without verifying its accuracy, often influenced by personal emotions, beliefs, or peer pressure (Del Vicario et al., 2016). In many cases, this behavior is not always driven by malicious intent but may be rooted in psychological, social, or ideological motivations (Apuke & Omar, 2020). Several studies have shown that certain personal and psychological factors, such as religiosity, altruism, political bias, trust in media, and socialization, can significantly shape individuals' decisions to share unverified or fake news (Laato et al., 2020; Talwar et al., 2019). For example, people with high religious beliefs may unknowingly share religious content without verifying its authenticity,

believing it to be spiritually beneficial. Similarly, individuals who strongly trust a particular media source might assume all content from that source is credible, reducing their likelihood of checking the information before sharing.

In the Pakistani context, these factors become even more relevant due to the deeply rooted religious sentiments, political divisions, and limited media literacy among youth (Ahmad & Irshad, 2025). University students, who represent a large portion of the online population, are often exposed to high volumes of information daily. Their behavior on social media can play a critical role in either curbing or contributing to the spread of fake news. Moreover, the increasing consumption of news through digital platforms has blurred the lines between professional journalism and user-generated content. This shift has led to a situation where users no longer differentiate clearly between verified news and unverified claims, particularly when the news aligns with their personal or ideological beliefs (Pennycook et al., 2020). The urgency to share breaking news, the desire to help others (altruism), and the influence of peer groups (socialization) all add to the complexity of fake news sharing behavior.

Given this background, it becomes important to study the motivations and factors behind fake news sharing in the local context. While global research has addressed fake news in developed countries, there remains a gap in understanding how such behavior manifests in developing countries like Pakistan, especially among youth populations who are both active on social media and vulnerable to misinformation (Adnan et al., 2022). This research aims to bridge that gap by exploring how university students in Islamabad engage with and contribute to the spread of fake news on social media. It focuses on identifying the personal, psychological, and ideological factors that may influence their behavior. The study specifically investigates five independent variables—religiosity, altruism, trust in media, political biasness, and socialization—to understand how they relate to the dependent variable: fake news sharing behavior. To collect data, a quantitative survey-based method was used, and the data was analyzed using both SPSS and SmartPLS (SEM modeling) to reveal meaningful patterns and relationships. The goal of this research is not only to add to the academic understanding of fake news behavior but also to offer insights that could help in designing effective awareness campaigns and digital literacy programs in universities across Pakistan.

1.2 Problem Statement

In the contemporary digital age, the proliferation of fake news has become a significant challenge, particularly on social media platforms. This issue is aggravated by the rapid spread of misinformation, which can have profound societal impacts. Understanding why people share fake news is crucial for developing effective strategies to combat this phenomenon.

With the rise of social media platforms as primary sources of news and information, the spread of fake news has become a significant global concern. In Pakistan, where digital literacy is still developing and political, religious, and social sensitivities are deeply rooted, the unchecked dissemination of false information can lead to real-world consequences, such as social unrest, public confusion, and health-related panic. University students, as one of the most active segments of social media users, are both consumers and disseminators of online content. Despite their educational background, many engage in sharing unverified information, often without critically assessing its credibility. While global studies have investigated factors such as political ideology, trust in media, and emotional triggers behind fake news sharing, limited research has been conducted within the Pakistani context—particularly among university students. This gap highlights the need to explore the specific psychological, ideological, and social motivations influencing fake news sharing behavior among young social media users in Islamabad. Identifying these factors is crucial for developing effective interventions aimed at curbing misinformation in Pakistani society.

This study will evaluate the factors that influence fake news sharing behavior. By studying these factors, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the motivations behind fake news sharing among Pakistani community, thereby contributing to the development of targeted interventions to mitigate the spread of misinformation.

1.3 Significance of Study

This study holds significant importance for several reasons. This study will contribute to a deeper understanding of the underlying factors that drive individuals to share fake news. By identifying and evaluating these factors, the study will provide insights into the psychological and social motivations behind the dissemination of misinformation.

The study will contribute to enhancing social media literacy by highlighting the importance of mindfulness and critical thinking when consuming and sharing news online. This can lead to the development of educational programs aimed at improving the digital literacy of university students and the wider population. Conducting the study within the Pakistani context adds a unique cultural perspective to the existing body of research on fake news. Cultural factors play a significant role in shaping behaviors and attitudes towards information sharing, and this study will highlight the specific cultural dynamics at play in Pakistan, particularly among university students.

The study will add to the academic discourse on misinformation by providing empirical evidence from a relatively under-researched population. This can spur further research in similar cultural settings and contribute to a more global understanding of fake news propagation. By understanding the factors that contribute to the spread of fake news, communities can be better equipped to resist misinformation. This can enhance community resilience, ensuring that individuals are less susceptible to false information and more capable of making informed decisions. The findings will aid policymakers, educators, and social media platforms in developing targeted interventions and strategies to mitigate the spread of fake news. By understanding specific motivations such as religiosity, political biasness, altruism, and trust in the media, interventions can be more effectively tailored to address these particular drivers.

In a nutshell, this study is significant as it addresses a critical issue in the digital age, providing valuable insights and practical implications for combating the spread of fake news. It not only contributes to academic knowledge but also offers tangible benefits for society, particularly within the Pakistani context.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the possible factors involved in the spread of fake news spread on social media in Pakistan.
2. To study the dominating factor(s) responsible for fake news spread among university students of Islamabad.

1.5 Research Questions

RQ1. How do factors such as altruism, political biasness, religiosity, trust in social media, and socialization contribute to the spread of fake news on social media in Pakistan?

RQ2. Which of these factors (altruism, political biasness, religiosity, trust in social media or socialization) is the most dominant in influencing fake news sharing behavior among university students in Islamabad?

1.6 Delimitations of the Study

1. The study is confined to university students of Islamabad and does not include students from other educational institutes like colleges/schools.
2. The study solely focuses on the university students of Islamabad excluding people of other age groups or other professions who also are news consumers.
3. The research is strictly limited to digital media platforms (social media)

CHAPTER – 2

Literature Review

The previous chapter discussed introduction of the study including the problem statement, objectives and the research questions. In this chapter a detailed review of literature is performed by the author. The literature review in this chapter consists of subsections starting from the overview of 'Fake News' followed by the brief discussion of minor differences between mis - dis and mal-information. After that some of the examples of the well-known fake news were quoted. Subsequently, impact of fake news on the human society is discussed and then some of the Fake News cases in Pakistan are discussed followed by the detailed literature review of factors affecting the fake news behavior. In the end of this chapter "affordance theory" in the subsection theoretical framework of this study is discussed.

2.1 Fake news: An overview

Before diving into the deep world of fake news and its repercussions on the whole world it's pertinent to shed light on the definition of fake news. Scholars have conceptualized fake news in many ways, but with almost the same meaning. McGonagle (2017) described fake news as a deliberately fabricated information that is circulated to misinform and deceive individuals into accepting lies or uncertain verifiable facts. Consistent with this view, Duffy et al. (2019) categorized fake news as any information that mimics legitimate news story but has false and misleading content. Meanwhile Baptista and Gradam (2022) defined fake news as "a type of online disinformation (1), with (2) misleading and/or false statements that may or may not be associated with real events, (3) intentionally created to mislead and/or manipulate a public (4) specific or imagined, (5) through the appearance of a news format with an opportunistic structure (title, image, content) to attract the reader's attention, in order to obtain more clicks and shares and, therefore, greater advertising revenue and/or ideological gain". In this current research, fake news is viewed as untrue information, including myths, rumors, conspiracy theories, hoaxes as well as deceptive or erroneous content intentionally or unintentionally disseminated on social media platforms (Wang et al., 2019. Based on this definition, there is a divergence between the creation and dissemination of fake content on social media platforms. By implication, fake news sharing may be unintentional, but its creation could be highly intentional (Egelhofer and Lecheler, 2019). This

view is related to the issue of COVID-19, where people may reshare false content with the intention of helping.

2.2 Misinformation, Disinformation & Mal-information

"Misinformation is false or inaccurate information that is communicated regardless of an intention to deceive" (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017, p. 20). Misinformation is the false information which is shared/spread unintentionally without any specific intent to be seen. It can be spread due to a number of reasons including misunderstandings or cognitive biases. The intent in sharing is not malice rather it is spread/created due to human error. Example of Misinformation includes the different health remedies shared on social media as a treatment of COVID-19 without any scientific backing especially of then US President Donald Trump who endorsed ingestion of disinfectants to fight Covid-19 virus which was a death warrant for public (BBC, 2020).On the contrary, Disinformation is false or misleading information that is deliberately created and spread with the intent to deceive, manipulate, or cause harm. It is often used for political, social, or economic gain. "Disinformation is the deliberate creation and sharing of information known to be false with the intent to deceive and cause harm" (Fallis, 2015, p. 401). The major difference between misinformation and disinformation is that of intent. Intent, in both cases matter and differentiate between these two kinds of information. Disinformation is used to manipulate public opinion, to topple governments, or satiate any specific agenda (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

Meanwhile, Malinformation is a bit similar to Disinformation as its intent is also to cause harm but the information it carries is real. Malinformation is defined as "Malinformation is based on reality but used to inflict harm on a person, organization, or country" (Wardle, 2018, p. 5). It is genuine information but is shared in such a way or context or on such an occasion to manipulate the facts and put things in different context where it causes potential harm than good. When any of these mis, dis or malinformation is shaped in a form of news then this news is called as fake news (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

2.3 Examples of well-known fake news

When talking about fake news one of the most famous fake news comes to our mind i.e. Pizza gate scandal. During 2016 U.S. presidential election a fake news was circulated on social media regarding involvement of U.S. presidential candidate Hillary Clinton in children and drug

trafficking happening at a café in Washington known as the pizzeria (Canonne, 2020). In the aftermath of this fake news an armed man entered in the café with the intent of acting against child traffickers and fired shots, luckily no one was hurt, and the man was arrested eventually. Another well-known example of the dissemination of fake news during 2016 U.S. is that of Pope Francis endorsing the presidential candidate Donald Trump which was late clarified by the Pope by terming that he doesn't interfere in the politics of any country (Evon, 2018). Meanwhile another most highlighted fake news was about Iraq of possessing weapons of mass destruction which paved a way for the United States to enter the Iraq and resulted in multiple fatalities (Blix, 2004)

Whereas in the era of COVID-19 the world has seen bombardment of fake news leading to fear, chaos, cyberchondria (Laato et al., 2020). Many of the recent examples of fake news boom were during the COVID-19 pandemic era. Even the president of United States Donald Trump took a step forward in the COVID related fake news by terming ingestion of disinfectants as a shield against corona virus (BBC, 2020). The consequences were disastrous leading to severe health issues in the people trying such a thing with an increase of 121% in the accidental poisoning by ingesting disinfectants after the Trump's statement (Kluger, 2020). Similarly, before corona virus pandemic, another endemic Ebola Virus was also surrounded by a number of conspiracies/misinformation one of which was that the Ebola was a man-made virus or that the government was intentionally infecting populations through vaccines making such conspiracies a basis of distrust in health authorities and lead to opposition from the affected population from seeking necessary medical interventions (Milman, 2014). Another example of misinformation includes climate-gate scandal as a British blogger termed Global Warming as a hoax and termed it politically and economic motivated manipulation by elites (Kadlec, 2011). Due to the fast spreading misinformation about the origin of COVID-19 virus it was believed that this virus was man-made in the laboratories of Wuhan, China where it was discovered for the first time, due to which it was also termed as Chinese virus by social media users, the same word mentioned in his tweet by Donald Trump calling China to be the creator and distributor of Covid virus to the whole world (Viala-Gaudefroy & Lindaman, 2020) which was clarified later in multiple studies that Wuhan labs had nothing to do with the creation of COVID-19 virus (Mallapaty, 2024).

2.4 Impact of Fake News on society

Fake news affects the society in many ways. From eroding trust in public and media institutions to creating confusions about health hazards including vaccine hesitancy fake news has drastically affected the society. Either it is political unrest or violent protests or hinderance of the democratic process fake news has played a significant role behind such events (M & Hairunnisa, 2023). As discussed earlier it was due to a disinformation which was made a basis for military intervention against a country (Iraq), the false news accusing the country of possessing a weapon of mass destruction (Blix, 2004). While discussing health defects of Fake News it is pertinent to mention "Cyberchondria" which is also an effect of misinformation spread and cyberchondria was at peak during COVID-19 (Laato et al., 2020). Fake news is often weaponized for political gain, deepening divisions within society. Political actors and interest groups use disinformation campaigns to manipulate public opinion, spread propaganda, and create ideological divides. This results in heightened polarization and social unrest. Same happened during the 2016 U.S. presidential election which saw an influx of disinformation campaigns aimed at swaying voter opinions through fabricated news stories about candidates (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Fake news can have severe financial implications, particularly when it spreads misleading information about businesses, stock markets, or economic policies. Companies can suffer reputational damage, stock manipulation, or loss of consumer trust due to false information. In 2013, a fake tweet from a hacked Associated Press Twitter account claimed that there had been an explosion at the White House, causing the U.S. stock market to briefly plunge (Lazer et al., 2018).

Strategic detrimental effects of Fake news can create a war like situation as in the aftermath of Pulwama attack in Indian occupied Kashmir, the misinformation spread on social media about involvement of neighbor country Pakistan in carrying an attack in its soil lead to the Balakot strike incident and consequently counter attack by Pakistan, thus pushing two nuclear armed countries on the brink of war (Husnain et al., 2021). Due to deliberate spread disinformation Fake News can be a used as a tool leading to the violent events in the society, similar cases of violence occurred in India, when through WhatsApp groups misinformation about Muslims slaughtering and selling meat of Cow (the holy animal of Hindus) lead to the mob lynchings of Muslims by 'gau-rakshaks' (cow protectors) in the several parts of country (Mukherjee, 2020). Apart from other cases of the Fake news impact on the society, Pakistan is also affected by Fake News in various ways. Since

2015, Pakistan and Afghanistan are the only two countries still trying to eradicate Poliovirus while the other four remaining countries also got polio-free by that time (Dunn et al., 2015). There are many challenges to Polio-Virus eradication in Pakistan the most important challenge is the vaccine hesitancy which is caused by a number of factors including religious misconception, illiteracy and conflict and insecurities in the region (Hussain et al., 2016). One of the main drivers of Polio virus vaccine hesitancy is due to the fake news spread regarding vaccines resulting in people not allowing their children to be vaccinated and thus the virus remains in the country (Ittefaq et al., 2021). Such is the impact of fake news on the society that misconceptions and misinformation about the polio vaccine has caused a significant harm to a country which is still at a risk of Polio virus endemic.

2.5 Fake news cases in Pakistan

Pakistan has not remained untouched by the global wave of fake news. Social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter (now X), and YouTube have become hotspots for the rapid spread of false and misleading information. Fake news in Pakistan is often driven by political rivalries, religious sentiments, and social tensions, and its impact has ranged from misinformation-fueled panic to real-world violence. One of the most notable fake news cases in Pakistan occurred during the Pulwama-Balakot conflict in 2019. Following the Pulwama suicide attack in Indian-occupied Kashmir, Indian media and social media platforms began circulating fake stories about Pakistan's involvement, some even claiming the presence of terrorist training camps in Balakot. Indian media falsely reported heavy casualties and destruction caused by the Indian Air Force. However, international reporters and analysts later confirmed that no such casualties occurred, and Pakistan responded with its own airstrike, bringing both nations to the brink of war (Husnain et al., 2021).

Another common fake news theme in Pakistan revolves around health-related misinformation, especially during COVID-19 and polio vaccination campaigns. During the COVID-19 pandemic, numerous false claims were circulated on social media, such as drinking hot water or eating garlic to cure the virus. Religious misinformation also played a role, with posts declaring that Muslims were immune to COVID-19, creating a false sense of security (Laato et al., 2020). In the case of polio, conspiracy theories claiming that polio vaccines cause infertility or are part of a Western plot to harm Muslims led to widespread vaccine hesitancy, especially in rural

and conservative areas. As a result, Pakistan remains one of the last two countries in the world where polio is still endemic (Ittefaq et al., 2021).

Another major incident was the spread of fake news about a child abduction gang in Lahore in 2018. Voice messages and forwarded videos warning parents of an active gang targeting school children flooded WhatsApp groups. Although police denied these claims and confirmed no such gang existed, the rumors created panic among parents and led to unnecessary school closures in some areas (Duniya News, 2022). The spread of religiously sensitive fake news has also caused serious harm. In 2017, the case of Mashal Khan, a university student in Mardan, shocked the nation. Mashal was lynched by a mob of fellow students over false allegations of blasphemy circulated on social media. Investigations later revealed that the accusations were baseless and driven by campus politics (Reuters, 2017). This incident highlighted the deadly consequences of fake news in a country where blasphemy is a highly charged and sensitive topic.

In a more recent example, during the 2022 floods in Pakistan, several fake videos and altered images were widely circulated online, some falsely claiming that relief efforts were being blocked or that aid was being distributed only along political lines. Such misinformation created distrust between the public and government agencies and slowed down relief work (Adnan Rehmat, 2022). These cases demonstrate how fake news in Pakistan often exploits existing political, religious, and social divides. The ease with which false information can be created and shared on social media platforms, especially without effective regulation or fact-checking—poses a serious threat to public safety, national security, and social harmony. In a low-literacy environment where many people believe and share content without verification, the need for media literacy and awareness campaigns becomes all the more important.

2.6 Factors predicting Fake News Sharing Behavior

According to a study by Balakrishnan et al. (2022) the main reasons people spread fake news include ignorance, altruism, entertainment/pass time/socialization, health/media literacy, and low trust in the government/news media. The phenomenon was more common among younger, males, and those with less education. The most often researched methods for identifying fake news were machine learning and deep learning, while the most popular subjects were vaccination, viruses, cures/remedies, therapy, and prevention. According to Pennycook and Rand, (2021) the spread of misleading information on the internet is a significant scientific puzzle and practical

impediment. Contrary to popular assumption, political polarization in a culture where truth is frequently ignored leads to an inability to discriminate between false or misleading news and the truth. While people are more likely to trust news that supports their political ideas, this bias exists for both truthful and misleading headlines. This suggests that people are more accurate in assessing politically oriented headlines. The fundamental issue stems from people's failure to pause and consider the reality of the content they encounter on social media. Basic initiatives that encourage consumers to emphasize accuracy can significantly improve the quality of online news.

A study conducted by Apuke and Omer (2020) in Nigerian society found that altruism is the primary determinant of the sharing of false information among Nigerians. The study additionally discovered that the sharing of fake news is significantly influenced by information sharing, socialization, information searching, and pass time activities. However, there was no substantial correlation between entertainment and the dissemination of misinformation in this particular situation. These conclusions are derived from the examination of specific components, recognizing that additional factors such as lack of knowledge, lack of awareness, influence from peers, and a desire for attention may also play a role in the dissemination of false information. Whereas a similar research conducted by An et al. (2023) revealed that religiosity and lack of mindfulness had a great impact on the user's fake news dissemination behavior. The study modelled different factors impacting misinformation sharing behavior including instant news sharing, lack of mindfulness, self-expression and religiosity. Using quantitative survey questionnaire method given to the Nigerian students, the study discovered that all the above-mentioned factors had somewhat impact on false information sharing behavior. Contrary to these factors' exploration was discovered to have adverse effect on misinformation sharing. The study identified some more factors, namely ignorance, peer pressure, unawareness and attention seeking for future researchers working in this area of research.

Laato et. al (2020) conducted a study in the era of COVID-19 when the spread of misinformation was on the rise. They studied the relation between online trust as well as information overload and the sharing of misinformation online. Along with that they studied the effect of health misinformation on "cyberchondria". This was one of the only studies where work has been done on cyberchondria in relation to the factors influencing fake news sharing. The study on the foundation of three theories namely Health Belief Model, Protection-Motivation theory and

Cognitive Load Theory conducted survey on 1000 randomly selected students of two universities of Bangladesh and found that both the factors, information overload and information trust increased the behavior of sharing fake news online as well as the other factor "cyberchondria". Gender based statistics show that the females were more prone to "Cyberchondria" than males whereas on the contrary females were less prone to sharing misinformation online than their male counterparts thus negating the contrary findings by Chen et al. (2015) who discovered that female had more tendencies of sharing the misinformation online. The study also shows that a majority of respondents (92%) were using Facebook as a source of information related to COVID-19.

Apuke & Omar (2021) during the era of COVID-19 found some more related factors predicting the fake news sharing behavior. Uses and gratifications theory was used and in light of this theory different motivations influencing the misinformation sharing behavior were studied namely altruism, information sharing, socialization, entertainment, information seeking as well as pass time motivation. The study used online survey questionnaires as a tool of date collection. The population of the study were Nigerians with a sample size of 385. The study found altruism to be the major predicting factor of fake news sharing behavior. From this it is evident the Nigerian population use social media to satisfy their altruistic motivations and sharing fake news is also influenced greatly by the aforementioned motivation. Other factors found to be influencing similar behavior were information sharing, information seeking, pass time and socialization except of entertainment motivation. The study found one factor "entertainment" to have no effect on predicting the fake news sharing behavior. Ajina et al. (2024) later in their study also found entertainment/enjoyment not predicting fake news sharing behavior. Whereas entertainment is one of the main drivers of the misinformation sharing behavior (Koohikamali & Sidorova, 2017). There can be two possible reasons for entertainment motivation to have no role in this particular scenario that (i) The fear and chaotic situation of the pandemic (ii) May be the users were fulfilling their entertainment needs/motivations through the other affordances of social media like chats, watching movies or playing games and not finding sharing fake news as a fascinating entertainment (Apuke & Omar, 2021).

Meanwhile, Talwar et. al (2019) studied some other factors related to the sharing of fake news behavior. While claiming the study to be novel in terms of empirically explaining the relation of factors associated with misinformation sharing behavior (dark side of social media) namely

Online Trust, Self Disclosure, Social Comparison, Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) and Social Media Fatigue it was found that trusting the content while sharing it as well as self-disclosure and FOMO were directly influenced the behavior discussed earlier. On the contrary Social Comparison had no influence on such behavior of news sharing. Here it should be noted that a new factor in the area of Fake News Sharing was introduced namely Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) which wasn't studied much in relation to the foresaid behavior before. The study was conducted under the guidance of three theories, namely the theory of rational choice, social comparison theory and self-determination theory. Again, the instrument used was research questionnaire with the sample size 1022 users of WhatsApp being the students of three universities of Lahore, Pakistan. Meanwhile, future researchers should study other factors affecting the sharing behavior of fake news and should include mediating as well as moderating variables and may consider cultural differences across the diverse population (Talwar et al., 2019).

In another study by Wei et. al (2023) some other topic related factors were studied namely Information Sharing, Status Seeking, News finds me and Trust on social media. This study found all above-mentioned factors/variable to be positively related with the misinformation sharing behavior but out of these two factors namely "trust on social media" and "status-seeking" were noted to influence the behavior than others. This study supports the study by Thompson et al. (2020) in the same area who also found "information sharing" and "status seeking" gratification as a driver of sharing the news that is fake. As identified by Talwar et. al (2019) in her study that future researchers while studying the sharing behavior of fake news should include moderating and moderator variables and as observed by Ahmed (2022) in his study that education has a major role in disinformation sharing, this study included social media literacy skills as a moderating variable between sharing factors and misinformation sharing behavior. The study successfully confirmed the moderating role of social media literacy skills with respect to the aforementioned factors and fake news sharing behavior. This discovery provides us with Social Media Literacy skills as a mitigating or deterrent against such behavior (Wei et al., 2023). Again, there is a new factor being measured in this study namely "News finds me" perception. News find me perception, if briefly explained is related to the phenomenon when a person is using social networking sites (SNS) to socialize with his fellows (having no intent of following the SNS specifically for news) but still gets to receive news shared by the accounts he follow of his peers and fellows (Ahmed, 2022). This study finds its basis on rational choice theory which is yet another related theory in

this area. Survey questionnaire, being the favorite tool of researchers in this area was also used in this study while the population of the study were Nigerian universities students with a sample size of 1000. The future studies should also include mediating variable to study the mediating effects in between the dependent and independent variables (Wei et al., 2023).

Omar et. al (2024) filled the gap identified by Wei et al. (2023) and in their study while studying the fake news factors added a mediator variable named as " Fake news awareness". This study had somewhat more different and novel aspects from prior studies. In this study the author grouped all the factors under two broad groups terming them (i) User/Individual Factors and (ii) Online Environmental Factors. The factors like Altruism, Information Sharing, Socialization and Status Seeking were grouped under user related factors (intrinsic/internal factors) and were studied under the light of Uses and Gratification theory while the other factors like Trust in Network, Homophily, Norm of reciprocity and Tie strength were studied under the group of environment based sharing behavior influencing factors (extrinsic/external factors) and were studied under the guidance of Social Capital Theory. Along with that the study introduced Fake News Awareness as a mediating variable while studying the relation between both intrinsic/extrinsic factors (independent variable) and Fake news sharing behavior. While combining both of the aforesaid theories the author conducted survey on Malaysian population (yet another Asian country being studied after India, Bangladesh and Pakistan) using crowd participatory method. The study found that both the intrinsic and extrinsic factors affect fake news sharing behavior especially the extrinsic factors influence the behavior more. This means that online environment has a decisive role in compelling the user to indulge in misinformation sharing behavior. Apart from that the mediating factor "Fake News Awareness" which was not studied before is confirmed as playing a mediating role in combating Fake News Sharing Behavior. From these results we get another tool in the shape of "Fake News Awareness" apart from the tool "Social Media Literacy Skills" identified by Wei et. al (2023) to mitigate or deter the adverse effects of fake news sharing behavior in the society. This means, man (being the center of this study and many previous common areas of research) due to his behavior of sharing news on social media that is fake can be the one who can reverse this action by using the tool like Social Media Literacy as well as Fake News Awareness which both in one way or another are similar or related to each other. Whereas in a similar attempt to group factors into broad group of variables (Halpern et al., 2019) grouped the factors in three themes namely (i) Personal and Psychological Factors (ii) Frequency of Social

Media Use (iii) Political Ideology and Political Activism. The study measured three key variables with the relation of these factors namely Exposure to Fake News, Credibility in Fake News and Sharing Fake News. The study found that political participation and political extremity is a big driver of Fake News Sharing Behavior as respondents from far-right groups were seen to believe and share fake news more than their opponents.

Another interesting study in this area is conducted by Chadwick & Vaccari (2019) who conducted a survey on the population of UK using social media for news. The survey found some interesting statistics. Key points of the survey are that about 60% of the social media users from UK confessed about facing or coming across fake news of any sort on social media in a month. Out of these users about 40% of the respondents claimed to have shared fake news in any guise. Demographically the males and younger population was more involved in the act of sharing fake news which at this point is confirming as the same was claimed by Laato et al. (2020) in his study and was discussed in this review of literature earlier. Another dimension/factor in light of the behavioral profile claimed by the author was that the most of the users sharing fake news were the ones who were interested in politics and out of those politically motivated respondents the people from the right-wing politics were more prone to do such an act than the ones associated with the lift-wing politics thus upholding the same claim made by Halpern et al. (2019) discussed earlier. Another angle of the area of fake news sharing was discussed in this research; the audience/respondents who claimed to have shared fake news (either intentionally or unintentionally) were asked whether they were corrected by someone after sharing the disturbing news. Only around as little as 30% of the respondents claimed to have been corrected by the other users of social media. Another alarming figure was of those people who claimed to have corrected other users of social media when spotted fake news being shared by them, the number was as little as 8.5%. When digging more the author also contributed to the factors influencing fake news sharing behavior as the author found that two main factors/motivations of sharing made up news were that of "to inform others" and to "express their feelings". But another motivation was also discovered in this research that some of the users (contributing almost 20% of the respondents) were moved by the motivation of "upsetting others" when sharing disturbing/made-up news on the social media.

In an attempt to curb the spread of fake news Lazer et. al (2018) in his study suggested that there can be two kinds of interventions to put a hold to the spread of fake news sharing on social

media being (i) Human based intervention (ii) Platform based intervention. By human-based intervention he meant that the man may be educated with respected to the new media so that it can act as a barrier in the spread of the news that it false (social media literacy) which was also a significant focus in the studies discussed above. Whereas, by platforms-based intervention he meant that the social media platforms which are being used as a source of peddling lies, should put some filters (leash), some fact checks on the information flow in order to curb the menace of fake news spread through them.

Khan & Idris, (2019) in an attempt to find the relationship between perceived ability of humans in detecting false information shared on social media and sharing news without verification found different factors collaboratively driving such action. When measuring the perceived ability to recognize the false information online the author found that the demographic factors like "education level", their "income difference" and "internet surfing skills" played a decisive role in making them perceive that they are able to detect information online that is false. On the other hand, "attitude towards information verification" and "belief in reliability of information" were found to be the factors behind the act of sharing news without verification. The interesting finding in this study while measuring the perceived ability of detecting false information was that people with low education level were also confident in perceiving that they can detect false information online whereas they were actually not doing so. This study was conducted on Indonesian population (Indonesian students belonging from three universities of Jakarta) through survey questionnaire with a sample size of 396.

In the light of above studies a number of factors were identified affecting the behavior of sharing misinformation were found namely religiosity, status seeking, altruism, FOMO, information seeking, information sharing, frequency of social media use, perceived self-reliability in detecting false information, gender, age, income, to inform others, to express their feelings, socialization, trust in social media, social comparison, pass time, lack of mindfulness, political extremity and political activism. All these factors tested in different studies at different times on different population samples in different environments and cultures using multiple methodologies were somehow more or less found to be predicting the behavior of sharing false news online. The author selected some of these variables/factors affecting fake news online on the basis of the most suitable factors believed to be related closely to Pakistani population/culture. The factors selected

by author in this regard are Frequency of social media use, Religiosity, Altruism, Political Biasness, Trust in Media and Socialization.

2.7 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Affordance Theory, which provides a useful lens for understanding users' interaction with digital platforms and how certain features of social media afford (i.e., enable or encourage) specific behaviors, including the sharing of fake news. Originating in ecological psychology, the term "affordance" was first introduced by Gibson in 1977, who described it as the action possibilities offered by the environment to an individual (Greeno, 1994). In the context of digital communication, affordance refers to the perceived and actual properties of technology that influence user behavior (Norman, 1999). Applied to social media, affordance theory suggests that the design and features of platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp—like instant sharing, reposting, liking, and commenting—encourage certain types of user behavior, including rapid information sharing with minimal verification. Social media affordances such as visibility, persistence, editability, and association shape how users engage with content and how misinformation spreads across platforms (Treem & Leonardi, 2013).

Affordances create both opportunities and risks. On one hand, they enable users to share helpful and timely information; on the other hand, they also facilitate the rapid spread of unverified or fake news, often driven by personal, emotional, or social motives. For instance, users may feel a sense of urgency to share content due to social pressure, altruistic intent, or the fear of missing out (FOMO)even if the content's accuracy has not been confirmed (Apuke & Omar, 2021). This study adopts affordance theory to examine how individual-level psychological and social factors— such as religiosity, altruism, trust in media, political bias, and socialization—interact with the features of social media platforms to influence fake news sharing behavior. These internal and external motivations are viewed through the lens of what the social media environment affords its users: instant sharing without verification, social validation through likes or retweets, and emotional gratification through engagement. Thus, affordance theory provides a flexible and dynamic framework to understand not only why individuals share fake news but also how the design and structure of digital platforms contribute to this behavior. Based on the theoretical foundation, the conceptual framework of this study positions fake news sharing behavior as the dependent variable, influenced by five key independent variables

CHAPTER – 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The previous chapters discussed the background of this study along with the review of the related literature. This chapter discusses the research methodology starting from the research design which provides the crux of this chapter. Following, thew population of the study is discussed along with sampling technique used and after that the variables of the study are defined, and their operational definitions are presented. Subsequently, research instrument is discussed and then data collection method is briefed followed by the analysis technique of the data and lastly the ethical considerations while the collection and analysis of data are also discussed at the end of this chapter.

3.1 Research Design

The purpose of this study was to find out the effect of select factors on the fake news sharing behavior of social media users. In this regard, a quantitative research design was compiled to determine the factors influencing fake news sharing behavior among university students in Islamabad. The author selected the students of three universities: International Islamic University (IIUI), National University of Modern Languages (NUML), and Bahria University Islamabad. Participants were selected using convenience sampling, focusing on individuals actively engaged with social networking platforms for news consumption. Data collection was conducted through an online survey questionnaire, a method widely utilized in similar studies on fake news dissemination. The survey link was distributed to the identified sample, resulting in 135 valid responses. The questionnaire encompassed both independent and dependent variables and demographics as well which shed light on the social media use patterns of the university students of Pakistan.

The data collected was analyzed using SPSS and Smart PLS software. Descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the data, and Partial least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed to examine the relationships between variables. Ethical considerations were meticulously observed throughout the research process. Participants were informed about the study's objectives, and their participation was entirely voluntary, with assurances of confidentiality

and anonymity. This approach aligns with ethical standards in social science research, ensuring the integrity and credibility of the study's findings.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The population of this study are the university students of Islamabad. For this purpose, three universities of Islamabad were shortlisted namely International Islamic University (IIUI), National University of Modern Languages (NUML) and Bahria University Islamabad. The research being social media uses specific and studying false news sharing behavior filtered out those students who were not actively using social networking websites.

Current study used convenient sampling as a tool for sampling population. Sampling is a tool used to carry out research studies on a smaller portion of a large population representing equal traits and all the characteristics of that population. A survey on a large population requires a great amount of economic and physical resources which a university student cannot even think of affording. Therefore, here comes the magic of sampling. The researcher applied a convenient sampling method to collect the required data. This sampling technique involves the selection of participants based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. The sample was drawn from individuals who use digital media for news consumption. The sample size was 140.

3.3 Operational Definitions

3.3.1 Independent Variables

The independent variables of this study are "Religiosity, Altruism, Political Biasness, Trust in social media and Socialization".

3.3.2 Dependent Variable

"Fake news sharing" is the dependent variable of this study.

3.3.3 Fake News

Content that is intentionally and verifiably false, created and disseminated with the purpose of misleading or deceiving an audience. This includes entirely fabricated news stories and false reports that mimic the style and structure of legitimate news but lack factual basis.

3.3.4 Fake News Sharing Behavior

Fake news sharing behavior refers to the actions and practices through which individuals disseminate false or misleading information through social media platforms. Sharing fake news posts is mainly related to fake news sharing behavior.

3.3.5 Religiosity

Religiosity refers to the extent to which an individual's religious beliefs, practices, and affiliations influence their behavior in sharing unverified or false information.

3.3.6 Altruism

Altruism refers to the extent to which an individual's intent to benefit others or contribute to the greater good influences their behavior in sharing unverified or false information.

3.3.7 Political Biasness

Political biasness refers to the extent to which an individual's political beliefs are polarized and intense, influencing their propensity to disseminate unverified or false information that aligns with or reinforces their ideological stance.

3.3.8 Socialization

Socialization can be operationally defined as the extent to which individuals engage in sharing information on social media platforms to develop, maintain, or enhance relationships and a sense of belonging within their social networks.

3.3.9 Trust in Social Media

Trust in social media refers to the extent to which an individual relies on and believes in the credibility, reliability, and integrity of online sources and information when deciding to disseminate content.

3.4 Research Instrument

The instrument used in this study is survey questionnaire. The researcher carefully designed a questionnaire consisting of close-ended questions. The questionnaire had questions related to the variables of the study. The questionnaires consisted of research oriented as well as

demographic questions. The survey questionnaire served as a medium of data collection. It was compiled in English language as all the respondents had a good command on English language. In the meantime, it was made sure that all the participants were active social media users. Most of the famous studies reviewed by the author in this area used survey questionnaire as a tool of date collection (as shown in table below). Respecting the norm in this area and for the convenience, the researcher selected survey questionnaire as an instrument of this study.

Table No.1 Research methodologies used by scholars in relevant area

Author(s)	Method(s)
(Chadwick & Vaccari, 2019)	Survey Questionnaire
(Chen et al., 2015)	Survey Questionnaire
(Khan & Idris, 2019)	Survey Questionnaire
(Talwar et al., 2019)	Survey Questionnaire
(Huang et al., 2015)	Interview

3.5 Procedure (Data Collection)

Data is collected using online survey questionnaire with the help of google forms. The survey was uploaded on google forms and a link was shared with the respondents from the aforementioned population sample and their responses were recorded. A total of 135 accepted responses were recorded during the collection.

3.6 Data Analysis

After the data was collected using google forms, a spreadsheet of the responses was retrieved from the google forms and statistical analysis software namely SPSS and Smart PLS were used in the analysis of data. Smart PLS was specifically used for the PLS – SEM structural modelling and getting the results accordingly.

3.7 Ethical Consideration

While conducting this study the author took utmost care with regard to the safety and privacy of the subjects of the study. The participants of this study were briefed about the purpose of the study and all the participants willingly, voluntarily participated in the study with diligent consent. Every step taken throughout the study was to ensure minimize potential harm or discomfort to the participants of the study.

CHAPTER – 4

DATA ANALYSIS

Previous chapters of the study discussed the introduction of the study followed by the detailed review of the related literature and then the research design applied in the study. In this chapter, we talk about the data we collected during research. As earlier after reviewing the related literature on the said topic and after selecting affordance theory to be applied in this study the author after studying more than a dozen of factors affecting fake news sharing behavior, selected five independent variables for this study which were namely, altruism, religiosity, trust in media, political biasness and socialization. The dependent variable of this study is fake news sharing behavior. The author selected university students of Islamabad as the population of this study. Three universities were focused on this regard namely, International Islamic University, Bahria University and National University of Modern Languages. As discussed earlier, the university students are the most active users of social media, besides they are also the users who not only consume the content but also disseminate the content. The author used convenient sampling for this study. The sample size for this study was 135. The instrument used in this study is survey questionnaire. To disseminate the survey to be filled the author used google forms as a platform in this regard. The link of the survey was shared with the respondents and the author got responses online.

After the submission of responses by survey participants the author used statistical software SPSS and SmartPls for data analysis. SPSS was used for descriptive analysis and Smartpls for Structural Equation Modeling. Upcoming in this chapter the demographic and topic level questions are discussed. The demographic variables include age, gender, education level, social media consumption time as well as consumption platforms and along with that political affiliation was also measured by the author. Topic level questions were used to measure independent as well as dependent variables. The author used survey questions from the existing studies.

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

4.1.1 Frequency Tables and Data Narration

Table 2: Gender

	Frequency	Percent
Male	84	62.7
Female	50	37.3
Total	**135**	**100.0**

The questionnaire was shared with more than 150 people. Out of them the accepted responses were 135. The ratio of gender demographic variable had a disparity compromising male as 63% whereas the female respondents were 34% of the sample. Due to convenient sampling the gender gap was wider in responses.

Table 3: Age

	Frequency	Percent
18-24	38	28.4
25-34	79	59.0
35-44	17	12.7
Total	**135**	**100.0**

The author while generating the survey divided the age of respondents into three clusters/groups. The first group being the ages of between 18 to 24 years were 28% while the second group of ages between 25-34 years had a ratio of 59% making it the majority respondents' group whereas the last group of ages between 35-44 years were comprising of 13% making it the lowest respondent group. While there was another group added in the questionnaire of the population of the ages of 45 and above but none of the respondents lied in that group, that's why such group was removed from table number 2.

Table 4: Education Level

	Frequency	Percent
Bachelors	72	53.7
Masters	57	42.5
PhD	05	3.7
Total	**135**	**100.0**

The educational level of participants was measured and the participants being the university students were bachelor's, master's or PhD students. Bachelors' category had the most students' participants with the ratio comprising of 54% whereas the master's students ranking second in the list were of 42% while the PhD students had the lowest participation rate of merely a total of almost 4%.

Table 5: Social Media Consumption (Hours)

	Frequency	Percent
less than 1 hour	08	6.0
01-03 Hours	49	36.6
04-06 Hours	49	36.6
07-09 Hours	23	17.2
10-12 Hours	05	3.7
Total	**135**	**100.0**

Social Media Consumption scale was used by author to measure the consumption rate of social media by the research participants in hours. There were 5 categories of social media usage in hours starting from less than one hour and ending at 10-12 hours at the most. Here the interesting thing about the consumption rate is that more than 70% of the respondents were lying in the group of 01-06 hours of social media usage, where there were also peak social media users using social media more than 6 hours and the most of 12 hours per day such respondents had a ratio of almost more than 20%. Here the question arises especially about the enormous use of social media by respondents, if such use is a positive use having any practical, positive, practically beneficial purpose then it may be acceptable. While on the contrary if the use is just for waste of time, pass time gratification or other useless purpose then such a use can be reconsidered.

Table 6: Social Media Platforms used

	Frequency	Percent
Facebook	62	46.3%
Instagram	67	50.0%
WhatsApp	95	70.9%
Twitter	15	11.2%
TikTok	03	2.2%
LinkedIn	04	3.0%
Total	**246**	**183.6%**

Another demographic question was asked by the author to measure the platform use trend by the participants. The author, unlike other single choice questions in the survey put this question a bit different and the participants were allowed to checkmark more than one choice and along with the four provided choices of platforms like Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp and Twitter the author also provided the option of "other" as a blank option so that the students can write about any other platforms being used by them which the author missed in his choices given from where the author got two other popular platforms among the students namely TikTok and LinkedIn though the ratio of these platforms use was much less than the other platforms being used. However, according to the responses by the students WhatsApp stood first among the platforms most used by the university students whereas Instagram preceded WhatsApp by becoming the second most popular social media platform among the students. Facebook stood as the third most used social media platform whereas Twitter stood at fourth rank. WhatsApp being the most used app is used for different purposes including messaging (text and voice message), calling (audio and video call) as well as sharing media files with each other.

Table 7: Political Interest

	Frequency	Percent
Very interested	16	11.9
Moderately interested	40	29.9
Slightly interested	42	31.3
Not interested at all	36	26.9
Total	**135**	**100.0**

To determine the effect of political bias on the fake news sharing behavior (which was measured later in the questionnaire) the author deemed it necessary to measure the political interest of the university students. The students were offered the four choices to measure their political interest including very interested, moderately interested, slightly interested and not interested at all. Most of the students (more than 70%) were interested in the country politics out of which more than 10% were very interested while 30% were moderately interested and more than 30% were interested slightly. In the meantime, around 25% of the respondents were not interested in the political landscape of the country at all.

Table 8: How likely are you to share religious news or content without verifying its authenticity?

	Frequency	Percent
Never	06	4.5
Rarely	08	6.0
Sometimes	18	13.4
Very often	26	19.4
Always	76	56.7
Total	**135**	**100.0**

To measure the factors influencing the false news sharing behavior (religiosity) the respondents were asked about their tendency to share religious news or content without verifying its authenticity. To the researcher's surprise more than 90% of the respondents said that they share religious news without verifying its authenticity. Whereas most of the participants of survey respondent that they "always" do such an act of sharing the religious content without verifying

making it more than 50% of the sample size. Only about 5% of the survey participated denied sharing such content.

Table 9: Do you believe sharing religious messages (even unverified) brings spiritual rewards?

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	07	5.2
Agree	16	11.9
Neutral	28	20.9
Disagree	32	23.9
Strongly Disagree	51	38.1
Total	**135**	**100.0**

The respondents were asked about their belief that whether they believe that sharing religious content brings any kind of spiritual rewards to them? The ratio of disagreement stood at more than 60% comprising of the participants with almost 25% disagreeing with the statement whereas about 40% of them strongly disagreed. About 20% of the respondents chose to be neutral whereas almost 15% agreed.

Table 10: When you see a religious post on social media, how often do you fact-check its source before sharing?

	Frequency	Percent
Always	34	25.4
Very often	26	19.4
Sometimes	28	20.9
Rarely	25	18.7
Never	20	14.9
Total	**135**	**100.0**

In a question about fact checking content observed on social media about 35% of the respondents reported that they frequently fact check the sources of a religious post encountered on

social media whereas almost 40% of the respondents reported that they don't do such an exercise more frequently while almost 15% of the respondents denied performing such an activity ever.

Table 11: I believe that most of the news that is shared on social networks is credible

	Frequency	**Percent**
Strongly Agree	02	1.5
Agree	15	11.2
Neutral	48	35.8
Disagree	52	38.8
Strongly Disagree	17	12.7
Total	**135**	**100.0**

In a question about the credibility check of social media most of the respondents disagreed with the statement that they believe a major portion of news shared on social media is credible compared to a less ratio of respondents agreeing with the statement (a mere number of almost 12%). The ratio of disagreement stood at almost 50% whereas a surprising figure of 35% of respondents chose to be neutral about such an encounter.

Table 12: I believe that most of the news that is shared on social networks is relevant/accurate

	Frequency	**Percent**
Strongly Agree	01	0.7
Agree	12	9.0
Neutral	43	32.1
Disagree	57	42.5
Strongly Disagree	21	15.7
Total	**135**	**100.0**

In a similar question about the accuracy and relevancy of content shared on social media a similar number of more than 50% of the sample population disagreed that they believe most of the content shared on social networking sites is relevant and accurate while a mere number of almost

10% of the survey participants agreed with the statement whereas almost 30% of respondents were neutral about this statement.

Table 13: I believe that most of the news that is shared on social networks is trustworthy

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	02	1.5
Agree	13	9.7
Neutral	35	26.1
Disagree	65	48.5
Strongly Disagree	19	14.2
Total	**135**	**100.0**

In a statement about the trustworthiness of news content shared on social media the respondents were asked whether they believe such content shared on social media sites in trustworthy? To which they responded, more than 60% of them disagreed with the statement while almost 12% did agree with the statement. Meanwhile, 26% of the sample population chose to be silent against.

Table 14: I share news on social media to help keep others informed

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	15	11.2
Agree	60	44.8
Neutral	26	19.4
Disagree	22	16.4
Strongly Disagree	11	8.2
Total	**135**	**100.0**

The respondents were asked whether they agree to the statement that they share news on social media to help keep others informed to which most of the respondents making more than 75% agree with the statement whereas almost 20% of respondents did not agree with the statement and remaining 20% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Table 15: I believe sharing news can benefit my community

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	18	13.4
Agree	73	54.5
Neutral	27	20.1
Disagree	11	8.2
Strongly Disagree	05	3.7
Total	**135**	**100.0**

Similarly, a statement was put in front of the respondents whether they believe that sharing news on social media can benefit their community, to which most of the respondents agreed comprising 70% of the survey sample whereas more than 10% disagreed and 20% of them took no sides.

Table 16: I feel a responsibility to share important news with my friends and family.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	20	14.9
Agree	68	50.7
Neutral	23	17.2
Disagree	17	12.7
Strongly Disagree	06	4.5
Total	**135**	**100.0**

"I feel a responsibility to share important news with my friends and family" in a response to this statement a major portion of survey respondents agreed with the statement being nearly 65% of the respondents whereas almost 17% of the survey respondents denied such an act and meanwhile almost 17% of them were neutral towards such an act.

Table 17: I identify strongly with a particular political party

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	07	5.2
Agree	14	10.4
Neutral	42	31.3
Disagree	43	32.1
Strongly Disagree	28	20.9
Total	**135**	**100.0**

A question was asked to respondents related to their political affiliation and identification, whether they identify themselves with a political party to which almost 15% of them agreed whereas almost more than 50% of the respondents disagreed with the statement. In the meanwhile, nearly 30% of them chose to be neutral.

Table 18: My political beliefs influence the news I choose to share

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	04	3.0
Agree	30	22.4
Neutral	36	26.9
Disagree	38	28.4
Strongly Disagree	26	19.4
Total	**135**	**100.0**

To measure the political biasness as a factor influencing fake news sharing behavior the researcher asked the respondents whether their political beliefs affect their news sharing choices to which almost 25% of them agreed whereas almost 45% of the participants denied such an act and meanwhile 27% of the participants neither agreed nor disagreed.

Table 19: I prefer news that aligns with my political views

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	03	2.2
Agree	34	25.4
Neutral	32	23.9
Disagree	37	27.6
Strongly Disagree	28	20.9
Total	**135**	**100.0**

In a similar attempt to measure political biasness the author asked the respondents whether they prefer the news that align with their political views. Almost nearly 27% of the respondents agreed that they prefer such news whereas nearly 47% of the survey respondents did not agree with such a preference whereas almost 24% of respondents took no sides and remained neutral.

Table 20: I share content on social media because I can freely talk about issues with others

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	08	6.0
Agree	41	30.6
Neutral	43	32.1
Disagree	27	20.1
Strongly Disagree	15	11.2
Total	**135**	**100.0**

To measure the socialization variable of the research study the author asked the respondents whether they agree with the notion that they share content on social media because they can freely communicate on different issues/topics with other users to which almost 37% agreed (out of which only 6% strongly agreed) whereas almost nearly 32% of the respondents disagreed with the statement whereas 32% of the respondents chose to be neutral.

Table 21: I share content on social media because I feel involved with other people's issues

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	09	6.7
Agree	38	28.4
Neutral	32	23.9
Disagree	33	24.6
Strongly Disagree	22	16.4
Total	**135**	**100.0**

Another variable question was asked to the respondents whether they share content on social media because they feel involved with other peoples' issues to which they answered as almost 35% of the respondents agreed with the statement and nearly 40% of the survey respondents disagreed and meanwhile 24% of them chose to be neutral.

Table 22: I share content on social media because I can effortlessly interact with other members in my network when sharing

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	07	5.2
Agree	46	34.3
Neutral	35	26.1
Disagree	28	20.9
Strongly Disagree	18	13.4
Total	**135**	**100.0**

The respondents were asked whether they share content on social media in order to interact with the other members of the community. Almost 40% of respondents agreed with the statement whereas almost 35% of the respondents disagreed with the statement and 26% of them chose to be neutral.

Table 23: I often share information or news without checking its authenticity

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	02	1.5
Agree	13	9.7
Neutral	21	15.7
Disagree	60	44.8
Strongly Disagree	38	28.4
Total	**135**	**100.0**

About merely 10% of the respondents agreed to a question asked by the author whether they share content on social media without checking its authenticity whereas most of the respondents disagreed to the same question asked, comprising nearly 70% of the respondents. Meanwhile almost 15% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement and chose to be neutral.

Table 24: I share information or news without checking facts through trusted sources.

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	03	2.2
Agree	21	15.7
Neutral	22	16.4
Disagree	52	38.8
Strongly Disagree	36	26.9
Total	**135**	**100.0**

The researcher asked the respondents if they share information or news on social media without checking through trusted sources to which the ratio of agreement stood at almost 17% of the survey respondents whereas most of the respondents disagreed with statement making them almost more than 60%. Meanwhile 16% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed and chose to be neutral.

Table 25: I share information or news without verifying that it is true

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	01	0.7
Agree	16	11.9
Neutral	17	12.7
Disagree	57	42.5
Strongly Disagree	43	32.1
Total	**135**	**100.0**

The author asked the respondents whether they share information or news on social networking sites without verifying it. Most of the respondents disagreed with the statement and denied such an act. Such participants were of almost more than 70% of the whole respondents whereas out of the other 25% respondents almost 13% of them agreed having done such a deed while 12% of them neither agreed nor disagreed and chose to be neutral to this statement.

Table 26: I share information or news even if sometimes I feel the information may not be correct

	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	01	0.7
Agree	12	9.0
Neutral	27	20.1
Disagree	50	37.3
Strongly Disagree	43	32.1
Total	**135**	**100.0**

In the last question of the survey the researcher asked the respondents if they share content on social media despite knowing that the content they are sharing is not correct to which most of the respondents (more than 65% of the respondents) disagreed whereas almost 10% of the respondents agreed with the statement. However, about 20% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement and chose to remain neutral.

CHAPTER – 5

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

Previous chapters of this study shed light on the introduction of the study followed by the literature review and then research methodology and after that data analysis is discussed. This chapter, being the last chapter of the study, talks about discussions of data analysis including the discussion of the research questions of this study with respect to the analysis results and after that conclusion of this study is presented. At the end of this chapter limitations and future recommendations of this study are discussed. The core purpose of this study was to find the factors or motives which make a social media user share content (news) on social networking sites that is fake/false. What are the reasons or the motivations which make a user share such content either deliberately or mistakenly? After reviewing the literature, the author found more than a dozen factors which were studied to be affecting such behavior. Out of those factors the author picked the factors most related with the Pakistani society. Those factors were the independent variables of the study namely religiosity, altruism, trust in media, political biasness, and socialization. The dependent variable, the core of this study was 'fake news sharing behavior. The population of this study are university students as university being the young population are a major users of social media platforms. This generation is digitally connected but may lack critical media literacy skills, making them vulnerable to unknowingly contributing to the spread of fake news. Hence, their behaviors and motivations are essential to study and understand. The study used quantitative survey method as a research tool. A total of 135 survey responses qualified were analyzed using statistical software like SPSS and SmartPls and their results are below.

5.1 Discussion

The research targeted the factors which affect the false news sharing behavior. As shown in Table NO. 26, out of the 135 survey respondents 63% (84 respondents) were male whereas 34% (50 respondents) were female. Age wise most of the respondents were lying in the age bracket of 25-34 years. More than 80% of the respondents were young people. When talking about the education level of the survey participants, about half of the respondents were bachelor's students while the other half were the master's students. Meanwhile there were five students of PhD too. If

we talk about the social media consumption of the respondents most of the respondents reported to be using the social networking site in between one to six hours.

Table 27: Demographic information of respondents (n = 135)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	84	62.7
Female	50	37.3
Age		
18 – 24	38	28.4
25 – 34	79	59.0
35 – 44	17	12.7
Education Level		
Bachelors	72	53.7
Masters	57	42.5
PhD	05	3.7
Social Media Consumption		
Less than 1 hour	08	6.0
01 – 03 Hours	49	36.6
04 – 06 Hours	49	36.6
07 – 09 Hours	23	17.2
10 – 12 Hours	05	3.7
Social Media Platforms		
Facebook	62	46.3
Instagram	67	50.0
WhatsApp	95	70.9
Twitter	15	11.2
TikTok	03	2.2
LinkedIn	04	3.0

When asked about the platforms they use for surfing social media most of the users reported WhatsApp as their primary platforms, while Instagram stood second and Facebook stood at third place. Meanwhile, although less used, platforms like Twitter (11%), TikTok (3%) and LinkedIn (2%) were also reported by the respondents. The respondents were asked about their political interest whether they were interested in the country's political scenario or not to which most of the respondents nodded with yes and a slight number of respondents denied such an interest.
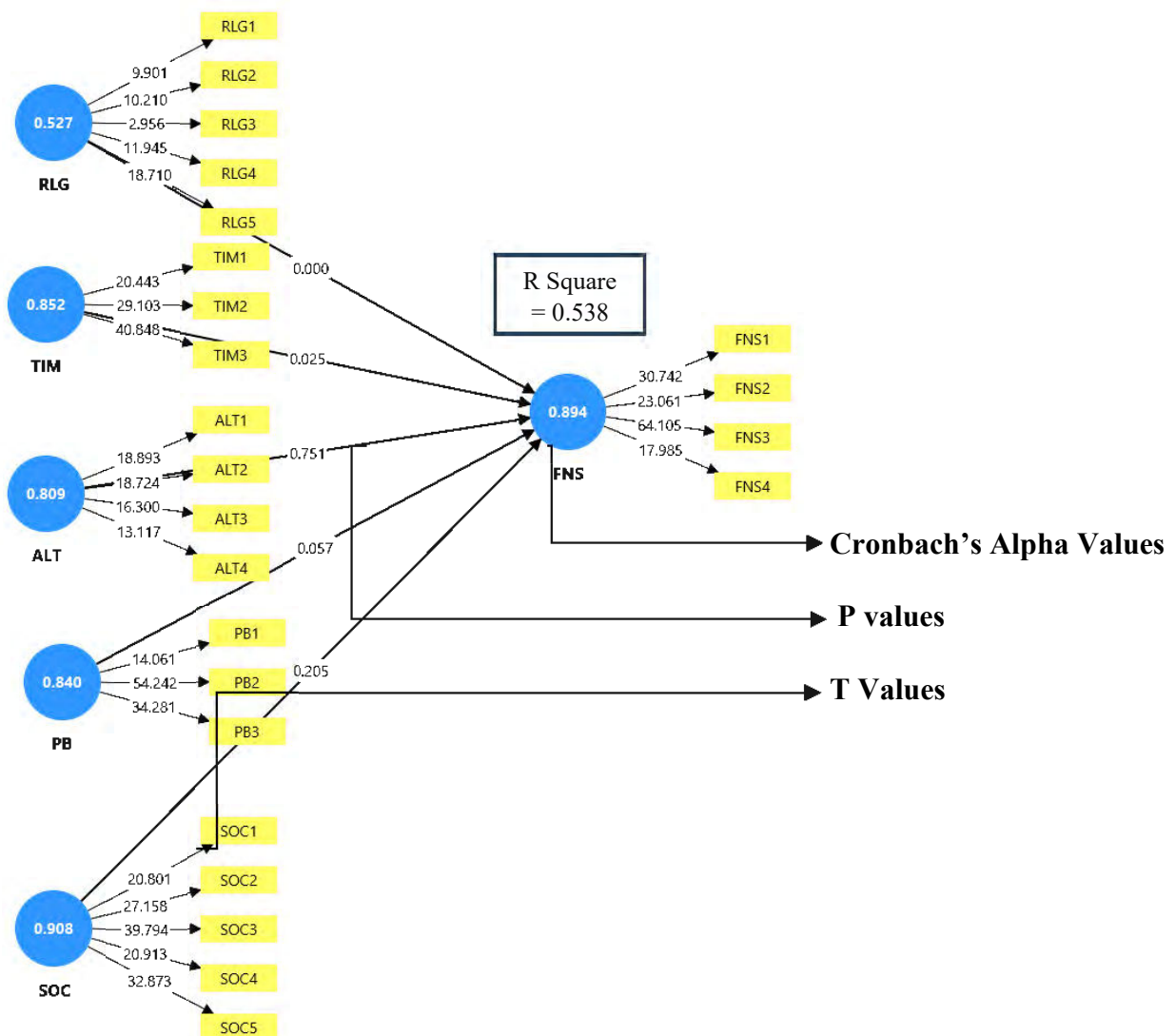

Figure: 1 Structural Model for Fake News Sharing

RQ1. How do factors such as frequency of social media use, altruism, political biasness, religiosity, trust in social media, and socialization contribute to the spread of fake news on social media in Pakistan?

The analysis conducted using SmartPLS Structural Equation Modeling gives insights into how various emotional, political, and social factors affect fake news sharing behavior among university students of Islamabad. The results demonstrate mixed levels of influence among the variables tested. The results indicate (refer to Table 27) that Religiosity, Trust in Media and Political Biasness predict fake news sharing behavior. Religiosity among all the variables, emerged as the strongest and most statistically significant predictor of fake news sharing behavior. Having a β value of 0.519, a t-value of 7.295, and a p-value of 0.000, the results indicate a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between religiosity and the likelihood of sharing false news. According to these results we can imply that those students who hold stronger religious beliefs may be more inclined to share such news that aligns with their faith, and that too without verifying its authenticity, (often due to trust in religious sources or due to the belief that sharing such content is morally righteous). Another factor which is showing significant results in predicting fake news sharing behavior is Trust in media. With a β value of 0.121, t-value of 2.239, and a p-value of 0.025 Trust in Media indicates that students who place higher trust in media sources are more likely to share content from such sources without verification. This behavior might be attributed to perceived credibility and reliance on familiar platforms or personalities, even when such trust may not always be warranted.

Political biasness showed positive results with respect to Fake News Sharing behavior. Having a β value of 0.165, t-value of 1.905, and p-value of 0.057, although this value is slightly above the conventional 0.05 threshold, it suggests a potential positive relationship between political attribution and fake news sharing. This aligns with previous studies suggesting that individuals often share politically congruent content even if it lacks factual accuracy, reflecting confirmation bias. Meanwhile, the study found that the last two factors measured namely altruism and socialization do not show statistically significant relationships with fake news sharing. Bearing a β value of 0.011, t-value of 0.011, and p-value of 0.751, Altruism predicts no meaningful impact. Similarly, socialization was observed having a β value of 0.167, t-value of 1.268, and p-value of 0.205, which clearly indicate that social motivations did not significantly influence fake news sharing behavior in this sample. These findings predicts that in the context of Pakistan, especially

among educated youth, ideological and belief-driven factors (such as religiosity and media trust) appear to contribute more significantly to the spread of fake news than interpersonal motivations like altruism or socialization.

Table 28: The structural model's findings

Constructs	β Value	T - Value	P - Value
Altruism	0.011	0.011	0.751
Political Biasness	0.165	1.905	0.057
Religiosity	0.519	7.295	0.000
Socialization	0.167	1.268	0.205
Trust in Media	0.121	2.239	0.025

RQ2. Which of these factors (altruism, political biasness, religiosity, trust in social media or socialization) is the most dominant in influencing fake news sharing behavior among university students in Islamabad?

The researcher through this study found that the dominant most factor affecting the Fake News Sharing Behavior is Religiosity. Having a β coefficient of (0.519), a very strong t-value (7.295), and a highly significant p-value (0.000), indicates a strong and reliable relationship. Results suggest that students with higher religious orientation are significantly more likely to engage in sharing content they perceive as religiously meaningful, even if that content is not factually accurate. This finding reflects the broader cultural and social context of Pakistan, where religious sentiments often play a key role in shaping online behavior. In such settings, content that aligns with religious views may be accepted and shared without critical scrutiny, driven by trust in religious authorities or the belief that the act of sharing itself is a virtuous deed.

In contrast, other factors such as trust in media showed a significant but comparatively weaker effect ($\beta = 0.121$), while political biasness was borderline significant ($\beta = 0.165, p = 0.057$). Whereas the last two factors, altruism and socialization, did not yield any significant results. Therefore, the study concludes with terming Religiosity as the most dominant, influential and consistent predictor of fake news sharing behavior in this study's population.

42

5.2 Conclusion

This study "Motives Behind the Spread of Fake News on Social Media: Exploring the Users' Perspective" was a motivation of researcher to explore the area of Fake News and to know what causes it or what make people share such news. The study focused on exploring the psychological, ideological, and social factors that influence the sharing of fake news on social media, with a specific focus on university students in Islamabad, Pakistan. In an age where information is rapidly produced and shared, understanding the motives behind the spread of misinformation is not only relevant but also critical. The findings of this research provide significant insights into how personal beliefs and trust when employed on social media platforms shape the way false information is circulated online. The study employed a quantitative approach, using a structured online questionnaire distributed to a sample of 135 university students across three major universities of Islamabad. The data were analyzed using both SPSS for descriptive statistics and SmartPLS for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the relationships between the dependent variable that is fake news sharing behavior and five independent variables namely religiosity, altruism, political biasness, trust in media, and socialization. Among the key findings, religiosity emerged as the most dominant and statistically significant factors affecting the fake news sharing behavior which suggests that individuals who are highly religious may be more inclined towards sharing content that aligns with their beliefs, even without verifying its authenticity. This behavior could stem from a strong sense of moral duty, trust in religious sources, or a desire to share what they believe to be spiritually beneficial. These findings highlight the role of deeply held belief systems in influencing online behavior in Pakistan's culturally and religiously sensitive environment.

Trust in media also showed a significant positive relationship with fake news sharing. Participants who reported higher levels of trust in specific news outlets or social media sources were more likely to share content from those sources without questioning its accuracy. This underscores the potential dangers of over-reliance on specific platforms or channels without critical evaluation, especially in an era where even traditional news sources may occasionally disseminate misinformation. Political biasness, although not statistically significant at the conventional 0.05 level, came close to significance, indicating a possible link between political alignment and the tendency to share information that reinforces existing ideological beliefs. This

finding is consistent with international research suggesting that confirmation bias often drives individuals to accept and spread content that aligns with their political views. In contrast, altruism and socialization were not found to be significant predictors in this study which indicates that, at least across the selected sample of university students, motivations such as helping others or maintaining social bonds may not strongly influence the sharing of fake news. These results challenge some previous assumptions and emphasize the need to consider cultural and contextual differences in studying online behavior. From a theoretical perspective, the study was grounded in Affordance Theory, which helped to explain how the design and features of social media platforms enable certain user behaviors. The theory highlighted how affordances like instant sharing, ease of access, and visibility create an environment where misinformation can spread quickly and effortlessly. By linking users' personal motivations to the structural properties of social media, this research adds a nuanced understanding of how fake news behavior is not solely a matter of individual choice but is also shaped by platform design.

This study contributes to both the academic literature and practical understanding of fake news dissemination in the digital age, particularly within the Pakistani context. The findings hold valuable implications for educators, policymakers, and digital platform designers. There is a pressing need for digital and media literacy programs, especially tailored for young adults, to encourage critical thinking, fact-checking habits, and responsible content sharing. Additionally, awareness campaigns that are culturally and religiously sensitive may help address behaviors rooted in deep-seated belief systems. While this study offers important insights, it also has certain limitations. The sample was limited to students from three universities in Islamabad, which may not fully represent the diverse population of Pakistani youth. Moreover, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of social desirability bias. Future research could expand the geographic and demographic scope, including qualitative methods, or explore mediating and moderating variables such as media literacy, peer influence, and emotional triggers. In conclusion, the research affirms that fake news sharing behavior is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, influenced by a mix of belief systems, perceived trust, and platform features. Understanding these dynamics is key to designing more effective strategies for reducing misinformation and promoting healthier, more informed digital discourse in Pakistan and beyond.

5.3 Limitations and Future Recommendations

Like any academic research, this study is subject to certain limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. Firstly, the sample size was limited to 135 university students from only three universities in Islamabad. While this group provided valuable insights, the findings may not be generalizable to all university students across Pakistan, especially those in rural or less digitally connected areas. Future studies should consider expanding the sample geographically and demographically to include a more diverse and representative population. Secondly, the data were collected through self-reported online questionnaires, which may be influenced by social desirability bias or participants' lack of self-awareness about their own behavior. Respondents might have underreported or overreported their fake news sharing habits. Incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews or focus groups, in future research could offer deeper insights into the motivations and emotions behind this behavior. Third, the study primarily focused on a limited set of independent variables i.e. religiosity, altruism, trust in media, political biasness, and socialization. Other potential influencing factors such as FOMO, media literacy, emotional triggers, peer influence, or online fatigue were not included but may have a significant impact.

Moreover, while this study was guided by Affordance Theory, future researchers could integrate other theoretical frameworks such as the Uses and Gratifications Theory, Cognitive Load Theory, or Social Identity Theory to examine different angles of misinformation behavior. Lastly, the cross-sectional design of the study limits the ability to assess changes in behavior over time. Future studies should consider longitudinal research to observe how fake news sharing patterns evolve, especially during events such as elections, crises, or public health emergencies. In conclusion, while this study offers valuable insights, addressing its limitations in future research will lead to a more comprehensive understanding and help in developing more effective misinformation mitigation strategies.

REFERENCES

Adnan, M., Nawaz, M. B., & Khan, R. S. M. (2022). Predictors of fake news sharing on social media during COVID-19 in South Asia: Evidence from Pakistan. *South Asian Studies*, *36*(1). http://journals.pu.edu.pk/journals/index.php/IJSAS/article/view/5390

Adnan Rehmat, W. N. (2022). *Countering Disinformation in Pakistan*.

Ahmad, S., & Irshad, M. (2025). Impact of social media fake news on social, political and ethical behavior by considering the moderating role of hostile attribution bias. *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society*. https://doi.org/10.1108/JICES-09-2024-0140

Ahmed, S. (2022). Disinformation Sharing Thrives with Fear of Missing Out among Low Cognitive News Users: A Cross-national Examination of Intentional Sharing of Deep Fakes. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, *66*, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2022.2034826

Ajina, A. S., Javed, H. M. U., Ali, S., & Zamil, A. M. A. (2024). Fake or Fact News? Investigating Users' Online Fake News Sharing Behavior: The Moderating Role of Social Networking Sites (SNS) Dependency. *International Journal of Human–Computer Interaction*, *40*(14), 3607–3621. https://doi.org/10.1080/10447318.2023.2192108

Allcott, H., & Gentzkow, M. (2017). Social media and fake news in the 2016 election. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, *31*(2), 211–236.

An, Y., Huang, Y., Danjuma, N. U., Apuke, O. D., & Tunca, E. A. (2023). Why do people spread fake news? Modelling the factors that influence social media users' fake news sharing behaviour. *Information Development*, 02666669231194357. https://doi.org/10.1177/02666669231194357

Apuke, O. D., & Omar, B. (2020). Modelling the antecedent factors that affect online fake news sharing on COVID-19: The moderating role of fake news knowledge. *Health Education Research*, *35*(5), 490–503.

Apuke, O. D., & Omar, B. (2021). Fake news and COVID-19: Modelling the predictors of fake news sharing among social media users. *Telematics and Informatics*, *56*, 101475. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2020.101475

Balakrishnan, V., Ng, W. Z., Soo, M. C., Han, G. J., & Lee, C. J. (2022). Infodemic and fake news–A comprehensive overview of its global magnitude during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021: A scoping review. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, *78*, 103144.

Baptista, J. P., & Gradim, A. (2022). A working definition of fake news. *Encyclopedia*, *2*(1). https://www.mdpi.com/2673-8392/2/1/43

BBC, N. (2020). Coronavirus: Outcry after Trump suggests injecting disinfectant as treatment. *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52407177

Blix, H. (2004). *Disarming Iraq*. Pantheon.

Canonne, J. (2020). *A timeline for main fake news incidents and how it was handled*. https://blog.i-dare.org/en/2020/09/20/a-timeline-for-main-fake-news-incidents-and-how-it-was-handled/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

Chadwick, A., & Vaccari, C. (2019). *News sharing on UK social media: Misinformation, disinformation, and correction*. https://repository.lboro.ac.uk/articles/News_sharing_on_UK_social_media_misinformation_disinformation_and_correction/9471269/files/17095679.pdf

Chen, X., Sin, S.-C. J., Theng, Y.-L., & Lee, C. S. (2015). Why students share misinformation on social media: Motivation, gender, and study-level differences. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, *41*(5), 583–592.

Del Vicario, M., Bessi, A., Zollo, F., Petroni, F., Scala, A., Caldarelli, G., Stanley, H. E., & Quattrociocchi, W. (2016). The spreading of misinformation online. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *113*(3), 554–559. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1517441113

Duniya News, D. (2022, September). https://web.dunyanews.tv/en/FakeNews/669619-Punjab-police-reject-rumors-over-child-kidnapping-gang--

Dunn, G., Klapsa, D., Wilton, T., Stone, L., Minor, P. D., & Martin, J. (2015). Twenty-eight years of poliovirus replication in an immunodeficient individual: Impact on the global polio eradication initiative. *PLoS Pathogens*, *11*(8), e1005114.

Evon, D. (2018). *Pope Francis Shocks World, Endorses Donald Trump for President, Snopes. Com*.

Fallis, D. (2015). What is disinformation? *Library Trends*, *63*(3), 401–426.

Greeno, J. G. (1994). *Gibson's affordances.* https://psycnet.apa.org/record/1994-28169-001

Halpern, D., Valenzuela, S., Katz, J., & Miranda, J. P. (2019). From Belief in Conspiracy Theories to Trust in Others: Which Factors Influence Exposure, Believing and Sharing Fake News. In G. Meiselwitz (Ed.), *Social Computing and Social Media. Design, Human Behavior and Analytics* (pp. 217–232). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21902-4_16

Huang, Y. L., Starbird, K., Orand, M., Stanek, S. A., & Pedersen, H. T. (2015). Connected Through Crisis: Emotional Proximity and the Spread of Misinformation Online. *Proceedings of the 18th ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work & Social Computing*, 969–980. https://doi.org/10.1145/2675133.2675202

Husnain, M., Mateen, M., & Maqsood, A. (2021). Analysis of Pakistani and Indian Media towards Warfare: Case Study of Pulwama Attack & Balakot Airstrike. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry*, *12*(8). https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Muhammad-Husnain-19/publication/356726803_Analysis_of_Pakistani_and_Indian_Media_towards_Warfare_Case_Study_of_Pulwama_Attack_Balakot_Airstrike/links/61a8d997ca2d401f27bbedae/Analysis-of-Pakistani-and-Indian-Media-towards-Warfare-Case-Study-of-Pulwama-Attack-Balakot-Airstrike.pdf

Hussain, S. F., Boyle, P., Patel, P., & Sullivan, R. (2016). Eradicating polio in Pakistan: An analysis of the challenges and solutions to this security and health issue. *Globalization and Health*, *12*(1), 63. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12992-016-0195-3

Ittefaq, M., Abwao, M., & Rafique, S. (2021). Polio vaccine misinformation on social media: Turning point in the fight against polio eradication in Pakistan. *Human Vaccines & Immunotherapeutics*, *17*(8), 2575–2577. https://doi.org/10.1080/21645515.2021.1894897

Kadlec, C. (2011). *The Goal Is Power: The Global Warming Conspiracy*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/charleskadlec/2011/07/25/the-goal-is-power-the-global-warming-conspiracy/

Khan, M. L., & Idris, I. K. (2019). Recognise misinformation and verify before sharing: A reasoned action and information literacy perspective. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, *38*(12), 1194–1212. https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2019.1578828

Kluger, J. (2020). Accidental poisonings increased after President Trump's disinfectant comments. *Time*.

Koohikamali, M., & Sidorova, A. (2017). Information re-sharing on social network sites in the age of fake news. *Informing Science*, *20*. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/232602449.pdf

Laato, S., Islam, A. K. M. N., Islam, M. N., & Whelan, E. (2020). What drives unverified information sharing and cyberchondria during the COVID-19 pandemic? *European Journal of Information Systems*, *29*(3), 288–305. https://doi.org/10.1080/0960085X.2020.1770632

Lazer, D. M. J., Baum, M. A., Benkler, Y., Berinsky, A. J., Greenhill, K. M., Menczer, F., Metzger, M. J., Nyhan, B., Pennycook, G., Rothschild, D., Schudson, M., Sloman, S. A., Sunstein, C. R., Thorson, E. A., Watts, D. J., & Zittrain, J. L. (2018). The science of fake news. *Science*, *359*(6380), 1094–1096. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aao2998

M, D. S., & Hairunnisa. (2023). The Phenomenon of Fake News (Hoax) in Mass Communication: Causes, Impacts, and Solutions. *Open Access Indonesia Journal of Social Sciences*, *6*(3), Article 3. https://doi.org/10.37275/oaijss.v6i3.161

Mallapaty, S. (2024). Wuhan lab samples hold no close relatives to virus behind COVID. *Nature*, *636*(8043), 531–532. https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-024-03982-2

Milman, J. (2014). *The inevitable rise of Ebola conspiracy theories*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonk/wp/2014/10/13/the-inevitable-rise-of-ebola-conspiracy-theories/

Mukherjee, R. (2020). Mobile witnessing on WhatsApp: Vigilante virality and the anatomy of mob lynching. *South Asian Popular Culture*, *18*(1), 79–101. https://doi.org/10.1080/14746689.2020.1736810

Omar, B., Apuke, O. D., & Nor, Z. M. (2024). The intrinsic and extrinsic factors predicting fake news sharing among social media users: The moderating role of fake news awareness. *Current Psychology*, *43*(2), 1235–1247. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-023-04343-4

Pennycook, G., McPhetres, J., Zhang, Y., Lu, J. G., & Rand, D. G. (2020). Fighting COVID-19 Misinformation on Social Media: Experimental Evidence for a Scalable Accuracy-Nudge Intervention. *Psychological Science*, *31*(7), 770–780. https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797620939054

Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. G. (2021). The psychology of fake news. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, *25*(5), 388–402.

Rehman, H. U., & Hussain, S. (2020). Social media, democracy and fake news in Pakistan: An analysis. *Global Political Review*, *5*(1), 84–93.

Reuters. (2017, April). https://www.reuters.com/article/world/mob-attacks-man-accused-of-blasphemy-in-northern-pakistan-idUSKBN17N239/

Talwar, S., Dhir, A., Kaur, P., Zafar, N., & Alrasheedy, M. (2019). Why do people share fake news? Associations between the dark side of social media use and fake news sharing behavior. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, *51*, 72–82.

Tandoc, E. C., Lim, Z. W., & Ling, R. (2018). Defining "Fake News": A typology of scholarly definitions. *Digital Journalism*, *6*(2), 137–153. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2017.1360143

Thompson, N., Wang, X., & Daya, P. (2020). Determinants of News Sharing Behavior on Social Media. *Journal of Computer Information Systems*, *60*(6), 593–601. https://doi.org/10.1080/08874417.2019.1566803

Treem, J. W., & Leonardi, P. M. (2013). Social Media Use in Organizations: Exploring the Affordances of Visibility, Editability, Persistence, and Association. *Annals of the International Communication Association*, *36*(1), 143–189. https://doi.org/10.1080/23808985.2013.11679135

Viala-Gaudefroy, J., & Lindaman, D. (2020). Donald Trump's 'Chinese virus': The politics of naming. *The Conversation*, *21*. https://www.academia.edu/download/63257912/Donald_Trumps_Chinese_virus__the%20politics_of%20naming20200510-117012-1weotjn.pdf

Wardle, C. (2018). Information disorder: The essential glossary. *Harvard, MA: Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy, Harvard Kennedy School*. https://www.globacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/infoDisorder_glossary.pdf

Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2017). *Information disorder: Toward an interdisciplinary framework for research and policymaking* (Vol. 27). Council of Europe Strasbourg. http://tverezo.info/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/PREMS-162317-GBR-2018-Report-desinformation-A4-BAT.pdf

Wei, L., Gong, J., Xu, J., Abidin, N. E. Z., & Apuke, O. D. (2023). Do social media literacy skills help in combating fake news spread? Modelling the moderating role of social media literacy skills in the relationship between rational choice factors and fake news sharing behaviour. *Telematics and Informatics*, *76*, 101910.

APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear Respondent: Thank you for your time participating in this research survey. The scholar is student of MS "Media and Communication Studies" at International Islamic University, Islamabad. This questionnaire is the part of his compulsory academic course which required him to conduct a Research on topic "Motives behind Fake News Sharing: A user's perspective". The objective of this research study is to find out the factors which affect fake news sharing behavior on social media. You are requested to carefully read each question and opt your desired answer accordingly. Your information is valuable to me and all data received through this questionnaire will be used only for research purposes and kept confidential.

Section A: General Information (Demographics)

1. **Gender**
   - Male_____
   - Female_____

2. **Age**
   - 18 – 24_____
   - 25 – 34_____
   - 35 – 44_____
   - 45 and above_____

3. **Education**
   - Bachelors_____
   - Masters_____
   - PhD_____
   - Other_____

4. **Hours spent on social media (per day)**
   - 10 – 12h_____
   - 07 – 09h_____
   - 04 – 06h_____
   - 01 – 03h_____

5. **Social media platforms used most frequently**

- WhatsApp_____
- Facebook_____
- Instagram_____
- Twitter_____
- Other_____

6. **Political Interest**

- Very interested_____
- Interested_____
- Slightly Interested_____
- Not interested at all_____

Section B: Topic related information (Research Variables)

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
How likely are you to share religious news or content without verifying its authenticity?					
Do you believe sharing religious messages (even unverified) brings spiritual rewards?					
When you see a religious post on social media, how often do you fact-check its source before sharing?					
I have spread false information about religion, thinking it to be real.					
Even if it is false, I believe in religious news.					
I believe that most of the news that is shared on social networks is credible.					
I believe that most of the news that is shared on social networks is accurate.					
I believe that most of the news that is shared on social networks is trustworthy.					
I share news on social media to help keep others informed.					

I believe sharing news can benefit my community.					
I feel a responsibility to share important news with my friends and family.					
I share content on social media because I want to motivate and inspire others.					
I identify strongly with a particular political party.					
My political beliefs influence the news I choose to share.					
I prefer news that aligns with my political views.					
I share content on social media because I can freely talk about issues with others.					
I share content on social media because I feel involved with other people's issues.					
I share content on social media because I can effortlessly interact with other members in my network when sharing.					
I share content on social media because I can easily exchange views with other members in my network efficiently.					
I share content on social media because it helps me keep in contact with other members in my network.					
I often share information or news without checking its authenticity.					
I share information or news without checking facts through trusted sources.					
I share information or news without verifying that it is true.					
I share information or news even if sometimes I feel the information may not be correct.					