

MS Research Thesis
**RELIABILITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFORMATION IN
PAKISTAN: AN ANALYSIS OF THE FACTORS
EMPLOYED BY YOUTH**



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INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY ISLAMABAD

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This thesis is submitted to the Department of Media and Communication Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, International Islamic University, Islamabad to fulfill the requirements for degree of MS (Media and Communication Studies).

DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES
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DEDICATION

Researcher dedicates his dissertation work to his family and friends. A special feeling of gratitude to his loving parents, his brothers and sisters who have never left him alone and they are very special to him.

Researcher also dedicates this dissertation to his friends and his university fellows who have supported him throughout the process. He will always appreciate all they have done for him.

Researcher gives special thanks to his supervisor Dr Syed Inam-ur-Rahman for being there for him throughout the entire MS program. Researcher thanks his supervisor for being so cooperative to him. Supervisor has been his best teacher throughout his MS journey.

FORWARDING SHEET

This thesis entitled “**Reliability of Social Media Information in Pakistan: An Analysis of the Factors Employed by Youth**”, submitted by **MUSA KAMAL** Registration # 505-FSS/MSMC/F21 to fulfill the partial requirements, for the award of degree of MS (Master Studies) in Media and Communication Studies, under my guidance and Supervision is forwarded for the further necessary action.

Date: _____

Dr. Syed Inam ur Rahman
Assistant Professor/ Supervisor

Thesis Completion Certificate

This thesis entitled “**Reliability of Social Media Information in Pakistan: An Analysis of the Factors Employed by Youth**”, submitted by **MUSA KAMAL** Registration# **505-FSS/MSMC/F21** in partial fulfillment for the requirement of MS Media and Communication Studies has been completed under our guidance and supervision. We are satisfied with the quality of student research work and allow him to submit this thesis for further process as per IIUI rules and regulations.

Dr. Syed Inam-ur-Rahman
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STATEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING

The researcher “**Musa Kamal**” having registration number **505-FSS/MSMC/F21** and student of MS Media Communication Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, International Islamic University Islamabad do declare that thesis entitled “**Reliability of Social Media Information in Pakistan: An Analysis of the Factors Employed by Youth**” submitted by me in specific satisfaction of MS degree in the original work except other acknowledgement of text has not been submitted or published earlier nor in future be submitted by me for any degree from this university or institution.

DATE: _____

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ABSTRACT

In today's digital era, social media networking sites have become the most important sources of information and news, especially among the youth in Pakistan. However, the reliability of information spread through social media is a significant concern due to the prevalence of misinformation. This study aims to identify key factors affecting the reliability of information on social media in Pakistan. The study employs a quantitative approach, and data was collected through a Likert scale online questionnaire from a diverse sample of 400 respondents. The sampling included variations in age, gender, education, profession, marital status, job, and province of residence to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the target population. The study's findings show that social validation thresholds, content quality, and the credibility of information sources are critical in evaluating the reliability of social media information. Besides, the presence of social media plugins, references to credible sources, and user engagement are significant determinants of information reliability. The study shows a growing awareness among Pakistani youth about the importance of fact-checking and verifying news before trusting it, reflecting a positive trend towards curbing misinformation. The results show the need for collective efforts to enhance digital literacy and promote educational initiatives aimed at fostering critical thinking and responsible internet usage. The study concludes that improving information reliability on social media requires a multi-faceted approach involving media organizations, government agencies, educational institutions, and the public.

Keywords: Social Media Reliability, Youth Information Assessment, Fact-Checking Methods, Credibility Factors

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In the current and contemporary times, social media has become an important tool for the spread of information and sharing of news. The current world is dominated by the large quantity of social media platforms, and they have revolutionized the dissemination and spread of news and information by deeply impacting several aspects of life (Bokoh et al. 2022). Specifically in the company of the youth population, social media has become the basic source for accessing news, opinions, and various contents in Pakistan (Mahmood et al., 2022).

Pakistan is a country which is characterized by its vibrant and dynamic socio-political and socio-economic landscape and a diverse population as well. It has seen a noticeable increase in internet and social media usage in the recent time. According to Statista, Pakistan had more than 47 million active social media users, has a large percentage of the population being young. (Zeib, 2021). There are so many platforms, like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp which dominate the social media landscape, and Pakistani youth use these sites to actively gather, share, and engage with information. While the credibility of news and information on social media not a local but a global concern. There are certain evils which have dominated the world today on many fronts, such as fake news and misinformation.

The complex atmosphere of information in this country is impacted by a number of factors, such as political, social, economic, and cultural factors, which makes it

significantly important in the realm of the credibility and reliability of information. A significant portion of Pakistan's population consists of youth, and it is evident in today's world that social media has a great influence not only in the spread of news and information but also in misinformation and disinformation (Aslam et al., 2023). However, despite the huge reach and accessibility social media, there are a number of doubts related to the authenticity and accuracy of the news and information that are provided by these social media sites (Zhang & Gupta, 2018). The increase in the use of social media has brought about significant challenges in the shape of fake news, propaganda, misinformation and even disinformation (Guess & Lyons, 2020). It has emerged not only as a regional or local concern but a global concern with nearly all states of the world, including Pakistan, striving to decrease the negative impact of fake news, propaganda and misinformation on their respective societies. (Hutchby & Ian, 2006).

The current and contemporary rise of social media has seen a significant and great evolution since its emergence to the limelight in the past two decades. (McIntyre, 2014). Following this, social media platforms developed into the massive modern platforms that are used by billions of users today (Grover et al., 2022). The history of social media dates back to 1997 and the launch of Six Degrees, the first social media network. Friendster and Myspace followed in the early 2000s (Edosomwan et al., 2011).

In 2004, Facebook was launched and it has now become the most popular and renowned social media platform across the world, and its users are now over than 2.9 billion monthly as of 2022. Similarly, Twitter was launched in 2006, initially as a micro-blogging platform, Instagram was launched as a photo-sharing social media platform in

2010; Snapchat started working as a messaging app in 2011 initially, and TikTok started working as a short-form video-sharing social media platform in 2016 (Burns, 2021).

Nowadays social media platforms serve various purposes, including advertising, marketing, and political campaigns, and these platform have become an integral part of people's lives (Arackal, 2015). Social media platforms mean the online platforms and tools that assist the social media consumers to create various kinds of contents, share, post, comment and interact with content, ideas, and other users (Duong, 2020). Additionally, social media allows individuals and organizations to stay in contact connect with people from all over the world very easy, while sharing information and building networks globally (Bingham & Conner 2010). Social media platforms typically offer a multiple features, including profiles, newsfeeds, messaging, commenting, and sharing. Social media has had a deep impact on communication, marketing, politics, and society as a whole, and its influence is expected to continue growing in the upcoming years in the future. The current rise and increase in the use of social media as the most important sources of latest news and key information is the new normal trend in the ongoing globalized world order. Hence, there is a great need to get that how multiple organizations, people and even countries assess the reliability and credibility of news and information which are there on social media sites (Lazer et al. 2018).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The rampant and unbridled growth of social media has evolved the ways in which individuals, organizations and even countries acquire and share news and information. Nevertheless, the growing dependency on social media platforms for news and information has given birth to new evils, such as fake news, misinformation and disinformation. This

trend is not only a regional or a local concern but a global concern, with nearly all countries of the world trying to overcome the effects of fake news and misinformation on their societies. Similarly, Pakistan is a country with more than 80 million internet users, and there is an increasing trend of social media as well. However, there is a lack of research available on the phenomena that how internet users in Pakistan evaluate the credibility of news and information that are available on social media sites.

It presents a critical problem as the spread of fake news and misinformation on social media have negative implications in all walks of life – social, political, cultural and economic. Therefore, the present study aimed at the investigation of the perceptions of users regarding the reliability of news and information on social media in Pakistan. The present study focused on identifying the key factors that social media users undertake when they assess the credibility of news and information that are available on social media platforms while looking into the challenges of distinguishing credible news and information from fake news and misinformation.

1.5 Research Objectives

- To examine the elements and factors that social media users in Pakistan take into account while assessing the veracity, authenticity and credibility of news and information that are shared on social media networks, such as its tone, source, content, and even context of the message.
- To explore the obstacles and challenges that social media users in Pakistan confront while attempting to distinguish credible and reliable news and information from fake news and misinformation on social media sites.

- To identify the methods that social media users in Pakistan consider while they verify the reliability and credibility of news and information on social media?

1.3 Research Questions

RQ-1: What are the elements and factors that social media users in Pakistan take into account while assessing the veracity, authenticity and credibility of news and information that are shared on social media networks, such as its tone, source, content, and even context of the message?

RQ-2: What are the obstacles and challenges that social media users in Pakistan confront while attempting to distinguish credible and reliable news and information from fake news and misinformation on social media sites?

RQ-3: What are the methods that social media users in Pakistan consider while they verify the reliability and credibility of news and information on social media?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study is important because it looks at how people in Pakistan assess the truthfulness of news and information on social media. Understanding this phenomena can help policymakers and social media sites to develop ways to stop the spread of fake news and misinformation. The study also highlights the difficulties people face in distinguishing real news from fake news. Raising awareness about these challenges can reduce the impact of fake news on political, social, and economic issues. By focusing on Pakistan, this study provides valuable insights into how social media affects information in a developing country. The findings can help policymakers, social media companies, and users

understand and address the reliability of information in Pakistan. Additionally, the present study can inspire other researchers to explore this topic further, contributing to a better understanding of social media's role in spreading information

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Review of the Literature

The literature review depicts and assesses research evidence at a large. Credibility is also a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, and there is no universal and accepted definition of it yet. Therefore, different researchers have focused on identifying a number of factors that impact people's credibility, authenticity and evaluations. In the present era, different scholars have primarily focused on understanding the prominent dynamics of social media information reliability and credibility, especially among young population. Abbas et al. (2019) showed the scope of the reliability and credibility of social media information in the context of countries like Pakistan, where social media sites have gained great popularity among the youth demographic. These social media platforms serve as the basic and primary sources of news and information, and play a key role in shaping the attitudes on a number of socio-political and socio-economic issues.

The significant evolution of social media in Pakistan is taken abck to the emergence of platforms like Facebook, Twitter and their transformation from tools of social media (Irem, 2014). With the new and innovative invention of smart phones, the great growth of social media has been increased in Pakistani youth (Tariq et al., 2012). Gasser et al. (2012) showed that Pakistani youth most often heavily rely on the news and information that is shared by family members and even peers on social media networks even if these sources are not authentic, accurate and credible. The study found out that there is a great need for

intervention in this regard to increase digital literacy and even critical thinking skills among the youth population of Pakistan.

Raheed et al. (2024) showed the rampant and unbridled growth of fake news, misinformation and disinformation on social media sites in Pakistan. In developing nations like Pakistan, false rumors and conspiracy theories spread more rampantly with great speed, which ultimately lead to the spread of inaccurate information and the breaking of trust in the traditional and conventional news sources. Stark et al. (2020) showed the most important role of algorithmic bias in shaping the credibility of social media sites. It was found out that the existing algorithmic recommendations on social media networks, such as Facebook, Twitter and Youtube, mostly give importance to sensational or polarizing or viral content, which consequently lead to the spread of misinformation and disinformation. Rafi et al. (2019) discussed the importance and scope of digital literacy in eradicating the risks of fake news and misinformation, and it focused on the need for more inclusive and comprehensive digital literacy programs that enable the youth with the capacity to differentiate fake and false news and even misinformation from real and factual news.

Researches have consistently found that well-designed and organized websites are generally viewed as more credible than those that are poorly designed and disorganized. This includes aspects such as using clear fonts, appropriate colors, and an easy-to-navigate layout. However, too many intrusive advertisements can harm credibility evaluations. Zha and Wu (2014) found that people may see these ads as manipulative or indicative of a site more focused on making money than providing accurate information. Social media shows the important activities of consumers, and it is the most important source of information to spread current news and trends worldwide (Kang, Lee, 2017). In the last decades, social

media has successfully increased the number of consumers which is more than 32% of the world population in 2016 (Emarketer, 2016).

Social media has exceedingly changed the way people interact, and it has given rise to new ways in which individuals and brands communicate with each other. Social media has given rise a higher communication between consumers and brands, in addition, it is also able to develop their online attitude (Szolnokia *et al.*, 2018; Pelau & Acatrinei, 2019).

The significant expansion in the worldwide web client base has achieved an essential change in purchaser conduct, promoting a groundbreaking pattern in how buyers effectively look for data through arising mass correspondence channels like virtual entertainment. (Men and Tsai 2013). There is an immensely variable in the world of social media which is the credibility of source, and it because of the abundance of information available online. Owing to this trend, it is imperative to have gatekeeping responsibility of consumers rather than content producers (Haas & Wearden, 2003). In conventional media, there are so many gatekeeping options: journalists, and editors etc. They are supposed to check information whether it is true or not, and thus it assists in filtering information. And checking is credibility (Salcito, 2009).

As a result, the internet and social media have significant impact on consumer purchasing behavior. These platforms enable consumers to connect with each other and businesses to engage with both current and prospective customers. Notably, in countries like Germany, the findings of a 2014 survey indicate that social media information has influenced the buying choices of over 6% of German consumers (Berger 2014). Despite the fact that social media enhance knowledge sharing among students, thereby promoting

their engagement and creativity in graduate research training, the correlation between students' social media usage and the adverse effects of cyberbullying, which refers to the repeated and intentional use of electronic means to harm a victim who is unable to easily defend themselves, is anticipated to be weak (Smith et.al., 2008).

Over the last few years, social media has become increasingly ingrained in people's lives and is now present in almost every aspect of life (Raniar. Rawaski, Yang, & Johnson, 2014; Ruleman, 2012). In the field of education, social media has also gained significant popularity, with recent studies highlighting its impact (Kaplan & Haelein, 2016). For instance, research has found a positive correlation between the use of social media and students, academic performance (Alwagait, Shazhad, & Alim, 2015).

Social media is characterized by its user-based content, and it has remarkable ability to disseminate information regardless of borders and boundaries. In the unique socio-economic and geo-strategic landscape of Pakistan, the growth of these social media platforms offer a nuanced perspective. Pakistan came to the realm of social media in the decade of 2010. Rehman et.al (2014) explored the role of social media in the societal transformation in the context of third world in general, and Pakistan in particular. In the study, thematic analysis was used while collecting data from 40 participants including teachers, parents and youth. Findings of the research revealed that social media played a crucial role in improving the standard of life by giving an easy access to global markets, financial services and opportunities for employment. Besides, it is a significant source of socialization for youth in less time with less cost. In the age of social media, the interaction with peers, friends, and family members became easier. However, there are certain dark

sides of the utilization of social media use, such as unethical practices, privacy breaches, misinformation and even disinformation.

Zulqarnain and Hassan (2016) discussed the perception of people about the credibility of social media in Pakistan. The primary purpose of the study was to depict the profound impact of social media reliability on the five areas of news: national news, international politics, local news, disaster and relief works, and business and entertainment news on social media. The study was done through an adapted questionnaire while non-probability convenience sampling method was employed. In the study, 164 respondents' data was collected including both male and female students of universities in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Then, the collected data was analyzed through regression and Pearson correlation analysis. The study helped in finding individuals' narratives about social media and gave suggestions that in order to maximize the social media usage and increase its credibility, individuals' perception must be changed. Similarly, the results of social media credibility related to disaster and relief were seen to be the most significant as 56.8 percent variation were found out due to social media usage. Besides, the government, non-governmental organizations, online media platforms and other authorities associated to social media must consider the news about relief works as one of the most important factors which are affected by the credibility of social media.

Malik and Latif (2022) described that social media is present everywhere, and its scope and significance cannot be ignored but the spread of disinformation and fake news is raising questions on its credibility; and it calls for more research in this area. The present study is done to analyze the perceptions of Pakistani journalists regarding the credibility of news and information available on social media. The study finds out that whether social is

a reliable source of information for Pakistani journalists or not. The researcher used cross-sectional survey method while conducting this study. In order to test the proposed hypothesis, the researcher used the questionnaire technique by using 196 questionnaires. The sample for the study was both male and female journalists from both electronic and print media of Lahore. The results show that journalists use social media for news and professional needs. The study also shows a significant link between the social media usage and its credibility. It shows that if journalists spend enough time on site; then, they can easily find fake news. The study provides a comprehensive account of knowledge in the area of social media credibility and perceptions of journalists in Pakistan.

Nawaz (2017) conducted a study on the use, problems and prospects of social media in youth in Southern Punjab. The study focused on the investigation of social media use and its gratification among young population of South Punjab, focusing on the deep problems and even future prospects. The researcher focused on investigating the social media usage, gratification, motives, and gave priority to population within the age range of 17-25. The study also explored the dependency of youth in terms of seeking relaxation, knowledge or even information while using different websites of social media on internet. The level of impact of social media reliability was measured through the information taken from social media networks. The data collection was done through survey research design by using a pre-constructed questionnaire which was screened after pilot study. In this study, 1200 respondents were selected through a purposive sampling technique from three selected regions of South Punjab. In this study, a total number of 1000 out of 1200 participants responded to the questionnaire. The findings of the research show that almost most of the participants were having social media accounts; however, Facebook users were

more dominant as compared to other social media sites. The study observed that most of the respondents used 2-4 hours of social media daily. There was a considerable correlation between the academic education and social media networks as a prominent source of information. Most of the respondents preferred photo sharing activity as compared to other activities like videos, creative contents and poetry. Result of the study supported both the theories used – Gratification and Social Learning theories - as there was a great difference of usage patterns among youth belonging to diverse socio-demographic backgrounds. The above mentioned study also gave direction to future researchers.

Abbas et al. (2019) explored the role of social media in the learning attitudes of university students to acquire academic education. In the current world, social media has an influential and essential impact on education. Technology has made the world a global village, and now the emergence of social media is shrinking it even further. However, the study aims to look into the positive and negative factors that affect students' minds. Similarly, it was noticed that the social networking sites have enormous positive as well as negative impacts on students and their attitudes towards education. The study was done through cluster sampling method, and the respondents were taken from five selected regions. The researchers distributed 1013 questionnaires among the target population with an age from 16 to 35. The researchers received 831 valid responses. The study applied the social gratification theory to assess students' behavior while practicing social media. The findings showed that social media usage has a negative impact on student's behaviors as compared to the positive impacts. Although the results may not be taken true for the entire student community. However, the study shows a relationship between antithetical and

creative characteristics of social media, and shows new ways for future studies by facilitating a better understanding of social media networking sites.

A study on the dependability of social media platforms as a consumer information source was done in by Pop et al. (2019). The internet has significantly altered how individuals engage and communicate with one another in the modern era. The internet has taken the place of traditional media as a source of information, and social media users are now content providers as well as consumers, improving customer connection. In a similar vein, users are free to publish on the internet, reply, and express their ideas. When it comes to social media, gatekeepers are irrelevant, yet in traditional media organizations, news and information are filtered. Regarding what can be posted on social media, there is evidently no control. The survey covered how customers felt about fake news and misinformation. It was conducted through discriminant analysis, there are different opinions presented for people of different ages.

According to a study by Kang and Lee (2017), social media has a significant and profound function in human communication, and it is a highly significant activity for customers. It is also a fantastic resource for media and information for keeping up with and disseminating global news. Social media has advanced significantly over the last ten years; in 2016, over 32% of individuals used social media platforms (Emarketer, 2016). In 2021, there were over 3.02 billion active users on social media. Szolnokia et al. (2018) conducted a study that social media has transformed the way people interact, and it has given rise to new opportunities for people and brands. Social media made it possible for a more robust and higher communication between users, and in addition, it can generate content and even develop online behavior.

Appel et al. (2020) carried out a research study on social media marketing's future. According to the report, social media platforms have a direct impact on audience-company communication by fostering a more intimate exchange. The disadvantage of these advancements is that bad news spreads swiftly in addition to consumer communication. Users now search for and trust the information they find on social media platforms in a different way due to the dramatic shift in communication brought about by these platforms. It's important to pay attention to what the audience reads because deceptive content can also be presented on different platforms.

Westerman et al. (2014) explored the reliability of information and news, while discussing the news related to risk and crisis. The study examined that how certain number of the available information on social media sites can deeply impact the source of credibility. In the current study, the respondents were gauged by viewing 1 of 3 Twitter pages that depicted enormous differences with the tweets that were uploaded. The collected data suggested that there were bright sides for both application and theory in the times of crisis communication and computer-mediated communication. The study also discussed limitations of the current study and even way forward for future research in the same field.

Khan et al. (2021) explored the level of trust that social media as a new and evolving technology, and how it has given rise to e-government services. However, in spite of its central role, there is no evaluation or examination of the factors that can develop citizens' faith to utilize these services, especially in countries like Pakistan which are in the developing stage. In the study, a research gap was addressed. For this study, a total number of 615 respondents were selected having familiarity with e-government and the profound and deep role of social media in it. The findings of the study depicted that there is a deep

and profound correlation between the citizens' trust to use e-government along with social media network services. There was a 56.4% of variance in trust. Similarly, the implications, limitations and even suggestions for future research gap were also proposed. These findings and results can assist government and policymakers in building decisions that can increase the participation of citizens to have faith in e-government and social media networks.

Abbasi & Huang (2020) discussed the emergence of the future generations consumers which can give a new shape to use and impact internet in this society. In the current age, users can go to and use multiple devices, such as PC, laptop, Tablet and smartphone etc. The study figured out that this phenomenon increased among teenagers when they get involved with media devices not only at home but also at schools. Social media has a crucial role in the consumption, and it has framed the usage and production of social media. One of the key and alarming challenges rose after the 2016 US presidential election, and it was the notion of false and fake news, besides, it was also related to terrorism and natural calamities. The study deeply emphasized that how teenagers identify fake and false news on social media networks, and their news practices and experiences on these social media sites.

One of the basic concerns is when evaluating information on social media is the credibility of its source. A number of studies have explored that how individuals assess the reliability of that source. Khan et al. (2019) figured out that Pakistani youth determine the credibility of news through the number of likes, shares and comments. Rasheed et al. (2020) showed that the validation of social media posts depend on the number of likes and comments, and it plays a crucial role in shaping youth's perception.

Sinthiya (2024) explored the reliability of news on social media networking sites with special reference to WhatsApp users. The study depicted that several social media sites are widely used by consumers for dissemination of news and information. The study focused on the belief that journalists need to learn a lot when it comes to sharing news through different social media sites. The study also compared the trustworthiness of news shared on social media to the conventional media. Similarly, it also shared the news shared on WhatsApp with other social media networking sites through diffusion of innovations idea. The study discussed the reliability of news shared on WhatsApp in District Vellore, India. In order to collect primary data, a well-structured questionnaire was developed, and it was distributed among 200 respondents for the study. Analysis was done through SPSS and the statistical tool chi-square test, and SEM analysis. Besides, frequency tables were used to derive the result. It was found that the residents of Vellore district rely on the news shared WhatsApp and they also check the reliability of the news before believing it.

Yaqub et al. (2020) explored the deep impacts of credibility signs on social media networks news and information. The study discussed that social media networks' services have been drastically affected by false stories. In order to spot these, it is imperative to mark them with credibility indicators. The study carried out an online study of 1512 people to unveil the effects of four kinds of credibility signs and indicators. It was found out that credibility signs can surely decrease the intensity to disseminate false news. However, the effect of certain indicators was different than others, with fact checking service being the most effective one. These findings had applicable and important footsteps for eliminating the rampant spread of disinformation, misinformation and false news through social networks.

The message trustworthiness and accuracy of identifying fake news as it appears on social media were investigated by Luo et al. (2022). In order to assess the degree to which consumers find news headlines credible and to differentiate between fake and legitimate news on three different topics—politics, science, and health—the study created a paradigm for deception detection for headlines and ran online experiments. The findings indicated a deception-bias for news on social media and demonstrated that individuals frequently believed bogus news headlines. An average detection accuracy of about 51% was found in all the experiments. In a similar vein, the second study assessed the influence of social media endorsement cues, including Facebook likes.

Isoraite & Aktas (2023) studied the dependability of social media. The study concentrated on people's perceptions of the accuracy of information found on social media platforms. to ascertain the rationale behind the respondents' assertions that they can separate trustworthy information from untrustworthy information. In summary, it was done to classify arguments into groups that might distinguish between trustworthy and untrustworthy sources of information. The study also included critical thinking, common sense application, and self-analysis. It was discovered that the arguments made by those who are incapable of identifying trustworthy information claimed that it is impossible to comprehend the reliability of information because they believe it to be biased.

Ida et al. (2020) explored the role of social media usage, political learning and the participation of youth. It was a comparative analysis between Pakistan and Indonesia, and it unveiled the youth participation in political matters. The study drew comparative analysis of youth involvement in certain political matters. The study focused on the sway of social media in increasing youth involvement in political participation, political learning and

political efficacy. The study was quantitative in nature, and it employed both online and offline surveys in both Indonesia and Pakistan in the times of elections. The data was collected in systematic manner from both these countries, first from Pakistan in 2018 General Elections, and then from Indonesia in 2019 General Elections. A total number of 400 questionnaires were distributed among the respondents, selecting 200 from each. The results showed that the youth has a significant role while contributing to politics in their respective countries. The results depicted that the use of social media assisted the youth population to actively engage in political activities to increase their knowledge, and provide an opportunity to participate, and effectively and efficiently build the capacity of political awareness. The study found out that youth has actively engaged and used to dialogue and debate on the political matters, and social media's role to sensitize and spread political awareness in the public.

Adil et al. (2020) showed that how social media might be used as a source of political while talking about the Panama Leaks case in Pakistan. The study discussed that how social media's ability to communicate instantly and vibrantly has made it a popular information source for people of all regions. Researchers should look into how users should use social media to learn about socio-economic, social-political, and cultural concerns in society, as this is the basic way that social media is used as a source of information. The purpose of the study was to look into how social media is used in Pakistan to obtain political information about the Panama Leaks controversy. 500 educated individuals provided the key data for the quantitative analysis.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework assists the researcher to use the accurate and applicable theories of communication with the help of which the researcher examine, and unveil the proposed study. It is the offshoot of the research, and it ushers the plan of the proposed study and helps in the systematic armament of the study. The current proposed study employed the Information-Processing Theory.

2.2.1 Information-Processing Theory

The Information-Processing Theory explains that how people perceive, process, and evaluate information. The theory proposes that individuals utilize cognitive processes, like attention, comprehension, and memory to evaluate information. This theory can serve as a suitable theoretical framework to study information reliability on social media in Pakistan. People's perception, processing, and evaluation of information are explained by the information-processing theory. It suggests that people evaluate the veracity and believability of information by using cognitive functions including memory, attention, and comprehension. This idea is a great starting point for researching the validity of information on Pakistani social media. The Information-Processing Theory provides a methodical comprehension of how people engage with information. This hypothesis helps to explain how users of social media filter, analyze, and retain the huge volumes of information that they are continually exposed to. We can gain a deeper understanding of the cognitive processes people utilize to discern between reliable content and false information and fake news by putting this theory to work.

The Information-Processing Theory is particularly relevant to social media research because it addresses how users encounter and process the diverse and often conflicting information presented on these platforms. This theory's focus on cognitive processes such as attention, comprehension, and memory is crucial for understanding how individuals navigate the complex information landscape of social media. Attention helps identify what captures users' interest, comprehension pertains to how users interpret the information, and memory affects how information is retained and recalled, all of which are essential for evaluating the credibility of information. Additionally, the theory's multidisciplinary applications in fields like education, neuroscience, and psychology provide a solid foundation for analyzing cognitive mechanisms in the context of social media. Its established empirical support further validates its use in studying information reliability, ensuring a robust framework for exploring how users assess and interact with information on social media platforms.

By utilizing the Information-Processing Theory, this study aims to provide deeper insights into the cognitive processes that influence how social media users in Pakistan evaluate the credibility of information. This understanding can inform strategies to enhance media literacy and combat misinformation, contributing to a more informed and discerning public. The information-processing theory provides a systematic understanding of how individuals perceive, process, and evaluate information, which are exceedingly relevant in the context of social media networking sites. The information processing theory explores that the individuals actively process and store information like computer's operations. It is used to acquire cognitive phenomena, and it has multiple walks of life - education, neuroscience and Psychology.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research methodology is to discuss the methods used for the proposed study, including data collection, techniques for data analysis, the universe of the study, and sampling methods. Research is a systematic method in which a researcher thoroughly investigates through a coordinated process (Walliman, 2011). The methodology employed in this research was quantitative in nature, with data collected through a questionnaire focused on the reliability of social media information in Pakistan and analysis of the factors considered by the youth.

3.1 Research Design

The study was structured around the research problem and then explored the role of the reliability of social media information in Pakistan. Quantitative research was used to collect and analyze data. Quantitative research primarily involves collecting data in numerical form, which is analyzed mathematically. In this study, the data was collected using a structured online questionnaire distributed to social media users across Pakistan.

3.2 Population

The study was conducted in Pakistan, a country with a total area of 881,913 square kilometers (Kumar et al., 2017). Pakistan is located in the Asian continent with the Arabian Sea to its south, Iran to its southwest, and Afghanistan to its northwest. According to the 2017 census, Pakistan's total population was 207.68 million, with approximately 65,000,000 individuals within the age range of 18-35 years. The focus of this study was on this youth population, particularly those who frequently use social media platforms for

staying connected with friends and family, staying updated on current events, and sharing content.

3.3 Sampling

The sample size for this study was determined using Taro Yamane's formula. Given the large population of youth in Pakistan, a sample size of 400 individuals was selected. The respondents were categorized based on education, gender, profession, tehsils, marital status, age, and job status.

3.3.1 Taro Yamane's Formula

There are many methods and formulas used to calculate the sample size. The researcher used Yamane's formula in conducting the current study:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$$

The total population of district Pakistan was *207680000* as per the 2017 census. Out of which, the youth population within the age range of 18 to 35 years were approximately 65,000,000. Hence by following this formula:

$$N = \text{Population of the study}$$

$$K = \text{Constant (1)}$$

$$e = \text{Degree of the error expected}$$

$$n = \text{Sample size}$$

$$n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$$

$$n = 65,000,000 / 1 + 65,000,000 (0.05)^2$$

$$n= 399.93$$

The sample of the study was 400 respondents belonging to different walks of life in Pakistan. To retrieve sample, Taro Yamane's formula was used, and size of the sample was 400 respondents.

3.4 Data Collection

The data collection process involved both primary and secondary sources.

- **Primary Data:** Original data was collected through an online questionnaire distributed to social media users across Pakistan. This method provided firsthand information directly from the targeted population.
- **Secondary Data:** Information was also collected from published sources such as books, articles, reports, and online information related to the reliability of social media information in Pakistan. This data was used to supplement and support the primary data.

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using quantitative methods. The data from the questionnaires was processed and analyzed to derive insights related to the reliability of social media information in Pakistan. The analysis was focused on understanding how the youth population assesses the credibility of information on social media.

3.5 Variables

In the current study, consideration of information sources, and content characteristics are independent variables, while perceived reliability and judgment of reliability are dependent variables.

3.5.1. Independent Variables

a. Consideration of Information Sources

- **Conceptualization:**

This variable refers to the process by which individuals evaluate the credibility and trustworthiness of the sources from which they receive information.

It includes factors such as the reputation of the source, the frequency of the source being cited, and the perceived authority or expertise of the source.

- **Operationalization:**

This will be measured through questionnaire items asking respondents how much they consider the source of the information when assessing its credibility.

b. Content Characteristics

- **Conceptualization:**

This variable refers to the attributes or qualities of the content itself that influence how it is perceived, such as the tone, style, clarity, and accuracy of the information. It also includes whether the content is presented in a balanced manner or is biased.

- **Operationalization:**

This will be operationalized through questions in the questionnaire that ask respondents to assess the content characteristics when determining reliability. Items could include the perceived neutrality of the content, the clarity and coherence of the information, and the presence of supporting evidence.

3.5.2. Dependent Variables

a. Perceived Reliability

- **Conceptualization:**

Perceived reliability refers to the extent to which individuals believe that the information they encounter is accurate, dependable, and credible. This perception is shaped by both the source of the information and the characteristics of the content.

- **Operationalization:**

This variable will be measured by asking respondents to rate their overall trust in the information they receive on social media.

b. Judgment of Reliability

- **Conceptualization:**

Judgment of reliability refers to the conscious decision or evaluation process that individuals go through when determining the credibility of the information. It involves critical thinking and the application of criteria to assess whether the information should be trusted.

- **Operationalization:**

This will be operationalized by asking respondents to describe their judgment process when evaluating information. Questions could include how they verify the information, whether they compare it with other sources, and how they decide whether to believe or dismiss the information. Likert scale items and open-ended questions could be used to capture this judgment process.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

. The researcher wanted to see the reliability of social media information in Pakistan, and analysis of the factors employed by youth. The researcher made some tables to see the results of the response of different respondents.

4.1 Analysis of the Statements

Demographic and geographic information about participants is given at the start of statistical research. The details are given below:

Respondents of the Questionnaire

In the present study, a total number of 400 respondents were selected on the bases of Taro Yamane's formula.

Respondents on the Bases of Gender

In this study, the researcher observed a predominant representation of male respondents with 311 while female respondents were 89 in number.

Table 1: Gender of the Respondent

Gender	F	%
Male	311	77.75
Female	89	22.25
Total	400	100

The male participants comprised of 77.75%, while female respondents constituted only 10.2% of the study population in the present study. The diversity in gender enriches the proposed study.

Table 2: Age of the Respondent

Age	F	%
18-25	231	57.75
25-30	123	30.75
30-35	46	11.5
Total	400	100

The majority of them are in 18-25 age, with 231 respondents, accounting for 57.75% of the total respondents. Then, 25-30 age range make up the great portion with 123 participants having 30.75%. 46 respondents are in 30-35 age range making up 11.5%. The diversity in age group gives a purposeful direction to the present study.

Table 3: Respondents of the Questionnaire on the Bases of Marital Status

Status	F	%
Single	303	75.75
Married	97	24.25
Total	400	100

The marital status distribution among participants shows a great majority of single population, having 303 respondents, accounting for 75.75% of the total participants. Conversely, the married segment consists of 97% respondents, accounting for 24.25% of the study population.

Table 4: Respondents on the Bases of Education

Education	F	%
Matric/O-Level	6	1.5
FA/F.sc/A-Level	33	8.25
BA/B.sc	127	31.75
MA/M.sc	153	38.25
M.Phil./Ph.D.	81	20.25
Total	400	100

The education distribution among participants shows a diverse range of academic qualifications. A minor percentage of 1.5% with Matric/O-Level; 8.25% with FA/F.sc/A-Level; 31.75% with BA/B.sc level; 38.25% with MA/M.sc or BS level; and 20.25% with M.Phil. /Ph.D. level academic qualifications. This diversity in the academic backgrounds enriches the present study.

Table 5: Respondents on the Bases of Education

Degree	F	%
Mass Communication	86	21.5
Natural Sciences	44	11
Social Sciences	156	39
Engineering	38	9.5
Medical	76	19
Total	400	100

The respondents of the study show a diverse array of academic qualifications, with Mass Communication consisting of 21.5%, natural sciences with 11%, Social Sciences with the highest majority of 39%, Engineering at 9.5%, and Medical with 19%. This difference and variety in academic specializations improves the multidisciplinary nature of the present study.

Table 6: Respondents on the Bases of Province

Profession	F	%
KPK	324	81
Punjab	39	9.75
Baluchistan	8	2
Sindh	20	5
AJK/GB	7	2.25
Total	400	100

The researcher collected the data from a diverse range of respondents who belong to different provinces, contributing to the richness of the study population. The respondents of the study show a diverse array of provinces: KPK with 81%, Punjab with 9.75%, Baluchistan with 2%, Sindh with 5%, and AJK/GB with 2.25%. This diverse provincial representation calls for a comprehensive exploration of narratives related to the topic.

Table 7: Use of Electronic Device

Job	F	%
Smart Phone	276	69
Laptop	12	3
All of them	112	28
Total	400	100

The use of electronic gadget by the participants is quite diverse as well: 69% are serving of the participants used smart phone; 3% used laptops and 28% used all of these devices. The variety in the electronic gadgets enriches the collected data with diverse perspectives, conducting insights from individuals having different electronic gadgets.

Table 8: Social Media Use

Status	F	%
Yes	397	99.25
No	3	0.75
Total	400	100

The distribution of participants on the bases of social media usage shows a great majority of population answering with “Yes” which stood at 99.25%, while only 0.75% answered in “No.” It shows that an overwhelming majority of the people use social media in the current and contemporary era.

Table 9: Frequent Social Media User or Not.

	F	%
Yes	285	71.25
No	39	9.75
May Be	76	19
Total	400	100

The substantial majority of the respondents agreed to the question that they considered themselves as frequent social media users with 71.25%. On the other hand, only 9.75% disagreed to the question, while 19% of the respondents answered in an uncertain way by saying “May Be.”

Table 10: Social Media Platform

Platform	F	%
Facebook	86	21.5
Twitter	17	4.25
WhatsApp	97	24.25
Instagram	39	9.75
Youtube	30	7.5
All of them	131	32.75
Total	400	100

In order to enrich the present study, the respondents were asked about the social media platform which they use often. 21.5% of them were Facebook users; 4.25% Twitter users; 24.25% were frequent WhatsApp users; 9.75% used Instagram; 7.5% were WhatsApp users; and 32.75% answered that they used all of these social media networking sites. This diverse data collected from various social media network users shows that the respondents used various social media platforms.

Table 11: Social Media Usage Purpose

	F	%
To Kill Time	55	13.75
Contact	50	12.5
Entertainment	57	14.25
Education	53	13.25
News	106	26.5
All of the above	79	19.75
Total	400	100

In order to enrich the present study, the respondents were asked about the reason that why do they use social media. The answers were nearly the same in the 10-20 range. The distribution is given below: 13.75% answered that they used it to kill their time; 12.5%

used it for contact purposes; 14.25% used it for entertainment purposes; 13.25% used it for educational purposes, 26.5% for news and 19.75% stated that they used for all of the above purposes.

In the upcoming section, the researcher gives a number of statements while focusing on the reliability of social media information in Pakistan while employing an analysis of the factors employed by youth. These responses were collected on the bases of Likert Scale, and it had statements related to the reliability of social media information in Pakistan while employing an analysis of the factors employed by youth. These responses greatly contributed the present study by providing deep and profound analysis of the reliability of social media information while employing the factors employed by youth. The researcher interpreted and discussed these responses, and aimed to find the results of the present study effectively.

Table 12: Evaluating Source Credibility on Social Media.

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	84	21
Agree	203	50.75
Neutral	74	18.5
Disagree	32	8
Strongly Disagree	7	1.75
Total	400	100

The statement was exceedingly important in the context of examining the reliability of social media information in Pakistan while analyzing the factors employed by youth.

The whopping majority of 71.75% of the respondents either strongly agreed or agreed to the statement that the source of information is thoroughly considered and deeply looked, while evaluating its credibility on social media. However, 18.5% % of the respondents remained neutral, 8% disagreed and 1.75% strongly disagreed to the statement.

The response shows that the source of information is considered while evaluating the credibility of information on social media. It suggests the notion that the information and news of social media should be researched before believing it. Similarly, it should not be rejected before consulting fact checking.

Table 13: Impact of Message Content on Credibility Perception

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	87	21
Agree	235	50.75
Neutral	62	18.5
Disagree	14	8
Strongly Disagree	2	1.75
Total	400	100

The statement was asked to see whether the content of a particular message on social media influence the perception of its credibility. Out of the 400 respondents, 87 respondents strongly agreed to the statement, while 235 agreed to the statement which made a total of 71.75% population who agreed to the statement. 62 respondents remained neutral, while only 16 participants either disagreed or strongly disagreed to the above statement

The response showed that the content of a particular message on social media deeply influence the perception of its influence. It suggests that the particular kind of content has a specific role in influencing the perception of credibility.

Table 14: Contextual Influence on Information Reliability

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	62	18.5
Agree	250	62.5
Neutral	64	16
Disagree	17	4.25
Strongly Disagree	7	1.75
Total	400	100

The statement was based on the exciting narrative that the context of information on social impacts the judgment of its reliability. It suggests that the news and information which are shared in the wake of specific context impact the judgement of its credibility. Social media algorithms have a strong bias towards the viral content rather than the accurate one.

A substantial majority of 81% participants – either strongly agreed or agreed – shows a widespread consensus on the crucial role of context in which the particular news are given. The 16% respondents who remained neutral shows a portion of population that needs further knowledge to understand the role of a particular context in which information are shared on social media. The low disagreement rate of 6% suggests that the context of a specific news and information deeply impact the reliability of information on social media. Besides, it shows the powerful image of social media that it can be used for a specific purpose in specific times.

Table 15: Cross-Referencing Social Media Information

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	74	18.5
Agree	165	41.25
Neutral	79	19.75
Disagree	65	16.25
Strongly Disagree	17	4.25
Total	400	100

The statement and its data show the significant impact of cross-checking of social media’s information with other sources of news and information – print, electronic media and newspapers – before fully believing it.

A significant majority of the participants of nearly 60% - either agreed or strongly agreed – is a great testament to the inevitable role of cross-checking of social media’s information with other sources of news and information. The notable segment of 19.75% of population who remained neutral shows that they need further understanding and exploration of this role. On the other hand, a total number of 20.5% disagreed to the statement. The data of the respondents aligns with the cross-checking of information with other sources, such as traditional media etc.

Table 16: Role of Visual Aids in Judging Authenticity

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	72	18
Agree	213	53.25
Neutral	62	15.5
Disagree	42	10.5
Strongly Disagree	11	2.75
Total	400	100

The statement was asked to see the deep and profound role of visual aids (images, videos and documentaries) shared on social media, and how it plays a pivotal role in the judgement of its information's authenticity, credibility and reliability. The statement and its data show the significant impact of visual aids (images, videos and documentaries) shared on social media. A significant majority of the participants, 71.25% - either agreed or strongly agreed – is a great testament to the inevitable role of visual aids (images, videos and documentaries) shared on social media. The minor 15.5% segment of population who remained neutral shows that they need further understanding and exploration of the role of visual aids (images, videos and documentaries) shared on social media. The disagreement rate, 13.25%, is a mere minority, and it does not posit any significant challenge to the veracity of data.

The data of the respondents aligns with the broader narrative that visual aids (images, videos and documentaries) shared on social media play a pivotal role in the judgement of information's reliability. These findings are a great testament to the understanding that visual aids (images, videos and documentaries) shared on social media

play a pivotal role in the judgement of its information’s authenticity, credibility and reliability.

Table 17: Impact of Engagement Metrics on Trust.

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	91	22.75
Agree	184	46
Neutral	57	14.25
Disagree	57	14.25
Strongly Disagree	11	2.75
Total	400	100

The collected data shows the crucial role of the number of reacts, likes, comments, shares, and retweets in impacting the trust in information’s accuracy and reliability on social media. A great majority of 68.15% of the respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed to the above statement shows the great influence of the number of reacts, comments, shares, and retweets in information’s accuracy and reliability on social media. The 14.25% neutral respondents show a portion of population that need further understanding. The disagreement rate of 17% shows a subset of population with opposite views. The data shows that there is a deep role of the number of reacts, comments, shares, and retweets in information’s accuracy and reliability on social media. However, it does not mean that the viral content is the accurate one but the respondents perceive it this way.

Table 18: Trust in Information from Verified Accounts

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	105	26.25
Agree	184	46
Neutral	68	17
Disagree	35	8.75
Strongly Disagree	8	2
Total	400	100

The data collected from the participants reveals a strong impact of the reliability of news and information that are spread by credible people and verified accounts on social media sites. A significant 63.25% of the respondents – either agreed or strongly agreed – show that there is a deep impact of information that are shared by verified accounts on social media platforms. The minor portion of 17% neutral population shows that there is a need of investigation into the perspectives of the neutral respondents. On the contrary side, the 10.75% population, who either strongly disagreed or disagreed, presents a dissenting view that might be rooted in skepticism. However, the majority of the respondents believe in the reliability of information that are shared by verified accounts on social media platforms.

Table 19: Credibility of Information Linked to Credible Sources

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	77	19.3
Agree	210	52.5
Neutral	77	19.3
Disagree	30	7.5
Strongly Disagree	6	1.5
Total	400	100

The data suggests that a significant majority of the participants believe that social media’s information, connected with references to credible sources, seems more authentic and credible. A great majority of 71.8% participants – either strongly agreed or agreed – show a prevailing perception that social media’s information, connected with references to credible sources, seems more authentic and credible.

The 19.3% neutral respondents represent a segment of population that need further understanding of the role of credible sources when it comes to social media information and news. On the contrary side, only 9% of the population – either strongly disagreed or disagreed – posed an interesting contrast. However, the majority of participants acknowledge the role of credible sources in the dissemination of social media information and news. This high level of agreement reflects the perceived effectiveness and efficiency of credible sources in the spread of social media information and news.

Table 20: Skepticism towards Emotionally Evocative Content

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	57	14.3
Agree	169	42.3
Neutral	117	29.3
Disagree	50	12.5
Strongly Disagree	7	1.8
Total	400	100

The data collected from the respondents affirm that social media’s information that evokes strong emotional feelings (fear, anger, and discrimination) are skeptical to trust in. Social media’s information plays an instrumental role if it is reliable. An overwhelming majority of 56.6% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed to the statement that

social media’s information that evokes strong emotional feelings (fear, anger, and discrimination) are skeptical to trust in.

The notable 29.3% of neutral respondents represent a portion of the population with reservations or uncertainties regarding the role of social media’s information that evokes strong emotional feelings (fear, anger, and discrimination). On the contrary side, only 14.3% of the population, either disagreed or strongly disagreed, posed a contrasting perspective. The overwhelming majority of the respondents - who either agree or strongly agree to the above statement - suggests that social media’s information that evokes strong emotional feelings (fear, anger, and discrimination) are skeptical to trust in.

Table 21: Platform Impact on Trust and Credibility

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	55	13.8
Agree	228	57
Neutral	70	17.5
Disagree	37	9.3
Strongly Disagree	10	2.5
Total	400	100

The data collected from the respondents underscores a predominant inclination of the population towards the social media’s platform on which the particular information is shared (Youtube, Facebook, Twitter), and it deeply impacts the trust-level and its credibility.

A substantial majority of 70.8% respondents either strongly agreed or agreed to the statement that social media’s platform deeply impacts the trust-level and its credibility. The 17.5% of respondents remained neutral, and it shows a segment of population with

uncertainty regarding the role of social media's platform on which the particular information is shared (Youtube, Facebook, Twitter). Conversely, 11.8% of population either strongly disagreed or disagreed to the statement, and it shows a handful segment of the community that does not recognize the role of social media's platform in reliability of the information.

Table 22: Challenges in Distinguishing Reliable Information from False Information.

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	85	21.3
Agree	201	50.3
Neutral	75	18.8
Disagree	33	8.3
Strongly Disagree	6	1.5
Total	400	100

The data of the statement shows a predominantly positive response from the targeted population, and a substantial majority of 71.6% respondents either agreed or strongly agreed to the statement that it is quite challenging, and hard to distinguish reliable information from misinformation on social media. This huge response affirmed the fact that it is quite hard to discern fake news and propaganda on social media from real news. The 18.8% respondents remained neutral. On the hand, only 9.8% expressed disagreement which represents a small segment of participants who have a skeptical view about the statement that it's quite challenging, and hard to distinguish reliable information from misinformation on social media.

Table 23: Prevalence of Propaganda on Pakistani Social Media

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	165	41.3
Agree	161	40.3
Neutral	48	12
Disagree	18	4.5
Strongly Disagree	7	1.8
Total	400	100

The statement was exceedingly important in the context of the present study, and it shows that how propaganda and misinformation are widespread on Pakistani social media platforms. It suggests that content creators and social media users need to neglect the possibility of falling prey to the rise of propaganda and misinformation. The whopping majority of 81.6% of the respondents agreed to the statement that propaganda and misinformation are widespread on Pakistani social media platforms. However, 12% of the respondents remained neutral, 4.5% disagreed, and 1.8% strongly disagreed to the statement. The response showed that there is a profound role of propaganda and misinformation on Pakistani social media platforms.

Table 24: Highly Sensationalized Content Distracts from Authenticity.

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	75	18.8
Agree	199	49.8
Neutral	84	21
Disagree	31	7.8
Strongly Disagree	11	2.5
Total	400	100

Highly sensationalized content on social media often distracts me from knowing its reliability and authenticity. The collected data shows a strong consensus among respondents related to the highly sensationalized content on social media often distracts them from knowing its reliability and authenticity.

A whooping majority of 68% recognizes the fact that highly sensationalized content on social media often distracts from knowing its reliability and authenticity. The neutral response of 19% suggests that a portion of population remains uncertain about the role of social media that highly sensationalized content on social media often distracts them from knowing its reliability and authenticity. While a minor segment of 10% either disagreed or strongly disagreed to the statement.

Table 25: Difficulty in Evaluating Viral Content’s Authenticity.

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	94	23.5
Agree	220	55
Neutral	59	14.8
Disagree	17	4.3
Strongly Disagree	10	2.5
Total	400	100

The collected data underscores a strong consensus among respondents with 78.5% of the respondents - either strongly agree, or agree to the statement that there is a rapid spread of viral content on social media, and it makes it difficult to evaluate its authenticity before it is widely accepted. The neutral response of 14.8% shows a portion of population who are unsure or uncertain about the role of viral content on social media in this regard.

While a minority of 6.8% expressed either strong disagreement or disagreement to the statement.

Table 26: Challenges in Identifying Credibility of User-Generated Content

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	61	15.3
Agree	234	58.8
Neutral	71	17.8
Disagree	24	6
Strongly Disagree	10	2.5
Total	400	100

The collected data shows a strong consensus among respondents on the notion that it is difficult to identify the credibility and authenticity of user-generated contents – personal experiences and stories etc – on social media platforms.

A whopping majority of 74% recognizes the fact that it is difficult to identify the credibility and authenticity of user-generated contents – personal experiences and stories etc – on social media platforms. The neutral response of 17.8% suggests that a portion of population remains uncertain about the role of social media in sharing of impactful images, videos and visuals related to terrorism in Swat. While a minor segment of 8.5% either disagreed or strongly disagreed to the statement.

Table 27: Trust Issues Due to Fake Accounts and Bots.

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	128	32
Agree	170	42.5
Neutral	70	17.5
Disagree	24	6
Strongly Disagree	8	2
Total	400	100

Owing to the presence of fake accounts and bots, it is quite difficult to fully trust information on different social media platforms. The collected data reveals that in the presence of fake accounts and bots, it is quite difficult to fully trust information on different social media platforms. A substantial majority of 72.5% respondents, either strongly or agree to statement. The 17.5% of respondents remained neutral which means that they either remained undecided or uncertain about the role of social media in this context. While a mere 8% of the respondents - either strongly disagree or disagree to the above-mentioned statement.

Table 28: Information Overload Hinders Authenticity.

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	122	30.5
Agree	184	46
Neutral	67	16.8
Disagree	17	4.3
Strongly Disagree	10	2.5
Total	400	100

A substantial majority 76.5% of the respondents agreed to the statement that there is an unlimited amount of information on social media platforms, which makes it difficult

to know what genuine information is, and what is not. The 16.8% respondents remained neutral, while 7% of the respondents – either strongly disagreed or disagreed to the statement – is taken as a minor community while expressing their opinions.

Table 29: Lack of References Raises Authenticity Questions.

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	96	24
Agree	190	47.5
Neutral	76	19
Disagree	25	6.3
Strongly Disagree	12	3
Total	400	100

The collected data reflects a positive sentiment among the targeted population. A significant 71.5% of respondents - either strongly agree or agree to the statement - acknowledge the role of proper references and links in social media information and posts. The 19% of respondents remained neutral. On the other hand, 9.3% expressing disagreement or strong disagreement to the statement.

Table 30: Difficulty in Differentiating Fake News.

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	104	26
Agree	195	48.8
Neutral	64	16
Disagree	29	7.3
Strongly Disagree	8	2
Total	400	100

The statement was pivotal in the context of fake news on social media platforms than other platforms. 104 respondents strongly agreed to the statement which makes it 26%,

and 195 respondents agreed to the statement, which makes it 48.8%, while 64 of them stayed neutral which makes it 16%. Besides, 29 of the respondents disagree to the above-mentioned statement, which makes it 7.3%, and 2% strongly agreed to the statement. It is evident from the positive response - either strongly agreed or agreed – of 74.8% participants that it is quite hard to differentiate reliable news from fake news on social media platforms than other platforms.

Table 31: Cultural Context Challenges in Information Reliability.

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	67	16.8
Agree	214	53.5
Neutral	82	20.5
Disagree	30	7.5
Strongly Disagree	7	2.8
Total	400	100

The collected data reveals the crucial fact that it is quite hard to differentiate reliable news from fake news on social media platforms than other platforms. A significant majority of 70% of the respondents who either agreed or strongly agreed to the statement. The 20.5% neutral respondents show a portion of population that may have reservations or lack of understanding of social media’s impact in this regard. The disagreement rate of 10% shows a subset of population with opposite narratives in this regard.

Table 32: Consulting Fact-Checking Websites for Verification

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	47	11.8
Agree	189	47.3
Neutral	106	26.5
Disagree	46	11.5
Strongly Disagree	12	3
Total	400	100

The statement and its data show the significant impact of verification of information on social media, and the deep role of fact-checking websites on social media. A significant majority of the participants, 59% - either agreed or strongly agreed – and it shows the role of verification of information on social media, and the deep role of fact-checking websites on social media. A considerable 26.5% segment of population who remained neutral, while the disagreement rate, was 14.5%.

Table 33: Discussions with Family/Friends for Information Validation

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	52	13
Agree	199	49.8
Neutral	107	26.8
Disagree	32	8
Strongly Disagree	10	2.5
Total	400	100

The statement was pivotal in the context of validation of reliability of social media information, and the role of discussions with friends or family members in it. It is evident from the positive response - either strongly agreed or agreed - of 62.8% participants that

validation of reliability of social media information is must. It is important to note that only a great percentage of 26.8% showed neutrality, and 10.5% showed disagreement.

Table 34: Reliance on Official Accounts for Verification

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	74	18.5
Agree	189	47.3
Neutral	98	24.5
Disagree	29	7.3
Strongly Disagree	10	2.5
Total	400	100

The data of the statement shows a predominantly positive response from the targeted population. A substantial majority of 65.8% of respondents - either strongly agree or agree - affirm the fact that Social media users rely on ‘official accounts’ or experts to verify the validity of information available on social media platforms. A substantial majority of 8.3% respondents remained neutral. On the hand, only 9.9% express disagreement which represents a small segment of participants who have a skeptical view regarding the role of ‘official accounts’ or experts to verify the validity of information available on social media platforms.

Table 35: Ignoring Sensational Information on Social Media

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	50	12.5
Agree	153	38.3
Neutral	114	28.5
Disagree	68	17
Strongly Disagree	15	3.8
Total	400	100

The collected data shows a strong consensus among respondents related to the fact that social media users tend to ignore information that seems sensational or evoking emotions on social media platforms. A considerable majority of 50% of the respondents agreed to the statement. It affirms the fact that a large portion of population does not ignore information that seems sensational or evoking emotions on social media platforms.

The neutral response of 28.5% suggests that a portion of population remains uncertain, and they are undecided about the fact that whether people tend to ignore information that seems sensational or evoking emotions on social media platforms or not. While a minor segment of 21% of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed to the statement. It also shows a significant population who does not tend to ignore information that seems sensational or evoking emotions on social media platforms.

Table 36: Searching Multiple Platforms for Comprehensive View

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	68	17
Agree	194	48.5
Neutral	88	22
Disagree	39	9.8
Strongly Disagree	11	2.8
Total	400	100

The collected data reveals a positive inclination toward the notion that in order to get an authentic and comprehensive view of the information available on social media platforms, social media users search it on multiple platforms. A substantial majority of 65.6% of respondents – either strongly agree or agree to the statement – shows that there is a widespread and prevailing agreement about the statement, and respondents said that in

order to get an authentic and comprehensive view of the information available on social media platforms, they search it on multiple platforms.

The 22% of respondents remained neutral, and it represents that segment of population who are unsure or uncertain about the statement. While a small portion of 13% population expressed either strong disagreement or disagreement to the statement.

Table 37: Preference for Traditional Media over Social Media

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	68	17
Agree	175	43.8
Neutral	82	20.5
Disagree	56	14
Strongly Disagree	19	4.8
Total	400	100

The collected data shows a strong consensus among respondents related to the effectiveness of traditional media platforms – TV and newspaper – over social media platforms owing to authenticity concerns. A whopping majority of 60.8% recognizes the positive role of traditional media platforms – TV and newspaper – over social media platforms owing to authenticity concerns. The neutral response of 19% suggests that a portion of population remains uncertain about the role of traditional media platforms in this regard. While a minor segment of 18.8% either disagreed or strongly disagreed to the statement.

Table 38: Social Media as a Primary News Source in the Digital Age

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	120	30
Agree	180	45
Neutral	72	18
Disagree	17	4.3
Strongly Disagree	11	2.8
Total	400	100

The collected data underscores a strong consensus among respondents with 75% of the respondents - either strongly agree, or agree to the statement that in the current digital era, social media is the basic and primary source of news and information. The neutral response of 17.7% shows a portion of population who are unsure or uncertain about the role of social media in this regard. While a minority of 10% expressed either strong disagreement or disagreement to the statement.

Table 39: Social Media's Role in Tackling Misinformation

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	77	19.3
Agree	192	48
Neutral	97	24.3
Disagree	24	6
Strongly Disagree	10	2.5
Total	400	100

The collected data depicts an overwhelmingly positive perception among respondents that the spread of misinformation can be tackled by social media platforms to take more responsibility in curbing the menace of misinformation. A significant segment of 19.3% strongly agreed, and 48% agreed to the statement. The neutral response of 24.3%

suggests that a small portion of targeted population remains uncertain, while a minority expressed disagreement of 8.5% showed either disagreement or strong disagreement to the statement.

The overwhelmingly positive perception underscores the importance of the notion that the spread of misinformation can be tackled by social media platforms to take more responsibility in curbing the menace of misinformation.

Table 40: Trust in User Reviews for Product/Service Authenticity

Variables	F	%
Strongly Agree	70	17.5
Agree	222	55.5
Neutral	79	19.8
Disagree	25	6.3
Strongly Disagree	4	1
Total	400	100

The collected data shows a positive perception among participants with a great majority of 73% either agree or strongly agree to the statement that social media users trust user’s reviews and comments on multiple social media platforms to gauge the authenticity of a particular product or service.

The neutral responses of 19.8% shows a population who remains unsure or uncertain about the statement, while a mere minority of 7.3% expressed either strong disagreement or disagreement to the statement.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

The present study has highlighted that there are certain factors that deeply influence the reliability of information on several social media platforms among the youth population in Pakistan. The proposed study gives valuable insights into the deep and complex areas surrounding the reliability of social media information among youth in Pakistan. The respondents in the present study depicted a great interest in verifying the credibility of news and information from fact-checking sources before fully trusting it.

The findings of the present study depicts the critical issue of reliability of social media information in Pakistan by focusing on the factors that are employed by youth who engage with social media. There was an overwhelming preference from social media users for fact-checking and even verification of news before fully trusting it. This is an optimistic trend which shows the awareness among youth when it comes to the restriction of misinformation and the scope and significance of verifying information and its sources before placing trust in it in the current digital age.

The study shows that people in Pakistan think a lot about where information comes from to decide if it is true, with 71.75% saying the source is very important. Content also matters, as 71.75% believe it affects how trustworthy the information is. Context is important too, with 81% agreeing that it influences how reliable information seems. Many people check social media information with other sources, with 59% saying this is important. Visual aids, like pictures and videos, help in judging if information is real, according to 71.25%

of respondents. Engagement metrics, such as likes and shares, influence trust for 68.15% of people. Information from verified accounts is trusted by 63.25% of respondents. Additionally, 71.8% think information linked to reliable sources is more trustworthy. However, 56.6% are doubtful about information that triggers strong emotions, showing the difficulties in telling real news from fake news.

The findings align well with the research objectives. The data shows that 71.5% of respondents value references, and 74.8% acknowledge the difficulty in identifying fake news. This reflects the factors and challenges social media users in Pakistan consider when assessing the authenticity of information. A significant portion, 59%, trusts fact-checking websites, while 65.8% rely on official accounts for verification. Additionally, 60.8% prefer traditional media like TV or newspapers, indicating skepticism toward social media platforms. These findings demonstrate how users navigate the complexities of verifying news, aligning with the study's focus on factors, challenges, and methods of verification.

The whopping emphasis on verification and fact-checking shows a societal norm in the context of credibility of online information sources. In the current age of misinformation and disinformation, it is highly challenging for decision-makers and common public to distinguish real information and news from misinformation. The findings of the present study suggested that youth in Pakistan are aware of the dangers posed by misinformation and unethical use of social media, and they even try to find out new ways to reduce the risks of social media misinformation. This trend of verification of news sources aligns with the existing literature on information reliability and digital literacy. Similarly, it also sheds light on fostering critical thinking skills in getting through the information in the current digital universe. A number of studies have shown that those

people who actively try to identify misinformation from real information are way better at digital literacy. Through this method, youth in Pakistan try discern misinformation from real information.

The process of fact-checking also shows the inability of social media to counter the issue of misinformation itself. Although social media platforms have implemented a number of ways to counter the evils of misinformation effectively but still the responsibility of verification and fact-checking falls on social media users to evaluate the credibility of news and information. It shows that there is a need for a collective approach from all stakeholders to combat these evils effectively. There is also a need for reliance on fact-checking and verification which can be facilitated through intervention from media organizations, government agencies and even educational institutes. There must be initiatives taken for digital literacy and good citizenship in the digital universe which can be achieved through a culture of critical thinking and evidence-based reasoning to bring about a more informed citizens with real news and information. The findings of the present study sheds light on the scope of verification of news in shaping the perceptions of youth about social media information and its reliability in this country.

5.2 Conclusion

After a thorough analysis, it has been proved that the reliability and credibility of information is significantly dependent on a number of factors. Similarly, it was showed that language, atmosphere and sensationalism are the key indicators of reliability and credibility of information along with the way in which the specific information are presented. Moreover, the number of likes, comments and shares served as the social

validation factors which cannot be ignored in this regard as these factors are often seen important in the accuracy of information.

There are a number of challenges confronted in assessing the reliability of information. The world of media is constantly evolving and it needs the importance of assessing the credibility and reliability of information. Although there are a number of struggles brought by the unbridled rise of fake news and misinformation, such as sensationalism and the presence of fake accounts and bots on social media.

It is exceedingly important to tackle the challenges of fake news and misinformation efficiently. There is also a great need of the acceptance of the multi-dimensional challenges presented by these issues. Misinformation exists in the digital spectrum due to a number of factors, like its rapid spread, lack of fact-checking sites and even accountability, and the phenomena of viral things. While amidst these tough challenges, there are also great opportunities for practicable and new solutions. In order to increase information reliability and credibility on social media, it is imperative to take holistic and collective efforts. Information reliability can be achieved with the help of certain steps and initiatives, like incorporating fact-checking sites and even algorithms, while providing social media users with certain tools for the verification of information.

In order to resolve the challenges presented by the evils of misinformation and fake news, the inclusion of digital literacy in multiple walks of life is exceedingly important. Digital literacy in the youth population is extremely important as it helps them to overcome the challenges presented by the evils of fake news and misinformation. Besides, certain campaigns in the realm of education and digital literacy also play a crucial role in

inculcating fact-checking and cross-checking of the information presented to them, and it will enable them to differentiate credible and authentic information from false information. In addition, it is crucial to urge youth population, social media sites and even legislators and policymakers to take more steps in distinguishing credible information and news from fake news.

5.3 Recommendations

With the help of the findings of the present study, there can be several concrete recommendations drawn for future researches to conduct studies related to my topic in the future;

A study can be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of digital literacy programs in enhancing the ability of youth to identify credible information on social media, a longitudinal study will be conducted. This study will measure the digital literacy levels of participants before and after attending structured digital literacy workshops. By assessing changes in participants' abilities to evaluate the reliability of social media information, the study aims to provide insights into how education can mitigate the spread of misinformation and improve information reliability.

To investigate the psychological factors influencing credibility judgments, a study will examine how cognitive biases, such as confirmation bias, affect youth's evaluation of social media information. This study will use surveys and psychological tests to assess the correlation between cognitive biases and credibility judgments. The potential findings aim to identify key psychological traits that make individuals more susceptible to misinformation, providing insights that could help develop targeted interventions to

improve information literacy and reduce the impact of cognitive biases on credibility assessments.

A comparative analysis of credibility evaluation across different social media platforms will compare how youth evaluate the credibility of information on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok. This mixed-methods study will use surveys and focus groups to understand platform-specific credibility evaluation criteria. The potential findings could offer insights into platform-specific strategies to improve information reliability, helping social media companies tailor their approaches to enhancing credibility based on the unique characteristics of each platform.

To explore the role of social media influencers in shaping the credibility of information among youth, a study will analyze the content and engagement metrics of influencers and survey their followers to gauge the impact on credibility perception. This research aims to understand the influence of personalities on information trustworthiness and develop strategies for leveraging influencers in combating misinformation. The findings could inform best practices for influencers and social media platforms to promote credible information and reduce the spread of misinformation.

Assessing the effectiveness of fact-checking tools and services involves implementing an experimental design where participants use different fact-checking tools while engaging with social media content. This study aims to evaluate the impact of these tools on the information evaluation behavior of youth. The potential findings could provide a practical assessment of the utility of fact-checking tools in everyday social media use,

highlighting which tools are most effective in helping users discern credible information from misinformation.

To examine how social media credibility is affected during crisis situations, such as pandemics or natural disasters, a study will conduct case studies and content analysis of social media posts during recent crises, supplemented with surveys. The objective is to understand user behavior and develop strategies for improving information reliability during critical times. The potential findings could provide valuable insights into how social media platforms and users can better manage information credibility in crisis situations, ensuring that reliable information prevails during times of heightened uncertainty.

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Annexure

Appendix 1

Reliability of Social Media Information in Pakistan: An Analysis of the Factors Employed by Youth

Dear Participant,

I am conducting a study on, *Reliability of Social Media Information in Pakistan: An Analysis of the Factors Employed by Youth*, to figure out the reliability of social media information in Pakistan through the analysis of factors employed by youth. Your response would be kept confidential and would be used only for academic purposes. Filling out this questionnaire will consume your 5-10 minutes. I would be thankful to you, if you fill up this questionnaire.

If you face any problem in filling out this questionnaire, you may contact me at Musakamal666@gmail.com.

Thanks

Researcher,

Musa Kamal

DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES

FACULTY OF

SOCIAL SCIENCES

INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY ISLAMABAD

Demographic Variables

Gender

Male

Female

Age

18-25 years

26-30

31-35

Marital Status

Married

Single

Education

Matric

FA/F.sc

BA/B.sc

MA/M.sc

MS/Ph.D

Other

Types of Degree

Mass Com.

Natural Sciences

Social Science

Engineering

Medical

Other

Province

KP Punjab

Balochistan

Sindh

AJK & GB

Section-2

1. Which electronic gadget do you use?
 - a. Laptop
 - b. Smart Phone
 - c. Tablet
 - d. Any other_____.
2. Do you use Social Media?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
3. Do you consider yourself a frequent social media user?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
4. Which social media platform do you use most often? (*If other than the one mentioned below, please mention in the blank space*).
 - a. Facebook
 - b. Twitter
 - c. WhatsApp
 - d. Instagram
 - e. All of them
 - f. Any other_____.
5. Why do you use social media?
 - a. Entertainment
 - b. To kill time
 - c. Contact
 - d. Advertisement
 - e. Education
 - f. News

Section-3

S/No	Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	The source of information is thoroughly considered and deeply looked, while evaluating its credibility on social media.					
2.	The content of a particular message on social media (e.g., language, tone and sensationalism) deeply influences the perception of its credibility.					
3.	The specific context in which information is given on social media affects the judgement of its reliability.					
4.	Social Media's information are often cross-checked with other sources of information – print, electronic media and newspapers – before fully believing it.					
5.	The visual aids (images, videos and documentaries) shared on social media play a pivotal					

	role in the judgement of its information's authenticity, credibility and reliability.					
6.	The number of reacts, likes, comments, shares, and retweets impact the trust in information's accuracy and reliability on social media.					
7.	It is more likely to trust information that are shared by verified accounts on social media platforms.					
8.	Social media's information, connected with references to credible sources, seems more authentic and credible.					
9.	Social Media's information that evokes strong emotional feelings (fear, anger, and discrimination) are skeptical to trust in.					
10.	Social media's platform on which the particular information is shared (Youtube, Facebook,					

	Twitter) impacts the trust-level and its credibility.					
11.	It's quite challenging, and hard to distinguish reliable information from misinformation on social media.					
12.	Propaganda and misinformation are widespread on Pakistani social media platforms.					
13.	Highly sensationalized content on social media often distracts me from knowing its reliability and authenticity.					
14.	There is a rapid spread of viral content on social media, and it makes it difficult to evaluate its authenticity before it is widely accepted.					
15.	It is difficult to identify the credibility and authenticity of user-generated contents – personal experiences and stories etc – on social media platforms.					
16.	Owing to the presence of fake accounts and bots, it					

	is quite difficult to fully trust information on different social media platforms.					
17.	There is an unlimited amount of information on social media platforms, which makes it difficult to know what genuine information is, and what is not.					
18.	There is lack of proper references and links in social media information and posts, and it raises questions about its authenticity.					
19.	It is quite hard to differentiate reliable news from fake news on social media platforms than other platforms.					
20.	It is often confusing on social media platforms to share information outside its original cultural or regional context, and its reliability is frequently doubtful.					
21.	In order to verify information on social					

	media, fact-checking websites are often consulted by social media users.					
22.	To validate the reliability of social media information, discussions with friends or family members are held.					
23.	Social media users rely on ‘official accounts’ or experts to verify the validity of information available on social media platforms.					
24.	Social media users tend to ignore information that seems sensational or evoking emotions on social media platforms.					
25.	To get an authentic and comprehensive view of the information available on social media platforms, social media users search it on multiple platforms.					
26.	People tend to prefer traditional media platforms – TV and newspaper – over social					

	media platforms owing to authenticity concerns.					
27.	In the current digital era, social media is the basic and primary source of news and information.					
28.	The spread of misinformation can be tackled by social media platforms to take more responsibility in curbing the menace of misinformation.					
29.	Social media users trust user's reviews and comments on multiple social media platforms to gauge the authenticity of a particular product or service.					