Fake News: The Newest Gift of The Digital Era

Neeru Tiwari,
TGT (Social Sciences)
St. Michael's Convent School,
ITI, Mankapur, Gonda, U.P
Email: neerutiwari1967@gmail.com

****

ABSTRACT

One of the finest examples of how even the most advanced technology may pose risks to human beings is provided by the many social media platforms. In 2018, almost twenty individuals lost their lives as a direct result of false information that was disseminated on social media. The rumor in question was essentially connected to the bogus news of a kid being taken. Through the use of digital forms of communication such as edited pictures, videos, memes, unverified ads, and social media platforms (such as WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram), rumors are spread very quickly with the click of a button, which has become a very big challenge for the government and administration to monitor. As a result, the Supreme Court had to step in and take action to combat the spread of fake news.

Keywords: *Fake News, Digital Era, media, Barack Obama, Supreme Court.*

****

To see how the best systems can become dangerous for human beings, social media is one of the best example of this. Due to misleading information being spread on social media, in 2018 about 20 people lost their lives and the rumor was basically related to the fake news of stealing a child. Fake news means generally misleading information or information that is not completely based on facts or is accurate through the digital forms of communication such as edited pictures, videos, memes, unverified ads and social media platforms (such as WhatsApp, twitter, Facebook, Instagram) rumors are spread very quickly with the click of a button which has become a very big challenge for the government and administration to monitor the Supreme Court had to intervene and give strict instructions to the Central government in this matter.

The Apex court issued guidelines for media houses "We expect the media (Print, electronic or social) to maintain a strong sense of responsibility and ensure that unverified news capable of causing pain is not disseminated. We do not intend to interfere with the free discussion about

pandemic but direct the media refer to and publish the official version about the developments" Rasmus Kleis Nielsen director at Returns Institute For the study of journalism also believes that this problem is more serious in India than in Western countries. They wrote that - "The problem of disinformation in a society like India might be more sophisticated and more challenging than they are in the west ". The reason for this is that in India with a total population of 1.25 billion. 93% people use internet only for social media. About 70 million people have phones, of which 25 crore people have smart phones. About 15.5 million people visit Facebook every month and 16 crore people visit WhatsApp but due to lack of awareness, they push the messages without thinking and reading it in a critical manner. The result of which is strengthened by rumors the year 2019, Microsoft conducted a survey is about 22 countries. Accordingly more than 64% of Indians face fake news daily. According to British newspaper The Guardian, India's media research agency CMS says that the reason for spreading Fake news in India is..." Lack of a media policy for verification. Additionally, law enforcement officers have arrested reporters and journalists for "creating fictitious articles" especially when the articles were controversial but no such actions were taken for the social media.

In the context of India, most fake news is related to the issues of politics and religion. As many political parties have their own IT cells and they post all kinds of rumors, videos, memes about their rival parties. The purpose of which is to tarnish the image of the opposition party or to further their motives. There is no doubt that Social media is a powerful means of reaching the public and political parties takes full advantage of it. Lance Prince wrote in his book The Modi Effect that "The current Prime Minister Narendra Modi had already understood that social media is very important to reach people directly. It became a necessity for them, not just passion and the year 2014 it is played an important role behind his victory." The Financial Times even called Modi India's first social media Prime minister.

In this reference the former White House communications Director for President Barack Obama Anita Dunn said that "If you are not communicating with Social media, you are leaving a growing part of the population out of the conversation" So the use of social media by government is creating the means to improve governance because it helps in providing the means for easy publication and the rapid spread information, thereby creating a transparent atmosphere that can strengthen citizen's goodwill towards the government but it is a positive

aspects of social media and if used properly it & very beneficial and fruitful but it is very unfortunate that political parties use social media to divide people into religion, sect and caste and seek maximum votes. Their aim is to gain power at all costs. They do not care how much it hurts the country's image.

In recent days the rumor market has been quite hot on some issues in India. Some of these issues are like this... Corona virus, Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 Election, Article 370 etc." These issues to a large extent, affected not only the lives of the people. It also affected the economy of the country. The fake news related to coronavirus which was seen most on social media, were the news related to home treatment, the measures to avoid the coronavirus, the prediction about the elimination of the coronavirus and some conspiracy theories. Even when some people did not take it seriously , refusing to accept it as a disease. While Prime Minister Narendra Modi made an early appeal in March 2020 not to spread misleading information. There were also some arrests in this context. Similarly, the PIB (Press Information Bureau) also denied that Functions like economic emergency have arisen in the country. Supreme court also intervened by dictating that prime minister Modi should maintain a strong sense of responsibility, while disseminating news on coronavirus and should ensure that unverified and fake news is not published. The Supreme Court said on October 7 Tuesday after the central government drew the court's attention to the possibility of people panicking due to "fake" and "inaccurate reporting" of news connected with Covid-19.

The second biggest example related to Fake News is related to CAA. On which misleading information was spread to such an extent that there was a situation of instability in country for a few months while those who were protesters. They did not know whether CAA is there and whether they have any relation with it or not. In this context, about 500 social media handles from Pakistan spread false news and incited Indian Muslims to riot and spread anarchy. Not only this, they also dragged Children and women in this disgusting act. In India, around 1500 social media mediators worked to verify the false and fake news being spread on CAA. Especially spread on Twitter, Facebook, TikTok and Helo. Supreme court also asked the central government in this case "a plea for publicizing aims, objectives and the benefits of the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) to weed out fake news that was being circulated on the issue." The plea lawyer stated "I visited Jamia and seelampur. 95% protesters do not know about the CAA. They feel that the bill will take back their citizenship. Miscreants are

circulating fake news". It has also been seen many times that the sources of fake news are so credible that representatives of the entire country also fall prey to it. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs called out the Prime Minister of Malaysia for "factually inaccurate remarks" on the CAA. While the Bangalore Police Commissioner advised people not to trust CAA related fake news, Assam police also asked people to be beware of rumors being spread on social media. Delhi Police also told the misleading information being spread on social media the reason for the violence that broke out from Jamia Mia Islamia University. "We are monitoring some social media accounts to check spread of misinformation. Appropriate action will be taken if anyone is found violating the laws "... A senior official said.

The 2019 Lok Sabha elections were also largely affected by fake news. The election were called by some as "India's first WhatsApp elections" with WhatsApp being used by many as a tool of propaganda. A false story that has been widely shared on social media claims Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born leader and Chairperson of Congress Party is richer than the Queen but the story was debunked six years ago. The second biggest fake news was about the educational qualification of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In which he was a not told to read more than the high school. Such false news was spread by the Congress supporters.

Fake news websites EU Disinfolab (Which is an independent non-profit organization focused on tackling sophisticated disinformation campaigns targeting the EU, it's member states, core institutions and core values) has more than 265 fake news websites in over 65 countries and works to serve New Delhi's interests, the organization's investigation showed. Prominent fake news-spreading websites and online resources include OpIndia (Indian right-wing news portal founded by Rahul Raj and Kumar Kamal in 2014).

This website has published fake news and anti-Muslim commentary on multiple occasions, including a 2020 incident in which it was falsely claimed that a Hindu boy was sacrificed in a Bihar Mosque, this website is dedicated to BJP and the Hindutva ideology. Postcard news founded by Mahesh Vikram Hegde, who is editor of right-wing propaganda website postcard/ It is known for spreading right - wing propaganda and fake news.

False and fake news related to Jammu and Kashmir, an integral part of India, never ends Attempts are made to deepen the controversy by using pictures of Syria and Iraq's civil war are often from Jammu and Kashmir. Article 370 was withdrawn. In a particular case,

information related to Jammu and Kashmir's basic facilities like healthcare, educational institutions, banks, security of people, food, vegetables and ration supply, and administration related information was disseminated. While not only from the government but also from the twitter accounts of CRPF and Kashmir police, appealed not to spread any kind of fake news. The Indian Army and several media houses such as India Today also denied such reports. The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology had shut down eight Twitter accounts such as @Kashmir 787, @Riazkha723. @sadaf2k19 etc., after the Indian Army spread rumors and false information about people burning homes, torturing them and killing them. From these accounts, the news was spread that on the occasion of Bakrid, firing was carried out in the Kashmir valley, while the local administration spoke celebrating the festival in a peaceful manner. The name of Vice President of JNU Students Union Rehla Rashid comes to prominence in spreading false and baseless facts against India in the case of Jammu and Kashmir. The New York Times also claimed that the government of India is pretending to control everything in Jammu and Kashmir. While a Security personnel there says that the situation might remain explosive. The newspaper wrote mentioning the statement of solider Ravi Kant "mobs of a dozen, two dozen, even more sometimes with a lot of women, come out and pelt stones at us and run away". The supreme Court of India was told by the solicitor General Tushar Mehta that "not a single bullet had been fired by security forces after August 5 ". However BBC reported otherwise, The Supreme Court also instructed the Central Government that the normal condition should be restored at the earliest leading to increased pressure.

Many more examples are related to spreading baseless facts and misinformation can be seen such as the 2013 (August - September) Muzaffarnagar (Uttar Pradesh) riot claimed that around 62 people were killed, including 42 Muslims and 20 Hindus.193 people were injured and 50,000 were forced to leave their homes. Such news was widely circulated on social media on WhatsApp.

As part of the 2016 Indian banknote demonetization, India introduced a new 2,000/- rupee currency note. The fake news claims that consumers will not be able to exchange Rs 2000 notes after October. RBI has confirmed to Mirror that the message circulating is false following this, multiple fake news reports about spying technology being added in the bank notes went viral on WhatsApp and had to be dismissed by the government. Similarly the

Namo App, which is dedicated to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was also widely rumored to be used to win elections in 2019.Also hate and hysterical Posts were shared through this app.

Imposters posing as army personnel on social media were called out as liars and dissolution was done by the Indian Army. Recently, the way in which the promotion and dissemination of baseless facts and fake news is growing rapidly, it is a matter of concern and it should be curbed as soon as possible. Otherwise, the situation will take an even more frightening form. In the current scenario, it would not be unfair to say that the government should initiate public education to make people aware of fake news . As in Kannur district of Kerala, the government conducted fake news classes in government school.

The government in an effort to check fake news, defamatory articles, pornographic materials, anti-national and terror contents in the online scenario. Media proposed to link Aadhar cards to various social media accounts which led to the government facing resistance from tech giants such as Facebook which was concerned with its users privacy policy. Which bead to multiple legal battles in various courts throughout the country. Attorney General Kk Venugopal appearing for the state government said "The linking of state Social media profiles of the users with the Aadhar was needed to check fake news, defamatory articles, pornographic materials, anti-national and terror contents in the online media. Critics have questioned for the proposal of Aadhar linking as a simplistic solution to a complex problem which will violate privacy and free speech and legalize censorship and lead to targeted harassment instead of curbing fake news.

Apart from this, if we have to find an amicable solution to this problem. Where the government and the law Enforcement bodies will have the freedom to work and at the same time the privacy of the user remains then we have to understand what is the root of the problem. Why people tend to believe in fake news and spread it ? Answer is very simple - cognitive bias, which is a very important term in understanding psychology behind social media. It increases people's ability to think and make quick decisions and does not let them think about other verified facts. In this way news based on facts gets buried somewhere and fake news starts trending again. People draw pre-motivated conclusions which suit their sensibilities, and then only want to look at facts and believe in formation and support that conclusion while ignoring facts and info to the contrary. Also as a solution there are several

independent fact checking tools and websites but even they are sometimes accused of being selective. People often believe in certain news and facts based on the reputation of the organization presenting them. So perhaps the only way we can improve upon this is by broadening our perspective and realizing that perhaps not every person that has a different opinion than us is wrong and different ideologies that we may not agree upon exist. Also perhaps a general increase in awareness and instilling a sense of responsibility in people will go a long way towards rebuilding social media as a place of positivity and happiness and not some battleground. So that the time we spend on these websites is more productive than damaging.