Policy Brief

Disinformation Economy in Pakistan

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Disinformation in Pakistan is no longer an incidental byproduct of digital communication; it is a fully operational economy. Falsehoods are systematically produced, amplified, and monetized through an infrastructure that rewards outrage, exploits algorithmic bias, and evades meaningful accountability. This paper offers a structural diagnosis of the disinformation ecosystem, grounded in historical context and shaped by recent technological shifts, including the rise of generative AI and synthetic media.

Drawing on Pakistan's evolving disinformation landscape, from early smear campaigns and political trolling to gendered deepfakes and cross-border influence operations, it traces how the velocity, scale, and harm of false narratives have intensified. It argues that platforms do not merely host disinformation; they profit from it. That governments, in the name of regulation, often suppress speech rather than protect truth. And that media institutions, hollowed out by economic collapse, are left to navigate a storm without shelter.

Rather than treating disinformation as a content issue to be moderated away, this paper positions it as a systemic challenge embedded in political incentives, platform architecture, and commercial logic. It proposes a set of rights-based, gender-aware interventions across three pillars: policy reform, platform responsibility, and civil society resilience. These include legislative safeguards against state overreach, revenue-sharing and transparency mandates for platforms, and sustained support for journalistic verification and media literacy.

The goal is not just to simply curb viral lies but to rebuild the informational integrity of Pakistan's digital public sphere. A response rooted in digital rights, democratic participation, and gender equity is not optional; it is the only viable path forward.

1. Background

Disinformation in Pakistan has evolved from isolated political smear campaigns into a systemic ecosystem powered by commercial incentives and cross-border influence operations. From the manipulated narratives of the 2013 and 2018 elections to the AI-powered propaganda of 2024–25, disinformation has increasingly shaped public perception, undermined trust in institutions, and eroded democratic participation. Meanwhile, regulatory overreach, weakened media institutions, and profit-driven platforms have failed to address the root causes.

1.2 Introduction

This paper presents a comprehensive framework for addressing the disinformation economy in Pakistan, where falsehoods are no longer accidental or marginal; they are monetized, weaponized, and embedded into the digital infrastructure. Drawing from historical patterns, current platform dynamics, and regional case studies, it identifies the political, commercial, and algorithmic foundations that sustain disinformation. The recommendations are divided into three actionable categories: policy reforms, platform accountability, and civil society responses, all grounded in digital rights and gender equity.

2. Historical Context

Understanding the historical context of disinformation is critical to comprehending its persistence, adaptability, and impact across time. It allows us to see disinformation not as a novel phenomenon but as a recurring feature of human societies that has evolved alongside communication technologies and political structures.

By situating current challenges within this broader historical trajectory, we can more accurately assess the underlying drivers of disinformation, anticipate its future manifestations, and design policy responses that are informed by both past lessons and present realities.

2.1 As Old as Power Itself: Disinformation's Long Shadow Through History

From monastic scribes embellishing royal decrees to Renaissance pamphleteers fabricating papal bulls, disinformation has always travelled whichever highways of communication a society possessed [1]. In the medieval period, a forged charter might take months to cross a principality; by the nineteenth century, a rumour could ride the telegraph from London to Calcutta in hours [2].

Today, a doctored video generated by a consumer laptop can circle the globe before the target of the smear even learns it exists. Each leap in the speed and capacity of information systems has compressed the interval between invention and impact, stripping audiences of the temporal buffer they once used to verify or dismiss dubious claims. In the networked present, that buffer has virtually

---

[1] Asa Briggs and Peter Burke, A Social History of the Media: From Gutenberg to the Internet, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).
[2] Tom Standage, The Victorian Internet: The Remarkable Story of the Telegraph and the Nineteenth Century's On-Line Pioneers (New York: Walker & Company, 1998).

disappeared, allowing falsehoods to cascade through social feeds, encrypted chats, and recommendation algorithms faster than any manual fact-checking process can hope to keep pace [3].

Understanding this trajectory is key to recognising the patterns and power structures that make disinformation so enduring. For instance, during the Second World War, disinformation was institutionalised into state strategy. The Nazis weaponised radio and cinema to build domestic support for genocide, while Allied forces dropped counterfeit German newspapers and leaflets behind enemy lines to sow confusion and doubt [4]. British intelligence famously ran Operation Mincemeat, planting fake invasion plans on a corpse to mislead Hitler's command about Allied troop movements [5].

These were not isolated incidents; they marked a broader recognition that controlling the narrative could be as decisive as commanding the battlefield. What has changed in the digital age is not the intent, but the velocity, reach, and granularity with which falsehoods are deployed. Where the wartime pamphlet had a limited drop radius and a single language, today's disinformation campaigns can be algorithmically targeted across borders, languages, and demographic groups, optimised for virality by platforms that monetise outrage [6].

The historical record shows that disinformation thrives when it exploits fear, uncertainty, and identity; digital systems now operationalise these conditions at scale. Without this historical grounding, our response to contemporary disinformation risks treating it as a purely technological glitch rather than a deeply political instrument with centuries of precedent.

2.2 Falsehood as a Weapon: The Strategic Logic of Disinformation

Acceleration alone does not explain the current crisis; it is the deliberate weaponisation of falsehood that makes modern disinformation uniquely corrosive. Military planners now describe "cognitive warfare" as a strategic domain alongside land, sea, air, cyber, and space, noting that hostile actors mix hacked data, synthetic audio, and coordinated troll swarms to erode adversary morale or steer elections without firing a shot.

Commercial incentives point the same way. Platforms that monetise engagement reward the content most likely to provoke anger or fear, so malicious actors enjoy an asymmetrical advantage: outrage is cheap, nuance is expensive. Artificial-intelligence tools amplify that advantage by lowering production costs. Where once a propaganda outfit needed a studio and a staff, it can now prompt a text-to-video model and churn out convincing fakes in minutes.

2.3 Pakistan's History of Disinformation Encounters

Pakistan's experience with digital-era disinformation predates the advent of deepfakes. The 2011 controversy surrounding the leaked memo allegedly sent by Ambassador Husain Haqqani

---

[3] Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan, Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policy Making (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2017).
[4] Philip M. Taylor, Munitions of the Mind: A History of Propaganda from the Ancient World to the Present Day (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).
[5] Ben Macintyre, Operation Mincemeat: The True Spy Story that Changed the Course of World War II (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).
[6] Zeynep Tufekci, Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018).

demonstrated how quickly online spaces can be flooded with fabricated context. In the aftermath of the leak, platforms were swarmed with purported BlackBerry chats, edited call logs, and speculative commentary implicating various institutions [7]. Regardless of the authenticity of the memo, the surrounding digital clutter illustrated how rapidly misinformation can complicate public understanding and reshape a political episode into a broader, more polarising narrative.

That lesson resurfaced during the 2013 general elections, Pakistan's first truly social-media contest. Researchers catalogued doctored ballot photos, cloned TV-channel logos, and WhatsApp rumours of sectarian violence designed to depress turnout in swing constituencies [8]. Cheap, emotive image macros routinely outperformed official manifestos, and many migrated from Facebook timelines to prime-time talk shows because newsrooms still lacked verification desks.

By 2018, disinformation in Pakistan had evolved from scattered digital propaganda into what could be described as a semi-industrial practice. Social media was no longer just a platform for political discourse; it had become a battleground for social and political influence, with organised operations actively manipulating public opinion in the lead-up to elections [9].

Media Matters for Democracy's Trends Monitor report, which analysed over fifty political hashtags in the two weeks before the general elections, uncovered systematic manipulation through coordinated "human-bot" networks. These were not fully automated bots, but groups of real individuals managing multiple accounts programmed to behave like automated systems, amplifying political slogans, circulating edited videos, and pushing polarising content designed to dominate the trending algorithms of platforms like Twitter (now X).

The objective was simple: to manufacture the appearance of organic public sentiment and flood the digital space with narratives favouring particular parties or discrediting opponents. These coordinated bursts of activity would often succeed in making hashtags trend nationally, attracting not only more online visibility but also coverage on mainstream television and print media, further legitimising manipulated discourse.

Independent researchers and journalists noted that these campaigns were not confined to one political group. Competing parties appeared to run parallel digital operations, some reportedly managed by contracted PR firms or in-house media cells [10]. The combination of relatively low costs, platform algorithmic bias toward engagement, and a largely unregulated digital environment created the perfect conditions for amplification without accountability.

This marked a turning point: political messaging was no longer merely reactive or campaign-season dependent; it became perpetual, gamified, and deeply entangled with platform economics. As The Guardian reported in a 2019 regional review, "in South Asia, political influence operations have moved

[7] Haqqani, Husain. India vs Pakistan: Why Can't We Just Be Friends? Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2016.

[8] Baig, Asad. "The Rise of Social Media Disinformation in Pakistan." Digital Rights Monitor, 2013.

[9] Media Matters for Democracy. Trends Monitor: Election Disinformation Analysis. Islamabad, 2018.

[10] Bytes for All and Digital Rights Foundation. Digital Elections in Pakistan: Manipulation, Monitoring and Mobilisation. Lahore, 2019.

beyond the troll farm into the mainstream of electoral strategy," citing Pakistan among countries where digital manipulation was becoming institutionalised [11].

The Trends Monitor findings were among the first systematic attempts to document this shift in Pakistan, and remain a valuable reference point for understanding how human-bot coordination blurred the line between grassroots political engagement and engineered virality.

The February 2024 polls added generative AI to the arsenal. Campaign volunteers openly cloned party leaders 'voices for robo-calls, auto-translated speeches for micro-targeted clips, and used text-to-image tools to fabricate rally photographs. Various organisations have documented gender-focused deep-fakes aimed at discrediting female candidates, while data scientists traced fresh botnets that shifted from Pakistan-centric hashtags to global platforms within hours.

Since early 2025, however, the most aggressive streams have arrived across the border. Investigations building on EU DisinfoLab's Indian Chronicles expose, a 750-site, 15-year influence network, show that the same ecosystem now seeds doctored battlefield footage, counterfeit NGO statements, and fabricated UN press releases each time tensions flare.

Following the Pahalgam attack in 2025, a wave of disinformation surged across social media platforms, falsely claiming that Pakistani drones had struck civilian areas inside Indian-administered Kashmir. The claim originated from a set of anonymous, partisan Indian accounts that circulated grainy visuals of explosions, later shown to be stock footage recycled from unrelated conflicts. Independent satellite imagery, including verification by open-source investigators affiliated with GeoConfirmed and Sentinel Hub, confirmed that no drone activity or airstrike had occurred in the area on the dates alleged.

Nonetheless, the narrative gained traction across Twitter (now X), WhatsApp groups, and Facebook pages, racking up millions of views before it was formally debunked. By that point, retaliatory hashtags had already trended for over 24 hours, feeding into television segments and prime-time panel shows across Indian media.

In a separate incident during the brief May skirmishes, propaganda accounts on Twitter claimed that Pakistan had targeted a critical Indian Air Force base in Punjab. Accompanying the claim was a widely shared image of a nighttime explosion, quickly identified by fact-checkers at Alt News and Boom Live as an AI-generated composite with tell-tale artefacts around shadows and blast geometry.

Despite the image's synthetic origins and a complete lack of physical evidence from the alleged strike site, the post was amplified by a network of recently created Indian social media accounts. Within hours, the same content had migrated from X to Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, and Telegram channels, suggesting a coordinated cross-platform campaign.

Network analysis by digital researchers at the Centre for Internet and Society pointed to signs of inauthentic behaviour, including repetitive posting patterns, simultaneous retweets, and language mismatches, hallmarks of a centrally managed amplification effort.

---

[11] The Guardian. "Political Troll Armies Are Shaping South Asian Democracy." June 2019.

These recent episodes illustrate how cross-border disinformation has escalated from fringe narratives into a structured offensive tool. What began as isolated instances of political smear or conspiracy in 2011 has evolved into coordinated domestic disinformation during the 2013 and 2018 elections, followed by AI-powered electoral messaging in 2024, and now fully operationalised external campaigns in 2025.

3. Current State and Impact

This section examines the current landscape of disinformation in Pakistan, highlighting how digital platforms, weakened media institutions, and emerging technologies like AI have intensified the scale, speed, and harm of false narratives. It explores the various forms disinformation takes today, who it targets, and the far-reaching consequences it has on public trust, democratic processes, and national security.

3.1 The Role of Platforms

Disinformation today is not merely an unfortunate byproduct of digital communication but more of a 'business model'. Social media platforms, hereafter referred to as 'platforms', thrive on outrage, friction, and emotional extremes, and they profit directly from the virality of falsehoods. Their algorithms are not designed to surface truth; they are engineered to maximise engagement. And in that calculus, the truth is optional [12].

In Asad Baig's 2025 article, "Verified No More", published in Dawn, he laid out how Meta's quiet dismantling of its fact-checking infrastructure, just as synthetic media was becoming mainstream, was not a lapse in judgment. It was a strategic reorientation. By replacing journalist-led fact-checking efforts with crowd-sourced "community notes," Meta effectively outsourced truth arbitration to the same users being targeted by misinformation [13].

This profit-first logic is not unique to Meta. A 2021 report by the Center for Countering Digital Hate (CCDH), titled "The Disinformation Dozen", found that just twelve individuals were responsible for 65% of all anti-vaccine misinformation on Facebook and Twitter, yet platform enforcement against them was negligible [14]. Critics argue that the traffic on said accounts could be the reason. These accounts were highly engaging and profitable. Similarly, Global Witness and SumOfUs demonstrated in 2022 how Facebook approved fake ads inciting ethnic violence in Ethiopia, despite these violating its own hate speech policies. Facebook made money off every click [15].

A 2023 investigation by The Washington Post revealed internal documents from Meta warning that the platform's algorithm amplified "toxicity" and "polarising content" in political discourse, yet executives refused to reform the ranking model because doing so risked reducing user engagement and ad revenue. In short, rage sells, and platforms are not in the business of leaving money on the table.

---

[12] Tufekci, Zeynep. Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018.
[13] Baig, Asad. "Verified No More." Dawn, February 2025.
[14] Center for Countering Digital Hate. The Disinformation Dozen. London, 2021.
[15] Global Witness & SumOfUs. Facebook Approved Ethnic Hate Ads in Ethiopia. London, 2022.

In the Pakistani context, this has had corrosive consequences. The efficacy of platform moderation for local languages remains in question. Despite repeated push from civil society, companies like Meta have not invested meaningfully in linguistic moderation tools or sustainable regional fact-checking partnerships [16]. What this means is that hate speech, fake news, and political propaganda targeting Pakistani audiences routinely escape enforcement, even as similar posts in English or other "priority markets" are swiftly flagged or removed [17].

This double standard is well-documented. Meta's Oversight Board, in its 2023 annual report, acknowledged that users in South Asia are disproportionately exposed to harmful content due to the platform's failure to localise enforcement capacity [18]. And yet, when pressure mounts, companies often turn toward performative moderation, suspending political content or blocking access during elections, not to protect users, but to deflect accountability.

This deliberate neglect dovetails with a pattern activist have written about extensively: the economic reward structure of disinformation. Low-cost viral content, whether it's a sensationalist clip, a fake quote, or a synthetic video, requires no journalistic rigour, yet delivers exponentially higher returns in the form of reach, shares, and monetisation. In a 2022 Media Matters for Democracy study on YouTube misinformation, it found that even mid-tier Pakistani content creators were replicating falsehoods across channels because "algorithm hits translated directly into ad dollars."

Accountability Lab Pakistan's myth-busting campaign to counter dis and misinformation during COVID-19 pandemic gathered hundreds of myths and disinformation that were created and systematically spread to stop people from taking Covid vaccines. Such misinformation campaigns continue to hamper polio-vaccine campaigns in Pakistan even today.

Globally, a UNESCO policy brief published in 2023 confirmed this: "Platforms prioritise content virality over content veracity." It warned that the business models of major social media companies are structurally incompatible with democratic information environments unless subject to reform or regulation [19]. To summarise, platforms do not passively tolerate disinformation but monetise it. Their engagement algorithms prioritise controversy over context. Their moderation policies are unevenly applied. Their enforcement is weakest where the harm is greatest. And their transparency, wherever it exists for namesake, is performative, not accountable.

In Pakistan, this has translated into a digital environment where lies trend faster than facts, rage performs better than reason, and the algorithm is effectively the new editor-in-chief. Until this architecture of amplification is addressed through platform reform, regulation, and localised enforcement, the battle against disinformation will remain structurally rigged against the truth.

[16] The Washington Post. "Facebook Knew Its Algorithm Amplified Hate, Internal Docs Show." July 2023.
[17] Baig, A. (2023). "The Outrage Machine." Dawn. Retrieved from: https://www.dawn.com
[18] Meta Oversight Board. Annual Report 2023.
[19] UNESCO. Information Integrity on Digital Platforms: G20 Policy Brief. Paris, 2023.

3.2 The State's Response: A Cure Worse Than the Disease

In theory, governments have a legitimate role in mitigating online harms. In practice, however, Pakistan's regulatory response has inflicted twice the damage by relying on overbroad, punitive laws that do little to dismantle disinformation, while prioritising political control, policing, and criminalisation.

In Asad Baig's Dawn article "Censorship or Fighting Fake News?", he argued that recent legislative interventions masquerading as anti-misinformation measures have only deepened public mistrust [20]. Take the amendments to the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), for instance. Introduced under the pretext of fighting falsehoods, these changes criminalise online "misinformation" without any clear standard for what counts as false or harmful. Instead of building trust, such ambiguity enables selective prosecution, often targeting journalists, activists, and political opponents, while leaving large-scale, coordinated disinformation operations untouched [21].

This tendency to treat digital speech as a law-and-order issue has also led to technical solutions that create more problems than they solve. Entire platforms have been throttled or blocked during politically sensitive moments. Twitter, for instance, was rendered unusable for weeks around the 2024 elections [22]. But this kind of blanket censorship doesn't stop disinformation; it simply reroutes it. When one platform is shut down, false narratives migrate to encrypted WhatsApp groups, Telegram channels, and YouTube comment threads, spaces with even less visibility or oversight. The government's obsession with "fake news" also distracts from the root causes of the problem. Instead of investing in media literacy, fact-checking infrastructure, or support for independent journalism, criminalisation of information reroutes dangerous disinformation into blackholes which are neither public nor inteveneable, such as private WhatsApp groups, causing much more harm, much faster.

Additionally, this kind of environment not only discourages legitimate expression but also breeds cynicism. As the government positions itself as the arbiter of truth, citizens increasingly view any form of official correction as suspect. That's the paradox: by overreaching in its fight against misinformation, the state weakens its credibility, pushing more people into the arms of conspiracy theorists, disinformation peddlers, and algorithmic echo chambers.

The government's attempts to legislate its way out of this crisis have failed not because regulation is inherently bad, but because the regulation we've seen is misdirected, authoritarian, and deeply out of touch with how digital ecosystems work. A genuine solution requires the opposite: transparency, investment in civic information infrastructure, and a regulatory model that protects both the integrity of information and the right to speak freely. Until then, Pakistan's regulatory response will remain, at best, ineffective, and at worst, complicit [23].

---

[20] Baig, Asad. "Censorship or Fighting Fake News?" *Dawn*, March 2022.
[21] Digital Rights Foundation. PECA Amendments Briefing Paper. Lahore, 2022.
[22] NetBlocks. "Pakistan Restricts Twitter Access During Election Period." Report, February 2024.
[23] Access Now. Fighting Fake News or Silencing Dissent? The State of Internet Regulation in Pakistan, 2023.

This regulatory dysfunction has another, less visible consequence: it sabotages meaningful platform accountability. Ideally, governments should serve as public-interest negotiators, pressuring global tech companies to enforce moderation in local languages, build safeguards against gendered disinformation, and create transparent systems for appeal and redress [24]. But that leverage is rarely used to protect citizens. Instead, it is redirected toward expanding political control.

Rather than demanding better moderation policies or algorithmic transparency, often influence over platforms is used to extract concessions that suit its short-term political interests, be it takedown requests, algorithmic deprioritisation, or pressure to curb "undesirable" political content. The result is a system where platforms are less accountable to the public and more responsive to the power structures, they depend on to operate.

This dynamic creates a perverse incentive for platforms to appease governments rather than serve users. In effect, governments 'misuse of disinformation regulation actively blocks the development of real platform accountability. Without structural reform, both in how governments negotiate with platforms and how they define the public interest, Pakistan will remain trapped in this feedback loop: platforms evade responsibility and the legislative actions enforce compliance to police, not protect rights; and the public continues to suffer the consequences of both.

In this sense, regulatory failure isn't just a missed opportunity; it's a structural enabler of the very disinformation crisis it claims to fight.

3.3 Media Organisations and Fact-Checking Deficiencies

Suppose platforms and governments are two pillars of the disinformation crisis. In that case, media institutions stand at the fragile center, expected to both withstand and correct the chaos with dwindling resources and mounting pressures. While it is easy to fault newsrooms for failing to counter disinformation effectively, such critiques often overlook the structural decay that has hollowed out verification capacity across the industry.

The decline of newsroom verification isn't the result of negligence but a by-product of shrinking revenues, rapid digital transformation, and a relentless news cycle driven by speed rather than accuracy. Many media outlets, especially outside major urban centers, operate without dedicated research desks, investigative units, or even basic digital verification tools. Reporters are expected to compete with viral content in real time, often without the time or institutional backing to verify claims before publication.

Fact-checking in Pakistan remains vastly underdeveloped, not for lack of will, but for lack of investment and available resources. Unlike Western markets, where philanthropic and academic ecosystems have helped build stand-alone fact-checking entities, Pakistani initiatives are relatively recent and often underfunded. Many journalists do not receive formal training in digital verification, reverse image

---

[24] Global Partners Digital. Platform Accountability and Government Overreach in the Global South, 2022.

searches, or deepfake detection. When such skills are taught, they're often confined to short-term donor projects with limited long-term integration into newsroom routines.

This gap has become particularly dangerous in the age of algorithmic amplification. Sensational claims on social media or in viral WhatsApp forwards often make their way into broadcast and print coverage without rigorous vetting. In some cases, channels have aired AI-generated clips or old war footage falsely attributed to breaking news events. In others, editorial opinion segments have cited unverified "online trends" as evidence of national sentiment, mistaking manufactured virality for authentic discourse.

It is important to acknowledge that media organisations are not only victims but also targets of the disinformation ecosystem. Coordinated campaigns routinely attack the credibility of journalists, flood their timelines with abuse, and circulate false narratives designed to discredit their work. In many cases, professional newsrooms are left to fight off both algorithmic and political manipulation without legal protection or platform support.

Yet despite these challenges, Pakistani journalism has shown moments of quiet resilience. Local reporters have debunked election-day hoaxes, exposed bot farms linked to political actors, and resisted pressure to repeat state-backed falsehoods. Initiatives like Media Matters for Democracy's Facter project have begun to formalise fact-checking within newsrooms, showing that even modest infrastructure, when sustained, can produce significant gains in information integrity.

What the media needs is not blame, but support. Without targeted investment in verification training, access to real-time open-source tools, and institutional partnerships with independent fact-checkers, newsrooms will remain ill-equipped to act as the front line of defense against digital falsehoods. Moreover, platform accountability must include formal recognition of media organisations as trust anchors in the digital information ecosystem, not just content creators, but information guardians.

In an environment where falsehoods spread faster than corrections, journalists cannot be expected to carry the burden of truth alone. But with the right tools, protections, and alliances, they can remain society's best hope for navigating the storm.

The disinformation crisis gripping media organisations in Pakistan is compounded by a deeper, systemic issue: the economic collapse of the traditional news business. Revenue models that once sustained robust editorial structures have crumbled under the weight of digital disruption, audience fragmentation, and a platform-dominated ad economy. As a result, newsrooms across the country are shrinking, not just in size, but in their ability to verify, investigate, and uphold the basic standards of credible journalism.

According to the Columbia Journalism Review, newsroom layoffs have directly undermined verification workflows globally [25]. In Pakistan, the situation is particularly stark: conservative estimates suggest that between 2,500 to 3,000 journalists have been laid off in the past six years, many of them from

---

[25] Columbia Journalism Review (2023). "Layoffs and disinformation: The hollowing out of verification desks." Retrieved from: https://www.cjr.org

verification-heavy roles like desk editors and beat reporters [26]. With fewer trained professionals, stories are often published based on single-source social media claims, sometimes lifted directly from WhatsApp forwards or tweets from "verified" but politically aligned accounts.

The collapse of legacy revenue streams has also shifted newsroom priorities. As the advertising market tilts decisively toward engagement metrics and platform virality, many editorial teams are forced to chase clicks rather than fact-check. Reporters are pushed to file multiple stories a day, often under crushing deadlines that leave no room for forensic verification. In MMfD's recent DISINFO Bootcamp, and Accountability Lab's fake news events with district-level press clubs, these dynamics were flagged repeatedly by journalists as institutional failures, not personal ones.

This editorial vulnerability is being exploited. Political operatives, digital mercenaries, and foreign disinformation networks increasingly rely on the assumption that newsrooms will pass along their narratives without scrutiny. And too often, that assumption is correct.

Internationally, these trends are echoed. The Reuters Institute's 2024 survey found that only 29% of newsrooms worldwide have formal verification protocols for breaking news, and that figure drops even lower in developing media ecosystems. Most rely on informal methods, including but not limited to WhatsApp groups, X platform DMs, or personal judgment, which are no match for the speed and sophistication of AI-generated disinformation today.

And while the crisis intensifies, external support for journalism is vanishing. As your presentation notes, international media development funding has been cut by up to 80% in the wake of global budget freezes[27]. Platforms are simultaneously pulling back from the fact-checking partnerships they once touted, leaving underfunded local outlets to face a flood of synthetic content without reinforcements[28].

In such a climate, blaming journalists for every lapse is neither fair nor productive. Instead, what's needed is a structural response, investment in newsroom infrastructure, real-time verification tools, and national standards for editorial integrity. If newsrooms are the last line of defence, they must be equipped like it. Because in the absence of trusted journalism, the space is rapidly filled by rage-driven influencers, conspiracy entrepreneurs, and AI-powered fabricators, none of whom owe the public a single truth.

3.4 Gendered Disinformation and Targeted Harassment

One of the most insidious evolutions in the disinformation ecosystem is its increasingly gendered nature. Women in public life, particularly journalists, activists, artists, and politicians, or anyone really who has a public persona, are no longer just collateral targets of online toxicity; they are the deliberate focus of coordinated campaigns designed to discredit, silence, and intimidate. These attacks go far

---

[26] Estimates from Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ)
[27] Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) (2024). "Funding Press Freedom: The Global Pullback." Retrieved from: https://www.cima.ned.org
[28] The Guardian (2024). "Meta ends key fact-checking contracts amid misinformation surge."
Retrieved from: https://www.theguardian.com

beyond ordinary trolling. They involve false narratives, AI-generated content, and deeply invasive forms of humiliation that weaponise both gender norms and digital technologies[29].

This pattern has become distressingly familiar. A woman journalist shares her journalistic work or voices a political opinion, and almost instantly, she is targeted, not with rebuttals, but with threats of violence, doctored images, and fabricated allegations about her personal life. Gharidha Farooqi and Asma Shirazi are two examples from Pakistan. These attacks are amplified through anonymous bot networks and partisans masquerading as citizens, giving the illusion of mass outrage while shielding the original orchestrators from accountability.

These narratives are often seeded across private WhatsApp groups, Telegram, and Facebook groups, where moderation is minimal and virality is algorithmically rewarded [30]. This phenomenon has been extensively documented in local research. Media Matters for Democracy's investigative series on gendered disinformation highlights how women reporters face a uniquely curated form of digital abuse. Their credibility is undermined not through critique of their work, but through false claims about their morality, family life, or fabricated relationships with political actors[31].

This trend is neither accidental nor apolitical. As documented by global initiatives such as the International Center for Journalists '(ICFJ) Online Violence Against Women Journalists report and UNESCO's findings on disinformation, gendered attacks are often part of broader attempts to exclude women from shaping public discourse. Disinformation becomes a form of gatekeeping, used to enforce patriarchal norms by punishing women who exercise influence or visibility. The intent is not merely reputational damage; it is erasure[32].

What makes these attacks especially potent in the current digital landscape is the convergence of three elements: synthetic content, anonymous amplification, and cultural weaponisation. Deepfakes and AI-generated photos can fabricate scandalous imagery with near-photographic realism. Low-cost bot networks can promote these images until they trend. And in a context where victim-blaming remains widespread, the burden of proof often falls unjustly on the woman to disprove the lie rather than on the system to prevent its spread. The psychological toll is immense. Many women report withdrawing from online spaces, reducing their journalistic output, or refusing bylines to avoid abuse. In a 2023 survey by MMfD, over 89% of women journalists in Pakistan reported self-censorship due to fear of targeted online harassment. For those without institutional support, the harassment often spills offline, leading to stalking, threats, and reputational damage that affects not just careers but personal safety.

The lack of legal recourse further compounds the problem. Existing cybercrime laws in Pakistan, such as sections of the PECA Act, are either too vague or too politicised to offer real protection. Women who attempt to file complaints are often discouraged by law enforcement, told to "ignore it," or worse, advised to take down their own content rather than hold perpetrators accountable. Meanwhile,

[29] UNESCO. (2021). The Chilling: Global trends in online violence against women journalists.
https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377223
[30] ICFJ. (2022). Online Violence Against Women Journalists: A Global Snapshot. https://www.icfj.org/our-work/online-violence-against-women-journalists
[31] Media Matters for Democracy. (2022). Gendered Disinformation in Pakistan [report series]. https://mediamatters.pk
[32] Digital Rights Monitor. (2023). Case Studies on Coordinated Gendered Disinformation. https://digitalrightsmonitor.pk

platforms continue to under-enforce their community standards in non-Western contexts. Even when content clearly violates their rules, takedowns are slow, appeals are opaque, and accounts responsible for abuse are rarely suspended [33].

Addressing gendered disinformation is not just a matter of content moderation; it is a structural challenge. It requires platform reform, legal protection, media industry solidarity, and a broader cultural shift that treats online gendered abuse not as "just the internet being mean," but as a serious threat to democratic participation [34].

Women have the right to be seen, heard, and feel safe in public discourse. Suppose disinformation is allowed to become a tool of gendered suppression. In that case, we risk building a digital future that mirrors the worst of our offline inequalities, only faster, more brutal, and harder to trace. The battle against falsehoods is also a battle for inclusion, and if we lose it, we risk silencing the very voices democracy needs most [35].

3.5 AI and Synthetic Content

The emergence of AI-generated content, including but not limited to deepfakes, voice clones, and synthetic images, has radically transformed the disinformation landscape, making it faster, cheaper, and more scalable than ever before. What once required professional studios and technical expertise is now within reach of anyone with a consumer-grade laptop and access to open-source tools. This shift has enabled the mass production of highly convincing disinformation, tailored to specific political contexts, targeted at individual victims, and disseminated instantly across social media.

In effect, synthetic content is no longer a future threat but the present architecture of digital deceit [36]. In Pakistan, synthetic disinformation has already shaped major political and security events. During the 2024 general elections, a voice-cloned message mimicking former Prime Minister Imran Khan was circulated through WhatsApp and Telegram, calling on supporters to boycott the polls. Although the message was eventually debunked, it had already sown confusion on polling day, eroding confidence in the electoral process[37].

During the 2025 India–Pakistan standoff, AI-generated videos claimed that Pakistani airbases had been struck; one fabricated blast image led to the hashtag #AdampurAirbaseHit trending for nearly eight hours on X (formerly Twitter). Investigations traced the campaign to coordinated Indian accounts amplifying a single AI-generated visual across Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts, and Telegram channels. These examples demonstrate how AI is being operationalised to inject disinformation at the pace of conflict.

[33] Digital Rights Foundation. (2020). Cyber Harassment Helpline Annual Report. https://digitalrightsfoundation.pk
[34] ARTICLE 19. (2021). Toxic Spread: How Social Media Platforms Are Failing Women. https://www.article19.org
[35] Media Matters for Democracy. (2023). Survey on Online Harassment and Self-Censorship Among Women Journalists in Pakistan. https://mediamatters.pk
[36] Westerlund, M. (2019). The Emergence of Deepfake Technology: A Review. Technology Innovation Management Review. https://timreview.ca/article/1282
[37] MMfD. (2024). Facter Monitoring Report: General Elections 2024. [Internal monitoring report, unpublished]

Another case was monitored by MMfD's Facter, wherein an AI-generated video of the ISPR spokesperson falsely alleging the downing of two Pakistani JF-17 jets amassed a massive reach on platforms. The video was later fact-checked by multiple news outlets in Pakistan and India, but only after it had been widely seen and circulated. Beyond geopolitical manipulation, synthetic media is being weaponised for personal harm, particularly against women and marginalised communities. Deepfake "revenge porn" and voice-generated blackmail have become frighteningly common. In 2024 alone, the Digital Rights Foundation recorded a sharp increase in reported cases involving AI-fabricated sexual imagery, often used to intimidate women journalists, activists, and trans rights defenders. These synthetic attacks are difficult to detect and nearly impossible to erase.

Once shared on Telegram or another platform, the damage is both viral and permanent. A single doctored clip can end careers, destroy trust, and push survivors offline or into hiding. The law offers little help; under Pakistan's Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), but in real life, the implementation is far from effective. Globally, warnings have already been issued. UNESCO's 2023 Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms stressed that most social media companies continue to profit from viral falsehood, including AI-generated content, without meaningful investment in detection, labelling, or user education. The European Commission's Code of Practice on Disinformation has called for AI-specific disclosure norms, but no such alignment exists in South Asia. In the absence of such standards, Pakistani users remain uniquely vulnerable to digitally manipulated propaganda with real-world consequences, ranging from misinformed voting to reputational ruin and physical threats [38].

Synthetic disinformation is no longer an isolated tactic; it is a system. It generates false events, impersonates public figures, and fabricates scandals with the click of a button. Without robust AI governance, updated legal definitions, platform reform, and survivor-focused remedies, Pakistan risks becoming a testing ground for weaponised unreality. The stakes are not just informational; they are democratic, civic, and deeply human.

3.6 Cross-Border Disinformation Operations

Disinformation has long been a tool of geopolitical influence, but in the context of recent India–Pakistan tensions, it has evolved into an offensive capability, deployed not only to shape global narratives but also to provoke domestic unrest, erode institutional trust, and militarise public sentiment. While states generally engage in information warfare to varying degrees, recent patterns suggest that India has operationalised digital disinformation as a deliberate strategy during periods of heightened conflict with Pakistan.

The 2025 flare-up following the Pahalgam incident offered a stark demonstration of how digital platforms can be weaponised in the fog of conflict. Within hours of the attack, false claims began circulating across Indian social media suggesting that Pakistani drones had targeted civilian areas inside Kashmir. AI-generated visuals of explosions, along with recycled footage from unrelated conflicts, were widely shared on X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and WhatsApp.

[38] UNESCO. (2023). Guidelines for the Governance of Digital Platforms. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000385138

Investigations by independent analysts and media watchdogs later confirmed that many of the viral images were either fabricated or misleading. Satellite imagery and on-ground reporting debunked specific claims, proving no damage had occurred. Nevertheless, these narratives gained traction across partisan pages and primetime broadcasts, inflaming public sentiment and escalating tensions well before any official statements were released. The disinformation ecosystem, amplified by loosely coordinated accounts and algorithmic visibility, effectively shaped the public narrative ahead of verifiable facts. What distinguishes the current moment, however, is the role of AI in accelerating and legitimising these campaigns. Unlike earlier propaganda that relied on doctored newspaper clippings or poorly photoshopped images, today's cross-border disinformation often includes synthetically generated visuals that bypass traditional detection tools.

These cross-border operations are not limited to the military domain. During the 2024 general elections in Pakistan, several Indian pages and Telegram channels circulated false polls, manipulated candidate statements, and AI-generated videos designed to undermine electoral credibility. The goal, it appeared, was to amplify internal fractures and erode confidence in Pakistan's democratic process from the outside. In many cases, this content was indistinguishable from domestic political propaganda, blurring the line between internal contestation and external attack.

The absence of an international platform for accountability exacerbates the problem. Social media companies often treat cross-border disinformation campaigns as domestic political content, failing to intervene even when such campaigns contribute to militarised narratives or civil unrest. Meanwhile, Pakistani regulators, rather than building strategic response mechanisms, have focused on censoring dissent and blocking platforms; moves that do little to neutralise foreign propaganda and instead fuel domestic distrust.

Cross-border disinformation is not merely a political irritant but a strategic weapon. It exploits digital architecture, algorithmic bias, and weak regulatory environments to shape public perception during critical moments of national vulnerability. Without a coordinated regional strategy, platform transparency, and investment in real-time monitoring, Pakistan risks fighting not just kinetic wars but narrative ones, on terrain already controlled by its adversaries.

One of the most pressing challenges exacerbating Pakistan's exposure to cross-border disinformation is the declining capacity of its mainstream media sector. With revenues steadily shrinking and the resources of the credible newsrooms stretched thin, many media organisations no longer possess the institutional infrastructure required for rigorous, real-time verification. Dedicated fact-checking teams are rare, social media monitoring remains inconsistent, and editorial workflows often prioritise speed and engagement over accuracy. This environment allows false narratives, particularly those produced and amplified by coordinated foreign networks, to enter public discourse largely unchecked. During episodes such as the viral spread of the #AdampurAirbaseHit claim, the absence of swift, credible counter-verification by domestic outlets enabled disinformation to gain traction across platforms before corrective narratives could emerge. This structural deficit is compounded by the lack of investment in digital verification tools and training, leaving many journalists reliant on unverified visuals or partisan commentary sourced from social media. In an environment where disinformation travels faster than the truth, weakened media institutions struggle to serve as effective gatekeepers, ultimately

allowing foreign-origin propaganda to influence public perception and undermine democratic resilience.

3.7 Monetisation of Disinformation Ecosystems

Disinformation is not just a political weapon; it is big business[39]. At the heart of today's sprawling disinformation ecosystems lies a powerful commercial logic: falsehoods are not only tolerated by platforms and publishers; they are actively rewarded. Whether through clickbait farms generating ad revenue, covert influence operations paid for by political actors, or low-cost content mills gaming algorithms for profit, the digital information economy has become a breeding ground for incentivised deceit. The infrastructure sustaining this economy is neither chaotic nor amateur; it is calculated, professionalised, and often deeply enmeshed with the business models of the very platforms it exploits.

At the most basic level, sensational or false content outperforms verified information in terms of reach, virality, and user engagement. Platforms like Meta and YouTube reward this virality with algorithmic promotion and monetisation opportunities. Content that provokes outrage, tribalism, or moral panic drives clicks, which in turn drives ad revenue, both for the platforms and for the creators of that content [40]. Disinformation, in this context, is not a failure of moderation; it is a revenue model. The longer false narratives remain live, the more engagement they generate, and the more valuable they become to advertisers in the attention economy.

This commercial incentive structure has led to the emergence of entire disinformation industries. In Pakistan and across South Asia, clickbait farms operate openly, churning out low-quality, misleading, or entirely fabricated content dressed up in emotionally charged headlines and hyperpartisan messaging[41]. These operations often employ teams of writers, graphic designers, and SEO strategists to manufacture virality. Their content floods Facebook pages, WhatsApp groups, YouTube channels, and TikTok feeds, monetising outrage through automated ad networks or direct sponsorships. Crucially, these entities are rarely punished; their pages or channels are often reinstated even after takedowns, thanks to opaque platform enforcement and lax accountability.

Beyond the clickbait economy, there exists a more insidious commercial layer: coordinated disinformation-for-hire operations. These are not anonymous trolls acting out of boredom; they are professional public relations outfits, marketing firms, and political consultancies running influence campaigns for paying clients [42]. From artificial boosting of narratives to smear campaigns against critics, these PR disinformation networks have been used to discredit journalists, intimidate dissenters, whitewash state violence, and artificially inflate the popularity of political figures. Funded by state actors, corporations, or private political donors, these campaigns manipulate the public conversation while maintaining plausible deniability for those who finance them.

---

[39] ProPublica reported that Google ads (and likewise Facebook/Meta) routinely appeared on global sites spreading election conspiracy, COVID-19 myths, and climate denial, showing that major platforms are actively funding misinformation
[40] https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/craigsilverman/viral-fake-election-news-outperformed-real-news-on-facebook
[41] https://www.wired.com/story/iowa-newspaper-website-ai-generated-clickbait-factory
[42] https://cmpf.eui.eu/demonetisation-of-disinformation

The monetisation of falsehoods is also embedded in platform architecture itself. Sponsored posts and promoted content often bypass moderation systems entirely, allowing disinformation to circulate as paid advertising. In multiple instances, political actors have used paid ads on Facebook to spread misleading narratives during elections, capitalising on loopholes in ad transparency rules. The lack of local language enforcement makes it easier for these actors to microtarget populations with tailored disinformation that platforms cannot or will not detect.

Moreover, disinformation ecosystems do not exist in isolation from legitimate media economies. In financially strained environments like Pakistan's media industry, struggling outlets sometimes resort to publishing sensationalised or misleading content to chase clicks and meet ad revenue targets. This economic pressure weakens editorial standards and fosters a perverse alignment between mainstream media incentives and the disinformation economy. When journalists are underpaid and newsrooms are underfunded, the ethical boundary between reporting and click-chasing becomes dangerously porous.

Compounding this, platforms have shown little willingness to confront the commercial root of the problem. Their policy focus remains on surface-level moderation, flagging or removing content, while leaving intact the deeper systems that monetise manipulation. Disinformation is treated as a content issue, not a business model problem. This framing protects profit margins while shifting blame onto users, individual bad actors, or local governments.

If we are to dismantle the disinformation economy, policy efforts must go beyond calls for moderation and transparency. They must target the commercial scaffolding that keeps it standing. This includes compelling platforms to demonetise provably false content, banning political advertising that lacks real-time transparency, auditing recommendation algorithms for bias and amplification of misinformation, and holding PR firms and ad networks accountable for their role in promoting false narratives. Without addressing these economic underpinnings, the fight against disinformation will remain performative, treating symptoms while the system that profits from deception grows ever more entrenched.

4. Recommendations

These recommendations are not exhaustive, but they mark a shift from reactive, content-level interventions toward structural reform. By targeting the political, commercial, and algorithmic infrastructure of the disinformation ecosystem, they offer a pathway to restore information integrity, protect marginalised voices, and rebuild public trust in digital discourse.

4.1 Policy Actions

Directed at lawmakers, regulators, and government institutions.

- **Reform PECA with Rights-Based Safeguards:** Amend the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) to narrow the definition of disinformation, prevent misuse against journalists and dissenters, and ensure that any moderation mandate is tethered to judicial oversight and free expression standards.

- **Establish an Independent Digital Communications Commission:** Create a rights-oriented statutory body that includes journalists, technologists, women's rights groups, and civil society representatives to monitor disinformation trends, recommend moderation frameworks, and coordinate real-time responses during elections and crises.

- **Enforce Transparency from Platforms through Binding Agreements:** Mandate that platforms disclose country-specific ad spending, moderation actions, and algorithmic impact assessments, with specific reporting requirements on gendered abuse, language-based enforcement, and election integrity.

- **Ban Non-Transparent Political Advertising:** Enact legislation prohibiting political ads that lack real-time disclosure of sponsors and targeting criteria. Political ads must be archived publicly in a searchable and locally accessible format.

- **Regulate Disinformation-for-Hire Networks:** Develop clear legal frameworks to address coordinated disinformation-for-hire operations, including political consultancies, PR firms, and advertising agencies that knowingly amplify false or harmful content. Ensure that accountability mechanisms are transparent, proportionate, and rights-respecting, with safeguards to protect freedom of expression and legitimate dissent.

- **Mainstream Media and Information Literacy (MIL):** Develop and implement a national MIL strategy that embeds critical thinking and digital literacy into school and university curricula. Ensure the curriculum addresses gendered disinformation, algorithmic manipulation, and platform economics, empowering citizens to navigate information ecosystems safely and responsibly.

4.2 Platform Actions

Directed at social media companies, search engines, and digital advertising platforms.

- **Demonetise Provably False Content:** Establish clear policies for the demonetisation of verified disinformation across all ad-enabled platforms. Include clauses for repeat offenders, with progressive sanctions including ad account suspension.

- **Expand Local Language Moderation and Human Review:** Significantly increase investment in Urdu and regional language moderation by hiring human moderators, training on cultural context, and improving automated tools. Prioritise gender-sensitive review systems.

- **Institutionalise a Redressal System for Harassment Victims:** Develop survivor-focused escalation channels for users, especially women journalists and activists, to report harassment and gendered disinformation. Ensure complaints are handled transparently and promptly.

- **Open Access to Platform APIs for Verified Fact-Checkers:** Facilitate data access for local fact-checking organisations, enabling real-time detection and tracking of disinformation trends, coordinated amplification, and cross-platform spillover.

- **Audit and Disclose Algorithmic Amplification Metrics:** Publicly share aggregate data on the amplification of disinformation by algorithms, including breakdowns by geography, language, and gendered content. Conduct regular audits to identify and mitigate systemic bias.

- **Build a Trusted Media Registry:** Collaborate with independent journalistic bodies to identify and uplift credible news sources in recommendation systems, reducing algorithmic competition from clickbait disinformation.

- **Share Platform Revenue with Credible Media Outlets:** Develop fair revenue-sharing models that allocate a portion of advertising and engagement profits to independent media outlets producing verified public interest journalism. This should include transparent criteria for eligibility and prioritise outlets operating in underfunded or underserved regions.

4.3 Civil Society Actions

Directed at NGOs, media organisations, universities, and citizen groups.

- **Institutionalise Fact-Checking Units in Newsrooms:** Support the establishment of in-house verification desks across media outlets. Invest in training journalists to use open-source intelligence (OSINT), deepfake detection, and reverse image tools.

- **Create a Rapid Response Coalition Against Gendered Disinformation:** Build cross-sector coalitions of feminist organisations, digital rights defenders, and legal aid groups to track, expose, and counter gendered attacks against women in public life.

- **Develop a Public Archive of Viral Disinformation:** Establish a searchable database documenting major disinformation incident, deepfakes, and coordinated campaigns, with verified fact-checks and timeline analysis for media literacy and journalistic use.

- **Launch Digital Media Literacy Campaigns with a Gender Lens**: Implement wide-reaching educational programs in schools, colleges, and communities that teach critical consumption of information, focusing on how disinformation exploits gender stereotypes and identity politics.

- **Train Political Parties and Activists in Ethical Digital Campaigning:** Engage campaign workers and party media cells on the risks of disinformation and the long-term damage to democratic trust. Promote charters of ethical conduct in digital spaces.

- **Push for Regional Dialogue on Cross-Border Information Warfare:** Foster collaborations among civil society groups across South Asia to exchange research, map influence networks, and demand platform accountability in response to cross-border disinformation campaigns.

About Accountability Lab Pakistan:

Accountability Lab Pakistan is part of a trans-local network of 13 independent, locally registered, governed, and managed organizations. As a locally registered think tank in Pakistan, Accountability Lab is committed to fostering transparency, accountability, and good governance. With a focus on driving positive change through innovative approaches, the Lab has been at the forefront of initiatives aimed at enhancing the democratic processes in the country.

The Lab's profound impact on the discourse surrounding women's empowerment in Pakistan is a testament to its commitment to catalyzing positive change through innovative and forward-thinking approaches. In the purview of strengthening women's role in the country's development, the Lab has consistently occupied headship by harnessing the power of innovative methodologies, actively contributing to the evolution of inclusive practices in Pakistan. Central to the Lab's mission is its unwavering emphasis on factors such as social acceptability, institutional insulation, and the holistic strengthening of democracy. These core principles not only underpin the Lab's approach but also resonate deeply with the recommendations outlined in this policy brief.

About Media Matters for Democracy:

Media Matters for Democracy (MMfD) is a journalist-led organization dedicated to media development, digital democracy and rights, Media and Information Literacy (MIL), and Internet governance. MMfD's work includes policy research, advocacy, and capacity-building interventions. Founded by a group of journalists committed to public interest media, the organization strives to ensure that both the media and the public have the tools and an enabling environment to exercise their fundamental rights.

MMfD also promotes innovation in media and journalism through the use of technology, research, and advocacy. As the media industry evolves in the digital age, the organization works to introduce new media concepts, sustainable business models, and critical debates within the Pakistani media landscape. A key objective is to equip emerging journalists with the skills and digital tools necessary for effective reporting. A core area of MMfD's work is the protection of media and digital freedoms. This includes advocating for progressive communication policies, amplifying the voices of citizens, especially women in online spaces, and integrating digital rights issues into mainstream political discourse.

To support evidence-based advocacy and storytelling, MMfD also produces original journalistic content through a team of in-house reporters. Their coverage focuses on digital rights, Internet governance, and thematic data-driven stories, often using Right to Information (RTI) laws to demonstrate the power of investigative journalism. Gender inclusion is a cross-cutting priority in all MMfD programs and initiatives. Whether through research, training, or advocacy, the organization maintains a consistent emphasis on fostering inclusive, equitable media and digital environments.