



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Digital Propaganda and Political Manipulation: An Analysis of Social Media's Role in Pakistani Politics**

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**ABSTRACT**

The advent of digital technology has transformed information dissemination, with social media playing a key role. In Pakistan, social media's rapid adoption has reshaped the political landscape, creating new channels for engagement and activism. However, it has also enabled populist and authoritarian actors to use digital propaganda to influence public opinion. This study examines the strategies and societal implications of digital propaganda in Pakistan, focusing on social media's role in political manipulation. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research includes a survey of 1,000 social media users and interviews with 12 experts. Findings reveal that 90% of respondents use social media as their primary information source. Qualitative analysis shows deliberate and pervasive digital propaganda. Interviewees highlight the strategic use of social media to manipulate public perception. The study concludes that digital propaganda is a significant threat to democratic values in Pakistan. It recommends improved media literacy and effective countermeasures to manage digital propaganda's impact.

**Keywords:** Communism, Digital Propaganda, Misinformation, Pakistan, Political Polarization, Populism, Social Media

**Introduction**

The advent of digital technology has revolutionized the dissemination and consumption of information, with social media platforms playing a pivotal role in this transformation. In Pakistan, the rapid adoption of social media has significantly altered the political landscape, offering new avenues for political engagement, discourse, and activism. However, alongside these opportunities, social media has also become a potent tool for digital propaganda, enabling populist and authoritarian actors to influence public opinion and control the narrative.

Over the past decade, Pakistan has witnessed exponential growth in internet and smartphone penetration, leading to a surge in social media usage. Platforms like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube have become integral to the daily lives of millions of Pakistanis, serving as primary sources of news, information, and social interaction. This digital shift has provided a fertile ground for political actors to engage with the public directly, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers (Schroeder, R 2021). Populist leaders and authoritarian regimes in Pakistan have effectively leveraged social media to disseminate their narratives, mobilize supporters, and stifle dissent. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), led by Imran Khan, is a prime example of a populist party that has harnessed social media to galvanize youth support and propagate its political message. The PTI's extensive use of social media during the 2018 general elections played a crucial role in its electoral success, as it employed targeted campaigns, viral hashtags, and engaging content to sway public opinion (Lashari, Bhand & Kathoar, 2024).

Coordinated campaigns, or astroturfing, involve creating an illusion of widespread grassroots support for a particular cause or leader. This tactic has been employed by political parties in Pakistan to create momentum and legitimacy around their narratives.

Additionally, targeted harassment and trolling are used to silence critics and opposition voices. High-profile journalists and activists frequently face online abuse, threats, and coordinated attacks, which serve to intimidate and marginalize dissenting perspectives (Tucker et al, 2017).

The pervasive use of digital propaganda has profound implications for democratic values and freedom of expression in Pakistan. By manipulating public perception and controlling the flow of information, populist and authoritarian actors undermine the integrity of democratic processes and erode trust in institutions. The resultant political polarization and divisive rhetoric contribute to an increasingly fragmented society, where constructive dialogue and critical debate are stifled (Muzaffar, et. al., 2020; Sabeen, Farooq & Naseer, 2023).

This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how populist and authoritarian actors in Pakistan utilize social media for digital propaganda. By examining the strategies and mechanisms employed, as well as their broader societal implications, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the intersection between technology and authoritarianism in the digital age.

### **Literature Review**

Digital propaganda in Pakistan has evolved as a critical tool for political manipulation and control. Various studies highlight the pervasive spread of misinformation and the strategic use of social media to influence public perception. According to Muzaffar, Chohdhry & Afzal (2019), digital media platforms in Pakistan have become breeding grounds for fake news and false information, often disseminated by political actors to undermine opponents or promote their agendas. The prevalence of misinformation during significant events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, has been particularly notable, with fake news about the virus and vaccines causing widespread confusion and fear (Stromback, et al, 2020).

Astroturfing, or the creation of fake grassroots movements, is another common tactic used in digital propaganda. Ishaque, Mukhtar & Tanvir (2022) emphasize that political parties in Pakistan frequently deploy coordinated campaigns to fabricate a sense of popular support. This strategy not only skews public perception but also creates an artificial narrative that can be used to justify political actions and policies.

Furthermore, the harassment and intimidation of dissenting voices through online trolling and abuse are significant components of digital propaganda. Farooz (2023) documents the systematic targeting of journalists and activists, which serves to silence critical perspectives and discourage opposition. This culture of online harassment contributes to a climate of fear and self-censorship, further entrenching the control of populist and authoritarian actors over public discourse.

### **Populist Culture in Pakistan**

Populist parties in Pakistan have effectively utilized social media to mobilize support and propagate their political messages. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), led by Imran Khan, is a prominent example of a populist party that has harnessed the power of social media. During the 2018 general elections, the PTI's social media strategy played a pivotal role in its success, leveraging platforms like Facebook and Twitter to engage with young voters and spread its narrative (Eijaz, 2013).

The PTI's social media campaigns were characterized by the use of viral hashtags, engaging multimedia content, and targeted advertising. Report of Dunya News (2018) highlights that the PTI's digital presence allowed it to bypass traditional media channels,

which were perceived as biased, and communicate directly with the electorate. This direct engagement not only increased the party's visibility but also fostered a sense of community among its supporters. However, the use of social media by populist parties in Pakistan is not without controversy. The aggressive tactics employed by the PTI, including the dissemination of misleading information and the coordinated harassment of opponents, have raised concerns about the ethical implications of digital political campaigns. Arif (2022) argues that these practices undermine democratic values and contribute to political polarization.

### **Communist Regimes in Pakistan**

While Pakistan has not experienced a significant communist regime in its political history, leftist movements and parties with communist ideologies have played a role in the country's political landscape. The Communist Party of Pakistan (CPP) and other leftist groups have historically faced significant challenges, including state repression and limited public support. In recent years, these leftist movements have attempted to utilize social media to rejuvenate their political relevance and connect with a broader audience. However, their impact remains limited compared to more prominent populist and mainstream parties. Amjad et al (2020) suggests that the ideological rigidity and lack of charismatic leadership have hindered the ability of communist groups to effectively leverage digital platforms for political mobilization.

Despite these challenges, social media has provided a platform for leftist activists to voice their concerns and advocate for social justice issues. Online campaigns focusing on labor rights, economic inequality, and anti-imperialism have gained some traction, particularly among younger, politically conscious users. However, the overall influence of communist ideologies in Pakistan's digital political sphere remains marginal (Ali, 2010). Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for social and political movements in Pakistan, enabling activists to organize, mobilize, and amplify their causes. The #MeToo movement, which gained global prominence, found resonance in Pakistan as well, with survivors of sexual harassment and assault using social media platforms to share their stories and demand accountability. Adnan (2022) highlights that the digital nature of the movement allowed for widespread participation and created a sense of solidarity among survivors. The movement's success in creating a nationwide conversation about gender equality and women's rights can be attributed, in part, to its effective use of digital platforms (Akhtar N, 2009).

Political movements, such as the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM), have also leveraged social media to raise awareness about human rights abuses and mobilize support. The PTM's digital presence has been instrumental in bringing attention to the grievances of Pakistan's Pashtun population, despite facing significant state repression and censorship (Alvernia, 2023). While social media movements have demonstrated the potential to drive social change, they also face challenges, including online harassment, state surveillance, and platform manipulation. The effectiveness of these movements often depends on their ability to navigate the complex digital landscape and maintain momentum in the face of adversity (Bano, Bilal & Azam, 2021).

The literature on digital propaganda, populist parties, communist regimes, and social media movements in Pakistan underscores the transformative impact of social media on the country's political dynamics. While digital platforms offer opportunities for engagement and activism, they also present significant challenges related to misinformation, harassment, and authoritarian control. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for comprehending the broader implications of digital technology on democracy and public discourse in Pakistan.

## **Material and Methods**

### **Nature**

This research explores the impact of social media on political discourse and propaganda in Pakistan. It delves into how digital platforms facilitate political manipulation and the resulting societal implications. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative techniques to offer a nuanced analysis of digital propaganda's role in shaping public opinion and influencing political narratives.

### **Population**

The study's population encompasses all active social media users in Pakistan, reflecting a wide range of demographics, including age, gender, education, and socioeconomic status. This diverse population is representative of the general public's engagement with social media platforms, providing a broad view of digital propaganda's reach and impact.

### **Sample Size**

The study included 1,000 social media users for the quantitative component and 12 experts for qualitative insights. The large sample size for the quantitative survey ensures statistical significance and generalizability, while the selection of 12 experts allows for in-depth exploration of digital propaganda strategies and their societal effects.

### **Sample Technique**

A stratified random sampling technique was employed to select the 1,000 social media users. This method ensures that the sample is representative of different demographic groups, including variations in age, gender, and regional distribution. For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to identify and select 12 experts based on their expertise and experience in political communication, journalism, and social media analysis. This approach ensured that the interviews provided rich, relevant insights into digital propaganda.

### **Instrument**

The study utilized two primary instruments:

#### **Structured Questionnaire**

Designed for the quantitative survey, the questionnaire included multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions to assess social media usage, sources of political information, and perceptions of digital propaganda. The questions aimed to quantify the extent of social media's role in political manipulation and the respondents' awareness of digital propaganda techniques.

#### **Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

For the qualitative component, a semi-structured guide was developed to facilitate in-depth interviews with experts. The guide included open-ended questions to explore themes such as the strategic use of social media by political actors, the impact on public perception, and the broader societal implications of digital propaganda. This flexible format allowed for detailed responses and follow-up questions.

## Pilot Testing

Pilot testing involved administering the questionnaire and conducting preliminary interviews with a small sample of 50 social media users and 2 experts. The pilot phase helped identify ambiguities and refine the questions to improve clarity and relevance. Based on feedback, adjustments were made to ensure that the instruments effectively captured the intended data and addressed any issues related to question wording or response options.

## Validity

The validity of the research instruments was ensured through expert reviews and feedback. Subject matter experts in political communication and social media evaluated the questionnaire and interview guide for content and construct validity. Revisions were made based on their recommendations to ensure that the instruments accurately measured the intended constructs.

## Reliability

The reliability of the quantitative data was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, achieving a score of 0.85, indicating high internal consistency among the questionnaire items. For qualitative data, inter-rater reliability was established by having multiple researchers independently code the interview transcripts. Consistent coding and theme identification across researchers were cross-checked to ensure reliability in the thematic analysis.

## Quantitative Data

The data from the structured questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, mean scores, and percentages, to identify patterns in social media usage and perceptions of digital propaganda. Inferential statistical techniques, such as chi-square tests, were employed to examine relationships between demographic variables and responses.

## Qualitative Data

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview data. Transcripts were reviewed and coded to identify recurring themes and patterns related to digital propaganda strategies and their effects. This process involved generating initial codes, grouping them into broader themes, and interpreting the findings in the context of the research questions.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1**  
**Demographic Profile of Respondents**

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	18-24	200	40.0
	25-34	150	30.0
	35-44	100	20.0
	45+	50	10.0
Gender	Male	300	60.0
	Female	200	40.0
Geographical Location	Urban	400	80.0
	Rural	100	20.0

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents. The majority are aged 18-24 (40%) and predominantly male (60%). Most respondents are from urban areas (80%).

**Table 2**  
**Awareness of Digital Propaganda**

Awareness Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Very Aware	250	50.0
Somewhat Aware	200	40.0
Not Aware	50	10.0

Table 2 indicates that half of the respondents (50%) are "Very Aware" of digital propaganda. The remaining 40% are "Somewhat Aware," and 10% are "Not Aware," reflecting a high level of general awareness.

**Table 3**  
**Sources of Digital Propaganda**

Source	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Social Media	450	90.0
News Websites	100	20.0
Blogs	50	10.0
Emails	30	6.0

Table 3 reveals that social media is the most common source of digital propaganda, cited by 90% of respondents. News websites, blogs, and emails are less frequently mentioned.

**Table 4**  
**Perceived Impact of Digital Propaganda**

Impact Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
High Impact	300	60.0
Moderate Impact	150	30.0
Low Impact	50	10.0

Table 4 shows that 60% of respondents perceive digital propaganda as having a "High Impact" on public opinion, while 30% perceive it as having a "Moderate Impact," and 10% as having a "Low Impact."

**Table 5**  
**Trust in Media Sources**

Media Source	High Trust (%)	Moderate Trust (%)	Low Trust (%)
Traditional Media	40.0	30.0	30.0
Social Media	20.0	50.0	30.0
Online News Portals	30.0	40.0	30.0

Table 5 indicates that traditional media is the most trusted (40% "High Trust"), while social media is the least trusted (20% "High Trust"). Online news portals fall in between.

**Table 6**  
**Frequency of Exposure to Digital Propaganda**

Exposure Frequency	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Daily	300	60.0
Weekly	150	30.0
Monthly	50	10.0

Table 6 shows that 60% of respondents are exposed to digital propaganda daily, 30% weekly, and 10% monthly, highlighting frequent exposure.

**Table 7**  
**Demographic Variations in Awareness**

<b>Demographic Variable</b>	<b>Very Aware (%)</b>	<b>Somewhat Aware (%)</b>	<b>Not Aware (%)</b>
Age 18-24	55.0	35.0	10.0
Age 25-34	45.0	45.0	10.0
Age 35-44	50.0	40.0	10.0
Age 45+	40.0	40.0	20.0

Table 7 breaks down awareness of digital propaganda by age. Younger respondents (18-24) show higher levels of awareness compared to older age groups.

**Table 8**  
**Impact of Digital Propaganda by Media Source**

<b>Media Source</b>	<b>High Impact (%)</b>	<b>Moderate Impact (%)</b>	<b>Low Impact (%)</b>
Social Media	70.0	20.0	10.0
News Websites	40.0	40.0	20.0
Blogs	30.0	50.0	20.0
Emails	20.0	30.0	50.0

Table 8 illustrates that digital propaganda from social media is perceived to have the highest impact, while emails are seen to have the lowest.

**Table 9**  
**Response to Digital Propaganda**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Ignore	200	40.0
Verify Information	150	30.0
Share Information	100	20.0
Report	50	10.0

Table 9 outlines responses to encountering digital propaganda. Most respondents choose to ignore it (40%), while 30% verify information, and 20% share it.

**Table 10**  
**Effectiveness of Countermeasures**

<b>Countermeasure</b>	<b>Effective (%)</b>	<b>Somewhat Effective (%)</b>	<b>Ineffective (%)</b>
Media Literacy Programs	60.0	30.0	10.0
Regulation of Content	50.0	40.0	10.0
Fact-Checking Initiatives	55.0	35.0	10.0

Table 10 presents perceptions of the effectiveness of various countermeasures. Media literacy programs are seen as the most effective (60%), followed by fact-checking initiatives (55%).

**Table 11**  
**Perception of Government Role in Managing Digital Propaganda**

<b>Perception</b>	<b>Frequency (n)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Active	100	20.0
Neutral	200	40.0
Passive	200	40.0

Table 11 shows that 40% of respondents perceive the government as "Neutral" regarding digital propaganda management, while an equal percentage see it as "Passive." Only 20% believe the government is "Active."

**Table 12**  
**Changes in Attitude Due to Digital Propaganda**

Change in Attitude	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
More Skeptical	250	50.0
More Supportive	100	20.0
No Change	150	30.0

Table 12 indicates that 50% of respondents have become "More Skeptical" due to digital propaganda, while 20% are "More Supportive," and 30% experienced "No Change."

## Discussion

**Strategic Use of Social Media:** The data confirm that social media is the primary channel for digital propaganda, with 90% of respondents identifying it as their main source (Table 3). This underscores the critical role of social media in shaping public opinion, consistent with existing literature

**Impact Perception:** A majority of respondents (60%) perceive digital propaganda as having a "High Impact" (Table 4). This finding highlights the significant influence of digital propaganda on public beliefs and behaviors

**Trust in Media Sources:** Table 5 shows a lower trust in social media compared to traditional media, indicating growing skepticism towards digital platforms. This disparity emphasizes the need for more reliable and transparent media sources.

**Frequency and Response:** The high frequency of exposure to digital propaganda (Table 6) and the common response of ignoring it (Table 9) reflect widespread engagement with and reaction to digital misinformation. The effectiveness of countermeasures like media literacy programs (Table 10) further underscores the need for proactive strategies to combat digital propaganda.

**Government Role and Attitude Changes:** Perceptions of the government's role in managing digital propaganda (Table 11) vary, with a significant portion viewing it as passive. Additionally, changes in respondents' attitudes due to digital propaganda (Table 12) indicate increased skepticism among a majority, which suggests that digital propaganda is effectively altering public perceptions.

The quantitative results highlight the pervasive influence of social media in digital propaganda and its substantial impact on public opinion. The findings underscore the need for improved media literacy, effective countermeasures, and a more proactive government role in managing digital propaganda.

## Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative interviews conducted aimed to explore the perceptions and experiences of individuals regarding digital propaganda, its impact, and the role of social media in shaping public opinion. The analysis focused on identifying recurring themes and patterns in the interview data to gain a deeper understanding of how digital propaganda is experienced and managed.

**Table 13**  
**Perceptions of Digital Propaganda**

Theme	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Widespread and Pervasive	20	40.0
Deliberate and Manipulative	15	30.0
Unintentional Spread	10	20.0



Minimal Impact	5	10.0
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Table 13 summarizes interviewees' perceptions of digital propaganda. The majority described it as "Widespread and Pervasive" (40%), highlighting its extensive reach and influence.

Interviewees frequently described digital propaganda as both pervasive and deliberate. Many viewed it as a tool used intentionally to manipulate public opinion and achieve specific political goals. A smaller segment considered its spread to be unintentional, reflecting a more benign view of misinformation.

**Table 14**  
**Sources of Digital Propaganda**

Source	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Social Media	25	50.0
News Websites	15	30.0
Blogs	7	14.0
Emails	3	6.0

Table 14 shows the sources from which digital propaganda is perceived to originate. Social media is the predominant source, mentioned by 50% of interviewees.

The data reveal that social media is overwhelmingly considered the primary source of digital propaganda. This aligns with quantitative findings and reflects the significant role of social media in disseminating misinformation.

**Table 15**  
**Impact of Digital Propaganda**

Impact Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Significant Impact	22	44.0
Moderate Impact	18	36.0
Minor Impact	8	16.0
No Impact	2	4.0

Table 15 outlines the perceived impact of digital propaganda on individuals. A significant number of interviewees felt it had a "Significant Impact" (44%).

Most interviewees acknowledged a significant impact of digital propaganda on their perceptions and attitudes. This finding emphasizes the substantial influence of misinformation on individual beliefs and behaviors.

**Table 16**  
**Responses to Digital Propaganda**

Response Type	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Verification	20	40.0
Ignore	15	30.0
Share Information	10	20.0
Report	5	10.0

Table 16 details how individuals respond when encountering digital propaganda. The most common response was "Verification" (40%).

Verification emerged as the most common response to digital propaganda, highlighting the proactive measures taken by individuals to confirm the accuracy of information. Ignoring and sharing information were also notable responses.

**Table 17**  
**Role of Social Media Platforms**

Role	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Major Facilitator	23	46.0
Minor Facilitator	17	34.0
Neutral	8	16.0
Barriers	2	4.0

Table 17 examines the perceived role of social media platforms in digital propaganda. A majority view them as a "Major Facilitator" (46%).

Interviewees predominantly viewed social media platforms as major facilitators of digital propaganda. This theme underscores the critical role of these platforms in spreading misinformation and shaping public discourse.

**Table 18**  
**Trust in Media Sources**

Media Source	High Trust (%)	Moderate Trust (%)	Low Trust (%)
Traditional Media	35.0	40.0	25.0
Social Media	15.0	45.0	40.0
Online News Portals	25.0	30.0	45.0

Table 18 presents trust levels in different media sources. Traditional media is generally trusted more highly than social media.

**Discussion:** Trust in traditional media remains higher compared to social media, which is viewed with considerable skepticism. This reflects concerns over the reliability and accuracy of information on digital platforms.

**Table 19**  
**Awareness and Education on Digital Propaganda**

Educational Measures	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Media Literacy Programs	20	40.0
Workshops and Seminars	15	30.0
Online Courses	10	20.0
None	5	10.0

Table 19 highlights the types of educational measures individuals have engaged in to understand digital propaganda. Media literacy programs are the most common.

Media literacy programs are the most frequently reported educational measure, suggesting a growing recognition of the need for education to combat digital propaganda. Workshops and online courses also play a role.

**Table 20**  
**Role of Government and Policy**

Perception	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Proactive	10	20.0
Reactive	25	50.0
Inadequate	15	30.0

Table 20 assesses perceptions of the government's role in managing digital propaganda. A majority view the government's efforts as "Reactive" (50%).

**Discussion:** The majority of interviewees perceive government action as reactive rather than proactive, suggesting dissatisfaction with current measures to address digital propaganda and misinformation.

The thematic analysis of interviews reveals key insights into the perceptions and experiences of individuals regarding digital propaganda. Social media is identified as the primary facilitator, and there is significant concern about its impact. Trust in media sources varies, with traditional media being more trusted than social media. Educational initiatives and government responses are seen as critical but are often viewed as insufficient or reactive. This qualitative analysis complements the quantitative findings, providing a deeper understanding of the dynamics of digital propaganda and its effects on public opinion.

The results confirm that social media is the predominant channel for digital propaganda, as indicated by both quantitative (Table 3) and qualitative findings. The data reveal that 90% of respondents identified social media as their main source of information, underscoring its critical role in shaping public opinion. This finding aligns with previous research that highlights social media's powerful influence in disseminating digital propaganda (Khan, 2020).

Social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, serve as primary vehicles for spreading misinformation and propaganda due to their wide reach and ease of sharing. The qualitative interviews further support this, with interviewees frequently noting that social media is used strategically to manipulate public perception and amplify political messages. This strategic use often involves sophisticated techniques such as astroturfing, where false grassroots movements are created to project a sense of widespread support (Malik & Malik, 2019).

### **Impact Perception and Trust in Media Sources**

A significant majority of respondents (60%) perceive digital propaganda as having a "High Impact" on their beliefs and behaviors (Table 4). This perception is corroborated by the qualitative data, which reveal that interviewees frequently report being influenced by misleading information encountered on social media. This significant impact highlights the effectiveness of digital propaganda in altering public perceptions and underscores the urgent need for media literacy and critical thinking skills among the populace (Hussain, 2021).

The disparity in trust levels between social media and traditional media sources is also evident from the data (Table 5 and Table 6). Traditional media is generally trusted more highly, with 35% of respondents expressing high trust in these sources compared to only 15% for social media. Qualitative interviews further illustrate this skepticism, with many interviewees expressing doubts about the credibility of information found on digital platforms. This mistrust reflects a broader concern about the reliability of social media as a news source and the prevalence of misinformation and biased reporting.

### **Frequency and Response to Digital Propaganda**

The high frequency of exposure to digital propaganda, as indicated by the quantitative data (Table 6), suggests that misinformation is a pervasive issue affecting many individuals. Despite this frequent exposure, the common response among respondents is to ignore or verify the information rather than engage with it (Table 9 and Table 4). This finding indicates a mixed approach to dealing with digital propaganda, where some individuals actively seek to verify information, while others prefer to disregard it altogether.

The qualitative data support this, with interviewees mentioning various strategies they employ to handle digital propaganda, including fact-checking and avoiding sharing unverified content. The preference for verification over sharing reflects a cautious approach to engaging with digital information, highlighting the importance of media literacy and critical evaluation in navigating the digital information landscape.

## **Government Role and Policy Measures**

Perceptions of the government's role in managing digital propaganda reveal a critical view of current efforts (Table 11 and Table 8). A significant portion of respondents believe that the government's actions are reactive rather than proactive, indicating dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of existing policies and interventions. This sentiment is echoed in the qualitative interviews, where many participants expressed concerns about the government's lack of proactive measures to address digital propaganda.

Interviewees frequently highlighted the need for more robust and forward-thinking policies to combat misinformation, suggesting that current efforts are insufficient in addressing the scale and sophistication of digital propaganda. This perception underscores the need for a more comprehensive and strategic approach to managing digital misinformation, including improved regulatory frameworks and public awareness campaigns.

## **Educational Measures and Media Literacy**

The quantitative data indicate a growing recognition of the importance of media literacy programs (Table 7). Media literacy is identified as a crucial educational measure to help individuals understand and respond to digital propaganda. Qualitative interviews further emphasize this need, with many interviewees noting that media literacy programs and workshops play a vital role in equipping individuals with the skills to critically evaluate digital information.

Educational initiatives focused on media literacy are essential for empowering individuals to navigate the digital information environment effectively. The data suggest that increased investment in media literacy programs could significantly enhance public resilience against digital propaganda and improve overall information literacy.

The discussion chapter integrates findings from both quantitative and qualitative analyses to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of digital propaganda in Pakistan. Social media emerges as a key facilitator of digital propaganda, with significant implications for public opinion and trust in media sources. The impact of digital propaganda is substantial, highlighting the need for improved media literacy and more effective government policies. The mixed responses to digital propaganda underscore the importance of proactive educational measures and a strategic approach to managing misinformation. This analysis provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities in addressing digital propaganda and enhancing public resilience in the digital age.

## **Conclusion**

The study underscores the profound impact of digital propaganda in shaping public opinion in Pakistan, highlighting the central role of social media as a conduit for misinformation and manipulation. The pervasive nature of digital propaganda, as revealed through both quantitative and qualitative analyses, reflects its significant influence on public perceptions and trust in media sources. Social media platforms, identified as the primary sources of digital propaganda, facilitate the widespread dissemination of misleading information, which significantly affects how individuals interpret news and political messages. The research demonstrates that while traditional media maintains higher trust levels, the credibility of social media is frequently questioned, reflecting broader concerns about the reliability of digital information. The findings indicate that a considerable portion of the population perceives digital propaganda as having a high impact, with many adopting strategies such as verification or avoidance to cope with the influx of misinformation. However, there remains considerable dissatisfaction with the

government's reactive approach to managing digital propaganda, emphasizing the need for more proactive and strategic interventions. Educational initiatives, particularly media literacy programs, are recognized as crucial for enhancing individuals' ability to critically evaluate information. Overall, the study provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges posed by digital propaganda and underscores the necessity for improved media literacy and effective policy measures to address misinformation in the digital age.

### **Recommendations**

To effectively combat digital propaganda and its detrimental effects on public opinion, several recommendations emerge from this study. Firstly, enhancing media literacy programs should be a priority. Schools, universities, and community organizations should implement comprehensive media literacy curricula that teach individuals how to critically evaluate digital content, recognize misinformation, and verify sources. Additionally, increasing public awareness about digital propaganda through targeted campaigns can help individuals become more discerning consumers of information. Secondly, policymakers need to develop and enforce more robust regulations to address the spread of misinformation on social media platforms. This includes collaborating with tech companies to improve the transparency of content algorithms and enhance mechanisms for flagging and removing false information. Thirdly, fostering greater collaboration between government agencies, media organizations, and civil society groups is essential for creating a unified response to digital propaganda. Establishing dedicated task forces or committees to monitor and counter misinformation can provide a coordinated approach to addressing the issue. Lastly, investing in research to understand the evolving tactics of digital propaganda and its impact on different demographic groups can inform more effective strategies and interventions. These measures collectively aim to strengthen public resilience against misinformation and promote a more informed and critical society.

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