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UNPACKING THE THREAT OF SOCIAL MEDIA POLITICAL DISCRIMINATION: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF PAKISTANI POLITICIANS ON SOCIAL MEDIA AND FAKE NEWS

Muhammad Alamgir[*1], Ijaz ul haq[2], Shabana Nasreen[3]

[*1]*Phd Scholar Riphah International University Islamabad*
[2]*Phd Scholar Department of English, Kohat University of Science &Technology (KUST)*
[3]*Mphil Scholar, Department of English, Minhaj University Lahore*

[*1]muhammadalamgir178@gmail.com, [2]Ijazulhaqfap875@gmail.com
[3]shabananasreen20193511@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: *
Muhammad Alamgir
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ABSTRACT
Social media has an important impact on all angles of life, such as social, political, religious and educational way of life. It engages the people to discuss social, political, economic, and religious information. It constructs the opinions of people; especially political scenario has been changed by it. The use of social media has connected politicians with people to shape their opinions. The aim of this qualitative study is to explore social media political disinformation and how Pakistani politicians especially Imran Khan addresses them. The study analyzes the speech of Imran Khan regarding "Social Media and Fakes News". The study identifies persuasive strategies used by Imran Khan that how he convinces the audience about the negative impacts and dangers of fake news on social media through his persuasive strategies. Apart from this, the study examines the contributions of his persuasive strategies on disinformation and its impacts on democracy and the balance between civilians and military power. The study applies Aristotle's modes of persuasion: ethos, pathos and logos in order to know the construction of the persuasive strategies used by Imran Khan. The findings of the study provide an insight about the role of social media and the significance of evaluation of information of social media.
Keyword: *Social media, political disinformation, democracy, civilians and military power.*

INTRODUCTION

Social media is a source of connection and sharer. It connects people to share and receive information. It informs people socially, culturally, religiously and politically. It conveys the message of politicians as campaigners to support them at the time of vote casting. The political speeches of politicians on social media shape the opinions of people. It is now a source of discussion (Happer & Philo, 2013).

Furthermore, as compared to other aspects of life, political discussion has become the topic of millions of users in Pakistan (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Besides people, politicians interact with their audience due to extensive adoption of social media. The traditional media channels are being bypassed by them and they directly interact with people (Klinger & Svensson, 2015). However, the use of political speeches on social media has raised concerns about misinformation and fake news.

In addition, the propagation of fake news and disinformation can raise fear between civilian and military power which is a threat to the unity, stability, and democracy of country. (Allcott & Gentile, 2019). This kind of fake news and disinformation construct the opinion of people in such a way that the they lose trust in institutions which sometimes take the people to the side of conflicts and other bad consequences (Martens, et

all (2018). Anyway, politicians, can play a role to bring awareness among the people so that they can distinguish between right and wrong.

The aim of this study is the exploration of social media political disinformation and how it is being addressed by the politicians of Pakistan, especially by Imran khan. The study analyzes the speech of Imran khan about "Social Media and fake news". The study identifies the persuasive strategies used by Imran khan that how he convinces people about the disinformation and fake news on social media. The study applies Aristotle modes of persuasion: ethos, pathos and logos to understand persuasive strategies in the selected speech. The study provides an insight to the readers that how politicians shape the opinion of people through social media and spread disinformation and fake news. Furthermore, this study examines the contributions of Imran Khan's persuasive strategies to disinformation and its impacts on democracy and the balance between civilians and military power.

1.1 Research Objectives

The present study intends to:

1. Explore persuasive strategies used by Imran Khan about disinformation and fake news on social media.
2. Investigate the impact of his persuasive strategies on the opinions of people regarding fake news and disinformation in Pakistan.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What kind of persuasive strategies have been used by Imran Khan about disinformation and fake news on social media?
2. How the opinions of the people have been influenced by him about fake news and disinformation in Pakistan?

1.3 Rationale of the study

This study is crucial due to the propagation of fake news and disinformation on social media in Pakistan. The use of such type of news grows concerns and threats to democracy, national security and stability of the country. (Allcott & Gentile, 2019). It brings awareness for the readers to know about the reality of fake news and disinformation on social media (Shu, et all, 2017). The study provides an insight to the readers that how politicians shape the opinion of people through social media and spread disinformation and fake news. Furthermore, this study examines the contributions of Imran Khan's persuasive strategies to disinformation and its impacts on democracy and the balance between civilians and military power. Ultimately, this research enhances our understanding of the complex dynamics between social media, politics, and disinformation in Pakistan.

This study is delimited to analyze only one speech of Imran Khan that focuses on his persuasive strategies that how he addresses social media disinformation. It does not analyze the non-political areas and their impacts on social medias. The study is also limited to the reliance on qualitative data that is limited to single-context focus and generalizability. The analysis is further restricted to by subjective interpretation of persuasive strategies, potentially leading to varying conclusions. Additionally, the study's use of Aristotle's framework may overlook other culturally relevant rhetorical strategies.

1.4 Delimitations and Limitations of the Study

This study is delimited to analyze only one speech of Imran Khan that focuses on his persuasive strategies that how he addresses social media disinformation. It does not analyze the non-political areas and their impacts on social medias. The study is also limited to the reliance on qualitative data that is limited to single-context focus and generalizability. The analysis is further restricted to by subjective interpretation of persuasive strategies, potentially leading to varying conclusions. Additionally, the study's use of Aristotle's framework may overlook other culturally relevant rhetorical strategies.

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1. Literature Review

This part of the study talks about the role of social media that how does it shape public opinion and political discourse. It shares information about the engagement of people and politicians through social media. It also highlights the negative impacts and risks of disinformation and fake news on social media that such kind of fake news can lead to distrust in institutions and political division. It provides suggestions and solutions to reduce fake news and the users of social can identify accurate information.

The rapid growth of social media has connected people and politicians. Politicians make the use of it excessively and communicate their message by it (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Millions of people in Pakistan use social media and have different points of views about political scenario around the country (Ahmad, Alvi, and Ittefaq (2019). However, concerns have been raised about the integrity of democratic processes due to the disinformation and fakes news that are being propagated on social media (Allcott & Gentile, 2019).

Saaida, M. (2023) has conducted research on "The Role of Social Media in Shaping Political Discourse and Propaganda". The researcher found that there is an important impact of social media when it comes to political discourse and propaganda. It has become a new source of communication for everyone. The politicians transmit their message very easily. However, along with advantages, it has brought some disadvantages as well. The political parties use this source negatively to spread misinformation. So, it is difficult for the consumers to distinguish between right and wrong.

Fortson, A. (2021) investigated "Social Media's Influence on Political Engagement." The study found that social media influences the opinions and thoughts of people through logical reasoning and emotional appeal. It enables politicians to forward their message to people and prepare them to vote. It has become a source of advertisement for political figures. To covey the right message to the people, fact-checking steps are necessary to avoid disinformation.

According to the findings of Ali, Awais, & Faran (2021), social media engages people in politics and leads them towards political polarization. People consume news from different platforms of social media and they debate on issues pertaining to politics. The news inclines the people to side by a political party and support it and then it is difficult to treat this platform uniformly.

Iyengar and Westwood (2015), demonstrate the role of social media and its persuasiveness. They explore that social media makes the use of pervasive strategies which convince the audience and their attitude. The persuasive strategies used by social media sometimes reinforce the people towards the existing biases and political polarization. Secondly, this platform provides disinformation which has negative impacts on the life of people. However, effective fact-checking initiatives can mitigate misinformation.

A study has been carried out on social media platforms by Brennen et al., (2022). They investigate that there are two sources which are responsible for the propagation of fake news and misinformation. The two identified sources are Gab and You Tube. They concluded that fact checking features can reinforce to bring awareness among people about fake news and misinformation. Such steps will guide the people to distinguish between right and wrong, fact and fake news.

Thia is essential for every platform of social media to convey authentic news and to avoid falsehood and fake news. Researchers have worked to find a suitable mechanism that uncover fake news and maintain fact and reality on social media. One of such mechanism is to bring awareness among the people about the misinformation and disinformation of social media. Secondly, providing warnings about false information and nudging users to think about accuracy could be effective in combating the spread of online misinformation (Pennycook and Rand, 2019).

According to the research study of Balakrishnan, Ng, & Abdul Rahim 2021, the impact of fake news is not limited to country but extended to the whole world and has become a widespread and global issue. He found that most of the news about COVID-19 were based on prediction and fake news. The fact and authentic news were shared by few platforms.

The study "Unpacking the Threat of Social Media Political Discrimination" is justified on account of the impact of social media. Social media shapes the opinion and attitude of people by sharing fake news and misinformation. Such type of news can be a threat to the reliable institutions, democracy and security of the country. People connect themselves with politicians by social media, but

some platforms share news in such manner which can destabilize the democratic process and stability of the country. This qualitative research examines how Pakistani politicians, particularly Imran Khan, address social media political disinformation; exploring how persuasive strategies used to persuade people about fake news dangers. By examining Khan's speech on "Social Media and Fake News," the study addresses a critical knowledge gap, enhancing understanding of social media's role in shaping opinions and the importance of evaluating information, ultimately contributing to global efforts to combat fake news and its harmful consequences.

2. Research Design and Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature. Qualitative method focuses on the exploration of ideas, experiences and other perspectives by analyzing non-numerical data such as videos, audio or text. This method assists to know about a situation profoundly and improve new ideas for research (Ahmad et al., 2019).

Moreover, the study applies Aristotle's Modes of Persuasions: Ethos, Pathos and Lagos to know the construction of the persuasive strategies used by Imran Khan. The findings of the study provide an insight to the role of social media and the significance of evaluation of information of social media.

The first strategy of Aristotle's Modes of Persuasion is Ethos. Trustworthiness, reliability and character of the speakers are depicted by Ethos. Integrity, authority, respect and credibility are such qualities that are included in Ethos and these qualities tell us that how the audience look at the reliability of the speaker (Dlugan,2010).

The second strategy is Pathos. It refers to the emotional appeal among the audience. Love, sympathy, empathy, hate, anger and guilty are included in Pathos. Emotional appeal sometimes helps to attract the audience so that they do something, such as clapping, laughing, smiling and even weeping (Ting, 2018).

The third strategy is Logos that means to use logic and persuade the audience. It comprises the use of arguments, the opinions of experts, statistics and real-life examples. It also includes deductive, abductive and inductive inferences (Aceh, 2019).

3. Analysis and Discussion

Imran khan is the ex-prime minister of Pakistan. He presented his short speech during inauguration ceremony of the Digital Media Development Program in Islamabad, on September, 24, 2021. The speech related to social media is available on Geo News (https://www.geo.tv/latest/372279-pm-imran-khan-addresses-inauguration-ceremony-of-digital-media-development-programme). In his speech Imran khan has made the use of Ethos, Pathos and Logos strategies of persuasions. He has used Ethos to build trustworthiness and credibility, Pathos, for the provocation of strong emotions and logos for the presentation of logical arguments. A strong persuasive strategy is found in every sentence of his speech that attracts the audience. The three strategies are mentioned one by one:

4.1 Ethos

"Some people pass their exams because they are talented, but students who keep working hard will get ahead of them later." (Khan, line 29)

This is a statement of Khan which is comprised of both ethos and pathos strategies of persuasion. This is talking about ethics and value that points towards hard work, sense of hope and determination. By emphasizing that students who work hard will get success in their life, Khan appeals to the ethic of steadfastness and thorough struggle, he presents hard work as an ethical value. By this statement, the audience consider him as a minister who prioritizes struggle over innate ability.

"My government does not fear the media and judiciary." (Khan, Line 35)

This utterance of Khan is based on ethos. It depicts the picture of confidence and trustworthiness. He wants to shows his authority and trust by emphasizing accountability and open scrutiny. To make a statement more effective in ethos, honesty, respect and credibility are important to be mentioned by the speaker. Khan's statement indicates trustworthiness that his government does not hide anything from public, which helps him in the persuasion of his audience.

4.2 Pathos:

The following statement of khan reveals pathos strategy of persuasion. As he said,

"[Fake news] is degrading for the country." (Khan, line 45)

This statement "[Fake news] is degrading for the country", evokes concern and a sense of national

pride. He wanted to appeal his audience to keep away from fake news. Fake news and misinformation weaken the integrity and stability of the nation. Khan has used pathos as a persuasive strategy to convince his audience about the disadvantages of fake news that it is a threat for certain values, such as trust, unity and patriotism. Pathos as a persuasive strategy that is used to convince other people and highlights issues that weaken values, such as trust, patriotism and unity.

"When a person tells the truth, their status in society rises, and no one respects a person who lies." (Khan, 55).

The sentence "When a person tells the truth, their status in society rises, and no one respects a person who lies" means that honesty and speaking the truth is highly appreciated and valued in the society. It helps in the enhancement of the reputation of a person. On the other hand, if a person tells a lie, this is dishonesty and dishonesty leads to degradation. A person who tells a lie loses his respect in the society and no one trusts him. This statement is based on Pathos that inclines the audience towards speaking the truth and honesty. Emotions which are related to different values, such as respect and honesty can firmly persuade others.

"And we are heading towards this goal [...] before we used to bow down before the global superpowers." (Khan, line 97).

Khan positions himself and his government as a proponent of truth and his statement establishes a framework of morality. The sentence expresses independence of the nation and country. It exhorts the audience to speak the truth and keep away from sharing fake news and become independent. This statement of Khan is also based on Pthos strategy of persuasion. He talks about national pride and ethical values. These can persuade the audience towards justice and morality.

"[But now] we are heading towards making Pakistan like Riyasat-e-Madina [a welfare state]" (Khan, line 115)

This utterance tells audience about the just society and the powerful vision of future. This shares the objective of his government to make Pakistan a prosperous country in future. It is a hope for the nation from his behalf to make Pakistan like Riasat-e- Madina. Here Pathos in the sentence is found when he promises his nation about the powerful and just message for his people that creates a sense of hope and inspiration among the audience. Hope leads the people towards their future dreams and it helps the speaker that his audience support his utterance.

4.3 Logos:

Khan has also used logos strategy of persuasion in his speech. As he has said:

"They can take advantage by running fake news, but with time, it will be discredited." (Khan, Line 67).

This statement is about journalism and those journalists who run fake news without proper enquiry. This also emphasized that the fakes news will be disclosed with the passage of time and every one will come to know that the news that was shared without investigation was fake. It implies that as a person is judged by his trustworthiness, so the outlets of media are also judged. He wants to tell the audience that a short-term benefit can be received by misinformation and fake news but its long-term duration is detrimental. This prediction emphasizes the eventual downfall of unethical journalism.

"You can take a look at the records, and I guarantee you that 70% of the programs are against us." (Khan, Line 75)

Khan makes the use of statistics to construct a statement in such a way that the audience take his utterance logically instead of taking his statement emotionally. This is in accordance to the logos strategy of persuasion. When a speaker is talking about statistics and logical reasoning, he or she uses logic to convince others.

"What could be bigger slander than this? That the sitting prime minister had picked AJK's prime minister through numerology." (Khan, Line 83)

Khan has posed logical question that challenges the trustworthiness of his opponents. According to Aristotle mode of persuasion, logical proofs, reasonings and structured questions that take the audience towards conclusion rather than emotions. Khan has also posed this question to his audience so that they may listen to him attentively and pay attention.

"The ones involved in corruption fear them, but my government does not." (Khan, Line 87)

This saying of Khan constructs an ethical contrast between the administration of Khan and those who are involved in corruption (according to Khan). A speaker can build his credibility when he demonstrates goodwill, wisdom and virtue. He distances his government from corruption and he

claims that if investigation is done regarding his government, he does not have any fear. He wants to tell his opponents that that those who are involved in corruption, they have fear about investigation.

Discussion

Imran Khan, ex-prime Minister of Pakistan, uses ethos, pathos, and logos strategies for the persuasion of his audience during the inauguration ceremony of the Digital Media Development Program. His speech strategically incorporates these elements to connect with and influence his audience. Each rhetorical appeal is explored with discussion.

This statement "Some people pass their exams because they are talented, but students who keep working hard will get ahead of them later" combines both ethos and pathos to emphasize hard work and determination. By highlighting that continuous hard work leads to success, Khan promotes values of perseverance, hope, and effort. Aristotle's theory of ethos describes how a speaker's character can foster trust and respect, especially when they promote virtues that resonate with the audience's beliefs (Aristotle, trans. 2007). Halloran (1982) adds that ethos becomes persuasive when it reflects the speaker's alignment with cultural and moral ideals, which, in this case, encourages the audience to view Khan as a leader who values hard work and ethics.

Khan's statement "My government does not fear the media and judiciary" here utilizes ethos by emphasizing transparency and accountability, aiming to project confidence and build trustworthiness. According to McCroskey (2006), ethos is strengthened when the speaker demonstrates honesty and credibility. By openly stating that his government has nothing to hide, Khan positions himself as a trustworthy leader who respects democratic values. Aristotle notes that ethos is particularly persuasive when the speaker is perceived as transparent and honest (Trans, 2007).

This statement of Khan's "[Fake news] is degrading for the country" draws on pathos by appealing to feelings of national pride, as he emphasizes the negative impact of fake news on the country's reputation. Bitzer (1968) defines pathos as the emotional appeal aimed at influencing the audience's values and sense of responsibility. By warning against the dangers of misinformation, Khan seeks to unify his audience against fake news for the greater good of national integrity.

This sentence "When a person tells the truth, their status in the society rises, and no one respects a person who lies" promotes values like honesty and respect, aiming to evoke a desire for truthfulness among the audience. According to Herrick (2012), pathos appeals often target values like honesty, which influences people's attitudes and motivates them to act. Khan uses this statement to reinforce the importance of truth and respect within society, appealing to his audience's emotions and persuading them to value honesty.

In this utterance "And we are heading towards this goal [...] before we used to bow down before the global superpowers" Khan appeals to pathos here by appealing to the audience's sense of independence and national pride. He highlights Pakistan's journey towards self-reliance, aiming to inspire unity and support for his vision. According to Foss, and Trapp (2002), pathos helps to establish a strong emotional connection by appealing to shared goals and experiences. Here, Khan appeals to collective pride, fostering a sense of unity among his audience.

This sentence "They can take advantage by running fake news, but with time, it will be discredited" relies on logical reasoning, as Khan predicts the eventual discrediting of fake news. Aristotle's logos explains that a well-reasoned argument helps persuade by following a logical sequence (Trans. 2007). Toulmin (2003) explains that logos often involves logical progression, predicting that unethical practices like fake news will ultimately harm those who spread them.

Khan's use of statistics to highlight bias against his administration is an example of logos, aiming to persuade the audience based on evidence. As he said, "You can take a look at the records, and I guarantee you that 70% of the programs are against us." Aristotle argues that logos appeals are strengthened when facts and rational arguments support the claim (Aristotle, trans. 2007). Toulmin (2003) also asserts that data-driven arguments enhance credibility by presenting verifiable evidence, which helps to frame the issue logically rather than emotionally.

This rhetorical question "What could be bigger slander than this? That the sitting prime minister had picked AJK's prime minister through numerology" employs logos to challenge the logic of his critics' accusations. Toulmin (2003) explains

that rhetorical questions can lead the audience to evaluate an argument's plausibility and recognize its flaws. By questioning the validity of these accusations, Khan subtly encourages the audience to dismiss them as illogical, fostering a sense of skepticism toward his opponents.

In summary, Khan's speech combines ethos, pathos, and logos to establish his credibility, engages his audience emotionally, and presents logical arguments. This balanced approach allows him to connect with his audience on multiple levels, reinforcing the effectiveness of his message.

Findings

This part of the study explores the persuasive strategies employed by Imran Khan during his speech at the inauguration of the Digital Media Development Program. The analysis reveals that Khan effectively integrates Aristotle's modes of persuasion—ethos, pathos, and logos—into his rhetoric, thereby engaging his audience and addressing the pressing issue of social media disinformation.

1. Ethos (Credibility and Trustworthiness):

Khan's speech demonstrates a strong reliance on ethos, as he articulates values that resonate with his audience. For instance, his assertion that hard work ultimately leads to success emphasizes the importance of perseverance and determination, fostering a sense of trust in his character as a leader. Furthermore, his statement regarding his government's transparency enhances his credibility by portraying him as accountable and respectful of democratic principles.

2. Pathos (Emotional Appeal):

The use of pathos is prominent in Khan's appeal to national pride and integrity. By addressing the detrimental effects of fake news, he connects with his audience's emotions, invoking a collective responsibility to combat misinformation. Statements that highlight the value of truth and respect resonate with the audience's desires and aspirations, encouraging them to prioritize honesty in their own lives and in the media.

3. Logos (Logical Argumentation):

Khan employs logos effectively to present logical arguments and statistics that support his claims. His predictions about the eventual discrediting of fake news illustrate a rational perspective on the issue. By providing statistical evidence regarding media bias against his administration, he strengthens his position and encourages the audience to think critically about the information they consume.

It was found that the propagation of fake news and disinformation raise fear between civilian and military power which is a threat to the unity, stability, and democracy of country. Fake news is degrading for the country. It evokes concern and a sense of national pride. Fake news and misinformation weaken the integrity and stability of the nation. Fake news is it is a threat for certain values, such as trust, unity and patriotism. This kind of fake news and disinformation construct the opinion of people in such a way that they lose trust regarding various institutions which sometimes take the people to the side of conflicts and other bad consequences. Additionally, the political parties use social media negatively to spread misinformation. So, it is difficult for the consumers to distinguish between right and wrong. Moreover, social media engages people in politics and leads them towards political polarization. People consume news from different platforms of social media and they debate on issues pertaining to politics. The news inclines the people to side by a political party and support it and then it is difficult to treat this platform uniformly. Similarly, the persuasive strategies used by social media sometimes reinforce the people towards the existing biases and political polarization. Secondly, this platform provides disinformation which has negative impacts on the life of people.

It was suggested based on the above study that in order to avoid fake news, awareness among the people about the misinformation and disinformation of social media is required. Secondly, providing warnings about false information and nudging users to think about accuracy could be effective in combating the spread of online misinformation. Honesty and speaking the truth should be appreciated and valued in the society that can eradicate fake news. It helps in the enhancement of the reputation of a person. politicians, can play a role to bring awareness among the people so that they can distinguish between right and wrong. To covey the right message to the people, fact-checking steps are necessary to avoid disinformation. Effective fact-checking initiatives can mitigate misinformation. Fact checking features can reinforce to bring

awareness among people about fake news and misinformation. Such steps will guide the people to distinguish between right and wrong, fact and fake news.

Overall, Khan's strategic use of ethos, pathos, and logos not only enhances the persuasiveness of his message but also underscores the importance of evaluating information critically in the age of social media. The findings highlight the potential of rhetorical strategies in shaping public discourse and reinforcing democratic values amid the challenges posed by misinformation.

Conclusion

The analysis of Imran Khan's speech on social media disinformation demonstrates how politicians can use persuasive strategies—ethos, pathos, and logos—to influence public opinion. By appealing to credibility, emotions, and logical reasoning, Khan effectively addresses the dangers of fake news, presenting it as a threat to national integrity, democracy, and public trust. His references to ethics, values, and patriotic duty create a powerful emotional connection with his audience, urging them to reject misinformation and uphold honesty.

This study also highlights the broader significance of social media disinformation in Pakistan's political landscape, where it affects the balance of civilian and military power and the stability of democratic institutions. Through his rhetoric, Khan emphasizes the importance of truth and transparency, aligning himself with the audience's aspirations for a trustworthy leadership.

This qualitative examination underscores the urgent need for careful evaluation of social media content. It reminds readers that politicians play a key role in promoting informed and constructive political discourse, which is essential for strengthening democratic values and preventing the harmful impacts of fake news on society.

Here's a recommendations section crafted closely from your wording and ideas, keeping it original yet distinct:

Recommendations

To mitigate the spread and impact of social media disinformation in Pakistan, several strategies are recommended. Firstly, it is essential to implement comprehensive fact-checking mechanisms on social media platforms. This can help users distinguish between credible information and misleading content, reducing the influence of fake news on public opinion. Raising awareness about disinformation is also crucial. Media literacy programs can educate the public on recognizing and questioning false narratives, fostering a more informed society.

Moreover, politicians and influencers should prioritize transparency and avoid spreading unverified information. By modeling ethical behavior, they can help establish a standard of honesty in digital communication, reinforcing public trust in leadership and democratic processes. Additionally, emphasizing accountability within both political and media sectors can further discourage the creation and distribution of misinformation.

Finally, collaborative efforts between social media platforms, government entities, and civil society are recommended to create guidelines and policies that effectively combat fake news. These measures can contribute to a more balanced and reliable information environment, ultimately supporting the stability and integrity of Pakistan's democratic institutions.

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