



DISINFORMATION, SOCIAL MEDIA, AND DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE IN BANGLADESH: EMERGING THREATS AND COUNTER-STRATEGIES

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Abstract

The digital landscape has undergone a complete transformation in Bangladesh and this unprecedented expansion of the digital world has introduced vulnerabilities to disinformation in Bangladesh. This study examines the interaction between social media, disinformation and societal resilience in the context of political transition period between 2024-2026 in Bangladesh. It seeks to identify new patterns and trends, as well as to identify the patterns of disinformation and their impact on social cohesion and democratic participation, and to analyze current counter-strategies. This study uses a qualitative case study method using data from secondary sources including fact-checking reports, academic publications, investigative journalism, institutional reports and policy documents. The findings indicate that the increasing scale and sophistication of disinformation, politically targeted information manipulation, gendered disinformation against women in public life, communal and cross-border narratives, and vulnerabilities of the platforms have intensified information risks, resulting in loss of trust, social polarization, and challenges in democratic engagement in thematic analysis. Fact-checking efforts, digital literacy programmes and institutional action are the rise, but there are significant gaps in platform accountability, moderation in Bengali language, awareness among the people and regional cooperation. The study argues that a more resilient society will require multiple forms of technological accountability, media literacy and independent verification systems, and collaborative governance. The findings offer valuable new knowledge for information vulnerabilities in transitional democracies in the era of rapid digital manipulation.

Keywords: Disinformation, Information Disorder, Social Media Manipulation, Democratic Resilience, Artificial Intelligence-Generated Disinformation, Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

The digital transformation in Bangladesh has been nothing short of a miracle. The country has entered into the digital era with 73 per cent of households owning at least one smartphone, while 57.2 percent have Internet access (BBS, 2025). The majority of the people in Bangladesh, approximately 80 percent, get their news, information and political discourses from social media platforms, especially Facebook where more than 76 million people are active in Bangladesh (Hasan & Hakim, 2025; Social Media Users in Bangladesh - 2026, 2026). This connectivity has created new opportunities for civic engagement, democratic participation and freedom of expression. It has also ushered in another development, however—that of the weaponization of information itself (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

The political shift in Bangladesh in July to August 2024 completely changed the country's information landscape (Bhadra, 2024). The decades of authoritarianism have left opportunities and vulnerabilities in the wake of a fragile democratic opening. Familiar truths eroded, new agents were vying for power, and the information landscape was both a battleground and an arsenal of narratives and truths (Benkler, Faris & Roberts, 2018).

In 2025, Rumor Scanner detected a record 4,195 pieces of misinformation in Bangladesh, a 30 percent increase from 2024 (Rumor Scanner Team, 2026). Political disinformation dominated with 2,281 items, including 309 related to the upcoming election (ibid). While The Interim Government and Chief Adviser Dr. Yunus were frequent targets, with 91-93 percent of related content presented negatively, misinformation related to Awami League and Sheikh Hasina was mainly positive (ibid). Key concerns included a 409 percent surge in AI-deepfakes and a 47 percent rise in fake media photocards (ibid). Facebook remained the primary platform for spread. Notably, communal disinformation often originated from Indian social media accounts. The final quarter saw the highest volume of misinformation, driven by political events (ibid). Dismislab also reported 60 percent rise of misinformation in 2024 (The Daily Star, 2026).

This information warfare comes with a price. In 2024, during the communal violence in Khagrachhari and Rangamati, the spreading of disinformation on social media was widespread (Imam, 2024). The number of victims killed was distorted online with some claiming 32, 67 and even more than 100 dead (ibid). The footage from the past and also from India was intentionally distorted and the narrative was portrayed as a genocide on indigenous people (Indian Video Misrepresented as Khagrachhari Incident: FactWatch | Fact Check, n.d.). In Bangladesh, these fake death tolls were being used by the supporters of the ousted Awami league to attack the interim government and Muhammad Yunus (Liakat, 2025). Emails spread the petition, and several hashtags, including #StepDownYunus, went viral globally, serving as a warning for how false information can infiltrate political campaigns, cross national boundaries and attract world attention (Prothom Alo English, 2025).

The targeting is not random rather specific. The analysis has shown that there are certain patterns in the abuse of women politicians, who are targeted with disproportionate abuse and the sexualization of narratives to coerce and silence them (Shuchy & Uddin, 2026); the communal disinformation of minorities based on fear and division (Imam, 2024); and the sustained delegitimization campaign against institutions, including the Bangladesh Army and the Election Commission (Rumor Scanner Team, 2026). During the pre-election period, there was a coordinated rumor campaign of AI-generated content that swept the social media platforms (Bubun & Ayon, 2026; Bangladesh Partidin, 2025; CSOH, 2026). The complexity is further complicated by the cross-border nature of the situation, and coordinated Indian disinformation (such as the 'HinduGenocide' hashtag with 171,000-plus followers) attempting to impact Bangladesh's political trajectory (Malay Mail, 2026).

The importance of this study is that it presents a comprehensive study of the disinformation scenario in Bangladesh and its effect on the resilience of the society. Existing research has investigated information disorder around the world, but the dynamics of post-authoritarian transition, the relationship between the digital transformation and the deep social divisions, and the rise of media manipulation using AI in low-literacy environment need specific analysis (Norris, 2011; Woolley & Howard, 2019). To fill this gap, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive overview of

disinformation trends, implications to democratic resilience, and contemporary counter strategies in Bangladesh.

The paper is divided into five sections to ensure readability and accessibility. The next section, literature review, discusses theoretical approaches related to disinformation and societal resilience. The methodology section explains the qualitative case study method used and the secondary data sources. The results section includes systematic analysis of disinformation trends, targeting patterns, dynamics of platforms, and the cross-border dimensions. The discussion section reviews the new counterstrategies, provides gaps and suggests policy recommendations. Lastly, the conclusion summarizes the key findings and their implications for future counter disinformation management in Bangladesh.

2. Literature Review

Theoretical Frameworks: Information Disorder and Societal Resilience

The theoretical development of the study of information disorder has changed significantly in the past decade. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) gave some conceptual clarity by highlighting that there are three types of information disorder, namely misinformation (false information disseminated without harmful intent), disinformation (false information fabricated and disseminated with harmful intent), and malinformation (genuine information disseminated with harmful intent, sometimes because the information is taken out of context). This taxonomy is still relevant to the study of Bangladesh's information ecosystem as all three types are working in complex interaction (Rumor Scanner Team, 2026).

The threat multiplier framework, which was initially applied to climate-security, has been translated to better appreciate the role of disinformation in destabilizing societies. Benkler, Faris and Roberts (2018) showed how disinformation can exacerbate social divisions, weaken trust in institutions and trigger polarization and conflict. This framework sheds light on how false narratives are used to exploit existing ethnic, religious and political divisions in the Bangladeshi context, thereby fanning the flames of tensions and bringing them into the open (Rumor Scanner Team, 2026).

Automated accounts, coordinated inauthentic behavior and computational propaganda are explored in the context of networked propaganda theory (Woolley & Howard, 2019). In Bangladesh, researchers documented coordinated disinformation campaigns during the 2024 election period, including the use of networks of Facebook pages and accounts to amplify misleading political narratives (Bubun & Ayon, 2026). These networks centralized, providing the same content to many Pages and Groups within seconds of its release to spread the same malicious narratives.

To respond to the unique aspects of information disorder targeting women, there are gendered disinformation frameworks. The traditional disinformation practices developed mostly in the context of the Global North do not consider the relational and contextually coded nature of abuse in Bengali-language environments. Concepts such as shamakami (homosexual) are used as weapons against political figures to undermine them and defeminize their image, and public figures are often referred to as pornographic icons for character assassination (The Business Standard, 2024; Faiaz, 2025). A nation-wide survey by ActionAid (2023) shows that 64% of Bangladeshi women experience online harassment.

Societal resilience theory is about how communities resist and rebound after shocks and also information shocks. Norris (2011) defines resilience as having three components: robustness (stress resistance), redundancy (alternate systems) and rapidity (rapid recovery). The strategies to enhance resistance against disinformation for Bangladesh are to improve fact-checking (robustness), multi-source trusted information sources (redundancy) and quick correction of false narratives (rapidity). The interim government's identified disinformation as a national security threat and stressed that safeguarding mind was also important: *"National security cannot be ensured by weapons alone – we must also safeguard minds. Misinformation is a psychological weapon, and our defense must include verified facts, trust-building, and proactive outreach (The Daily Star, 2025)"*.

Information Warfare and Democratic Transitions

Scholars have been interested in the connection between information manipulation and democratic transitions. According to Levitsky and Ziblatt (2024), disinformation is a danger to democratic norms and democratic institutional checks. In the midst of socio-political transition, societies are especially vulnerable to information warfare (Diamond, 2019).

There are instructive parallels in post-communist transitions in the East European states. Disha et al. (2025) reported on the impact of disinformation campaigns in North Macedonia on transitional moments and the delegitimization of democratic institutions, as well as the reinforcement of extremist messages. Likewise, GRC (2025) reports Russian disinformation efforts aimed at Ukraine after the Euromaidan protests, showing the use of external actors to manipulate neighboring countries' political course through information.

There are similarities and differences between the present transition in Bangladesh and the transition that occurred in Sweden. Bangladesh has to overcome the problem of institution-building following a long period of authoritarianism, similar to the post-communist countries. The transition is, however, different from that found in Eastern Europe, in Bangladesh it is taking place in the context of extreme climate vulnerability and a high degree of religious and ethnic diversity, and intense geopolitical competition between India and China. These overlapping vulnerabilities exist as distinct information warfare vulnerability.

Bangladesh's Information Ecosystem: Historical Context

The political contestation over the last few decades has shaped the information landscape of Bangladesh. In the era of Awami League rule (2009-2024), the media was subjected to further restrictions, and the media was polarized and independent journalism was tightly controlled (Naji, 2025; Ali, 2025). The Digital Security Act (2018) criminalized a wide range of online expression, thus had a chilling effect on dissent, without really tackling the less overt issue of disinformation (Shams, 2026).

The landscape of the media has changed dramatically over this time. The prevalence of television was still dominant, but social media grew by leaps and bounds (Hasan & Hakim, 2025), especially Facebook. By 2026, the numbers of Facebook users in Bangladesh were more than 76 million, one of the biggest markets in the world (Social Media Users in Bangladesh – 2026, 2026). In parallel, this digital shift did not come with an investment in digital literacy education, with many citizens still being vulnerable to being manipulated (UNICEF, 2025).

This landscape was severely altered by the uprising of July – August 2024. When the Awami League government was toppled, there was unprecedented freedom of expression (The Business Standard, 2024). While this opening, however, coincided with a deluge of coordinated disinformation from multiple sources: remnants of the old regime trying to delegitimize the transition; opposition actors trying to capitalize politically on the opening; and external actors trying to serve their geopolitical agenda (Prothom Alo English, 2025). The outcome is a scenario of unprecedented openness and unprecedented manipulation of information.

Disinformation in South Asia: Regional Perspectives

South Asia is becoming a global hotspot of disinformation and the challenges are unique to each country. As for India, there has been a disinformation campaign around elections, polarization of communities and distrust in institutions (Bhatia, 2025). There is ample documentation on the role played by WhatsApp in spreading misinformation, especially in contexts of limited digital literacy (Vaid, 2025). The same is the case with Pakistan, where disinformation is directed at political opponents, religious minorities, and the state institutions (Ghazanfar & Khan, 2026). Media manipulation combined with social media amplification has led to a complex information landscape where truth is being questioned (ibid).

The deadly power of disinformation was demonstrated by the Easter bombings in Sri Lanka in 2019. Anti-Muslim violence was already a Factor in 2018 due to false narratives spread on Facebook, and

inadequate content moderation in Sinhala and Tamil was noted as a contributing factor (Taub & Fisher, 2018). The case has relevant implications for Bangladesh, where Bengali language content moderation is no different. The case of disinformation in Nepal during the constitutional transition shows how information manipulation can make political processes already difficult even more challenging (Pathak & Acharya, 2026). The role of external actors, particularly from India, who have been able to amplify narratives to influence Nepali politics has also been recorded (ibid).

Platform Dynamics and Algorithmic Amplification

The importance of platform algorithms in the amplification of disinformation has been widely studied. For Zuboff (2019), surveillance capitalism is engineered to promote entertaining and misleading content over accurate information. Vaidhyathan (2018) talks about how Facebook is particularly damaging the discourse of democracy by algorithmically pushing out polarizing content.

A study of algorithmic amplification reveals that false information can spread further, faster and deeper than true information, regardless of information type (Vosoughi et al., 2018). This finding has crucial implications for Bangladesh, where the rate of spreading disinformation is high accompanied by low digital literacy and high social media penetration (Rumor Scanner Team, 2026).

These obstacles are accentuated by governance failures on the platforms. Gillespie (2018) refers to content moderation as a political act, since platforms have power in deciding whether content is visible or not. In Bangladesh, moderation of Bengali language is inadequate, and hate speech and misinformation go unchecked (Romim et al., 2020). The risk is posed to the Bengali speakers through engineered systems that are not contextually oriented.

Gaps in Existing Literature

The literature review reveals several gaps. First, there is lack of systematic analysis of disinformation trends in Bangladesh after the uprising, undertaken with the help of fact checking organizations, academic research work and investigative journalism. Second, there is a need to further examine the patterns of gendered disinformation and its implications on democratic participation. Third, scholarly analysis is needed for the assessment of new counter-strategies, such as the five-pillars strategy of the interim government and the regional cooperation strategies. Fourth, policy-relevant synthesis to bring together the research findings and make recommendations for building societal resilience needs elaboration. To overcome these gaps, this study has made an attempt for in-depth analysis of Bangladesh's disinformation ecosystem.

3. Methodology

Research Design

The research design is qualitative and the base of this research is a case-study of the dynamics of disinformation in Bangladesh between 2024 and 2026, focusing on the post-uprising period. It facilitates the analysis of disinformation in a systematic way by exploring questions: who is it being directed at, who is it targeting and what is the reaction? (George & Bennett, 2005).

Data Sources

The study is based on the extensive use of secondary data from various categories as is common in information disorder studies (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017):

- 1) Fact-checking organization reports: Rumor Scanner Bangladesh.
- 2) Academic research studies: academic research articles and books by prominent national and international researchers.
- 3) Investigative journalism reports: Reports by The Daily Star, Prothom Alo, The Business Standard, Bangladesh Pratidin etc.
- 4) International organization data: UNICEF's (2025) U-Report poll, ActionAid's (2023) research on online violence against women, and reports from the Center for the Study of Organized Hate (2026) on cross-border disinformation campaigns.

- 5) Government statements and policy documents: Statements by interim government officials.
- 6) Media coverage: Reports from national and international media outlets.

Analytical Strategy

Thematic analysis procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2021) were adapted for analysis of data, and used in this research. Initial coding found mentions of dimensions of disinformation: disinformation types, political targeting, gendered abuse, communal narratives, AI-generated disinformation, platform distribution, cross-border disinformation campaigns and counter-strategy. Secondary coding categorized findings by the thematic category and by type of actor. Patterns were explored in tertiary analysis and the effectiveness of counter strategies evaluated against the challenges documented.

The use of triangulation across sources of data supported validity: fact checking reports provided systematic documentation; academic research gave analytical depth; investigative journalism gave a real-time look at the dynamics; official statements gave a sense of how to respond. When the findings were supported by convergence across sources, confidence in the findings was increased (Denzin, 1978).

Methodological Limitations

The use of secondary data sources has its drawbacks. Detected misinformation will only be reported by fact-checking reports, and this is likely to underreport the true size of the misinformation (Rumor Scanner Team, 2026). Engagement and reach data for platforms can be limited. There is an interpretative uncertainty when identifying who is behind disinformation (Benkler, Faris & Roberts, 2018). The study mitigates these limitations by systematically triangulating the data sets, comparing the data sets, and being explicit about the uncertainty in the face of ambiguous evidence (Yin, 2009).

4. Findings

The secondary analysis of fact-checking reports, academic research, investigative journalism, institutional reports, and policy statements reveals a persistent phenomenon of disinformation in the digital information landscape of the post-2024 period of Bangladesh. The findings are grouped into five interconnected themes: (1) the growing scope and sophistication of misinformation, (2) politically-targeted and asymmetric information campaigns, (3) gendered disinformation and online abuse, (4) communal and cross-border disinformation, and (5) platform dynamics and emerging counter-strategies. The descriptive statistics below are only of documented and verified cases from available sources, not of the total amount of misinformation spread online.

Trend One: Increasing Scale and Changing Characteristics of Disinformation

The analysis points to a significant rise in Bangladesh's misinformation during the post-uprising era, and politics increasingly emerging as a catalyst for misinformation. In 2025, Rumor Scanner Bangladesh (RSB) has documented 4,195 instances of misinformation compared to 1,423 in 2024 and 1,020 in 2023 (Rumor Scanner Team, 2026). The relationship between political competition and information manipulation was evident and the most significant category of misinformation identified was political issues.

There is also evidence that misinformation is morphing. While fabricated text-based claims and false images were common in past misinformation incidents, recent incidents often include manipulated video, AI-generated content and manipulated digital media. Videos are one of the predominant types of misinformation reported by Rumor Scanner, as audiovisual material can evoke more powerful emotions and be spread quickly through social networks (Rumor Scanner Team, 2026).

AI is one of the most recent advancements in the information landscape in Bangladesh. The development of AI-generated images, synthetic videos and fabricated audio materials in political and social narratives has been documented in reports and media investigations, and has been on the rise (Rumor Scanner Team, 2026; Bubun & Ayon, 2026). The shift from simply detecting fake information to recognizing real and fake content is shown in these developments.

This trend aligns with the global research on computational propaganda highlighting that the production and dissemination of misinformation is easier with technologies, and that actors are able to be more targeted in their efforts to reach specific audiences (Woolley & Howard, 2019). The speed with which Bangladesh has embraced digital world and prevalent uneven media literacy among the population allows the content to spread widely.

Trend Two: Political Targeting and Information Manipulation During Democratic Transition

The most frequent theme among the reviewed sources was political disinformation. The political transition after July–August 2024 resulted in a highly polarized and conflicted information landscape where different political stakeholders sought to influence the public understanding of events, institutions and political legitimacy. Political misinformation was significant in verified cases during 2025, as were narratives often focused on election topics and political parties and government institutions and public officials (Rumor Scanner Team, 2026). These cases involved all sorts of propaganda and misinformation, such as false statements, bogus reports about public figures, bogus political involvement reports, and bogus accounts of events.

The results indicate that misinformation works in one direction: different political figures are variously becoming targets at different points in the political context. Media reports revealed the dissemination of misinformation against the interim government, the political parties and public institutions, sometimes to sway public perception about legitimacy and public trust (The Daily Star, 2025; Prothom Alo English, 2025).

The processes of political transition, associated with increased vulnerability, are consistent with the comparative research conducted on democratic transition. The research on transition societies shows that times of institutional uncertainty provide an opportunity to manipulate information, as a process of reconstruction of political identities, narratives, and public trust takes place. The studies of transition societies reveal that these transitional times offer opportunities to manipulate information, as a process of reconstruction of political identities, narratives and public trust is in play. The results thus indicate that political disinformation in Bangladesh is not just a series of disaffirmations; it's a larger battle for political storytelling, legitimacy of the institutions, and public awareness of the new emerging dynamics.

Trend Three: Gendered Disinformation and the Targeting of Women in Public Life

The analysis also uncovered a gendered type of disinformation. Gendered disinformation is a blend of false information and gender stereotyping, presenting sexualized narratives or blaming and attacking individuals for their moral values, which can undermine women's confidence and deter them from being active agents in public life.

The survey by ActionAid Bangladesh highlights the overall vulnerability of women in Bangladesh's online world. The research revealed that a large number of women face harassment online, thus revealing the social context in which gendered misinformation is at work (ActionAid, 2023). Online abuse of women in politics, journalism and activism also has been reported, and is a subject of study. The targets of such attacks are not necessarily political opinions or policies, but personal character, sexuality, family relationships and social reputation (The Business Standard, 2024; Faiaz, 2025).

The results also suggest that gendered disinformation has impacts beyond those of individual victims. These operations can lead to online and offline disenfranchisement of women, including the creation of reputational risk. This is in line with international research which indicates that gendered disinformation acts as a tool of political exclusion by taking advantage of social inequalities already in place (Shuchy & Uddin, 2026). In the Bangladesh case, disinformation is not just a type of online harassment, but a wider issue of democratic participation and representation.

Trend Four: Communal Disinformation and Social Fragmentation

The results show that communal disinformation is one of the most socially harmful types of information manipulation in Bangladesh as it is leveraging existing religious, ethnic, and political

tensions. Communal disinformation, unlike general misinformation, may have a greater potential for offline impacts and effects related to perceptions of threat, victimhood, and collective identity.

The 2024 Khagrachhari and Rangamati incidents demonstrate the relationship between online misinformation and communal tensions. Media investigation and fact checking revealed that casualty figures were being exaggerated, videos and images were being misused, and unrelated videos and images were being supplied as evidence of continued violence (Imam, 2024; Indian video misrepresented as Khagrachhari incident: FactWatch, n.d.). These myths were the foundations for various and conflicting perceptions of the situation and were used for different political gains.

The results indicate that there are three common patterns of communal misinformation: inflating the frequency of violence, omitting information from its original context, and portraying local violence as a sign of wider religious or ethnic persecution. These approaches are in line with existing studies on network propaganda, which shows that misinformation is most effective when it reinforces pre-existing social cleavages (Benkler et al., 2018).

Another critical aspect to communal disinformation is cross-border information flows. The Center for the Study of Organized Hate (2026) reported that there was a significant amount of online activity related to allegations of persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh. The report highlighted the spread of narratives at massive scales on digital networks, illustrating that local political issues can be linked to local information ecosystems at the regional level.

The results also reveal that there is a need for a careful consideration of the attribution. The use of cross-border networks and foreign based accounts has only exacerbated some of these narratives, but there is not always evidence that such online campaigns have had their backing from state actors. Thus, the question of transnational circulation and impact of narratives is the main analytics focus instead of definitive attributions of responsibility.

The communal disinformation trend has shown how disinformation can be used as a tool of social polarization. Malicious narratives connected to communal and identity-based conflict can undermine social trust and escalate community tensions.

Trend Five: Social Media Platforms, Algorithmic Amplification, and Information Vulnerability

The evidence reveal that social media plays an important role as an infrastructural space for the production and dissemination of misinformation in Bangladesh. The country has experienced a rapid digitalization process, including increased accessibility to information and greater political involvement which introduces new opportunities for manipulation. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2025) reveals that the availability of smart phones and the internet access have increased significantly in the households of Bangladesh. Social media, particularly Facebook, has become a very important source of news, political discussion and public communication (Hasan and Hakim, 2025; Social Media Users in Bangladesh—2026, 2026).

Digital dependence exacerbates structural vulnerabilities. However, algorithmic platforms have been discovered to prioritize content that wins the most attention from users, rather than the most accurate, which can result in the surge of hot content or controversial material into the view (Zuboff, 2019; Vaidhyathan, 2018). The political and identity information related disinformation can therefore be disseminated rapidly without verification in the context of Bangladesh.

Language and moderation issues also exist. Local language nuances, cultural references, and coded language are especially problematic because of the difficulties of automated moderation systems to understand local nuances. Bengali hate speech detection research suggests that language-specific technical challenges are still a big hurdle in regard of content governance (Romim et al., 2020). Thus, the accountability of the platforms becomes a key topic. The success in implementing such policy depends upon local enforcement, transparency and quick response mechanisms, while the big platforms have only tried to prevent the spread of misinformation and harmful content. This is not limited to Bangladesh, because the digital platforms are international and misinformation can occur in any specific cultural and political context.

Emerging Counter-Strategies and Institutional Responses

With the increasing complexity of the disinformation problem, the findings highlight several new ways to increase Bangladesh's information resilience. In the battle against misinformation, fact-checking organizations have stepped into the fray as a crucial component. Rumor Scanner Bangladesh and Dismislab issue periodic verification reports, identify misinformation and sensitize the public about it. Their work is of significance in the field of disinformation management particularly during periods of political uncertainty and social tension. The results also suggest, however, that fact checking is not a panacea, as it cannot solve the problem entirely. There is also a volume of misinformation that often outstrips the capacity of verification organizations, and media literacy and public awareness is also a significant component of the preventive approach.

Misinformation is now acknowledged as a problem in national security, social stability and democratic governance in increasingly frequent government statements. The interim government officials have called for tighter security system and increased public awareness and institutional coordination (The Daily Star, 2025). Some of the policy recommendations put forward have proposed to improve fact-checking coordination, to create digital literacy programmes, to set up support mechanisms for victims of online abuse, and to work in collaboration with digital platforms. These were aligned with international research highlighting the need for collaboration between various government bodies, civil society organizations, researchers, media and digital platforms to create resilience (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

The findings also support the need to emphasize digital literacy as a resilience strategy over the long-term. UNICEF Bangladesh's U-Report initiative revealed that misinformation poses a major issue amongst young people and the need for raising awareness on online safety, verification, and responsible digital engagement (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2025). Since the diffusion of ICTs into Bangladesh has not always been matched by an increase in critical information literacy skills, the need for developing digital literacy becomes more critical in the country. Therefore, building resilience must not only entail remedial actions after the fact of false information spreading, but also empower citizens to assess information before sharing.

In conclusion, the results indicate that a multi-layered strategy is needed to tackle disinformation in Bangladesh, including the implementation of verification processes, public awareness campaigns, platform accountability measures, and institutional collaboration. Although there have been efforts that are important, there are still major disparity between the rate of misinformation production and the ability of existing counter-measures.

5. Discussion

Interpreting Bangladesh's Disinformation Landscape

The findings show that disinformation in Bangladesh is no longer limited to cases of false information, but has become a regular phenomenon in the digital information landscape. This transformation has been driven by three main factors: the unprecedented digital growth, the political shift, and the growing reliance on social media for news and public debate. In the Bangladesh context, the environment of information disorder consists of multiple categories and subcategories of misinformation, disinformation and manipulated content, and the distinction between accidental dissemination of information and coordinated influence operations is becoming more difficult (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017).

This development is driven by the political transition that has come in the wake of the uprising in July-August 2024. Uncertainty about institutional authority, political legitimacy, and public narratives are common both during transitional periods and at the end of these periods (Diamond, 2019). In Bangladesh, greater freedom of expression was paralleled by greater competition between political actors vying to shape public perceptions. Thus, disinformation does not just manifest as incorrect information but is an integral aspect of wider issues of political narrative contestations and social trust conflicts.

Disinformation, Power, and Democratic Vulnerability

The findings indicate that the disinformation campaigns spread in Bangladesh are often predictable and do not happen by chance. This makes sense with Benkler, Faris, and Roberts' (2018) theory of networked propaganda, in which conflicts and institutional weaknesses are exploited. Political disinformation is used as a means to create perception of legitimacy, undermine opposition, influence public perception of political events. This is reflected in the asymmetric targeting of political actors. A wide variety of actors are targeted, depending on their role in a political competition, meaning that disinformation is not just a matter of false claims, but also a strategic endeavor. But attribution is still relatively difficult, as gaining transparency on digital platforms and conducting additional empirical studies will help to identify the source and coordination of online campaigns.

Another dimension of this challenge is gendered disinformation. The sexualization of women politicians, journalists and activists in the form of narratives and character attacks illustrates that online manipulation perpetuates gender inequalities. These attacks not only involve harassment of individuals but also prevent women from being able to access public life. In this way, gendered disinformation is defined as a digital safety concern, as well as a democratic inclusion issue.

Implications for Societal Resilience

The findings have important implications for Bangladesh's societal resilience. Norris (2011) defines resilience as having three elements: robustness, redundancy and rapacity. If this framework is applied, it will come to light that there are several weaknesses in the information environment in Bangladesh. First, robustness of the capacities to deal with information shocks is limited. Verification at Rumor Scanner and Dismislab has been growing, but the rate of misinformation has outpaced their ability to verify. A rise in manipulated videos and AI-generated content also makes it hard to detect and rectify misinformation. Secondly, the trustworthiness of information channels is compromised by over-reliance on social media platforms, especially Facebook. These platforms have also increased civic engagement, but at times they tend to prioritize content over information (Vaidhyanathan, 2018; Zuboff, 2019). This makes it difficult for accurate information to outcompete emotionally-charged or misleading narratives. This puts up the odds for emotionally-charged or misleading narratives to outcompete accurate information. Third, the speed of recovery from information shocks will depend on efficient coordination between government agencies, media, civil society and technology firms. While Bangladesh has evolved some emerging counter-strategies, the existing responses are largely reactive, and need to be better coordinated institutionally.

AI, Cross-Border Campaigns, and Emerging Challenges

AI has added a new facet to Bangladesh's disinformation landscape. AI-generated videos, images, and audio make it cheaper to produce convincing fake information and can boost its spread. This demonstrates the general issue of computational propaganda, in which technology tools can be used to manipulate more precisely and at a larger scale (Woolley & Howard, 2019).

AI-driven disinformation isn't limited to single lies. As it becomes more challenging to know if content is authentic or synthetic, trust in digital information may be undermined more generally. Bangladesh faces compounded problems due to the lack of capacity in moderating content in the Bengali language and variations in digital literacy. To solve the issue, investments in AI tools for detection, transparency of platforms, and raising awareness about synthetic media are needed.

The findings also demonstrate that modern disinformation is a regional phenomenon. As communal and political narratives circulate across borders, so have digital influence campaigns. The description of state involvement, however, should be interpreted with caution since the source of an online narrative does not necessarily imply a state's responsibility. The major difficulty poses the question of how transnational networks exacerbate local social tensions in Bangladesh. The key difficulty is to understand the effects of transnational networks on the polarization of social tensions in Bangladesh. This needs cooperation at a regional level between governments, researchers and fact checkers.

Strengthening Information Resilience

The evidence shows that there is need for a holistic strategy to combat disinformation in Bangladesh. While fact-checking is still vital, there is a need to build citizens' capacities to assess information, alongside prevention measures. Digital literacy, therefore, should be a permanent part of education and democratic processes, empowering citizens to check sources, identify forms of manipulation, and learn about the effects of algorithms.

It is important that the platforms are accountable as well. Technology firms require better Bengali-language moderation tools, increased transparency about content amplification and better counter-measures to coordinated manipulation. While doing so, the regulatory measures should ensure that it does not provide opportunities for political censorship and that it allows for legitimate expression.

The disinformation issue in Bangladesh isn't just a technical issue; it's also a matter of democratic endurance and social unity. To create a trusted information environment, state institutions, civil society, media and researchers, and digital platforms must cooperate. Institutional and citizen resilience in resisting manipulation as well as maintaining open public discourse will be a factor in the future efficacy of Bangladesh's democratic transition.

6. Conclusions

The study focused on how disinformation and social media have been shaped by post-July–August 2024 political transition in Bangladesh and how it has affected the country's resilience. The results reveal that disinformation is an entrenched part of the country's digital information landscape, influenced by the constant evolution of technology, political rivalry, and social susceptibilities. Disinformation is not a standalone phenomenon, but rather happens through multi-layered networks that include political narratives, communal tensions, gender-based attacks and emerging forms of disinformation facilitated by the use of AI technology (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Woolley & Howard, 2019).

The study reveals that the scale and sophistication of disinformation in Bangladesh have increased significantly. Political misinformation continues to be the primary category of misinformation, and the creation of AI-generated images, synthetic videos and manipulated media have created new problems with verification and public trust (Rumor Scanner Team, 2026). The results also reveal that disinformation is frequently tailor-made and that political actors, women in public life, minority groups and public institutions are targeted differently in this regard. These patterns reveal close linkages to other issues of power, representation and democratic engagement (Benkler et al., 2018; Shuchy & Uddin, 2026).

The study also points to the consequences of disinformation on the resilience of society. The misinformation and rumors can undermine the credibility of institutions, foster division and confusion about what is reliable information (Norris, 2011). From this, it can be seen that when communal narratives are amplified through online platforms, they can lead to tensions offline – as seen in the Khagrachhari–Rangamati case (Imam, 2024; Rumor Scanner Team, 2026). Likewise, gendered disinformation illustrates how disinformation online can limit participation in public life by reproducing existing inequalities and introducing barriers to the participation of women in politics and public discourse (Shuchy & Uddin, 2026).

The research also provides insight into new ways of enhancing resilience. In Bangladesh, key progress in addressing information disorder includes the efforts of fact-checking organizations, digital literacy programs, institutional awareness, and collaborative initiatives among stakeholders (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2025; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). But, there are considerable gaps. Current counter-measures tend to respond after misinformation has spread and the ability of platforms to moderate content in Bengali, public awareness and regional cooperation need to be further strengthened (Gillespie, 2018; Romim et al., 2020).

The findings indicate that there is a need to have a multi-faceted approach to disinformation rather than a single intervention. A resilient information environment requires strengthening verification

systems, embedding media literacy in education, enhancing platform transparency, safeguarding victims of online abuse and enhancing regional cooperation mechanism (Norris, 2011; Vosoughi et al., 2018). These measures should, however, be balanced and not hamper freedom of expression.

This study builds on the existing body of research on disinformation in transitional democracies by identifying the intersection of political uncertainty, digital transformation and social divisions that can lead to information vulnerabilities. Institutional uncertainty has been found to raise the risk of manipulation during democratic transitions and reduce the consolidation of democracy (Diamond, 2019). The case of Bangladesh is significant for the study of how developing democracies must contend with new forms of information manipulation as they seek to enhance democratic institutions.

Future studies should explore how audiences are exposed to disinformation, the evolution of their trust in information over time, and the efficacy of counter-strategies. Better access to the data stored in platforms would also allow for closer examination of the amplification of algorithms and coordinated influence operations (Gillespie, 2018; Zuboff, 2019).

Finally, the issue of disinformation in Bangladesh is not just about managing false information but also about the ability of the people to trust, participate in democratic processes, and make well-informed decisions. In the era of digital connectivity, ensuring democratic development, as opposed to its undermining, will depend on long-term cooperation between institutions, citizens, researchers, media actors and technology providers.

7. References

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