Digital Misinformation Across Borders: How False News Spreads in Bangladesh and the United States

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Growing up in Bangladesh, I saw how misinformation can sculpt what people believe. My parents would occasionally share with me some of the viral posts on Facebook and videos on WhatsApp, which appeared valid. These were everything from fabricated medical guidance to edited political clips that went viral. At first, I didn't pay much attention to it, but later I realized how false stories actually affect people's opinions and emotions. Sometimes they caused stress and confusion in our family, and it made me wonder how so many people could believe something that was not true.

Then, after coming to the United States, I realized that the same thing was happening here. Misinformation spread everywhere, whether it was about elections, or the COVID-19 pandemic, or some social movements. Indeed, studies prove that exposure to false news caused people to form false beliefs more than the truth; on the other hand, "false news has a higher chance of being propagated than the truth". One study conducted by UNICEF in 2020 also found that misinformation online is among the leading causes of stress for young people in Bangladesh. Realizing that both countries, so different in culture and background, struggle with the same digital problem drove me to understand that misinformation is not a local issue; it is global. This project is my personal experience and research to show how misinformation affects people across borders. I want to raise awareness about how easily false information is spread and help others-especially young people-learn how to question and verify what they see online. Only by fostering digital awareness and media literacy will the power of misinformation be minimized, thereby making online spaces much safer for all.

One of the things that surprised me the most while working on this project was realizing how fast false information travels online compared to real facts. It is not just because people want to believe lies, but because social media platforms are designed to keep us engaged. When something makes us emotional, whether it is anger, fear, or even surprise, we are more likely to share it. That is exactly how misinformation gets so much attention. A study by Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) found that false news spreads farther, faster, and deeper than the truth. This happens because social media rewards engagement, not accuracy. Every like, comment, and share makes the algorithm push a post to more people, even if it is completely false. Yale School of Management (2021) also found that social media platforms reward misinformation by promoting the most attention-grabbing content, which is often misleading or exaggerated.


Pictrue by AFP.

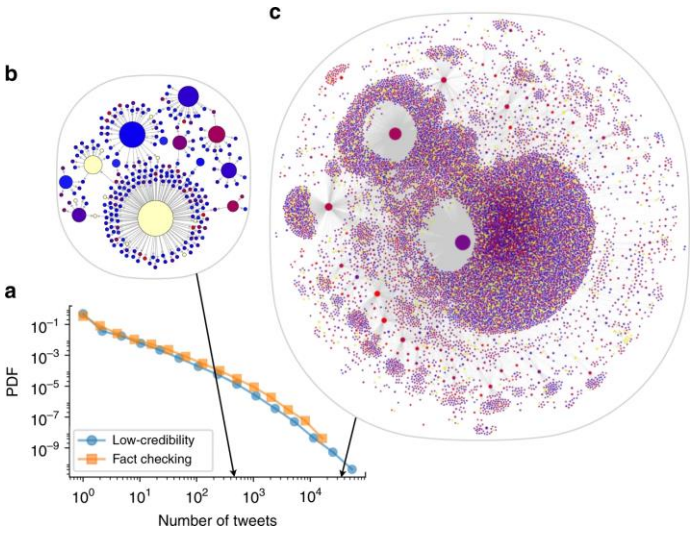
I have seen this happen many times. Back in Bangladesh, I remember seeing fake videos during local elections that were shared thousands of times. They spread fear and confusion among people who were just trying to understand what was going on. In the United States, I saw similar patterns during the 2020 election when rumors and false claims filled social media feeds. In both countries, the problem feels different on the surface but works the same way underneath. Algorithms push emotional content, and people share it before checking if it is true. What makes this worse is that most people trust what they see if it comes from friends or family. I know my parents did. It is easy to assume that something is real because someone you know posted it. That sense of trust is what misinformation uses to grow. Understanding this made me realize that fighting misinformation is not only about technology, it is also about human behavior and emotions.

Misinformation in Bangladesh and the United States

When I started paying attention to how misinformation spreads in Bangladesh, I noticed how quickly rumors could take off online. A single Facebook post or WhatsApp message could reach hundreds of people in just a few hours. Most of the time, these posts looked real. They used emotional language, convincing pictures, or fake "news" pages to make people believe them. People rarely questioned it, especially when it came from someone they trusted. Al-Zaman (2021) found that fake news in Bangladesh spreads mostly through Facebook, where millions rely on it as their main news source. UNICEF (2020) also found that misinformation is one of the top causes of stress among young people in Bangladesh. I have seen this myself. Friends and relatives would get upset over made-up stories about politics or health. It created fear and confusion, and it made me realize how damaging false information can be.

When I came to the United States, I realized the problem looked different but felt the same. Here, misinformation often spreads through bigger online communities. It is less about small family groups and more about massive audiences divided by beliefs. People end up following pages that already match what they think, and they stop seeing the other side. The Yale School of Management (2021) found that social media platforms tend to reward this kind of content because posts that make people emotional get more attention. I saw this during the 2020 presidential election and the COVID-19 pandemic. False information spread faster than the truth, and even people who usually fact-checked were unsure of what to believe anymore.

I found a study by Shao et al. (2018) that made this even clearer to me. The image below shows how low-credibility stories spread compared to fact-checked ones. Each circle represents a group of Twitter users sharing the same story. The larger and denser the circles, the more people it reached. The difference is huge. Misleading articles reached tens of thousands of users almost instantly, while verified information spread slowly. Seeing this helped me understand that misinformation is not just about people believing lies. It is also about how social media systems are built to push emotional and viral content further.



Online virality of low-credibility versus fact-checked content.
Adapted from Shao, C., Ciampaglia, G. L., Varol, O., Flammini, A., & Menczer, F. (2018). *The spread of low-credibility content by social bots. Nature Communications, 9*(1), 4787. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-018-06930-7

Looking at this figure made me think about both Bangladesh and the United States. The countries are different, but the problem feels the same. In Bangladesh, people often believe misinformation because it comes from someone they trust. In the United States, it spreads because algorithms show people what they already agree with. In both cases, emotion drives the spread, and technology gives it power.

Global Efforts to Control Misinformation

As misinformation keeps spreading across borders, some countries have started taking strong actions to fight it. One recent example is China's new rule that stops influencers from talking about topics like health, education, and law unless they have a verified degree in that subject. The government said this rule is meant to make online spaces more responsible and prevent people from pretending to be experts. The law also bans hidden advertisements for medical and health products that are often disguised as educational advice (The Economic Times, 2025). The goal is to protect users from being misled and to make sure that only qualified voices are giving serious information.

  by Dream time stock photos.

This new law has started a big debate online. Many people believe it will help improve the quality of online information and keep dangerous advice away from viewers. Others, however, see it as a form of censorship that limits creativity and freedom of expression. I can understand both sides. On one hand, the internet needs stronger rules to stop misinformation from spreading unchecked. On the other hand, I also know that not everyone who shares advice without a degree is trying to mislead people. Sometimes, people just want to share their experiences or personal stories.

This reminded me of the fake “expert” videos that I used to see growing up in Bangladesh. Some people would post videos about medical treatments or political issues, claiming to have inside knowledge or special training. These videos often spread faster than any official source and caused real harm when people believed them. While China’s approach might seem strict, I can see why a government would want to take strong steps after seeing how fast false information can spread. I think the best solution lies somewhere in the middle. Platforms should promote transparency and let users see where information comes from, rather than banning people altogether. People need to feel informed, not restricted.

After seeing how easily misinformation spreads both in Bangladesh and in the United States, I started paying more attention to how I could tell when something online was false or misleading. At first, I used to scroll past posts without thinking much, but once I saw how these posts could actually change how people think and feel, I became more careful. I started noticing patterns in the way fake news looks and sounds.

How to Recognize and Avoid Misinformation

One of the first things I learned was to always check where the information is coming from. If a post does not clearly show the source or if the website name looks suspicious, that is usually a bad sign. I also check the date of the post because many times, people share old news as if it is new. It creates unnecessary panic, especially when it is about sensitive topics like health or safety.

I also pay attention to how a message makes me feel. Research has shown that misinformation spreads fastest when it triggers strong emotions like fear, anger, or excitement (Vosoughi et al., 2018). When I come across something that makes me feel those things instantly, I take a step back before reacting or sharing it. Sometimes, I do a quick search to see if the same news is being reported by a reliable source. If it is only coming from one page or video, it is probably not real. Another habit that helps is reverse searching images or videos. I learned that some viral posts use real pictures but take them out of context. There are tools like Google Images or TinEye that can show where the photo originally came from. It only takes a minute but can prevent spreading a lie to hundreds of people.

I have also started using fact-checking websites like Snopes, PolitiFact, and FactCheck.org. They are especially helpful when I see claims about science, health, or global events. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, there were so many fake videos online claiming that home remedies could cure the virus. Checking sites like these helped me figure out what was real and what was just made up for views.The most important thing I have learned is that we all have a responsibility when it comes to sharing information. It is easy to think that one post does not matter, but each share can multiply misinformation very quickly. I saw this happen in my own community back home, and I do not want to see it continue. If everyone takes a few extra seconds to question what they read, we can stop false information before it spreads further.

Working on this project made me look at the internet in a completely new way. I used to scroll through my social media feed without thinking too much about what was true or false. But once I saw how easily misinformation can shape people's beliefs, I realized how serious this issue really is. I have seen it affect both of my homes, Bangladesh and the United States, in different ways but with the same emotional impact. In Bangladesh, people often trust what they see because it comes from friends or family. In the United States, people trust what they see because it fits their opinions or political side. In both cases, misinformation works because it connects to emotion before logic.

This project also became personal to me because I have seen how misinformation can change the way my parents and relatives think. Back home, I remember sitting at the dinner table and hearing my parents talk about something they saw online that was not true. It would spread from one person to another, and before long, everyone believed it. I did not blame them because the content looked real and came from people they trusted. But it made me want to do something, even something small, to help others learn how to question what they see.

Through my research, I learned that misinformation is not just a technology problem, it is a human problem. It spreads because we are emotional, curious, and connected. Studies like Vosoughi et al. (2018) and Shao et al. (2018) helped me understand the technical side, while sources like UNICEF (2020) and Al-Zaman (2021) showed me the real effects misinformation has on people's lives. Seeing how governments like China's are trying to regulate content (The

Economic Times, 2025) made me think about how complicated this issue is. There is no simple fix, but awareness and education are good places to start.

If there is one thing I will take away from this project, it is that every share, like, and comment has power. What we do online affects more than just our own feed. The digital world connects us all, and we each have a responsibility to protect it from false information. I hope that by sharing my experience and what I have learned, I can encourage others to pause and think before sharing something online. Even a few seconds of thought can make a big difference.

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