

Consolidated Report of Training Sessions with Youth on Countering Fake News



9th Jan – 11th Feb 2025

(Foundation University Islamabad, MY University Islamabad, NUML University Rwp. &
Hamdard University Islamabad)

**ADVOCACY AWARENESS &
SUSTAINABLE SERVICES ORGANIZATION**

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1. Project Background:

Considering the extensive increase in spread of fake news and their negative impacts on Pakistani Society, Advocacy Awareness & Sustainable Services Organization (AASS Organization) a Non Profit Organization working as think-tank initiated to create awareness and sensitize society on the sensitize issue. Fake News is today emerging as a global issue and there are different motives behind its spread in different nations/ regions.

AASS Organization believes that the motive behind the spread of fake news in Pakistan is more related to 5th Generation Warfare tactics rather than having some social, political or economic benefit. A planned and organized campaign is run on Social Media to malign the State institutions including Defense Organizations, Judiciary, Political Systems and key personalities of country.

Pakistan having a population of more than 64% become more vulnerable as its youth is primarily targeted in the above context. This is leading to increase in polarization, hate crimes, divisions and extremism among youth. The past few incidents of 9th May attacks on Military/ Defense Sites, Punjab College attack on alleged rape incident, Sri Lankan manager killing on charges of blasphemy, Jaranwala attacks where 26 Minorities Churches were set to fire and the fake propaganda on bankruptcy of Pakistan, all are meant to destabilize Pakistan and create chaos in the society.

In the above context, AASS Organization conducted a consultative session on Fake News with youth in Islamabad. Youth from different educational, political, social and regional backgrounds were invited in the 1 Day session. The activity helped to develop the understanding of needs and key issues that need to be catered. The 3 key areas were identified:

- ✓ Lack of Understanding the phenomena of Fake News & its Terminologies
- ✓ Fake News in Pakistan - 5th Generation Warfare Tools to malign Nationalism
- ✓ Lack of knowledge on Journalistic Ethics & Fact Checking Tools

2. Project Introduction:

AASS Organization initiated a pilot project to conduct 5 sessions with the University Youth of Rawalpindi & Islamabad. The project was aimed at partnering with universities to empower students to identify, debunk, and prevent the spread of fake news. Through training, awareness campaigns, and collaborative activities, this initiative seeks to cultivate a generation of informed digital citizens equipped to counter misinformation.

The project focusing on above mentioned 3 key areas aims to establish a network of university students who will serve as change agents on digital literacy. By leveraging the reach and influence of universities, this project will have a cascading impact, empowering students to act as ambassadors of truth in their communities.

The spread of misinformation is a global challenge, but in Pakistan, the problem is exacerbated by a lack of digital literacy and critical media consumption skills. Fake news not only misleads citizens but also deepens social divides and fuels extremism. University students, being active digital consumers, are at the forefront of this challenge but can also be key players in combating misinformation.

AASS (Advocacy Awareness & Sustainable Services Organization) has identified universities as critical partners in this fight. By engaging young, educated minds, this project aims to foster critical thinking, promote media literacy, and build a culture of responsible information sharing.

3. Project Objectives:

This project seeks to build the capacity of university students to combat fake news through a multi-faceted approach that includes training sessions, digital campaigns, peer-to-peer engagement, and collaborative activities. The program will partner with leading universities in Pakistan to develop a curriculum on digital literacy, host workshops, and run competitions to encourage innovative solutions.

1. **Increase Awareness:** Educate individuals and communities about the prevalence of fake news, its forms, and its detrimental social, political, and economic impacts.
2. **Build Media Literacy Skills:** Equip participants with the fact checking tools and techniques to critically analyze and verify the authenticity of information, responsible media consumption and sharing.
3. **Strengthen Community Resilience:** Empower local communities to recognize and counter misinformation effectively by fostering collaboration and creating networks to address these challenges collectively.
4. **Promote Ethical Information Practices:** Advocate for responsible communication and ethical media practices to reduce the spread of fake news in both traditional and digital media spaces.
5. **Foster Long-Term Impact:** Develop a sustainable approach to combat misinformation through the creation of resources, networks, and ongoing community engagement initiatives.

4. Target Universities/ Institutes Details:

Multiple universities were approached with the request to engage & register the students for In house sessions on Countering Fake News. The universities approached for these sessions were targeted, based on their significance in fostering critical thinking and their student demographic diversity. Students from different subjects were encouraged to register for the sessions. The universities were also requested to register a minimum number of 80 students for the in house training session.

On the basis of quick response from universities and students registrations, 392 Students from following 4 Universities were trained:

S. No	University	Date	No of Students
1	Foundation University Islamabad	9 th January 2025	73
2	My University Islamabad	3 rd February 2025	114
3	NUML Rawalpindi Campus	9 th February 2025	138
4	Hamdard University Islamabad	10 th February 2025	67

5. Sessions Details:

A consistent yet flexible methodology was adopted to ensure the training sessions were tailored to meet the specific needs and interests of each audience. The approach was designed to balance theoretical understanding with hands-on experience, ensuring maximum engagement and learning outcomes. The training sessions featured a diverse panel of renowned experts who brought varied and complementary perspectives to the discussions, enriching the learning experience for participants. The duration of Each Training Session was **135 Minutes** as below:

Session	Details	Duration	Moderator/ Expert
1	Understanding the phenomena of Fake News & its Terminologies	60 Min	✓ Waqar Haider Awan (Trainer) ✓ Abdul Nasir Jilani(CEO AASS/ Trainer)
2	Fake News in Pakistan - 5th Generation Warfare Tools to malign Nationalism	20 Min	✓ Uzma Osho Nasir (ED AASS Organization/ Journalist)
3	Journalistic Ethics & Fact Checking Tools	20 Min	✓ Anwar Raza (Senior Journalist/ Ex-President National Press Club)
4	Question Answer/ Discussion Session	20 Min	✓ All Panelists & Academia
5	Message from Academia	15 Min	✓ University Management

Session 1: Understanding the phenomena of Fake News & its Terminologies

The Session 1 on Understanding the Phenomena of fake News covered the academic side of the fake news. It focused on the conceptualizing the fake news with a focus on different terminologies and types. Students were briefed on the fake news and their connection with Post Truth Era. Through different presentations and examples the students were provided the conceptual clarity on fake news. The session also explained how a News is manipulated and treated to make it Fake News. The concept was also explained how News become literature or philosophy when manipulated or equipped with emotions/ illusions.

Different Digital media Platforms were also discussed that are acting as catalyst in spread of fake news. The session helped to sensitize students on different types of fake news, i.e. the satire, parody, hoaxes, advertisement and propaganda and they need to stay alert if any of such characteristic is found in any news.

The impacts of fake news were also discussed in the sessions with a focus on its political, social and economic impacts leading to create chaos in the society. The concept of 5th Generation warfare was also discussed with practical examples where a proper campaign was run to malign the state institutions. The Students were encouraged to share practical examples and incidents to relate them different fake news forms.

Session 2: Fake News in Pakistan - 5th Generation Warfare Tools to malign Nationalism

The Session was designed to develop understanding on the Fake News Issue in Pakistan. Though Political/ Social/ Economic reasons are the causes of Fake News spread in Pakistan but the key reason is to malign Nationalism in Pakistan. Through highly budgeted & organized Fake News Campaigns, the Defense and other state institutes of Pakistan are targeted. How youth is being brainwashed to malign the Army, Judiciary or Political Figures of Pakistan. The session linked the recent examples of 9th May Attacks on Military bases, Propaganda of Bankruptcy of Pakistan, Campaign to stopping Foreign Remittances in Pakistan, Rumors of Revolt in Defense Organizations & propaganda of Brain drain etc. in Pakistan all are meant to destabilize Pakistan by shaking citizen's confidence on state institutions.

The moderators not only delivered presentations but also actively engaged participants in discussions. They answered queries, encouraged critical thinking, and challenged participants to reflect on their digital consumption habits. This dynamic interaction allowed for deeper understanding and practical application of the concepts discussed.

Session 3: Journalistic Ethics & Fact Checking Tools

The session was designed to educate and sensitize youth on journalistic ethics. In the today's digital era, any individual using smart phone is also misconceived as journalist. The academic background, practice in any print / electronic media, credibility and relevance are all the prerequisites of being journalist. The session was moderated by Senior Journalists who explained the news reporting sequence where every news has to undergo a verification process and the journalist sharing the news has responsibility to prove it any court of law otherwise the journalist has to face defamation laws. The session also explained how digital media has trespassed all processes and there is no regulating/ fact checking process the informer and informant. The session also covered educating the students on legislations and policies including PECA Ordinance and other laws formulated by the Government of Pakistan to control spread of fake news.

The students were sensitized not to absorb or intake any information without ensuring the credibility of the journalist. The session helped the students to understand the definition of journalist and parameters of responsible journalism.

Question Answer Sessions:

Interactive question answer session encouraged students to raise questions, clarify doubts, and engage directly with experts. This also provided an opportunity to address university-specific concerns or interests, such as misinformation in specific fields like health or politics. The key concerns/ queries addressed during the sessions were as below:

- ✓ Does PECA suppress Freedom of Information?
- ✓ How to respond if the state is spreading fake news?
- ✓ Why TV Channels and Media Houses are not maintain their credibility by stopping fake news?
- ✓ In Punjab College Incident why state was hiding the facts?
- ✓ Why Pakistan is under Cyber-attacks and what our security agencies are doing to counter them?
- ✓ How many fact organizations working in Pakistan & how we can approach them?
- ✓ Which department is taking the applications on crimes like Blackmailing/ Propaganda on Social Media?
- ✓ How the world is countering Fake News?
- ✓ After installation of Firewall, How many fake news pages/ posts are being downed by GOP? And why this data is not available to public?
- ✓ Many Political parties are spreading fake news different social media tools. Why State is unable to control them?
- ✓ How fake news is promoting the extremism in the society?
- ✓ Why fake news journalists/ bloggers get more viewership than the genuine journalists?
- ✓ Even after PEMRA and other regulating organizations, why Print and Electronic Media are unable to stop fake news?
- ✓ Why fake news and defamation laws are not working in Pakistan like they are successful in UK and other countries?
- ✓ Can fake news be more harmful than traditional misinformation?
- ✓ What are the long-term consequences of fake news on society?
- ✓ How does fake news affect mental health and our perception of reality?
- ✓ Why do people fall for fake news so easily, even when it's obvious?
- ✓ Can Deep Fake technology be considered a part of fake news? How do we combat it?
- ✓ What role does emotional appeal play in the spread of fake news? How can we avoid falling for emotionally manipulative content?
- ✓ What responsibility do universities and educational institutions have in combating fake news?

- ✓ Will fake news always be a part of our digital lives?
- ✓ Is fake news the same as biased or misleading information?
- ✓ Can fake news ever lead to real-world violence or societal conflict?

The questions were addressed and explained in detail by the relevant experts/moderators up to the satisfaction of the participants. The session was highly productive in bringing clarity on certain issues that were left unattended/ unclear during the sessions. The session also showed students interest and concern in the issue of fake news.

6. Key Observations:

The sessions provided valuable insights into participants' understanding, engagement, and response to the topic of fake news. These observations highlight both general trends and university-specific behaviors and attitudes:

1. General Trends

a. High Enthusiasm among Students:

Across all universities, students displayed significant enthusiasm for the sessions, actively participating in discussions, Q&A segments, and group activities. However, it was evident that most students had limited prior exposure to fact-checking tools and techniques.

- Students commonly admitted to sharing unverified information on social media without questioning its authenticity.
- Many participants were surprised by how easily they could verify information once introduced to the right tools.
- Faculty Interest in Curriculum Integration:
- Faculty members consistently expressed a strong interest in incorporating media literacy and fact-checking topics into their university curricula.

Professors acknowledged the growing need to equip students with critical thinking skills to navigate the complexities of the digital information landscape. Several faculty members suggested that these sessions could be expanded into formal workshops or courses offered to students regularly.

Knowledge Gaps Identified:

Many participants were unaware of key terminologies like misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda. There was limited understanding of how algorithms on social media platforms amplify fake news.

7. Feedback from Youth

The feedback received from participants highlighted the success of the training sessions in empowering students to combat fake news, while also providing constructive suggestions for future improvements.

1. Positive Responses

Participants across all three universities shared enthusiastic feedback about their learning experiences. Key highlights include:

Increased Confidence:

Many students expressed a newfound confidence in their ability to identify and combat fake news after attending the sessions. For example:

"I feel more confident in identifying fake news now! This session was exactly what I needed to become more critical about the information I consume." – Student from NUML.

Students appreciated the step-by-step demonstrations of fact-checking tools, finding them practical and easy to apply in real life.

Practicality of Tools and Techniques:

The hands-on training was particularly well-received, with students finding it both engaging and highly relevant. For instance:

"These tools are amazing! I didn't know fact-checking could be this easy. I will definitely use them to verify what I see online." – Student from Hamdard University.

Participants expressed excitement about applying these skills in their personal and academic lives, with several mentioning their intent to share the knowledge with friends and family.

Inspiration for Advocacy:

The sessions inspired students to take an active role in promoting responsible media practices among their peers. For example:

"This session has inspired me to advocate for responsible media use among my peers. I want to help others understand how fake news affects our society." – Student from My University.

2. Suggestions

While the feedback was overwhelmingly positive, participants also provided valuable suggestions for enhancing the sessions in the future:

Advanced Topics:

- Students across all universities expressed interest in more advanced training sessions that delve deeper into emerging challenges in misinformation.
- A specific request was made for sessions focused on detecting AI-generated misinformation, such as deepfakes, manipulated audio, and synthetic videos.
- Participants highlighted the need to stay ahead of evolving technologies that make it increasingly difficult to distinguish between real and fake content.

Localized Case Studies:

- There was a strong recommendation for including more case studies from Pakistan, showcasing real-world examples of misinformation affecting the local context.
- Participants felt that analyzing fake news incidents relevant to their own culture, politics, and society would make the sessions even more impactful and relatable.
- Suggestions included exploring fake news related to local elections, public health misinformation, and religious or cultural narratives often distorted in media.

8. Way Forward

To build on the success of the training sessions and sustain the momentum generated, the following steps are proposed to expand the reach, depth, and impact of the initiative:

1. Expand Scope

- **Target Additional Universities:**

- Extend the training sessions to more universities, especially those in rural areas where access to such educational programs is often limited.
- Engage institutions that cater to underserved or marginalized communities to ensure inclusive outreach.
- Establish partnerships with regional universities to promote awareness about misinformation in areas that are particularly vulnerable to its spread due to lower digital literacy rates.

- **Focus on Journalism Schools:**

- Collaborate with schools of journalism and mass communication to provide specialized sessions on ethical media practices.
- Highlight the role of aspiring journalists in preventing the spread of fake news and misinformation through responsible reporting.
- Incorporate real-world case studies where ethical journalism has successfully countered misinformation, inspiring students to become proactive in their roles.

2. Advanced Sessions

- **Workshops on AI-Generated Misinformation:**

- Develop specialized workshops focusing on combating advanced forms of misinformation, including deepfakes, synthetic media, and manipulated audio or video content.
- Train participants on the latest tools and techniques for detecting AI-generated fake content.
- Include case studies of incidents where AI-generated misinformation caused significant impact, emphasizing the need for vigilance and proactive measures.

- **Seminars on Responsible Digital Citizenship:**

- Organize seminars to educate students on the importance of ethical behavior in the digital realm.
- Topics can include responsible social media use, avoiding confirmation bias, and understanding the role of algorithms in shaping online narratives.
- Invite experts in digital ethics and cybersecurity to provide a comprehensive view of responsible digital engagement.

3. Curriculum Integration

- **Introduction of Media Literacy Modules:**

- Collaborate with universities to integrate media literacy as part of their academic programs.

- Design a comprehensive curriculum that includes topics such as misinformation, ethical journalism, the role of social media, and fact-checking tools.
- Offer this as an elective or a mandatory module to ensure all students receive foundational knowledge about navigating the digital information landscape.
- **Capacity Building for Faculty:**
 - Provide training to faculty members on teaching media literacy effectively.
 - Equip them with the resources and tools necessary to engage students and create a lasting impact.

4. Follow-Up Initiatives

- **Periodic Refresher Courses:**
 - Conduct follow-up workshops and refresher courses to reinforce the skills and knowledge gained in the initial sessions.
 - Use these sessions to introduce updates on new tools, techniques, or emerging trends in misinformation.
- **Impact Assessment:**
 - Evaluate the practical application of skills taught in the training sessions by conducting surveys or assessments among participants.
 - Track how participants have utilized their knowledge to identify and counter fake news in their personal or academic lives.
- **Alumni Network:**
 - Create a network of trained students who can act as ambassadors for media literacy in their universities.
 - Encourage them to organize peer-to-peer workshops and awareness campaigns within their institutions.

9. Activities in Pictures:

Hamdard University Islamabad Campus



NUML University Rawalpindi Campus





Muslim Youth University Islamabad Campus





Foundation University Rawalpindi Campus

