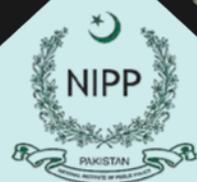


Roundtable
Discussion
Series

Regulating the Unbridled Social Media

A Policy Perspective



**Roundtable
Discussion**

**Regulating the
Unbridled Social Media:
A Policy Perspective**

January 2025

National Institute of Public Policy

**@ National Institute of Public Policy (NIPP)
at National School of Public Policy, Lahore**

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Rector's Message

As we navigate the complexities of the digital era, the influence of social media on society cannot be overstated. Social media platforms have become indispensable tools for communication, learning, and expression, connecting millions within Pakistan and billions globally. However, the unprecedented rise of unregulated social media also brings significant challenges, with consequences impacting economic stability, social harmony, political landscapes, and even national security. The need to understand and address these issues has never been more urgent. The need to understand and address these issues has never been more urgent, given the dual sides of social media – a tool that serves as both a source of information and, potentially, of misinformation.



The recent roundtable discussion titled “Regulating the Unbridled Social Media: A Policy Perspective” held at the National School of Public Policy (NSPP), aimed to dissect these multifaceted challenges and develop a comprehensive understanding of the regulatory landscape. Organized by the National Institute of Public Policy (NIPP), this event convened thought leaders, policymakers, academics, and social media experts who collectively offered valuable insights into the scope and scale of the issues we face. The discussion provided a platform to explore the balance between ensuring freedom of expression and addressing the risks posed by unchecked social media content, misinformation, privacy concerns, and data security vulnerabilities.

This roundtable further underscored NSPP’s dedication to advancing informed public policies that prioritize societal well-being. As an institution committed to excellence in public policy, we recognize that regulating social media is not about limiting freedom, but about creating a safer, more respectful digital environment that protects users while fostering healthy debate and engagement. This involves not only learning from the global best practices but also tailoring solutions to align with our unique national context, values, and priorities, reflecting the government’s commitment to areas like regulatory support and public education on social media use.

Moving forward, NSPP will promote a balanced, evidence-based approach to digital policy-making, guided by rigorous research and collaboration. I sincerely thank the panelists and participants for their valuable contributions and commend NSPP for leading this initiative. I am confident that the insights shared will help shape policies that tackle current challenges while fostering a vibrant and resilient society.

Thank you for your commitment to advancing this important work, and I look forward to seeing the tangible outcomes of our collective efforts.

Dr. Ijaz Munir

Foreword by Dean NIPP

It is my privilege to present this report on the roundtable discussion, “Regulating the Unbridled Social Media: A Policy Perspective,” organized by the National Institute of Public Policy (NIPP). In an era of rapid digital transformation, social media has emerged as a powerful force shaping public discourse, influencing decision-making, and fostering connections on an unprecedented scale. However, the unregulated expansion of these platforms has introduced significant challenges that require immediate and thoughtful responses. The misuse of social media poses risks to state security, societal stability, and individual dignity.

Intellectuals and analysts have consistently raised alarms about these issues. NIPP has taken note of their views and ideas to present a comprehensive picture of the consequences of unregulated social media. Dr. Ali Abbas, Research Associate at NIPP, conducted a meticulous analysis of prominent newspaper articles, examining the economic, social, and political ramifications of unregulated social media, government policy responses, regulatory gaps, and recommendations by experts. His research also highlighted best practices in social media regulation from around the world, offering valuable lessons for Pakistan.

Esteemed panelists who contributed their insights during the roundtable included Mr. Muhammad Farooq Mazhar, DG NIM Lahore; Dr. Savera Shami, Chairperson, Department of Digital Media, School of Communication Studies, University of Punjab; Mr. Safdar Ali Khan, Chief Editor, Daily Sarzameen; Dr. Fareed Zafar, Associate Professor, LUMS; Dr. Taimur Rahman, Associate Professor, LUMS; Mr. Usman Shami, Journalist, Daily Pakistan; and Ms. Nighat Dad, Founder of the Digital Rights Foundation.

While each panelist offered unique perspectives, they unanimously agreed on the urgent need for policy reforms, improved governance, and robust regulation to create a safe and responsible social media environment in Pakistan. This approach must go beyond regulatory measures to include promoting digital literacy, enhancing user safety, and ensuring accountability among social media platforms. Panelists emphasized the government’s role in providing clear and consistent policy frameworks and the importance of collaboration among civil society, the private sector, and other stakeholders in achieving a sustainable digital ecosystem.

This report serves as a valuable resource for policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders working on social media regulation. I extend my sincere gratitude to all contributors for their insightful perspectives and thoughtful recommendations.

Based on these recommendations, NIPP has devised an action plan to catalyze change and pave the way for a more resilient and responsible social media environment, which is vital for Pakistan’s social cohesion and digital safety.

Dr. Naveed Elahi

Team NIPP

Dr. Naveed Elahi
Dean NIPP



Ms. Bushra Bashir
Senior Research
Associate



Dr. Saif Ullah Khalid
Research Associate



Mr. Habib Ullah Khan
Additional Director
(P&A)



Dr. Ali Abbas
Research Associate



Ms. Faryal Maaz
Research Associate



Mr. Jahanzeb Waheed
Research Associate



Dr. Sumreen Khalil
Research Fellow



Ms. Sabina Babar
Research Fellow



Dr. Muhammad Abdullah
Research Fellow



Mr. Sajid Sultan
Statistical Analyst

Panelists of the Roundtable Discussion



Mr. Muhammad Farooq Mazhar, PSP
Director General, NIM, Lahore



Dr. Savera Shami
Chairperson, Department of Digital
Media School of Communication Studies,
University of Punjab



Ms. Nighat Dad
Founder of Digital Rights
Foundation



Mr. Usman Shami
Journalist Daily Pakistan



Mr. Safdar Ali Khan
Chief Editor, Daily Sarzameen



Dr. Taimur Rahman
Associate Professor, LUMS



Dr. Fareed Zafar
Associate Professor, LUMS

Summary of the Proceedings

The NIPP organised a roundtable discussion on “Regulating the Unbridled Social Media: A Policy Perspective” in Lahore on Monday, 4th November 2024.

The panel comprised leading experts, including Mr. Muhammad Farooq Mazhar, DG NIM Lahore, Dr. Savera Shami, Chairperson, Department of Digital Media School of Communication Studies, University of Punjab, Mr. Safdar Ali Khan, Chief Editor, Daily Sarzameen, Dr. Fareed Zafar, Associate Professor, LUMS, Dr. Taimur Rahman, Associate Professor, LUMS, Mr. Usman Shami, Journalist Daily Pakistan, Ms. Nighat Dad, Founder of Digital Rights Foundation.

The session was moderated by Dr. Naveed Elahi, Dean NIPP. It was attended by Research Associates and Research Fellows of NIPP, including Ms. Bushra Bashir, Dr. Ali Abbas, Ms. Faryal Maaz, Dr. Sumreen Khalil, Ms. Sabina Babar, Mr. Jahanzeb Waheed, Dr. Muhammad Abdullah, Mr. Habib Ullah Khan Addl. Director, and Mr. Sajid Sultan Statistical Analyst.

While opening the session, the Dean, Dr. Elahi, stated that Pakistan is facing a challenging situation regarding unbridled social media. This issue stems from a complex interplay of factors, including the rapid spread of misinformation, lack of regulatory frameworks, and inadequate digital literacy. To mitigate this crisis, it is crucial for the state to address these challenges through effective regulation, public awareness campaigns, and enhanced oversight mechanisms.

Rector NSPP, Dr. Ijaz Munir, warmly welcomed the attendees at the roundtable discussion on unbridled social media. He emphasized the critical need for alignment between the government and regulatory bodies to effectively address the challenges posed by the rapid evolution of social media. His insights set a constructive tone for the discussions, encouraging all participants to work towards actionable solutions for the issues at hand.

Dr. Ali Abbas presented a content analysis on the issue of unbridled social media, highlighting the issues arising from unbridled social media, its economic, social, and political consequences, gaps identified for social media regulation, response by government, and recommendations.

The panelists deeply deliberated the issue of unbridled social media and identified major causes such as ineffective governance and policies, the rapid spread of misinformation, inadequate regulatory frameworks, and insufficient digital literacy. They underscored the need for improved governance, the establishment of a comprehensive regulatory framework, and enhanced public awareness initiatives to effectively address these challenges. Furthermore, they emphasized the importance of collaboration among stakeholders to develop cohesive strategies for a more responsible digital environment.

NIPP aims to build consensus on actionable strategies emerging from the roundtable for effective policy implementation. Several recommendations, gleaned from the discussion, have been incorporated into this report.

Road Map of the Roundtable Discussion

Social Media Usage in Pakistan

Research Analysis

- Issue arising from Unbridled Social Media
- Gaps Identified
- Economic, Social, and Political Consequences,
- Policy Responses by Government,
- Recommendations by Authors

Global Practices and Lessons for Pakistan

Points to Ponder

Discussion by Panelists

Social Media Usage in Pakistan

Table: 1

Category	Statistic	Category	Statistic
Internet Usage		Social Media Statistics	
Total Internet Users	111 million	Total Social Media Users	71.7 million
Internet Penetration Rate	45.7% of population	Social Media Penetration Rate	29.5% of population
Growth from Jan 2023 to Jan 2024	+24 million (+27.1%)	Gender Split	25.9% female, 74.1% male
Platform-Specific Insights		Platform-Specific Insights	
TikTok Users (Aged 18+)	54.38 million (49% of internet users)	Facebook Users	44.5 million (18.3% of population)
TikTok Growth Rate	+229% year-on-year	Facebook Gender Split	80.1% male
YouTube Users	71.7 million (29.5% of population)	Instagram Users	17.3 million (7.1% of population)

As of January 2024, table shows social media usage¹. Pakistan has 111 million internet users, marking a 45.7% penetration rate and a substantial growth of 24 million users (27.1%) from January 2023. The digital landscape is becoming increasingly vital for economic growth, education, and social interaction. In the realm of social media, there are 71.7 million users, which is 29.5% of the total population, with a notable gender disparity—25.9% female and 74.1% male.

¹ Datareportal (2024) DIGITAL 2024: PAKISTAN. Retrieved from: <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-pakistan>

Platforms like TikTok have seen rapid growth, boasting 54.38 million users aged 18 and older, representing 49% of the internet user base, and a staggering 229% year-on-year increase. Other significant platforms include Facebook with 44.5 million users (18.3% of the population), predominantly male at 80.1%, and YouTube, which reaches 71.7 million users (29.5%). Instagram, with 17.3 million users (7.1% of the population), also plays a critical role, especially among younger audiences.

This data highlights the transformative shift in how people connect and communicate in Pakistan's increasingly digital society. The strong presence of platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and YouTube emphasizes the growing demand for diverse and engaging content, particularly short-form videos. These trends present both opportunities and challenges for stakeholders, including policymakers, marketers, and educators, as they seek to leverage this digital engagement while addressing issues such as digital literacy and gender disparities in internet access. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for shaping effective strategies that foster a responsible and inclusive online environment, ultimately contributing to Pakistan's social cohesion and economic stability.

Research Analysis

A research analysis of 25 newspaper articles from 2024 was conducted to examine the issue of unbridled social media in Pakistan, and the findings were presented at the roundtable. These articles addressed key aspects of the issue, including challenges posed by unregulated social media, its economic, social, and political impacts, government policy responses, and recommendations offered by various authors. The content analysis included articles from prominent Pakistani newspapers, with 11 from Dawn, 7 from The News, and 7 from Express Tribune.

Issues arising from Unbridled Social Media

Table: 2

Issues	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Spread of Misinformation	19	76%
Disinformation and Fake News	16	64%
Hate Speech and Sectarian Rhetoric	15	60%
Lack of Accountability for Online Actions	12	48%
Incitement to Violence	12	48%
Communal Tensions Amplified by Social Media	11	44%
Overuse of Social Media in Sensitive Conflict Areas	10	40%
Manipulation by Fake Accounts and Bots	9	36%
Cyberbullying and Harassment	7	28%
Proliferation of Social Media Scams	7	28%

The content analysis of newspaper articles on issues arising from unbridled social media highlights several critical challenges (Table-2 and Figure-1). The most frequently cited issue is the spread of misinformation (76%), a phenomenon that significantly impacts public understanding and opinion. Close behind is disinformation and fake news (64%), where intentionally deceptive information manipulates users, fueling misconceptions and misunderstandings.

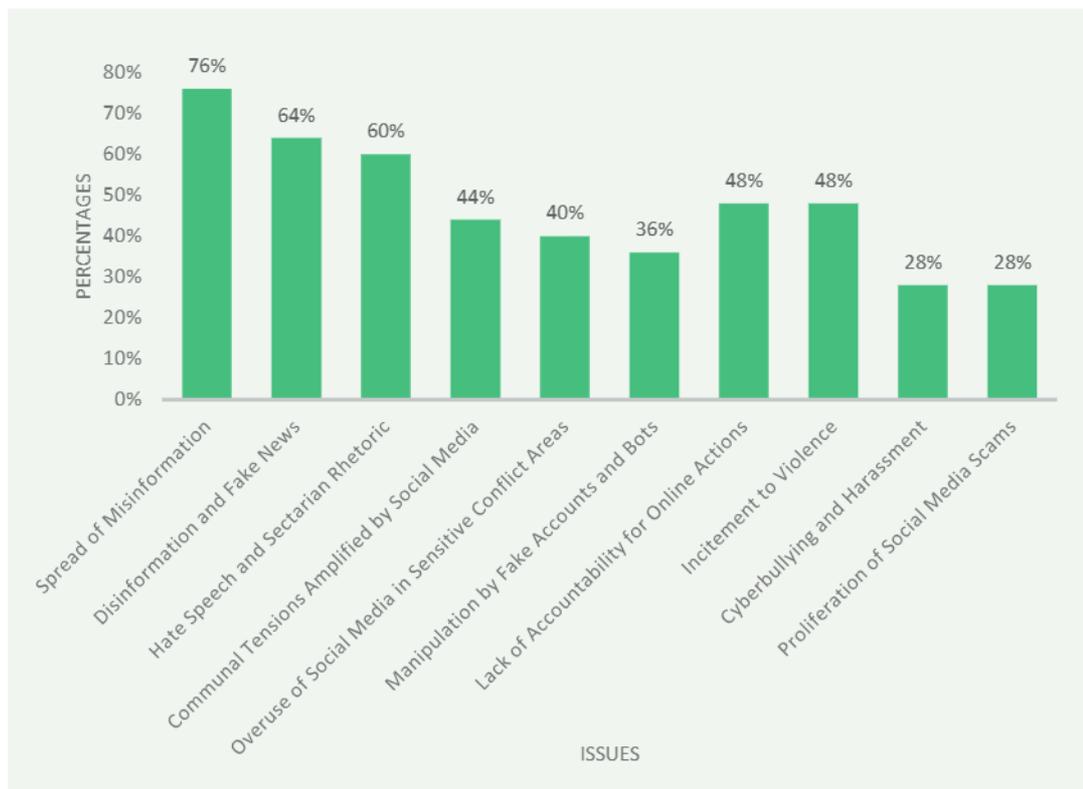
Hate speech and sectarian rhetoric was prominent in 60% of cases, showcasing how unregulated platforms allow divisive and inflammatory speech to thrive, deepening societal divides. Furthermore, a lack of accountability for online actions (48%) and incitement to violence (48%) indicate an urgent

need for oversight, as these issues reveal a gap in holding users responsible for harmful content.

Another major concern is the amplification of communal tensions by social media (44%), with digital platforms frequently exacerbating local conflicts. Overuse of social media in sensitive conflict zones (40%) and manipulation by fake accounts and bots (36%) point to the ways in which social media can be weaponized, especially in regions of high tension, where anonymity and automation further complicate accountability.

Lastly, cyberbullying and harassment (28%) and the proliferation of social media scams (28%) underscore personal and financial risks to individuals, with platforms enabling harmful behaviors that lack sufficient safeguards.

Figure: 1



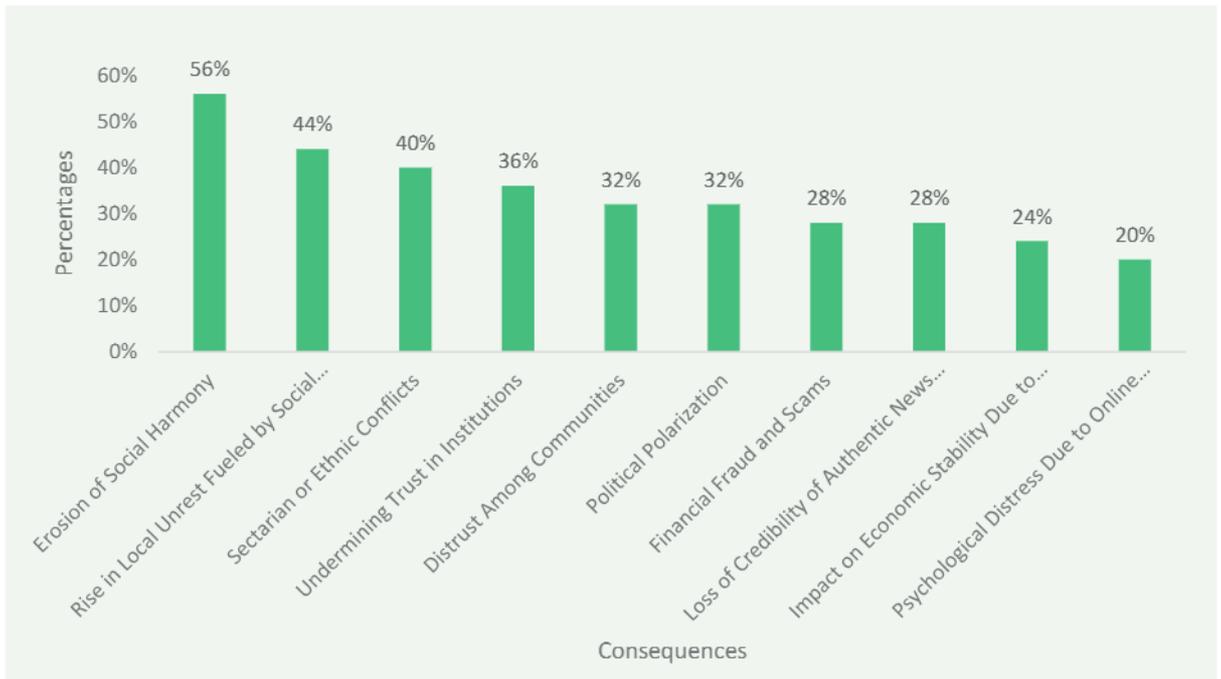
Economic, Social, and Political Consequences

Table: 3

Consequences	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Erosion of Social Harmony	14	56%
Rise in Local Unrest Fueled by Social Media Disputes	11	44%
Sectarian or Ethnic Conflicts	10	40%
Undermining Trust in Institutions	9	36%
Distrust Among Communities	8	32%
Political Polarization	8	32%
Financial Fraud and Scams	7	28%
Loss of Credibility of Authentic News Sources	7	28%
Impact on Economic Stability Due to Misinformation	6	24%
Psychological Distress Due to Online Harassment	5	20%

The second aspect of analysis “economic, social, and political consequences of unbridled social media” highlights significant impacts on societal stability and cohesion (Table-3 and Figure-2).

Figure: 2



The leading issue, erosion of social harmony (56%), illustrates how unchecked content disrupts community bonds, often fueling local unrest (44%) and sectarian or ethnic conflicts (40%). These findings underline the role of social media in amplifying tensions within communities.

Issues like undermining trust in institutions (36%) and political polarization (32%) point to long-term social divisions, while financial fraud and scams (28%) and loss of credibility of authentic news sources (28%) signal risks to both personal security and the credibility of reliable information. Economically, impacts on stability due to misinformation (24%) reveal how false information affects markets, and psychological distress from online harassment (20%) shows social media's toll on mental health. These findings underscore the urgent need for regulatory measures to protect social unity, trust, and public welfare.

Policy Responses by Government

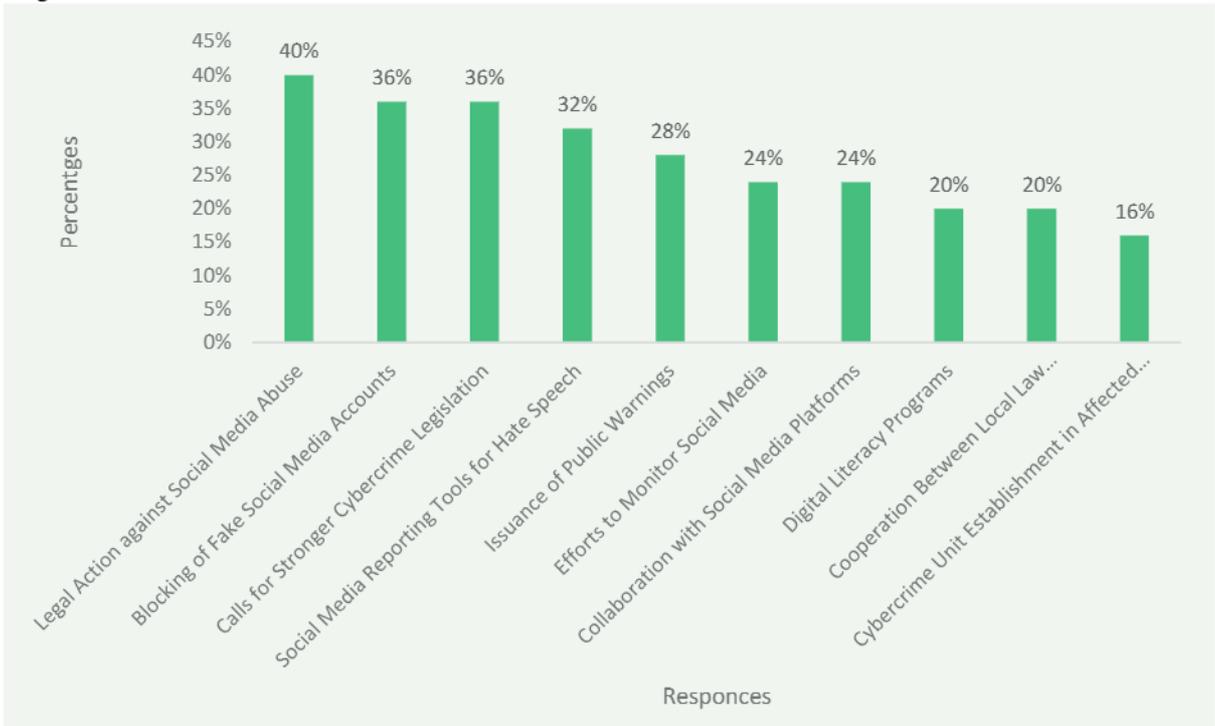
Table: 4

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Legal Action against Social Media Abuse	10	40%
Blocking of Fake Social Media Accounts	9	36%
Calls for Stronger Cybercrime Legislation	9	36%
Social Media Reporting Tools for Hate Speech	8	32%
Issuance of Public Warnings	7	28%
Efforts to Monitor Social Media	6	24%
Collaboration with Social Media Platforms	6	24%
Digital Literacy Programs	5	20%
Cooperation Between Local Law Enforcement and Experts	5	20%
Cybercrime Unit Establishment in Affected Areas	4	16%

This third aspect of analysis reveals the range of policy responses by the government to tackle challenges posed by unregulated social media (Table-4 and Figure-3). Legal action against social media abuse emerges as the primary response (40%), indicating a firm stance on addressing misuse. Measures such as blocking fake accounts (36%) and calls for stronger cybercrime legislation (36%) further underscore the government's focus on strengthening legal frameworks to curb harmful online activities.

The introduction of social media reporting tools for hate speech (32%) and public warnings (28%) highlights efforts to empower users and raise awareness of online risks. Additionally, the government's monitoring efforts (24%) and collaboration with social media platforms (24%) show a proactive approach to manage content. Initiatives such as digital literacy programs (20%) and cooperation between law enforcement and experts (20%) are steps toward long-term solutions, aiming to increase public resilience against online threats. Finally, the establishment of cybercrime units in affected areas (16%) demonstrates

targeted responses to localized social media issues. Collectively, these responses indicate a comprehensive approach, combining immediate action with preventive measures to foster a safer online environment.

Figure: 3

Gaps Identified in Social Media Regulation

Table: 5

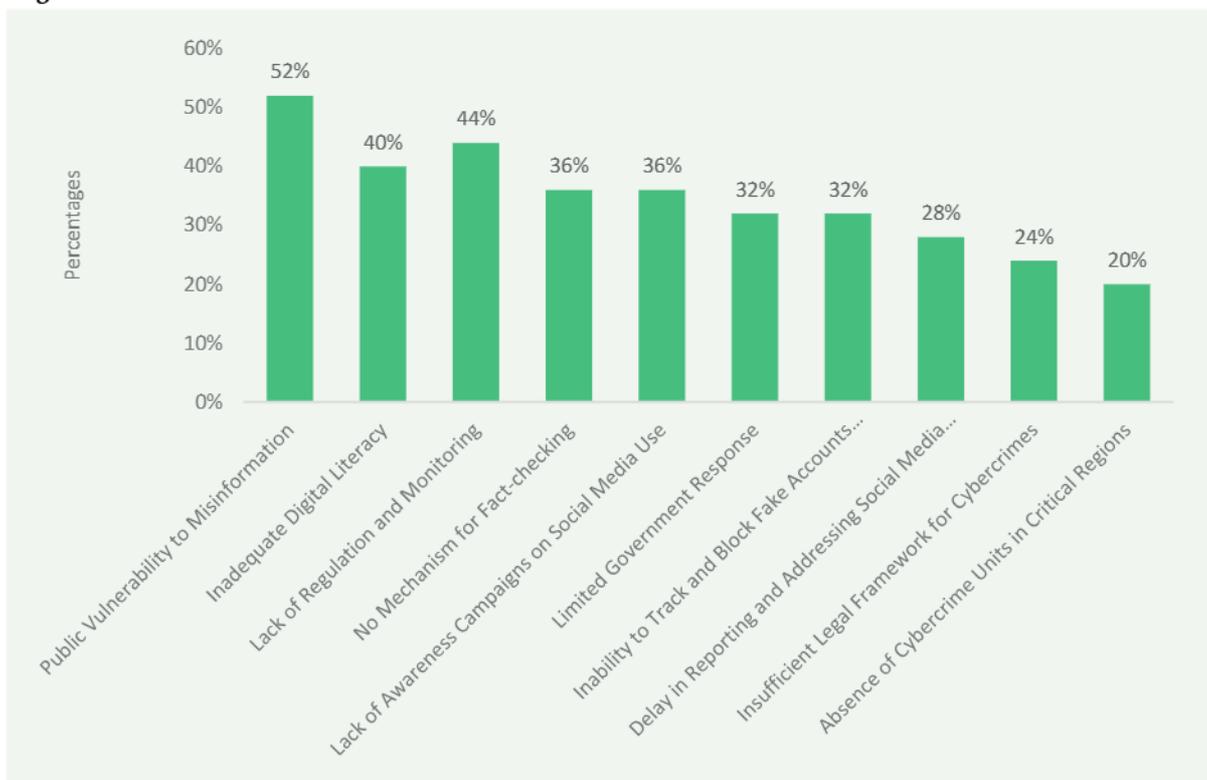
Gaps	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Public Vulnerability to Misinformation	13	52%
Inadequate Digital Literacy	10	40%
Lack of Regulation and Monitoring	11	44%
No Mechanism for Fact-checking	9	36%
Lack of Awareness Campaigns on Social Media Use	9	36%
Limited Government Response	8	32%
Inability to Track and Block Fake Accounts Effectively	8	32%
Delay in Reporting and Addressing Social Media Crimes	7	28%
Insufficient Legal Framework for Cybercrimes	6	24%
Absence of Cybercrime Units in Critical Regions	5	20%

Fourth aspect of analysis “gaps in social media regulation” highlights critical areas where current efforts fall short in addressing the challenges of unbridled social media (Table-5 and and Figure-4). The public’s vulnerability to misinformation ranks highest (52%), emphasizing the need for stronger protections against misleading content. Closely following are issues such as lack of regulation and monitoring (44%) and inadequate digital literacy (40%), both of which expose users to online risks and limit their ability to discern credible information.

The absence of effective fact-checking mechanisms (36%) and awareness campaigns (36%) further underscores the need for proactive measures to educate and inform the public on responsible social media use. Limited government response (32%) and challenges in tracking and blocking fake accounts (32%) suggest resource constraints in enforcing regulations and curbing harmful activities.

Additional gaps, including delays in reporting and addressing social media crimes (28%) and insufficient legal frameworks (24%), reveal procedural and legal obstacles to timely intervention. The absence of cybercrime units in critical regions (20%) signifies a geographic gap in enforcement, leaving certain areas vulnerable. Addressing these gaps through comprehensive regulatory and educational measures will be crucial to foster a safer, more resilient online environment.

Figure: 4



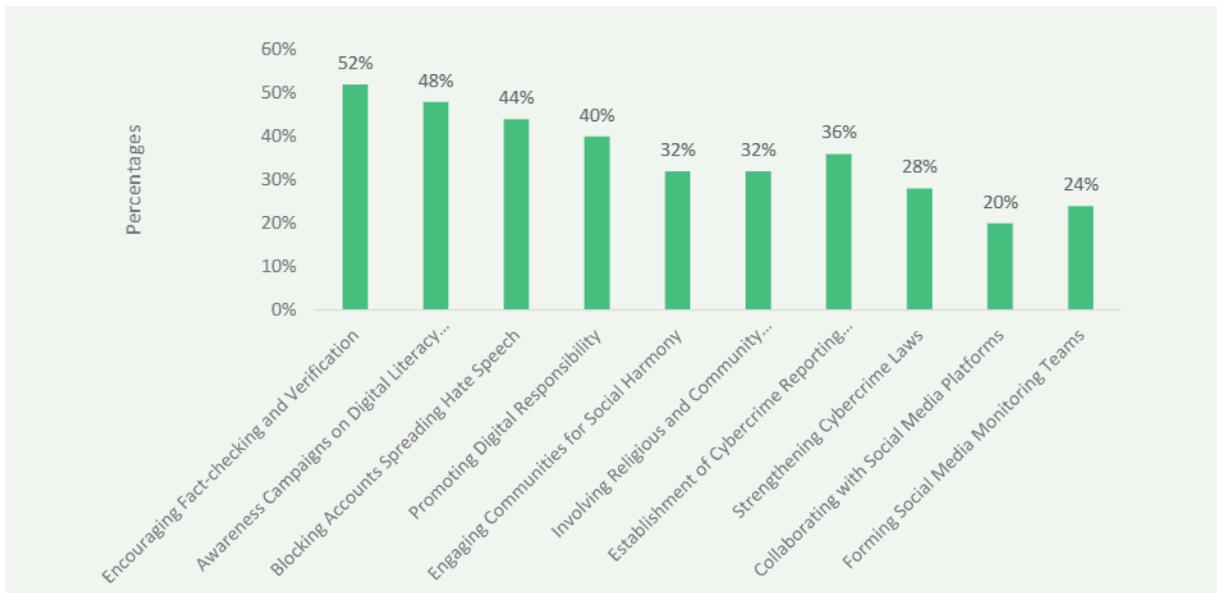
Recommendations by Authors

Table: 6

Recommendations	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Encouraging Fact-checking and Verification	13	52%
Awareness Campaigns on Digital Literacy and Responsibility	12	48%
Blocking Accounts Spreading Hate Speech	11	44%
Promoting Digital Responsibility	10	40%
Engaging Communities for Social Harmony	8	32%
Involving Religious and Community Leaders in Dialogues	8	32%
Establishment of Cybercrime Reporting Mechanisms	9	36%
Strengthening Cybercrime Laws	7	28%
Collaborating with Social Media Platforms	5	20%
Forming Social Media Monitoring Teams	6	24%

The fifth aspect of analysis “recommendations by author” highlights strategies to curb the negative effects of unbridled social media (Table-6 and Figure-5). Fact-checking and verification (52%) are prioritized, advocating for stricter content validation. Authors emphasize digital literacy and responsibility campaigns (48%) to enhance public awareness. Measures like blocking accounts promoting hate speech (44%) and fostering digital responsibility (40%) address immediate threats on these platforms.

Figure: 5



To foster a balanced approach, recommendations include community engagement (32%) and involving religious and community leaders in discussions for social harmony. Additionally, establishing cybercrime reporting mechanisms (36%) and strengthening cybercrime laws (28%) underscore the need for legal infrastructure. Collaborating with social media platforms (20%) and creating monitoring teams (24%) are also suggested for proactive and responsive oversight.

Points to Ponder

1. What are the key challenges in addressing misinformation, hate speech and fake news?
2. How to regulate the social media to avoid negative activities and impacts?
3. How to develop a transparent and collaborative social media regulatory framework?
4. What are the gaps in social media and cyber-security policy and strategy?
5. How can social media companies be made more accountable in Pakistan?
6. Which global regulatory models could be suitable for adoption in Pakistan?

Discussion by the Panelists

Mr. Muhammad Farooq Mazhar

He highlighted that while social media use and high tele-density in Pakistan are encouraging, they also bring serious challenges. Social media has become ubiquitous, accessible on every device, influencing political dynamics, security, personal lives, and various social dimensions. The platform's seamless operation and wide availability, especially among youth, are crucial for maintaining social order. Without careful oversight, social media can generate numerous issues, as seen globally, where it has affected elections, personal lives, and even national security, leading to significant challenges for both governments and societies. Therefore, some level of regulation and smooth functionality of social media is vital for sustaining social order in Pakistan and beyond.

He emphasized that social media is here to stay and will only become more integrated into daily life and society. With the rise of artificial intelligence, social media's influence has grown immensely, especially in its potential to spread misinformation and disinformation. This ease of access, particularly on mobile devices, allows information—whether accurate or not—to spread rapidly. In countries like Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan, social media has already contributed to significant law and order issues and security concerns. Even in advanced societies, such as the United States, where an election campaign is currently underway, social media is heavily utilized by various actors to shape public opinion. This highlights the need for awareness and potential regulation to mitigate social media's impact on stability and security.

The panelist noted that social media has given rise to new professions, such as fashion and opinion influencers, highlighting its role beyond mere information transmission. Social media now significantly shapes opinions, lifestyles, thought processes, and decision-making. He underscored the challenge for

countries in regulating social media effectively ensuring it provides accurate, valuable information without suppressing freedom of expression or diverse opinions. Rather than being solely a law enforcement issue, social media permeates all facets of social, political, economic, and religious life. This impact is intensified in societies with deep divisions and competing interests. He emphasized the need for responsible regulation alongside public education on using social media constructively. Such education would empower Pakistan's citizens to harness social media for economic and social advancement, promoting responsible digital engagement for national development.

During the question-answer session, he emphasized the potential for innovative, outsourced solutions to help manage social media challenges in Pakistan. He recounted a proposal from an international company that had offered to establish a monitoring system, fully funded by social media platforms, with profit-sharing for the government. However, due to political transitions, this initiative was shelved. The panelist pointed to this example as an opportunity for the government to explore alternative solutions that could ease regulatory burdens, generate revenue, and strengthen oversight of social media use.

He also addressed the limited resources of Pakistan's enforcement agencies, particularly the PTA and the FIA Cybercrime Wing, which struggle with overwhelming case backlogs. Although a new National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency was initially introduced to support the FIA, it was soon dissolved due to feasibility concerns. The panelist stressed that effective regulation must begin at the platform level, where companies enforce their policies, supplemented by a strong legal framework in Pakistan. He concluded with an example from India, where swift government action led to changes in WhatsApp's message-forwarding limits after a crisis involving mass misinformation. This demonstrated the potential impact of consistent engagement and regulatory influence, underscoring the need for Pakistan to develop similar strategies to manage social media challenges effectively.

Dr. Savera Shami

She highlighted the importance of establishing uniform regulations for social media platforms aligned with international standards with a clear distinction between regulation and control. She argued that governments must recognize the need to regulate, while stakeholders should be responsible for governing these portals. Both, government and stakeholders must understand the necessity to strike a balance between governance and regulation. She mentions that issues are faced when there is an attempt to control the content on social media platforms rather than focusing on evidence based regulatory practices. In her view, suspending or deleting content solely based on personal preferences is problematic. Instead, there should be a clear demarcation between accurate information and misinformation, rather than solely relying on personal biases.

She pointed out the need to define what constitutes freedom of expression. It is essential to delineate the boundaries of this fundamental right and acknowledge that not everything falls under the purview of freedom of expression. When one's actions encroach upon the rights of others, there is a clear need for regulation to maintain a harmonious societal balance. She quoted a rise of prevalence of misinformation

with a recent example of US elections. Another similar situation was faced in Dublin on the other hand, where misinformation led to a false call for Halloween gatherings on the streets, exemplifying how fake news has also infiltrated in western societies. By giving a national perspective of this issue, she diagnosed that our society is facing polarization resulting in individuals embracing information aligned with their respective ideologies resulting in the formation of echo chambers and filter bubbles. This unwillingness to engage with diverse perspectives underscores the critical need for media literacy to be incorporated into the regulatory framework. She stressed on the fact that legislation alone is insufficient; the effective implementation of any law is crucial to address the problems at hand. Merely enacting regulations without considering their practical/cultural contexts could lead to unintended consequences.

She proposed two main models for implementing such policies: the relatively free approach of the United States, and the highly restrictive approach of China. These represent the two extremes, with some countries adopting a middle ground of “conditional immunity” that regulates social media platforms. However, she depicts that implementing any model is challenging in the national context, where social media platforms such as Facebook and Google does not have presence of local offices. This makes it difficult to compel these companies to adhere to domestic regulations, as they may not consider Pakistan as a primary market.

She concluded the discussion on cultivating “media literacy” as a benchmark for evaluating the effectiveness of any initiative believing that heightened mass media awareness would have long lasting impacts on the effectiveness of any regulation. She advised on establishing a shared vision, whereby society, government, and significant key stakeholders should collaborate. Moreover, she convicted that promoting media literacy awareness in Pakistan is a vital endeavor and should be introduced as a compulsory subject at primary & secondary schools, colleges, and universities. This is crucial, as regulating social media is necessary to address the recent proliferation of misinformation that has caused significant disruptions. Lastly, she disclosed that Pakistan has more recently started focusing on developing a policy framework to enhance media literacy in Pakistan with the collaboration of UNESCO.

Mr. Safdar Ali Khan

A panelist from the Urdu media sector shared his perspective on the ongoing challenges of media regulation in Pakistan, which began around 20 years ago with the rise of electronic media. He pointed out that, unlike many other countries that address new technologies immediately with proper policy frameworks, Pakistan has often been reactive, waiting for incidents to trigger responses. This delay in action is compounded by a tendency to engage in a blame game rather than taking constructive steps. He stressed that the root cause of these issues lies in the lack of respect for the rule of law in Pakistani society. He noted that many in the country view their personal opinions as more important than legal structures, and the issue of defamation is often dismissed as trivial, leading to prolonged and ultimately abandoned legal cases. For these issues to be addressed effectively, the panelist emphasized the necessity of upholding the law as a means to solve problems.

The panelist further discussed the rise of fake news, stating that much of the content on social media

is often unbelievable and illogical. He strongly advocated for education as the key solution, noting that banning social media would not be effective and could, in fact, exacerbate the problem. He pointed out that in Pakistan, where about half of the population is active on social media, educating people about its merits and demerits is far more crucial than imposing restrictions. The rest of the world, he argued, is advancing with technological and media literacy, while Pakistan remains stuck in debates about what is good or wrong for the country. He also highlighted the stark contrast between Pakistan and other nations, where courts swiftly handle defamation cases and enforce punishments, whereas in Pakistan, social media often rewards the defamed, sometimes turning them into celebrities. The panelist called for a comprehensive understanding of the technology's effects, emphasizing that it is vital for Pakistan to educate its citizens, understand the implications of social media on society, and develop robust laws that can be implemented effectively. Only through these efforts, he concluded, could Pakistan ensure that social media benefits the next generation without causing harm.

Dr. Muhammad Fareed Zafar

He began his remarks by greeting the panelists and the audience. He explained that he wanted to address a few points that had not been discussed yet in the ongoing conversation, particularly regarding the issues surrounding social media, fake news, and cybersecurity policies. He shared a personal example to highlight the impact of misinformation and the growing reliance on social media. He suggested that this behavior is rooted in a significant trust deficit in traditional media, emphasizing that this trust deficit is not just a local issue, but a global one. He cited several examples from prominent news outlets, including headlines from Bol News and Geo, which reported dramatic and sometimes misleading news about events in Israel. These reports were published late at night, while no such events had actually taken place. He further noted that people are increasingly turning to social media for news not just because it is more convenient but because they no longer trust traditional media sources to provide accurate information. Furthermore, he pointed out the failure of official fact-checking initiatives. He acknowledged that governments had launched efforts to debunk fake news, but believed these efforts were ineffective. He attributed the failure to a lack of passion and commitment to truth in the way fact-checking was being carried out. According to him, people could easily tell that the official narratives were not being presented with sincerity, which is why they failed to gain trust. He suggested that significant work was needed in this area to restore trust in official media.

He also addressed the issue of cybersecurity policies in Pakistan, stating that over the past 10-15 years, the country had gone through several iterations of cybersecurity regulations. However, he was skeptical about the effectiveness of such regulations, particularly those aimed at controlling fake news or de-anonymizing online accounts. He elaborated that such regulations often focus on breaking encryption or monitoring online activity, emphasizing that these technological solutions were doomed to fail. Drawing from his expertise as a computer scientist, he explained that encryption could not be easily broken, and attempting to do so would have catastrophic global economic consequences. He criticized the frequent

discussion around deep packet inspection and content moderation, pointing out that these measures could be easily bypassed, further adding that while some policymakers believed such approaches would work, cybersecurity experts around the world were well aware of their limitations.

He also warned against the idea of regulating the internet in an attempt to stop fake news, arguing that the only way to address the problem was through education and a better understanding of the limitations of technology. He stressed that any approach that disregarded these limitations would only deepen the trust deficit, as people would perceive these measures as insincere or ineffectively motivated. In addition, many lawmakers and legal professionals did not fully understand cybersecurity, which could lead to flawed legal measures and unjust convictions. He gave the example of the online voting system proposed by the previous government, which failed to account for the lack of anonymity in online voting. This oversight, according to him, highlighted a deeper misunderstanding of the technology involved.

On the subject of cybersecurity laws, He emphasized the need for more informed and effective legislation, one that takes into account the complexities and limitations of the technology. He argued that while some nations like China could afford to isolate their economy, smaller countries like Pakistan could not. He concluded that global tech giants like Facebook, Google, and Twitter would not respond to local regulations unless there was a coordinated and impactful effort, such as the collection of credible data by trusted third parties, which could be used to hold these companies accountable.

He also briefly mentioned his research in the field of algorithmic auditing, highlighting the lack of regulation and control over many algorithms used by companies like YouTube and Facebook. He argued that businesses like YouTube and Facebook would only act when their bottom line was impacted, and suggested that a similar approach could be taken in Pakistan to hold these platforms accountable for their content. He emphasized that trusted third parties could play a crucial role in gathering evidence and presenting it in court, which might compel these platforms to take the necessary actions.

He concluded his remarks by highlighting a significant gap in Pakistan's cybersecurity capacity, explaining that the country's cybersecurity agencies lacked the necessary tools and knowledge to effectively monitor the internet and trace the origins of disinformation. He pointed out that the government's priorities were often misaligned with the needs of cybersecurity, and that insufficient salaries were preventing talented individuals from joining the relevant agencies. He concluded that without proper investment in human capital and technological infrastructure, the country would struggle to address these issues effectively. His insights underscored the complexity of tackling fake news, misinformation, and cybersecurity challenges, stressing the need for a more informed, nuanced, and practical approach to these issues, one that balanced regulation with a deeper understanding of technology's limitations.

Dr. Taimur Rahman

He highlighted the sweeping impact of modern technology, particularly innovations from Silicon Valley, on traditional ways of working and communication. He explained how advancements have transformed industries, such as transportation and goods delivery, with services like Food Panda and Amazon

revolutionizing the Pakistani market. This change extends to media, with print newspapers losing ground to digital platforms, and advertising shifting from passive TV channels to more dynamic, targeted online ads. He drew a parallel with educational transformations, mentioning massive open online courses, while noting that efforts to return to older methods of information dissemination are futile given the rapid technological evolution. He stressed that society's technological basis has fundamentally changed, likening attempts to revert to old systems to using outdated weapons against a modern army. He addressed the spread of misinformation, emphasizing that while some disinformation is shared maliciously, most is spread out of ignorance. He argued for strict regulations where malice is involved, but stressed the need for education to combat the broader issue. Using examples like his mother's reliance on WhatsApp for news, he illustrated the public's vulnerability to misinformation and underlined the importance of teaching media literacy. Referencing Noam Chomsky's work on propaganda and historical narratives, Dr. Rahman pointed out that while fake news is not new, its mode of dissemination has changed. He expressed concern that platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, driven by advertising revenue, prioritize user engagement over truthful information. He commended China's strategy of building local platforms insulated from Western social media influences and encouraged a more proactive approach to using social media for education. Advocating for positive engagement, he urged responding to misinformation not with hostility but with better, fact-based information. He concluded by emphasizing the need for collaboration between government and independent institutions to promote media literacy, critical thinking, and responsible social media use for public benefit.

During the question-answer session, he emphasized the evolving landscape of public engagement, stressing the importance of adapting to technological advances and social media's impact. He advocated for a proactive, education-focused approach that sees these changes as opportunities to promote informed civic involvement. Rather than reacting to issues after they arise, he urged the government and society to engage the public through objective, evidence-based information, fostering a culture of truth and informed discourse. Dr. Rahman also warned against allowing commercial enterprises to regulate social media, likening it to incentivizing police through fines, which could lead to misuse of authority. He stressed that regulation must be impartial, focused on public interest over profit motives, and structured to prevent excessive or biased control.

Mr. Usman Shami

Mr. Usman Shami began the discussion by expressing his opinion that Pakistan is not the only country facing the challenge of fake news as it is a concerning issue among various countries. Surprisingly, the U.S. and Britain are also facing this critical situation predominantly. He quoted the example of the U.S. previous presidential elections, when people rushed towards Capitol Hill after the proclamation of Donald Trump as a successor, negating the result of elections based on the circulation of fake news. Similar incidents also tend to happen in Britain. He stated that Pakistan is also exporting fake news, with some people sitting in a room, running different news channels publish sensational news targeting audiences worldwide, without knowing the evidence or ground reality of that news.

He further stressed that Eastern and Western societies also face the challenge of combating the spread of

fake news, and in many situations, one cannot know whether the information is correct or fake. Also, it has become difficult for journalists and professionals to identify the authenticity of each news we see on social media. The speaker underscored the significance of addressing the misinformation issue, noting that such challenges might not have caused any existential crisis to the U.S. or Britain; however, the situation is not the same in the case of Pakistan, given its weak legislative and regulatory framework. He mentioned that although the Prevention of Electronic Crime Act (PECA) provides provisions for cybercrime, the controlling authorities are separate entities with their own goals and mandates. Previously, NAB was a regulatory body with the authority to investigate and make people liable for any illegal activity, and at present FIA works as a strict law regulator.

He highlighted another drawback of lacking implementation of laws in the economy. PECA (2016) is in place, yet implementation of its provision is lacking. Another dilemma is the lack of people's trust in State representatives as they rely on other sources instead of considering statements issued by the Government. He agreed that blocking the applications is not a sustainable solution. Therefore, the judiciary, regulatory authorities, and legitimate bodies should play their role in revoking the misinformation problem.

He pondered that the state's aversion to social media freedom is because social media has exposed the loopholes in the state's structure and has amplified the inefficiencies or weaknesses. The speaker emphasized that instead of regulating social media, the state should respond to questions raised by the public. He stressed that to strengthen the stance of institutions there should be some efforts and practical steps and awareness programs for the public.

Ms. Nighat Dad

She appreciated the NIPP for hosting the discussion on social media regulation and suggested organizing a series of similar discussions, given the complexity of topics like misinformation, disinformation, and the weaponization of laws. She emphasized that these topics cannot be comprehensively addressed in a single session.

She highlighted that social media often reflects societal biases and contributes to trust deficits in government institutions. Using the Punjab College incident as an example, she explained how disinformation narratives emerged and were monetized. Her organization analyzed the incident and discovered that only a few accounts initiated discussions, with motives primarily linked to monetization rather than political agendas. She stressed the importance of identifying various motives behind disinformation, including personal vendettas.

On the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), she traced its history, explaining that discussions on its clauses began in 2014 and were contentious from the outset. While the law was passed after negotiations, subsequent governments misused it, even attempting to introduce stricter regulations that civil society resisted. She argued that the arbitrary enforcement of PECA must be addressed through proper oversight and accountability, urging stakeholders to collaborate with parliamentarians for its effective implementation. She also noted that despite a provision requiring the FIA to report on PECA's enforcement every six months, only two reports have been submitted since 2016.

She raised concerns about attracting social media platforms to Pakistan, citing the lack of incentives, security for their staff, and inadequate data protection infrastructure. She emphasized that platforms prioritize profit, and the government's push for data localization is unrealistic without creating a conducive environment. Drawing comparisons with the EU's Digital Services Act and India's recent data protection law, she highlighted the need for a robust, unbiased data protection law in Pakistan. She noted that while India's law has shortcomings, it has succeeded in attracting social media companies.

She called for connecting regulatory efforts to existing structural issues and stressed that new laws are not always necessary. Instead, she urged better implementation of current laws and regulations, such as PECA, which are underutilized or misapplied. She concluded by emphasizing the importance of building public trust in regulatory bodies and ensuring that any data protection regime involves diverse stakeholders rather than being controlled by a single institution.

Analysis

The roundtable discussion on the regulation of social media in Pakistan highlighted a range of perspectives on the challenges posed by misinformation, fake news, and the broader implications of unbridled digital platforms. A recurring theme across all panelists' remarks was the need to address the fundamental issues of trust, misinformation, and the effectiveness of current regulatory frameworks.

Dr. Muhammad Fareed Zafar's insights focused on the critical trust deficit in traditional media, which has led the public to increasingly rely on social media for news. He argued that misinformation on social platforms, although not new, has been exacerbated by a breakdown in the credibility of mainstream media outlets. He emphasized that the issue of fake news is not exclusive to Pakistan but a global concern, citing incidents like the U.S. Capitol Hill breach and similar occurrences in Britain. Dr. Zafar highlighted the ineffectiveness of current government initiatives to counter misinformation, criticizing the lack of sincerity in fact-checking processes. He pointed out that efforts to regulate social media through methods such as breaking encryption or monitoring online activity are doomed to fail, given the limitations of technology and the misalignment of the regulatory approach with the realities of global digital infrastructure.

Dr. Taimur Rahman complemented this view by discussing the broader impact of modern technology on society. He drew attention to how technological advancements, particularly in the digital and social media spheres, have transformed traditional industries and communications. Dr. Rahman observed that while misinformation is a widespread issue, much of it is spread out of ignorance rather than malice. He underscored the importance of media literacy and critical thinking as tools to combat misinformation. He argued that rather than focusing on regulation, the emphasis should be on education, particularly in building the capacity of the public to discern credible information. He further critiqued the idea of commercial enterprises regulating social media platforms, likening it to incentivizing police forces through fines, which could lead to potential abuse of authority.

Mr. Usman Shami echoed Dr. Zafar's and Dr. Rahman's concerns by drawing attention to the global nature of the misinformation problem. He pointed out that while the U.S. and Britain have faced significant

challenges, Pakistan's situation is more dire due to the national security implications of persistent disinformation. Mr. Shami also criticized the government's regulatory response, emphasizing that despite the existence of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), its provisions have not been effectively enforced. He argued that the lack of trust in government institutions contributes to the spread of misinformation and that the state should focus on responding to the concerns raised by the public rather than attempting to overly regulate social media. He warned that blocking applications or limiting access to platforms would not provide a sustainable solution to the problem.

Ms. Nighat Dad added a critical perspective, particularly regarding the regulatory environment and the historical context of PECA. She pointed out the contentious nature of the law's development and its subsequent misuse by governments. Ms. Dad emphasized the importance of oversight and accountability in the enforcement of such laws, which are currently underutilized or arbitrarily applied. She also highlighted that the real issue lies not in the creation of new laws but in the effective implementation of existing ones. Her remarks on attracting social media companies to Pakistan underscored the need for a conducive environment for these platforms to operate, citing the example of India's data protection law and the EU's Digital Services Act. Ms. Dad also pointed out the lack of data protection infrastructure and security for staff as key deterrents for global platforms.

While all panelists agreed on the need for reform, they differed in their proposed solutions. Dr. Zafar and Dr. Rahman stressed the importance of addressing the root causes of misinformation, such as the trust deficit in traditional media and the ignorance surrounding digital literacy, rather than focusing solely on regulatory measures. Dr. Sawera and Mr. Safdar stressed the importance of educating the masses about the merits and demerits of social media, whereas, Mr. Shami and Ms. Dad focused more on the shortcomings of the regulatory framework and the need for a practical approach to enforcement, which balances the demands of security with the freedom of expression.

Together, these perspectives suggest a multifaceted problem that cannot be solved by any single approach. The issues of fake news, cybersecurity, and social media regulation require a combination of technological, educational, and legal solutions. The general consensus among the panelists was that the current regulatory measures are not enough and that there needs to be greater collaboration between government agencies, civil society, and the private sector to effectively address the challenges posed by social media. It was clear from the discussion that while regulation is necessary, it must be balanced with the protection of fundamental rights, particularly freedom of speech, and should be accompanied by efforts to build public trust and media literacy.

Conclusion

The roundtable discussion on social media regulation was a critical platform for examining the complexities surrounding misinformation, disinformation, and the role of digital communication in modern society. Given the rapid growth and influence of social media, this RTD provided a much-needed space to explore the challenges faced by Pakistan and other nations in managing the spread of false or misleading

information online. The entire discussion focused on the intersection of technology, law, and societal dynamics, with a keen emphasis on understanding how social media platforms contribute to shaping public opinion and discourse.

The panelists highlighted the global nature of the misinformation problem, noting that even major democratic countries, such as the U.S. and the U.K., are grappling with the impact of fake news, particularly in political contexts. It was made clear that while the issue is not unique to Pakistan, the consequences of disinformation here have far-reaching implications for national security and social stability. Participants stressed the need to recognize the multifaceted nature of misinformation, which often spreads through ignorance rather than malicious intent, and the challenges it presents to both governments and citizens alike.

Furthermore, the discussions revealed significant gaps in the existing legal and regulatory frameworks, particularly concerning the implementation and enforcement of laws like the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA). While laws exist to curb cybercrimes, their application remains inconsistent, and public trust in regulatory bodies is often low. The panelists emphasized the importance of creating a balanced regulatory environment that fosters public trust, accountability, and transparency in addressing digital misinformation. The importance of building public media literacy and improving the enforcement of existing laws was underscored throughout the session, providing valuable insights for future policy development on this critical issue.

Recommendations

Based on the panel discussion on regulating unbridled social media, the following key recommendations have been derived:

1. **Strengthen Media Literacy Programs:** Implement nationwide education programs to improve media literacy, helping the public discern credible information from disinformation. Media literacy should be a core component of school curriculums to foster critical thinking skills from an early age.
2. **Promote Transparent Social Media Regulation:** Develop clear and transparent guidelines for social media platforms to operate in Pakistan, ensuring that regulations are enforced fairly and consistently without overreach or misuse of authority.
3. **Ensure Fair Enforcement of PECA and Raise Awareness:** Establish independent oversight for the fair enforcement of PECA and launch public awareness campaigns to educate citizens about cyber laws and the consequences of disinformation.
4. **Improve Inter-Agency Collaboration:** Facilitate better coordination between regulatory bodies like FIA, NAB, and the judiciary to effectively tackle misinformation and cybercrimes. A unified approach is essential for improving the impact of regulatory measures.
1. **Enforce Accountability for Disinformation:** Strengthen legal frameworks to hold individuals or organizations accountable for the deliberate spread of disinformation, especially when it poses a direct threat to national security or public order.

2. **Develop a National Framework for Social Media Governance:** Establish a comprehensive national policy on social media governance that balances freedom of expression with the need to combat harmful content and disinformation.
3. **Create Incentives for Social Media Platforms:** Attract international social media platforms to operate in Pakistan by providing incentives such as tax breaks, security for staff, and a robust data protection environment.
4. **Promote Local Alternatives to Foreign Platforms:** Encourage the development and growth of local social media platforms that align with national interests, ensuring they are insulated from external political pressures and can offer a space for more responsible discourse.
5. **Encourage Public Engagement with Government Communication:** Develop strategies for the government to actively engage with the public on social media, using these platforms to disseminate accurate and factual information directly from reliable sources.
6. **Regularly Update Cybersecurity Laws:** Continuously update cybersecurity laws to keep pace with the fast-evolving digital landscape, ensuring that they address new threats and vulnerabilities posed by emerging technologies.
7. **Support Independent Fact-Checking Initiatives:** Fund and support independent fact-checking organizations to verify news content on social media, providing the public with a reliable source of truth.
8. **Improve Trust in Government Communication:** Work towards rebuilding public trust in government communication by being more transparent, consistent, and evidence-based in addressing public concerns on social media platforms.
9. **Invest in Digital Infrastructure for Data Protection:** Invest in secure digital infrastructure to ensure that personal data is protected from misuse, establishing a legal framework for data protection that aligns with international standards.
10. **Develop Clear Legal Frameworks for Social Media Content Moderation:** Create legal frameworks that clarify the roles and responsibilities of social media platforms in moderating content, ensuring they operate fairly while respecting user rights.
11. **Combat the Monetization of Misinformation:** Take measures to regulate the monetization of content on social media platforms, particularly when it involves the spread of misinformation for personal or financial gain.
12. **Foster Public-Private Partnerships for Misinformation Awareness:** Encourage collaboration between government, civil society, and the private sector to promote responsible social media use and combat misinformation through shared resources and expertise.
13. **Encourage a Proactive Approach to Addressing Misinformation:** Adopt a proactive stance in combating misinformation by addressing issues before they escalate. Encourage the public and government agencies to act based on verified facts, rather than reactively to sensationalized claims.

Annexure-A: Newspaper articles for content analysis

Sr. No.	Date	News paper	Author	Title	Web link
1.	18-01-2024	Express Tribune	Durdana Najam	Judges in the crosshairs of social media trolling	https://tribune.com.pk/story/2453576/judges-in-the-crosshairs-of-social-media-trolling
2.	18-03-3034	Express Tribune	Our Correspondent	Shocking surge seen in sacrilegious activities on social media	https://tribune.com.pk/story/2459751/shocking-surge-seen-in-sacrilegious-activities-on-social-media
3.	03-04-2024	Express Tribune	Dr Raashid Wali Janjua	The perils of social media	https://tribune.com.pk/story/2461444/the-perils-of-social-media
4.	16-05-2024	Express Tribune	Inam Ul Haque	Perils of uncontrolled exposure in the age of AI-driven social media	https://tribune.com.pk/story/2466813/perils-of-uncontrolled-exposure-in-the-age-of-ai-driven-social-media
5.	08-08-2024	Express Tribune	News Desk	Survey highlights gender disparity in social media usage in Pakistan	https://tribune.com.pk/story/2486433/survey-highlights-gender-disparity-in-social-media-usage-in-pakistan
6.	09-09-2024	Express Tribune	M Nadeem Nadir	Manipulative tactics of social media	https://tribune.com.pk/story/2494619/manipulative-tactics-of-social-media
7.	27-10-2024	Express Tribune	News Desk	Social media: a rumour mill?	https://tribune.com.pk/letter/2256231/social-media-a-rumour-mill
8.	25-02-2024	Dawn	Muna Khan	Smoke and mirrors?	https://www.dawn.com/news/1816930
9.	19-03-2024	Dawn	Arifa Noor	Unruly social media	https://www.dawn.com/news/1822449
10.	27-04-2024	Dawn	Asad Baig	Censorship and disinformation	https://www.dawn.com/news/1829946
11.	04-06-2024	Dawn	Arifa Noor	A changing world	https://www.dawn.com/news/1837684
12.	09-06-2024	Dawn	Sheraz Khan Rajput	MEDIA:FIGHTING FAKE NEWS	https://www.dawn.com/news/1838759
13.	24-07-2024	Dawn		Individuals with no understanding of social media dishing out 'digital terrorism' labels: Imran	https://www.dawn.com/news/1847724
14.	01-09-2024	Dawn		Under the influence	https://epaper.dawn.com/DetailImage.php?StoryImage=01_09_2024_007_001

15.	02-09-2024	Dawn	Haider Rifaat	The focus should be on creating safer digital spaces': Pakistani stars speak out against cyberbullying	https://images.dawn.com/news/1192673
16.	29-04-2024	Dawn	Staff Reporter	'Women more prone to online hate speech'	https://www.dawn.com/news/1830295
17.	12-07-2024	Dawn	Staff Reporter	Of influencers and twisted influences	https://www.dawn.com/news/1845321
18.	15-07-2024	Dawn	Uzma Shah	A dangerous tool	https://www.dawn.com/news/1845950
19.	28-10-2024	The News		Social media — a boon or bane for our social fabric	https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1221442-social-media-a-boon-or-bane-for-our-social-fabric
20.	09-02-2024	The News	News Desk	Social media risks	https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1155787-social-media-risks
21.	22-01-2024	The News	Web Desk	500 social media accounts found involved in smear campaign against judiciary: info minister	https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/1150302-500-social-media-accounts-found-involved-in-smear-campaign-against-judiciary-info-minister
22.	17-05-2024	The News	We Desk	Social media use linked to smoking and vaping: Alarming statistics revealed	https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/1190015-social-media-use-linked-to-smoking-and-vaping-alarming-statistics-revealed
23.	01-09-2024	The News	Zahid Asghar	Digital junk food	https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1225872-digital-junk-food
24.	29-09-2024	The News	Muhammad Daud Khan	Another flare-up and (anti-)social media	https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/1234824-another-flare-up-and-anti-social-media
25.	17-10-2024	The News		HEC warns public against scam calls, fake social media pages	https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/1240890-hec-warns-public-against-scam-calls-fake-social-media-pages

Annexure-B: ACTION PLAN

Action Plan for Strengthening Social Media Regulation and Combating Disinformation.

Actions	Short Term (6-12 months)	Long Term (1-3 years)	KPI	Institutional Responsibility
Media Literacy Programs	- Launch nationwide media literacy campaigns targeting schools and communities.	- Develop and implement a comprehensive policy balancing freedom of expression with measures to combat harmful content and disinformation.	- Percentage of schools incorporating media literacy.	- Ministry of Education, -Media Regulatory Authorities, -School Boards
	- Integrate basic media literacy modules into existing school curriculums.	- Regularly review and revise the framework based on emerging technologies and trends.	- Number of students and teachers trained in media literacy.	-Ministry of Education, -Media Regulatory Authorities
Transparent Social Media Regulation	- Draft and publish clear guidelines for social media platforms operating in Pakistan.	- Provide funding and technical support to promote the development of local social media platforms aligned with national interests.	- Number of consultations held with stakeholders on social media regulation.	-Ministry of Information Technology, -Ministry of Law & Justice, Social Media Regulatory Authorities
	- Host consultations with key stakeholders, including tech companies and civil society, to ensure balanced regulations.	- Encourage partnerships between local developers and global technology firms for knowledge sharing.	- Number of social media platforms adhering to regulations.	- Ministry of Information Technology, - Ministry of Law & Justice
Fair Enforcement of PECA	- Establish an independent oversight body for PECA to ensure impartial enforcement.	- Invest in robust digital infrastructure for secure data storage and protection.	- Reduction in misinformation cases identified by independent oversight bodies.	- Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), - Ministry of Law & Justice, - PECA Oversight Body
	- Conduct public awareness campaigns to educate citizens on cyber laws and their rights under PECA.	- Pass legislation aligned with international data protection standards to safeguard user privacy.	- Percentage increase in public knowledge of PECA laws.	- Ministry of Law & Justice, - Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), - Ministry of Information

Inter-Agency Collaboration	- Develop inter-agency protocols for effective coordination between FIA, Police service of Pakistan, and judiciary to address cybercrimes.	- Create a central task force for faster response to misinformation and cyber threats.	- Number of successful joint operations and resolutions of cybercrimes.	- Ministry of Interior, - Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), Police service of Pakistan
	- Create a central task force for faster response to misinformation and cyber threats.	- Develop clear legal frameworks outlining the roles and responsibilities of social media platforms in moderating content.	- Average response time to cyber threats and misinformation.	- Ministry of Information Technology, - FIA, - Police, - Ministry of Law & Justice
		- Ensure these frameworks include mechanisms for users to appeal content moderation decisions.	- Number of content moderation appeals processed.	- Ministry of Information Technology, - Social Media Regulatory Authorities
Accountability for Disinformation	- Strengthen penalties for individuals and organizations involved in spreading disinformation that threatens national security.	- Implement early-warning systems for detecting misinformation campaigns.	- Reduction in incidents of disinformation causing harm to national security.	- Ministry of Information Technology, - Ministry of Interior, - Ministry of Law & Justice
	- Launch pilot programs for real-time disinformation detection tools.	- Develop rapid response teams to address and debunk misinformation before it spreads widely.	- Number of disinformation campaigns successfully identified and countered.	- Ministry of Information Technology, - Ministry of Interior, - Law Enforcement Agencies

Government Communication Strategy	- Improve government communication on social media by disseminating accurate and timely information.	- Establish transparency benchmarks for all government communication on social media.	- Percentage increase in public trust and engagement with government communications.	- Ministry of Information, - Media Regulatory Authorities,
	- Establish dedicated teams for fact-checking and responding to misinformation.	- Use public surveys and feedback loops to improve the effectiveness and reliability of communication channels.	- Number of fact-checks performed and issues resolved.	- Ministry of Information, - Media Regulatory Authorities
Public-Private Partnerships	- Partner with tech companies and civil society organizations to create awareness campaigns on responsible social media use.	- Begin funding independent fact-checking organizations to verify and debunk misinformation.	- Number of awareness campaigns launched and funded.	- Ministry of Information Technology, - Ministry of Communication, - Tech Companies, - Civil Society
	- Begin funding independent fact-checking organizations to verify and debunk misinformation.	- Expand digital literacy programs to include vocational training for professionals in media and IT sectors.	- Number of partnerships established with tech companies and civil society.	- Ministry of Information Technology, - Ministry of Education, - Higher Education Institutions
		- Partner with higher education institutions to conduct research on misinformation patterns and regulatory best practices.	- Number of research projects or studies conducted in collaboration with academic institutions.	- Ministry of Information Technology, - Higher Education Institutions
Incentives for Social Media Platforms	- Announce tax incentives and streamlined operational processes to attract international platforms to Pakistan.	- Engage with international organizations like the UN, EU, and major tech companies to share expertise and resources in combating misinformation and improving digital safety.	- Number of international platforms operating in Pakistan.	- Ministry of Information Technology, - Ministry of Finance, - International Relations

Brief Bios of the NIPP Team

Dr. Naveed Elahi

Dean NIPP. Prior to this, he served in the public sector in various departments for more than three decades. He did his master's and PhD from King's College London, UK. He is the author of several books and taught national security, public policy, and foreign policy of Pakistan at various universities.

Ms. Bushra Bashir

Senior Research Associate at NIPP. She is an Information Group officer with nearly 25 years of experience, having worked across various departments under the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the Punjab government, and the Civil Services Academy. She holds an MBA from the University of Hull, UK, and a Master's in Media and Communication Technology from Brunel University, London. She occasionally writes on social issues in national dailies and has a strong interest in public policy.

Dr. Saif Ullah Khalid

Senior Research Associate at NIPP. He completed his PhD, from Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, where his doctoral thesis was "Theory and Practice of police corruption control in Pakistan Case Studies of three Police Departments". He has also served as a Strategic Planning Expert in USAID projects in Pakistan.

Mr. Habib Ullah Khan

Additional Director Publications and Archives at NIPP. Prior to this role, he also served as Additional Director of Administration and Finance at the National Institute of Management Lahore. Previously held positions as Director I.T. and Deputy Director I.T. at the National Management College Lahore.

Dr. Ali Abbas

Research Associate at NIPP. He served in public and private academic and research institutes for more than ten years. He did his PhD in Economics from NCBA&E Lahore, where his doctoral thesis is on "Key Driving Factors of Business Cycle Synchronisation among Pakistan and its Trading Partners". He is the author of several research articles published in national and international journals in the field of environmental and development economics.

Ms. Faryal Maaz

Research Associate at NIPP. She has completed an M.Phil in Commerce and M.Sc in Accounting & Finance from Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan. Previously, she has served at SMEDA, Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, and Centre of Excellence for CPEC (PIDE). She has experience in policy research at public sector organisations and is also author of academic publications.

Mr. Jahanzeb Waheed

Research Associate at NIPP, currently a PhD candidate in Development Studies at the University of Lisbon, Portugal, holds an MSc in Development Studies from the University of Glasgow, UK. He has taught Public Administration and Analysis of Institutions courses and worked for the Planning and Development Department, Punjab.

Dr. Sumreen Khalil

Research Fellow at the NIPP. She holds a PhD in Total Quality Management from the University of the Punjab, Lahore (2021). With prior experience in local government administration and lecturing at prestigious Pakistani universities, notably at the University of the Punjab, Lahore, since 2015, she has published articles in HEC recognized national and international journals.

Dr. Muhammad Abdullah

Research Fellow at NIPP. He graduated with a Bachelor of Dental Surgery (BDS) in 2011 from Lahore Medical and Dental College and later obtained a master's in public health (MPH) from Griffith University, Australia, in 2017. He has also been awarded by the governor as a "Best volunteer" for healthcare in Punjab.

Ms. Sabina Babar

Research Fellow at NIPP holds an MPhil in International Relations from Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad. She has served as a Research Officer at the Centre for Aerospace and Security Studies, Lahore. She has held the position of a Researcher at Strategic Vision Institute, Islamabad. Prior to that she has also worked as a lecturer at the University of Central Punjab. She is a prolific writer with publications in national and international journals.

Mr. Sajid Sultan

Statistical Analyst at NIPP. Before that, he was a Data Analyst at the Population Welfare Department, Govt of Punjab. He has also served in many other institutions as Lecturer as well as Controller of Examination. He has done MPhil in Statistics from Minhaj University Lahore.

Brief Bios of the Panelists

Mr. Muhammad Farooq Mazhar

Mr. Muhammad Farooq Mazhar is DG NIM Lahore, also holding the rank of Additional Inspector General. With 31 years of experience, he has served in a variety of field and staff roles in both federal and provincial governments in Pakistan. He has held positions such as District Police Officer and Regional Police Officer in various districts and divisions of Punjab. At other command assignments in police, he headed various functional units and wings e.g. operations, elite police, special branch, traffic, finance and welfare, etc. He also commanded an intelligence agency in Punjab and worked for the private sector before joining the service.

Prof. Savera Mujib Shami

Prof. Savera Mujib Shami is an accomplished academician with over 19 years of experience. Currently, she serves as the Professor and Chairperson of the Department of Digital Media at the School of Communication Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. Her extensive academic background, coupled with her wealth of expertise, has positioned her as a thought leader in the media studies house.

Mr. Safdar Ali Khan

Mr. Safdar Ali Khan is an M.A LLB from Punjab University and has practiced as an advocate from 1985 to 2011. After that, he engaged himself in Journalism and currently he runs his own newspaper as Chief Editor of Daily Sarzameen. He is also known for his columns and analysis of the current affairs of the country.

Dr. Muhammad Fareed Zaffar

Dr. Muhammad Fareed Zaffar received his Ph.D. in Computer Science from Duke University in 2005 and his BSc. (Hons) degree from LUMS. His primary research interests are in the areas of security, privacy, and Internet measurement. His recent work focuses on social networks, online fraud, and cybercrime and his previous work looked at enabling public sector reform through technology and the use of information and communication technologies for development.

Mr. Taimur Rahman

Dr. Taimur Rahman has been teaching political science at LUMS since 2002. He has also taught economics at the Lahore School of Economics. He holds a Ph.D. in Political economy from the University of London and a Masters in International Relations from the University of Sussex. He has authored the book *The Class*

Structure of Pakistan published by Oxford University Press. He is also a political activist and spokesperson for the band Laal.

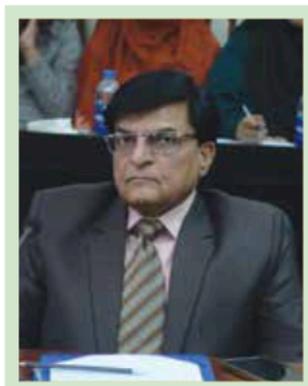
Mr. Usman Shami

Mr. Usman Shami is a graduate of the Institute of Business Administration, Karachi, one of the most reputed business schools in the country. After his bachelor's, he completed Masters in International Business from Hult International Business School, Shanghai. Currently, he is managing one of Pakistan's largest digital media houses Daily Pakistan which has an online following of over 25 million on various digital media platforms.

Ms. Nighat Dad

Ms. Nighat Dad is the founder and Executive Director of the Digital Rights Foundation and a global pioneer in advocating for digital rights. She serves on the UN Secretary-General's High-Level Advisory Board on AI (HLAB) and is a founding member of Meta's Oversight Board. Additionally, Nighat is part of the French President's tech leader's cohort, advising on digital governance for the French government and helping to define strategic priorities.

Glimpses of the Roundtable Discussion



The Panelists and Team NIPP



NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC POLICY (NIPP)
Roundtable Discussion on
Regulating the Unbridled Social Media: A Policy Perspective
November 04, 2024



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|----------|---|--|---|---|
| 1st Row: | Mr. Imtiaz Ullah Khan,
Asst. Director (PAA), NIPP | Mr. Tamur Rashid,
AP at LUMS. | Ms. Baithe Bashir,
Senior Research Associate, NIPP | Dr. Saima Ghani,
Chairperson, Dept. of Digital Media School of Communication Studies, PU |
| L to R: | Mr. Usman Shams,
Journalist Daily Pakistan. | Mr. Sohrab Ali Khan,
Chief Editor, Daily Saqamain | Dr. Iqbal Malik,
Rector NIPP | Dr. Naveed Elahi,
Dean NIPP |
| | Mrs. Hagar Dadi,
Founder of Digital Right Foundation | Dr. Farzeel Zafar,
AP at LUMS | Gen. (r) Muhammad Usman,
Dewanding Staff, INAC | Mr. Muhammad Farooq Masher,
DG NIM, Lahore |
| 2nd Row: | Mr. Saad Sultan,
Statistical Analyst, NIPP | Dr. Muhammad AbulBakr,
Research Fellow, NIPP | Dr. Zariah Taseem,
Mr. Muhammad Subman Khan, | Dr. Amrah Malik,
Dr. Ali Azhar,
Research Associate, NIPP |
| | Mr. Maqta Kamal Pasha, | Dr. Raza Zaidi, | | Dr. Sumreen Khalil,
Research Fellow, NEPP
Ms. Saima Sabir,
Research Fellow, NIPP |

National Institute of Public Policy (NIPP)

The National Institute of Public Policy is an integral unit of the National School of Public Policy (NSPP) and acts as a “Think Tank” for the federal government. It is the principal research arm of NSPP. With a team of researchers and in collaboration with its partner institutions, NIPP provides research-based policy advice to the Federal Government on matters of public policy and advises it on the issues of policy significance referred to it.

Vision

An internationally recognized public policy research institute, acting as an independent think tank of the Government of Pakistan and a hub for public policy research in/on Pakistan.

Mission

NIPP’s Mission is to improve the quality of public policy decision-making and service delivery by creating fresh knowledge and evidence and continuously improving the data, information, and communication management systems on key public policy issues in Pakistan.



87 Sharah-e-Quaid-e-Azam, Lahore, Pakistan



