Understanding Misinformation in Nepal

Expert Views on Definitions, Determinants, Solutions and Way Forward

Ujjwal Acharya & Shehnaz Banu

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PURAK ASIA

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This publication is an occasional paper of Purak Asia. It presents findings from an expert survey and provides insights into how experts perceive misinformation, its causes, its societal impact, and the interventions required to address it. The analysis informs wider debates on misinformation and the evolving information ecosystem in Nepal.

Author : Ujjwal Acharya and Shehnaz Banu
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Content

Introduction

Misinformation, for this paper, is any false or misleading information in the public domain, which today has become the biggest threat to democracy, various norms and social harmony. In early 2024, the World Economic Forum (WEF) ranked the spread of misinformation as one of the greatest threats to humanity. It said that growing distrust of information and media and governments as sources, will deepen polarized views – a vicious cycle that could trigger civil unrest and possibly confrontation (WEF, 2024, p. 8). The WEF ranking was not unexpected because for many years "disinformation ha[d] been widely seen as a pressing challenge for democracies worldwide" (Bateman & Jackson, 2023, p. 1).

Misinformation is not a new phenomenon, as lies have probably existed ever since humans learned to communicate with each other. It is "more prevalent or harmful because social media platforms have disrupted our communication systems" (McKay & Tenove, 2021, p. 703). The threat posed by misinformation, therefore, is alarming because of the unprecedented rate at which internet-based technology, which contributes to its spread, has grown.

The impact of misinformation on politics has been varied. The Brexit campaign in the United Kingdom (2017) and the election of Donald Trump in the United States in 2016 are among the better-known examples of disinformation campaigns intended to disrupt democratic order (Bennett & Livingston, 2018, p. 122). Misinformation seemed to have influenced the results of elections in those nations (Silverman, 2016; Read 2016; Henkel, 2021) while in others like Nepal, while misinformation has been abundant, it has had no significant impact on election results (Shrestha, 2022, p. 4). It is important to note that "while the discussion is often focused on the U.S., political disinformation, and the Facebook newsfeed, information disorder is a global threat" (Wardle, 2018, p. 5) and every country – both developed or developing – has faced it in one form or another. With increasing penetration of the internet and social media, misinformation spreads in developing countries as fast as it does in developed countries (Haque et al, 2018, p. 2). It is worrisome that no democratic nation

is immune to communication breakdowns where sources from within and without spread disinformation that disrupts the once authoritative information flows from government officials to the public through the mainstream press (Bennett & Livingston, 2018, p. 127). In other words, the once reliable information carried by the media is no longer considered reliable.

Studies have shown that political misinformation is mostly found online (Kanozia et al, 2021, p. 60) possibly because it draws much attention of the public as well as researchers, and the impacts are also well documented. There is also documentation on the negative impacts of misinformation in other fields. In health, as evidenced during the COVID outbreak, misinformation can delay or prevent effective care, in some cases threatening the lives of individuals (Wang et al, 2019, p. 124). Arguably, therefore, there is growing agreement on the adverse impacts of misinformation across disciplines.

Nepal has experienced problems caused by misinformation, the worst of which had taken place before the arrival of social media. In 2000, a false claim about the Indian film actor Hrithik Roshan telling a TV interviewer that he "hated" Nepal and its people had sparked riots in Kathmandu, during which at least five [sic] people were killed, and hundreds were injured (Bhattarai, 2023, pp. 221–227). Another fallout of misinformation was the 2009 lynching of 18 people [in multiple locations across Nepal] following rumors claiming that kidnappers were on the lookout for children to abduct (Acharya, 2023, p. 12). These were the extreme cases, but misinformation did have some role in stirring tensions.

There have been studies suggesting that a significant amount of misinformation has been circulating and has been having varied impacts on Nepali society. The database of the non-governmental organization Center for Media Research – Nepal (CMR-Nepal) shows that in-country fact-checking initiatives had published 408 reports on misplaced facts between March 2020 to July 2024. Fifty-six percent of the fact-checked misinformation had originated in social media, and 36 percent in the traditional print or online media (online news portals). Further, a 2021 CMR-Nepal survey (2022, p. 9) on use of social media had concluded that 9 of 10 social media users had received

misinformation online in the past seven days, mostly from Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter (now X).

Combating misinformation is proving to be a daunting task, particularly because of the speed at which it is spreading. It has proven to be "difficult to define, understand, and measure, let alone address" (Bateman & Jackson, 2023, p. 1) but there also are numerous measures that have been employed to tackle the problem. Bateman & Jackson (2023, p. 5) listed 10 interventions with varying degrees of effectiveness and implementation difficulties. The interventions include supporting local journalism, media literacy education, fact-checking; labeling social media content; counter-messaging strategies; cybersecurity for elections and campaigns; statecraft, deterrence and disruption; removing inauthentic asset networks, reducing data collection and targeted ads; and changing recommendation algorithms.

What is clear is that efforts to counter misinformation will not be easy. Bateman and Jackson (2023, p.88) states:

> It is likely to be a long journey through a dark thicket, with many wrong turns and pitfalls along the way… yet democracies have no choice but to undertake this difficult journey—hopefully guided by the light of evidence, no matter how dim this light may be.

The lessons learnt from the efforts add to the shared understanding of the problem and its impacts and thereby contribute towards the design and implementation of effective countermeasures. The starting point for all of the efforts underway in different parts of the world is a shared understanding of definitions and key terminologies. Without clear, shared definitions, conversations among academics, technology companies, politicians, educators, and civil society are meaningless (Wardle, 2018, p. 5).

In Nepal, digital media, including websites, social media, and online platforms, have become increasingly dominant in the information ecosystem, pushing traditional media like newspapers, radio, and television behind (Acharya, 2025, pp. 9-24). There has been a significant increase in internet subscribers

alongside high mobile phone adaption, and as result many Nepalis use platforms such as Facebook, TikTok, and YouTube as their primary sources of news and information, even though their trust on the platforms remains low (Dahal, 2025, pp. 35-53). These digital channels have also contributed to the increase in the spread of misinformation, by making it omnipresent online and reaching 9 of 10 internet users (CMR-Nepal, 2022, p. 9). Surveys indicate that most Nepali social media users have encountered and are concerned about misinformation.

Key contributors to the spread of misinformation are social media users and influencers, who often share viral content without verification. Among them are cadre of political parties, politicians who organize cyber forces and use social media to manipulate narratives, promote agendas, and attack opponents, particularly during elections (Dahal & Acharya, 2025, pp. 25-50). There have also been instances of foreign governments, notably China and India, disseminating false narratives through social media and state-sponsored media outlets to influence public opinion and decision-making in Nepal (Dahal & Acharya, 2025, pp. 25-50). Traditional media outlets, whose gatekeeping role has been weakening, are sometimes involved in spreading misinformation due to factors like sensationalism, political affiliations, or lack of verification, thus degrading public trust (Acharya, 2025, pp. 9-24). This decline is reflected in national surveys, which show a steady drop in media trust between 2017 and 2022 (Kathmandu University & Interdisciplinary Analysts, 2023, p. 40), and in recent provincial data from Gandaki, where nearly one-third of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the media (Sapkota, Adhikari & Pathak, 2025, p. 9). The misinformation poses a concern for democracy in Nepal and is expected to worsen with the advancement of artificial intelligence (Pathak & KC, 2025, p. 7).

This study is a step towards exploring the understanding of misinformation, its definition, and impacts, among people – collectively referred to as experts – working to tackle the issue in Nepal. By capturing expert insights from diverse fields such as journalism, policy, law, digital rights, and education, the survey seeks to build an evidence base that reflects the complexity of the problem in Nepal's fast-changing information ecosystem. Therefore, a

nuanced understanding from those actively working to address it is essential to develop effective interventions and policies. Various criteria were used to select the experts for this study (See: Materials and methods). The main research questions are:

RQ 1. How do experts in Nepal define misinformation?
RQ 2. What do experts in Nepal think about the current misinformation debates?
RQ 3. According to experts in Nepal, why do people believe and share misinformation?
RQ 4. What do experts in Nepal think about the effectiveness of interventions against misinformation?
RQ 5. How do experts in Nepal think the study of misinformation could be improved?

Materials and methods

The purpose of this expert survey is to collect context-specific information on how misinformation is defined, perceived, and addressed in Nepal. Although elsewhere around the world, research has so far revealed how misinformation affects democracy and social harmony, much less is known about Nepal, which has seen growing digitalisation and the spread of politically oriented content. This study seeks to address this gap by documenting the perceptions of the individuals who are actively involved in combating misinformation, enhancing digital literacy, and shaping public discourse. This study has adapted the questionnaire used by "A survey of expert views on misinformation: Definitions, determinants, solutions, and future of the field" (Altay et al, 2023). This study was published in the Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review (July 2023, Volume 4, Issue 4), a publication of the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government in United States of America.

Selection of experts

The researchers adopted a broad definition of expertise to identify individuals for the study. For selection as respondent, the individual had to meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Has published at least a research article on misinformation in academic journals;
- Has authored news or opinion articles addressing misinformation in newspapers;
- Has participated in initiatives such as fact-checking and media and information literacy;
- Has engaged in grassroots-level initiatives against misinformation;
- Has demonstrated a history of activism against misinformation and for digital rights;
- Has studied misinformation in an academic or professional context; and
- Has participated in national or international conferences or discussions on misinformation.

Efforts were made to minimize the inclusion of non-expert respondents, but the researchers do not claim that all participants met the desired standards of expertise. A measure taken to mitigate the inclusion of non-experts was ensuring that participants met one of the two conditions below:

1. Has conducted rigorous scientific studies on misinformation,
2. Has consistently authored articles on misinformation (at least two publications), and
3. Has actively participated in initiatives or discussions related to misinformation (at least two engagements).

The selection began with the compilation of a list of potential participants. This was achieved through systematic searches on Google Scholar and NepJOL (a repository of Nepali journals) using "misinformation," "disinformation," "fake news," and "information manipulation" as keywords. Additional names were sourced via Google searches for news or opinion articles using the same keywords, and from participant lists of national and international conferences or discussions, particularly those held after 2020. The researchers also reviewed available reports of relevant discussion programs to identify experts.

Contact information for potential participants was obtained through various means, including personal networks, internet searches, and social media platforms. Individuals whose contact details could not be established were excluded. Subsequently, the researchers evaluated the contributions and work of each identified individual and shortlisted 216 experts to be contacted for the survey. This approach was intended to ensure the inclusion of participants with substantive expertise and engagement on the study subject.

The experts were contacted via email between April 18 and June 22, 2024. The email contained detailed information about the study's purpose and included a link to the survey. Additionally, follow-up phone calls were made to remind those contacted about the email and to encourage them to participate. A total of 117 experts accessed the survey and 104 completed the questionnaire. However, four completed surveys were excluded because they were filled by individuals not included in the expert list, suggesting that the link may have been forwarded by someone who had been contacted.

Demographics

The survey questionnaire was distributed to 216 experts across Nepal, including from Bagmati (78), Gandaki (16), Karnali (20), Koshi (12), Lumbini (33), Madhesh (30), Sudur Paschim (25), and two from outside Nepal who are/were involved in Nepali journalism in some capacity. The final sample consisted of 100 respondents (n=100), including 21 females. The mean age of the respondents was 39.10 years, with a standard deviation of 9.24 years. The participants represented all seven provinces of Nepal, although with notable imbalances. Experts from Bagmati Province constituted the largest group (44%), followed by Madhesh and Lumbini provinces (19% each). The remaining participants were from Gandaki (5%), Karnali (5%), Koshi (3%), and Sudur Paschim (3%) provinces. Two percent of respondents resided outside Nepal. Despite efforts to recruit more participants from provinces other than Bagmati, the final distribution remained imbalanced because either the responses were received after the deadline or because those contacted did not respond to the survey.

The majority of the experts had completed a master's degree (58%), followed by those with a bachelor's degree (29%). A smaller proportion held doctoral degrees (8%), while five percent had completed intermediate or high school level of education. For participants with intermediate-level qualifications, the researchers carefully vetted their contributions to the field of misinformation to ensure relevance and expertise.

The largest group of experts (65%) had a background in journalism, media, and communication. Other fields represented included management (11%), law or legal studies (10%), political science (5%), sociology or anthropology (3%), other social sciences (3%), science or information technology (2%), and public health or medicine (1%).

Survey design and procedure

The experts were contacted via email, which included an introduction to the study, its scope, and objectives, along with a link to an online survey. The

survey form was developed in both English and Nepali languages to ensure uniform access for all participants and to reduce confusion that could be created by language and terminology differences. Technical terms were defined for clarity.

Participants completed and signed a consent form before accessing the questions arranged in the following order:

a) Preliminaries (7 demographic questions),
b) Definition of misinformation,
c) Forms of misinformation,
d) Reasons people believe in misinformation,
e) Reasons people share misinformation,
f) General perceptions of statements regarding misinformation and the internet,
g) Actors involved in misinformation,
h) Interventions to combat misinformation,
i) Future directions for the field of misinformation studies, and
j) Perceived contribution to disseminating misinformation in Nepal.

The complete questionnaire is provided in Appendix A.

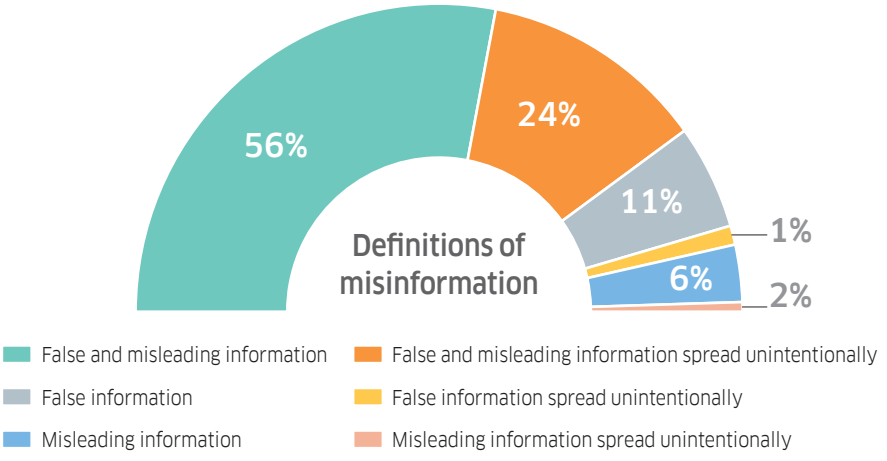
The questions were presented in a fixed order on a single page. Similarly, the response options were displayed in a fixed sequence. The questions and response options were adapted from Altay et al. (2023), with modifications to match the Nepali context. Specifically, some questions—such as those on nationality, political orientation, and methods used to study misinformation—were excluded, while response options relevant to Nepal, such as statements about the impact of misinformation on Nepal's politics, and the perceived contribution to disseminating misinformation were added.

Findings and analysis

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the opinions of experts from different disciplines on various types of content that may constitute misinformation. The findings reveal distinct patterns of agreement and disagreement, reflecting nuanced interpretations of intent, impact, and context.

Defining misinformation

The concept of misinformation was particularly prominent in fields such as journalism, media, and mass communication, which are areas that focus on the societal and communicative impacts of the phenomenon. A majority (56%) of the respondents defined misinformation as "false and misleading information", reflecting a broad consensus on the importance of falsification, and intent embedded in the definition of the term. Some participants had emphasized the unintentional spread of false information (24%), suggesting that a significant minority viewed that intent to deceive was not always a defining characteristic. This suggests that the primary concern was more about the information itself than its origin or intent. Smaller groups described misinformation as either "false information" (11%) or "misleading information" (6%), with limited

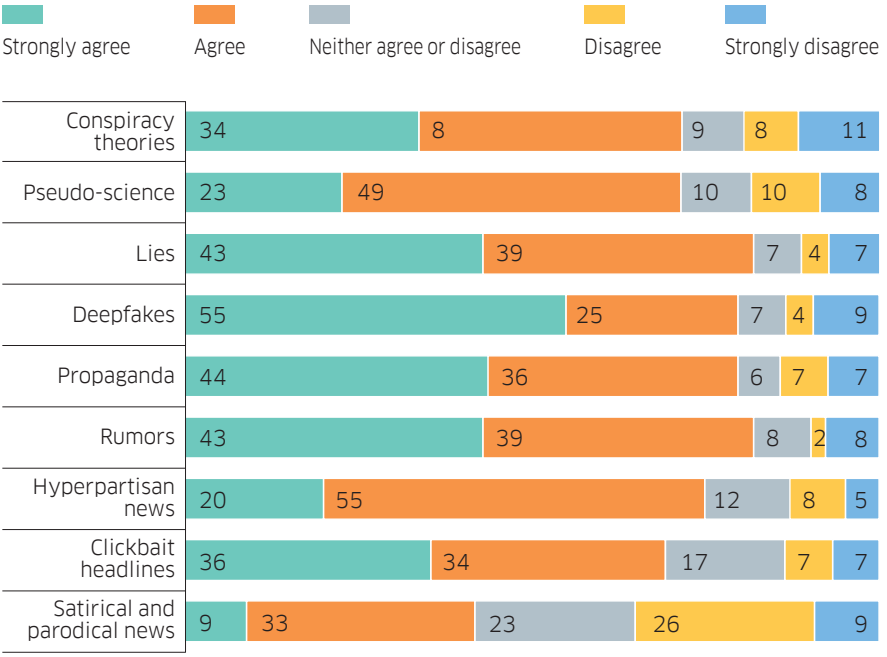


emphasis on unintentionality and indicating a preference for definitions that encompassed both falsity and misdirection. The responses suggested that while most experts agreed on the general nature of misinformation, nuances regarding intent and spread remained areas of differing interpretation.

Overall, respondents from different disciplines interpreted misinformation variously, but they mostly focused on how the information mislead and distorted understanding. Similarly, the study revealed varying levels of agreement among experts regarding what constituted misinformation.

Deepfakes garnered the strongest agreement of being misinformative, with 80 percent of respondents; they said such misinformation reflected the deceptive potential. Lies, propaganda, and rumors also saw high agreement, 82%, 80%, and 82% respectively. Many respondents agreed pseudo-science

To what extent do you agree that following are examples of misinformation?



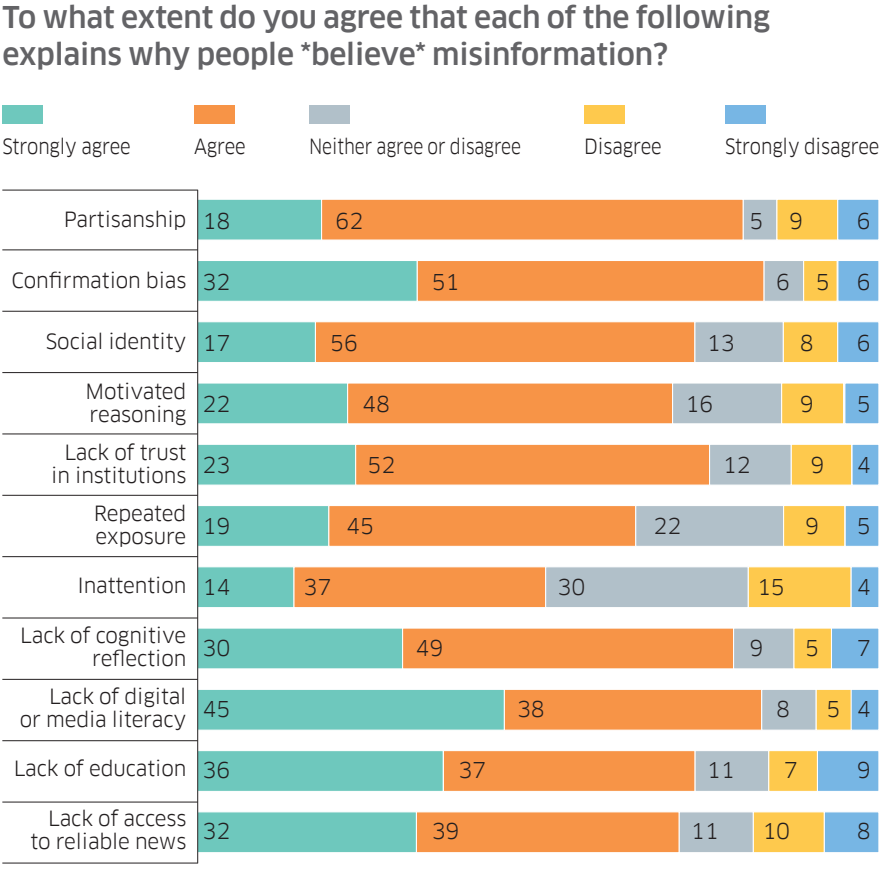
72% and hyper-partisan news 75% were influential, though less deceptive directly. Clickbait headlines were classified as moderate misinformation, with 70 percent agreement reflecting the sensational nature of such content rather than deliberate falsehood. Conspiracy theories elicited mixed reactions, with 72 percent of respondents agreeing that they were misinformative, while 19% disagreed, reflecting varied perspectives on their intent and underlying belief systems. Satirical and parodical news drew the most divided opinions, with only 42% agreement and 35% disagreeing, indicating how the meaning obtained often depends on whether such content is seen as entertainment or commentary (to provoke thought).

These findings indicated that while some types of misinformation, such as deepfakes and lies, were widely recognized, others, like satire and conspiracy theories, were debated. The variation across disciplines underscored the importance of context and intent in defining misinformation, suggesting a need for clearer frameworks to address its many forms effectively.

Why do people believe and share misinformation?

For believing misinformation, confirmation bias 83% of respondents and lack of cognitive reflection 79% were the dominant factors that emphasized the role of cognitive limitations. Social dynamics, such as partisanship (80%) and social identity (73%), were also identified as significant drivers; this highlighted how political and group affiliations influenced belief in false information. In contrast, inattention got less support (51%), implying that carelessness was less important.

When it came to sharing misinformation, social identity (66%) and motivated reasoning (78%) emerged as key reasons, indicating that people shared misinformation to affirm group loyalty or advance personal narratives. In the survey, 69 percent of respondents identified repeated exposure as a key factor in the spread of misinformation, suggesting that social media algorithms, which promote content based on users' prior engagement, may be reinforcing falsehoods by increasing familiarity and perceived credibility. This indicated that the social media algorithms, which are designed to display content that is similar to likes and previous engagement of users, are larger contributors



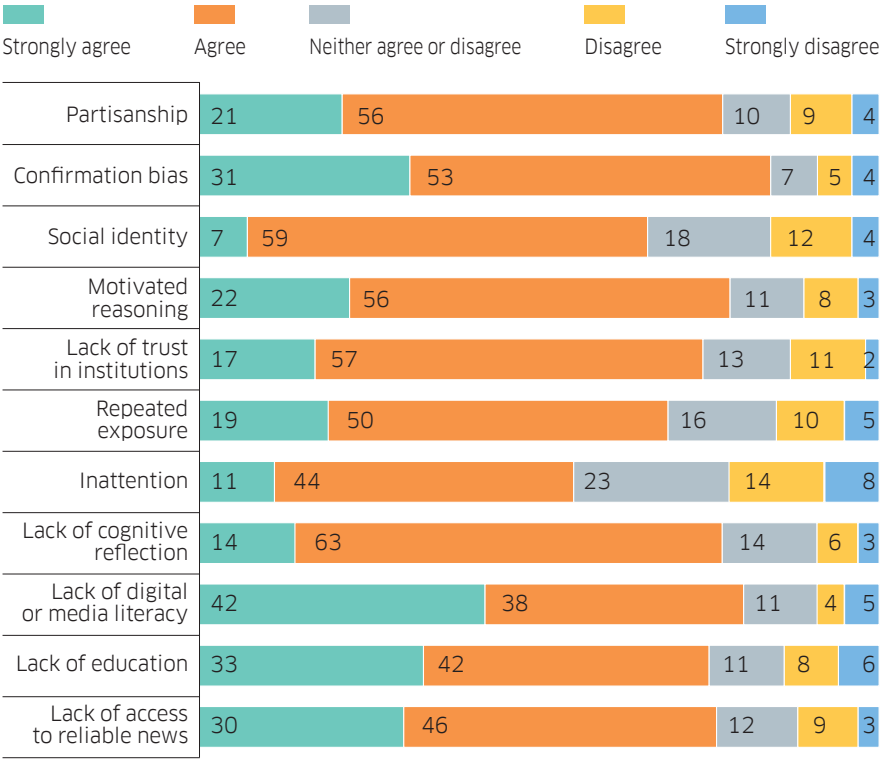
to the spread of misinformation. Hence, the algorithms remain a concern because once an algorithm earns audience trust, it will expose audiences to misinformation that they tend to believe – and share. While lack of trust in institutions played a moderate role in both belief (75%) and sharing (74%), it was not as influential as cognitive or social factors.

Partisanship, confirmation bias, motivated reasoning, and lack of trust in institutions received the strongest agreement overall on why people believed in misinformation across disciplines. The data indicated widespread agreement across disciplines on key factors driving belief in and sharing of misinformation, with partisanship, social identity, confirmation bias, and motivated reasoning

standing out as significant contributors. Journalism professionals consistently showed the strongest agreement on these factors, and emphasized that lack of trust in institutions, repeated exposure, digital/media literacy, and education were reasons contributing to the spread of misinformation. While experts from law and administration also recognized these influences, some neutrality and disagreement were also observed, particularly regarding social identity and institutional trust. Overall, experts from journalism led in acknowledging the complexity of misinformation, reflecting – perhaps – its critical role in understanding and addressing the issue.

Believing in misinformation was tied more to cognitive and literacy gaps while sharing it was heavily influenced by social and ideological motivations,

To what extent do you agree that each of the following explains why people *share* misinformation?

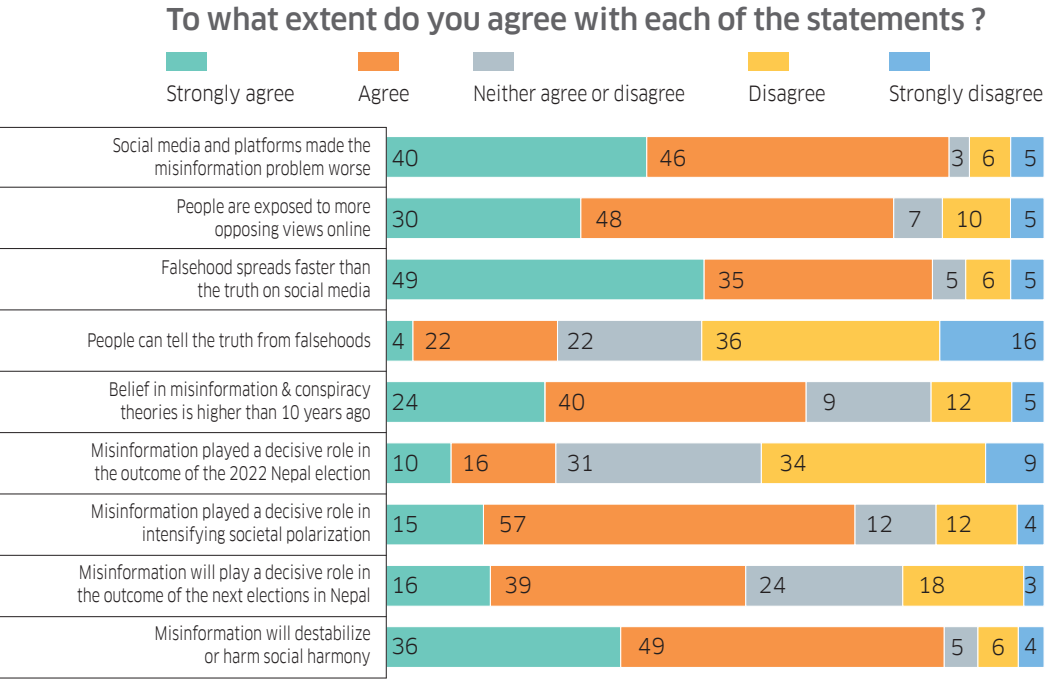


though both behaviors overlapped in being driven by confirmation bias and lack of digital literacy. This broad agreement among experts underscored the multifaceted nature of misinformation, highlighting the necessity for comprehensive strategies to address the diverse contributing factors through interventions focused on:

- Improving digital and media literacy education,
- Promoting critical thinking skills, and
- Addressing social and ideological polarization to mitigate group-driven misinformative behaviors.

Opinions about misinformation and digital media

The study gathered insights from misinformation experts on current debates surrounding misinformation, social media, and echo chambers. The data revealed widespread agreement on the proposition that social media has significantly worsened the misinformation problem, with 86



percent respondents believing that the platforms amplify the spread of false information. Additionally, 84 percent respondents agreed that falsehoods spread faster than truth on social media, pointing to the role of the platforms in the rapid dissemination of misinformation.

While 78 percent agreed that people were also exposed to more opposing views online, this was not enough for mitigating the influence of misinformation. Only 26 respondents believed that people can reliably recognize truth from falsehoods, while 52% disagreed, reflecting skepticism on an individual's ability to navigate misinformation effectively. There was strong concern about misinformation's societal impact, with 64% agreeing that belief in misinformation and conspiracy theories had increased over the past decade. Further, 72 percent believed that misinformation had intensified societal polarization, and 85 percent agreed that it had the potential to destabilize or harm social harmony.

Opinions on the role of misinformation in the 2022 Nepal election were divided, with only 26 percent believing it had played a decisive role, while 43 percent disagreed. However, 55 percent agreed that misinformation will have decisive influence in the coming elections, indicating growing concern about the potential impact.

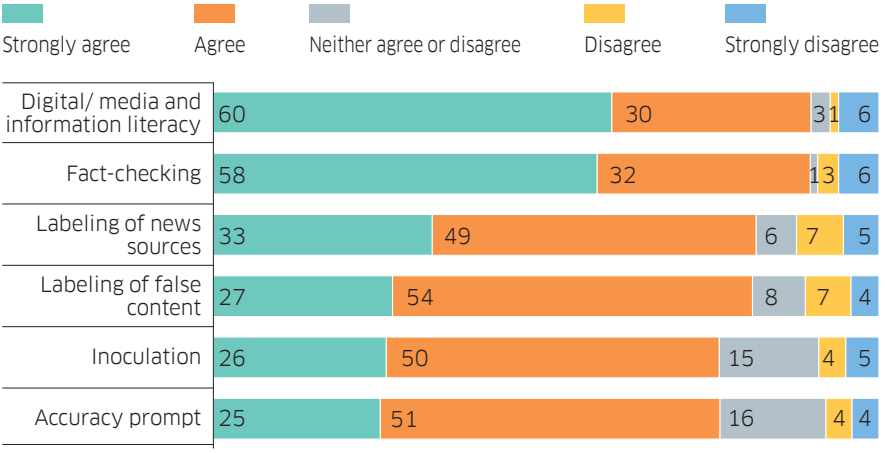
In summary, the data underscored the critical role of social media in spreading misinformation and also indicated the challenges people faced in separating credible information from falsehood. Misinformation, therefore, could lead to significant societal consequences, including further polarization, increased instability, and even greater interference during elections.

What are the solutions to the problem of misinformation?

The research team examined the preferred individual-level interventions and system-level actions against misinformation to assist academics and practitioners in determining solutions that could be explored and implemented.

Considering individual interventions, the findings revealed strong support for digital/media and information literacy and fact-checking as effective tools to

To what extent do you agree that the following tools would be effective to combat misinformation?

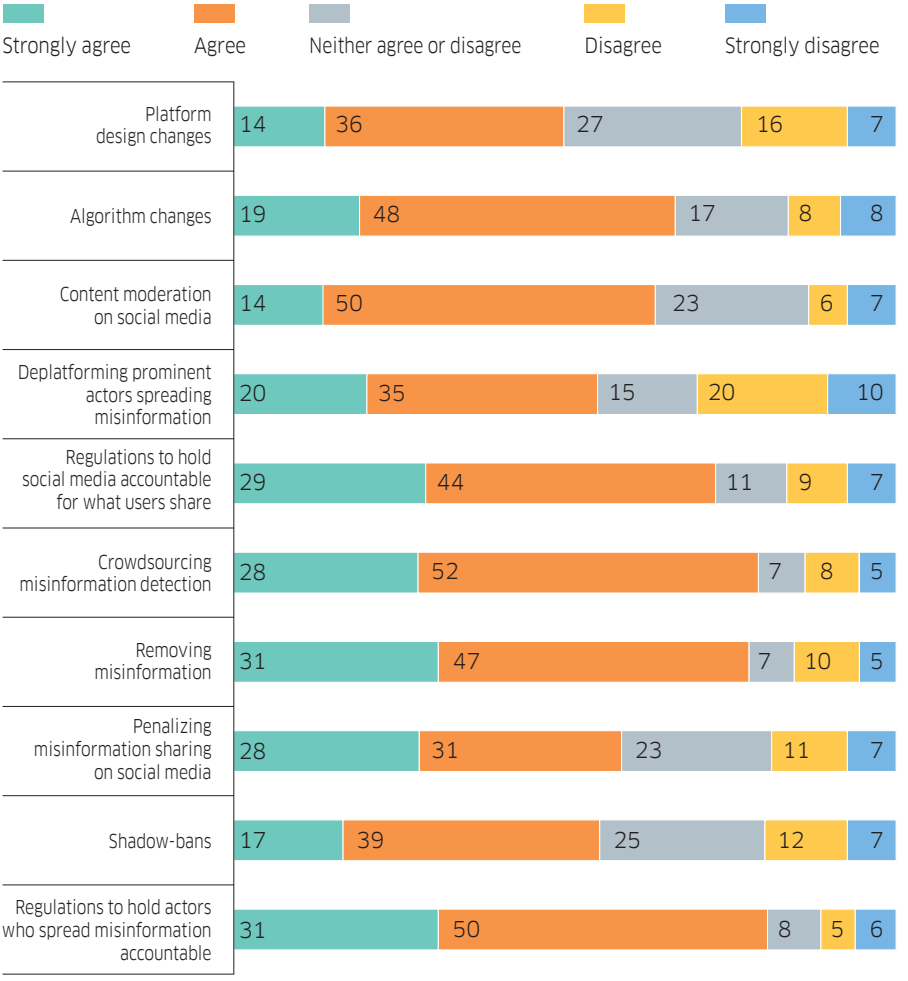


combat misinformation, with 90 percent agreement (combined "strongly agree" and "agree"), respectively. The results underscored the need for empowering individuals with critical thinking skills and tools for verifying information to reduce the spread of falsehoods. Labeling false content and news sources, and inoculation also garnered significant support, with agreement levels ranging from 75 percent to 82 percent. Providing contextual cues was also suggested as a possible way to mitigate misinformation, although the endorsement was not as high compared to that received by literacy and fact-checking. Accuracy prompts received slightly lower but notable agreement at 76 percent, indicating a moderate belief in the efficacy of such cues to nudge individuals toward careful information consumption.

Overall, the findings reflected agreement on the need for multi-faceted approaches to addressing misinformation, with the strongest support for education-based approaches and verification strategies. However, the varied levels of neutrality and disagreement across some tools also suggested room for further exploration and refinement to enhance effectiveness.

Regarding system-level actions against misinformation, the highest levels of agreement were seen for regulations to hold the actors accountable (81%)

To what extent do you agree that the following interventions should be used against misinformation?



and removing misinformation (78%), underscoring a strong preference for accountability and direct action, respectively. Particularly, 73% of respondents supported regulations to hold social media platforms accountable for what users share. This reflects a strong public demand for platform-level accountability alongside user-level responsibility. Only 16% opposed this measure, while 11% remained neutral, indicating a relatively broad consensus on the need for systemic

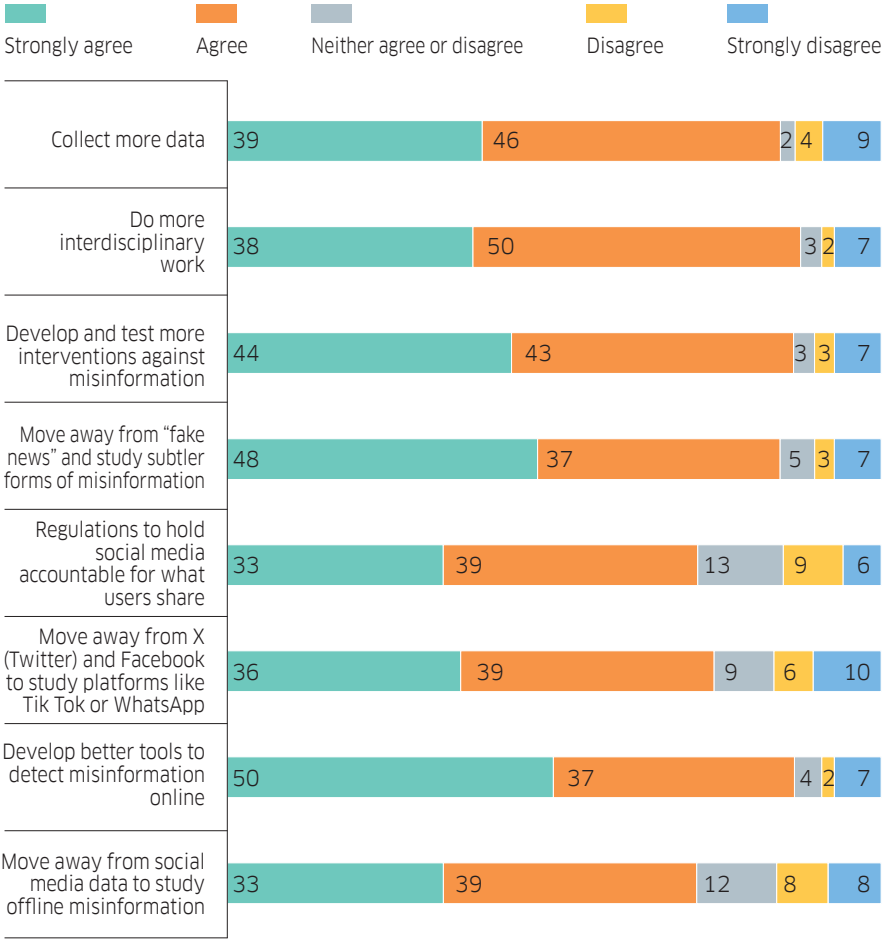
regulatory oversight of social media companies. Crowdsourcing misinformation detection (80%) also received significant support, and this highlighted trust in collaborative, community-based approaches. Platform design changes and deplatforming prominent actors elicited lower agreement (50% and 55%, respectively), with notable neutrality and disagreement, suggesting these measures were more contentious or were perceived as less impactful. Similarly, penalizing misinformation sharing (59%) and shadow-bans (56%) received moderate support but also higher neutrality and opposition, reflecting concerns about fairness or effectiveness. Content moderation on social media (64%) and algorithm changes (67%) received moderate agreement, and this emphasized the need for structural changes but with some reservations.

The findings showed a clear preference for regulations, community efforts, and education to fight misinformation, supported by targeted removal of such content and fact-checking as solutions. While these methods were widely supported, opinions on platform-specific and punitive actions varied, suggesting the need for careful planning and continued discussions to bring about broader agreement. The mixed views on some tools suggested that more work was needed to improve their effectiveness.

What is the future for misinformation research?

The findings suggested strong agreement on key priorities for advancing misinformation research. The highest levels of agreement were for developing better tools to detect misinformation (87% agreed or strongly agreed), moving beyond "fake news" to study subtler forms of misinformation (85%), and expanding interdisciplinary efforts (88%). There was also significant support for collecting more data (85%) and testing new interventions (87%). However, shifting the focus from mainstream platforms like X (Twitter) and Facebook to alternatives like TikTok or WhatsApp (75%) and exploring offline misinformation (72%) received slightly lower agreement, reflecting the need for balanced approaches. In summary, there was strong agreement on the need to move beyond "fake news" and study more nuanced forms of misinformation, reflecting an evolving understanding of how misinformation operates. Notably, regulation, particularly, holding social media platforms accountable resulted in

For the future of the field of misinformation, to what extent do you agree that it's important to



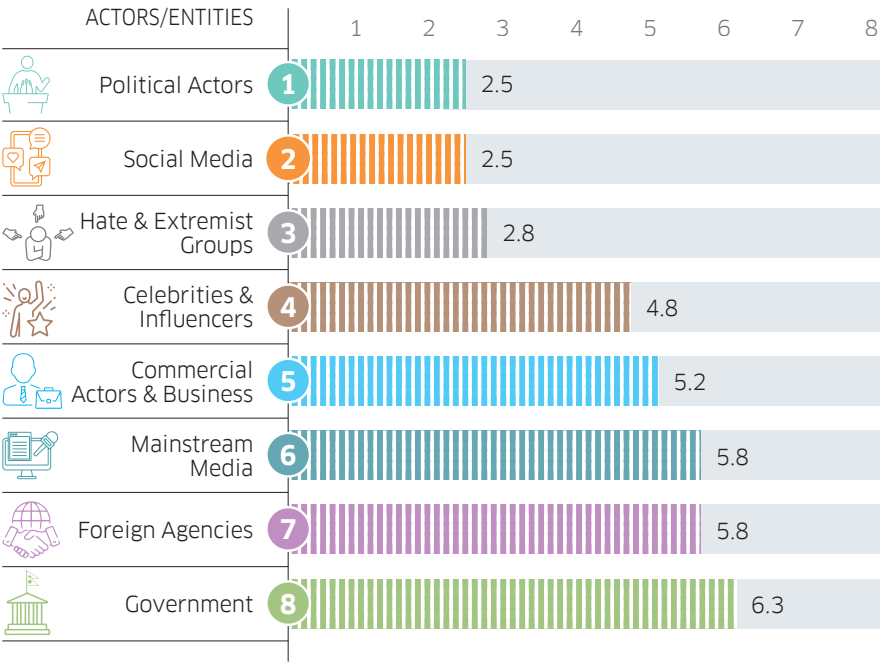
mixed views, with higher rates of neutrality and disagreement. This suggested that while experts saw value in regulatory approaches, there was caution around how such measures should be implemented.

Overall, the experts demonstrated strong interest to have innovation and diversity in research methods and in exploration in different directions to better understand and tackle misinformation.

Perceived contribution of actors in disseminating misinformation

The survey revealed a clear hierarchy of perceived contributors to misinformation in Nepal, with social media platforms and political actors emerging as the most significant sources. Both entities shared an average ranking of 2.5, reflecting their dominance in disseminating false information. Social media was ranked first by 34.7 percent respondents, while political actors were ranked second by 30.5 percent (*To look closer into the individual actors/ entities ranking, see Appendix 3*). This suggested the high influence online platforms and political rhetoric have in shaping misinformation narratives.

Following these, hate and extremist groups were identified as moderate contributors, with an average ranking of 2.8. This group was frequently placed third, with 24.8 percent of respondents assigning them significant responsibility. These findings underlined the role of ideologically driven groups in spreading misinformation.



The middle tier included celebrities/influencers and commercial actors/ businesses, with average rankings of 4.8 and 5.2, respectively. While these actors did not rank as high as social media or political entities, they still played a major role, especially because they were perceived as leveraging their public reach to amplify unverified or misleading content. Celebrities were often ranked fourth or fifth, indicating their moderate but visible influence.

The foreign agencies (average ranking: 5.8) and mainstream media (average ranking: 5.8) were perceived as having lower contribution to misinformation. Foreign agencies were predominantly ranked sixth, reflecting a limited but acknowledged role, potentially linked to external narratives influencing local contexts. Similarly, mainstream media, were ranked seventh, suggesting a relatively lower perceived involvement in spreading misinformation in Nepal. Finally, government entities were consistently perceived as the least involved in spreading misinformation, with an average ranking of 6.3. Over 31.7 percent respondents placed the government in the lowest rank, indicating a higher degree of trust or lower visibility when it came to association with misinformation compared to other actors.

This analysis has underlined the critical need to address misinformation spread by dominant sources such as social media platforms and political actors and has also acknowledged the moderate contributions of influencers and businesses. The study has also indicated relatively lower concerns regarding the role of traditional institutions like mainstream media and government agencies in spreading misinformation.

Conclusions and implications

The study looked at how experts from different fields in Nepal perceived misinformation, its definitions, causes, solutions, and future directions. Misinformation is a problem all over the world, but its effects can be complex in certain places because of cultural and political factors. These often make it easy for misinformation to spread quickly, which can cause divisions and social unrest. This survey shows how important it is to get local experts' opinions on the causes and effects of misinformation in Nepal. These points of view are important for making plans for future research, guiding policy choices, and coming up with interventions, especially in situations where digital platforms are widely used but media literacy remains low. This study adds much-needed depth and focus to national conversations about misinformation by giving a voice to people who work at the forefront of Nepal's information ecosystem.

The study suggested there was a broad consensus on several key drivers of misinformation, including confirmation bias (people's tendency to believe what aligns with their views), low digital/media literacy, and political partisanship (political bias). These findings point to the urgent need for education-based interventions to tackle misinformation, particularly media and information literacy programs to help in building critical thinking skills across the population. Fact-checking emerged as another widely supported strategy for countering false narratives.

The experts in the study expressed strong concern over the role of social media platforms and political actors in spreading misinformation and emphasized the need for increased accountability of these sources. This aligned with broader sentiments captured in the study, which pointed to a clear public demand for stronger regulatory oversight of social media companies. At the same time, there was a caution on heavy-handed regulation, with many experts favoring community-driven and non-punitive approaches. This suggested that while policy responses were necessary, they needed careful designing to avoid unintended consequences while also retaining public trust. The relatively

lower role perceived of both mainstream media and government institutions in spreading misinformation also provides an opportunity for mobilizing the same entities for seeking solutions, particularly through partnerships with civil society, educators, and fact-checkers.

The wide variation in how different types of misinformation – such as satire, conspiracy theories, and deepfakes – were interpreted across different disciplines indicated a need for clearer definitional frameworks, particularly those that paid attention to both context and intent. The study also stressed the need for continued investigations to better understand issues such as offline misinformation and that on newer platforms like TikTok and WhatsApp. These steps would be important for understanding and addressing misinformation in Nepal's fast-changing media environment.

Lastly, the study has shown that combating misinformation in Nepal needs a comprehensive, evidence-based approach that combines education, technology, community engagement, and institutional accountability. A concerted effort like this can help raise critical thinking skills, increase public awareness of misinformation, and strengthen society's ability to withstand the growing threat of false narratives spreading.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Expert Misinformation Survey 2024 Questionnaire

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

TITLE OF THE STUDY: Mapping the Landscape of Misinformation in Nepal: Expert Views on Definitions, Determinants, Solutions, and the Future of the Field

INTRODUCTION: You are invited to participate in a research survey conducted by Purak Asia, focusing on the escalating concerns regarding the rapid and extensive dissemination of false information, especially within the realm of social media in Nepal. This survey is specifically designed for individuals with advanced knowledge of information and digital rights issues, who are actively engaged in this field. Your participation in this voluntary survey is entirely optional, and you have the flexibility to withdraw at any point should you choose to do so.

PURPOSE: We aim to explore the definition and opinions surrounding ongoing debates on misinformation, assess the efficacy of interventions against misinformation, and examine ways in which misinformation can be mitigated. We seek insights from individuals well-versed in this field to enhance our understanding. The results of the research will be part of a publication in an article or book at some time in the future. Your name will be included in this publication only with your permission. In case you are also consulted separately, your permission will be sought again before mentioning you as a source of information.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: Some questions may be personal or upsetting. You can skip them or quit the survey at any time. Anytime you share information online there are risks. We're using a secure system to collect this data, but we can't completely eliminate this risk.

BREACH OF CONFIDENTIALITY: There is a chance your data could be seen by someone who shouldn't have access to it. We're minimizing this risk in the following ways:

- All identifying information is removed and replaced with a study ID.
- We'll keep your identifying information separate from your research data, but we will be able to link it to you. We'll destroy this link after we finish collecting and analyzing the data.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: Your involvement does not yield significant immediate advantages, but a possible outcome could be your inclusion in a forthcoming article or book upon publication.

The term misinformation used in this survey encompasses other terminologies such as disinformation and mal-information.

If you agree to participate in this study, please sign below and proceed to next page and respond to the questions. If not please ignore the questionnaire.

.....
Signature

PART I: Preliminaries

1. **Full Name:** .....

2. **Age (Tick one):**
   A. 21-30
   B. 31-40
   C. 41-50
   D. 51-60
   E. 61- 70
   F. Above 70

3. **Gender (Please tick one)**
   A. Female
   B. Male
   C. Prefer not to say
   D. Others (please specify below)

4. **Where do you work (work base)? (Please tick one)**
   A. Koshi Province
   B. Madhesh Province
   C. Bagmati Province
   D. Gandaki Province
   E. Lumbini Province
   F. Karnali Province
   G. Sudhur Paschim Province
   H. Outside Nepal (please specify below)

5. **Education (Completed) (Please tick one):**
   A. SLC / SEE
   B. Intermediate level
   C. Bachelor's level
   D. Master's level or higher
   E. MPhil / PhD

6. Primary Field of Expertise: (Please tick where appropriate):

A. Psychology
B. Journalism, Media, and Mass Communication
C. Political Science or related
D. Sociology / Anthropology
E. History / Culture
F. Law / Legal Studies
G. Security
H. Public Health / Medicine
I. Management / Administration J. Others (please specify)

7. Indicate your profession or the area you work on (If multiple, please mention all)

8. Which of the following do you think best describes the term 'misinformation'? Select one.

A. False information
B. Misleading information
C. False and misleading information
D. False information spread unintentionally
E. Misleading information spread unintentionally
F. False and misleading information spread unintentionally

9. To what extent do you agree that the following are examples of misinformation?	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Pseudo-science – statements, beliefs, or practices that claim to be both scientific and factual but are incompatible with the scientific method.					
Conspiracy theories – a theory that explains an event or set of circumstances as the result of a secret plot usually by powerful conspirators.					
Lies.					
Deepfakes – photo, audio or video that has been convincingly altered and manipulated to misrepresent someone as doing or saying something that was not actually done or said.					
Propaganda – sharing biased or misleading information to promote a particular agenda or point of view.					
Rumors.					
Hyper-partisan news – media content, often in the form of news articles or websites, that strongly aligns with a specific political ideology or party, presenting information in a way that caters to and reinforces the beliefs and opinions of a particular partisan audience.					
Clickbait headlines – a sensationalized headline that encourages you to click a link to an article, photo, or video, etc.					
Satirical & parodical news – forms of content that use humor, exaggeration, and irony to entertain, provoke thought, and comment or highlight current events, social issues, or shortcomings.					

10. To what extent do you agree that each of the following explains why people *believe* misinformation?	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Partisanship.					
Social identity.					
Confirmation bias – underlying tendency to notice, focus on, and give greater credence to evidence that fit with one's existing beliefs.					
Motivated reasoning – an unconscious or conscious process by which personal emotions control the evidence that is supported or dismissed.					
Lack of trust in institutions.					
Repeated exposure.					
Inattention.					
Lack of cognitive reflection.					
Lack of digital or media literacy.					
Lack of education.					
Lack of access to reliable news.					

11. To what extent do you agree that each of the following explains why people *share* misinformation?	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Partisanship.					
Social Identity.					
Confirmation bias.					
Motivated reasoning.					
Lack of trust in institutions.					
Repeated exposure.					
Inattention.					
Lack of cognitive reflection.					
Lack of digital or media literacy.					
Lack of education.					
Lack of access to reliable news.					

12. To what extent do you agree with each of the following statements?	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Social media and platforms have made the misinformation problem worse.					
People are exposed to more opposing views online.					
Falsehood spreads faster than the truth on social media.					
People can tell the truth from falsehoods.					
Belief in misinformation & conspiracy theories is higher than it was 10 years ago.					
Misinformation played a decisive role in the outcome of the 2022 Nepal election.					
Misinformation has played a decisive role in intensifying societal polarization.					
Misinformation will play a decisive role in the outcome of the next elections in Nepal.					
Misinformation will destabilize or harm social harmony.					

13. Please rank the following actors or entities in order of perceived contribution to disseminating misinformation in Nepal, from highest to lowest: (1 = highest, 10 = lowest)

1. Political actors. ☐
2. Hate and extremist group. ☐
3. Foreign Agencies. ☐
4. Government. ☐
5. Commercial Actors/Businesses. ☐
6. Celebrities/Influencers. ☐
7. Mainstream Media. ☐
8. Social Media. ☐

14. To what extent do you agree that the following interventions should be used against misinformation?	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Platform design changes.					
Algorithm changes.					
Content moderation on social media.					
Deplatforming prominent actors spreading misinformation – removal or restriction of influential individuals from online platforms to reduce their ability to disseminate false or misleading information.					
Regulations to hold social media accountable for what users share					
Crowdsourcing misinformation detection –using the collective efforts and insights of a group of people to identify and combat false or misleading information.					
Removing misinformation.					
Penalizing misinformation sharing on social media.					
Shadow-bans – a practice where a user's content is made invisible to others without their knowledge, often implemented by online platforms to curb unwanted behavior or violations of community guidelines.					
Regulations to hold actors who spread misinformation accountable.					

15. To what extent do you agree that the following tools would be effective to combat misinformation?	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Digital / media and information literacy.					
Labeling of false content.					
Fact checking.					
Accuracy prompt.					
Labeling of news sources.					
Inoculation – A communication strategy aimed at preemptively exposing and refuting misleading or false information to help individuals resist its influence.					

16. For the future of the field of misinformation, to what extent do you agree that it's important to:	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree or disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Collect more data.					
Do more interdisciplinary work.					
Develop and test more interventions against misinformation.					
Move away from "fake news" and study subtler forms of misinformation.					
Regulations to hold social media accountable for what users share.					
Move away from X (Twitter) and Facebook to study platforms like TikTok or WhatsApp.					
Develop better tools to detect misinformation online					
Move away from social media data to study offline misinformation.					

Appendix 2

Working definition of key terminologies

1. **Clickbait headline:** a sensationalized headline that encourages you to click a link to an article, photo, or video.

2. **Confirmation bias:** underlying tendency to notice, focus on, and give greater credence to evidence that fits with one's existing beliefs.

3. **Conspiracy theory:** a theory that explains an event or set of circumstances as being the result of a secret plot usually by powerful conspirators.

4. **Crowdsourcing misinformation detection:** using the collective efforts and insights of a group of people to identify and combat false or misleading information.

5. **Deepfakes:** photo, audio or video that has been convincingly altered and manipulated to misrepresent someone as doing or saying something that was not actually done or said.

6. **Deplatforming actors spreading misinformation**: removal or restriction of influential individuals from online platforms to reduce their ability to disseminate false or misleading information.

7. **Disinformation:** any false or misleading information spread intentionally

8. **Hyper-partisan news:** media content, often in the form of news articles or websites, that strongly align with a specific political ideology or party, and present information in ways that cater to and reinforce the beliefs and opinions of particular partisan audiences.

9. **Inoculation**: a communication strategy aimed at preemptively exposing and refuting misleading or false information to help individuals resist the influence.

10. **Misinformation:** any false or misleading information in public domain.

11. **Motivated reasoning:** an unconscious or conscious process by which personal emotions control the evidence that is supported or dismissed.

12. **Parodical news:** forms of content that use humor, exaggeration, and irony to entertain, provoke thought, and comment or highlight current events, social issues, or shortcomings.

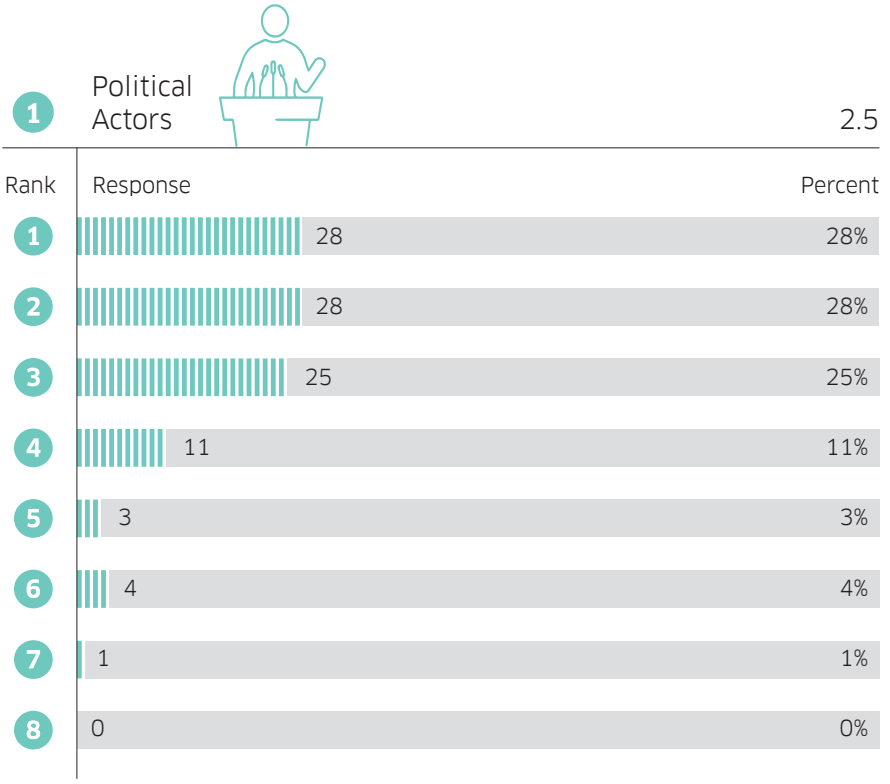
13. **Propaganda:** sharing biased or misleading information to promote a particular agenda or point of view.

14. **Pseudo-science:** statements, beliefs, or practices that claim to be both scientific and factual but are incompatible with the scientific method.

15. **Shadow-bans:** a practice where a user's content is made invisible to others without their knowledge, often implemented by online platforms to curb unwanted behavior or violations of community guidelines.

Appendix 3

Perceived contribution to disseminating misinformation: Individual ranking of actors/entities



2 Social Media 2.5

Rank	Response	Percent
1	31	33%
2	30	31.9%
3	13	13.8%
4	9	9.6%
5	4	4.3%
6	2	2.1%
7	1	1.1%
8	4	4.3%

3 Hate & Extremist Groups 2.8

Rank	Response	Percent
1	32	32%
2	23	23%
3	13	13%
4	12	12%
5	10	10%
6	7	7%
7	2	2%
8	1	1%

4 Celebrities & Influencers

4.8

Rank	Response	Percent
1	1	1%
2	6	6%
3	19	19%
4	20	20%
5	22	22%
6	12	12%
7	14	14%
8	6	6%

5 Commercial Actors & Business

5.2

Rank	Response	Percent
1	0	0%
2	3	3%
3	10	10%
4	17	17%
5	30	30%
6	22	22%
7	11	11%
8	7	7%

6 Mainstream Media 5.8

Rank	Response	Percent
1	4	4%
2	4	4%
3	8	8%
4	14	14%
5	13	13%
6	9	9%
7	19	19%
8	29	29%

7 Foreign Agencies 5.8

Rank	Response	Percent
1	3	3%
2	4	4%
3	6	6%
4	10	10%
5	9	9%
6	25	25%
7	27	27%
8	16	16%

8 Government 6.3

Rank	Response	Percent
1	1	1%
2	2	2%
3	6	6%
4	7	7%
5	9	9%
6	19	19%
7	25	25%
8	31	31%

PURAK ASIA

Kunwar Marg, Kathmandu-31, Nepal
00977-1-4564599
info@purakasia.org
www.purakasia.org

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