

DISSERTATION
ON
Escalation of Rumor in Social Media Platform in the Context of
Bangladesh: Theories, Challenges and Prevention

Course Title: Supervised Dissertation

Course Code: Law 406

Submitted to:

Monira Nazmi Jahan

Senior Lecturer

Department of Law

East West University

Submitted By:

Linkon Ahmed Ruman

ID: 2018-2-66-006

Date of Submission

18/05/2022

Acknowledgement

First of all, I would like to thank my almighty for giving me the strength and patience to complete this research without any hindrance or trouble.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to my honourable Supervisor Monira Nazmi Jahan, Senior Lecturer of the Department of Law, East West University, for her motivation, cooperation, suggestion, patience and immense knowledge. In a very packed academic schedule and all the difficulties during the research, this research would not have been possible without the efforts, supervision and contribution of my honourable Supervisor Ma'am. I have learned so many things throughout this journey, and genuinely grateful to her.

Then I would like to thank my parents for giving me the spirit and support in all aspects of my life.

Last but not least, I also want to thank my seniors and friends who were there for me and encouraged me to complete the dissertation.

Declaration

I, Linkon Ahmed Ruman, bearing Student ID: 2018-2-66-006, do hereby solemnly declare and affirm that this research paper is original and my own work and is not copied from anywhere or from anyone's view and has neither been published in any journal, newspaper or article nor been submitted to any of such publications. It is completed during my academic education as a requirement for my academic degree of LL.B. Information from works of others used in this research is duly acknowledged and referred to accordingly, and a list of references has also been included.

Linkon Ahmed Ruman

Abstract

In this modern digitized Bangladesh, where many people have access to the internet and various social media, spreading false rumors is a frightful issue. Nowadays, rumors are frequently used to create confusion and chaos to execute one's interest. This paper scrutinizes the variables, characteristics, and causes of rumors. The paper further addresses media roles, impacts, and patterns of rumors in certain situations. Moreover, the dynamic techniques of spreading rumors have been taken into account. Bangladesh has some noteworthy legal provisions to deal with rumors-based offences. The prevention methods and effectiveness of those have also been evaluated. Hence, the main focal points of this paper are to find out the dominance of rumors over digital platforms, the prevention, and the effectiveness of legal sanctioning as a curative method. This thesis paper is processed based on the qualitative, comparative, linguistic, and pragmatic analyses. Moreover, comprehensive research on several printed and electronic materials and online contents has been conducted regarding the preparation of this paper. The aftermath resulting from this analytical paper accentuates the preventive schemes which can be applied to combat spreading rumors in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Rumor, Misinformation, Conspiracy Theory, Rumor Detection, Fake News

**Escalation and Impact of Rumor in social Media
Platforms in the Context of Bangladesh-Theories,
Challenges and Prevention**

Table of Contents

<u>Chapter-1: Introduction</u>	1
1.1 Introductory Statement	1
1.2 Research Objective	2
1.3 Literature Review	3
1.4 Research Questions	3
1.5 Research Methodology	3
1.6 Limitations.....	4
<u>Chapter-2: Rumors: Concept and Theories</u>	4
2.1 Introduction	4
2.2 What is Rumor?	5
2.3 Types of Rumor	5
2.4 Basic Characteristics of Rumor	6
2.5 Sources of Rumor	7
2.6 Theory: Conspiracy Theory	8
2.7 When do People Believe Conspiracy Theory and How does it Spread?	9
<u>Chapter-3: Challenges and Transmission</u>	9
3.1 Introduction	9
3.2 Causes of Rumor	10
3.3 Negative Impact of Rumor	11
3.4 The Media's Influence on Our Daily Lives	12
3.5 Impact of Rumors and Misinformation on COVID-19 in Social media	14
3.6 Patterns of Spreading Rumors in Bangladesh	15
3.7 Rumors Spreading Techniques	16

3.8 Challenges in Handling Rumors	17
<u>Chapter-4: Prevention and Laws regarding to Spreading Rumors and Misinformation</u>	18
4.1 Introduction	18
4.2 Prevention of Rumors	18
4.2.1 By Imposing Restriction on Content Sharing	19
4.2.2 Warning and Strict Accountability	19
4.2.3 Filtering the Content	19
4.2.4 Governmental Steps to Prevent Rumors	20
4.2.5 Non-Government, Private Sector and NGO's Initiatives	21
4.3 Relevant Legal Provisions of Rumors in Bangladesh	22
4.4 Rumors Related Case	23
4.5 Legal Consequences of Rumor in Bangladesh	26
4.6 Worldwide review of Rumor issues	27
<u>Chapter-5: Conclusion</u>	30
5.1 Findings of the Study	30
5.2 Recommendations	31
5.3 Concluding Remarks	32

Chapter: 1 Introduction

1.1 Introductory Statement:

Rumors and their prevalence have shaped the world's various sectors since ancient times. In this high-tech era, rumors are most often used as a weapon to accomplish any particular interest of a group by targeting a particular subject. Rumors can be viewed as a disease of the mind, and their spreading can be viewed as an epidemic of infectious minds; because misinformation or rumor acts like a virus that affects a person's mind, where the spreader acts as a carrier of the "rumor virus", and its rapid spreading is similar to the epidemic situation.¹

Furthermore, rumor has become gigantic, and spreading rumors has become more accessible due to the internet, social media, and other digital platforms. In the ancient era, spreading rumors was limited in a particular area due to inadequate communication. The notion "rumor" is viewed as emanating from one or more person's informational assertion about some occurrences that are not officially announced. The term "media rumors" refers to information statements spread by one or more people about unconfirmed official events that arise spontaneously or arbitrarily, are broadcast verbally or in writing via mainstream media, and are transmitted far into much-altered forms from the time of their creation till the official confirmation or denial.² In Bangladesh, there have been multiple situations where the abuse of online platforms has become a security threat during the previous few years. From the event of Ramu in 2012 to Bholā in 2019, there has been a worrying number of assaults against minority populations provoked by rumors on social media and associated misinformation. In various movements rumors played a detrimental role in Bangladesh. Shahbagh Movement in 2013, the Quota Reform Movement, and the Road Safety Movement in 2018 are some remarkable examples.

The paper prolonged from introduction to context and theories, then to challenges and transmission, prevention and laws regarding spreading rumor and misinformation and settled with the conclusion. Characteristics and impact of rumor, the role of media rumor, effective measures, findings, and necessary reformation are the significant concerns that have been discussed thoroughly.

¹ Maziar Nekovee and others, 'Theory of Rumor Spreading in Complex Social Networks' (2007) 374.

² Marina R. Zheltukhina and others, 'Role of media rumors in the modern society' (2016), Vol.11, 10581-10589

1.2 Research Objective:

The objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze the characteristics, theories and changing variables of rumor
2. To find out the core reasons and dynamic techniques behind spreading rumors
3. To evaluate the roles of social media and other digital platforms
4. Impact and spreading patterns of rumors in particular situations
5. To discuss the prevention mechanism related to the rumor
6. To analyze the effectiveness of the legal provisions regarding a rumor

1.3 Literature Review:

A significant number of studies and research materials related to rumors are available. Only a few articles and books on modern ideas and publications are assessed because of a lack of time and scope. However, a few contextual discussions necessary for this paper are reviewed here.

A Psychology of Rumor by Robert H. Knapp (1944)³ stated that criticizing and controlling rumors are different in every aspect, the writer discussed the causes and consequences of rumor control problems. I agree about the classification, patterns, theories, and controlling measures of rumor because these give a clear picture of rumors that can be used to prevent rumors.

Dr. Matiur Rahman, in his journal 'Causes and Prevention of Rumors' (2021)⁴, analyzed the definition, historical background, categories, reasons, psychological and sociological factors of rumors. I partially disagree with the idea of rumor as baseless propaganda. Because in the present world rumor is used purposefully most of the time.

³ Robert Knapp, 'A Psychology of Rumor' (1944) 8 Public Opinion Quarterly.

⁴ Dr. Matiur Rahman, 'Causes and Prevention of Rumors' *The Daily Sun* (2021).

Social Media Rumors in Bangladesh (2020)⁵, in this article, the authors opined that social media itself is a major online source of social media rumors and this type of rumor has seven popular themes. Furthermore, they discussed about the other sources and aims of rumors. I agree with the notion of this article that social media itself is the dominant online source of social media rumors.

The article "Dead men tell no lies"- Rumors and Social Tension during the Covid-19 Pandemic in Bangladesh (2020)⁶ by Niloy Biswas analyzed the crime and violence statistics related to rumors, factors behind this and other rumor related issues during the Covid-19 pandemic. I agree with the point that, " a rumor is considered successful when its origins remain untraceable and it could circumvent official surveillance."

1.4 Research Questions:

Several questions can be framed on this research topic. To fulfill the purpose of the research following question will be addressed:

1. How has the shape of rumor modified with time from offline to online?
2. Are existing legal provisions and sanctions enough to minimize rumors on digital platforms?
3. What should be the efficacious preventive measures to stop rumors?

1.5 Research Methodology:

This research is mainly theoretical research or descriptive research with qualitative method. The majority of the data was gathered from secondary sources. As a result, this study relies on published information and data from books, journals, magazines, and newspapers, among other sources. Existing data was gathered from various sources to understand better the causes, challenges, and present conditions of rumor and misinformation in Bangladesh. This paper covers many aspects of the problem and tries to figure out how to control rumors by implementing preventive measures and reforming laws.

⁵ Md. Sayeed Al Zaman, 'Social Media Rumors in Bangladesh' (2020) 8, p-77

⁶ Niloy Biswas, 'Dead Man Tell No Lies'- Rumors and Social Tension During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Bangladesh' (2021) 4

1.6 Limitations:

The limitation of this research is the non-availability of resources. Moreover, the non-availability of the case laws on the internet and DLRs, and most importantly, the non-availability of particular books. The research on this issue might be able to get a better outcome if case laws were available to discuss. There is a lack of current information and resources, and four months is not enough time to research a topic like rumor. Perhaps, I tried my best to do a new thing in a short time. There are not many journals and articles to do this research, and also, it is tough to make a public opinion on that topic. We do not have much law based on my project. Overall, there are many limitations to doing this research in this field.

Chapter -2

Rumors: Concept and theories

2.1 Introduction:

Rumor has been a common phrase since the ancient time and it has developed into a major issue in the modern era as it travels rapidly through social media and has a detrimental effect on democracy, economics, society and personal life. At first glance, rumor appears to be innocuous and ineffective, yet it can range from harmless gossip to major propaganda. Rumors and conspiracy theories are inextricably linked and misinformation, disinformation, hearsay, speculation, fake news is indirectly connected with rumor.

2.2 What is Rumor?

Rumor is defined as the spread of information, a statement, or a tale without confirmation, certainty, or the validity of the facts.⁷ According to Merriam-Webster Dictionary, rumor is any

⁷ Rumor Definition < <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/rumor> >

opinion, statement, or news widely circulated without ascertainable source or authenticity.⁸ Peterson and Gist (1951) define it as an unofficial account or explanation of any incident, object, or public issue circulating by one person to another.⁹

If we focus on the base of any rumor, we can see that it must be an exciting story or any piece of news which may be true or not, or a mixture of both, but it spreads very rapidly from one person to another as rumor is always captivating.

2.3 Types of Rumor:

Robert H. Knapp identified three types of rumors, based on emotion ¹⁰-

The first one is the **Pipe dream rumor**. It expresses the wishes, desires and hopes of any group of people who circulate it to others. This type of rumor is positive in nature; it represents a fanciful future benefit and hopes, which is why people believe it easily. The second one is **Bogie, or fear rumor**, which comes from fear or anxiety of any specific event and it creates extra concern about that issue. For example, during Covid-19 pandemic, one audio recording was spread on social media that around 20 people died in Chittagong Medical College due to corona and most of the people believed it.¹¹ The last one is **Wedge Driving or Aggression Rumor**, this type of rumor divides people into different groups by derogating them. It also affected interpersonal relationships by spreading hatred.¹²

Some rumors are **Spontaneous**, and some are **Premeditated**.¹³ Spontaneous rumor spreads during the periods of utter chaos, stress, mistrust or when people are anxious about any issue and people

⁸ Mark Schindler, 'Rumors in Financial Markets (Insights into Behavioral Finance), Definition and Characteristics Of Rumor' (2012) 10.

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ Knapp (n-3)

¹¹ Monira Nazmi Jahan, 'Pandemics: Always Accompanied by Rumors' *The Daily Observer* (2020)

¹² Knapp (n-3)

¹³ Alelign Aschale, Review of the Grapevine Communication (January, 2018), P-11

also forget it after a few days, when it becomes impertinent.¹⁴ On the other hand, Premeditated rumors spread for a specific reason, and it was preplanned for achieving any target.¹⁵

Chua, Aricat and Goh identify rumors based on three different criteria, the level of urgency, its relation to unimpeachable truth and its enthusiastic request.¹⁶ They also analyze rumor messaging and are classified into four categories: emotion-related, deliberation, information-related and call to action.¹⁷ Rumor can be spread as a form of jokes, little stories, spam or information leak. Derczynski et al, classified rumor into four categories: Speculation, controversy, misinformation and disinformation.¹⁸ Speculation is spending of a property with the hope that it will bring more money, controversy is different types of opinion regarding any issue or public dispute, misinformation is giving inaccurate information unintentionally for the reason of knowledge gaps and disinformation is false information, where the informant spreads it deliberately to deceive people.¹⁹

2.4 Basic Characteristics of rumor:

Robert H. Knapp showed three primary characteristics of rumor in 'A Psychology of Rumor' (1944).²⁰

1. It dispatched by word of mouth
2. It gives information regarding a person, happening or condition
3. It discloses and gratifies the sentimental needs of the community.

Other Characteristics:

- Rumor is a piece of information about someone or something which is not verified or an inferior authenticating source.

¹⁴ ibid

¹⁵ Aschale (n-13)

¹⁶ Al Zaman (n-5)

¹⁷ ibid

¹⁸ Al Zaman (n-5)

¹⁹ Al Zaman (n-5)

²⁰ Knapp (n-3)

- Most of the time, rumor has a territory and time-limited interest to the people on that particular issue. Those people who belong to that territory or sufferers are the 'public' of that rumor.
- Every rumor must have a specific subject; it can be a person, a nation, a group, or any current issue.
- Rumor is like wildfire, and it spreads very quickly; it can change slightly every time it is transmitted to another and gets more exaggerated.
- Rumor is created based on the 'emotional needs of the society.
- Rumors want to make sense in the context of ambiguity, danger or potential threat and when this uncertainty and ambiguity are reduced by reliable information, at that time rumors become weak and drop out from the limelight.
- Rumors are connected with political influence; one party wants to spread damaging rumors against the opposite party.

2.5 Sources of Rumor:

Kapferer, in his analysis, talked about eight primary sources of rumor: expert opinion, confidential information, testimony, urban legends, troubling facts, fantasies, misunderstanding, and manipulation.²¹ Jo classified sources of internet rumors into two types; one is the internet itself, and another is traditional mass media, online information sources include websites, social media, etc. and traditional mass media includes newspapers, television, radio, magazines, etc. Nowadays, rumors from online sources have become more active and popular. Shin, Jian, Driscoll and Bar classified two primary sources of rumors by analyzing the Twitter dataset and they have shown that most of the rumor comes from non-traditional media, including websites, social media, e-journals and other internet sources.²²

2.6 Theory: Conspiracy theory

Conspiracy theory is an explanation of any harmful, tragic, emotional and confusing facts by a powerful and secretive group when there is no authentic or official news being published, or maybe

²¹ Al Zaman (n-5)

²² ibid

that explanation is not adequate.²³ This explanation rejects the ordinary fact; rather it expresses a different view of the fact and they do it within a political influence, insist other persons to follow it.²⁴ These theories progress during periods of anxiety, uncertainty, war situations, revolutions, and economic depression like after pandemics, tsunamis, and earthquakes and it also affects politics, culture, globalization, terrorism, ethnic minority groups, inequality and new technologies.²⁵ Conspiracy theories have the power to focus on facts people want to believe. It gives specific agents extra power to control others, maintain secrets, and execute plans; this group is liable for the conspiracy.²⁶

The subject matter of conspiracy theories is emotionally attached and driven by a strong human desire as the explanation is always satisfactory, but the evidentiary value is inferior. It can survive only in case of emotional and psychological biases and the unreliability of official sources.²⁷

There are some common characteristics of conspiracy theory. It finds out the source of social, political and international forces, interprets political events by comparing good and evil, and suggests that the ordinary public affairs report distracts general people from the natural source of power.

The latest example of conspiracy theory is the "Birds aren't real" movement. This movement is related to a Gen-Z fueled conspiracy theory, which claims that birds do not exist in reality; it is actually duplicates of drones equipped by the U.S government to keep an eye on the American citizens. The central theme behind this movement is to fight back against the misinformation and rumor culture in this advanced connectivity era.²⁸

2.6.1 When do people believe conspiracy theories, and how does it spread?

Some motivated reason which pushes to believe conspiracy theory-

²³ Scott A. Reid, 'Conspiracy Theory' (*britannica.com*, 2022) <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/conspiracy-theory>> accessed date, 15/04/2022

²⁴ *ibid*

²⁵ Ried (n-23)

²⁶ Ried (n-23)

²⁷ Karen M Douglas, Robbie M Sutton and Aleksandra Cichocka, The psychology of conspiracy theories. 2017;26(6):538-42

²⁸ Taylor Lorenz, Birds aren't real, or aren't they? Inside a Gen Z Conspiracy Theory, *The New York Times* (2021).

- **Confirmation Bias or Biased Assimilation:** Most people seek out that type of information which is consistent with their pre-existing beliefs; moreover, they also avoid that type of information that may challenge their beliefs or may be inconsistent.²⁹
- **Disconfirmation Bias:** People spend their time denying the opposite party's logic by counter-argument.³⁰
- **Attitude-Congruence Bias:** when a person holds a definite position on any issue, he always tries to give a stronger argument than the opposite party.³¹

Chapter: 3

Challenges and Transmission

3.1 Introduction:

Rumors are an unavoidable part of human life. It is a multi-dimensional phenomenon with cognitive, emotional, psychological, and social aspects. The growth of large-scale online social networks and online data exchange is becoming incredibly popular. Rumors have a significant influence on various sorts of conflicts: intergroup and worldwide. In case of absence or lack of knowledge about a subject, people spread rumors or misinformation believing it as true. Later the rumor fills the informational vacuum by imparting an image of that event.³²

²⁹ Trey Poche, Rumors and Conspiracy Theories, (*LSU Faculty Website*, 2021)
<<https://faculty.lsu.edu/fakenews/rumorsandconspiracy.php>> accessed date 4 April, 2022

³⁰ ibid

³¹ Poche (n-29)

³² Zheltukhina and others (n-2)

3.2 Causes of Rumor:

According to Dr. John Daly, there are four types of root causes of rumors.³³ To seed a rumor, all of these four factors must be present -

- The degree of stress of the person who hears the rumor
- The reliability of the rumor's creator
- The importance of the subject matter to the individual who hears the rumor
- The level of ambiguity in the environment as a whole.

In "The Psychology of Rumor" (1948), Gordon Allport and Leo Postman discuss the psychological basis behind rumors.³⁴ They listed the reasons for the rumor as follows:

1. Uncertainty in the circumstance and anxiety: When the situation is uncertain, the possibility of spreading rumors increases. According to several studies, stressed persons are more inclined to spread rumors.³⁵

2. Importance of information and obscurity: when a gossip understands that people are curious to know about a topic, he tries to spread that type of information and when people have no solid understanding of a subject matter, they listen to rumors.³⁶

3. Maintaining one's self-image and create strong social standing: People trust the information supporting their image and consider the rumor true, even many people use rumors to boost their social status.³⁷

4. To degrade the opponent: According to researchers, rumors are also transmitted to humiliate others.³⁸

³³ 'Deconstructing Rumors in the workplace' < <https://go.mcombs.utexas.edu/Rumors-in-the-Workplace-TEE-Blog.html> > accessed 05 April,2022

³⁴ Rahman (n-4)

³⁵ ibid

³⁶ ibid

³⁷ ibid

³⁸ ibid

According to the findings of several researchers, some rumors spread quickly among certain groups of people who believe in the philosophy of a specific political party, religion, or social issues as it reflects their mentality and attitude; they also claimed that in primitive communities, rumors are more common, as the literacy rate is poor and lack of access to reliable information.³⁹

It is human nature that they exist in a society separated into several groups and always try to safeguard their interests; as a result of this struggle, one party broadcasts false information about the other group to influence the general public in their favor.⁴⁰

3.3 Negative impact of rumor:

Users of social media frequently exchange emotions instead of factual information, and some users create provocative content to attract other users.⁴¹ Sometimes this type of fake rumor affects our daily lives; for instance, we can refer to the most controversial rumor, which was, **Human Heads for the Padma Bridge-**

In 2019, a few interested groups shared rumors on Facebook and YouTube, that completing the Padma bridge would need one hundred thousand heads of human children; this rumor provoked mob attacks around the country, resulting in the deaths of eight people and the injuries of 30 others suspected of being child kidnappers.⁴²

Rumors can be utilized to achieve a variety of objectives in conflict situations by misrepresenting the opponent or audience. Even Genghis Khan applied this strategy, spreading stories about his army's superior strength in order to suppress his opponents' competitive spirit.⁴³

³⁹ ibid

⁴⁰ ibid

⁴¹ Al Zaman (n-5)

⁴² Md Sayeed Al Zaman, 'Storytelling and Rhetoric of rumor in social media, Chapter-3, P-50

⁴³ Al Zaman (n-5)

3.4 The media's influence on our daily lives:

Facebook has been an effective tool for those who are attempting to promote hatred. According to statistics from NapoleonCat, Bangladesh has 47.2 million Facebook members as of May 2021. This figure represents 28% of the country's overall population.⁴⁴

Some rumors have particular goals of executing socio-political goals through deception, and some of these have destroyed the fabric of interreligious harmony, as for example on October 20 2019, hundreds of Muslims gathered in the town of Borhanuddin in the Bohla region to protest a presumably disrespectful Facebook post about Islam's Prophet Muhammad, posted by a Hindu man; four people were killed in clashes between protestors and police. According to police, the alleged Facebook account was hacked, and the hackers were provoking a conflict between the different sides.⁴⁵

According to Lampe, Vitak, Gray and Ellison, (2012), many Facebook users regard it as a useful source of information and Bene (2017) discovered that many young people rely on Facebook for political information.⁴⁶ Apart from politics, social media information is utilized for commercial promotion, news and healthcare, and an interested group takes advantage of this and spreads disinformation.⁴⁷ However, misinformation spread on social media during pandemics also disrupts campaigns, promotes panic, and increases public anxiety. During the Corona pandemic, One of the most famous myths about the COVID-19 vaccination arose from a viral video featuring Carrie Madej, a US osteopath who said that people who received the COVID-19 vaccine would undergo DNA modifications and would be connected to artificial intelligence interfaces.⁴⁸ A similar story that gained popularity was that giant tech companies such as Microsoft intended to implant covert

⁴⁴ 'Facebook users increase by 10 million in Bangladesh' *The Prothom Alo* (Dhaka,10 June,2021)

⁴⁵ Rahat Rafe, DW 'Bangladesh: Fake news on Facebook fuels communal violence' (1 November,2019) <<https://www.dw.com/en/bangladesh-fake-news-on-facebook-fuels-communal-violence/a-51083787>> accessed 5 April, 2022

⁴⁶ Al-Zaman (n-5)

⁴⁷ ibid

⁴⁸ Biswas (n-6)

microchips into humans through the vaccine (BBC News).⁴⁹ After that rumor many people did not want to take the vaccine. Similarly, we can see various types of rumors that control and influence us very strongly in our daily lives.

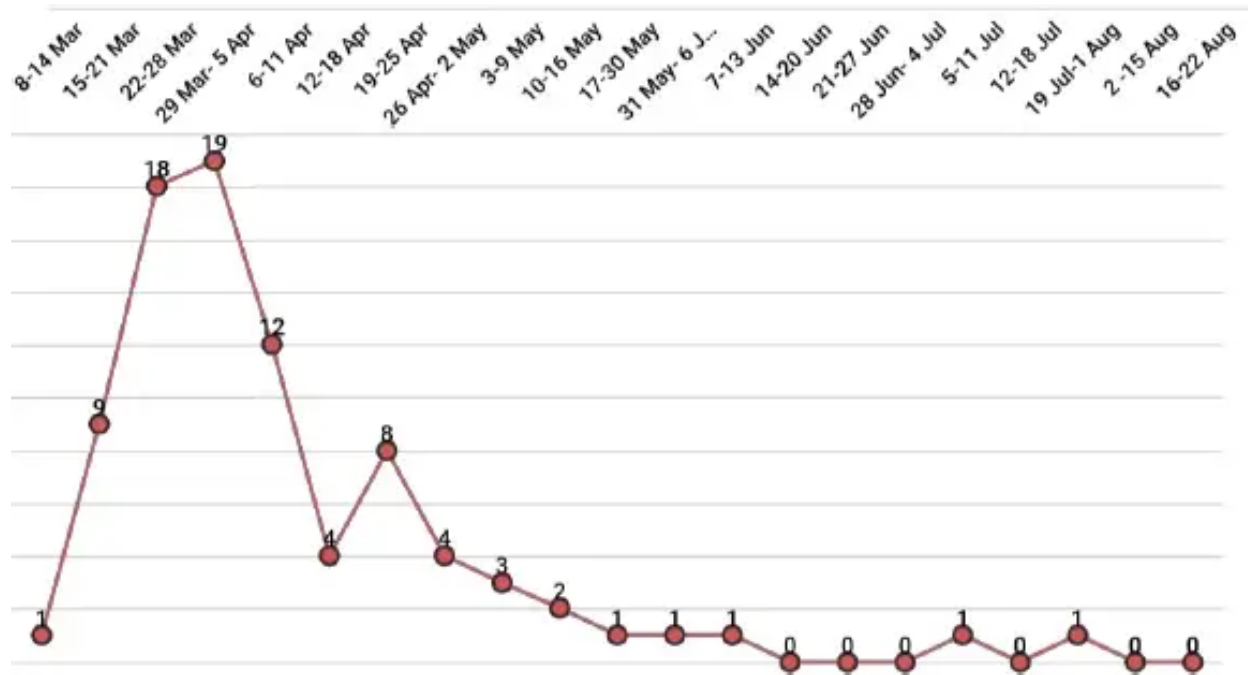


Figure 1: Weekly trend incidents of rumor and misinformation (March 8 -August 22 ,2020) ⁵⁰

On August 30, 2020, around 86 rumor related incidents were published in the national newspaper, where we can see that in March and April, it was the highest. In the second week of April and onwards, it decreased since at that time the Bangladesh government took various measures to provide authentic news about Covid-19 related information by IEDCR.⁵¹

⁴⁹ ibid

⁵⁰ ibid

⁵¹ ibid

3.5 Impact of rumors and misinformation on Covid-19 in Social Media:

3.5.1 Religious Rumor:

According to a study, 53% of individuals believed that coronavirus would not spread in Bangladesh because it is a Muslim-majority country; 12% of people said that God sent the virus to punish sinners and non-believers, and it was sent to China as a result of the government's oppression of Chinese Muslims and their haram eating habit.⁵²

3.5.2 Rumors regarding the age of people:

One of the most frightening beliefs was that the virus only affected the older and not the young, while another group circulated that the coronavirus infected everyone, but only the elderly died.⁵³

3.5.3 Rumors about hot weather:

Another rumor was corona does not spread in hot countries like Bangladesh where the temperature is over 30 degrees, and all viruses will die throughout the summer; unfortunately, it was misinformation as Coronavirus disease can spread even in hot climates, according to the WHO.⁵⁴

3.5.4 Rumors about food consumption:

Drinking three cups of tea every day might help you get rid of coronavirus, and behind the reason of spreading this rumor was a Chinese doctor, Dr. Li Wenliang, who claimed that drinking three

⁵² Akon, Md Saifullah, and Afnan Nur Bhuiyan. "Rumors and Its Impact on Youth during COVID-19 Pandemic: The Case of Bangladesh." *Journal of Research in Education, Science, and Technology* 5.1 (2020): 26-35

⁵³ ibid

⁵⁴ ibid

cups of tea daily heals corona sufferers.⁵⁵ Eating farm chickens increases the chance of coronavirus, for this rumor poultry farm business suffers a huge loss.⁵⁶

3.6 Patterns of rumors spread in Bangladesh:

3.6.1 Disseminating unverified information through Facebook posts in order to amplify the protest:

A rumor circulated on Facebook during the Quota reform movement that a rubber bullet fired by the police had injured one of the protestors in the scrotum, and the story spread instantly through several Facebook groups and various online portals but it was a fake news.⁵⁷

3.6.2 Rumors against a person who is in controversy or in the limelight:

When a person or an organization becomes the focus of attention, whether for positive or negative reasons, a flood of disinformation begins to circulate across the information ecosystem to defame that person with bogus charges or discover irrelevant information from the past and recreate it to embarrass him/her.⁵⁸

3.6.3 Rumors about renowned person's death:

Numerous clickbait news sources and Facebook pages use this strategy to increase interaction and reach quickly. For instance, a week before the prominent Bangladeshi television actor Abdul Kadir died, many rumors spread on social media, saying that the actor was dead, the individuals targeted for this type of rumor are typically well-known figures to whom the general public has an emotional attachment.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ ibid

⁵⁶ ibid

⁵⁷ Ayesha Binte Towhid, LIRNEasia “Misinformation in Bangladesh: A Brief Primer” < <https://lirneasia.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Misinformation-in-Bangladesh-A-Brief-Primer.pdf> > accessed 17 April, 2022

⁵⁸ ibid

⁵⁹ ibid

3.6.4 Sharing Satire as news:

Online news portals frequently disseminate satires from local, regional or international sources as real news, for instance, during the 2020 US elections, a satirical column headlined "The United States requested Bangladesh's assistance in counting votes" was published in the Bangla daily newspaper "Prothom Alo"; the article was republished without acknowledgement by various online news portals and was circulated as original content.⁶⁰

3.6.5 Using the name of the significant person:

Sheikh Hasina as a Nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize; the following fake news was circulated in 2017 by Bangla Insider, an online portal, in collaboration with a few other national news agencies, including The Asian Age and The Daily Kaler Kantho. The rumor was also actively spread over social media platforms by political bootlickers, but that was just a rumor.⁶¹

3.7 Rumors Spreading Techniques:

Rumors is created by deceptive storytelling with falsified images to maximize its reach. The following are some of the most commonly used strategies to spread rumors -

- They use captions, like "The media will not share, so it is up to you to share" or "Corporate media makes a lot of things viral for their own benefit, but this needs to be made viral for the commoners' advantage" and the message concludes with the phrase "collected," making it difficult to determine the original source.⁶²

⁶⁰ ibid

⁶¹ Zaman M (n-42)

⁶² Towhid (n-57)

- Recognized and trusted media agencies are impersonated through the use of a slightly altered logo or font; furthermore, they add a condition like sharing the post may be associated with prizes, discounts, or gifts; they also emotionally blackmail to persuade readers to share the post⁶³
- Repurposing old news from new perspectives and presenting it as a recent event to get attention and fake "death news" is created by manipulating real photographs of famous people in hospital beds to appeal many people's emotions.⁶⁴

3.8 Challenges in handling rumors:

There are numerous hindrances to effectively preventing rumors. The primary challenge in controlling the issues related to rumors is the ambiguity regarding the definition and categorization of rumors; even the relevant laws that handle rumors do not give a proper definition or classification of rumors.⁶⁵ The deficit of an appropriate framework under which the various types of rumors can be dealt with makes it tougher to focus on every rumor-related incident. Because of this ambiguity, both the public and law enforcement agencies often become confused when identifying an incident or content as rumor-based. Secondly, the tendency to use rumors to attain our benefit is very common in our country; especially the political parties and the influential group spread rumors for their benefit and stay out of the reach of law due to their position.

Thirdly, the fact-checking process and some social and media platforms are sometimes biased towards specific content. Fourthly, there are many drawbacks regarding the awareness programs and policy. Most of the workshops and awareness programs are organized in some targeted cities such as Dhaka and Chittagong.⁶⁶ Furthermore, the participants of these programs are a particular targeted class of audience, such as students, media professionals, and any institutional or academic individual. This means those participants belong to an organization or institution. As a result, many people who do not have any academic connection and do not belong to any institution are dropped out of such programs. Thus, their knowledge about media literacy and rumors cannot be enhanced. Lastly, in our country, most of the policies taken by the government or any organization are not

⁶³ ibid

⁶⁴ ibid

⁶⁵ ibid

⁶⁶ ibid

followed up after some time. Thus, the update and outcome of those initiatives remain primarily ineffective.

Chapter: 4

Prevention and Laws regarding spreading rumors and misinformation:

4.1 Introduction:

Spreading rumors is considered a criminal offence in most countries. Because rumors can cause severe types of violence, all of these countries are trying to prevent rumors by legal and technological means. Bangladesh is also following the same tactics. However, the policies still need to be changed to prevent rumors as there are still some lacking.

4.2 Prevention of Rumors:

Allport and Postman highlighted their worries and offered suggestions for dealing with rumors; it has been proposed that certain interventions will be necessary to prevent rumors from spreading further.⁶⁷ On the other hand, Shibutani claimed that the dissemination of rumors had been uncontrollable; the latter is especially remarkable and more convincing in the social media era.⁶⁸ In comparison with traditional media, on social media, editors are not properly surveilling the content or information before making it public; for this reason, imposing restrictions and strict laws are vital.

We can manage rumors only through certain practical methods, and while this is not easy, we can lessen it by-

⁶⁷ Biswas (n-6)

⁶⁸ ibid

4.2.1 By imposing restrictions on content sharing:

Bangladeshi authorities have requested Facebook and Google to take action against certain content on several occasions. Due to COVID- 19 related misinformation and blasphemy, Facebook limited access to 123 items between January and June 2020. This is first time content has been banned based on "misinformation.".⁶⁹

According to a Google Transparency Report, the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) requested that 6 Facebook URLs be removed from Google Search, stating that the content misled facts about the COVID-19 outbreak.⁷⁰

4.2.2 Warnings and Strict Accountability:

During COVID-19, the government issued a solid warning to citizens and various platforms to resist transmitting unverified information, rumors, and propaganda about the epidemic. The Cyber Security and Crime Division of the Dhaka Metropolitan Police contacted around 20 to 25 social media users and online news portals to correct misconceptions about the deadly virus, and they were instructed to correct their coronavirus-related posts and stories. ⁷¹

4.2.3 Filtering the content:

In our country, there are several fact-checking organizations which help to find out the authenticity of the content. Though fact-checking is very new in our country, some organizations are actively involved-

a. BD Factcheck:

It monitors the factual accuracy of statements made by political party leaders, public figures, intellectuals and disputed content in traditional media and social media, finally posting it on its website and Facebook page.⁷²

⁶⁹ Towhid (n-57)

⁷⁰ ibid

⁷¹ ibid

⁷² Bd Factcheck < <https://bdfactcheck.com/> >

b. Rumor Scanner:

The goal of Rumor Scanner is to show the truth behind common rumors like various types of viral topics on different grounds like politics, social, economic, health-care etc. It delivers fact-checked reports on current events via its website and Facebook page.⁷³

c. Fact Watch:

The organization analyzes information distributed by social media, thoughts made by public figures and politicians, news articles published by mainstream media, and other pertinent materials and publishes them on their website under several categories such as "false," "half true," and "unverified."⁷⁴

d. Jachai:

It is a Bangla fact-checking website; Jachai, the Bangla version of "verify", the Jachai team used its Facebook page to debunk and clarify numerous photographs and news stories that were circulating on social media.⁷⁵

4.2.4 Governmental Steps to prevent rumors:

a. preventive measurement of ICT Division:

The ICT division, in association with Leveraging ICT for Employment and Growth (LICT), Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC), and Digital Bangladesh, established an online portal called "Durbar21.org" to work against rumors. The campaign is called "Ashol Chini," which translates to "Know the Truth," and it includes the recruitment of youth ambassadors across the country to raise awareness about rumors and misinformation.⁷⁶

⁷³ Rumor Scanner < <https://rumorsscanner.com/>>

⁷⁴ Fact Watch < <https://www.fact-watch.org/web/>>

⁷⁵ Jachai < <https://www.jachai.org/about>>

⁷⁶ 'ICT Minister launches campaign to differentiate the truth from online lies and rumors' *The Business Standard* (Dhaka, 8 September,2020)

b. Initiatives of Law enforcement agencies:

The Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) has established a cyber-verification cell that educates people on responsible content sharing and debunks selected misinformation to combat the continued propagation of rumors on the coronavirus pandemic.⁷⁷

4.2.5 Non-government, Private sector and NGO's initiatives:

Non-government steps:

South Asia Center for Media in Development (SACMID) has been conducting incredible work; it is responsible for developing content on 'Media and Information Literacy' that will be integrated into school students' ICT curriculum. National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) have collaborated on this initiative. Additionally, it publishes a Bengali book titled "Gono Maddhyam Sakkhorota: Sahaj Path" that would teach media literacy in simple words.⁷⁸

Private Sector's initiative:

Preneur Lab:

Preneur Lab recently launched a website called "Nirapod Online" to combat various sorts of online threats; Nirapod Online is a digital wellbeing and information technology tool that will tackle fake news, rumors and internet threats by fact-checking.⁷⁹

Grameenphone:

Grameenphone has already launched online safety and etiquette initiatives, including public awareness campaigns against the propagation of rumors on social media. For this goal, the company has prepared various commercials and blogs. Such mass-media activities appear to be an effective means of combating misinformation.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ 'RAB launches cyber-verification cell to tackle Covid-19 misinformation' *The Daily Star* (April 09,2020)

⁷⁸ SACMID < <https://sacmid.asia/sacmids-activities-2020/> >

⁷⁹ Preneur Lab < <https://preneurlab.com/blog-post/nirapod-online/> >

⁸⁰ Towhid (n-57)

NGO's Initiative:

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF):

Through its Media Monitoring Task Force, UNICEF Bangladesh made an effort to combat rumor during the pandemic. Its social media team trained 16 volunteers, and the volunteers mostly monitored and reported medical rumors about COVID-19 on social media channels, particularly Facebook.⁸¹

According to the UNICEF Bangladesh communication officer, the team discovered 85 large misinformation posts with roughly 1.87 million interactions on social media during the monitoring exercise with the volunteers.⁸²

UNDP Digital Khichuri Challenge:

The United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) Digital Khichuri Challenge (DKC) is a program for young Bangladeshi changemakers who want to make the digital world a safer and more tolerant place. The competition's theme for 2020 was rumor, fake news, hate speech, and cyberbullying.⁸³

4.3 Relevant legal provisions of rumors in Bangladesh:

As rumors are considered a crime, like other countries, Bangladesh also has several legal provisions to tackle the issues regarding rumors. **Section 505 of the Penal Code 1860** deals with various types of rumors. This section narrates that if any person spreads any statement, rumors, or report intending to cause harm to any defense force officer or to cause fear and turmoil in the law-and order situation of the society. Later in 2018 the Bangladesh government enacted stricter provisions that include harsher punishment than before through Digital Security Act 2018. **Section 21 of the Digital Security Act 2018** describes that if any person runs or assists in running any propaganda or campaign through the digital medium, against the liberation war of Bangladesh,

⁸¹ Iftikhar Ahmed Chowdhury, UNICEF ‘ Youth volunteers bust COVID-19 myths and combat misinformation’ (17 August,2017)< <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/stories/youth-volunteers-bust-covid-19-myths-and-combat-misinformation> > accessed date 17 Aril, 2022

⁸² ibid

⁸³ Digital Khichuri Challenge < <https://digitalkhichuribd.org/about/> >

cognition of Liberation War, father of the nation, National anthem, or national flag, he will be considered committing an offense under this Act. **Section 25** of this Act, deals with spreading or circulating offensive, false, or fear-inducing data or information. It describes that if any person circulates any offensive or fear-inducing news being aware that it is false through any digital medium, intending to cause harm to any individual or to tarnish the image of the nation, that activity will be an offense under this Act. **Section 28** of this Act exclusively deals with religious sentiment or values. If any person or group spreads any false or offensive information intending to hurt any religious sentiment or values through any website or electronic format, will be considered as an offense under this Act. **Section 31** says that if any person intentionally publishes or broadcasts any type of file on any website or digital format, that can create hostility, hatred, or adversity among people or deteriorate the harmony and law and order of the society or any communal harmony, it is considered as an offense. **Section 66A of the Bangladesh Telecommunications (Amendment) Act, 2010** narrates that if any person spread or posts any signal, message, or invitation which is against the national unity and solidarity, or seditious, harmful to the sovereignty, defense, foreign relations, public safety, and law and order situation or can create adversity, division, and unrest, fear among the communities or people, will be considered as an offense under this Act.

4.4 Rumors related cases:

A significant number of cases have been reported during the Covid-19 pandemic in Bangladesh. On March 25, 2020, two government college teachers were allegedly suspended for posting provocative statements, and pictures on social media which alleged to be inconsistent with the government's ongoing mobilized activities regarding control of the Covid-19 pandemic.⁸⁴

In Badda, Taslima Begum Renu, 40, was killed in a mob beating after she was suspected as a child lifter when she went to the school in the hope of getting her daughter admitted there. This murder was instigated by a rumor that Renu was a child lifter.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ Human Rights Watch, “Bangladesh: End Wave of COVID-19 Rumor Arrest” (March 31, 2020) <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/31/bangladesh-end-wave-covid-19-rumor-arrests>> accessed date 10 April,2022

⁸⁵ “Badda mob beating: 13 accused of Renu murder indicted” *The Daily Star* (Dhaka,1 April,2021)

On June 5, 2020, a Bangladeshi cartoonist was among 11 people arrested for "spreading misinformation"; the 11 are accused of "spreading rumors and misinformation regarding the coronavirus issue on Facebook." Two of the 11 were detained; artist Ahmed Kabir Kishore and writer Mushtaq Ahmed. Kishore was working on a "Life in the Time of Corona" cartoon series featuring caricatures of ruling party politicians and claims of health sector corruption, and Ahmed has been a vocal critic of the supposed inadequacy of safety gear for doctors. They were charged under the Digital Security Act, 2018.⁸⁶

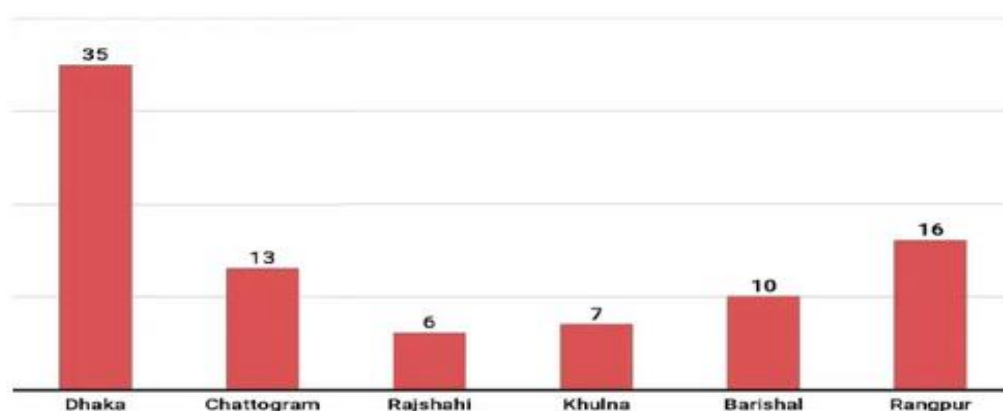


Figure-2: Division- wise rumor related arrest (March 8 -August 22)⁸⁷

The GOB's security agents arrested 87 individuals. A division-wise distribution of the data reveals that Dhaka (35) has the most remarkable rate of arrests for rumor-related offenses, second Rangpur (16) and third Chattogram (13). Rajshahi division has the lowest arrest rate.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ France 24 "Bangladesh Police charge 11 people for spreading virus rumor (06 May, 2020) <<https://www.france24.com/en/20200506-bangladesh-police-charge-11-for-spreading-virus-rumours>> Accessed May 10, 2022

⁸⁷ Biswas (n-6)

⁸⁸ ibid

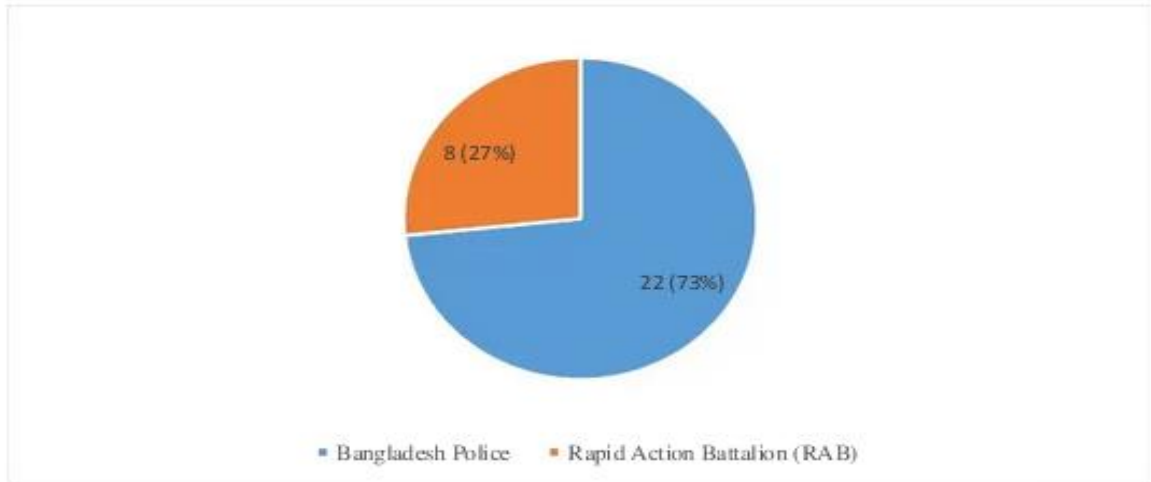


Figure 3: Rumors related to arrest by law enforcement agencies⁸⁹

Additionally, the BPO data indicates that out of 30 arrest-related occurrences of COVID-19 rumors, 22 (73 %) were made by Bangladesh Police and 8 (27 %) by the RAB. According to newspaper claims, law enforcement agencies charged several defendants for allegedly spreading rumors under the Digital Security Act 2018.⁹⁰

Bangladesh witnessed many cases instigated by rumors in the past. The Ramu attack that shook the harmony among the different communities of Bangladesh was initiated by a Facebook post. On September 29 and 30, 2012, a gang of fanatics inflicted havoc on the Ramu Buddhist community by spreading a rumor that a Facebook post insulting the Holy Quran had been posted on the Facebook page of a native Buddhist teenager Uttam Barua. Later, The Daily Star discovered that the Facebook profile with the photo denigrating the Holy Quran, which allegedly provoked the violence, was fake.⁹¹

In the **Shinu Syamalan and Ors. vs State of Kerala** case, the petitioners were accused of circulating rumors. In this case, the court held that the petitioners will be subject to punishment

⁸⁹ ibid

⁹⁰ ibid

⁹¹ Ashutosh Sarkar, 'Eight years of Ramu Attack: Buddhist still wait for justice' The Daily Star (Dhaka, September 29, 2020)

under section 505(1)(b) of the Indian Penal Code. But the court granted bail to the petitioners on stringent grounds.⁹²

4.5 Legal consequences of rumor in Bangladesh:

The legal consequences of committing offences related to rumors are quite harsh. If any person commits an offense under **section 505 of the penal code,1860**, he will be punished with imprisonment, which may extend to seven years or with a fine or both. If any person commits an offense under **section 21 of the Digital Security Act 2018**, he will be punished with imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years or with a fine up to 1 crore taka or both. If any person commits this offense repeatedly, he will be punished with life imprisonment or a fine not exceeding 3 crores taka or both. If any person commits an offense under **section 25** of this Act, he will be punished with imprisonment up to 3 years or with a fine not exceeding 3 lacs taka or both. If any person repeatedly commits this same offense, he will be punished with imprisonment for a term not exceeding five years or with a fine not exceeding ten lacs or with both. When any person commits an offense under **section 28** of this Act by creating or spreading rumors related to religious sentiment or values, he will be punished with imprisonment of a term not exceeding seven years or a fine not exceeding 10 lacs taka or with both. If any person repeatedly repeats the same offense for the second time, he will be punished with imprisonment not exceeding ten years or with a fine not exceeding 20 lacs taka or both. When any person publishes or broadcasts anything to create turmoil and commits an offence under **section 31**, he will be punished with imprisonment up to 7 years or with fine of 5 lacs taka or both. If a person repeatedly commits this offense, he will be punished with imprisonment for a term not exceeding ten years or with a fine not exceeding 10 lac taka or with both. When a person commits or abets in committing such an offense under **section 66A of the Bangladesh Telecommunications (Amendment) Act, 2010**, the Commission will order the concerned telecommunication service provider to stop that alleged signal, message or invitation if any telecommunication service provider violates the order that will also be considered

⁹² 2020 (4) KHC 611, 2020(4) KLJ173

as an offense under this section and will be punished with imprisonment not exceeding five years or with a fine not exceeding 300 crore taka or both.

4.6 Worldwide review of rumor issues:

The other countries are also handling significant numbers of rumor issues and they also took various types of steps to prevent it.

India

India is facing an alarming number of rumors on messaging platforms like WhatsApp, which has induced violence across the country. Though the national government had issued anti-fake news guidelines before, all those went in vain. In 2018, the Indian government shut down the internet more than 100 times to stop the spread of rumors on WhatsApp; According to Freedom House, the shutdowns of the internet in India are more frequent than in other countries and cost billions of dollars.⁹³ India does not have a specific law to deal with rumors-related issues. However, the country has legal provisions under the Indian Penal Code, 1860. **Section 505 of the Indian Penal Code 1860** made rumors or statements, or reports punishable which may cause fear to the public. **Section 54 of the Disaster Management Act 2005** deals with false alarms or warnings regarding the disaster that leads to panic and makes such activity punishable offenses.⁹⁴ India has brought changes in the **Information Technology Act 2000**, which would require social media platforms to initiate tracing the originators of texts. This step aims to control the spread of offensive content and rumors on messaging platforms like WhatsApp, and besides punishment, the country has started to keep records of the previous offenders.⁹⁵

Pakistan

Pakistan has become more active in handling rumors issues since 2018 after facing frequent rumors-based incidents on Twitter. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting of Pakistan

⁹³ Daniel Funke and Daniela Flamini, Poynter 'A guide to anti-misinformation actions around the world' (March,2018) <<https://www.poynter.org/ifcn/anti-misinformation-actions/#india> >accessed date 17 April,2022

⁹⁴ Milindanand14, 'Rumors During Pandemic and Laws Around it'

⁹⁵ Funke and Flamini (n-93)

introduced an account called Fake News Buster to disclose fake and negative propaganda.⁹⁶ Pakistan enacted the **Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016** which made offenses regarding spreading fake news or defamatory statements against a person or state through online, non-bailable.⁹⁷ Pakistan enacted another latest rule named **Citizens Protection (Against Online Harm) Rules 2020**, that made correspondingly with the previous parent acts. This rule requires social media companies and other online media companies to register with PTA (Pakistan Telecommunication Authority), and establish permanent physical office and database servers in Pakistan. The social media companies must cooperate with PTA such as removing the content involved in spreading fake news or news harming the religious, cultural, ethnic, or national security of Pakistan. If any social media company violates the regulation, it may be subject to a penalty or blockage.⁹⁸

United States

After facing severe unrest in the U.S presidential election, which has been alleged to be caused by Russia, the U.S federal government has taken many piecemeal actions. In the USA, Congress announced a bill that would demand that online platforms keep a copy of ads and other information. After some days, the California state government passed a law that supports media literacy in public schools. The Department of Education is required to make a chart of instructional materials and resources on the procedure of assessing trustworthy media.⁹⁹

United Kingdom

The British government has also taken many steps to combat the rumors issue in the UK. The UK government mostly focused on how misinformation spreads. In addition, the government founded the National Security Communications Unit which will be dealing with the task of combating misinformation by the state and others. Furthermore, the UK's education and health secretaries added a new topic in the school curriculum to teach the kids how to spot misinformation online.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ ibid

⁹⁷ Ayaz Gul, VOA News, 'Pakistan Toughens Law Against Fake News' (February 21,2022)

<<https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistan-toughens-law-against-fake-news-/6452434.html> >accessed 20 April,2022

⁹⁸ Ahmad and Tariq, 'Pakistan: Federal Government Issues Controversial Rules on Social Media Content' (2020)

⁹⁹ Funke and Flamme (n-93)

¹⁰⁰ ibid

China

China is one of the countries that have the strictest laws to deal with rumors. Creating and spreading rumors that harm the economic and social order are criminal offenses. The law requires social media platforms to exclusively republish and link news articles from registered news media. Later, the government launched an app that enables people to report potential fakery. The app is also able to automatically detect rumors on the platforms such as WeChat, Weibo.¹⁰¹ The Chinese government requires every service provider to suspend the accounts related to spreading rumors.¹⁰²

Italy

The Italian government introduced a law in 2017, that had criminalized the posting or sharing of false, exaggerated, or tendentious news and imposed fines. This law also proposed imprisonment for the serious nature of rumors that might invoke violence or crime and made social media platforms obligated to monitor their activities. Promoting media literacy is also a major concern of this law.¹⁰³

Bangladesh

Bangladesh is still lagging in combating rumors issues both legally and technically. As people of Bangladesh are not that conscious of rumors, fake news or misinformation, the action against the rumors from the side of the public is not noticeable. Also, while committing such kinds of offenses, many offenders don't even know that they are committing a crime according to the laws, because they are not aware of the relevant laws.

Recently, the Bangladesh judiciary sector has given some significant judgment in these types of cases; High Court Division has issued five directives to prevent rumors and lynching and expand awareness regarding these issues. The high court ordered the home ministry to continue publishing awareness programs on electronic and other media regarding lynching. The home ministry has been ordered to take steps to prevent any kind of audio, video, or SMS on social platforms, which can create rumors or instigate public lynching, and also ordered to take steps to identify and punish the mobsters involved in such activity. When an incident of such lynching would take place in any

¹⁰¹ ibid

¹⁰² Damian Tambini, 'Fake News: Public Policy Responses', Media Policy Brief 20 (2017)

¹⁰³ ibid

area, the OC of the respective police station will be compelled to register FIR without any delay and inform the designated special officer of the circle. Every investigating circle officer will have to inspect this type of case personally and must complete the investigation within three months. The secretary of the Education Ministry has been ordered to investigate and take steps regarding the issue of whether the headmaster of the North Badda Primary School is eligible to be employed in his post. As the victim, Taslima Begum Renu was in the custody of the headmaster before being murdered.¹⁰⁴

Chapter: 5

Conclusion

5.1 Findings of the study:

Social media users are increasing rapidly, making it easy for a rumor to reach people. The spread of rumors generally increases during particular situations or emergency situations, and political parties most often take advantage of it, even if they influence the spread of rumors.

With the time, the nature and patterns of the rumors have been changed from offline and limited form to online. The effective measures like auto fact-checking tools, accountability of social media and other media companies etc. are not duly implemented yet. Fact-checking tools and systems are still not totally free of cost. This is another reason for people being reluctant to use fact-checkers.

The laws related to rumors or misinformation are not effective enough compared to the laws of other countries. Moreover, there is definitional and classification-related ambiguity in the laws that deal with rumors, such as Penal Code, 1860, Digital Security Act 2018 and Bangladesh Telecommunications (Amendment) Act, 2010.

¹⁰⁴ Rafsan Jani, 'Five directives of the High Court, to prevent rumors and mass beating' (Dhaka, 15 February, 2020)

Despite harsher punishments, the existing laws fail to address various types of rumors due to the ambiguity in the legal framework to cover them. Moreover, this ambiguity sometimes becomes beneficial for the government to suppress the freedom of speech or expression.

Like the laws of Pakistan, China, and Italy, none of our country's laws makes liable or answerable social media companies to the authority if they fail to cooperate with the concerned Bangladeshi authority in case to prevent the spreading of rumors. Similarly, to India, our country's law enforcement agencies have no database of previous offenders, which is necessary.

The rumor-related provisions of the Digital Security Act, 2018 can be used arbitrarily by the government as, section 25, can be used to censor logical political expression. The law enforcement agencies are authorized by this Act, to arrest anyone only based on suspicion, even without a warrant.¹⁰⁵

5.2 Recommendations:

Bangladesh needs some major reformation in both the legal and technical sectors. Like Italy and the UK, media literacy should be given importance. For this, the respective authorities and government can introduce some policies from the beginning level, such as in the school curriculum to literate the people from a young age. A topic of media literacy can be included as an additional study at the school level, which students will study to learn about the many things related to online and offline media platforms. IT authorities should launch some apps or mechanisms which will automatically detect fake content, which China did. There should be added some mechanism that would filter every content before sharing or posting on the online and digital Platforms. The government also should bring reform and upgrade our legal sectors. Likewise India, law enforcement agencies should make a database including records of previous offenders. Like Pakistan, social media and other news and online media companies must be registered or affiliated and they also should be made liable if any rumor or fake news spread through their platforms. The existing legal provisions related to rumors also should be modified. As the interpretation of rumors

¹⁰⁵ Amnesty International, 'Bangladesh: New Digital Security Act is attack on freedom of expression' (12 November,2018) < <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/11/bangladesh-muzzling-dissent-online/> > accessed date 1 May,2022

is not widely clear in the Digital Security Act 2018 and the government can use these provisions as weapons to suppress someone's freedom of speech, the necessary information and categorization should be added. There also should be a classification of offenders in the law. Because sometimes, a person may spread rumors believing that the information is true and unintentional. Thus, the punishment should be lesser than the intended offender. Lastly, our law should be reformative because only harsh punishment cannot stop rumors-related crimes. In order to do that, reformative or correctional punishment can be introduced in the law.

5.3 Concluding Remarks:

Rumors that create an uproar in a community, society, country, or even globally during the time of a disaster, war, pandemic, or any significant event, cannot be exterminated totally because any human being is prone to transmit rumors under uncertainty and confounding situations. A person always does not have the ability of critical thinking to verify a rumor. Furthermore, the advancement in information and communication technology and several online media have expedited the way of spreading rumors nowadays. Rumors are being used to manipulate various significant events such as elections, war, etc. A remarkable example is the rumor of microchips in the corona vaccine to make the vaccination program questionable. Hence dealing with rumors must be more plan and action-oriented. The public also should be more cautious and sensible.

Given the increasing usage and interactive nature of social media, critical thinking is regarded as a crucial component of media literacy that everyone in a community should possess. In most cases, rumors get spread and believed because of not having enough knowledge and counter-evidence to combat them. As rumor is false news, and if an individual who hears a rumor has the minimum knowledge about the happening, can have the possibility of not believing that rumor. Thus, besides preventive measures, the general public needs to stay updated with current happenings. We should also be careful about the preventive legal and technological framework. It must not become a tool of the government or wealthy people to suppress someone's freedom.

Bibliography

Statutes:

- 1.The Penal Code, 1860
- 2.The Digital Security Act, 2018
- 3.The Bangladesh Telecommunication (Amendment) Act, 2010
- 4.The Indian Penal Code, 1860
- 5.The Disaster Management Act, 2005
- 6.The Information Technology Act,2000
- 7.The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act,2016
- 8.Citizen Protection (Against Online Harm) Rules,2020

Cases:

1. Shinu Syamalan and Ors. vs State of Kerala 2020 (4) KHC 611, 2020(4) KLJ173

Journal:

1. Ahmad, Tariq, 'Pakistan: Federal Government Issues Controversial Rules on Social Media Content' (2020)
2. Akon, M. S. & Bhuiyan, A. N. (2020). Rumors and its impact on youth during COVID-19 pandemic: the case of Bangladesh. Journal of Research in Education, Science and Technology, 5(1), 26-35
3. Al Zaman M, 'Storytelling and Rhetoric of rumor in social media, Chapter-3, P-50
4. Al Zaman M, 'Social Media Rumors in Bangladesh' (2020) 8, p-77
5. Aschale A, 'Review of The Grapevine Communication'(2018), p-11
6. Biswas N, 'Dead Man Tell No Lies'- Rumors and Social Tension During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Bangladesh' (2021) 4

7. Douglas KM, Sutton RM and Cichocka A. The psychology of conspiracy theories. 2017;26(6):538-42
8. Knapp R, 'A Psychology of Rumor' (1944) 8 Public Opinion Quarterly
9. Milindanand14, 'Rumors During Pandemic and Laws Around it'
10. Nekovee M, 'Theory of Rumor Spreading in Complex Social Networks' (2007) 374
11. Schindler M, 'Rumors in Financial Markets (Insights into Behavioral Finance), Definition and Characteristics of Rumor' (2012) 10
12. Tambini. D, 'Fake News: Public Policy Responses', Media Policy Brief 20 (2017)
13. Zheltukhina M, 'Role of Media Rumors in The Modern Society' (2016) 11

Newspaper:

1. 'ICT Minister launches campaign to differentiate the truth from online lies and rumors' *The Business Standard* (Dhaka, September 8,2020) < <https://www.tbsnews.net/bangladesh/ict-minister-launches-campaign-differentiate-truth-online-lies-and-rumours-130153>> accessed April 19,2022
2. 'Facebook users increase by 10 million in Bangladesh' *The Prothom Alo* (Dhaka, June 10,2021) < <https://en.prothomalo.com/science-technology/social-media/facebook-users-increase-by-10-million-in-bangladesh> > accessed April 10,2022
3. 'RAB launches cyber-verification cell to tackle Covid-19 misinformation' *The Daily Star* (April 09,2020) < <https://www.thedailystar.net/rab-launches-cyber-verification-cell-tackle-coronavirus-covid-19-misinformation-1891354>> accessed April 23,2022
4. "Badda mob beating: 13 accused of Renu murder indicted" *The Daily Star* (Dhaka, April 1,2021) <<https://www.thedailystar.net/law-our-rights/law-news/news/badda-mob-beating-13-accused-renu-murder-indicted-2070433> >
5. Jahan M, 'Pandemics: Always Accompanied by Rumors' *The Daily Observer* (2020)
6. Jani. R, 'Five directives of the High Court, to prevent rumors and mass beating' (Dhaka, February 15,2020) <<https://www.newsbangla24.com/news/179628/Five-directives-of-the-High-Court-to-prevent-rumors-and-mass-beatings> >accessed April 20,2022
7. Lorenz T, 'Birds Aren't Real, or Are They? Inside A Gen Z Conspiracy Theory' *The New York Times* (2021) accessed April

5,2022<<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/12/09/technology/birds-arent-real-gen-z-misinformation.html>>

8. Rahman D, 'Causes and Prevention of Rumors' *The Daily Sun* (2021) < <https://www.daily-sun.com/printversion/details/592495/Causes-and-Prevention-of-Rumours> > accessed in April 15,2022
9. Sarkar. A, 'Eight years of Ramu Attack: Buddhist still wait for justice' *The Daily Star* (Dhaka, September 29, 2020) < <https://www.thedailystar.net/backpage/news/eight-years-ramu-attack-buddhists-still-wait-justice-1969173?fbclid=IwAR3glT9-r34IgNmKW79-BefIUuM81CXo2thMRTiMpcMyDKBIOskfZh7ZYSM> >

Website:

1. 'Deconstructing Rumors in the workplace' < <https://go.mcombs.utexas.edu/Rumors-in-the-Workplace-TEE-Blog.html> > accessed April 5,2022
2. Amnesty International, 'Bangladesh: New Digital Security Act is attack on freedom of expression' (November 12,2018) < <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/11/bangladesh-muzzling-dissent-online/> > accessed date May 1,2022
3. Bd Factcheck< <https://bdfactcheck.com/> >
4. Chowdhury. I, UNICEF' Youth volunteers bust COVID-19 myths and combat misinformation' (August 17,2017)< <https://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/en/stories/youth-volunteers-bust-covid-19-myths-and-combat-misinformation> > accessed date 17 Aril, 2022
5. Digital Khichuri Challenge < <https://digitalkhichuribd.org/about/> >
6. Fact Watch < <https://www.fact-watch.org/web/> >
7. France 24 "Bangladesh Police charge 11 people for spreading virus rumor (May 6, 2020) <<https://www.france24.com/en/20200506-bangladesh-police-charge-11-for-spreading-virus-rumours>> Accessed May 10, 2022

8. Funke. D and Flamine. D, Poynter' A guide to anti-misinformation actions around the world' (March,2018) <<https://www.poynter.org/ifcn/anti-misinformation-actions/#india>>accessed date April 17,2022
9. Gul. A, VOA News, 'Pakistan Toughens Law Against Fake News' (February 21,2022) <<https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistan-toughens-law-against-fake-news-/6452434.html>>accessed April 20,2022
10. Human Rights Watch, "Bangladesh: End Wave of COVID-19 Rumor Arrest" (March 31, 2020) <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/03/31/bangladesh-end-wave-covid-19-rumor-arrests>> accessed date April 10,2022
11. Jachai < <https://www.jachai.org/about>>
12. Poche T, 'Rumors and Conspiracy Theories' (*LSU Faculty Website,2021*) <<https://faculty.lsu.edu/fakenews/rumorsandconspiracy.php>> accessed date April 4, 2022
13. Preneur Lab < <https://preneurlab.com/blog-post/nirapod-online/>>
14. Rafe R, DW 'Bangladesh: Fake news on Facebook fuels communal violence' (1 November,2019) <<https://www.dw.com/en/bangladesh-fake-news-on-facebook-fuels-communal-violence/a-51083787>> accessed 5 April, 2022
15. Reid S, 'Conspiracy Theory' (*britannica.com, 2022*) <<https://www.britannica.com/topic/conspiracy-theory>> accessed date, 15/04/2022
16. Rumor Scanner < <https://rumorscanner.com/>>
17. SACMID < <https://sacmid.asia/sacmids-activities-2020/>>
18. Towhid. A, LIRNEASIA "Misinformation in Bangladesh: A Brief Primer" < <https://lirneasia.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Misinformation-in-Bangladesh-A-Brief-Primer.pdf>> accessed 17 April, 2022