

# D/Misinformation on Social Media and the Role of the LIS Profession: A South Asian Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

The spread of d/misinformation on social media poses serious threats to the social, cultural, political, and economic structures of human societies. This panel is designed to discuss the phenomenon of d/misinformation and fake news on social media, including the motives of its sharing and its impact on society. The panelists will also highlight the role of LIS professionals in educating society to assess the quality of online information before decision-making. Sponsored by the South Asia Chapter and bringing in voices from various South Asian countries and North America, the primary focus of the panel will be on the South Asian perspective in looking at d/misinformation. Synergizing multiple perspectives and firsthand experiences of experts and listeners on the contextual misinformation fact-checking phenomenon while focusing on South Asia, the panel should inform the viewpoints of listeners, while contributing towards the research and practice of information professionals, as well as towards institutional policies.

## KEYWORDS

Misinformation; disinformation; fake news; South Asia; LIS profession

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of disinformation and misinformation (we shorten it to d/misinformation) has prevailed across centuries. However, it has emerged as a great threat in the age of social media, particularly during and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Flynn & Li, 2019; Erdelez, Agarwal, & Jahnke, 2019). The spread of false information on social media poses serious threats to the social, cultural, political, and economic structures of societies – for instance, Arab spring in the early 2010s, UK or London riots in 2021, US Presidential election in 2016, etc. (Bonnet & Sellers, 2019; Lin & Wang, 2020). It can cost human lives, as witnessed during Ebola and Zika epidemics, and more recently the COVID-19 pandemic, where false information hindered timely intervention in the spread or impact of these diseases.

Historically, the LIS profession has played its role in the healthy and effective functioning of democratic societies. It has done so by educating people with the provision of credible and trustworthy information sources and services (Malik et al., 2021; Paor & Heravi, 2020). However, in the current dynamic environment of social media and smartphones, rather than access to information, discerning accurate information from d/misinformation is a bigger challenge. Various researchers have written about the significant role of libraries and librarians as experts in teaching critical thinking skills to recognize and refute d/misinformation (Jones-Jang, et al., 2021; Noreen et al., 2020; Paor & Heravi, 2020; Agarwal & Alsaedi, 2021).

However, how the librarians, educators, and other information professionals of South Asia are responding to this challenge is a question yet to be answered. South Asians are ranked among the world's most ubiquitous users of social media platforms (Tapsell, 2020). According to Statista (2022), almost 18.44% of social media users are from South Asia. There is a dearth of literature highlighting this phenomenon in the context of South Asia. South Asia is home to more than one-fourth of the world's population, with various universities offering LIS education (Islam & Agarwal, 2021). It is a region where the literacy rate is generally low, libraries are less developed, and in many of the countries, democracy is in differing stages of maturity, whereas penetration of social media among the general public is very high (Malik et al., 2021; Malik et al., 2022). Keeping this unique context in view, it is significant to know how LIS professionals in the region can play their part in educating people in assessing the quality of information on social media, and how the results can benefit other librarians and information professionals all over the world.

## AIM OF THE PANEL

The proposed panel is designed to discuss the phenomenon of d/misinformation and fake news on social media, including the motives of its sharing and its impact on society. The panelists will also highlight the role of LIS

professionals in educating society to assess the quality of online information before decision-making. These questions will guide the discussion.

Q1. How is d/misinformation phenomenon contextualized in the South Asian region?

Q2. What kinds of challenges do libraries and librarians face in initiating and implementing programs and initiatives to fight d/misinformation?

Q3. In what ways should information professionals be prepared to understand contextual d/misinformation?

Q4. How can LIS professionals sensitize and educate people about d/misinformation?

Q5. What are the effective strategies and tools that information professionals can adopt to mitigate the d/misinformation crisis?

### **FORMAT OF THE PANEL**

The panel is designed to be interactive. The panelists as well as the members of the audience will contribute to the discussion.

- Introductions (4 mins)
- Discussion of questions (56 mins)
- Q&A (15 mins)

### **Amara Malik (Pakistan, panelist)**

Amara Malik is an Assistant Professor at the Institute of Information Management, University of the Punjab. She did her Ph.D., M.Phil, and Master's (with distinction) from the same institute. She has published her research in international journals such as Information Development, Health Communication, Library Hi Tech, Journal of Information Science, Information and Learning Sciences, Online Information Review, portal: the Academy and Libraries etc. Amara has also presented her research at conferences in Pakistan and internationally, and has participated in many seminars and workshops. Her research interests include human information interaction, social media, misinformation/disinformation, and fake news. Recently, she has published articles on the phenomenon of misinformation/disinformation and fake news in reputed journals. She will talk about how the information professionals should be prepared to understand the phenomenon of misinformation and how they can make people to assess the quality of information before its sharing or taking any decision. Her Google scholar profile can be accessed at: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=ApNGaocAAAAJ>.

### **Syeda Hina Batool (Pakistan, panelist)**

Hina Batool is Assistant Professor at the Institute of Information Management, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan. In 2016, she did her PhD from ISchool, University of Sheffield, UK. Currently, she is doing her Postdoc from University of British Columbia, Canada on "Investigating misinformation and disinformation in the context of Higher Education: Preventing scholarly anarchy through Critical Information Literacy". Her research interest focuses on examining information literacy instruction and related literacies (health, digital, workplace, visual, media etc.), more specifically through qualitative research lens. She has published a good number of empirical research work in national and international journals. She is serving at various national and international forums. She is also ASIS&T South Asia Chapter chair 2022-2023. Previously she served as social media manager and web master in ASIS&T South Asia Chapter and SIG III actively during 2020 and 2021. She will bring into light the role of information literacy in combating misinformation. As she is teacher and researcher in the area of IL, she will share her national as well as Canadian perspective on the importance of assessing the quality of information.

### **Naresh Kumar Agarwal (USA, moderator and panelist)**

Naresh Agarwal is a Professor and Director of the Information Science & Technology Concentration at the School of Library & Information Science at Simmons University, Boston, Massachusetts. Naresh's research area is information behavior and knowledge management. His first book 'Exploring Context in Information Behavior' was published by Morgan & Claypool in 2018. His second book was published in 2021 as 'Engineering to Ikigai' in South Asia and 'You know the glory, not the story' internationally. He has been a keynote/invited speaker at workshops and conferences in Bangladesh, France, India, Iran, Japan, Pakistan, South Africa, and the US. Naresh is the Immediate-Past President of ASIS&T, where he has held various leadership positions, including co-chairing its Annual Meeting in 2017 and founding the South Asia Chapter. In 2012, he was awarded the ASIS&T James M.

Cretsos Leadership Award. You can learn more about Naresh at [nareshagarwal.com](http://nareshagarwal.com) and [projectonenessworld.com](http://projectonenessworld.com). Naresh has given various talks on disinformation and fake news. A poster based on his paper on disinformation behavior model (Agarwal & Alsaeedi, 2021) was among the Top 10 most downloaded articles, Wiley, 2022. Dr. Naresh will moderate the session as well as give a comparative perspective of USA and India.

**Md. Anwarul Islam (Bangladesh, panelist)**

Md. Anwarul Islam is an Associate Professor in the Department of Information Science and Library Management, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. His research areas revolve around knowledge management, information behaviour, Social media, Information literacy and Informetrics. He holds ACU Fellowship in UBC, Canada; DRF Fellowship in JAIST, Japan; ACRC Fellowship in NTU, Singapore and VLIR-UOS fellowship in the University of Antwerp, Belgium. He has served in various roles at ASIS&T including member of membership committee, Chair of Chapters & SIGs, member of program committee, and now serving as advisor to South Asia Chapter, communication officers to Asia Pacific Chapter, and member of the Awards & Honors committee of ASIS&T. He is one of the winners of the SIG-III 2019 International Paper Contest (IPC), recipient of the New Leaders Award 2017 and James M. Cretsos Leadership Award 2021. He has been actively involved with the International Conference on Library and Information Science (IConLIS), Asia-Pacific Conference on Library & Information Education and Practice (A-LIEP), and international editor of 'Data and Information Management' journal. He will present the role of libraries and librarians in Bangladesh to educate the people regarding the misinformation and disinformation phenomenon. He also highlights the challenges faced by the libraries in doing so.

**Prasadi Jayasekara (Sri Lanka, panelist)**

Prasadi Jayasekara is a Senior Assistant Librarian at the University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka. She is currently working towards her doctoral degree in Information Systems at the Faculty of Business and Economics, University of Auckland, New Zealand. She received her B.Sc. degree in Agriculture from the Faculty of Agriculture, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka, and her Master's degree in Library and Information Science from the National Institute of Library and Information Science, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka. Her research interests include social media – information behavior, misinformation/disinformation sharing and evaluation by social media users, altmetrics and information literacy. Her doctoral research is focused on understanding gardening information dissemination and discovery via social media channels, where she will study gardeners' information behavior as well as information misbehavior. As she is librarian she will highlight the challenges libraries are facing to initiate misinformation refuting programs. She is also working on information behavior particularly on social media, so will give her suggestions for librarians to adopt workable strategies to mitigate misinformation.

**Reshma Dangol (Nepal, panelist)**

Reshma Dangol has been in the library profession for thirteen years. Library is her passion. She is currently a Professional Librarian in the SAARC Secretariat. She is the General Secretary of the Nepal Library Association. She is engaged as a Library Trainer of CTEVT. Reshma has been recognized in the IFLA Wall of Fame. She has been awarded the Excellence Award in SAARC 2019. She has conducted various webinars, seminars, and conferences in Nepal and internationally. She played a major role in success of the 'Building Strong Library Association (BSLA)' program affiliated with IFLA. She worked as Rapporteur at the WLIC 84th IFLA General Conference and Assembly, Kuala Lumpur Malaysia. In 2021, she participated in the Internet Governance Forum (IGF 2021) in Katowice, Poland. She will discuss the challenges of libraries and librarians in designing and developing awareness programs to educate the people of Nepal regarding the d/misinformation.

**Manika Lamba (India, panelist)**

Manika Lamba has recently completed her Ph.D. in Information Science from the University of Delhi, India. Her research focuses on information retrieval, digital libraries, social informatics, and scholarly communication using NLP, and machine learning techniques. In addition to publishing scholarly articles, she has published 2 books. Currently, she is serving as the Editor-in-Chief of IJLIS, and the Chair of the Professional Development SubCommittee at the IFLA STL Section. She has received funding from Princeton University, NSF, ASIS&T, and SICSS. ASIS&T South Asia chapter received the "Best Publication" Award in 2022 for the Newsletter designed and edited by her. She will highlight the Indian perspective regarding how misinformation is perceived by people and what kind of initiatives libraries are taken to sensitize the people about the issue.

**CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

The panelists from South Asia will highlight the actual context of the d/misinformation phenomenon in the region of South Asia based on their local practices and experiences, while the panelists from North America will provide an overall perspective. The speakers will highlight the significant role of several stakeholders in fighting this phenomenon, including the role of information professionals. Moreover, the experts will talk about their own experiences, insights, and ideologies to combat this 'infodemic'. They will discuss the information policies and the required set of skills needed to eradicate the crisis.

The contribution of this panel will be a synthesis of multiple perspectives of experts and listeners focusing on the South Asian region. The discussion will provide essential future pathways to initiate or improve information literacy programs intended to train people in assessing the quality of information on social media. It will provide guidelines to librarians to continue and enhance their role in the digital era by helping people develop the critical thinking skills

to spot and refute d/misinformation. The takeaways of this discussion will help the research and practice of information professionals and possibly inform their institutional policies.

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