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In the Shadows of Disinformation: Fake News and Violations of Human Rights

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Abstract

This study examines the interconnected phenomenon of disinformation and fake news and their relationship to the struggle for human rights. Through an interdisciplinary perspective, we explore the crucial role of the deliberate dissemination of false information in threatening and violating human rights globally. The focus is on how disinformation has become a subtle form of conflict, often circumventing traditional perceptions of war and confrontation. Our study reflects on developing effective strategies and mechanisms to counter disinformation. It suggests multidimensional approaches combining legislative, educational, and technological efforts to comprehensively address this emerging challenge.

Keywords: Disinformation, Fake news, Human rights, Information warfare, Countermeasures

Introduction

The phenomenon of fake news, although not entirely novel in the realm of political and cultural discourse, has undergone significant evolution and expansion, conferring it an unprecedented global scope.[1][2] This trend has captured the attention of scholars, political

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figures, and social actors, emerging as one of the most addressed and discussed issues in the contemporary landscape. The study of fake news represents an interdisciplinary space involving various disciplines such as communication, political science, psychology, and sociology.[3] Their propagation, facilitated primarily by digital channels and social media, has produced substantial impacts in the public sphere, compromising trust in institutions, distorting the democratic process, and influencing collective perceptions[4]. One crucial element of this changing process lies in the speed of information dissemination through digital networks, amplifying the effects of fake news and making source verification an increasingly complex task. This effect is intrinsically linked to the information society, characterized by rapid news transmission and growing dependence on digital resources. Simultaneously, the proliferation of fake news raises ethical questions about the responsibility of media, online platforms, and users in addressing misinformation[5]. Efforts to counter this flow necessitate collective reflection on the role of information technologies and the need to promote media literacy to ensure informed participation in today's society[6]. In summary, although not a conceptual novelty, this wave has acquired global proportions that require a joint and synergistic response from all social and political actors. A comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon is indispensable for developing effective strategies to mitigate its negative influences on democracy, public opinion credibility, and the quality of discourse. The intricate nature of the phenomenon is evident from the definitional level, emphasizing the significant difficulty in formulating a comprehensive notion of this occurrence[7]. Analogous to Isaiah Berlin's description in 1967,[8] the analysis of the fake news concept could risk falling into the "Cinderella Complex." According to Berlin's analysis, populism can be likened to the metaphor of the slipper, where different political "feet" try to fit comfortably into the concept of populism, as if it were footwear. Similarly, to the fairy tale, the political prince may make mistakes until he finds the version of populism that fits perfectly, a sort of pure populism. In a quite similar manner, the term fake news poses semantic and conceptual challenges reminiscent of the "Cinderella Complex." The blurred and polysemic definition of fake news can lead to a situation where different interpretations and applications of the term seek to adapt to specific circumstances, as if

they were feet in search of a shoe. In this scenario, there is a risk that the term is used appropriately, depending on conveniences and subjective interpretations, without a clear correspondence with a precise and shared notion. The definition of the expression lends itself to a blur, as it generally refers to a heterogeneous set of false or distorted information and news, without any distinction regarding the intentions behind their creation and dissemination. This conceptual ambiguity has contributed to complicating the formulation of a unique and detailed definition. Moreover, the difficulties in this exercise may provide fertile ground for behaviours aiming to label authentic but inconvenient news as false. This instrumentalization of the concept translates into a distorted use aimed at suppressing legitimate criticism and opposition, relegating the term to a tool of power rather than an instrument of objective analysis. The need to address these definitional challenges becomes crucial for an accurate and rigorous understanding of the fake news phenomenon and to develop critical tools capable of discerning between authentic information and distortions deliberately created for specific purposes. Given the widespread ambiguity and misuse of the term, in this context, the use of the nouns "disinformation" and "misinformation" is privileged. This terminological choice aims to ensure greater precision and avoid confusion arising from the indiscriminate application of the word. The concept of "disinformation" specifically refers to false or distorted news carefully created and disseminated with the precise goal of causing harm to one or more individuals. The intentional harm underlying the creation and dissemination of such erroneous information is emphasized. On the other hand, the term "misinformation" designates false or altered news created and disseminated without the specific intent to cause harm. In this case, the emphasis is on the lack of malice in the intention of those spreading such erroneous information, distinguishing it from disinformation. According to Fallis[9], the concept of misleading information can be accurately subdivided into two distinct categories, outlining a crucial distinction between disinformation and misinformation. Disinformation, as defined by Giglietto et al.[10] takes the form of deliberately false information with the intent to deceive. In this context, it is a deliberate and targeted manipulation, often orchestrated to achieve political or economic goals. On the other hand, misinformation is

conceived as a type of misleading information that circulates as a result of honest errors, negligence, or unconscious biases. This phenomenon implies the spread of inaccurate information without intentional malice but rather because of unintentional inaccuracies, omissions, or distortions due to psychological or contextual factors. Effectively addressing both these categories is essential to improve information quality and preserve trust in news sources. To do so, it is crucial to implement strategies aimed at strengthening transparency in communications, encouraging source verification, and promoting critical awareness among the public. This way, one can contribute to mitigating the harmful effects of disinformation and misinformation while preserving the vitality of the informational process in a democratic society. The adoption of these distinctions is based on a precise and rigorous approach, allowing for a more accurate and contextualized analysis of the false information phenomenon. Using more specific and clearly defined terms, the aim is to foster a more informed discussion and prevent conceptual abuses, promoting greater clarity in the public debate on the issue of misleading information. Regardless of the intentions behind the creation and sharing of false news, both disinformation and misinformation can cause significant harm, both directly and indirectly, to the primary recipients of information and to third parties or those remaining unrelated to the situation. This reflection underscores the need to carefully consider the deleterious impacts of both phenomena on human rights. In light of this realization and the fact that the effects of disinformation and misinformation on human rights generally show analogies, this article, unless otherwise specified, will use the term disinformation with the intention of including misinformation. This terminological choice is based on the awareness that, although the two forms of erroneous information may differ in the motivations and intentions of the involved actors, their negative impacts on individuals and society often overlap. Using the term disinformation inclusively aims to reflect the inherently harmful nature and risks associated with both phenomena, promoting a perspective that transcends conceptual distinctions to focus on the harmful effects and implications for human rights.

1.   An In-Depth Look at the State of the Art

The in-depth investigation initiated should be situated within a broader framework of online disinformation, as the flow of fake

news is an integral part of a more sophisticated and articulated system of issues. Such an interpretation presupposes the ability to distinguish and attribute value to the multiple factors that intersect and facilitate the genesis, dissemination, and perception of disinformation. These processes are considered interconnected and interdependent, wherein various elements converge to shape the digital information landscape. The generation of disinformation is influenced by various factors, including intentional information manipulation, algorithmic dynamics of online platforms, cultural and social trends, as well as cognitive vulnerabilities of users. In light of the above, there is a need to adopt an integrated approach in media studies, such as that outlined by Julie D'Acci[11] with the concept of "media circuit studies." This approach implies an analytical perspective that extends beyond the mere observation of individual elements and instead focuses on understanding the multiple interconnected aspects characterizing fake news and other forms of online disinformation. This model acts as an analytical paradigm aiming to examine the media ecosystem, considering the production, dissemination, and reception of information in an interactive and interdependent context. In this context, fake news is considered a product of a complex system of cultural, social, technological, and political dynamics, where different actors and factors converge to shape the informational narrative. An integrated approach, therefore, necessitates a holistic view that transcends traditional disciplinary boundaries, involving cultural studies, media studies, social informatics, media psychology, and other relevant disciplines. This cross-cutting perspective is indispensable to grasp the complexity of online disinformation and to develop more effective research strategies and methodologies. The challenge also requires a cultural transformation in how we attribute meaning to information, build trust in sources, and conceive our role in the realm of information, implying a profound reconsideration of cultural paradigms shaping our relationship with news and knowledge[12]. Within this broader context, it is common to dwell on the issue of news falsification as a non-isolated manifestation but rather an expression of a series of more significant phenomena, such as the democratization of information production and distribution with new digital technologies[13][14]. Contemporary society is characterized by a plurality of voices and opinions, but while this pluralism is a

positive aspect, it also creates fertile ground for the spread of false or distorted narratives. It is imperative, therefore, to adopt an interdisciplinary approach involving sociology, social psychology, communication, and political science to fully understand the roots and consequences of fake news. Through a critical analysis, one can appreciate how information manipulation has deep roots in human history[15], but the digital age has accelerated and amplified these dynamics in previously unimaginable ways[16] [17] [18]. These circumstances also reflect the pressure exerted by platforms on their goals, user preferences, and the consequences for information quality and the health of the democratic system. Special attention to popularity can incentivize the creation and dissemination of sensational or polarized content, creating an environment conducive to the proliferation of fake news[19]. Additionally, the logic of homophily, or the tendency of platforms to show users content similar to what they have already been exposed to, can contribute to creating echo chambers where people are mainly exposed to concordant perspectives[21] [22]. These mechanisms, while facilitating the personalization of the user experience, can also generate a kind of "filter bubble" that limits exposure to divergent opinions[23]. In this context, fake news can thrive as they are circulated within homogeneous groups not exposed to a broad spectrum of information[24]. In the context of the discussion on the formation and manifestation of the phenomenon under examination, it is, therefore, appropriate to recognize that it assumes a peculiar configuration within the hybrid media system, as outlined by Chadwick[25.] The intrinsic metamorphoses in such a system are triggered by an ever-evolving process primarily fuelled by digitization and its corollaries in terms of "datafication"[26] [27] and "platformization" [28] [29] [30]. It is evident, therefore, that democracy, understood as the foundation of citizen participation and informed debate, relying crucially on the free dissemination of individual opinions, is closely tied to ubiquitous access to a variety of information sources—a access strongly influenced by the prevailing media environment. However, a significant challenge emerges in the current societal landscape: the pervasive presence of disinformation through social platforms. Understanding the term "disinformation" presents an epistemological challenge, but there is broad consensus in the literature regarding its mammoth nature as a problem for

democratic systems. Notably, disinformation encompasses the entire cycle of creation, transmission, dissemination, and reception of intentionally false or misleading messages, inherently motivated by political and economic objectives[31]. In particular, social networks emerge as a key element facilitating the accelerated spread of disinformation, causing significant harm and polarization in the public sphere[32]. This phenomenon not only undermines trust in institutions, as highlighted by Jungherr and Schroeder[33], but also erodes its very foundation, threatening the democratic fabric through a lasting and profound impact. The interconnection of social networks amplifies the scope and speed at which disinformation spreads, jeopardizing the quality of public discourse and citizens' ability to form opinions based on accurate information. Addressing this challenge requires a multifaceted approach involving critical media literacy, promotion of transparency in information sources, and advocacy for targeted educational tools to strengthen the resilience of democratic society against the threats of disinformation. The rampant spread of disinformation through social networks, moreover, poses a direct threat to fundamental human rights, casting a shadow over the fabric of democracy and civic participation. The free expression of opinions, enshrined as a human right, is compromised when distorted and manipulated information dominates the media landscape. Furthermore, the right to information, emphasized as an essential element for democratic participation, is eroded by the pervasive presence of disinformation, which distorts the perception of reality and hinders the formation of informed opinions. To address this challenge in line with human rights principles, it is necessary to adopt approaches that promote transparency, accountability, and the protection of the freedom of information. In this way, one can contribute to preserving the health of democracy and ensuring that fundamental human rights remain steadfast in the face of emerging challenges in the contemporary media context. Furthermore, there is an additional element to add to the discussion regarding why social media companies and traditional media conglomerates show significant reluctance to implement substantial changes that could mitigate the spread of fake news and disinformation. This resistance could primarily be attributed to two factors: economic logic and technological limitations. From a purely economic perspective, social media platforms and traditional media

often rely on active user engagement to increase revenue from advertising[34]. Sensational and attention-grabbing news tends to attract more clicks and shares compared to accurate and reasoned news[35]. Therefore, companies may be hesitant to implement stringent measures to combat disinformation, as such measures could compromise user engagement levels and consequently reduce advertising revenue. Moreover, there are inherent technological limitations that make it difficult to identify and suppress fake news and disinformation entirely through automated means. Despite investment in sophisticated algorithms and specialized moderator roles, the increasing sophistication of false information and its rapid propagation hinder the maintenance of an adequate information environment[36]. Additionally, there is the risk of attempting to censor and violate freedom of expression, thereby raising a series of concerning ethical and legal issues[37]. In conclusion, while it is crucial to address the delicate issue of fake news and disinformation, social media companies and traditional media conglomerates are called upon to strike a balance between economic interests, technological limitations, and ethical considerations necessary to arrive at an effective and enduring solution.

2. Under the Veil of Disinformation: Crucial Implications for Human Rights

As we have seen, the phenomenon of disinformation has experienced significant growth in recent years, outlining a distinctive progression that can be divided into a pre and post the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the global health emergency, efforts to understand the characteristics and dynamics of disinformation were already underway; however, the expansion of disinformation underwent a significant acceleration in the context of the pandemic. In the pre-COVID phase, disinformation was a growing concern, with scholars investigating its various manifestations, including the manipulation of information for political and economic purposes. In 2018, for example, the European Commission established a high-profile expert committee focused on fake news and online disinformation, known as the "High-Level Expert Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation." The primary objective of this initiative was to identify fundamental principles and best practices to adequately address the challenges related to the spread of misleading information. The implementation of this expert group was a strategic

response to the growing concern about information manipulation, providing a methodological framework and expert advice to outline effective solutions in response to disinformation. Through this initiative, the European Commission proactively demonstrated a commitment to understanding the complex dynamics of online disinformation, recognizing its relevance both at the national and transboundary levels. The emphasis on identifying guiding principles and exemplary initiatives reflects an awareness of the need for a multifaceted and cooperative approach to address this complex challenge. This deliberate action is emblematic of a conscious and action-oriented political response, laying the groundwork for a broader and coordinated strategy at the European level. Furthermore, the creation of such an expert group highlighted the willingness to stimulate interdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration among institutions, civil society, and academic experts to effectively address the phenomenon of online disinformation and preserve the health of public discourse and the democratic system. However, the advent of the pandemic brought new challenges, with the spread of misleading information on crucial public health issues such as vaccine safety and the origin of the virus. This situation made it imperative to strengthen counter-strategies, which must now address not only pre-existing disinformation but also the new dynamics and specific challenges presented by the pandemic. Consequently, the need to develop more sophisticated and contextually sensitive countermeasures has become an even more urgent priority. Moreover, the coronavirus pandemic triggered a massive dissemination of misleading and false information, characterized by influence operations and targeted disinformation campaigns orchestrated by state and non-state actors. The goal of these strategies was to influence public opinion and shape debates within the European Union (EU), intending to harm both the European Union and its member states. The effect extended to undermining European democracies, the credibility of European institutions, and national authorities. In response to this challenge, there emerged the need to adopt approaches grounded in communication and transparency principles while safeguarding freedom of expression and pluralism in the context of democratic discourse. The current communication from the European Commission and the High Representative for EU Foreign Policy has

repeatedly emphasized the importance of responding to this complex situation through a set of well-coordinated measures. These include promoting freedom of expression and pluralism, implementing effective communication mechanisms, and providing citizens with adequate information tools. In particular, the communication aims to raise awareness among the population about disinformation and strengthen the resilience of European society so that it can address informational manipulations more robustly. The outlined approach reflects the joint commitment of the EU to preserve the health of democratic discourse and mitigate the negative impacts resulting from the uncontrolled spread of misleading information during the pandemic. It is noteworthy that efforts in the context of the disinformation debate have often significantly overlooked the perspective of human rights. This gap represents a critical issue that requires careful and in-depth examination. The dimension of human rights, being a fundamental pillar of democratic principles, should be a primary consideration in the development and implementation of strategies aimed at countering disinformation. The lack of a human rights-based approach can lead to solutions that, while pursuing the goal of reducing the spread of misleading information, could simultaneously compromise freedom of expression, privacy, and other fundamental rights. Therefore, it is crucial to integrate a human rights conceptual framework into anti-disinformation initiatives, ensuring that the effectiveness of adopted measures is balanced with the indispensable respect for fundamental rights enshrined in international conventions and democratic principles. This integrated perspective represents an essential step in developing approaches that not only address the threat of disinformation but do so in harmony with universally recognized human rights values and standards. Moreover, technology, with all its nuances, is often conceived to decentralize and destabilize power dynamics, even assuming, according to arguments put forth by some scholars, the role of an opportunity to democratize both the investigation and the defense of human rights[38]. This perspective implies recognizing technology as a catalyst for paradigmatic changes, with the potential to redistribute power through facilitating access to information and promoting monitoring initiatives and human rights protection on a broader scale. If technology emerges as a democratizing force on

various fronts, it does not automatically prove equally effective in promoting sustainable organizational change over time. On the other hand, traditional policies regarding science and innovation may contribute to increasing disparities unless specifically designed to mitigate such a phenomenon[39]. This statement suggests that strategies for scientific and technological development, if not carefully designed to pursue the opposite goal, can inadvertently intensify existing socioeconomic inequalities. According to the perspective put forward by cognitive scientist Abiba Birhane[40], there is a conception that technology never acts as a neutral or objective entity but rather as a mirror reflecting social biases, inequalities, and injustices. This line of thought emphasizes the inherently values-laden and culturally contextual role of technology, serving as a means through which social dynamics and inequalities manifest and perpetuate. The metaphor of the mirror suggests that technology reflects and, to some extent, amplifies existing attitudes and disparities in society, highlighting the complexity of the relationship between technology and society. It underscores how the apparent objectivity of technology is shaped by pre-existing social and cultural constructs. This reflection directs attention to the need for a critical evaluation of technology, not only in terms of functionality and efficiency but also in relation to social implications and the potential perpetuation of inequalities. This is especially relevant because the connection between technology, disinformation, and social inequalities is intrinsic. A critical understanding of how technology reflects and perpetuates social biases could contribute to the development of more conscious and responsible approaches in managing digital platforms and combating disinformation while promoting greater information equity.

3. Invisible Iniquities? The Contribution of Disinformation to Human Rights Violations

The contemporary era is fully characterized by the rapid dissemination of information across various platforms, and the term "disinformation" has gained crucial relevance in public discourse. At this point, after exploring the various consequences regarding the issue, it becomes indispensable to highlight and explore the complex interplay between disinformation, fake news, and direct implications on human rights. Analyzing an emblematic case will provide a unique perspective on how disinformation, when not adequately

addressed, can contribute to human rights violations, and undermine democratic principles. This exercise aims to underscore the importance of a conscientious approach in information management, emphasizing the crucial role of technology in shaping public perception and, consequently, social and political dynamics. Moreover, a critical understanding of this interplay between disinformation and human rights becomes imperative to develop preventive strategies and promote an information environment that respects fundamental principles of equity, non-discrimination, and democratic participation. For instance, in the context of the genocide perpetrated against the Rohingya minority in Myanmar in 2017, the spread of disinformation and fake news through social media emerged as a significant element in creating a hostile climate[41]. With a user base of over 18 million individuals with internet access in Myanmar in 2018, predominantly through mobile devices, there is a plausible conjecture that social media may have been exploited as a vehicle for groups promoting ethnic or religious discrimination[42]. The strategic use of distorted narratives also contributed to justifying brutal acts against the Rohingya population, fuelling a climate of hatred, and facilitating the perpetration of human rights violations[43]. In this specific case, disinformation played a key role in preventing an accurate understanding of the situation, undermining efforts for accountability and justice. Stepping back, the issue concerning the Rohingya Muslim minority has captured international attention since 2012, following violent clashes triggered by the rape and killing of Thida Htwe, a young Buddhist woman[44]. These events led to severe violence against the Rohingya, with over 600 deaths, thousands missing, and the destruction of numerous villages. This escalation of violence triggered a significant wave of Rohingya fleeing, culminating in 2015 with around 25,000 refugees leaving the Gulf of Bengal, resulting in a migrant emergency exacerbated by the closure of neighbouring countries. The first video evidence of former child soldiers emerged following attacks on military checkpoints in Rakhine by the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA). In response, the military initiated a systematic repressive operation against the Rohingya, characterized by massacres, sexual violence, intentional fires, and crimes against humanity. Since August 2017, over 730,000 civilians were forced to flee to Bangladesh, settling in refugee camps along the border.

Despite a bilateral repatriation agreement between Bangladesh and Myanmar in 2018, the process was delayed due to protests by human rights advocacy groups. Between May 2018 and May 2019, only 185 refugees were repatriated, with only 31 doing so voluntarily. Myanmar authorities accused the Rohingya and Muslim organizations in refugee camps of discouraging the return, while it appeared that reluctance stemmed from the lack of improvement in living conditions in Myanmar, characterized by ongoing discrimination and violence. In 2018, the United Nations classified the events against the Rohingya as ethnic cleansing, while the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights expressed a concrete risk of genocide[45]. This concern arose from the explicit intent of Myanmar security forces to destroy, either wholly or partially, this ethnic group. The situation became even more complicated and intertwined when the ethnic minority decided to take legal action against Meta, formerly known as Facebook, accusing it of contributing to the spread of hate messages against them. This legal move was motivated by the scandal involving Frances Haugen, a former Product Manager at Facebook, who handed over internal documents to The Wall Street Journal revealing the nature of the social network's algorithmic mechanisms, which appeared inclined to favor divisive content to maximize profits. The lawsuit, filed in a San Francisco, California court, where Meta is headquartered, sought substantial compensation of $150 billion. The basis of this legal action argues that the algorithms used by the company favoured the spread of disinformation and extremist ideologies, leading to real-world violent acts. In the document drafted by the plaintiffs, Facebook is likened to a robot programmed with a single mission: growth. It is emphasized that the growth of the social network in question, fuelled by hatred, division, and disinformation, has had severe consequences, leaving hundreds of thousands of Rohingya lives devastated. This legal action raises ethical and legal questions regarding the responsibility of social platforms in content moderation and preventing the dissemination of harmful messages. The outcome of this case could have significant impacts on how technology companies address content moderation and their responsibilities in terms of social impact. According to the United Nations, Mark Zuckerberg's company played a "determining role" in the genocide of the Rohingya in Myanmar. In both cases, the

accusation is the same: Facebook is a powerful information tool, but it does little or nothing to curb the circulation of fake news and hate messages. Guarding in utmost secrecy, and in the name of the right to privacy, the "black box" of data that can trace the origin of disinformation. In response to the accusations against it, Meta has reacted firmly, reiterating its commitment to counter the publication of violent content on the platform. A spokesperson for Zuckerberg's company stated, "There is no place on Facebook for content that promotes hate and violence. We work tirelessly to keep them off our platform." This statement reflects the company's intention to take concrete measures to prevent the spread of harmful and dangerous content. The spokesperson further highlighted Facebook's significant efforts, both in terms of investments in advanced technology and local language skills. These investments aim to ensure the rapid removal of violent content and the adoption of decisive actions against those who repeatedly violate the platform's policies against hate speech. This response from Facebook highlights their commitment to mitigating the issue of the spread of harmful content, reaffirming the willingness to actively work towards maintaining a safe online environment free of content that could promote hatred or violence. But was it this way from the beginning? Trying to go in order raises several questions yet to be adequately addressed. The report titled "Social Atrocities: Meta and the Rohingya's Right to Reparation," published on September 29, 2022, by Amnesty International, is based in part on internal documents made public by whistleblower Frances Haugen, known as "Facebook Papers." The document denounces the involvement of Facebook's algorithms, owned by Meta, in the crimes committed in 2017 by Myanmar's military against the Rohingya minority, predominantly Muslim, residing in the northern state of Rakhine. The report highlights how, in the preceding years, users associated with the military and ultranationalist Buddhist groups in Myanmar saturated Facebook with anti-Muslim content and fake news, fuelling false stereotypes such as portraying the Rohingya as "invaders" and orchestrators of an Islamist coup. Facebook's algorithms amplified the spread of harmful content, contributing to the creation of a climate conducive to real-world violence. Despite Meta receiving reports from local human rights activists between 2012 and 2017, the company did not respond appropriately, neglecting to enforce its own policies against

hate speech. The report concludes that Meta was aware or should have been aware of the role of algorithms in spreading hatred against the Rohingya before the ethnic cleansing campaign but took no corrective actions, prioritizing profit. Amnesty International has thus called on Meta to respond to the compensation demands made by the Rohingya and to address responsibility for its actions. Meta's initial response, therefore, was rather evasive, stating that Facebook does not directly engage in philanthropic activities. This response underscores the need for a more responsible and committed approach by major social platforms toward their social and humanitarian implications.

4. Conclusion

The rise in hate speech and the spread of disinformation, fuelled by social media platforms, have characterized recent electoral processes in several countries, including the United States, Denmark, India, Kenya, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka[46]. Political elites, hate-promoting groups, and foreign government interferences have all played a significant role during electoral periods marked by divisions and heightened tensions, pursuing various political objectives. In Denmark, for instance, the dissemination of false propaganda with an Islamist orientation through hidden Facebook pages has triggered an increase in anti-immigrant sentiments[47]. The ascent of the Danish People's Party, which is anti-immigration, exerted pressure on major political parties to intensify their electoral campaigns with more pronounced anti-immigration stances[48]. In India, on the other hand, Hindu nationalist parties capitalized on anti-Muslim and anti-minority hate speech, leveraging disinformation spread through social media to achieve significant electoral success.[49] [50] This strategy resulted in a politically resonant victory. These examples highlight how the distorted use of social media has significantly influenced electoral dynamics, inducing polarization, ethnic tensions, and political successes based on the manipulation of public opinion. These phenomena, intrinsically linked to disinformation, raise serious human rights issues, particularly concerning the right to information and political participation without distortive interferences. The manipulation of public opinion through disinformation undermines trust in democratic institutions and can lead to violations of fundamental human rights, such as the right to free and fairly informed elections.

Furthermore, hate speech conveyed through disinformation fuels social tensions, undermining social cohesion and jeopardizing the safety and well-being of affected communities. The need to decisively address this challenge becomes urgent not only in terms of national security and stability but also to ensure the respect and promotion of the fundamental human rights of all citizens. Understanding the link between fake news and human rights violations is ultimately driven by the fact that the importance of preventive strategies and accurate information interventions during humanitarian crises has become a priority. These false narratives have shaped international perception and had direct implications on human rights, influencing the global response and the perception of the situation within the country. Analyzing disinformation highlights the need for a balanced approach in evaluating information during periods of political tension. Fake news can compromise an accurate understanding of human rights in the context, emphasizing the importance of reliable informational resources for the protection of human rights. Effectively addressing the phenomenon of disinformation requires a multifaceted and collaborative approach involving various sectors of society[51]. Effectively tackling the issue of disinformation requires a multifactorial and collaborative approach that actively involves various sectors of society. Firstly, it is essential to implement targeted educational programs to improve media literacy at all levels of education, providing individuals with the necessary tools to critically evaluate sources, recognize false information, and understand the dynamics of online disinformation. In parallel, collaboration between the public and private sectors is crucial: promoting synergies between governments, non-governmental organizations, and digital platforms can foster the development of coordinated strategies against disinformation. Transparency of digital platforms is another crucial pillar, achieved through the implementation of policies that clarify information management methods and inform users about the functioning of algorithms. Additional initiatives include strengthening fact-checking and information verification, as well as holding digital platforms accountable through the adoption of more stringent policies and the implementation of sanctions or incentives. Actively involving civil society, non-governmental organizations, and community groups in the fight against disinformation is also crucial, promoting

informative campaigns and awareness initiatives to spread awareness of the impacts of disinformation. Finally, continuous research support is imperative to understand new trends in disinformation and develop continuously updated and adaptable counter-strategies to the ever-changing dynamics of the digital information landscape. Implementing such an integrated model will require concerted efforts from governments, organizations, and citizens to effectively address the complexity of disinformation and preserve trust in online information.

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