

## **Fractured Truth Between the Border and Broadcasts – The Post-Truth Gaze of Indian Media on Bangladeshi Hindus After the July Uprising.**

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***Abstract:** This paper emphasises the intersectional lens of disinformation and misinformation of Indian media about the July Movement 2024 in Bangladesh. It highlights how Indian media are constructing post-truth realities of Bangladeshi Hindus after the July Movement 2024. It explores the way Indian media are exploiting the digital, social, and printing media platforms. Furthermore, this paper represents how fabricated and manipulative news creates a hyperreality about the events of the July Movement 2024 in Bangladesh. The primary objective of this study is to explore how Indian media circulate disinformation and misinformation and produce manipulative narratives to create hyperreality about the Bangladeshi Hindu after the July Movement 2024, which has replaced political unrest with religious and anti-democratic sentiments. Data were collected and analysed using content analysis to explore power dynamics, biases, and identity politics. This paper also illustrates how historical contexts and politics of othering have made the circulation and consumption of disinformation and misinformation plausible. Lastly, it mentions how the agency and subjectivity of images, the monetary system of social media, and other external and internal factors drive various actors to construct the post-truth reality of Bangladeshi Hindus through disinformation and misinformation.*

### **Introduction**

This paper discusses the interplay of disinformation and misinformation and the post-truth reality of the July Movement 2024 in Bangladesh in the Indian media. According to Guo et al. (2022), disinformation indicates the deliberate circulation of false information, and misinformation means the unintentional spread of inaccurate information. Post-truth reality is when objective facts or empirical evidence are overshadowed by personal belief (Hussain, 2019). Production, reproduction, and consumption of disinformation and misinformation are not uncommon. The twisted

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nature of disinformation and misinformation creates a partial truth. It sometimes politicises events (Guo et al., 2022). In the era of digitalisation, disinformation and misinformation create hyperreality. In that process, they construct post-truth realities. However, disinformation, misinformation, and post-truth reality intersect with identity, interest, power, and authority at both macro and micro levels; at the macro level, various organisations or institutions, such as media, political parties, and community groups, produce narratives and discourses. On the other hand, individuals with different interests consume and reproduce disinformation and misinformation at the micro level. However, one of the recent events of disinformation and misinformation is the July Movement 2024 in Bangladesh. The July Movement 2024 has changed the political landscape of Bangladesh. During and after the movement, both local and international media, political parties, and community groups were active in producing disinformation and misinformation. A report by Prothom Alo (2024) claimed that about forty-nine Indian media such as Republic Bangla, Zee News, Aaj Tak, ABP Ananda, NDTV, TV 9, Economics Times, Business Standard, First Post, Tribune India, OP India, Calcutta News, Free Press Journal, News 9, Mirror Now, India.com had spread more than thirteen disinformation about Bangladesh after the July Movement 2024. These Indian media have exaggerated the July movement and the following political events in Bangladesh. Therefore, the primary objective of this paper is to focus on how these Indian media outlets are spreading disinformation and misinformation about the July Movement 2024. This paper will also explain how the interplay of digital platforms, social media, print media, and the mainstream news media of India has dislocated the movement. The fabricated and manipulative news of political unrest in Indian media has created the illusion of religious persecution and “minority injustice”. They have represented Bangladesh as an anti-democratic country. Moreover, they have made a post-truth reality where the truth is stripped of the actual event and serves the interests of different groups of people.

### **Brief History of the July Movement 2024 and the Circulation of Disinformation**

Initially, July 2024 was the second wave of the quota reformation<sup>1</sup> movement, where students fought against the 56% quota in the BCS (Bangladesh Civil Service Examination) (Humayra, 2024). It started on 01 July 2024 and lasted till 05 August 2024. After the attack of Chhatra League<sup>2</sup> and other ruling party activists on the quota protesters in Dhaka University and the death of 6 people in the clash between students and police (The Daily Star, 2024), the movement was no longer a reformation

movement. It was the protest against the “tyranny” of the “dictator” Sheikh Hasina (former prime minister of Bangladesh), and ended on 5<sup>th</sup> August 2024 when Hasina fled to India. Nevertheless, the Indian media has portrayed the post-July movement in 2024 as an “anti-Hindu” movement and spread disinformation about the political instability of Bangladesh. Prothom Alom (2024) and other mainstream Bangladeshi news media have reported that about forty-nine Indian news media spread at least thirteen disinformation about Bangladesh between 12 August 2024 and 05 December 2024 (Prothom Alo, 2024). They have manipulated the images and videos of the political crisis in Bangladesh after the July movement in 2024. In that report, Prothom Alo (2024) mentioned the details of disinformation, such as Chief Advisor Dr Muh, employing them as a tool to represent the movement in Bangladesh as “anti-Hindu” and “anti-India”. Ammad Yunus being admitted to the ICU, Dr Yunus fleeing to France after Trump’s victory in 2024, sanctions lifting on banned militant organisations in Bangladesh, weapon importation by Pakistani ship in Chittagong, advocate Saiful Islam, who was killed in a clash between ISKCON<sup>3</sup> and police in Chittagong, was represented as Ramen Ray or as Chinmoy Krishna Das’s lawyer, biased and misinformations of Mashrafe Mortaza’s (elected MP from Narail-2 constituency) burnt residence, Mahbubur Rahman Mollah College incident (2024) and many others (Rtv news, 2024). Through this disinformation, they established how unsafe Bangladesh was for its Hindu “minority” and that Bangladesh was turning into an “anti-democratic” and “communal country” (Republic Bangla, 2024).

This disinformation spreads like fire through social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, and Twitter. Indian media has claimed that after the fall of Hasina’s regime, Bangladesh has become an “Islamic extremist” (*Jihadi/kattarpanthi/maulabhadi*), and the Hindus are not safe in this country anymore (Zee News, 2024). The effect of disinformation was evident, especially on social media sites. They were filled with hashtags such as #SaveBangladeshHindus, #AllEyesonBangladeshiHindu, #BangladeshiHinduProtest, #BangladeshCrisis.

The interplay of disinformation and misinformation about the post-July by Indian media dislocates the July movement 2024. It is presented as an anti-Hindu and anti-India movement. The Muslim “majority” are advocated as “oppressors” and the Hindu “minority” as the “victim”. Moreover, they have raised questions about Bangladesh’s democracy and constitution. Indian media has constructed a post-truth reality about the

post-July movement in Bangladesh through the spread of disinformation and misinformation.

## **Methods**

This paper explores how disinformation and misinformation constructed a post-truth reality around the July movement of 2024. For this, qualitative content analysis is applied. Encountered through purposive engagement, this research is grounded in thematic interpretation of a broad range of media content. By examining social media content, online news, and videos, the materials were analysed through close reading and interpretive engagement. The materials were selected for their popularity, mass consumption, and relevance. It also focuses on discursive patterns and narrative structures of the viewed content. This paper aims not to generalise the situation but to provide an analytical depth by highlighting how disinformation and misinformation manipulate narratives.

## **Disinformation and Misinformation in the Global Digital Order**

Spread of disinformation and misinformation has geopolitical implications (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019). According to the Global Risks Reports (2024), in the following 2 years, disinformation and misinformation are going to be the most significant problems globally (WEF, 2024). Incidents, such as COVID-19 (Brennen et al., 2020), the Russia-Ukraine crisis in 2014 (Erlich & Garner, 2021), the 2016 British referendum (Schünemann, 2022), and the immigration issue (Humprecht et al., 2020), have raised the concern of spreading disinformation and misinformation worldwide. Disinformation and misinformation have a complex relationship with identity politics and hyperreality. It was evident in the case of Covid- 19 when xenophobia spread worldwide. Discussing echo chamber and its effects on social media regarding Covid 19, Cinelli (2021) argued that, disinformation and misinformation fueled anti-Asian racism. It created identity crisis especially for Chinese people, as Donald Trump called it “Chinese virus” and created a hyperreality of “unhygienic eating culture” of Chinese people ( AP news, 2022). Similarly, Mounk (2018) connoted political polarisation through the spread of disinformation and misinformation. In the 2016 U.S presidential election, disinformation was circulated through social media, which played a significant role in shaping voters’ behaviors and public perceptions. Targeting African-American voters, it fueled white nationalist identity narratives. This political polarisation weakened the trust of citizens in their democratic system (Grinberg et al.,

2019). Besides political polarisation, disinformation gives legitimacy to structural violence in some cases, such as in 2017, it gave legitimacy to the ethnic cleansing of Rohingya in Myanmar. Social media, such as Facebook, was weaponised to spread false claims and hate speech to portray them as “terrorists” (YUE, 2020). It led to the killing of thousands of Rohingya and turned millions into refugees. Here, disinformation became a strategy to justify the oppression of dominant groups in Myanmar and gave the legitimacy of ethnic cleansing. This association of disinformation and misinformation with identity politics and hyperreality is multilayered. In the era of digitalisation, information is treated as a commodity (Allen, 1990).

Along with monetary value, it also has social and political capital. This enables disinformation to create hyperreality. Since the virtual world is often algorithmic-driven, it easily manipulates public perception. Here, the fragmented reality becomes the absolute reality. Simultaneously, identity politics is both destabilised and reinforced by disinformation and misinformation, as we discussed. In social, cultural and political domains, disinformation and misinformation have emerged as a global challenge. It reminds us of being an integral part of contemporary geopolitics and identity formation, which will be discussed in the following section.

### **Interconnection of Disinformation and Misinformation in Post-truth Reality**

In the era of digitalisation, information is a powerful tool. However, the actors can manipulate the information both intentionally and unintentionally. Disinformation means the deliberate spread of fake news (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017) or fabricated information (Beauvais, 2022), false information (Lee & Lee, 2021), or purposeful deception or rumours (Schünemann, 2022). Misinformation is “unintentional misleading information” (Schünemann, 2022, p. 34), distorted facts (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017), or the accidental circulation of false information (Beauvais, 2022). The interconnection of disinformation and misinformation in post-truth reality is quite strong. It creates an illusion among the consumers and binds them within a hyperreal world. Lilleker (2018) defined post-truth reality as a cultural phenomenon where actors put their perceptions before any data or documentation. In post-truth reality, the objective truth has less control over public opinions, and the truth is constructed by emotional and personal biases (Wight, 2018). Post-truth reality shapes discourses and influences the decisions of various actors. Steve Tesich (1992) first introduced the concept of post-truth reality. Later, post-truth discussions gained popularity due to the

spread of disinformation about events, such as the Ukrainian crisis in 2014, the British referendum in 2016, the US presidential election campaign in 2016, and COVID-19 or the infodemic (Corner, 2017). These events raised concern about the illusion that the public communication system had created. Contemporary public communication has become more chaotic. However, people believe in public communication since, in the modern world, humans have freely accepted illusions over actual truth (Tesich, 1992). Even though actors doubt the communication system, they believe in it (Lilleker, 2018). In the contemporary world, information spreads in no time. The easy accessibility to information, disinformation, and misinformation has blurred the distinction between truth and falsehood. In this process, the concept of truth becomes very complex as it creates a “what if” situation for the people. Because of this “what if” situation, any fragmentation of the whole event creates “the partial truth”. Then, the partial or fragmented truth becomes more “real” than the actual truth. Later, it produces “information disorder” and spreads disinformation and misinformation through contemporary communication media (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Information scarcity no longer exists; modern media and consumers exploit the information they need. This interrelation of the multilayered press and the active participation of various actors has produced a post-truth reality (Lilleker, 2018). Thus, fragmented truths, preexisting beliefs and emotional biases sustain post-truth complexities by distorting public perception in the era of digitalisation.

### **Indian Media and the Post-truth Reality of the July Movement 2024 of Bangladesh**

As the earlier section discusses the contribution of disinformation and misinformation in constructing post-truth reality, this section illustrates how Indian media is fueling post-truth reality and how fragmented truths, beliefs, AI-generated misleading content, and emotional biases are overpowering objective facts. As discussed, Prothom Alo (2024) claimed that about forty-nine Indian media outlets spread more than thirteen fake news stories about Bangladesh after the July Movement 2024. Among them, Republic Bangla has spread five phoney stories. Similarly, Hindustan Times, Zee News and Live Mint published three fake news. Moreover, Aaj Tak and ABP Ananda spread two phoney news items in India today. The remaining Indian media were NDTV, TV 9, Economics Times, Business Standard, First Post, Tribune India, OP India, Calcutta News, Free Press Journal, News 9, Mirror Now, Financial Express, India.com, The Wire, The Times of India, CNN news 18, The Stateman, RT India and so on (Prothom Alo, 2024). Al Jazeera (2024) also raised similar concerns. In their report, they

mentioned how Indian media were exaggerating the attacks on Hindus. They also showed how Indian media linked the July Movement 2024 with China and Pakistani intelligence (Mahmud & Sarker, 2024). However, these reports do not reflect the overall picture of the reproduction and consumption of disinformation and misinformation. But it helps to understand the mechanism of post-truth reality about Bangladesh in Indian media. For example, Zee News spread a piece of false news about Bangladesh on 02 December 2024.

That day Zee News broadcasted some news titled “Jihadi toolkit against Hindus in Bangladesh”. Some parts of the video they used as proof were AI-generated. In that news, they claimed that the interim government of Bangladesh was doing a campaign against the Bangladeshi Hindus and India. They mentioned how Islamic extremists were forcefully trying to convert Hindus. They also claimed that Hindus were threatening to be killed or burned alive. They took public opinion on how Hindu women were gang raped and abducted, temples were vandalised, and Hindu priest was killed. They also argued that Bangladeshi Hindus were not permitted to practice any religious practices. They showed a mass protest of jihadi<sup>4</sup> against the Hindus chanting “Nara-e-takbir”<sup>5</sup> or Allah-hu-Akbar”. They presented six jihadi toolkits against Hindus by Bangladeshi Islamic extremists: 1. Convert them as Muslim by force, 2. Attack on temples, 3. Target the male Hindus and kill them, 4. Abduct women and children to convert them to Islam, 5. Arrest Hindu politicians, 6. Behead the Hindus who are associated with ISKCON. (Zee News, 2024).



**Figure 1 & 2 : Zee News(2024). Jihadi Toolkit Against Hindus in Bangladesh. Photograph:**

They also fabricated the news of internal conflicts of three educational institutions in Bangladesh and presented some video clips as a jihadi toolkit against Hindus. On 25

November 2024, Kabi Nazrul Government College students and Suhrawardy College attacked Dr Mahbubur Rahman Molla College (Prothom Alo, 2024). Using the video of the clash of these institutions, Zee News (2024) fabricated the event as religious persecution in Bangladesh against Hindus. Later, on 03 December 2024, Zee News published another report on the jihadi toolkit where they claimed that the massacre of Hindus in Bangladesh was predesigned and Islamic extremist, Jamaat-e-Islami<sup>6</sup> along with Hefazat-e-Islam<sup>7</sup> planned it with China (Ratnamber, 2024). This selective representation of facts has created communal anxieties and identity politics of “**us vs them**”. They also have delegitimised alternative narratives about the July movement. Moreover, people gave their opinion in news interviews where they believed in the existence of the jihadi toolkit. Here, personal beliefs and emotions have overpowered the objective truth.

After the July Movement 2024, Bangladesh faced a politically vulnerable situation after the sudden void in the state apparatus. Political violence became widespread during and after the July movement, such as violent clashes between opposition parties and members of Awami league<sup>8</sup> (Rahman, 2024), an arson attack on factories owned by the Beximco group and Bengal group because of their political affiliations (Hossain, 2024), attack on garments and textile factories (The Daily Star, 2024) and so on. Aside from political violence, concerns have been raised against the vulnerability of “ethnic communities” and “religious minorities” (World Report, 2025). About 205 attacks took place in 52 districts where “minorities” of Bangladesh suffered (The Daily Star, 2024). Bangladeshi social media was filled with hashtags, and people asked for justice.

Nevertheless, the distinction between truth and falsehood was blurred at the national and global levels. The contents of news media and social media became highly contested. Fabricated and AI-generated news started to circulate widely through social media. The exaggeration of Indian media was uncontrollable. They approached their viewers as if they were telling nothing but the truth. They consciously ignored the political violence. Their ignorance gave legitimacy to political violence, such as vandalism of political offices and attacks on political members. However, as the media, it was their moral responsibility to condemn violence and attacks. Instead, they partially reported the cases associated with the Hindu “minorities”. These fragmented representations of events overshadowed the objective truth of post-July Bangladesh.

This paper's main argument is that in the era of digitalisation, disinformation and misinformation are more efficient than ever in creating a post-truth reality. First, they isolate an event from its whole context. Then they partially represent the "truth." Partial representation is associated with both internal and external political affairs. The consumer culture and interests of local people intersect. Furthermore, the interplay of political matters, consumer culture, and people's interests legitimises disinformation and misinformation. Indian media, including social media, print media, and mainstream media, have created a post-truth reality about Hindu persecution and Bangladesh's democracy. This post-truth reality is the product of the Indian media trial. Personal beliefs and confirmation biases also unintentionally politicised the July movement and the following events by spreading misinformation. The whole event connected the inner and outer worlds with different groups of people's interests. Moreover, this post-truth reality has questioned Bangladesh's democratic system. It also explains the fragile condition of democracy in the face of the post-truth movement in Bangladesh..

### **Representation of the Truth of the July Movement 2024 and the Fragility of Democracy**

Based on Schünemann's (2022) disinformation as a threat to democracy, this section explores how the spread of disinformation and misinformation in Indian media has threatened the democratic system and integrity of Bangladesh. He described the problematic nature of disinformation and its effects. Democracy provides freedom to media and its freedom of speech. Similarly, McQuail (2012) argued that The "bias against [media] control" in international relations creates disadvantages for democracy and its systems. According to him, democracy must ensure media freedom, and in this process, it becomes "vulnerable to manipulative information operation" (Schünemann, 2022, pp-32). Information operations are the actions of governments and other organised non-state actors who manipulate public opinion by circulating fake news to manipulate domestic and foreign political sentiments ( Weedon et al., 2017). In disinformation, information operation becomes an "essential component". He claimed that information operations can produce anxiety among the actors. This anxiety harms democracy since the spread and consumption of disinformation and misinformation are uncontrollable in the contemporary world. He stated that media and its misuse of information create tension or anxiety in international politics. So, he marked disinformation as an "element of international threat politics" (Schünemann, 2022, pp-33). Moreover, he continued that it creates threat perception, which is associated with a high level of uncertainty. This threat perception refers to recognising and interpreting

harm or threats by individuals and groups (Stein, 2013). Due to high anxiety levels, the threat perception of disinformation doubts the credibility of other parties and is used as a weapon in political conflict (Schünemann, 2022, pp-34). Other actors then deliberately produce, reproduce, and replicate fake news. Then, the false news is circulated through various media outlets. Additionally, disinformation becomes a tool for “blame game” for political parties.

The disinformation on Hindu persecution in Bangladesh has already created anxiety and uncertainty globally. Mamata Banerjee, the Chief Minister of West Bengal, stated that the interim government has a “vindictive attitude” towards Bangladeshi Hindus (World, 2024). She wanted the foreign policymakers to intervene in Bangladesh to maintain “peace”. Her statement questioned the democratic position of Bangladesh and blamed the interim government for the communal violence. The statement of “vindictive attitudes” is also a product of post-truth realities that are created by Indian media. The illusion of saving Bangladeshi Hindus became more plausible when American Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi claimed that Hindus were being targeted to be slaughtered in Bangladesh (Business Standard, 2024). The reproduction and circulation of disinformation of these political figures through Indian media has created anxiety and tension among the other actors. They have weaponised the media and have created threat perception.

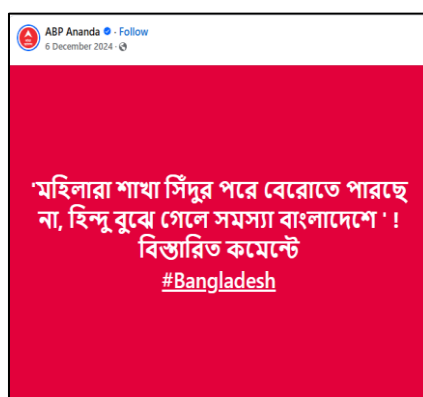


**Figure 3 : Anandabazar Patrika (2024). *Mamata wants the UN to intervene to save Bangladeshi Hindus*, photograph: collected.**

**Figure 4: Republic World. (2025, January 8). *Homes destroyed; temples vandalised: Indian-american MP rakes up violence against Hindus in Bangladesh*. Photograph: collected.**

In 2024, Data Journalist Anna Fleck raised concerns about the risk of “disinformation” and “misinformation” being highest in India and how they “weaponised the platforms

of WhatsApp and Facebook” (Fleck & Richter, 2024) to spread false news. On December 06, 2024, a renowned news channel in Bangladesh, “He shared how Indian media, especially the Kolkata media, manipulated the news of Bangladesh through fake and phantom experts (Islam, 2024). Rumour Scanner, a leading fact-checking organisation in Bangladesh, also reported that about forty-nine Indian media outlets had spread more than thirteen fake news about Bangladesh after 12 August 2024 (RS Team, 2024). All these mainstream and local media of India have created a post-truth reality of Bangladeshi Hindus, where they are tortured for their religious identity (Business Standard,2024).



**Figure 5 : ABP Aanda (2024). A part of Bangladeshi Muslims are protesting against the religious persecution, and Hindu girls are being kidnapped. Photo: Facebook.**  
**Figure 6: ABP Aanda (2024). Hindu women are facing problem because of their shakha and vermilion. Photo: Facebook.**

These figures explained how Indian media have circulated disinformation about post-July Bangladesh. These figures also illustrate the effect of the circulation of disinformation, where Bangladesh failed as a democratic country that does not protect its “minority” rights.

However, things got worse when Chinmay Krishna Das, the leader of ISKCON, got arrested for “disrespecting the national flag” of Bangladesh. In clashes between police and followers of a former ISKCON leader, a lawyer was killed in Chattogram (The Daily Star, 2024). The whole incident was manipulated in Indian media, where they

claimed the Islamic fundamentalists had killed the lawyer who was defending Chinmay Krishna Das. In some news portals, he was mentioned as “Ramen Roy” (Prothom Alo, 2024)



**Figure 7: Republic Bangla(2024). Muslim lawyer defending Hindu priest Chinmaya Prabhu killed. Photograph: Facebook.**

**Figure 8: A Facebook user is claiming Ramen Roy (fake) as Chinmay’s lawyer, who is admitted to the hospital. Photograph: Facebook.**

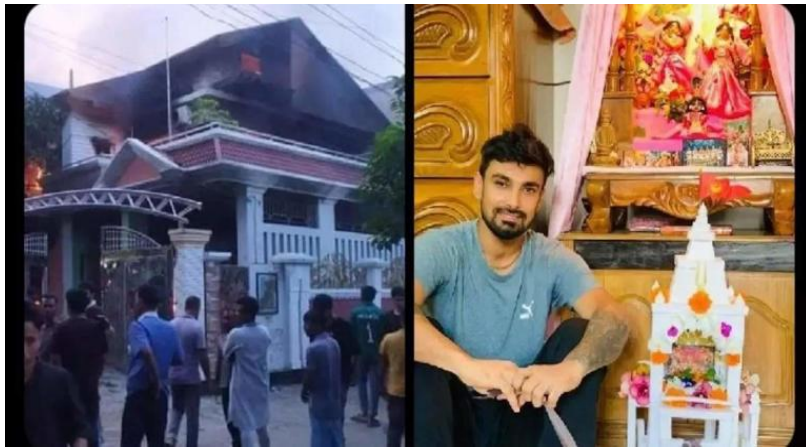
The people of Bangladesh demanded justice, but the Indian media distorted the incident and published it as an anti-Hindu and anti-India protest in Bangladesh. Mainstream media of India such as Business Standard, The Times of India, The Hindu, India Today, The Indian Express, NDTV, Republic Bangla, and others portrayed Bangladesh as Islamic Extremist or “Maulabadi”, “Jamaat panthi”, “Jihadi” after the July 2024 movement( Republic Bangla, 2024) as they manipulated stories and visuals, such as temple desecrations or attacks on Hindus to fit the preconceived notions of religious persecution in Bangladesh ( The Daily Star 2024). Facebook and Twitter were filled with hashtags, “#SaveBangladeshiHindu”, “#AttackOnBangladeshiHindu”, “#BangladeshiHinduProtest”, “#BangladeshCrisis”, “#AllEyesOnBangladeshiHindus”, where fake news spread like fire by using disinformation and misinformation. These incidents indicate the fragile nature of

democracy in the post-truth era. However, the illusion of post-truth is multilayered. When the Indian media spread disinformation about the Bangladeshi Hindus, the mass population of India not only believed them but also internalised them and created a chain of disinformation and misinformation for saving Bangladeshi Hindus. In this context, actors followed their organisation's ideologies and ignored the authenticity of that information. Thus, disinformation can create an individual's political consciousness" (Spytska, 2023). In this context, the post-truth realities have blurred the objective facts for the actors. And their political consciousness is replaced by religious consciousness. This consciousness is a product of "hyperreality" (Baudrillard & Glaser, 1994), as Indian media represented the political instability of Bangladesh as communal violence is not as political violence. Here, influenced by confirmation bias, emotional beliefs and fabricated stories, post-truth reality accelerates the construction of hyperreality. In return, sustaining the post-truth reality, hyperreality normalises the illusion (Málik, 2024).

### **The Hyperreality of the July Movement in Indian Media**

The term hyperreality was first introduced by Jean Baudrillard (1981). Hyperreality indicates a situation where reality is replaced by stimulation. According to Baudrillard (1981), hyperreality has replaced reality by representing false images without distinction between the real and the false. In the contemporary world, such representation is accelerated by the media. Media's representation of disinformation and misinformation replace the reality or actual truth (Heinze, 2012). Here, disinformation obscures the perception of reality and creates hyperreality. And hyperreality blurs the distinction between honest and stimulated (Barry, 1995). Later, the actors represent the disinformation "as if" it is happening or it is the absolute truth. And the consumers of disinformation believe them because of their preexisting elements of knowledge (Schünemann, 2022, pp-35). However, Foucault (1975) argued that knowledge is not neutral. It is a product of power relations. Knowledge establishes discourse, and discourse constructs the truth through surveillance, regulation, and normalisation. The interplay of knowledge, discourse, and power shapes the behaviour of individuals or groups. Therefore, knowledge is used as a tool to circulate disinformation. Similarly, Schünemann (2022) argued that knowledge is collective, and by the "collectively built filters of perception" (Schünemann, 2022, pp-36), individuals consume the information. The interrelation of hyperreality and knowledge motivates actors to consume and circulate disinformation.

Here, Baudrillard's argument on real/imagined, reality /illusion, and surface /depth is deeply connected to Indian media, mainly when they had fabricated and manipulated the news of Mashrafe Mortaza (elected MP from Narail-2 constituency) where protesters burned his house down on August 5, 2024 for his political affiliation. This video was shared by Republic TV, an Indian news channel, where they claimed that the victim was Liton Das (Bangladeshi cricketer), and the militant Muslims set his house on fire because of his Hindu identity. They created stimulation or illusion of "minority cleansing" and communal violence and blurred the line between real and imagined. These representation were constructed through language, visuals, and discourses (Hall, 1997).



**Figure 9: The Economic Times (2024). *Viral images of cricketer Liton Das and a burning house on Indian social media, claiming Bangladeshi Hindu athlete's home was burned by Islamic extremists.* Photograph: collected.**

Even though later the truth was unfolded, by the distinction between stimulation and reality was blurred, reinforcing communal solidarity and invoking Hindu nationalism in India. In this context, Baudrillard's (1981) concept of "simulacra" explained how "signs" become more significant than the real. Pictures and videos of people moving towards the Indian border, burnt houses, temple desecrations, and attacks on Hindu people became the sign of the "oppression" of Hindus in Bangladesh. After 17 years of Hasina's regime, Bangladesh had become politically unstable (Rahman, 2024). One of the primary reasons for the attack was political affiliation. Moreover, the crime rate suddenly increased in the overall country after the police started protests and withdrew

from their duties (Marof & Rizve, 2024). However, Indian media portrayed the whole incident as a deliberate attack on the Hindu population of Bangladesh only. This hyperreal situation is embedded in the historical context, politics of othering, and Bollywoodization of islamophobia.

### **Politics of Othering Regarding Disinformation**

Creating distinctions between groups of people based on gender, ideology, race, religion, and so on is known as the politics of othering (Jian, 1999). It establishes inequality and hierarchy. It excludes a community or group of people constructing the narrative of “us vs them” (Jensen, 2011). Through media representation and discourses, the politics of othering considers “the other” a threat. The politics of othering in Indian media about the Muslims of Bangladesh is embedded in the historical context of the partition of 1947. Therefore, the disinformation of Hindu persecution gained popularity throughout India. It revived the collective memory of the Hindu-Muslim riots during and after the partition of 1947. Not only that, the disinformation about Bangladesh and its Hindu population in Indian media has given strength to the transnational Hindu solidarity (Pti, 2024). They argue that the Islamic extremists are attacking the “minorities” and those communities are vulnerable in Bangladesh. The media narratives are represented through the politics of “us versus them” and have portrayed the Hindus in Bangladesh as “victims of religious persecution”. Edward Said in “*Orientalism*” (1978) argued that cultural and political binaries such as Hindu vs Muslim are constructed by the “politics of othering”. Media portals like NDTV, The Hindustan Times, Zee News, Aaj Tak, Business Standard, Republic Bangla and ABP Anand have framed the Bangladeshi Muslim population as “oppressor”, “extremist”, and “intolerant” of Hindus. Historically, through Indian media narratives, Muslims are tagged as “oppressors” or the “other”. It is embedded in the historical media politics of partition. During the partition of 1947, communal violence occurred throughout the Indian subcontinent, especially between the Hindu, Sikh, and Muslim, such as the Rawalpindi massacres (1947), and the Noakhali riots (1946) (Pollack & Ejiofor, 2007). These historical events have turned Muslims into a nemesis in the discourses of India, which is reflected mainly in Bollywood movies.

Recent movies such as “The Kerala Story” (2023), “Baaghi 3” (2020), “Gadar 2” (2023), “The Kashmir Files” (2022), “Sooryavanshi” (2021) explain how Bollywood fuels its anti-Muslim narratives (Masood, 2023). Muslims in these movies are terrorists who want to harm the Hindus. The Bollywoodization of Muslims as terrorists,

extremists, and anti-democratic (Afaqi, 2024) evokes emotions for the Bangladeshi Hindus to be saved by Indian Hindus and creates a sense of belonging. Doreen Massey explained the political nature of space and place and argued how a “sense of belonging” is shaped through interactions, social relations, and power dynamics (Massey, 1996). So, it is no surprise that after the July movement, the Indian media successfully evoked a sense of belonging where they created narratives to save the Hindus from the “others”, the Bangladeshi anti-democratic extremist Muslims, along with the importance of “Hindutva”.



**Figure 10 : Republic Bangla (2024, September 26). *The number of Hindus is continuously decreasing in Bangladesh*, photograph: collected.**

**Figure 11 : ABP Ananda (2024). *Islamic fundamentalists are forcing Hindus to convert*, photograph: collected.**

Indian media is representing Bangladesh as anti-democratic through “selective” representation and manipulation of the events of post-July 2024. They are using the images to revive “collective memories” (Hamilton, 1997) of communal violence throughout India; for example, Republic Bangla broadcast, in an exclusive episode on their news channel on 26 September 2024 where they claimed that the July movement was pre-planned to reduce the Hindu population of Bangladesh and established the “us vs them” narrative more strongly (Republic Bangla, 2024).

The Hindu nationalism or Hindutva is being re-established through these collective memories, and it has become the “sacred” duty of “Indian Hindus” to save

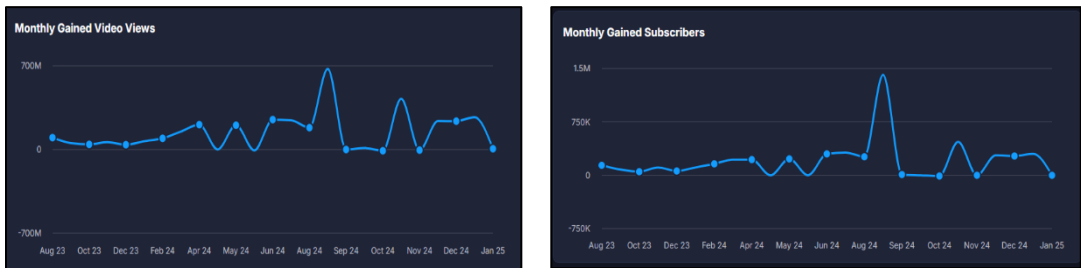
“Bangladeshi Hindus”. Therefore, the Indian media trialling became very popular throughout India. Again, the interplay of disinformation and misinformation of Indian media about Bangladesh reflects the “political consciousness” and “religious consciousness” of “The Citizenship Amendment Act, 2019 (CAA)” which provided Indian citizenship for “persecuted religious minorities” from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Pakistan who arrived in India by 2014 (Aljazeera, 2024). By the act of CAA, Bangladesh is, by default, not a safe place for its Hindu population. Thus, policy, belief, and ideology have strengthened identity politics and politics of othering. The historical context has mobilised the perception of Hindu persecution, contributing to the post-truth realities of July.

Moreover, the “Godi media”<sup>10</sup> (Bhat, 2022), (Chakrabarty, 2022) or the lapdog media and their media soldiers are producing news in support of the ruling political parties of India and has become the weapon for post-truth reality. Dominant Indian media discourses about Bangladesh have created a “fabricated” reality for their nationalist agenda, the Hindutva of Hindu nationalism. The Indian media is now operating as a “tool for identity formation”, presenting Bangladesh as an anti-democratic, “violent”, and “unsuitable” place for Hindus. They have created a sense of moral duty to save Bangladeshi Hindus from religious conflict and Hindu persecution through media trials. They have re-established the discourse of Hindus as “victim” and “Muslims” as oppressors” in Bangladesh. In this process, they have dislocated, de-historicised, and politicised the July 2024 movement—various actors reproduced and consumed this disinformation due to media, technology, business, etc.

### **Reproduction and Consumption of Disinformation**

Disinformation and misinformation are produced, reproduced, and consumed for various reasons. Social, cultural, and religious sentiments, ideology, politics, lifestyle, livelihood, and other things are associated with disinformation and misinformation production, reproduction, and consumption. The fundamental characteristic of a democratic country is freedom of speech. The media, such as print, digital, and social media, is a way to exploit freedom of speech. However, disinformation and misinformation have become a new money machine in the contemporary world. It is not about telling the truth. Instead, it is about making money. At the micro level, different news media are often associated with this money-making manoeuvring. Moreover, news media is no longer confined to television. Their YouTube channel and verified Facebook page generate income according to the views. For example, the

estimated monthly income of the YouTube channel of Republic Bangla is \$365.7K - \$1.1M, and they have over 6.85 million subscribers over the last 30 days (vidIQ, 2025).



**Figure 12: vidIQ. (2025, January 13). Republic Bangla’s mainly gained video views. Photograph: webpage of vidIQ**

**Figure 13: vidIQ. (2025, January 13). Republic Bangla’s monthly gained subscribers. Photograph: webpage of vidIQ**

Both graphs represent an interesting shift from August 24 to September 24 and show the growth of subscriptions and viewers. As mentioned before, republic Bangla, along with other Indian media, produced more than 13 disinformation about the post-July situation of Bangladesh. Their fabricated news on religious persecution caught viewers and subscribers more than ever, which indicates an increase in income. News channels want to sell their news by any means. They use public sentiments to sell news and feed on their emotions. However, the motivation for making money using disinformation and misinformation is multilayered. The competition among the media channels motivates print and digital media to create sensational headlines, primarily focusing on contemporary trends or events. This “sensationalist colouring of the news” (Kaplan, 2008, pp-5370) is called “yellow journalism”, where the term yellow represents the “cheap, popular, sensationalist fiction” (Kaplan, 2008, pp-5370). Some headlines of Indian news media after the July movement such as “the blueprint of Hindu reduction” (Bangla, 2024), “Bangladesh interim government blind to genocide against Hindus” (Bureau, 2024), “Bangladesh News: ‘We are all Taliban, this country will become Afghan’ (Bhattacharya, 2024), “Hindus forced to resign from jobs in Bangladesh, face ‘love trap’ propaganda” (Mishra, 2024), “Bangladeshi forces crack down on Hindus in Chittagong after post sparks unrest” (Mishra, 2024), “Bangladesh Violence: Where is the order and money coming from to wipe out Hindus in Bangladesh” (zee news,2024) and many more.

All these sensational headlines were trending in Indian media. The narrative they have produced through this sensationalism has caught consumers of different interests. Reproduction and consumption of disinformation and misinformation are easy money, and social media is a space for making money more effortlessly. At the micro level, individuals are motivated by such incentives. It has become a way of livelihood for many people. The mining of Facebook and YouTube content, such as videos and reels, motivates individuals to share any content. Moreover, social media has no restrictions or policies to cross-check any disinformation or misinformation, nor does it have any penalty system. Disinformation and misinformation can be easily shared and spread by clicking the share option. However, the AI algorithm controls the life of individuals. The algorithms of Facebook and YouTube bring similar content together and keep hammering individuals' cognition. It provokes individuals to share that "trendy" issue. However, it also creates a dilemma for individuals. Consumers are well aware of the deceptive nature of news media. Because of the dilemma of truth and false, viewers consume disinformation and misinformation based on their ideologies and interests. Therefore, they create a post-truth reality where political, cultural, and religious ideologies are more significant than the concept of truth and false.

According to Beauvais (2022), reproduction and consumption of disinformation and misinformation are also external, internal, and individual factors. She explained how these factors are responsible for making disinformation plausible. External factors are known as social media platforms and the ecosystem of media. It includes the availability of false news in the mainstream news agenda, individual creators and consumers, the role of social media platforms, the competitive nature of true and false information, and uncertainty. In contrast, internal factors are cognitive, such as the prenotation of truth, novelty, and confirmation bias. Other internal factors include emotionally evocative content and sociological factors such as echo chambers, false news fabrication, and pressure groups Beauvais (2022). She also explained individual factors, such as passing time, socialisation, and altruism. As the media influences the flow of information in a digitalised world, it often presents the data as authentic. They sensationalise the audience by presenting the narratives of truth, justice, and duties. Because of the audience's or consumer's preexisting or confirmation bias, these narratives produce anxiety and uncertainty among them. So, when the Indian mainstream and local media broadcast the news on Hindus being prosecuted in Bangladesh after the July movement because of their religious identity and being a "minority", it creates a highly emotional state for the Indian Hindu population.

Additionally, the prenotation of the Muslims being extremist, violent, and anti-Hindu has made the disinformation more plausible to consume. Moreover, echo chambers or online communities fuel it by sharing sensational news without cross-checking. According to Beauvais (2022), echo chambers reflect people's shared interests and values on social media. Therefore, shared content gradually becomes real through the selective exposure of social media algorithms. It becomes a trend, and individuals share it to promote solidarity, reveal the truth, seek justice, and make money. Since the verification and restriction of sharing the AI-generated video is not possible in social media, the promotion of disinformation has no limits, and disinformation and misinformation are represented as if they are real.

Another explanation for consuming disinformation can be W.J.T. Mitchell's (1996) famous argument on the "agency of images." He argued that images are "not passive." They have their own "agency" and "desire," through which images shape viewers' perceptions, desires, and emotions. Therefore, Images can be used as a political intervention strategy and an ideological manipulation agent (Mitchell, 1996, p. 74). Images "manifest as lack" (Mitchell, 1996, p. 76).

Furthermore, through the interplay of agency, desire, and manifestation of lack, the image communicates and motivates its viewers. When the Indian media portrayed violent and conflicting photos and presented them as religious persecution of Bangladeshi Hindus, the images evoked religious sentiments and generated sympathy for the Bangladeshi Hindus. Both photos and dominant media discourse circulate misinformation and disinformation and function as powerful tools for creating a post-truth reality for Bangladesh.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has focused on how Indian media has constructed a post-truth reality of the July Movement 2024 and its effect on Bangladesh. The July Movement 2024 is a critical political event for Bangladesh. Nevertheless, the post-truth realities have striped truth off from the actual event. Indian media has created a hyperreal situation of Hindu or "minority" persecution in Bangladesh. Lack of policy intervention and restriction in social media, degradation of ethics and morality of both print and digital media, the business of information, and increased uncertainty and anxieties among people in the contemporary world help to construct the post-truth reality through disinformation and

misinformation. The deceptive nature of the media has caused people to lose their trust. Even though individuals produce, reproduce, and consume disinformation and misinformation for various reasons. The post-truth reality is based on preexisting notions of belief systems and ideologies. Political or religious sentiments motivate actors at both the macro and micro levels. Moreover, the high unemployment rate, easy money-making strategy, and psychology of following the trends also motivated actors to consume disinformation and misinformation. Technological advancements such as AI have already created confusion about the “truth”, which has produced dilemmas among the actors. This continuous dilemma creates anxieties and uncertainties, leading to a delusion about the actual event and constructing a post-truth reality.

Since actors cannot fully trust the visual representation, they follow their ideologies. Algorithms of Facebook and YouTube follow the user’s browsing history and present similar content as much as possible to control an individual’s lifestyle and ideology. This paper also illustrates the power of disinformation and misinformation in media trials and their role in making democracy a fragile component. This media trialling, along with their faithful followers or media soldiers, further creates the post-truth reality and presents Bangladesh as anti-democratic and anti-Hindu. It also explores the bias of Indian media against vandalism and terrorism. Moreover, the Indian press presents themselves in an authoritative position and reproduces unverified and false news about post-July Bangladesh. The post-truth reality is thus dislocating the July movement through disinformation and misinformation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The first wave of the quota reformation movement happened in 2018 against the 56% quota in Bangladesh. See Borthakur, A. (2024, August 2). *Quota reform movement in Bangladesh: A deep dive into its origin and impact*. Vivekananda International Foundation <https://www.vifindia.org/article/2024/august/2/Quota-Reform-Movement-in-Bangladesh> retrieved on January 1, 2024

<sup>2</sup> Bangladesh Chhatra League is the student wing of Bangladesh Awami League. See press Xpress (2024, January 8). “*The history of Chhatra league is the history of Bengalis.*” Press Xpress. <https://pressxpress.org/2024/01/04/the-history-of-chhatra-league-is-the-history-of-bengalis/> retrieved on January 11, 2024

<sup>3</sup> International Society for Krishna Consciousness, or ISKCON, is a religious political party established in 1966. It is also known as the Hare Krishna movement. See Dasa, M. (2021, December 9). *The International Society for Krishna Consciousness*.

Krishna.org – Real Krishna Consciousness. <https://krishna.org/the-international-society-for-krishna-consciousness/> retrieved on January 8, 2024

<sup>4</sup> jihad is an Arabic word. It means effort or struggle. Nevertheless, in the contemporary world, the global media represented it as the militant ideology of Islamic extremists. BBC News. (2014, December 11). *What is jihadism?* BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30411519> retrieved on January 16, 2024

<sup>5</sup> Nara-e-takbeer is an Islamic chant to declare the Greatness of Allah. See. *When is youm e takbeer celebrated, and why?* – TEACHERSCOLLEGESJ. (2020, July 4). <https://teacherscollegesj.org/when-youm-e-takbeer-is-celebrated-and-why/> retrieved on January 16, 2024

<sup>6</sup> Jamaat-e-Islami is a political organisation in Bangladesh which believes in Islamic ideology. See EFSAS. (2017, March). *Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh: Past, present and future*. EFSAS. <https://www.efsas.org/publications/study-papers/jamaat-e-islami-in-bangladesh-past,-present-and-future/> retrieved on January 18, 2024

<sup>7</sup> Hefazat-e-Islam is a religious political organisation in Bangladesh. See Kapur, R. (2023, December 7). *Hefazat-e-Islam and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Bangladesh*. East Asia Forum. <https://eastasiaforum.org/2022/02/16/hefazat-e-islam-and-the-rise-of-islamic-fundamentalism-in-bangladesh/> retrieved on January 18, 2024

<sup>8</sup> Awami League is one of Bangladesh's oldest and major political parties. See Smith, W. (2025). *Awami League*. Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Awami-League> retrieved on January 18, 2025

<sup>9</sup> Introduced by Ashish Rajadhyaksha, Bollywoodization refers to the cultural impact and influences of Indian cinema on the mass population. See RAJADHYAKSHA, A. (2010, December 1). <sup>10</sup> The “Bollywoodization” of Indian cinema: Cultural... <https://bpb-us-e2.wpmucdn.com/sites.middlebury.edu/dist/1/3376/files/2015/01/Rajadhyaksha-Bollywoodization-of-Indian-cinema.pdf>, retrieved on December 14, 2024.

<sup>10</sup> The term Godi media was used by journalist Ravish Kumar as criticism against the bias of Indian media towards the Indian Government. See Ground Report Desk (2023, May 17). *What are Godi Media, and what are the top Godi media anchors?* <https://groundreport.in/what-is-godi-media-and-top-godi-media-anchors/> retrieved on January 11, 2025

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