



# IPOR's SURVEY

## From Likes to Lies: Citizen's Perceptions of Social Media and Misinformation in Pakistan



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[www.ipor.com.pk](http://www.ipor.com.pk)

## Introduction

*From Likes to Lies: Citizen's Perceptions of Social Media and Misinformation in Pakistan* is a survey conducted by the Institute for Public Opinion Research (IPOR) to assess public attitudes toward social media usage and its impact on information consumption. The study examines the extent of social media adoption in Pakistan, the role it plays in communication and access to news, and citizens' concerns regarding the spread of misinformation and fake content online.

With social media now central to public discourse, political debate, and everyday interaction, its influence on society is both profound and complex. While it offers opportunities for connectivity, information sharing, and civic engagement, it also poses risks by amplifying misinformation and undermining trust in credible sources. By documenting how citizens perceive these opportunities and challenges, the survey aims to provide evidence-based insights for policymakers, media practitioners, and civil society to promote responsible digital engagement and counter the threats posed by misinformation in Pakistan.

## Key Findings:

### 1. Strong Social Media Usage Patterns in Pakistan: WhatsApp Leads as Primary Platform of Choice

A significant 27% of respondents identified WhatsApp as their most frequently used social media platform, highlighting its dominance in everyday communication. Facebook (19%) and YouTube (18%) closely follow, showing their continued relevance in digital engagement and information consumption. TikTok (17%) and Instagram (10%) also command notable user attention, particularly among younger demographics, reflecting shifting entertainment and lifestyle trends. By contrast, Twitter (2%) registers minimal preference, underscoring its limited reach in broader public usage. The

findings indicate that messaging-based platforms and video content continue to shape Pakistan's digital habits, while microblogging remains a niche activity with marginal traction.

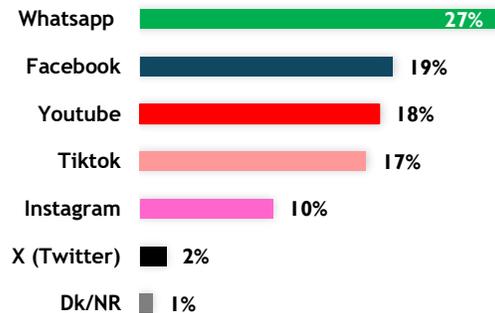


Figure 1: Which social media platform do you use the most?

### 2. Fact-Checking on Social Media: A Rare Practice

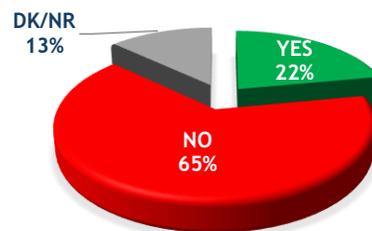


Figure 2: Do you verify the news you see on social media?

Only 22% of respondents reported verifying news they see on social media, reflecting limited engagement with fact-checking practices. In contrast, a clear majority, 65%, admitted they do not verify news, highlighting widespread vulnerability to misinformation and unchecked narratives circulating online. Additionally, 13% responded "Don't Know/Not Responded", suggesting uncertainty or indifference toward fact-checking behaviors. These findings reveal a concerning gap in critical media literacy, as most users rely on social media content without validation. The results underscore the urgent need for awareness campaigns and digital literacy initiatives to promote responsible consumption and verification of online information.

### 3. Preferred Methods of News Verification: Reliance on Credible Sources and Social Networks

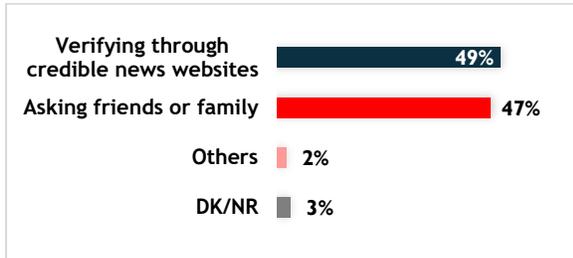


Figure 3: Of those said yes (22%) , which method do you use to verify the news?

Among respondents who verify news on social media, nearly half (49%), rely on credible news websites, reflecting trust in professional journalism and established media outlets as primary sources for fact checking. Close behind, 47% reported asking friends or family, highlighting the strong role of social networks and interpersonal trust in shaping verification practices. Only 2% indicated other methods, showing limited use of alternative verification strategies such as fact-checking organizations or independent research. These findings suggest that while traditional news outlets remain central to combating misinformation, a significant reliance on informal social validation underscores the importance of strengthening both professional media credibility and public media literacy.

### 4. Public Perceives Facebook Leading in Misinformation Spread

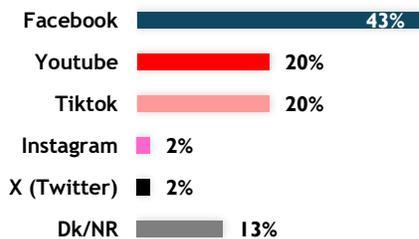


Figure 4: In your opinion, which social media platform is most used to spread false news?

A large proportion of respondents (43%) identified Facebook as the leading platform for the spread of false news, underscoring concerns

about its role in shaping misinformation trends. Both YouTube (20%) and TikTok (20%) were also perceived as significant channels, particularly reflecting the rising influence of video-based content in amplifying unverified information. In contrast, Instagram (2%) and X/Twitter (2%) were mentioned far less frequently, suggesting they are seen as relatively minor players in misinformation dissemination. These findings highlight Facebook’s dominant role in the public perception of misinformation sources, while also drawing attention to the growing risks associated with video-driven platforms like YouTube and TikTok.

### 5. Limited Impact of Social Media News on Opinion Change

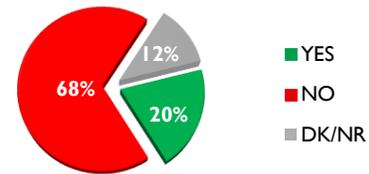


Figure 5: Have you ever changed your opinion because of news on social media?

A clear majority of respondents (68%) stated that they have never changed their opinion because of news on social media, reflecting skepticism toward online narratives or stronger reliance on pre-existing beliefs and alternative sources. Only 20% reported that social media news has influenced them enough to change their opinion, indicating that while impactful, such cases remain limited. These findings highlight that although social media plays a growing role in shaping public discourse, its direct power to alter individual opinions remains constrained, with most users maintaining a critical or resistant stance toward online news.

### 6. Social Media Feeds: Users See Repeated Interest-Based Content

A strong majority of respondents (64%) agreed that social media platforms repeatedly show content aligned with their interests or preferences, reinforcing the perception of

algorithm-driven echo chambers. This finding highlights growing public awareness of how digital platforms filter information and personalize feeds, potentially limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints. In contrast, 22% disagreed, suggesting that a segment of users either experiences more variety in content or remains skeptical of algorithmic influence.

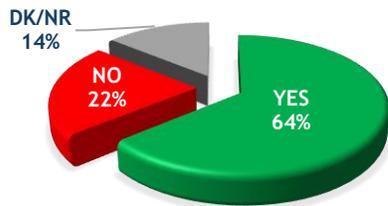


Figure 6: Some people believe that social media only shows you the content that matches your interests or preferences repeatedly. Do you agree with this?

These results indicate that most users recognize the filtering effects of social media, raising concerns about polarization, confirmation bias, and restricted access to balanced information.

### 7. Dealing with Opposing Views: Majority Choose to Ignore

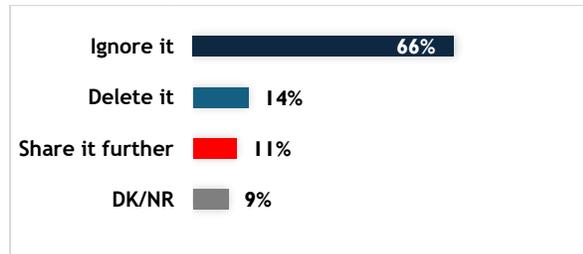


Figure 7: When you see content on social media that is different from your personal opinion, what do you do?

A majority of respondents (66%) said they ignore content on social media that differs from their personal opinion, reflecting either disengagement from opposing perspectives or reluctance to challenge them. Meanwhile, 14% reported deleting such content, suggesting an active effort to remove unwanted or uncomfortable viewpoints from their feeds. A smaller segment, 11%, admitted to sharing it further, which may indicate either endorsement, criticism, or simply forwarding without reflection.

These results suggest that most users prefer avoidance to engagement with differing opinions, reinforcing echo chamber dynamics and limiting constructive dialogue on digital platforms.

### 8. Political Narratives Online: PTI Dominates Digital Space

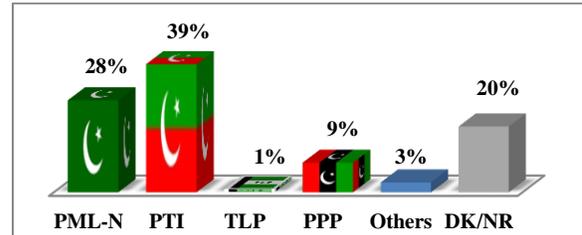


Figure 8: In your opinion, which political party is using social media most effectively to promote its narrative?

A plurality of respondents (39%) identified Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) as the political party using social media most effectively to promote its narrative, reflecting the party has established reputation for strong digital outreach and mobilization. Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N) followed with 28%, suggesting notable improvements in its online engagement strategy and resonance with audiences. In contrast, only 9% recognized Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) as effective in this domain, underscoring its relatively weaker digital presence. Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) registered just 1%, showing minimal acknowledgment of its social media influence. Meanwhile, a significant 20% responded ‘Don’t Know/Not Responded,’ highlighting uncertainty or lack of clarity among the public regarding which party leads in online narrative building. These findings suggest PTI maintains a dominant edge in digital politics, while PML-N is emerging as a competitive player in shaping political discourse online.

### 9. Public Perception of Government Narratives: Widespread Skepticism

Public trust in government-issued statements on social media appears limited. Only 12% of respondents strongly trust such information, while an additional 25% somewhat trust, bringing

overall trust levels to 37%. In contrast, skepticism is more widespread: 20% somewhat distrust and 35% strongly distrust government statements, meaning a combined 55% express distrust toward official narratives online.

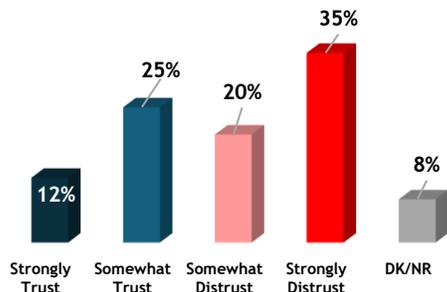


Figure 9: To what extent do you trust the statements/information issued by the government on social media?

These findings highlight a clear trust deficit, with the majority of respondents questioning the credibility of government communication on social media. The data suggests challenges for the government in building transparency and reliability in its digital outreach.

### Conclusion

IPOR’s survey highlights that social media in Pakistan is now central to communication, news, and politics but is also a key source of misinformation and distrust. While platforms like WhatsApp, Facebook, and YouTube dominate usage, fact-checking remains rare, and echo chambers shape digital engagement. PTI is perceived as the strongest in online narrative building, yet government communication faces a serious trust deficit. These findings point to a digital ecosystem that is powerful but fragile—requiring stronger media literacy, credible journalism, and transparent communication to ensure social media supports, rather than undermines, democratic discourse.

### Data and Methodology

IPOR conducted a nationally representative

Survey in August 2025 to capture public perceptions of social media and misinformation in Pakistan. Trained professionals interviewed 1,919 adults (18+) through Computer Assisted Telephonic Interviews (CATI). The sampling frame was drawn from IPOR’s national phone panel of 425,820 randomly recruited active mobile users, originally recruited through face-to-face interviews across all provinces. Primary Sampling Units (PSUs) were proportionally allocated by provincial population shares, and respondents were selected using Systematic Sampling with a Random Start (SSRS) to ensure representativeness. The survey achieved a 55% response rate, with a margin of error of  $\pm 3-5\%$  at the 95% confidence level.

### Demographic Profile

The demographic profile of the survey sample was designed to reflect the national population distribution, ensuring representativeness across key segments. A majority of respondents (58%) resided in rural areas, while 42% were from urban localities.

The gender composition included 65% male and 35% female respondents, highlighting a moderate gender imbalance commonly observed in telephonic surveys. Age-wise, the sample was weighted toward the working-age population, with 69% of respondents falling between 25 and 49 years, 20% between 18 and 24 years, and 11% aged 50 and above. Educational attainment varied, with 6% of respondents having no formal education, and others distributed across primary (11%), secondary (18%), matriculation (22%), intermediate (17%), graduate (18%), and master’s level (8%) qualifications. This distribution enables broad analysis across regions, ages, and education levels.

Note: Institute for Public Opinion Research (IPOR) is an independent research organization registered with SECP, specializing in public opinion on democracy, governance, and social issues. Its Executive Director is a member of ESOMAR, reflecting adherence to global research standards.