

Filter Bubble and Fake News: Facebook and Journalist Ethics

Fatima Saeed

Riphah International University, Department of Media Sciences, Pakistan

Abstract: In 2016, the result of the American presidential election and Referendum in the United Kingdom shocked journalists all around the world. Social networking sites are now blamed for the construction of the filter bubble. The filter bubble is considered an intellectual state of isolation in which algorithms are making a circumstance where consumers progressively are getting data that reinforce their prior beliefs and less exposure to contradictory viewpoints. Filter bubbles play a key role in the handling, distribution, and dissemination of fake news stories. The study's objective is to find out how a filter bubble increases susceptibility to believing and sharing fake news and whether applying the filter bubble violates journalistic ethics. Peircean pragmatic perspective is used as a methodological approach to concentrate on concepts such as representation, reality, and fixation of belief (p priori method) because this method is relatively close to what happens with the filter bubble on social networking sites. The study results reflect the thing that the platforms of Social media i.e. Facebook, and Google search engines are blamed for the false news controversy, but still, the users' belief activity and their online presence perform a critical role in driving facebook's algorithms in this problem.

Keywords: Filter bubble, fake news, journalistic ethics, Peircean Pragmatic perspective, P priori method

I. INTRODUCTION

News digitalization has challenged conventional news concepts. Online channels offer resources for non-journalists to reach out to a large number of users. The emergence of citizen participation in journalism has questioned the connection between reporting and media when non-journalists have begun to participate in investigative practices to generate news.

1.1 News

The term news is derived from the word "new". The word news is reflected as an abbreviation of four directions of the world i.e. north, east, west, and south.

According to one of the renowned sociologists Walter Lippmann, the news is a product of the media practices and standardized procedures of journalism. Lippmann, however, did not make a typical interpretation of the news but he concentrated on the news features, the interpretation of what it is, and the relation of news with the truth. He argues that the reports and truth are not the same and can be differentiated distinctly. The purpose of news is to indicate an incident or happening and the role of truth is to shed light on the unknown facts and to create an image of reality to which individuals may respond (Lippmann, 1922).

1.2 The Politics of Junk News: Fake News

Fake news is a part of society since time immemorial; however, the idea got prominence through media, newspapers, social media, etc. In the contemporary era, where each category of media wants a higher TRP by engaging its audiences. Hence, fake news becomes a web of entangling listeners and on-lookers through which any specific media type gets captivating ratings.

It is now understood that fake news is not a phenomenon of the 21st century, Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) explained the term fake news as "intense, inaccurate and misleading news stories, and these false and misleading articles can intentionally manipulate the democratic process". In the contemporary era, fake news is another problem that dominated social media sites both during and after the 2016 balloting in America. An investigation after the elections shows that in the months before the voting, "the top-level false news regarding elections on social media created more interest as compared to the top headlines from the major news organization". Misleading news stories posted on Facebook are overwhelmingly biased in support of trump. A total of 115 false stories were posted 30 million times in favor of Donald Trump and 41 phony news were distributed 7.6 million times over by Pro-Clinton. Given these figures, it is obvious what motivates the formation and dissemination of fake stories. Two explanations flourished news: firstly, fake content producers monetize their content via Facebook and Google advertisement platforms; secondly, social networking sites have successfully eliminated barriers to producing and distributing the content.

1.3 Journalistic Ethics

The concept of ethics was varied. The word ethics was derived from the Greek term "ethos" which means practices or procedures. Ethics are the moral principles that regulate the behavior of an individual. There are two aspects of ethics. First ethics refers to a well-based principle of right or wrong which recommend what should be done by humans. Right obligations, the doctrine of fairness, and benefit to society are considered the basis of ethics. Ethics, for instance, often refers to those principles which enforce a moral duty to abstain from defamation, theft, and murder. In the second dimension, ethics is related to studying and shaping the ethical principles of individuals. As mentioned above, laws and social principles will deviate from what is acceptable or ethical and it is important to continually check individual standards to

ensure that they are fair.

In reaction to the sensationalism of media, the “American Society of Newspaper Editors” introduced an ethical framework named the “*canon of journalism*”. There are seven basic ethical standards or canon of journalism in media that most citizens rely on such as freedom of press, accountability, precision, truthfulness, honesty, independence, objectivity, decency, and fair play. The code of ethics is often used as an agreement between the journalist and the general public. These standards help both parties to consider the professional style of the journalist.

1.3.1 Ethics: In Pakistani Perspective

In compliance with article 19 of the Human Rights Universal Declaration (UDHR) “Everybody has the right to liberty of speech and opinion: this privilege requires the choice to hold opinion without intervention and to search, seek and obtain information or knowledge across all media and without regard to any boundaries restricted for doing so”. This constitution article ensures that people may voice their thoughts, place their views or expression on paper, print them, put them online, or communicate them in whatever manner they feel. There are three main components that are the foundation of article 19 of the Human rights Universal Declaration; the flow of information without any restriction, unobstructed access to resources of info, and free expressions of views and ideas. The media thus has the right to practice in political systems, but with set accountability and the establishment of ethics, which is accepted on all platforms.

1.3.1.1 PFUJ

In 1950 PFUJ was developed. It has always stood out as a symbol of article 19. The principles of PFUJ provide the dos’ and don’ts for the journalist.

- A journalist shall do nothing to offend himself (his party, his newspaper, or his occupation) and bring a bad name to the union. He should accept his union’s rules and not behave against the union’s interest by the act of commission and omission.
- A journalist shall not be allowed to accept bribes, any personal favor, and gifts. The acceptance of any form of reward is one of the most severe criminal crimes.
- When journalists are dealing with a collection of facts and publication of the news, the right of criticism and fair remarks are principles. Every journalist should have a right to defend the criticism.
- Although this is a journalistic body, whenever the journalist wants to terminate his job, and don’t like to continue the job in a particular organization, you must detach yourself by giving notice.
- A journalist should not seek elevation in status and get the rank of another journalist unjustly.
- A Journalist who is a member of PFUJ shall not enjoy the privilege or good reputation by copying someone’s material. According to PFUJ plagiarism is a grave offense for the journalist.

- A journalist shall have a personal duty for all things he sends to his media organization, newspaper, and news agencies. He should honor the ethics of professional secrets and respect the confidences that impose by the organization, union, and source of information. A journalist should not change the document or the fact or distort the information.
- A journalist, correspondent, and media photographer should do nothing that causes embarrassment to the distressed person or party when they collect news or images. News and images should only be gathered in a decent way.
- In this principle of PFUJ, there is nothing new. Being a journalist you should keep in mind the risk of libel, defamation as well as the laws of copyright. When you are reporting the proceeding of the court there is special care to be considered for the journalist. All these principles of PFUJ are supposed to be followed by every journalist.

1.3.1.2 CPNE

CPNE provides a code of ethics not for journalists but for those people who hold managerial or important positions in media organizations. Before moving on to see what kind of code of ethics they have framed for the best working environment in the media organizations. CPNE was set up in 1957. The aim and objectives of this council were to safeguard the freedom of the press and establish healthy working conditions for journalists and journalism in Pakistan. PFUJ solely talks about journalistic ethics but the goal of CPNE is to safeguard the liberty of media or press.

CPNE believes in “the main responsibility of the journalists and the editors is to serve the truth”. It also claims that the different media outlets are conveyors of public discussion and promote the information from one source to another. This council works under the constitutional mandate and presents reports which are closer and closer to the facts.

- The following six elements should be avoided in any type of publication (such as editorials, ads, news outlets, and photographs). These six elements are dishonesty, vulgarity, and offensive remarks against any particular group, person, or party, preventing false and malicious allegations, avoiding sectarian sentiments and parochial approaches against the person, group, or institutions, avoiding any activity that incites violence, and last but not least, don’t present the crimes and vice in a glamorized way.
- The Public’s right to know is becoming the foremost important responsibility of the media and the journalist regardless of any other obligations or interests.
- This principle of CPNE talks about freedom which means public discussion on any issue will not be between two persons that will be between the public. The public issue must be discussed on a large platform. According to section A of article 19 of our

constitution, any public record or information is given to the journalist for scrutiny. This has been taken as a very important principle in the code of ethics given by CPNE.

- Every media organization and journalist has to observe the right to privacy of individuals.
- This principle of CPNE covers the whole element of professional journalism. Any news items or facts that are portrayed or aired must be fair and objective and there should be no willful act of leaving shreds of evidence. Moreover, any headlines provided by mass media must be sure that the content of the news should not be different from that. Similarly, the journalist and media organization has also responsible to honor the records commitment.
- Being a journalist you have every right to protect the name of the person who provides the information. There is also a provision in the law that journalists or media organizations should not disclose the source of information.
- All the advertisements and paid content should have seemed like an advertisement or a paid form of communication.
- Media organizations and journalists should not accept any form of bribes from foreign countries or any agencies.
- Any form of freebies, gifts, or special treatment that can compromise the integrity, influence over the content, and honesty of the journalist/editors should be avoided.
- A journalist shall not publish any derogatory expression about the religion that hurts the sentiments of the masses.
- A journalist should be protected by the friendly relationship between the two states. This principle of CPNE reflects the obligation of article 19.
- A journalist or press shall not publish any advertisement, news or photographs that undermine the safety and solidarity of the state.
- A journalist or press shall not publish or broadcast any news that undermines the allegiance and the devotions of armed forces and also avoid dragging the armed forces into the politics
- In case of the proceedings of assemblies, the journalist and the media shall not publish any news that expunged from the speakers
- When the media are reporting the proceeding of the court, there is special care to be considered for the journalist.

1.3.1.3 APNS

APNS was initially established in 1950. APNS is a symbolic body of Pakistan's newspaper owners. The aims for which All Pakistan Newspaper Society was established are: to serve as the core body of Pakistan's newspaper industry, to support, facilitate and improve state-of-the-art journalism, to

endorse advancement in the laws, to monitor, promote and protect the rights and the concern of newspaper owners or journalists and also establish rules that govern the conduct of its journalist.

- APNS undertakes to use all practicable steps by its journalists to improve the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the publication to provide the best output to the public.
- All News agencies shall take duty to ensure that all publications published by them are legal, fair, and contain no offensive content.
- The advertisers or journalists must ensure that no advertisement or content should be published that is inaccurate, ambiguous, misinformed, or confusing to the readers.
- Journalists'/advertisers should do nothing that will cause humiliation or distress among the readers.
- Advertisers should not target certain companies or products negatively or discredit them.
- The advertiser shall take responsibility for the disbursement of payments to an advertising agency not less than 45 days after the dispatch of invoices.

To procure advertisements, the members of APNS are eligible to approach the clients of ad agencies.

1.3.1.4 Freedom Network Pakistan (FN)

FN is a Pakistan-based media sector. The purpose for which FN was established is: to safeguard the freedom of expression, particularly press and online freedom, access to information, and to foster an educated society. FN has served the following mandates

- To work as a watchdog on the right to liberty of speech by monitoring the right to freedom of speech 24/7
- To foster ethical and responsible media promoting, supporting, and introducing policies to support democratic society and improve its stakeholders in diverse, responsive, and professional media focusing on professional ethics and best practices in journalism.
- To promote ethical media by fostering a safety and security culture for journalists

Research Questions

The research questions that guide this study are

RQ₁: How filter bubble increases susceptibility to believing and sharing fake news?

RQ₂: Is applying a filter bubble violation of journalistic ethics?

Research Objectives

- To examine whether the filter bubble raises the susceptibility of fake news on Facebook

- To examine that is applying a filter bubble violation of journalistic ethics

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Filter Bubble

The filter bubble has been considered a significant challenge to freedom of expression and the democratic system on social media. This situation can restrict the consumer's exposure to a source of information beyond their safe area and raise the possibility of polarized opinion. Pariser (2011c), in his book, explained how the search engine on the web and their algorithms are making a circumstance where consumers progressively are getting data that affirms their earlier ideas (beliefs). The algorithm of the search engines is utilized enormous amounts of data about the consumer to discover and display appropriate data (information) to the user. When the user operates an online search, browsing history is a key piece to tailor the search result. According to the main argument of the Pariser, this narrowing of information constructs a filter bubble, which is too small to see but has a massive influence on the data (Pariser, 2011c).

There are concerns that personalization algorithms may help to handle the overload of information on the internet and enhance the user experience; this can also cause algorithmic bias that restricts the user from finding contradictory information and generate the phenomena of the "filter bubble". This study uses a quasi-experiment on Sina Weibo to study the prevalence of the filter bubble in social media and in particular, its long-term effects. Statistics suggest the strong existence of the presence of the filter bubble because after the process of putting algorithmic filtering, the scope of people's attention has been somewhat restricted and this trend has become magnified over some time (Li, Mithas, Zhang, & Tam, 2019).

Eli power, in his research "filtering my newsfeed," published in 2017, has studied that digital media used a filter bubble to tailor the information that may not seem to the individuals. In addition, the gatekeeping theory has traditionally centered on how data is moved to and from a news organization and how journalist makes editorial decisions at editorial news outlets. In the digital world, web directories act as gatekeepers, and Facebook is probably the most obvious gatekeeper for social networking sites. The study explores the Facebook users should know how this new media modifies the news according to the interest of the users. Moreover, this two-part research explored the degree to which news filtering is identified to college students in the U.S. and the behavior and standards that influence news coverage and prioritization. The researcher specifically targets the two sets of consumers (students). The Researcher used a survey, and statistics suggested that consumers (students) are uninformed about Facebook's filtering mechanism and personalized newsfeed results. They also found less space within these bubbles for interacting with news and less possibility for the users to get different content (Powers, 2017).

2.2 The Politics of Rumours: Fake News

As more awareness has gained, the concept of false news has grown. The word fake news in its broadest context "any sort of material or information that has no factual basis, or not based on the reality but presented as news (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Silverman (2017) narrows down the concept of fake news "false information, exclusively financial information" which is related to reportable journalism to maximize coverage. Concerning false news and online media manipulation, some scholars emphasize the concept of a filter bubble to characterize communities of people who believe in the same idea (Zimmer, 2019).

Moreover, O'Connor and Weatherall (2019), in their book "the age of misinformation: how false belief spread," address a series of empirically-based questions 1) why do we shape belief, particularly incorrect assumptions? 2) Why are they spreading? They performed a series of experiments to gain an understanding of how an idea arises and spreads within the social network and which particular aspects of the social network help and support the flow of fake news. Furthermore, O'Connor and Weatherall discussed polarization and conformity. The researchers suggested that once people exchange information with each other, it is highly likely that people inside the network will ultimately hold the same belief, whether they are correct or incorrect. The agreement between the people would usually be about a true consensus, but the network will lead to a false belief under certain circumstances. This happens when some people in the network get and share misleading results.

In another study, Vosoughi, Roy, and Aral (2018) investigated that modern social technology that allows the large-scale flow of information and rapid sharing of information can facilitate the spread of misinformation. They examined how fake and real news reports were disseminated on social networking sites from 2006 to 2017. Statistics demonstrated that misleading news stories are significantly distributed more rapidly than objective news in all pieces of information, but the effects of false reports have been more pronounced for political news. Findings also suggested that fake news has more novel information than objective news, that's why it is more widely spread than real ones.

Similarly, Valdez (2019) conducted a study on online misinformation. In this research, scholars investigated who is responsible for the spread of fake news on the web. Furthermore, he shed a light on both perspectives (i.e. human and algorithm). The researcher first looks at how human action and decision-making behavior influence the dissemination of online fake news as well as how social media affect the users' opinion formation. This study discussed the two media's effect theories. The agenda-setting theory states that the media influences the quality of the information by giving filtered information. They argued that the media does not directly affect the opinion formation of users. The media and press represent not reality, but they filter it. Media focus on some issues and make the users more conscious of these

issues than others (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Similarly, cultivation theory further suggests that mass media exposure affects the socialization of individuals, and it offers a trend for norms and creates perceptions of a socially constructed reality. Critical concerns regarding the pervasiveness of false news in social media emerge from the filter bubbles. Users exposed to fake news become motivated by such phony information and can become a target for their counterfeit truths.

III. METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach of this study involves a qualitative conceptual study of the Peircean pragmatic perspective that emphasizes concepts like reality, fixation of belief, and representation to investigate the association between filter bubbles and fake news.

All kinds of fake news that are produced on digital media with no or little restriction seem to create an imperfect portrayal of facts. This trend promotes faster propagation of fake news with the narcotizing dysfunction that resists the development of new beliefs. According to Peircean pragmatic perspective, the term fake or real news are signs that are only a matter of belief (C. Peirce, 1877). In pragmatism, Peirce discussed the different approaches and notions for belief development, such as belief-fixing methods (Carvalho Alzamora & Andrade, 2019), reality, and representation (Zalta, 2008). According to Peircean, these approaches are used to determine what beliefs people are going to be accepted and which ones are going to be eliminated (C. Peirce, 1877).

IV. DATA COLLECTION

Data collection from documents is a widely used method in qualitative research in which the researcher uses documents either in the form of texts, videos, or audio to give voice, interpretation, and meaning to the research. Each method has its pros and cons since this study is intended to explore the relationship between the filter bubble and fake news.

This study intends to explore the filter bubble and fake news in the context of journalistic ethics, so for this purpose; five fake news on the “**Kashmir Dispute**” was selected through the fact-checking website “alt news”. Alt news is an Asian (Indian) fact-checking website. It was launched for a specific purpose just to fight the phenomenon of fake news. This website is verified by an international fact-checking Network (IFCN). The researcher selected the fake news from the period 5th august 2019 to 5 February 2020. Fake news related to the Kashmir issue is chosen by random sampling.

Following are the leads of fake news:

1. Footage from Bangalore shared as Kashmiris took part in J&K rally uttering ‘Bharat Mata ki Jai’
2. Did Reuters, BBC, and Al Jazeera fake reports of instability in Kashmir?

3. Indonesian protest footage shared by BBC NEWS as Kashmir
4. The 2018 Kulgam blast news story has been posted on social media as pictures of the current violence in Kashmir following the dropping of J&K’s status under Article 370.
5. The fake argument that the Saudi crown prince shared views regarding Kashmir

V. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis is the approach by which logical or statistical methods are used to explain, demonstrate and analyze results. In qualitative research, data analysis relies on procedures for reducing, structuring data and for summarizing the key findings (Beaudry & Miller, 2016). In qualitative research, if researcher is not analyzing his/her text or conducting their field of research, he/she can use the secondary sources extensively (Horkoff, 2018).

The previous researchers who studied the dynamics of fake news on social media they used the Peircean method of tenacity and authority to analyze the fake hashtags (Carvalho Alzamora & Andrade, 2019). Similarly, Guarda et al. (2018) used the scientific method of Peircean to analyze fake news.

Similarly, the Peircean Pragmatic perspective-Priori method is to deal with belief fixing phenomena. This method is used to analyze the data to answer the research question 1) how users’ belief-fixing practices affect the mechanism by which fake news is distributed on the web. 2) The logic behind the filter bubble increases the susceptibility to believing and sharing fake news on Facebook. This perspective focuses on the concept for evaluation of data such as representation and reality.

According to Peircean Pragmatic Perspective

Priori method of Peircean is not based on the actual observed facts but depends on assume principle or fact. This method of belief fixing is to deal with the proposition of “agreeable to reason”. Otherwise stated, people prefer to believe in ideas that are suits with their prior beliefs. Peirce as cited in Kemple (2019):

“System of this type has not depended on any observable evidence but it fundamentally adopted due to the proposition “agreeable to reason”. This means that people usually prefer to believe in ideas that correspond with their earlier beliefs.”

This method of Peirce is pretty close to what happens with the filter bubble on social networking sites.

This research analyzes the collected data by using Peircean perspective. This perspective focuses on the concept for evaluation of data such as representation, reality, like and share. The link of Fake News is illustrated below (Please see the appendix)

Fake News 1

A news report from the Muslim group uttering ‘Bharat Mata ki Jai’ has been posted on social media, saying that this walk happened in Kashmir. The report was widely circulated on social media with the caption “procession is the result of the cancellation of Article 370”. The reality of this report says that Bohra Muslims in Bangalore carried out procession in memory of martyred CRPF jawans. The representation of location shows that the video is not being filmed in Kashmir but Bangalore.

Fake News 2

In this fabricated report BBC, Reuters, and Al Jazeera news announced that Hundreds of opponents had taken to Srinagar streets against the attempt by the government to deprive J&K of their separate status. The media outlet argued that "evidenced police opening the flames and taking advantage of tear gas to clear the masses. *The reality about this news is that report aired by BBC, Reuters, and Al-Jazeera was clipped in the city of J&K, Srinagar. News report received 5200 shares on social media. The representation of the shots claims that not more than 20 people had protested.*

Fake News 3

Social media (Facebook) account named “*BBC News Kashmir*” posted a video that revealed an Indian police argument with a group of protesters. The message along with the clip posted on digital media and it portrayed a student protest taking place in J&K. However, the reality about this news is that the group of *students fought with police at a protest in Jakarta, Indonesia.* The news has received about 1,700 shares and 1600 likes. The representations show that the video is shot in Indonesia, not in Kashmir.

Fake News 4

The 2018 Kulgam blast news story has been posted on social media as pictures of the current violence in Kashmir following the dropping of J&K’s status under Article 370. The post has received 966 likes and 1910 comments. However, the reality about this news is that kulgam war news story shared on facebook as a photage of the current violence in J&K.

Fake News 5

Message accompanies a video posted on social media “*Opinion of Saudi prince on Kashmir*”. *The reality about this video message is that he is not a Saudi prince in the viral video but Imam Tawhidi, an Iranian-born Australian Shia Muslim Imam. News report received 150 likes and 476 shares on social media.*

VI. DISCUSSION

In 2016, the result of the American presidential election and Brexit Referendum in the United Kingdom shocked journalists all around the world. Social networking sites are now being blamed for constructing the filter bubble. These filters are considered intellectual isolation, where social

networking sites (Facebook) use an algorithm that selectively infers what type of content users would like to see. Then, give information to the users according to their taste. The algorithm of the search engines is utilized enormous amounts of data about the consumer to discover and display appropriate data (information) to the user. When the user operates an online search, browsing history is considered a key piece to tailor the result of the search. According to the main argument of Pariser, this narrowing of information constructs a filter bubble, which is too small to see but has a massive influence on the information. Filter bubbles play a key role in handling, distribution, and dissemination of fake news stories. Consumers’ beliefs and the online behavior of the users themselves explicitly impact the performance of such algorithms.

This research contributes to the discussion about the filter bubble and fake news by using Peirce Pragmatic study. From Peirce's perspective, this study discusses, firstly, why users share and believe in fake news. This research used a qualitative study of the Peircean pragmatic perspective that emphasizes on concepts like fixation of belief (piori method), reality, and representation in order to investigate the association between filter bubble and fake news. Following the findings of Peirce Piori approach which fixes the belief and is appropriate for reasoning and eliminates doubt, people can believe what they preferred to believe. A news report that agrees to what we previously know is assumed to be valid irrespective of whether or not they relate to reality. They remove the ambiguity of a disagreeable state of doubt. Therefore, our perceptual preferences in the digital environment produce a fertile ground for the production of fake news.

Similarly, the second thing was the reality. For Peirce, reality in itself is an external entity (complex entity) not the individual’s thinking about an object. Peirce claims that reality is not based on perception, if the users relate the reality with the perception then misleading information will rise in society. To examine the fake news from Peircean perspective, this study concludes that the notion of external reality must be portrayed in a factual news report and can’t be observed in false stories. News stories like the fake news on the Kashmir issue are not based on the external event but it is more inclined toward internal thought. Then the consequence is that this sort of news story fails to reach a reality-based conclusion.

In addition, the advancement of ICT, including social networking sites, has lowered the cost and time of information generation and transmission, including political information. Through social media, a growing number of individuals and journalists gather news through social networking sites (i.e. Twitter and Facebook). The employment of non-transparent filter is a violation of journalistic ethics. It is a big threat to the democracy or political system. Democracy demands that people consider each other's perspectives, yet people are more encapsulated in their own bubbles. It lowers the information’s quality and diversity of news.

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APPENDIX

1. <https://www.altnews.in/video-from-bangalore-viral-as-kashmiris-taking-out-rally-in-jk-chanting-bharat-mata-ki-jai/>
2. <https://www.altnews.in/did-bbc-al-jazeera-reuters-fabricate-reports-of-unrest-in-kashmir/>
3. <https://www.altnews.in/protest-video-from-indonesia-shared-as-kashmir-by-fb-page-imitating-bbc-news/>
4. <https://www.altnews.in/2018-kulgam-blast-video-shared-in-pak-social-media-as-kashmiris-massacred-in-recent-unrest/>
5. <https://www.altnews.in/viral-video-false-claim-of-saudi-prince-giving-opinions-on-kashmir/>