

# Bangladesh's Fake News Surge and the Deeper Crisis of Information

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Something striking is unfolding on Bangladeshi social media. Numerous pages, nearly indistinguishable from well-known newspapers and television channels, are spreading exaggerated or completely false stories. Their logos, fonts, and even headlines mirror those of genuine outlets. Yet, despite recognizing the deception, many users continue to follow, share, and debate these pages. This trend reveals more than simple gullibility—it exposes a profound crisis of trust, political fear, and a fractured information ecosystem.

When mainstream media loses credibility, imitations rush to fill the gap. Years of state influence, legal restrictions, and corporate pressure have made professional journalism cautious and predictable. Although the Digital Security Act (2018) was replaced by the Cyber Security Act (2023), its controlling spirit persisted. Journalists learned to avoid sensitive subjects, and readers learned to interpret silence. Over time, that silence began to resemble complicity. As belief in mainstream media waned, mirror pages—unverified but bold—emerged as emotional and fast-moving alternatives.

Political communication theory sheds light on this phenomenon: when formal institutions restrict access to information, informal networks rise to fill the void. During the quota reform protests and the turbulent July 2024 unrest, internet shutdowns and censorship created what scholars' term "information voids." In that silence, mirror pages claimed to speak the truth. They offered speed and certainty at a time when official sources faltered.

Psychology adds another dimension. People rarely process information rationally—they believe what feels true. Cognitive biases draw individuals toward content that reflects their emotions. Mirror pages thrive by resonating with anger, frustration, and hope. Sharing their content becomes a small act of rebellion, a way to feel seen and connected in a deeply divided society.

Social media platforms, especially Facebook, amplify this bias. For millions of Bangladeshis, it remains the primary source of news. Its algorithm favors engagement over accuracy—rewarding sensationalism rather than balance. Mirror pages gain the upper hand by being louder, faster, and unaccountable.

But technology alone isn't to blame. The root of the problem is institutional and moral. When political competition devolves into propaganda, citizens start trusting whatever narrative sounds most believable. The fake news boom is therefore not just a digital issue—it's a democratic crisis.

## The Path to Rebuilding Trust

To repair this crisis, credibility must be rebuilt from the ground up.

1. Reform the law:

Punishing journalists for errors or opinions has only silenced critical voices. The Cyber Security Ordinance 2025 must include clear safeguards for freedom of expression. Without these protections, self-censorship will persist, and misinformation will continue to fill the silence.

2. Reform the newsroom:

Too many outlets still write for officials, not readers. Journalists must prioritize transparency—explain how information is verified, acknowledge uncertainty, and correct mistakes promptly. Honest journalism fosters more trust than polished avoidance.

3. Reform the platforms:

Tech companies know which pages mimic legitimate media. They can authenticate real logos, limit

impostors, and boost verified content—especially during crises.

4. Reform the classroom:

Media literacy should be taught as a civic skill. Students must learn to verify claims, cross-check sources, and think critically. Doubt should be celebrated as a democratic virtue, not punished as disloyalty.

### Beyond the Mirror

Mirror pages are not mere parasites feeding on real media; they are symptoms of a society struggling with trust. They flourish where truth is uncertain and silence feels safe. The solution is not more censorship, but more courage, transparency, and accountability. Only by reviving trust in genuine journalism can Bangladesh move beyond the mirrors and look toward the light of truth.