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Fighting Disinformation in the Palestine Conflict: The Role of Generative AI and Islamic Values

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FIGHTING DISINFORMATION IN THE PALESTINE CONFLICT: THE ROLE OF GENERATIVE AI AND ISLAMIC VALUES

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ABSTRACT

In today's fast-paced world of globalization, hybrid wars, and the rise of the Zionist agenda, falsehood have become a powerful tool to distract people from what is right. Fifth-generation warfare may include the use of, but not limited to, artificial intelligence, fully autonomous systems of social engineering through tools like social media, unethical cyber-attacks, a plethora of misinformation and false news which includes biased, misleading, deceptive, or hyper partisan news. This research paper looks into the role of Generative AI in the Palestine conflict and to what extent it has supported the schema on either side and explores how Islamic values can be used to combat disinformation and promote transparency. The paper provides a comprehensive analysis of established research to clarify the point of view and concludes by discussing the role of different stakeholders involved in the situation, the user, the social media platforms, and the government.

Keywords: Generative AI, Islamic values, Palestine conflict, warfare.

Introduction

The fifth-generation warfare is not just about the bombs and bullets, it is more than that. The concept is so dynamic that it evolves with every new conflict the world witnesses. It may include the use of, but not limited to, artificial intelligence, fully autonomous systems of social engineering through tools like social media, unethical cyber-attacks, and a plethora of misinformation and false news¹ which includes biased, misleading, deceptive, or hyper partisan news.² Disinformation is simply the spreading of the misinformation.³ As the author suggests, it is the war of 'information and perception.'⁴ This type of warfare is of narratives that span over physical and non-physical spaces with violent and non-violent impacts. It does not necessarily employ military power rather instead it employs a mixture of kinetic and non-kinetic force.⁵ The recent 5th generation conflict is the half-century-long conflict in Gaza which

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is often misrepresented by the Western media⁶ in order to divert the narrative into something that suits the masters.

The fresh ongoing conflict in Gaza, which began on 7th October 2023, when Hamas' *Mujahideen* broke into the Illegal settlements by the Jews in Palestine and took back 20 towns and army bases in a fatal attack dubbed as a 'paradigm shift'⁷, is a sequel to Balfour declaration in 1917 – a promise to the Jews made by the UK's Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour. It was the time when tensions around the world grew due to World War I and the Ottoman Empire fell into the hands of the British Empire, where the British had now the control of the state of Palestine. Between the 1920s and 1940s Jews flew and gathered in today's Palestine when Europe was badly persecuting them and especially the Nazi holocaust in World War II.⁸ A couple of years went by when there was an uproar over the partitions and freedoms around the world; it was the time after World War II when the British had spent a fortune in winning the war and therefore was unable to run the affairs smoothly in the occupied regions like the sub-continent. In 1948, after the partition of the sub-continent in 1947, the British announced a state for the Jews called Israel in the fulfilment of the pledge stated earlier.⁹ This self-determination gave birth to an illegal state under the patronage of the failing world powers using a toothless law.

A brief history of the conflict

One of the severe and long-lasting disputes of the 19th and 20th century is the conflict is about the formation of a Jewish state and Palestine. In 1947, the United Nations adopted Resolution 181¹⁰, also known as the Partition Plan, which proposed to have an impulsive decision under the British Mandate of Palestine into Arab and Jewish states. The creation of the State for Jews on May 14, 1948, triggered the first Arab-Israeli War, which ended in 1949 with Israel claiming to be victorious. However, the war resulted in the displacement of 750,000 Palestinians, and the area was divided into three parts: the illegal State of Jews, the West Bank (of the Jordan River), and the Gaza Strip.

Over the course of several years, heightened tensions characterized the relations between Jewish entities and the nations of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria. The culmination of these tensions occurred in the aftermath of the 1956 Suez Crisis, during which Jewish forces invaded the Sinai Peninsula. Subsequently, recognizing the potential escalation of hostilities, Egypt,

Jordan, and Syria entered mutual defense pacts. The turning point came in June 1967 when Jewish forces launched a preemptive strike against the air forces of Egypt and Syria, marking the beginning of the Six-Day War. Post-conflict, Jewish territorial control expanded to encompass the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Golan Heights from Syria.

Subsequently, the Yom Kippur War, also known as the October War, unfolded as Egypt and Syria initiated a surprise two-front assault on Israel with the aim of reclaiming lost territory. Despite the absence of significant territorial gains for any party involved, Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat asserted the war's victory for Egypt, as it provided the impetus for subsequent negotiations over previously ceded territories. The year 1979 marked a pivotal moment when, after a series of cease-fires and diplomatic negotiations, representatives from Egypt and Jewish authorities formalized the end of the thirty-year conflict by signing the Camp David Accords and the Egypt-Israel Peace Treaty.

The Oslo Accords in the 1990s aimed to address this, leading to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. However, peace remained elusive, marked by events like the second intifada in 2000. Factionalism among Palestinians intensified, with Hamas gained control of Gaza in 2006. Ongoing tensions culminated in conflicts, such as the one in 2014. Despite various peace efforts, the situation remains complex, with recent developments including the Trump administration's policy changes and the 2021 Gaza conflict. The political landscape in Israel also witnessed shifts, including the formation of a far-right government in 2022, led by Benjamin Netanyahu.

Generative AI and its presumable effects

As described by the Harvard University's IT section,

*"Generative AI is a type of artificial intelligence that can learn from and mimic large amounts of data to create content such as text, images, music, videos, code, and more, based on inputs or prompts."*¹¹

It can be very hard to filter right from wrong, truth from false or black from the white. The amount of data that can be mined, edited and re-generated is so huge and so amazingly true that human minds are unable to distinguish the truth in the text, picture or video

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produced by generative AI. It is because, these models basically mimic the data already present and therefore, pick a bit of what is right and create a complete narrative out of it by generating fake images, fictitious stories, and resembling videos all to make it look like a verified case that can cause a tsunami of emotions in the people. These algorithms can actually precisely target the host like a virus does based on the data from their history, preferences, profile, age group, and even support to the religious or political party. It [then] scores content and then arranges it in descending, non-chronological order of interest for each individual user.¹²

The experts on Generative AI are carefully studying the impacts that could be caused due to the explosion of the tool and its widespread availability. The experts are of the view that we are perhaps witnessing the rise of the 'tech-enabled armageddon'.¹³ A research¹⁴ was conducted which argues that interventions aimed at reducing the spread of fake news are unlikely to have a significant impact on the overall quality of the information environment, given the limited prevalence of misinformation. Instead, interventions aimed at increasing trust in reliable news sources are more effective in improving the quality of information. The article simulates the effect of such interventions on a global information score, which increases when people accept reliable information and decreases when people accept misinformation. One of the studies conducted concluded that,

“The rise of “fake news” is a major concern in contemporary Western democracies. Yet, research on the psychological motivations behind the spread of political fake news on social media is surprisingly limited.”¹⁵

The concern has different aspects ranging from academic perspectives such as; communication to cognitive sciences to politics; as well as the data perspectives such as; quantity of mis-information, quality of misinformation, and plausible looking entirely inaccurate information that can affect people's beliefs and behavior's. The analysis of two main factors is given below.

a. Quantity of inaccurate information

The presumed effect of generative AI, particularly in the context of misinformation, revolves around the potential for an increased quantity of misleading or false information. Ill-intentioned actors can leverage generative AI to "flood the zone" by rapidly generating

and disseminating large volumes of inaccurate or deceptive content.¹⁶ This strategy aims to overwhelm information channels, making it challenging for users to discern between accurate and misleading information. As a result, the sheer volume of misinformation generated through AI-powered systems can drown out factual content, diminishing its visibility and impact. Additionally, the intentional spread of misinformation can contribute to the sowing of confusion among the audience, undermining trust in reliable sources and making it more difficult for individuals to make informed decisions based on accurate information. This poses significant challenges for mitigating the harmful effects of misinformation and underscores the importance of developing strategies to address the misuse of generative AI in disseminating deceptive content.¹⁷

b. Quality of accurate information

Generative AI, when used to flood the information space with misinformation, poses a stark contrast to the quality of information. While reliable information is characterized by accuracy, trustworthiness, and ethical standards, AI-generated misinformation tends to be inaccurate, deceptive, and manipulated for malicious intent. High-quality information is transparent, clear, and disseminated with positive intent, contributing responsibly to knowledge. In contrast, the intentional spread of misinformation through AI can sow confusion, erode trust, and exploit technology unethically, showcasing a significant divergence from the ethical standards and positive intent inherent in quality information.

There have been cases in the past where a popular social media platform was penalized for mishandling user data and subsequently being part of the mishandling of the US elections.¹⁸ Though debatable, social media platforms did play an important role in the dissemination of information during the Arab Spring in 2011. According to the accounts of several witnesses, social media played a crucial role in disseminating messages advocating freedom and democracy throughout North Africa and the Middle East. The platform facilitated the creation of expansive social networks among individuals sharing an interest in democratic ideals, leading to organized political action. As reported, social media emerged as an indispensable tool in the toolkit for achieving greater freedom, contributing significantly to the success of political uprisings.

Generative AI is one step ahead of the traditional AI. The contrast can be understood by an example that Generative AI is based on deep machine learning, where the word 'deep'

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signifies multiple layers in the neural network that use representation learning to extract better results as compared to traditional AI from the raw data. The real distinction lies in the fact that Generative AI is able to learn from the raw data itself whereas traditional AI needs to be manually engineered. Therefore, Generative AI is much more impactful as compared to traditional one.

The Gaza Strip and the fifth-generation warfare

The Gaza Strip is a mandated land for the Palestinians even after the unlawful Jewish settlements in the area. Although, controversial today, this beautiful coastal region on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea is about 40 kilometers long and 25 kilometers wide, home to a significant Palestinian population and is currently a focal point in the conflict at hand. In the fifth-generation warfare, this region has become a case study for the implementation of generative Artificial Intelligence tools creating information and disinformation for the people in and out of the region alike. When people have lost trust in the media agencies generally for the said conflict¹⁹, though it can be argued that there are factions in the media that still work in the larger interest of the region, keeping the standard high and the bar higher²⁰, therefore, people turn to what is readily available to them at the comforts of their homes and at the palm of the hands – social media, which is a hub of generative AI these days.

There have been multiple attempts in the past by Israeli high-ups and influencers to use misleading footages, pictures, and media to deceive people of the truth. It has been well-recorded by several news agencies and reports have been published in this regard.²¹ Some of the instances are given below,

- A video from Syria was circulated by the Israeli PM's spokesperson claiming it to be the rockets fired at Israel. Twitter labelled it as manipulated media. After criticism, it had to be deleted.
- To create fear and chaos, fake videos from IDF accounts were circulated which had gore images of killing children and abuses of the human race. Later was known that these were created by online tools.

- A fake video from Jordan of the boys carrying the funeral to avoid COVID restrictions was dubbed as the video of Gazans carrying the funeral and later on running away when the sirens blew off.

It also came into the limelight that the data available has also been manipulated. For example, the videos uploaded in Arabic were mistranslated to create outright falsehood continuously crowding out real reports of the conflict. One of the incidents as broadcasted by the media is as follows,

“This is gold. A Palestinian mother sees images online showing her son injured. She races to the hospital only to find it’s all fake,”²²

Several scholars of the Arabic language from different universities, such as Taufik Ben-Amor from Columbia University’s Arabic department in New York and Nasr Abdo from the same university stated the fact that there is no such indication that it is acting, which was kind of mistranslated and misinformed to people.

There is a narrative that the Generative AI has provided support to either side in the conflict when used by the activists to gather aid and support of different natures. There have been instances where the data generated by Generative AI is particularly to gain wider support. There have been instances of billboards in Tel Aviv showing victory and support of the IDF (Jewish defense forces) and Jewish influencers showing support to the IDF using the said technology.²³ An author has dubbed this current situation as an ‘algorithmically driven fog of war’²⁴, he further cites that for many just to distinguish the right from the wrong in this ongoing conflict is playing a role. The author presents the view of Hani Farid, from UC Berkeley School of Information, where he explains the confusion created online about the pictures of burned children posted by Benjamin Netanyahu’s X account that they were the results of Generative AI, while the pictures when analyzed by his team came out to be true, but he believes that the *seed had already been planted*. He further goes on to say about different versions uploaded where people got confused and had no intention of further empathizing with the burned Palestinian children because of the elaborated confusion now. He adds and I quote,

“And then that went online, and then people are like, ‘Well, wait a minute, if he could have made that one, then that one could be fake, and

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*now these two versions are going around, and everybody started saying, 'Oh, the puppy was the original, this is fake,' and then you just muddy the water,"*²⁵

The Fifth-generation Warfare and Proactive Response

When it is known that the practice of creating misinformation and false news is prevalent, it is our foremost duty as the representative of an Islamic state to respond to such a situation. Being a Muslim, the primary objective is to seek information from primary sources, while it would be relevant to follow the contemporary procedures in this globally connected digital world of ours. It is evident from the following verse of the Holy Quran,

"يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ فَتَبَيَّنُوا أَن تُصِيبُوا قَوْمًا بِجَهَالَةٍ فَتُصْحَبُوا
عَلَىٰ مَا فَعَلْتُمْ نَادِمِينَ"²⁶

The spread of any information without verification is not a trait of a believer let alone create one. This verse emphasizes the importance of verifying news before spreading it, especially if it comes from an untrustworthy source. It is a reminder to be cautious and not to spread rumors or false information that can cause harm to others. Moreover, the Quran states,

"وَلَا تَقْفُ مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ إِنَّ السَّمْعَ وَالْبَصَرَ وَالْفُؤَادَ كُلُّ أُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ عَنْهُ
مَسْئُولًا"²⁷

"And pursue not that of which thou hast no knowledge; for every act of hearing, or of seeing or of (feeling in) the heart will be enquired into (on the Day of Reckoning)."

This is a principle given to the Muslims in the Qurah whereby the practice and interpretation of the companions and followers of the companions (May Allah be pleased with them) was as follows,

*"Ali bin Abi Talhah reported that Ibn `Abbas said: 'This means do not say (anything of which you have no knowledge).' ... Qatadah said: 'Do not say, 'I have seen', when you did not see anything, or 'I have heard', when you did not hear anything, or 'I know', when you do not know, for Allah will ask you about all of that.'"*²⁸

Allah further says in the Holy Quran,

"اجْتَنِبُوا كَثِيرًا مِّنَ الظَّنِّ إِنَّ بَعْضَ الظَّنِّ إِثْمٌ"²⁹

"Avoid much suspicion; indeed some suspicions are sins."

As the Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ goes,

"إِيَّاكُمْ وَالظَّنَّ، فَإِنَّ الظَّنَّ أَكْذَبُ الْحَدِيثِ"³⁰

"Beware of suspicion, for suspicion is the falsest of speech."

Therefore, it is clear from the Primary sources stated above that Islam does not allow the false to prevail in any circumstance or situation and it will measure according to the need of the hour to curb the situation as it is prevailing right now. So, we turn to the contemporary ways to defeat the Zionist agenda of spreading falsehood and misinformation. Since there are different stakeholders involved, it is important to address them briefly from all different viewpoints.

A. The social media platforms

It is highly recommended that social media platforms take measures to make this happen. A research study recently conducted by a political behaviour scientist, published³¹, summarizes several steps that might be taken by social media platforms themselves.

- i. The first strategy is to filter out the information available through different tags, such as, 'disputed' and/or 'rated false'. The paper argues which one is better but at least the tags do raise a flag for the people to realize and do not consider the news/information true to be once and for all.
- ii. General warnings on these platforms regarding false information being spread by the people can also serve as a fruitful option.

B. The user

It is important for the user to be aware of what is happening around him. The number and kind of users vary as per their ability to contextualize the data based on their awareness of the issue and ability to use the tools to verify them. Age becomes one of the crucial factors here and there have been cases in the past where youth have been

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manipulated through misinformation or disinformation or maybe through correct information as have been highlighted earlier.

C. The government

The principal role is of the state where it can employ resources to filter out the data for the safety and understandability of the people. It is important for government organizations to take proactive measures to support and lead good cybersecurity practices in the fight against misinformation and disinformation. As is done in the case of pornography in Pakistan and several other countries, it needs to be considered as a pivotal and fundamental aspect of corrupting the minds. The diversity in the culture and difference of opinion may not corrupt to this extent because that is when a person knows what the other person has said. This is totally devastating because a person might not be fulfilling the basic requirements of debate as he is misinformed of the idea. One of the final ways could be where Governments around the world can use public communication to fight against disinformation and support policy. The success of these actions will depend on how well they are based on open government principles, especially transparency, to build trust in public institutions.

Conclusion

The infodemic is real. The vast majority of the population around the world happens to rely on information through social media and media agencies. It would be really difficult for the people to build trust in the government-led or fed media outlets since the government's reputation is always at stake. In this scenario, the teachings from the Primary sources in Islam and using further *Ijtehad* to fight this problem will lead to a prosperous and aware future.

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