

DIALOGUE ON RESEARCH FINDINGS

BUILDING A COLLECTIVE RESPONSE TO ELECTION DISINFORMATION

Event Report | November 2, 2025



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As Bangladesh heads toward its 2026 national election, disinformation and hate-driven campaigns have created an unprecedented threat to electoral credibility, social cohesion, and the participation of women and marginalized communities.

To better understand this challenge, Digitally Right, with support from The Asia Foundation under the Promoting Effective, Responsive and Inclusive Governance in Bangladesh (PERI) programme (funded by the FCDO, UK), conducted the research study **“Tackling Election Disinformation in Bangladesh: Building Collective Responses for Electoral Integrity.”**

To share the initial findings and foster collaboration, Digitally Right convened a dialogue titled “Building a Collective Response to Election Disinformation” on Sunday, 2 November 2025, at The Westin Dhaka. The event brought together key stakeholders from the media, the fact-checking community, election observers, and civil society. Sparked by a presentation of the research findings, the dialogue provided a candid platform to assess the gaps, capacities, and priorities needed to build a credible, collective response.

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The dialogue began with a presentation of the key findings by Abdullah Titir, Head of Research at Digitally Right. The study finds that Bangladesh’s online information environment has become increasingly fragile and fragmented. Political parties, religious groups, foreign, and diaspora-based influencers appear to be engaged in a kind of “digital contest,” using AI-generated content, organized propaganda networks, and commercially driven creators to shape public opinion.

The report notes that disinformation has expanded beyond political rivalry—eroding public trust, fueling communal divisions, and silencing women’s voices online

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Fabricated videos, synthetic images, and doctored content have already been used to target women candidates and minority communities, heightening the risk of harassment, intimidation, and voter suppression as the election approaches.

Despite the severity of these risks, Bangladesh's preparedness remains alarmingly limited. In a nation of over 170 million people, there are only around 40 to 50 professional fact-checkers, and most mainstream media outlets lack dedicated verification desks. Journalists and fact-checkers remain under-resourced and disconnected, while election observers and civil society organizations are largely absent from digital monitoring efforts. Social media companies rarely engage with other stakeholders, and the Election Commission lacks the policy framework, technical expertise, and institutional capacity to respond effectively. The study warns that *"the gap between risk and capacity is now dangerously wide."*

Following the presentation, a panel discussion emphasized the urgent need for collaboration between regulators, media, and technology

platforms to strengthen information integrity ahead of the 2026 polls.



A participant shares her perspective, contributing to the dialogue.

Shawkat Hossain, Head of Online at Prothom Alo, noted, *"Traditional media's traditional approach to fact-checking will not work anymore. They need training to move beyond old methods."* He added, *"With rapid advances in AI, it will be almost impossible for fact-checkers to keep up unless they are better supported."*

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Professor Sumon Rahman, Head of Media Studies and Journalism at ULAB, highlighted the issue of platform accountability: “The government must negotiate with platforms and demand transparency. Unfortunately, due to the previous administration’s arbitrary use of power, Bangladesh has lost much of its leverage.”

Abdullah Titir, who presented the study, added, “We have observed a number of regulatory frameworks being enacted in quick succession ahead of the election, without clear definitions or safeguards against misuse. This reflects a lack of meaningful consultation with stakeholders and risks enabling arbitrary implementation and suppression of legitimate critique.” She stressed that “regulations should only be adopted after adequate consultation to assess human rights implications and design necessary safeguards.”

Among others present were Ananya Raihan, Chairperson of iSocial; Emma Wind, Governance Adviser, FCDO; Kazi Faisal Bin Seraj, Country Representative, The Asia Foundation; and Miraj Ahmed Chowdhury, Managing Director, Digitally Right.

FINDINGS AT A GLANCE

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