

From Satire to Misinformation: Visual Mimicry and Audience Interpretation of Fake News Photo-Cards in Bangladesh

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Abstract

In Bangladesh, "photo-cards", standardized news graphics widely shared on social media, have become a dominant format for news dissemination, but their visual authority is increasingly exploited to circulate misleading claims. This study examines how manipulated photo-cards imitate the branding of trusted news organizations and how audiences interpret these artifacts in online discussions. We conduct a qualitative analysis of 167 fake photo-cards collected from Facebook between November 2025 and March 2026, focusing on 20 artifacts that closely mimic the visual identity of major Bangladeshi news broadcasters and analyzing approximately 400 associated user comments. Our findings show that these artifacts replicate familiar layout and branding cues, allowing fabricated claims to borrow the visual credibility of established media institutions. Comment discourse reveals that most users initially react to the claim rather than questioning authenticity, while only a small fraction attempt correction. These results highlight how visual familiarity, cognitive heuristics, and social interaction shape the interpretation of misinformation in mobile-first environments.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing** → **Empirical studies in collaborative and social computing**; **Empirical studies in HCI**; • **Social and professional topics** → *Cultural characteristics*.

Keywords

Photo-cards, Misinformation, Social Practice, Bangladesh, Global South, Visual Rhetoric, Information Equity, News Literacy, Digital Infrastructure

ACM Reference Format:

Sabbir Bin Abdul Latif, Mohammad Rizwanul Islam, Zannatun Tazree Tisha, and Tamanna Yesmin Maria. 2026. From Satire to Misinformation: Visual Mimicry and Audience Interpretation of Fake News Photo-Cards in

Bangladesh. In *ACM SIGCAS/SIGCHI Conference on Computing and Sustainable Societies (COMPASS '26)*, July 27–31, 2026, Virtual Event, USA. ACM, New York, NY, USA, 13 pages. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3811242.3819094>

1 Introduction

The rapid digitalization of the Global South has fundamentally transformed how information is disseminated, creating a mobile-first environment where technological affordances frequently outpace users' digital literacy [22, 31, 40]. In Bangladesh, social media platforms, particularly Facebook, dominate the digital landscape and serve as the primary source of news for millions of citizens [14, 22, 40]. Within this "snack culture" of digital media, traditional long-form journalism has increasingly been supplemented by the "photo-card" or "news card", a visually engaging format that condenses complex news into a single image featuring a short headline and a media logo [34]. While mainstream news outlets originally popularized these cards to quickly distribute information to audiences with short attention spans, the format has also become a vehicle for visual misinformation. Actors frequently imitate the aesthetic conventions of legitimate news photo-cards to circulate fabricated narratives and politically charged claims.

The persuasive power of manipulated photo-cards is closely tied to how users cognitively process visual information online. Visual media often exploits the intuitive perception that "seeing is believing," triggering rapid emotional responses that may override careful scrutiny [38]. On platforms like Facebook, photo-cards encourage heuristic processing, where users evaluate credibility based on surface-level cues such as recognizable layouts, professional design, or familiar media logos rather than verifying the underlying claim [34]. When misleading artifacts mimic the visual identity of established news organizations, these design cues can create an immediate impression of legitimacy.

A particularly complex challenge within this ecosystem is what may be described as the "sarcasm-as-confusion" phenomenon. Satirical or parody pages frequently produce photo-cards that imitate the visual style of legitimate news graphics. While these artifacts may be intended as humor within their original context, the satirical cues often disappear when the images circulate through reposts or screenshots across social media networks. As a result, users encountering these artifacts outside their original context may interpret



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ACM ISBN 979-8-4007-2702-3/26/07

<https://doi.org/10.1145/3811242.3819094>

them as factual news rather than satire. However, our expanded dataset also reveals a more extreme variant: pure-impersonation pages such as BDC News, which replicate the name, colour scheme, and card layout of DBC News without any satirical signal, further blurring the boundary between parody and deception.

The consequences of visual misinformation can extend beyond online discourse. In Bangladesh, social media rumors and manipulated media content have previously contributed to episodes of communal tension and violence, including incidents such as the Ramu violence in 2012, the Nasirnagar attacks in 2016, and the Padma Bridge child-kidnapping rumors in 2019 [22, 40, 41]. These incidents highlight how misleading information circulating in digital environments can influence social perceptions and collective behavior.

Despite the growing visibility of visual misinformation, many existing interventions focus primarily on textual fact-checking or automated content detection. Such approaches often assume that users individually verify information through search engines or external fact-checking platforms. However, research in Bangladesh suggests that people frequently rely on forms of situated fact-checking, where the credibility of suspicious information is evaluated collectively through discussions with peers or trusted community members rather than through formal verification tools [42].

To better understand how visual misinformation operates within this socio-technical context, this paper investigates how manipulated news photo-cards circulate and are interpreted on Facebook in Bangladesh. Using a qualitative analysis of fake photo-card artifacts and associated comment discourse collected during the 2025–2026 election period, the study examines how visual mimicry, emotional reactions, and community-driven verification practices shape audience interpretations of misleading content.

To systematically examine these dynamics, this study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do fake photo-cards visually mimic the design and branding conventions of legitimate news media in Bangladesh?

RQ2: How do audiences interpret and respond to these visually manipulated artifacts within Facebook comment discussions?

RQ3: How do informal forms of community-driven verification emerge when users encounter potentially misleading photo-card content?

This paper makes three main contributions.

First, we provide one of the first qualitative investigations of the “photo-card” format as a mechanism of visual misinformation in Bangladesh. By analyzing manipulated news graphics circulating on Facebook, the study demonstrates how visual mimicry of trusted media branding allows fabricated claims to borrow the appearance of institutional credibility.

Second, we introduce and distinguish two related phenomena, *sarcasm-as-confusion* (satirical intent lost in redistribution) and pure impersonation (no satirical intent at all), offering a finer-grained category of photo-card deception strategies.

Third, through discourse analysis of Facebook comment discussions, we reveal how emotional reactions, moral outrage, and informal community-driven verification practices shape how users collectively interpret and negotiate the credibility of visually manipulated artifacts in mobile-first social media environments.

2 Related Work

Research on misinformation increasingly examines visual media manipulation, cognitive heuristics in digital credibility judgments, and socio-technical approaches to misinformation mitigation. These studies highlight how users interpret visual content on social platforms and how community-driven verification practices emerge in Global South contexts.

2.1 Visual Misinformation, Cognitive Heuristics, and the Satire Trap in the Global South

The study of information disorders has historically focused on text-based rumors and fabricated news articles [5]. However, the rapid expansion of mobile internet and social media has fundamentally shifted the modern information landscape toward a highly visual culture [8]. In the Global South, particularly in countries like Bangladesh, this “visual turn” has manifested in the widespread adoption of the “photo-card”, a digital graphic combining a sensational headline, a photograph, and a mainstream media logo [34]. While early academic research treated misinformation primarily as a problem of factual inaccuracy, contemporary literature recognizes it as a complex socio-technical phenomenon that includes disinformation (intentional harm) and malinformation (contextual manipulation) [11, 28, 36]. Visuals are processed faster than text and possess a “seeing is believing” quality that bypasses critical scrutiny, making visual misinformation particularly dangerous [33, 43]. Furthermore, visual frames often reduce complex historical and geopolitical issues into emotionally charged, binary narratives of “victim versus aggressor” [34]. Despite the growing recognition of visual deception, there remains a critical need to evaluate how specific formats, such as sarcastic or satirical photo-cards, manipulate user cognition in regions with emerging digital literacy.

2.2 The “Lazy vs. Biased” Debate in Cognitive Processing

A major theoretical debate within the current literature centers on why individuals fall for misinformation. This debate is largely divided into two conflicting viewpoints: “motivated reasoning” versus “cognitive laziness.”

Proponents of the motivated reasoning framework argue that susceptibility to fake news is driven by partisan bias and ideological alignment [27, 28]. According to this view, users actively use their reasoning abilities to convince themselves that false information is true if it supports their pre-existing worldview or political identity [23]. Conversely, a growing body of research led by cognitive psychologists argues that susceptibility is primarily caused by “lazy thinking,” a lack of analytical reasoning and cognitive reflection [23, 42, 46]. This viewpoint suggests that users fail to discern fake from real news not because of deep political bias, but because they simply do not stop to think critically about the content they consume [23, 27].

In the context of social media, the “lazy thinking” hypothesis is strongly supported by research into heuristic processing [18, 33]. Because the digital environment causes information overload, users rely on mental shortcuts, or heuristics, to make rapid credibility

judgments. For example, the presence of a trusted news logo or a look-alike logo on a photo-card acts as an "expertise heuristic," causing the user to instantly assume the information is credible without reading further [21, 33]. This is exacerbated by the way young internet users in the Global South consume media. Research indicates that users spend much of their time in a passive "timepass" mode, casually scrolling for entertainment, which severely reduces their willingness to engage in effortful, analytical thinking [21, 46].

2.3 From Computational Detection to Socio-technical Inquiry

The methodological approaches to studying misinformation have evolved significantly, reflecting a broader shift in the fields of Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and Computer-Supported Cooperative Work (CSCW). Historically, the dominant approach was quantitative and computational. Computer science research heavily prioritized building Machine Learning (ML) and Natural Language Processing (NLP) models to automatically detect fake news based on linguistic patterns, sentiment analysis, and network propagation [19, 20, 28, 47].

While algorithmic detection is valuable, CSCW and HCI scholars have criticized these purely technical methods for ignoring the human context [24, 26]. Consequently, there has been a distinct methodological shift towards qualitative, user-centered, and ethnographic approaches. Researchers now emphasize methods like participatory co-design, focus groups, and contextual inquiry to understand the lived experiences of marginalized users [21]. This qualitative turn is crucial because it allows researchers to investigate how users make sense of technologies in their daily lives, moving the focus from "detecting" bad data to understanding the "social practice" of information consumption.

2.4 The Backfire Effect and Situated Fact-Checking

As platforms attempt to mitigate misinformation, a significant debate has emerged regarding the effectiveness of digital interventions, particularly warning labels and algorithmic corrections [28]. For years, the academic consensus was paralyzed by the fear of the "backfire effect," a psychological theory suggesting that directly correcting a user's false belief could cause them to become defensive and actually strengthen their belief in the misinformation [28]. However, recent large-scale studies have heavily contested this, demonstrating that the backfire effect is elusive and rare, and that factual corrections generally do improve accuracy [21, 39].

Despite evidence that warning labels can work, a critical gap remains: these interventions are designed based on Western assumptions of digital literacy and individualistic search behaviors. In the Global South, automated labels often fail to resonate. Research shows that rural Bangladeshi communities do not verify news by conducting individual Google searches; instead, they rely on "situated fact-checking" [42]. This is a collaborative, offline process where suspicious digital news is debated in physical spaces, such as local tea stalls, and evaluated based on the opinions of trusted community leaders or religious figures. Algorithmic systems that simply label a photo-card as "False" ignore these deep-rooted cultural workflows. Therefore, there is an urgent need within HCI to

design interventions that align with, rather than disrupt, these local community-driven verification practices.

2.5 The Sarcasm-as-Confusion Trap

While researchers have extensively mapped completely fabricated news and political propaganda, a highly nuanced and under-researched area is the role of satire and sarcasm in visual misinformation. Satire is a unique form of communication because it intentionally incorporates cues that reveal its own deceptiveness [11, 36]. It uses exaggerated headlines or manipulated images to deliver a humorous critique [18, 36].

However, the architecture of social media strips these visual artifacts of their original context. When a satirical photo-card is downloaded and shared on platforms like Facebook or WhatsApp, the contextual cues of the joke are lost [11, 36]. Consequently, users with lower digital literacy, or those operating in the passive "timepass" mode, fall into the "sarcasm-as-confusion" trap [36, 46]. They interpret the twisted headlines and manipulated media logos literally, mistaking the satire for objective truth.

Addressing this specific phenomenon is a notoriously difficult challenge for both researchers and platforms. Automated AI detection models struggle to understand the subtle cultural nuances of local sarcasm and irony [11, 18]. Furthermore, platforms cannot easily ban satirical pages without facing backlash for censorship and suppressing free speech. Because quantitative and automated methods fail here, understanding this phenomenon requires deep qualitative investigation.

The current literature successfully maps the broad cognitive vulnerabilities associated with visual misinformation and highlights the limitations of Western-centric fact-checking models. However, it reveals a distinct gap regarding the qualitative understanding of how sarcastic and satirical photo-cards deceive users in emerging digital economies.

This proposed research positions itself directly within this gap. By adopting qualitative HCI methods, specifically the thematic analysis of Facebook photo-cards and user comments in those Facebook posts at Bangladesh, this study moves beyond binary "true/false" detection paradigms. It seeks to unpack the socio-technical mechanisms of the "sarcasm-as-confusion" trap among mobile-first users. By bridging the cognitive theories of heuristic processing with the cultural realities of situated fact-checking, this research will provide vital, context-rich insights. Ultimately, this work will inform the design of future human-AI collaborative tools that respect local social practices and empower vulnerable communities against the visual infrastructures of deception.

3 Methodology

This research employs a qualitative content and thematic analysis of digital artifacts to investigate the socio-technical mechanisms through which visual misinformation circulates in Bangladesh [9, 16]. Rather than focusing solely on the factual accuracy of claims, our approach examines how manipulated "photo-cards" function within the broader social practice of information consumption in mobile-first environments. This qualitative, artifact-centered methodology aligns with and emphasizes understanding how people interpret and negotiate information within everyday digital

contexts. Qualitative artifact-centered analysis is particularly appropriate for studying misinformation formats such as photo-cards, where meaning emerges through the interaction of visual design, platform context, and audience interpretation rather than through isolated textual claims.

3.1 Data Collection and Sampling

The primary dataset consists of a curated collection of 167 fake photo-card artifacts circulating on Facebook between November 2025 and March 2026. This time period was selected because it corresponds to a politically sensitive period surrounding the national election and the immediate post-election phase, during which misinformation and politically charged content tend to intensify online. The dataset was compiled through an iterative search process combining fact-checking archives, keyword searches, and manual tracing of shared posts to capture widely circulated examples of manipulated news-style graphics.

Because Facebook functions as the dominant social media platform and primary news source for many users in Bangladesh, our data collection specifically focused on public Facebook posts containing manipulated news-style graphics.

3.1.1 Source Identification. To identify highly visible misinformation artifacts, we consulted archives and monitoring reports from several Bangladeshi fact-checking organizations, including Rumor Scanner [37], Dismislab [13], and Fact Watch [17]. These organizations regularly document viral misinformation circulating on Bangladeshi social media. These organizations maintain publicly accessible records of viral misinformation and are widely cited within Bangladeshi media monitoring initiatives, making them suitable starting points for identifying high-visibility artifacts.

Using these sources as entry points, we traced the identified claims back to their original or most widely circulated Facebook posts. This process allowed us to capture the visual artifacts as they appeared in their natural social media environment, including associated user comments and engagement metrics.

3.1.2 Artifact Selection. Within the larger dataset of 167 artifacts, we observed a recurring pattern in which manipulated photo-cards deliberately mimicked the visual branding of well-known Bangladeshi television channels and news organizations (e.g., Jamuna TV [25], Ekhn TV [15], BanglaVision [4], and DBC News [12]). In many cases, these artifacts used slightly modified outlet names or satirical page identities while preserving the visual layout of legitimate news graphics.

Because this study specifically focuses on the "*sarcasm-as-confusion*" phenomenon and the role of visual credibility cues, we conducted a focused qualitative analysis on a subset of 20 photo-cards that demonstrated clear visual mimicry or satirical imitation of established news media branding. These artifacts were selected through purposive sampling to represent the most prominent examples of this visual strategy.

Qualitative research prioritizes analytical depth rather than statistical generalization. The selected subset of artifacts was sufficient to reach thematic saturation, where additional artifacts did not produce substantially new patterns of visual mimicry or audience interpretation. Focusing on this smaller subset enabled a detailed

examination of visual design features and associated comment discourse.

3.1.3 Engagement Metadata. For each selected artifact, we recorded publicly visible engagement metadata, including the number of reactions, shares, and comments. These indicators provided contextual insight into how the content circulated and how emotionally charged responses may contribute to the visibility of misinformation within platform algorithms. Although engagement metrics were not used as quantitative indicators of misinformation impact, they provided contextual signals regarding the visibility and circulation of each artifact within the platform environment.

3.2 Comment Sampling

To analyze audience interpretation and discourse, we collected the first 20 visible comments associated with each selected photo-card post. This resulted in a total corpus of approximately 400 user comments.

The first comments were selected because they typically represent the earliest audience reactions to the artifact and often shape the tone of subsequent discussion. Examining these early responses allowed us to observe how users initially interpreted the manipulated content before correction attempts or extended debate occurred.

Sampling the earliest visible comments also aligns with prior social media research showing that early comment activity can significantly influence the tone and direction of subsequent discussion threads [1, 32]. Focusing on these initial responses therefore provides insight into how audiences interpret manipulated content during the earliest stages of public interaction.

3.3 Thematic Coding Framework

We employed an inductive–deductive thematic coding approach to analyze both the visual artifacts and associated comment discourse. The coding process followed three stages: (1) open coding to identify recurring patterns in visual design and user interpretation, (2) axial coding to group these observations into broader thematic categories, and (3) selective coding to refine final themes related to credibility cues, emotional reactions, and community-driven verification.

Two researchers independently coded the dataset and subsequently compared coding outcomes. Disagreements were resolved through iterative discussion and consensus-building to ensure interpretive reliability.

3.3.1 Deception Mechanisms (The "How"). Drawing on established categories of information disorder, including Wardle's framework, we categorized the mechanisms through which the photo-cards constructed misleading narratives [45]. This framework allowed us to systematically categorize how manipulated artifacts construct misleading narratives through different forms of visual and contextual manipulation.

- **Fabricated Content:** Entirely false claims accompanied by forged branding, manipulated imagery (e.g., edited photographs or synthetic images), or imposter logos designed to mimic credible news organizations.

- **Distorted or False Context:** Real images, quotations, or events that were selectively cropped, reframed, or presented outside their original context in order to alter their meaning.
- **Sarcasm-as-Confusion:** Satirical or humorous content that deliberately mimicked the visual style of legitimate news outlets. When these artifacts circulated outside their original satirical context, audiences frequently interpreted them as factual news.

3.3.2 *Social and Political Themes (The "What")*. In addition to deception mechanisms, artifacts were coded for their thematic focus on socially sensitive topics that could amplify public reaction or social tension. These thematic categories capture the types of socially sensitive narratives that frequently appear in misinformation artifacts and that may intensify emotional reactions within comment discourse.

- **Political Instability:** Content targeting political actors, government institutions, or international relations, often framing complex issues through simplified victim–aggressor narratives.
- **Communal and Religious Tensions:** Highly inflammatory content capable of triggering hostility toward minority groups or escalating existing religious tensions.
- **Gendered Harassment and Misogyny:** Fabricated claims or defamatory narratives targeting women in public life, activists, or female political figures, reflecting patterns of technology-facilitated gender-based violence in online spaces.

3.4 Discourse Analysis of User Comments

To understand how audiences interpret manipulated visual artifacts, we conducted a qualitative discourse analysis of the sampled comment corpus. Comments provide valuable insight into how users negotiate the credibility of visual misinformation in real time. By examining comment interactions, the analysis captures how users collectively interpret and negotiate the credibility of visual misinformation within the social environment of the platform.

Our analysis focused on three interpretive patterns.

- **Cognitive Heuristics:** Instances where users justified the credibility of a claim based on visual cues such as the presence of a familiar news logo, professional design layout, or perceived authority of the source.
- **Situated Fact-Checking:** Informal community-based verification practices in which users tagged knowledgeable peers, referenced external information sources, or collectively debated the authenticity of the artifact.
- **Emotional Reactions:** Expressions of anger, ridicule, fear, disgust, or moral condemnation triggered by the content of the photo-card. These reactions were analyzed to understand how emotionally charged responses may amplify engagement and shape online discourse.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Research involving social media discourse in politically sensitive environments requires careful ethical consideration. In accordance with ACM research ethics guidelines, all identifiable user information was anonymized prior to analysis. Usernames, profile details,

and location information were removed or pseudonymized to protect individual privacy. Because the study relied exclusively on publicly available posts and comments, no direct interaction with participants was involved.

Furthermore, the analysis focuses exclusively on aggregate patterns of discourse rather than identifying individual participants. This approach minimizes potential risks to users while allowing the study to document broader socio-technical dynamics of misinformation in Bangladesh.

4 Findings

This section presents the key patterns observed in the analyzed photo-card artifacts and associated comment discussions. Our analysis focuses on how manipulated photo-cards imitate the visual identity of trusted news organizations, how users interpret and react to these artifacts in comment threads, and how misinformation-related narratives are amplified or challenged within these discussions. The findings highlight the role of visual credibility cues, emotional reactions, and informal community verification practices in shaping how audiences make sense of misleading photo-cards on social media.

4.1 Categories of Satirical Misinformation

We analyzed 167 satirical misinformation artifacts and categorized them into seven distinct types based on thematic content and communicative patterns, including political, religious, and media-brand parody satire. These categories capture both the narrative intent and the mechanisms through which such content spreads and affects audiences. As shown in Table 2 summarizes the visual design dimensions replicated across the four most prominent fake outlet identities identified in the dataset. And Table 1 demonstrates categories exhibit distinct platform-level dynamics and varying degrees of user-level risk.

4.2 Visual Mimicry of News Branding

From the larger dataset of 167 collected photo-cards, we conducted a focused qualitative analysis of 20 artifacts that demonstrated clear visual mimicry or satirical imitation of established Bangladeshi news media branding. These artifacts collectively generated approximately 400 user comments, which formed the basis for the comment discourse analysis presented in this section. A prominent pattern observed across the dataset is the deliberate imitation of mainstream news photo-card branding. Rather than using generic graphic styles, many of the fake artifacts closely replicate the visual templates of well-known Bangladeshi television news outlets. These manipulated cards preserve the same layout structures used by legitimate broadcasters when publishing social media news graphics, including portrait images of public figures, headline-style quotation text, and the placement of media branding within the card design.

In several cases, the visual design is copied almost entirely from a specific news outlet, with only minor alterations in the outlet's name. Across the sampled artifacts, all 20 selected photo-cards displayed some form of visual mimicry of recognizable Bangladeshi television or news media branding. These included variations that altered outlet names while preserving the original visual layout, typography, and color schemes used by legitimate broadcasters.

Table 1: Categories of satirical misinformation and their platform- and user-level effects

Category	Count	Platform-level effect	User-level effect	Risk Level
Political satire	42	Strong virality and partisan interaction	Polarization and confusion	Very high
Religious satire	27	High emotional engagement	Moral offence and tension	Very high
Communal tension satire	23	Rapid spread in sensitive networks	Distrust and escalation	Very high
Gendered defamation satire	20	Abusive engagement and ridicule	Reputational harm and misogyny	High
Media-brand parody	19	False credibility through familiar design	Source confusion	High
Geopolitical satire	21	Sensational spread during global crises	Fear and distorted belief	Very high
Absurd satire	15	Meme-style circulation	Mixed amusement and confusion	Medium
Total	167			

Because the overall layout, typography style, and composition remain nearly identical to authentic news cards, these manipulated artifacts can appear legitimate at first glance when encountered during rapid social media browsing.

For instance, Figure 1 illustrates an example of this visual mimicry. The left image shows a fake photo-card, while the right image shows an authentic photo-card published by Jamuna TV, one of the most prominent television news broadcasters in Bangladesh. The manipulated artifact attributes a fabricated quote to a political figure, claiming that if national elections are held in February, earthquakes will stop occurring in the country. And people responded with negative comments in this post. For example, one person added:

“What is the relation between Earthquakes and elections?” - P1C8

Another person responded with:

“Does it make any sense?” - P1C11

Visually, the manipulated card closely follows the design structure used by Jamuna TV’s official social media graphics. The image of the political figure appears at the top, followed by a large quotation headline in Bangla, and a branding strip at the bottom. However, instead of the authentic Jamuna TV branding, the manipulated card replaces the outlet name with “Janina TV.” In Bangla, the word “Janina” translates to “I don’t know,” indicating a sarcastic or satirical modification of the original outlet name.

Despite this alteration, the card maintains the same visual hierarchy and stylistic cues as the original broadcaster’s design. As a result, users encountering the card within their social media feed may initially interpret it as a legitimate news graphic. Similar patterns of branding imitation were observed across multiple artifacts in the dataset, including cases where Ekhn TV’s design was replicated with the outlet name changed to “Tokhon TV,” and instances where BanglaVision was modified to “Gujob Vision.”

In Bangla, “Gujob” translates to “rumor,” indicating a sarcastic or satirical twist on the original broadcaster’s name. However, these alterations often remain subtle when viewed quickly in a scrolling social media feed. In addition to modifying outlet names, several of these pages also replicate the visual style of the original media

outlets’ profile pictures and page branding. Because the page names and logos closely resemble those of legitimate broadcasters, users may fail to recognize the page as unauthentic immediately.

A particularly high-risk sub-category within the dataset consists of pure-impersonation pages that lack any satirical signal. The most prominent example is BDC News, a fabricated page designed to mimic DBC News, a well-known Bangladeshi news broadcaster. Unlike ‘Janina TV’ or ‘Gujob Vision,’ where the altered name itself constitutes a sarcastic cue for attentive users, BDC News reproduces the near-identical name, red-and-white logo colour scheme, and card layout of DBC News with no ironic modification. This absence of satirical distancing makes BDC News artifacts virtually indistinguishable from legitimate DBC News photo-cards during rapid social media scrolling, and eliminates the possibility of users recognising satire as a credibility warning signal.

This combination of near-identical page identity and replicated news-card layout allows misleading artifacts to borrow the visual credibility associated with established news organizations, increasing the likelihood that the content will initially be interpreted as authentic news.

These observations suggest that misinformation producers frequently rely on visual mimicry of trusted media institutions to enhance the perceived credibility of fabricated claims.

4.3 Comment Discourse and Belief Formation

To understand how audiences interpret these manipulated photo-cards, we analyzed the comment threads associated with the sampled posts. For each artifact, a subset of comments was manually examined to identify patterns of interpretation, belief, and reaction among users.

Across the analyzed posts, comments frequently reflected strong emotional reactions toward the individuals portrayed in the manipulated news cards. Across the 20 sampled posts, we analyzed the first 20 comments associated with each artifact, resulting in a corpus of approximately 400 comments. Within this corpus, only a small proportion of comments directly questioned the authenticity of the photo-card. On average, approximately 10–15% of the comments attempted to challenge the credibility of the artifact, either

Table 2: Comparison of legitimate Bangladeshi news outlets and their fake counterparts across key visual design dimensions.

Outlet	Fake page (name meaning)	Logo	Layout	Typography	Color	Type	Risk
Jamuna TV	Janina TV (“I don’t know”)	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	SC	High
Ekhon TV	Tokhon TV (“At that time”)	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	SC	High
BanglaVision	Gujob Vision (“Rumor”)	✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	SC	High
DBC News	BDC News (no satirical signal)	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	✓✓	PI	Very high

SC = Sarcasm-as-confusion; PI = Pure impersonation. For SC cases, the outlet name is altered (✓) while all other design elements are fully replicated (✓✓). BDC News (PI) reproduces even the name near-identically, leaving no satirical signal for users to detect.



Figure 1: Comparison between a fake photo-card (left) and an authentic Jamuna TV photo-card (right). The fake card headline reads [translated from Bangla]: “If elections are held in February, there will be no more earthquakes in the country.” The authentic card reads: “Two-sided clash, 30 injured.” The manipulated artifact imitates the visual layout and branding style used by the broadcaster while altering the outlet name to “Janina TV,” demonstrating how misinformation leverages visual familiarity to appear credible.

by identifying the post as fake or by correcting other users. In the case illustrated in Figure 1, we examined the first 20 comments associated with the post. The majority of comments responded directly to the fabricated quote attributed to the politician rather than questioning the authenticity of the image itself. Notably, the statement presented in the photo-card was highly sensitive in a religious context, as it implied that holding a national election could prevent earthquakes is an interpretation that contradicts widely held religious beliefs that natural disasters occur solely according to divine will. This religious sensitivity appeared to intensify emotional responses in the comment section, with many users reacting with ridicule, anger, or moral criticism toward the politician depicted in the manipulated image.

Most commenters interpreted the statement as genuine and reacted with ridicule or hostility toward the individual depicted in

the photo-card. Users described the politician as irrational, incompetent, or unfit for leadership, with several comments explicitly calling the statement “crazy” or “mad.” Some users also extended their criticism beyond the individual, suggesting that such statements should lead to public rejection or boycott of the political party associated with the figure.

Religious framing also appeared in several comments, where users interpreted the claim through the lens of personal faith. One participant emphasized that natural disasters are controlled only by divine will rather than political events:

“Whether the election happens or not is not the important matter. Allah has protected us. No one except Allah has the power to save people from such a great disaster.” - P1C19

Such responses indicate that the fabricated claim triggered broader moral and religious interpretations, further amplifying negative reactions toward the individual portrayed in the image.

However, a small minority of users attempted to challenge the authenticity of the post. In several cases, these corrective comments triggered additional discussion threads. Approximately 22–26% of the analyzed comment threads contained reply chains where users collectively debated whether the content was satirical or fabricated. These replies often functioned as informal fact-checking exchanges, where participants pointed out inconsistencies in the page name, branding, or source of the post. In the analyzed comment sample, one user explicitly pointed out that the source was not the legitimate broadcaster but a manipulated page, writing that the post originated from “Janina TV” rather than Jamuna TV. Similarly, in some threads users responded to others by clarifying that the news card was fabricated.

Despite these corrective attempts, misinformation-related interpretations continued to circulate within the discussion. In some cases, users initially reacted to the content as genuine news before later realizing the source. For example, in another post featuring the same politician, one commenter first speculated that the statement could have come from a member of parliament, before editing the comment minutes later to acknowledge the mistake after noticing the altered branding of the page.

These interactions illustrate how misleading photo-cards can initially shape user perceptions before authenticity is evaluated, particularly in fast-moving social media discussions.

4.4 Amplification of Hate and Moral Outrage

Another notable pattern observed in the comment sections was the amplification of moral outrage and collective condemnation directed at individuals featured in the manipulated photo-cards.

Across the analyzed posts, comments expressing anger, ridicule, or condemnation frequently received the highest number of reactions from other users. Reaction patterns associated with the posts also reflected this emotionally charged engagement. Satirical or visually mimicked photo-cards frequently accumulated a large number of “Haha” and “Angry” reactions. However, interpreting these reactions was not always straightforward. In several cases, users appeared to use the “Haha” reaction not to express amusement but to signal disbelief, sarcasm, or frustration toward the statement presented in the photo-card. As a result, reaction metrics alone did not reliably indicate whether audiences perceived the artifact as humorous satire or misleading information. In the examined threads, comments criticizing or insulting the individuals portrayed in the photo-cards accumulated substantially more engagement than comments questioning the authenticity of the content.

This dynamic suggests that emotionally charged responses function as a form of secondary engagement, where users react not only to the original post but also to other users’ expressions of outrage.

A similar pattern was observed in posts involving sensitive social issues. For instance, Figure 2, shows one manipulated photo-card circulated claims linking a woman to a highly publicized murder case in Bangladesh. The artifact presented the claim as a news headline from a page mimicking (GujobVision) a known broadcaster (BanglaVision). In the examined comment sample associated with

this post, all analyzed comments expressed anger or demanded legal punishment for the individual mentioned in the claim. For example, one commenter said:

“If this person is brought into custody, everything will come out. She is the main culprit.” - P11C5

And 7 people liked this comment, and no one debunked that this is a fake post. These responses demonstrate how manipulated photo-cards can rapidly trigger collective blame and calls for punishment, even when the authenticity of the information has not been verified by users.

4.5 Correction Attempts and Situated Fact-Checking

Although most comments reacted to the content as if it were genuine news, a small number of users attempted to question or correct the authenticity of the manipulated photo-cards. These correction attempts often emerged within the comment threads themselves, where users pointed out inconsistencies in the source or branding of the news graphic.

For instance, in the comment thread associated with the post shown in Figure 1, one user explicitly noted that the source of the news card was not the legitimate broadcaster Jamuna TV but a manipulated page named “Janina TV.” Similarly, in other threads, users responded to earlier comments by clarifying that the post originated from a satirical or fake page rather than an official news outlet.

However, these corrective comments appeared less frequently and generally received fewer reactions compared to emotionally charged responses criticizing the politician depicted in the photo-card. Quantitatively, corrective comments represented only a small fraction of the overall discourse. Across the sampled posts, corrective or skeptical comments accounted for roughly 10–15% of the analyzed comments. In contrast, the majority of comments focused on reacting emotionally to the content of the photo-card rather than evaluating its authenticity. In several cases, users only recognized the manipulated source after initially reacting to the content as genuine news. For example, one commenter first speculated that the statement could have been made by a member of parliament before editing the comment shortly afterward to acknowledge the mistake after noticing the altered page branding.

These interactions reflect a form of informal or community-driven verification within comment sections. Nevertheless, because such corrective interventions appeared less frequently and generated lower engagement than emotionally charged reactions, the overall discussion environment tended to reinforce the misleading narrative presented by the photo-card before its authenticity could be collectively evaluated. Rather than relying on external fact-checking websites or formal verification tools, users occasionally attempt to validate information collectively through discussion and peer correction. Nevertheless, the limited visibility and engagement of such corrective comments suggest that misinformation narratives often circulate more widely than the efforts to debunk them.

Taken together, these patterns suggest that the persuasive power of manipulated photo-cards emerges not only from the falsity of their claims but from the interaction between visual credibility cues,



Figure 2: Side-by-side comparison of a manipulated and an authentic BanglaVision photo-card. The fake card headline reads [translated from Bangla]: “She (falsely accused) had a Facebook chat history with the killer.” The authentic card reads: “Major fall in global oil prices.” The left image is a fabricated news graphic attributed to “GujobVision,” designed to closely mimic the visual identity, layout, and branding conventions of established Bangladeshi broadcaster BanglaVision. The comparison highlights how misinformation content leverages visual familiarity and stylistic imitation to appear credible.

emotionally charged interpretations, and the uneven visibility of correction attempts within comment discourse.

5 Discussion

Taken together, the findings suggest that fake photo-cards function as visual credibility infrastructures, where familiar news design patterns allow misleading claims to circulate with the appearance of institutional authority. Rather than relying solely on textual falsity, their influence emerges from the interaction of visual credibility cues, cognitive shortcuts in information processing, and the dynamics of social interaction within comment sections.

5.1 Visual Familiarity as a Credibility Shortcut

These findings directly address RQ1, demonstrating that visual familiarity functions as a credibility shortcut that operates before conscious evaluation of content begins. One of the most consistent patterns observed across the dataset is the deliberate replication of mainstream news branding. Manipulated photo-cards frequently copied the visual templates used by well-known Bangladeshi newspapers and television broadcasters, including layout structure, typography, and logo placement. Only minor modifications, such as slightly altered outlet names distinguished the manipulated artifacts from authentic news graphics.

These findings suggest that misinformation producers strategically leverage what may be described as *visual credibility cues*

[2, 30]. When users encounter content in social media feeds, especially in mobile environments characterized by rapid scrolling and fragmented attention, credibility judgments often occur within seconds. Rather than carefully verifying sources, individuals frequently rely on heuristic signals such as professional design, recognizable logos, or familiar formatting to infer legitimacy [29].

The near-identical visual mimicry observed in the manipulated artifacts exploits this heuristic process consistent with the expertise heuristic model described by Meinert and Krämer [33]. Because audiences have repeatedly encountered legitimate news photo-cards from trusted outlets, the visual pattern itself becomes associated with journalistic authority. As a result, users may interpret the artifact as credible even before consciously evaluating the content.

This dynamic resembles cognitive phenomena such as typoglycemia, where readers can interpret words even when letters are rearranged because the overall structure remains recognizable [44]. Similarly, small modifications to outlet names, such as “Janina TV” instead of “Jamuna TV” or “Tokhon TV” instead of “Ekhn TV” may go unnoticed during quick visual processing. Users appear to recognize the overall visual pattern rather than scrutinizing individual textual details.

These findings contribute to ongoing debates in misinformation research regarding whether susceptibility to false information is driven primarily by ideological bias or cognitive shortcuts. The patterns observed here align more closely with explanations based on heuristic processing rather than motivated reasoning, suggesting

that visual familiarity can trigger credibility judgments before users deliberately evaluate the source [24, 35].

5.2 Emotionally Charged Interpretation and Moral Outrage

Beyond visual mimicry, the analysis of comment threads revealed that manipulated photo-cards often trigger strong emotional reactions among users. In many cases, commenters reacted directly to the fabricated quote presented in the image without questioning whether the artifact itself was authentic.

Comments frequently expressed ridicule, anger, or condemnation toward the individual portrayed in the photo-card. Some users described the politician depicted in the image as irrational or unfit for leadership, while others extended criticism toward the broader political party associated with the individual. These responses indicate that the manipulated artifact successfully framed the discourse around the alleged statement rather than the authenticity of the source.

This pattern aligns with prior research demonstrating that emotionally charged content, particularly expressions of anger or moral outrage, tends to generate higher engagement in online networks [3]. Social media platforms often amplify such emotionally intense interactions because they generate replies, reactions, and further discussion. On Facebook, emotionally intense interactions are further amplified through platform dynamics such as engagement-based ranking, reaction metrics, and algorithmic promotion of highly interactive posts [32].

Importantly, the emotional reactions observed in this study were frequently shaped by cultural and religious interpretations of the claim. In the example analyzed in Figure 1, the fabricated statement implied that holding a national election could prevent earthquakes. For many users, this claim conflicted with religious beliefs that natural disasters occur solely according to divine will. As a result, some commenters framed their responses in explicitly religious terms, emphasizing that such events are controlled only by divine authority.

These reactions illustrate how misinformation can activate deeply rooted moral or cultural frameworks. Once an artifact triggers such interpretations, the discussion often shifts from evaluating factual accuracy to expressing moral judgment.

This shift from factual evaluation to moral interpretation reflects patterns observed in prior research on the social amplification of outrage in digital networks. Studies have shown that expressions of anger and moral condemnation tend to spread more rapidly than neutral informational responses, particularly when they reinforce shared moral norms within a community. In such environments, misinformation artifacts can function as catalysts that activate collective emotional reactions rather than simply conveying factual claims [6].

5.3 The Production-Consumption Gap in Visible Discourse

This dynamic speaks to RQ2: audiences interpret manipulated photo-cards primarily through the lens of content rather than

source, and the comment environment they produce tends to amplify rather than correct that interpretation. Although comment sections provide valuable insight into how some users interpret manipulated content, they represent only a small fraction of the audience exposed to these artifacts. Research on social media participation consistently demonstrates a significant production–consumption gap, where a small minority of highly active users produce most visible content while the majority primarily consume information without publicly participating in discussions [35].

This dynamic has important implications for interpreting the comment patterns observed in this study. The emotional and polarized responses visible in comment threads may reflect the views of a highly engaged minority rather than the broader audience encountering the content. Many users may simply view the artifact without commenting or reacting at all.

The presence of this silent audience introduces substantial uncertainty in evaluating the persuasive effects of manipulated photo-cards. Some silent viewers may recognize the artifact as satire or misinformation and ignore it entirely. Others may suspect that the content is fabricated but choose not to publicly challenge it. However, it is also possible that some viewers accept the claim as legitimate information but do not express their interpretation through comments.

Because these interpretations remain invisible within platform interaction metrics, the observable discourse reflects only the most active participants. In this sense, visible comment threads represent what has been described as the “tip of the iceberg” of online political discourse [35].

This limitation suggests that measuring misinformation impact solely through visible engagement metrics may significantly underestimate its broader influence.

5.4 Collective Amplification Through Interaction

Another key observation from the dataset is the role of social interaction in amplifying emotional responses to manipulated content. Comments expressing anger or ridicule frequently received the highest number of reactions from other users, creating feedback loops in which emotionally charged responses gained additional visibility.

This process can be interpreted as a form of collective amplification. Users do not engage only with the original misinformation artifact; they also interact with each other’s reactions. When emotionally intense comments receive high engagement, Facebook’s comment-ranking interface can make them more visible within the discussion space, reinforcing the tone of the conversation [32].

Such dynamics align with research suggesting that online networks can amplify moral outrage through processes of social learning and reinforcement [6]. As users encounter multiple comments expressing similar emotions, they may perceive these reactions as socially normative responses to the event.

At the same time, the limited number of corrective comments observed in the dataset reflects patterns previously described as “situated fact-checking” in Bangladeshi communities. Rather than relying on formal fact-checking websites or platform-based warnings, users occasionally attempted to validate the authenticity of

the image through peer discussion and collective reasoning. These informal verification practices mirror community-driven information evaluation processes documented in rural Bangladesh, where credibility judgments are negotiated socially rather than through individual search-based verification [42].

5.5 Context Collapse, Satirical Mimicry, and Pure Impersonation

This phenomenon is central to RQ1 and RQ2 together: context collapse is not merely a technical feature of platform sharing but a designed vulnerability that pure-impersonation pages exploit even more completely than satirical ones. A particularly interesting pattern observed in the dataset involves the use of satirical or sarcastic page names that mimic established broadcasters. Examples include “Janina TV,” “Tokhon TV,” and “Gujob Vision.” While these names appear humorous or ironic when interpreted in context, their satirical intent may become unclear once the photo-card circulates independently of the original page.

When users encounter these images through reposts or shares, contextual cues indicating satire may disappear. Without such cues, audiences may interpret the artifact as genuine news content rather than parody.

This phenomenon reflects a broader issue often described as *context collapse* in digital media environments, where content becomes detached from the social and communicative context in which it was originally produced [7, 10]. As a result, artifacts intended as humor or satire can inadvertently function as misinformation when circulated across different audiences.

The manipulated photo-cards examined in this study illustrate how visual mimicry can blur the boundary between satire and deception once contextual cues disappear.

Pure-impersonation pages such as “BDC News” represent a further step beyond context collapse: because no satirical cue was ever embedded, there is nothing to collapse. The artifact is designed from inception to be indistinguishable from authentic news. This creates a qualitatively different deception mechanism that existing intervention frameworks, which typically assume some ironic distance that users may or may not detect, are poorly equipped to address.

This finding reinforces concerns raised in prior research regarding the difficulty of interpreting satirical cues in digitally circulated content. While satire traditionally relies on contextual signals that indicate parody or exaggeration, these signals often disappear when visual artifacts are shared independently of their original page environment. As a result, audiences encountering the image in isolation may interpret the message literally rather than recognizing its satirical intent [36].

5.6 Design Implications for Human–AI Fact-Checking

The findings of this study suggest that misinformation mitigation strategies must address the visual infrastructures through which credibility is communicated. Because users often rely on visual heuristics such as recognizable layouts and media logos, fact-checking interventions may need to operate directly at the level of image interpretation rather than focusing solely on textual claims.

Systems designed for mobile-first or low-literacy contexts could benefit from screenshot-based verification workflows that allow users to submit suspicious photo-cards for analysis.

Additionally, rather than presenting binary labels such as “true” or “false,” platforms may improve trust by providing transparent explanations indicating why a visual artifact may be manipulated—for example by highlighting altered logos or inconsistent branding elements. Such approaches align with the community-driven verification practices observed in this study and documented in prior research on situated fact-checking in Bangladesh [42]. By supporting collaborative verification rather than purely automated judgment, human–AI systems may better reflect the social dynamics through which misinformation is evaluated in everyday digital environments.

6 Limitations and Future Work

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the dataset focuses on a subset of Facebook posts collected during a specific political period in Bangladesh (November 2025–March 2026). As a result, the observed patterns may reflect dynamics unique to election-related discourse and may not fully generalize to other time periods or platforms. Future research could extend this analysis to additional social media environments such as WhatsApp, YouTube, or TikTok, where visual misinformation also circulates widely.

Second, the comment analysis relies on the first twenty visible comments for each artifact. While these early responses provide insight into initial audience interpretation, they represent only a small portion of the overall audience exposed to the content. Many users consume misinformation passively without publicly commenting or reacting. Future studies could combine qualitative analysis with surveys or experimental methods to better understand how silent audiences interpret manipulated visual content.

Finally, this study focuses specifically on photo-card style misinformation in Bangladesh. While this format is widely used in South Asian news ecosystems, visual misinformation may take different forms in other cultural or media contexts. Comparative studies across countries and media formats could further clarify how visual credibility cues operate across different information environments.

7 Conclusion

This paper examined how manipulated news photo-cards circulate and are interpreted within social media environments in Bangladesh. Through a qualitative analysis of visually mimicked photo-cards and associated Facebook comment discourse, the study demonstrates how familiar news design patterns allow misleading artifacts to borrow the appearance of institutional credibility.

The findings show that users frequently respond to the content of the claim rather than evaluating the authenticity of the source, while emotionally charged reactions often amplify misleading narratives within comment discussions. At the same time, small but visible forms of community-driven verification emerge as users collectively question or correct misleading artifacts.

Taken together, the study highlights how visual familiarity, cognitive heuristics, and social interaction dynamics shape the interpretation of misinformation in mobile-first environments. Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing misinformation interventions that address not only textual claims but also the visual infrastructures through which credibility is communicated online.

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