Dangerous channels

Misinformation and hate speech on Telegram in post-coup Myanmar

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By Intellectum Research Consortium

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MYANMAR DIGITAL RESEARCH 01

Acknowledgment

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K4DM was launched in 2017 by Global Affairs Canada and IDRC. It fosters a new generation of young actors to promote inclusion, gender equality, respect for diversity, and prosperity for all in Myanmar. Making use of online courses, fellowships and research on digital spaces, the initiative supports diverse students and researchers primarily in the Myanmar diaspora and research institutions outside the country.

Abstract

This study aims to raise awareness of the pernicious patterns of misinformation and hate speech threatening Myanmar's digital and sociopolitical landscape. It focuses on the spread of malinformation on pro-regime Telegram channels in Myanmar following the 2021 coup. Beyond threatening the digital safety and security of pro-democracy groups, these channels contain alarming instances of hate speech and dangerous speech targeting them. This research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative analysis with one-on-one key informant interviews.

In the wake of the 2021 coup, the military regime, or State Administration Council (SAC), quickly shifted its primary information operations from Facebook to alternative platforms, including Telegram, highlighting the adaptability of disinformation networks. In response, this study analyzed data from five Telegram channels. The research faced limitations in verifying incidents in areas with limited internet connectivity, and some pro-regime channels were removed during the research process. Language barriers also limited insight into Telegram content involving non-Burmese speakers.

The findings reveal that malinformation is the dominant category on pro-regime channels, accounting for about 30 percent of content analyzed. This content often combines facts with selective narratives and one-sided accusations. The Telegram channels frequently advocate retaliatory military action while omitting or denying certain events. Doxing is prevalent, with 16 documented Telegram doxing cases resulting in arrests. Interviews with fact-checkers and journalists shed light on the motivations behind the spread of misinformation and the tactics employed by the SAC. The impact of misinformation and disinformation is evident in community trust, the economy, and social cohesion, contributing to shifts in public opinion. Doxing incidents have wide-ranging effects, from loss of property to loss of life and citizenship. Improving digital literacy, fact-checking, and monitoring efforts will be essential to mitigating these harms. Telegram also needs to take greater responsibility by implementing policies addressing malinformation, misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech.

Keywords: misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, hate speech, telegram, 2021 coup, Myanmar, doxing, digital security, digital safety

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Introduction

The pervasive spread of mis/disinformation on Myanmar's social media landscape is a long-standing societal concern since before the 2021 coup. This study moves beyond the scope of mis/disinformation to dive into the spread of malinformation, the dominant phenomenon channeled through pro-regime Telegram channels in Myanmar. The propagation of hateful one-sided narratives jeopardizes the security and digital well-being of the pro-democracy population, among other disconcerting dimensions. Our literature research brings to light the alarming presence of hate speech and dangerous speech targeting both democracy proponents and those opposing the SAC (see Hayes, B.K., Heit, E., & Swendsen, H., 2010). Dangerous and threatening expressions find their breeding ground on uncensored Telegram channels endorsed by supporters of the regime. This study presents a thorough examination of five Telegram channels that support the Myanmar military/SAC while also disseminating propaganda. After our analytical endeavors, the study carried out a series of semi-structured interviews with journalists and fact-checkers to explore the multifaceted issues at hand. Through these interviews, we aim to present a nuanced understanding of the dynamics surrounding malinformation, hate speech, and the broader implications for Myanmar's digital and sociopolitical landscape.

It is noteworthy that in the aftermath of the coup, as military-related pages and accounts faced removal from Facebook ("Facebook takes down main page of Myanmar military," 2021), the SAC supporters promptly shifted their information dissemination to alternate platforms, including Telegram. This strategic move highlights the increasing flexibility of disinformation networks and the ongoing challenges in addressing this issue. While the research contributes valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge the need to continue refining and enhancing the methodology for future research. We advocate for ongoing empirical research studies like this, whenever circumstances permit. By doing so, we hope to raise public awareness of digital literacy and safety and foster a better understanding of and protection against the pernicious patterns of mis/disinformation, malinformation, and hate speech that pose significant threats to society.

Literature review

Misinformation and disinformation represent two distinct but interrelated concepts. Misinformation refers to the dissemination of inaccurate or misleading information, often unintentional, while disinformation involves the deliberate spread of false information to deceive or manipulate. Misinformation can result from various sources, including human error, misinformation campaigns, or the echo-chamber effect (Lewandowsky et al., 2012). In contrast, disinformation typically involves state actors, political campaigns, or ideologically driven groups aiming to influence public opinion (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Malinformation is a relatively newer concept, describing the deliberate sharing of genuine information with the intent to harm, deceive, or manipulate the target audience (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). Malinformation often takes the form of selectively edited or 'taken-out-of-context' content and can be used as a tool to damage the reputation of individuals, groups, or institutions (Guess

et al., 2019). In the context of Myanmar, malinformation has gained prominence in pro-regime Telegram channels, where genuine information is manipulated to further the military's agenda. It is crucial to understand the unique challenges and implications of malinformation in this context. Hate speech can incite further hatred, violence, or discrimination against individuals or groups based on their identity, such as race, religion, or political affiliation (Waldron, 2012). Dangerous speech is a subset of hate speech that goes beyond mere expressions to incite violence and harm directly (Zittrain & Roberts, 2010). The consequences of hate speech and dangerous speech can be severe, leading to real-world violence and social division. The role of pro-regime Telegram channels in perpetuating such harmful expressions is a growing concern. The shift of pro-regime actors to alternate information ecosystems like Telegram is a strategic response to content moderation efforts on mainstream social media platforms. Telegram provides an encrypted and unregulated environment for the dissemination of content (Tufekci, 2017). The ease of (anonymously) creating and joining channels on Telegram has facilitated the rapid spread of both information and disinformation. To conclude, this literature review highlights the importance of understanding the intricate web of mis/disinformation, malinformation, hate speech, and the use of Telegram channels within the context of Myanmar's political landscape. The existing body of work underscores the urgency of addressing these issues to safeguard digital safety, political stability, and social cohesion within the country.

Aim and objective of the research

This research paper aims to provide an in-depth exploration of the dynamics surrounding the spread of mis/disinformation and malinformation on Pro-Regime/SAC supporters' Telegram channels in Myanmar. The primary objective is to thoroughly analyze the patterns and characteristics of mis/disinformation and malinformation as they are promoted on these channels. Building upon this foundation, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the motivations, tactics, and impacts of these phenomena within the specific context of pro-regime Telegram channels in Myanmar.

Methodology

Method

The data for this study was collected systematically over five months, from January 2023 to May 2023 (see Figure 1).

Through a mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative textual data analysis, we hope to unravel the complexity of this information landscape. Our quantitative analysis will offer valuable insights into the frequency, volume, and dissemination patterns of hateful and dangerous content, shedding light on its prominence and reach within these channels. Meanwhile, our qualitative analysis will examine the content, themes, narratives, and potential impacts.

Ten one-on-one interviews were conducted with key informants to enrich our findings and provide a more comprehensive view. These interviews will not only validate and contextualize the data but also enable us to capture the perspectives and experiences of individuals. In the range of our trusted partners and close connections, over 20 people from the community who are related to the topic and have related background experiences were contacted for the interview through email or Signal, and ten respondents were selected according to their willingness to participate in this study. These ten participants include people who have changed their careers from media reporters to fact-checkers, who are digital/cyber security instructors/trainers, participants who are currently working at a media house, human rights defenders, analysts who monitor mis/disinformation and malinformation through automation, etc. We learned that some of these participants say that they often monitor Telegram channels for personal interest and watch fake news and doxing cases for work purposes. By employing the mixed-method approach, we aim to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role and impact of mis/disinformation and malinformation within the specific context of pro-regime Telegram channels in Myanmar.

Data

The primary research method involved coding to extract post data from five selected pro-regime Telegram channels. A qualitative textual analysis discerned patterns of misinformation, negative sentiment, and the dissemination of malinformation within these five channels. Before extracting data from the Telegram channels, a scraping program was built using the open-source Telethon module. Following data extraction, a formula was used to determine the minimum sample size required for known population sizes. The channel with the highest number of posts necessitated a sample size of 340, while other channels had lower sampling requirements. Furthermore, in the interest of privacy and data protection, Personally Identifiable Information (PIIs) such as National Registration Cards (NRC), phone numbers, profile URLs, and email addresses were systematically replaced with corresponding tags for anonymization and confidentiality, for instance, <NRC>, and so forth. The qualitative aspect of this research used a descriptive and exploratory design to gain an in-depth understanding of the nuances and motivations surrounding the spread of mis/disinformation, malinformation, and hate speech on pro-regime Telegram channels. Qualitative data was also gathered through 10 semi-structured interviews

with relevant stakeholders, including journalists, fact-checkers, and individuals with direct experience of disinformation campaigns. Thematic analysis (Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M., & Namey, E. E. (2014)) was applied to understand the qualitative one-on-one interviews, and qualitative textual analysis (Andreotta, M., Nugroho, R., Hurlstone, M. J., Boschetti, F., Farrell, S., Walker, I., & Paris, C. (2019)) was used to identify, analyze, and report patterns, themes, and narratives within the qualitative data extracted from selected Telegram channels. The analysis process involved coding the interview transcripts, grouping similar codes into themes, and deriving meaning from the data.

Ethical considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all interviewees, ensuring they were aware of the research purpose, their voluntary participation, anonymity, and data confidentiality. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Data collected was stored securely, and access was limited to authorized research staff to prevent data breaches and ensure the confidentiality of participants. All qualitative data, including interview transcripts, audio recordings, and coded materials, were organized and managed efficiently throughout the research process.

FIGURE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE SIZE FOR TELEGRAM DATA

ID	Channel	Start Date	End Date (Exclusive)	N Posts Total	N Posts Uploaded	Min Sample Size
20230101_20230601_kyawswar96999	https://t.me/kyawswar96999	2023-01-01	2023-06-01	3,181.00	500	342
20230101_20230601_kothetjournalist	https://t.me/kothetjournalist	2023-01-01	2023-06-01	4,396.00	500	353
20230101_20230601_hminewai	https://t.me/hminewai	2023-01-01	2023-06-01	3,101.00	500	341
20230101_20230601_babanyunt	https://t.me/babanyunt	2023-01-01	2023-06-01	3,626.00	500	347
20230101_20230601_shweba000	https://t.me/shweba000	2023-01-01	2023-06-01	1,870.00	500	318

Findings and discussion

Negative tone, accusation and hate speech

Total distribution

FIGURE (2) DISTRIBUTION OF NEGATIVE CASES

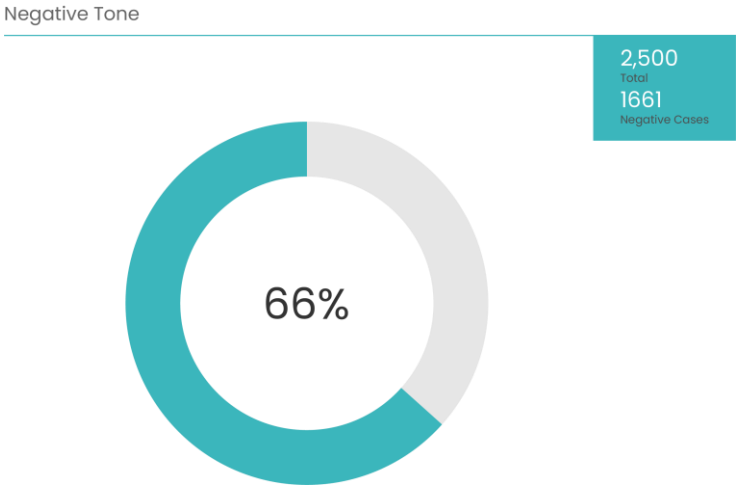
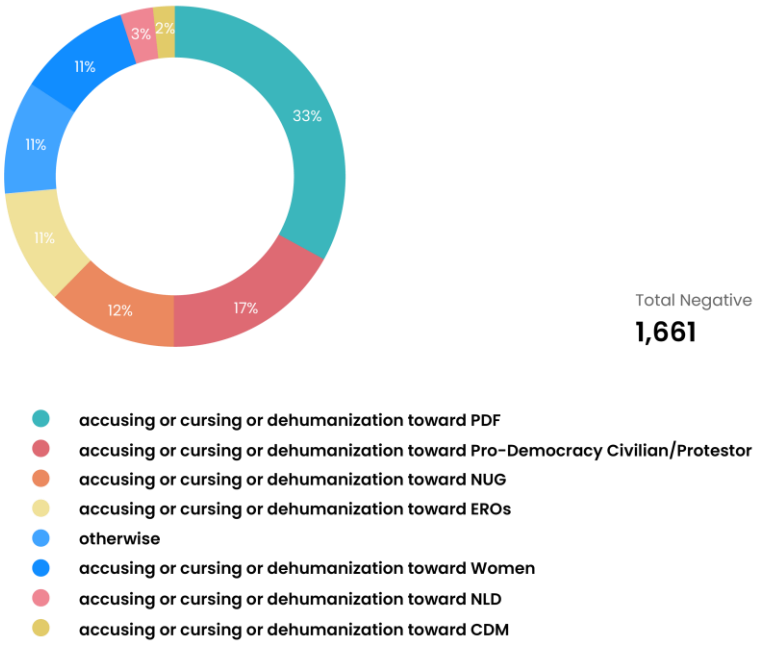


FIGURE (3) PERCENTAGE OF TONE DETAILS IN NEGATIVE CASES



A significant portion of the discourse was directed towards the People's Defence Forces (PDFs), comprising 33 percent of the total (see figure 3). Next, posts targeting pro-democracy civilians and protesters accounted for 17 percent. In contrast, discussions related to the CDMs (Civil Disobedience Movement) registered the lowest frequency at 2 percent. These discussion incidents encompass a spectrum of issues, including the spread of mis/disinformation, malinformation, and doxing. There is a recurring theme of conversations centered on destructive actions such as the targeting of ERO headquarters with calls for retaliatory violence. Some instances extend to threats and attacks against the United States, various foreign countries, and international organizations who support sanctions against the SAC. The discourse is further complicated by the mixed use of images that are challenging to authenticate and fact-check. Additionally, reports of deceased individuals lack specific locations or incident details. Notably, references to arrests, imprisonments, and criminal prosecutions are frequently interwoven throughout the dialogue. The discourse also features allegations of financial mismanagement against revolutionary forces, sometimes implicating all these forces collectively. It is worth noting that among the implicated entities, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA), Karen National Union (KNU), PDF, and NUG emerge as the most prominently involved parties in these allegations.

Hate speech towards PDFs

PDFs are the primary focus of attacks, with 33 percent of the total 1,661 negative cases in the study (see Figure 3). Among the five channels (see figure 4), the Hmine Wai channel and Kyaw Swar channel had almost the same amount of offensive intentions on PDFs (see figure 5). Some of the hate speech is documented in the following discussions. In the regions neighbouring Kachin and Sagaing, there are claims suggesting that PDF members aligning with the KIA are involved in the burning of villages and tend to withdraw when confronted by the military. There are recurrent accusations labeling them as a group prone to internal conflicts, sometimes branded as "murderous terrorist PDFs." These accusations depict them as individuals who disrupt communal activities, including instances of public obstruction.

Hate speech towards civilian protesters

The second most attacked category is civilian protester / pro-democracy groups or individuals with 17 percent of the 1,661 negative cases (see Figure 3). Among them, the following activities are included: accusations of misuse of funding, labeling as terrorist supporters, doxing, and arrest cases. By revisiting the historical backdrop of past coups, a leader from the ABSDF (All Burma Students' Democratic Front) faced accusations of financial impropriety during the 1988 uprising. In 2021, a prominent supporter of the NUG similarly engaged in Telegram channels, leveling allegations of financial mismanagement against the military's adversaries. Notably, two renowned artists, who had previously been detained and subsequently released, were encouraged to participate in the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM) and were criticized for continuing their involvement in the arts. They resorted to using derogatory slang terms, referring to NLD supporters as "Nepein," while disparagingly characterizing them as lacking in discernment.

FIGURE 4. LIST OF TELEGRAM CHANNELS

Channel Name	Channel URL
Banyunt	https://t.me/babanyunt
Hmine Wai	https://t.me/hminewai
Ko Thet	https://t.me/kothetjournalist
Kyaw Swar	https://t.me/kyawswar96999
Shwe Ba	https://t.me/shweba000

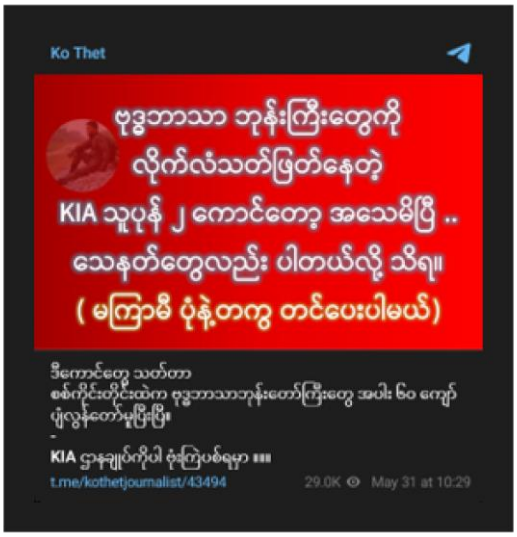
Hate speech towards EROs

FIGURE 5. LIST OF OFFENSIVE KEYWORDS USED AGAINST EAOS BY CHANNELS

Channel Name Accused KIA		Channel Name Accused KNU	
Ko Thet	21	Ko Thet	19
Kyaw Swar	11	Hmine Wai	14
Hmine Wai	7	Kyaw Swar	14
Banyubt	4	Shwe ba	9
Shwe Ba	4	Banyunt	1
Total	**47**	**Total**	**57**

Among the five channels, Ko Thet channel carried out the most attacks on EROs (see Figure 5). The findings indicate that all five channels had the highest number of attacks directed at the KIA and KNU, involving the use of offensive words. Additionally, other EROs, such as Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), Arakan Army (AA), and Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), were also targeted. Some examples of the channel's content can be documented as follows: It is said that the changes in positions within the KIA organization are because they support the NUG, and there are differences of opinion. There are also calls for the KIA headquarters to be bombed because they have killed more than 60 Buddhist monks in Sagaing (see Figure 6). Another ERO, the KNU/KNLA organization, is also accused of trying to destroy the country throughout its history.

FIGURE (6) EXAMPLE POST OF HATE SPEECH TOWARDS EROS



Caption: They (KIA) killed more than 60 monks in Sagaing region. KIA headquarter should be bombed.

Analysis: Accusation cannot be verified

Link: https://t.me/kothetjournalist/43494

Hate speech towards women

Notably, attacks on women can be found in 11 percent of the 1,661 negative cases (see Figure 3). The hate speech consists of targeting a woman NUG minister, female artists, women who support NUG, and Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. A female NUG minister was allegedly attacked over her request to the British foreign minister to recognize the NUG (see Figure 7). There are also verbal attacks on women artists who are doing revolutionary activities. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is attacked including comments that she has destroyed more than her father, General Aung San Maeng's work. A prominent female supporter was attacked with petty physical discrimination words.

FIGURE (7) EXAMPLE POST OF HATE SPEECH TOWARDS WOMEN

Caption: Zin Mar Aung is sacrificed by her life and demanding British foreign minister. She will only know what is being sacrificed.

Analysis: Accusation and defamation by insulting illustration.

Link: https://t.me/shweba000/372

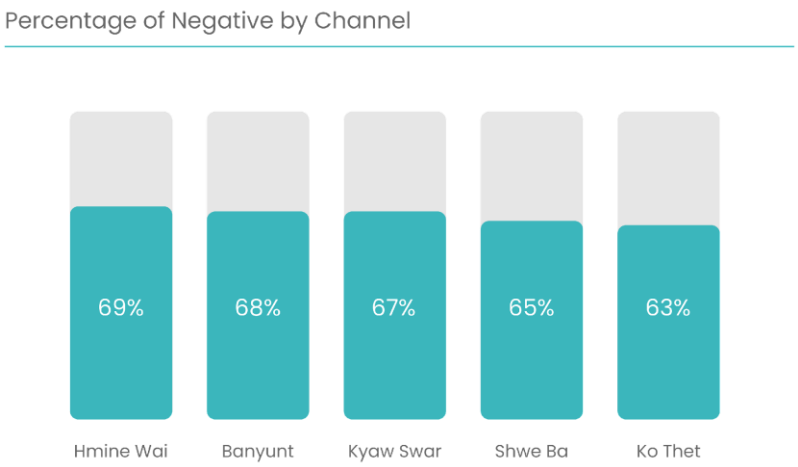
Hate speech towards CDMers

The lowest percentage of negative cases is the CDM, with 2 percent of the 1,661 cases in this study (see Figure 3). However, it still included doxing, defamation, and misinformation. The narrative used makes people think that participating in the civil disobedience movement was a mistake. Labeling health workers who have undergone CDM as activists for PDFs (PDFs were labeled as a terrorist group), soldiers who have undergone CDM are called deserters and are often disparaged as hiding in the jungle in collaboration with a terrorist group (PDFs were labeled as a terrorist group). Women CDMs were falsely accused of resorting to prostitution and found in border karaoke bars. Another accusation is that the call for CDM is futile and irresponsible, saying that schoolteachers are now working as prostitutes at the border.

Channel analysis

The total distribution of hate speech, misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, and doxing cases across all five channels shows similarities in percentages. According to Figure 8, the highest percentage of hateful content per channel is at 69 percent, while the lowest is at 63 percent. One significant observation is that all channels actively contribute to the production of negative cases.

FIGURE 8. PERCENTAGE OF NEGATIVE OR HATE SPEECH DISTRIBUTION BY CHANNELS



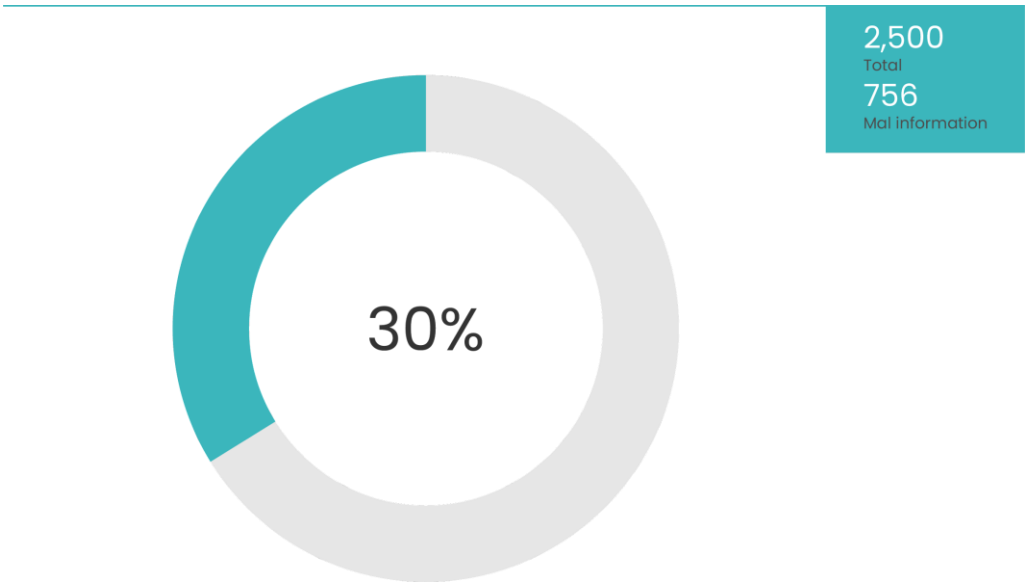
Mis/disinformation and malinformation

In this research, our approach predominantly revolves around an inductive research framework, highlighting three primary facets: mis/disinformation, malinformation, and hate speech (dangerous speech) as observed on pro-regime Telegram channels in the post-2021 coup landscape. Due to various constraints, we gathered data from five Telegram channels spanning the period from January 2023 to June 2023, totaling 2,500 posts, which then became the foundation for our research. Within this dataset, we discovered a noteworthy prevalence of malinformation, constituting approximately 30% of the

content for five months. This surpasses the extent of mis/disinformation, marking malinformation as the dominant category. Our findings highlight that these reports exhibit a blend of factual information alongside elements that are challenging to fact-check. These Telegram accounts often feature one-sided accusations, serving to disseminate a selective narrative. For instance, following airstrikes by the State Administration Council (SAC), Telegram channels frequently advocate for retaliatory military action, even though the targeted areas are often mines and evacuation camps. In response, the Telegram channels counter-allege that the airstrikes targeted weapons manufacturing facilities rather than mines. Furthermore, the victims of these acts of violence are portrayed either as supporters of the NLD party or non-supporters, while the perpetrators, regardless of their affiliation with the USDP, are frequently accused of being PDFs. In some instances, these dialogues exhibit inherent contradictions, with PDFs tending to project themselves as the instigators of criminal acts. An undertone of portraying PDFs as being undervalued is discernible throughout these narratives. Moreover, the Telegram channels often report clashes and raids on village defence posts in proximity to residential areas. Yet, upon cross-referencing these incidents with independent news media, it becomes apparent that residential villages were indeed subject to raids and arson. These Telegram channels, however, routinely omit or deny the veracity of such events. Additionally, Civil Disobedience Movements (CDMs) are subjected to defamation, with certain festivities exploited to sow discord between urban populations and regions experiencing severe turmoil across the country. Counter-revolutionary news is also frequently disseminated, as observed on the day of the Silence strike, depicting the movements of people. In sum, it becomes evident that the strategic inclusion of a blend of accurate facts within news reports is leveraged as a means of advancing a one-sided narrative, thus conveying the desired message.

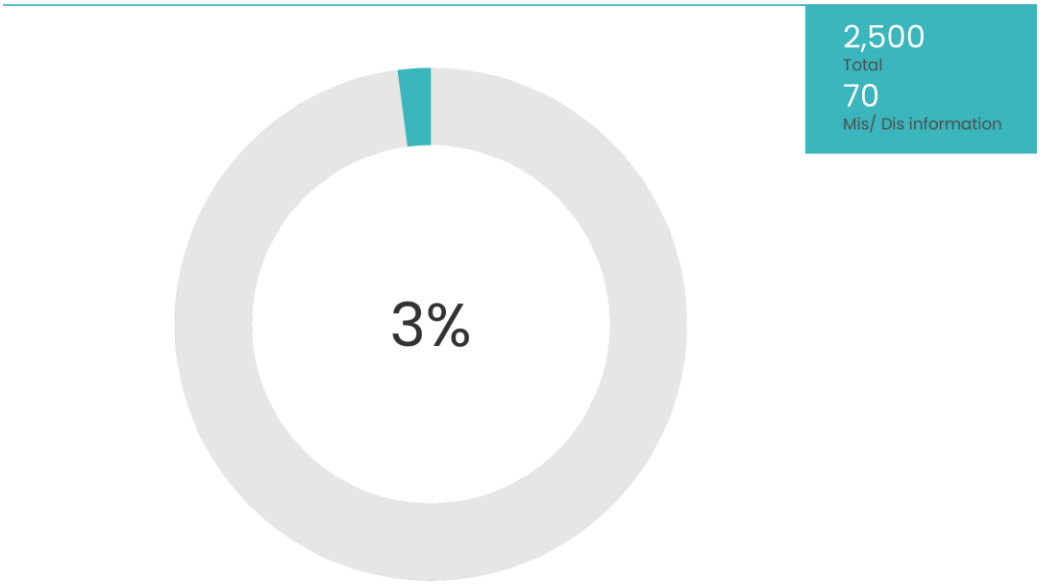
Malinformation

FIGURE 9. DISTRIBUTION OF MAL INFORMATION



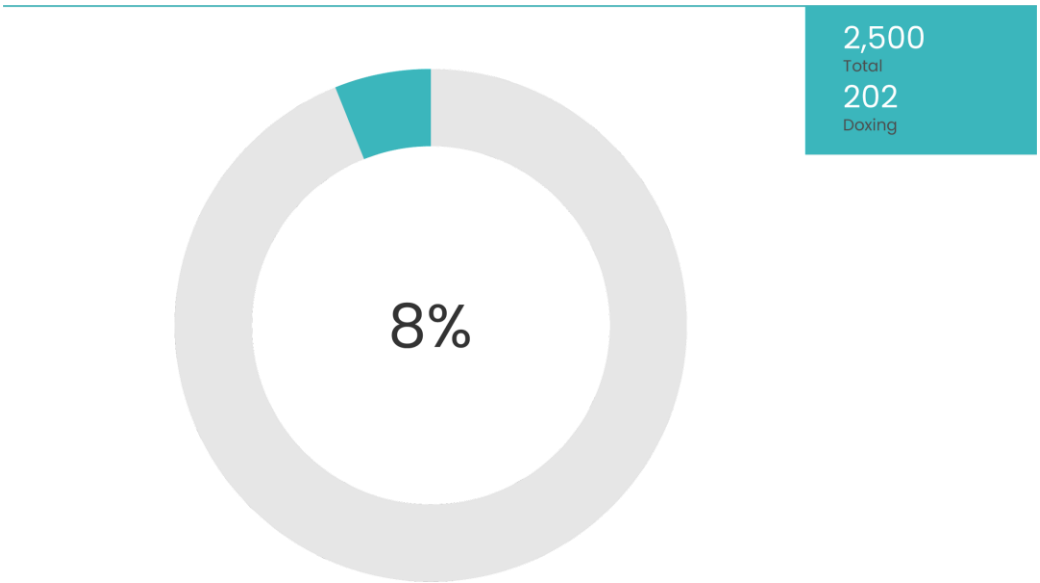
Mis/disinformation

FIGURE (10) DISTRIBUTION OF MIS/DISINFORMATION



Doxing

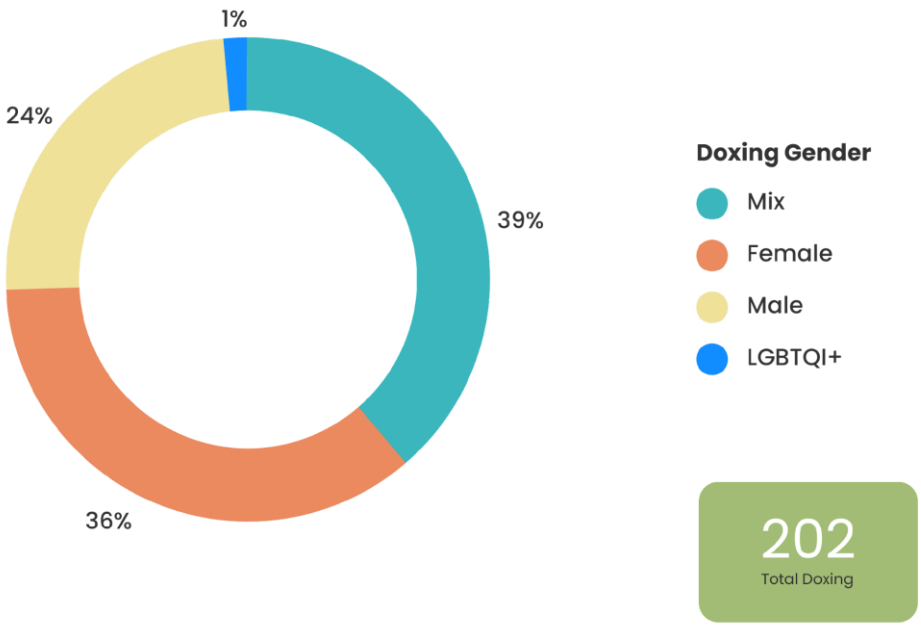
FIGURE (11) DISTRIBUTION OF DOXING CASES



We identified a total of 202 doxing cases, constituting approximately 8 percent of our sample size of 2,500 posts. Among these 202 doxing incidents, we have records of 16 cases that resulted in arrests. However, for the remaining 186 cases, we were unable to verify whether arrests were made or not. The doxing cases involve individuals of various gender categories, including male, female, and mixed. The mixed category pertains to situations involving both male and female individuals who were doxed together in a single post, often targeting an entire organization, and exposed to public scrutiny. Additionally, some posts were directed at the LGBTQ+ community, although their frequency was not substantial, so we grouped these cases under the mixed category. All gender categories, including CDM, PDF, EROs, and pro-democracy/protest, were affected by doxing incidents. Specifically, 36 percent of the total cases involved female individuals, 24 percent involved males, and the mixed category accounted for 40 percent of the cases, as indicated in the accompanying figure.

Doxing gender

FIGURE (12) GENDER COMPARE OF DOXING CASES

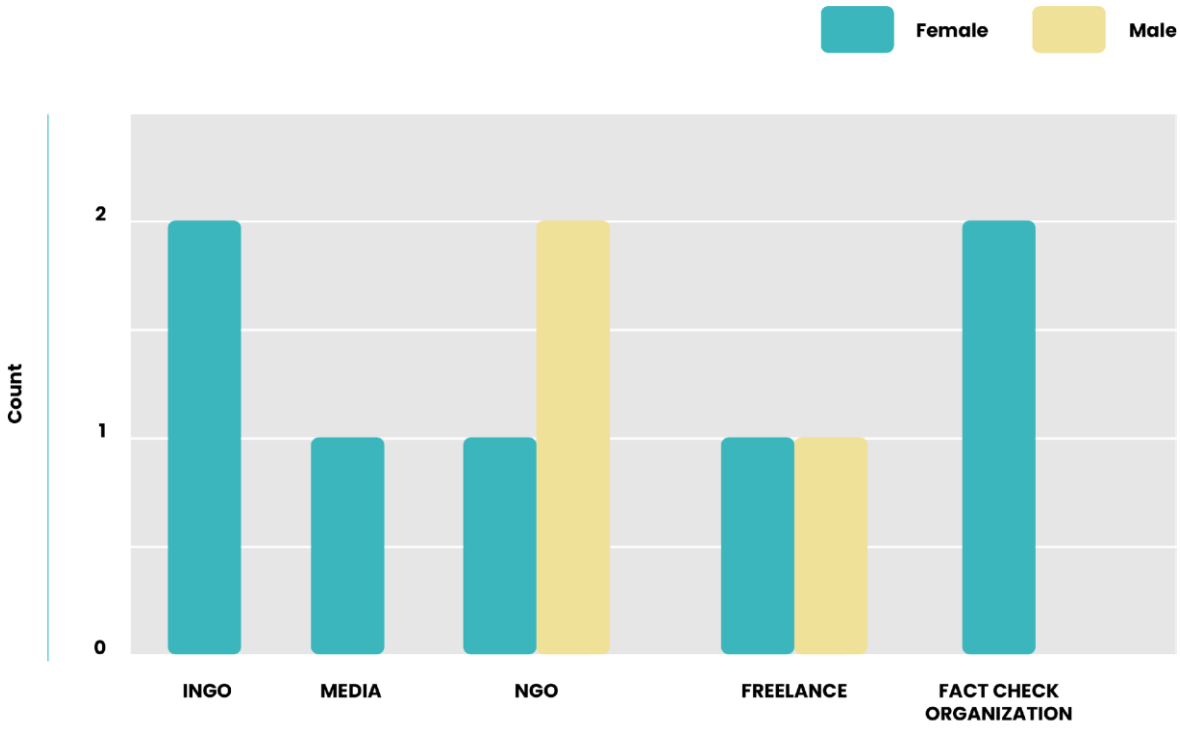


Qualitative analysis

We conducted a total of 10 interviews involving a diverse array of stakeholders, including representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), media outlets, fact-checking organizations, and freelance media professionals (see Figure 13). These interviews aimed to gather multifaceted insights and perspectives on the research's focal subjects.

The gender composition of these interviews consisted of seven female and three male participants hailing from these organizations. This gender diversity among the interviewees contributed to a well-rounded and inclusive discussion.

FIGURE (13) DISTRIBUTION OF INTERVIEWEES' INFORMATION



Social media experience of the interviewee

Participants have exposure in cyber security, digital literacy, media journalism, social media research, human rights, digital rights, and mis/disinformation fact-checking. All categories included such as providing training, monitoring mis/disinformation, and raising awareness of the public regarding digital literacy.

Channels that are spreading mis/disinformation

Most participants agree that Telegram is the source of pro-regime mis/disinformation production. Eighty percent of participants mentioned at least once the “Han Nyein Oo” Telegram channel name. However, a few of them mentioned the other channel names.

FIGURE (14) DISTRIBUTION OF INTERVIEWEE'S RESPONSES TO SPREAD OF MIS/DISINFORMATION PLATFORM AFTER THE 2021 COUP

Motivation and tactics

Respondents had different opinions on the purpose of producing fake news. They say that Telegram is used as a tool to influence public opinion, confuse, ridicule, and isolate and incite revolutionary forces, discredit reliable sources of information, and make only selected information known to the public, and possibly to weaken revolutionaries and revolutionary movements. A respondent fact-checker said that such intentions may not only target the opponents of the military council but also the supporters of the military council.

An individual who studies mis/disinformation from an INGO also noted that by spreading misinformation over and over again, there may be an intention to confuse the public and fact-checkers. “It’s like saying ‘Fake it until you make it’: sometimes we know that they are wrong, but we don't know if they are right. Until they think like that, they will deliberately misrepresent it." According to the discussions, Telegram channels are taking a variety of approaches to spread fake news. It is said that such methods often include religious beliefs, and topics related to race. A fact-checker said that as the public refuses to accept certain forms of misinformation immediately, religious, and ethnic content may be used, and such content may be aimed at a public with poor knowledge of the news, and its impact is difficult to measure. According to an independent study of mis/disinformation by an INGO, sometimes military supporters present

arguments to each other in an attempt to draw the attention of readers. Another way to divert attention from the fighting and bombings is to broadcast counter-news and make a series of arrests. Regarding the arrests, they could not independently confirm the connection.

On the other hand, since the coup, internet restrictions have been imposed, and most social media sites require a VPN (virtual private network) to be used, but the Telegram application does not need a VPN. A human rights activist said that in addition to false information from supporters of the military, state-owned newspapers also spread false information. Regarding that topic, although we have no proof, we found that private organizations named as news media departments are involved in Telegram's disinformation distribution.

Impact of mis/disinformation

Most participants are worried about the impact of mis/disinformation. Mis/disinformation tried to flip the community trust level and also tried to confuse the public in a way that tricks people into believing the narrative. Also, one participant pointed out the impact of the economy, in this case as soon as economic-related mis/disinformation spreads out to the public, the market price tends to be higher than usual. Additionally, social impact can be seen, they said, as people tried to cut off communication when one information struck emotionally. Also, the people who are hard to reach with reliable news would be completely immersed in the narrative, for instance, the families of Myanmar military soldiers (not officers) who must stay in the military compound with strict information controls. Furthermore, the reputation could be questionable after all this misinformation is influencing the public. In summary, when it comes to things that are directly related to people's interests, respondents are quite nervous about the potential for information to change public opinion on politics.

Experience of doxing incidents

In the interviews, 9 out of 10 respondents reported experiencing doxing or arrest, of themselves or their close friends, via Telegram channels. In addition, not only people from within the country but even people from outside the country are being doxed for revealing information. For example, those who live at the border are bribed with rewards for capturing them, etc.

There are also opinions regarding the purpose of these arrests, such as threatening to oppose the military, not wanting to be involved in politics, and weakening the revolution, as well as personal hatred. There is also a review of how online intelligence strategies have changed over time. "The fewer people there are to oppose them, the easier it is for them to build the dictatorship they want," interviewees said of the effects of pro-regime Telegram channels. Arrested or not, the impact can range from the low to very severe. From loss of property, changes in lifestyle, arrest, imprisonment and torture to loss of life, he said. Physical and emotional harm can be seen not only on the target but also on their family members and friends. In addition, there is also the loss of citizenship.

Prevention, mitigation, and final thoughts

With the rise of mis/disinformation, trust issues emerge for journalists and fact-checkers even if they know the source of a certain piece of news. They tend to view anything as a rumor, even if the source is reputable. In our research, we found that journalists and fact-checkers face similar challenges, and that they are constantly faced with difficult situations in verifying news posted on Telegram. The fact-checkers themselves said they still don't know what measures to take to account for this. After the coup, pro-democracy supporters stopped using real, true-name accounts to protect their identities. Thus, almost everyone began using fake-name accounts, very hard to verify. respondent said that even though he collected data from over 400 Telegram channels, this is not enough to know what information is true versus mis/disinformation.

Regarding Telegram's policies and responsibility, the respondents' suggestions and the findings of Telegram's research are consistent. Graphic images are not censored, and copyright protection is weak. "Telegram is very weak in terms of policy. Not when this kind of thing is happening, and even if it's content that children shouldn't watch, they don't take it down. They're weak in copyright. They don't follow a situation and then change a policy, (even if) everyone needs it. They should apply a policy on misinformation and disinformation. I think that they have not reached this level yet."

Regarding the practice of Doxing, some of the respondents reported that the personally revealing data came from Facebook and was then re-posted to Telegram, highlighting the importance of digital safety knowledge regarding personal data on social media. One of the fact-checker respondents revealed that the spread and reach of fake news is more than that of fact-checked news from reputable sources. He compared Telegram to Facebook and said that a team should be formed to ensure responsibility and accountability, and monitoring should be done. However, if it is not on the Telegram platform, it is said that the only thing that can be done is raising people's digital literacy skills, as propaganda can still be used on other platforms. For example, when talking about false news, we will include information about why it is confirmed as false news, and we will discuss providing awareness and debunking of false claims.

Limitation

There were certain limitations encountered in conducting the quantitative coding, primarily caused by the lack of accessible sources to verify incidents in areas with limited internet connectivity. This also made it challenging to obtain real-time, on-the-ground situational data. Furthermore, it's worth noting that one of the five pro-regime channels was removed by the Telegram company during the coding process. When coding for quantitative categorization, variations in classification arose because it is feasible to differentiate conversations involving key individuals and specific organizations. For example, when grouping allegations involving the Civil Disobedience Movement (CDM), women, National Unity Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (NUG) members, People's Defence Force (PDF), and Ethnic Revolutionary Organizations (EROs), it can lead to data confusion and hinder the achievement of a clear research objective. In the case of qualitative coding, limitations arose due to the sensitivity of

the research subject matter, resulting in a restricted pool of interviewees. Additionally, the questionnaire format was designed to evoke profound insights, but not all participants responded to every question with the same level of depth. Furthermore, as SAC supporters predominantly use the Burmese language to target the Burmese population, gaining an in-depth perspective from non-Burmese speakers and the international community proved to be challenging. Furthermore, when examining doxing cases on pro-regime Telegram channels, specifically in the context of disinformation or malinformation, it's important to note that while we were able to document certain instances leading to arrests resulting from doxing, it was not always possible to verify whether arrests occurred in every single doxing case.

Conclusion

In the face of Myanmar's evolving sociopolitical landscape and the relentless dissemination of mis/disinformation and malinformation, this study has shed light on the profound challenges and consequences experienced by its citizens. The research uncovered a disconcerting prevalence of malinformation, constituting the dominant category of content within pro-regime Telegram channels, surpassing traditional mis/disinformation. The amalgamation of factual information with selective narratives is a potent weapon, serving to advance one-sided viewpoints and manipulate public perception. These channels, which frequently advocate for retaliatory military action while downplaying or denying certain events, pose significant threats to digital and physical safety, political stability, and social cohesion in Myanmar. Doxing incidents have inflicted harm on individuals and their families, from loss of property to loss of life and even citizenship. The impact of these actions extends beyond the immediate targets, causing distress and uncertainty throughout society. This research highlights the pressing need for both national and international stakeholders to address these issues comprehensively, from digital literacy and fact-checking to monitoring and policy implementation. To combat the pervasive spread of mis/disinformation, malinformation, and hate speech, individuals and organizations must prioritize raising public awareness and fostering a culture of critical thinking. Fact-checking efforts, though important, cannot bear the entire burden of verifying the avalanche of information that floods the digital landscape. Telegram, as a platform of choice for the dissemination of such content, must assume greater responsibility by implementing and enforcing policies to curtail the spread of false information. In the wake of the 2021 coup, the shift of information sources to alternate platforms signifies the agility of disinformation networks. As these challenges persist and evolve, the lessons drawn from this research should serve as a clarion call for ongoing empirical studies and collective efforts to safeguard Myanmar's digital and sociopolitical landscape. Only by comprehending the intricacies of these issues and working collaboratively can society hope to mitigate the destructive impact of mis/disinformation, malinformation, and hate speech and maintain the integrity of public discourse and digital safety.

Recommendations

1. Support and enhance fact-checking organizations and initiatives within Myanmar. Encourage collaboration among these organizations and provide resources to help them verify and debunk false information, ultimately reducing the spread of deceptive content on digital platforms.
2. An imperative next step involves conducting a survey that compares public viewpoints on Telegram channels with those from independent news media.
3. Engage with social media platforms like Telegram to ensure they take a more proactive role in moderating content, especially when it involves hate speech, disinformation, or malinformation. Advocating for stricter content policies and enforcement mechanisms can help curb the dissemination of harmful information.
4. Engage with international partners and organizations to coordinate efforts in countering mis/disinformation and promoting digital safety in Myanmar. Collaborative research, knowledge sharing, and capacity-building programs can strengthen the resilience of Myanmar's society against digital threats.
5. Foster collaboration between research organizations and fact-checkers to facilitate the verification and debunking of false information in real time, increasing the accuracy of the information available to the public.

Appendix: Acronyms and references

Acronyms

All Burma Students' Democratic Front ..... ABSDF
Arakan Army ..... AA
Civil Disobedience Movement ..... CDM
Ethnic Revolutionary Organization ..... EROs
International Non-Governmental Organization ..... INGO
Kachin Independence Army ..... KIA
Karen National Union ..... KNU
Karenni National Progressive Party ..... KNPP
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender ..... LGBT
National League for Democracy ..... NLD
Non-Governmental Organization ..... NGO
People's Defence Force ..... PDF
State Administration Council ..... SAC
Ta'ang National Liberation Army ..... TNLA
The National Unity Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar ..... NUG
Union Solidarity and Development Party ..... USDP
United States of America ..... USA

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