



EDITORIAL

Why Pakistan's Tech Journalists Need More Technical Depth

Pakistani fact-checkers found that four out of five viral claims they investigated in the past two years were false or misleading, and AI-related fact-checks rose sixfold in a single year — yet most newsrooms still assign the "technology beat" to whichever reporter is free, not to anyone trained to tell a real breach from a rumour or a genuine model release from a marketing stunt.

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By **Muhammad Ashraf Jilali** | Tech Journalist, New York | Published: July 2026

✉ a.jilali@gmail.com | Position: Technology Correspondent

Introduction

The Centre of Excellence in Journalism at IBA Karachi reviewed 1,026 potentially false or misleading claims circulating in Pakistan between December 2023 and November 2025 through its iVerify fact-checking project. Of the 513 it investigated in depth, 78.2 percent turned out to be false and another 19.7 percent misleading — meaning fewer than one in fifty stood up to scrutiny. AI-related fact-checks alone rose sixfold in 2025 compared with the year before, as generative tools made fabricated speeches, deepfake endorsements, and subtly altered footage cheap and easy to produce. During the May 2025 India-Pakistan conflict, recycled footage and AI-generated claims spread faster than either country's information ministries could respond to them.

None of this is primarily a technology problem. It is a newsroom capacity problem. Deepfakes, ransomware disclosures, AI policy launches, and cryptocurrency schemes now cross a general assignment desk as often as court rulings or cricket scores, but Pakistani journalism education still trains reporters overwhelmingly for a media landscape built around press conferences and press releases, not one where a reporter needs to independently judge whether a viral video's metadata is consistent with the claimed date, or whether a "sovereign AI" policy launch actually changes anything material. The gap between what newsrooms are now asked to verify and what most journalism graduates are equipped to verify has never been wider.

"A reporter who cannot tell a genuine breach disclosure from a rumour, or a real model release from a marketing stunt, is not covering technology. They are laundering someone else's claims through a byline."

Why Journalism Schools Haven't Caught Up

Pakistan's mass communication curricula, largely unrevised in substance since HEC's 2013 framework, still centre on press law, reporting fundamentals, and traditional broadcast production. Data journalism, verification tooling, and any grounding in how the technologies reporters now cover actually work remain electives at best, entirely absent at worst. A former dean of mass communication at two major Pakistani universities put it bluntly in a recent industry essay: journalism education can no longer focus solely on traditional reporting, and must



integrate digital storytelling and data journalism into the core rather than treat them as add-ons for the technically curious.

Where training does exist, it has largely had to be built outside the university system entirely. The Centre of Excellence in Journalism at IBA, founded partly because — in the words of one of its own program directors — Pakistan had "limited or no world-class training or education opportunities for journalists," now runs the country's most credible fact-checking and data-journalism workshops. One CEJ trainer working with business and economic reporters noted that even experienced journalists on specialised beats often lack the theoretical grounding to explain complex technical material to the public — a diagnosis that applies at least as sharply to technology as it does to debt and development economics, and arguably more sharply, given how fast the underlying subject matter now changes.

Key Findings & Impact

The consequences show up in specific, checkable ways. Reporting on Pakistan's own cybersecurity incidents this year — a ransomware attack on the Capital Development Authority's billing system, a breach at an oil and gas exporter — has often repeated whatever an official statement claimed without independently establishing what data was actually exposed or how the intrusion occurred, because few reporters on the story had the background to ask. Coverage of AI policy announcements routinely repeats terms like "sovereign AI" without examining whether the underlying infrastructure, funding, or talent retention needed to make the claim real actually exists. None of this requires a computer science degree to fix. It requires reporters who know enough to ask a second question.

This has real downstream costs. Azhar Abbas, chairperson of CEJ's advisory board, has warned that when mainstream media cannot present verified facts with confidence, the resulting vacuum is filled by unverified social media content and AI-driven networks — a dynamic that punishes exactly the outlets trying hardest to get technical stories right, because audiences increasingly cannot tell a careful report from a confident guess. A technology desk that cannot distinguish a real security disclosure from a rumour does not just publish one bad story; it erodes the credibility of every subsequent story the same outlet runs on the same beat.

What's Next?

Fixing this does not require turning journalism students into engineers. It requires journalism schools to treat basic technical literacy — how to read a company's security disclosure, how to reverse-image-search a viral clip, how to ask a credible clarifying question about an AI claim — as core curriculum rather than an optional module bolted on for whoever happens to be interested. CEJ's model of short, practitioner-led, skills-based workshops has already shown this works when it is tried; the gap is that it exists almost entirely outside the formal degree system, reaching a few dozen working journalists a year rather than the thousands of students graduating from mass communication departments annually.

Newsrooms have a role here too, distinct from what universities can fix: dedicated technology desks with reporters who cover the beat long enough to build real sourcing and pattern recognition, rather than rotating whoever is free through it story by story. Pakistan does not lack technology stories worth covering — it has ransomware attacks on public infrastructure, a national AI policy, a fintech sector caught between over-regulation and opportunity, and a curriculum reform debate happening in its own universities. What it lacks, still, is enough journalists equipped to cover any of it with the technical depth the stories actually deserve — and until journalism schools treat that as a curriculum problem rather than an optional specialism, the fact-checkers will keep finding four false claims for every one that holds up.

About the Author

Asharaf is a Tech Journalist in New York, and a former technology correspondent who now researches media literacy and journalism curriculum reform. She can be reached at a.jilali@gmail.com.