

CAUSES OF FRIVOLOUS INFORMATION IN POLICE STATIONS

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ABSTRACT

The issue of frivolous information in police stations has become a pervasive challenge for law enforcement agencies worldwide. This study aims to explore the underlying causes of frivolous information, investigate its potential consequences, and propose a comprehensive approach to address the problem effectively. The study aimed to examine the causes of frivolous information. We conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) comprising lawyers, police and community common individuals. The results of the study showed that the community is well aware of the issue of frivolous information in police stations. The study concluded that bribery, political influence, personal and family disputes, public pressure, and social media influence are the major causes of frivolous information. The study proposed the use of advanced technologies in the investigative process. Training programs for law enforcement personnel and, more importantly, legal consequences for false reporting are also recommended as part of a multi-faceted approach. By addressing the root causes and implementing effective strategies, this research seeks to improve law enforcement efficiency and restore public confidence in the criminal justice system.

Keywords: Fake information, Frivolous Information, Police, Criminal, Conflict

INTRODUCTION

Frivolous information in police stations is a widespread problem in Pakistan. The police play a crucial role in maintaining law and order, and when they cannot accurately document and report incidents, it can have severe consequences. Frivolous information refers to content, data, or knowledge that is trivial, inconsequential, or lacking in significance or seriousness (Guthrie, 2000). It typically consists of unimportant facts, details, or anecdotes that hold little value or contribute to meaningful understanding or discussion. In law, frivolous or vexatious is a term used to challenge a complaint or a legal proceeding being heard as lacking in merit or to deny, dismiss, or strike out any ensuing judicial or non-judicial processes. The term is used in several jurisdictions, including England & Wales, Ireland, and New Zealand. Frivolous information is often seen as superficial and entertaining but ultimately trivial or inconsequential. It may include celebrity gossip, trivial anecdotes, irrelevant trivia, or external details about a subject matter. While it may serve as a source of entertainment or brief amusement, frivolous information is only sometimes considered relevant or substantial in discussions or decision-making processes that require deeper analysis or consideration of important matters. It is important to note that categorizing information as frivolous can be subjective and dependent on context, as what may be considered frivolous in one context or situation could be relevant or meaningful in another

(Che and Earnhart, 1997). The use of frivolous information in police reports can undermine the credibility of the police and erode public trust in law enforcement. It also has the potential to compromise the administration of justice and can lead to wrongful convictions. In recent years, numerous reports of frivolous information have been being used in police reports in Pakistan. This has been linked to various factors, including corruption, lack of proper training and resources, and a lack of accountability in the police force (Abbas, 2009). The consequences of frivolous information in police reports can be far-reaching and damaging. It can lead to frivolous allegations against innocent people and result in wrongful arrests, detention, and convictions. This can have devastating effects on the lives of individuals and their families and can lead to long-term consequences for their mental and physical health (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, 2018). Moreover, frivolous information in police reports can undermine the criminal justice system's integrity. It can result in wrongful convictions and severe and prolonged human rights violations (Abbas, 2011). A police station is a place declared generally or specifically by the Provincial Government to be a police station. It includes any local area so specified except a beat-house section 2 (1898) Criminal Code of Procedure. On the other hand, a police station is a designated facility or building where police officers and personnel are stationed to carry out law enforcement activities and maintain public order within the Punjab province of Pakistan. The police station serves as a local base for police operations and handles various aspects of policing within its jurisdiction. The primary functions of a police station are Crime Prevention and Investigation. Police stations are responsible for preventing and investigating criminal activities in their area. This includes conducting patrols, responding to emergency calls, and collecting evidence to solve crimes. The main objective of this study is to explore the causes of frivolous information in police stations in Pakistan and to examine the consequences of this problem.

Review of Literature

Warrach (2004) highlighted the issue of police powers in Pakistan and proposed that a balance between operational independence and accountability is critical to police reform. Autonomy in Decision-Making Police forces require a certain degree of functional freedom to enforce the law and maintain public order effectively. This includes the ability to make decisions regarding resource allocation, deployment of personnel, and response to criminal activities without undue political interference. Operational independence allows the police to respond promptly to incidents and emergencies, effectively maintaining law and order. Ahmed and Ahmed (2012) studied the slum areas in Karachi. Like many other urban areas, it often faces unique challenges that can influence law enforcement dynamics. Slum areas are characterized by high levels of poverty, limited access to essential services, and inadequate infrastructure. These socioeconomic disparities contribute to various social problems, including crime, drug abuse, and gang activity. Slum areas tend to be densely populated, with inadequate housing and sanitation facilities. The lack of formal urban planning and unplanned settlements can create an environment where criminal activities can thrive.

Perito and Parvez (2014) claimed that Pakistan's police stations can be crucial in counterterrorism efforts. There are some ways police stations can contribute to counterterrorism efforts. Police stations can serve as frontline sources of intelligence gathering. Officers can collect and analyze information about potential terrorist activities, including suspicious

individuals, radicalization trends, and local networks. Effective intelligence-sharing mechanisms with relevant security agencies can help identify and prevent potential threats. Police stations can engage with local communities to foster trust and gather information. Building strong relationships with community members allows police officers to receive tips and leads about suspicious activities or individuals. Community policing initiatives can also help identify and address grievances that may contribute to radicalization. Shabbir et al. (2018) argued that weak accountability mechanisms contributed to the persistence of corruption. The lack of effective oversight and disciplinary processes can undermine public trust in the police and create a perception of impunity for corrupt officers. Corruption within the police force affects service delivery and general satisfaction. When citizens experience corrupt practices, such as paying bribes to access essential services or facing hurdles in reporting crimes, it erodes their confidence in the police. It diminishes their perception of the legitimacy of law enforcement. Corruption can exacerbate discrimination and abuse of power within the police force. Marginalized communities or vulnerable individuals may be disproportionately targeted for bribes or harassment, leading to feelings of injustice and alienation. Corruption erodes public trust in the police and undermines their legitimacy as a law enforcement institution. When citizens perceive the police as corrupt, it diminishes their willingness to cooperate, report crimes, or seek help from law enforcement agencies. Braimah and Mbowura (2014) identified that crime combat in developing economies, such as Ghana, presents unique challenges for the police service. The Ghana Police Service faces several dilemmas in effectively addressing crime. Developing economies often need more resources, including limited funding, outdated equipment, and inadequate infrastructure. More resources can hamper the police service's ability to effectively combat crime, investigate cases, and respond promptly to incidents. Efforts to fight corruption and enhance police legitimacy in Lahore require a collaborative approach involving government authorities, civil society organizations, and the community. Establishing a transparent and accountable police force is crucial for maintaining law and order, protecting citizens' rights, and fostering public trust in the justice system.

Cheema and Hameed (2018) explored that developed economies often needed help providing adequate training and capacity-building opportunities for police officers. The Ghana Police Service faces the dilemma of ensuring that officers receive quality training on crime investigation techniques, community policing, human rights, and other relevant skills. The Ghana Police Service may face political pressure or interference, hindering their ability to act impartially and independently. Maintaining the operational autonomy of the police service while upholding the rule of law can be a delicate balance. Effective crime combat often requires collaboration and coordination with other government agencies, such as the judiciary, prosecution services, and social welfare departments. The Ghana Police Service is challenged to establish effective inter-agency cooperation mechanisms to enhance crime investigation, prosecution, and rehabilitation efforts. Addressing the dilemmas faced by the Ghana Police Service requires a multi-faceted approach. Ensuring sufficient funding allocation for the police service is crucial to addressing resource constraints, improving infrastructure, and acquiring modern equipment and technology.

Methodology

The study was qualitative in nature. We conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) to understand the frivolous information and its causes and consequences. We use the same themes

to provide a simplistic understanding of the issue. We conducted two focus group discussions, and the composition of each was as follows:

1. Layman = 03, the laypeople were those individuals who have been related to the criminal system, such as they had faced the judicial system but not been convicted, or one of those who had been affected by the fake information in the judicial system.
2. Lawyers = 03, those law practitioners who have been high court lawyers with at least practice 05 years in the lower court.
3. Police = 03, those police officers dealing with the First Information Report (FIR). The researchers interviewed two Station House Officers (SHO) and one sub-inspector.

The FGDs session was divided into three terms. The first session term was only about the community understanding frivolous information. The second term discusses the causes of frivolous information, and the last term is about the way forward of frivolous information.

Results

In each FGD, we begin the session after completing the prerequisite formalities, with the understanding of the frivolous information.

Community Understanding of Frivolous Information

To comprehend the knowledge and understanding of the community about frivolous information, the panel was asked to describe it. Participant B responded, “It is a baseless and fabricated story. The elements of frivolous information are that it should be against real facts, be self-made, and falsely implicate someone. Is it different from F.I.R. because it is simple information under inquiry? If proven as disinformation, it is discarded. F.I.R is lodged after verification of information and inquiry.” Concerning the self-made stories, Participant A said,

“One day, I sat in a police station for some inquiry. Police received an emergency call regarding my village. When I returned and asked the people about the incident, it was self-made.”

There is a sharp distinction between frivolous information and First Information Reports (FIR) within a legal framework. While frivolous information lacks relevance and substance, FIRs are formal complaints initiating criminal investigations. The First Information Report (FIR) holds significant importance in law enforcement as it is the foundation for starting criminal investigations. However, it is crucial to differentiate FIRs, which carry legal weight, from frivolous information, which needs more substance and relevance to law enforcement objectives. Frivolous information, as discussed earlier, refers to data or reports that lack relevance, importance, or substance in the investigation, prevention, or resolution of crimes. It possesses distinct characteristics that differentiate it from FIRs.

In summary, frivolous information differs significantly from FIRs in terms of relevance, legal status, purpose, accountability, and consequences. While frivolous information lacks substance and relevance to law enforcement objectives, FIRs serve as formal complaints that initiate criminal investigations, carrying legal weight and guiding the subsequent actions of law enforcement agencies. Differentiating between frivolous information and FIRs is crucial for law

enforcement personnel to focus their resources on legitimate cases, ensuring effective and fair criminal justice processes.

Participant I identified essential sources of frivolous information and said that unverified and said, *“baseless tips, false and prank calls, personal disputes and speculations are the major sources of frivolous information.”* Participant D believed that information lacking investigative value could be real fact or completely frivolous information. She further extended that it showed that such information also has the source of instinctive negativity among the people because *“people for no reason search for a reason to malign others.”*

Causes of Frivolous Information

In the second term of the FGD session, the panel discussed the causes of frivolous information. Participant B said, *“blackmailing, political revenge, personal grudge, bribery, and police touts are the major causes of frivolous information in police stations.”* Participant D believed that police stations are the second party of the politicians, and they reciprocally benefit each other. *“Police are not impartial. S.H.O. is an agent of any politicians who got him hired. To promote the agenda of politicians, they do his bidding. Police secure bribery, and people are harassed by it.”* Participant A extended the debate on bribery and police mechanisms while including politicians. He said,

“Police stations receive first information. They act without any inquiry and leave them after receiving bribes. They have all the facilities, but they do it to make politicians happy, making money and satisfying their grudges a petty ego, they do it.”

Participant D also stressed bribery as one of the leading causes of frivolous information at police stations. She said that regardless of the other operative factors and personal grudge of police officers, their relatives or anyone who can offer a good bribe for registration of an F.I.R. is a total winner.” Participant H said,

“The penalty for frivolous information is like no penalty; on the other hand, if one protects such information, he would have a reward like cash, a car, or even a house. The bigger the case, the bigger the reward.”

Relating frivolous information to the justice system, respondent B claimed, *“The investigation officers receive bribery from politicians and other influential persons for implicating the innocent. And these innocent ones make another file for the criminal courts, burdening the criminal justice system.”* Participant A pointed out another critical cause of frivolous information: poverty. He believed that poverty also breeds the flow of such information because the rich used the poor people to register such information in the police station. However, contrary to Participant A, participant I believed it also includes wealthy people, which does not make poverty a leading cause of frivolous information because *“it is the rich who cause the poor to register information.”*

The public's perception of the police and their expectations can contribute to accepting frivolous information. Police stations may face pressure to address all reported incidents, even

those lacking credibility. Public pressure, fueled by concerns over safety or a desire for swift action, can lead to the acceptance of frivolous information without proper scrutiny. Participant A described that

“Public pressure is a culture here, and police stations are part of such culture, then how is it possible that police stations stand against its own culture.”

Media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and influencing the information landscape. Media outlets can amplify specific incidents, create sensationalism, and generate public interest in particular cases. In the pursuit of capturing audience attention, media outlets may contribute to the presence of frivolous information by highlighting unverified reports or rumors without sufficient scrutiny. Such coverage can create public pressure on law enforcement agencies to address or investigate these incidents, even if they lack substance. Participant D related general stress with media influence; she said,

“We only think what media wants us to think; if they would show, say, a person A as a bad person, we also should think about it; media generates the public pressure.”

The advent of social media and citizen journalism platforms has democratized information sharing but also increased the risk of frivolous information. These platforms allow individuals to disseminate unverified information quickly, potentially reaching law enforcement agencies before the veracity of the data can be ascertained. The viral nature of social media can create a sense of urgency for police stations to respond, even to frivolous reports, to maintain public trust and address perceived threats. Participant B said that we should not forget that

“Social media is the mother of frivolous information related to the public pressure, mind game, political influence, and many more.”

The Way Forward

As far as the way forward is concerned, the summary of the proposed way forward is given below, representing the views, suggestions, and recommendations of all the participants. Professional training should promote attitudes like unbiased, tolerance, nobility, etc., which can reduce it. Religious motivations against bribery are also helpful. Religious ideals like justice and fairness should be promoted in training as a religious obligation.

- I. Police should be free of all political pressures and interferences.
- II. A committee should be formulated in every locality consisting of civil society to monitor the working of the police station of that place.
- III. Police should recruit noble and educated people and psychology tests should be designed to ensure it.
- IV. A mosque should be built in all the police stations. S.H.O. should play the role of Imam for his subordinates in all prayers and guide his associates in all five prayers.
- V. Whoever disseminates frivolous information must be put behind bars for the same offense.

- VI. If the Investigation officer of that frivolous information favors it, he should be dismissed from service and receive a heavy fine.
- VII. No action should be taken before verifying the information.
- VIII. Promotion should be given only to those who are noble and hardworking.

One of the important ways forward regarding frivolous information is that its reduction could reduce the recidivism because the socio-psychological factors are directly related with recidivism (Ahmad, Farid and Maqbool, 2022). Thus, the study is also of the view to restrict the registration of frivolous information so that the second and third time committing crime can be mitigated.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the community is enriched with understanding the frivolous information as they know it is a baseless and fabricated story. It is different from the First Investigation Report (FIR). The study explored various causes of frivolous information, including personal or family disputes, political interference, bribery, police culture, media or social media influence, and public pressure. The study proposed police independence to reduce the frivolous information flow in the police stations. The study also suggested that a local committee consisting of a majority of the local people would also be helpful in the reduction of such information. The study also proposed the use of advance technologies in investigation.

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