

WEAPONIZING INFORMATION: A STUDY OF DISINFORMATION AND INFORMATION WARFARE BETWEEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN

*Gull-e-Areeba and Ahmed Waqas Waheed**

Abstract

The rivalry between India and Pakistan, based on constant tensions over the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir, has shifted from conventional to network-centric warfare, especially information warfare. The modern era is characterised by Fifth-Generation Warfare (5GW), which focuses on the use of non-kinetic instruments, including disinformation, psychological operations, propaganda, and perception management, to influence political will, societal morale, and decision-making without military action. This paper discusses how information warfare is practised as statecraft in South Asia, with a specific focus on how it has shaped the realities, identities, and interests of two nuclear-armed adversaries. Drawing on Social Constructivism, the paper examines how these narratives are constructed and disseminated through algorithmic digital spaces, particularly during the Pulwama crisis of 2019 and the May 2025 conflict. This study used qualitative and analytical methodology to analyse the secondary data sources. Moreover, the case study research design is used to analyse two major cases of information warfare between India and Pakistan. Finally, it provides policy recommendations for how Pakistan should address disinformation, strengthen its digital infrastructure, and enhance its international perceptions.

Keywords: Disinformation, Information Warfare, Psychological Operations, Social Constructivism, India-Pakistan Relations.

Introduction

The rivalry between India and Pakistan dates back to their partition in 1947 through a series of conventional wars and conflicts over the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir, which has now shifted to hybrid warfare and particularly to information warfare. Today's world is living in a 5th generation warfare, which is characterised by the use of non-kinetic methods mainly focused on disinformation, psychological operations, propaganda, perception building, cyber-attacks to influence the political will, morale, and decision making for the attainment of political objectives without military confrontation.¹

*Gull-e-Areeba is a MPhil Scholar at IR&SS, Air University, Islamabad and also holds a Global UGRAD Fellow Fall-2023. Dr. Ahmed Waqas Waheed is a Research Analyst at the Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad. The authors can be reached at areebagull6000@gmail.com.

Information is now becoming a major tool for statecraft through the use of media channels, social media platforms, AI bots, and algorithm-based systems. States are now competing not only over territory but also trying to control perception and identity construction to gain legitimacy at the domestic and international levels. Many scholars have argued that evolution in modern warfare through technological advancements has empowered state and non-state actors to use kinetic and non-kinetic methods to shape domestic and international perceptions.² In South Asia, India and Pakistan are nuclear-weapon states, and any kind of disinformation campaign and social media war can create misinterpretation and chaos in public, and a lack of proper strategic communication can escalate the conflict.

This paper explains that information warfare is playing a role in constructing political realities and identities between India and Pakistan through traditional media and digital media. India portrays Pakistan as a supporter of militancy and itself as a defender against terrorism. Pakistan depicts itself as a victim and counters Indian propaganda by portraying India as the aggressor and violator of human rights in Indian-occupied Kashmir. These narratives and identities are reinforced and amplified through the use of digital platforms, deep fakes, AI bots, and algorithmic systems to gain legitimacy among the domestic public and influence international perceptions. This study is significant because it addresses the gap in existing literature, which contextualises the disinformation and information warfare but does not address its role in constructing identities, interests, and state behaviour in the international system.

This paper analyses India and Pakistan's construction of their own realities and identities through the lens of Social Constructivism because this is a post-truth era where reality is not given, but rather it is constructed through social interaction and narrative building. Furthermore, it examines the construction of narratives, realities, and identities during the major conflicts of Pulwama 2019 and the May 2025 conflict. The qualitative and analytical methodology is used to analyse the data, and data is collected through secondary sources. In the end, there are policy recommendations for Pakistan to protect its digital infrastructure and domestic public from disinformation and enhance its image at the international level.

A Constructivist Framework

Constructivists argue that international politics cannot be understood merely through material capabilities, anarchy, economic cooperation, and institutional framework; however, it is constructed through ideas, norms, beliefs, and shared meanings among actors. It opposes the assumptions of two major theories, Realism and Liberalism, and emphasises that reality is not given; it is socially constructed through social interaction and shared understanding among actors in the international system.³ Wendt argued in his article that Anarchy is not given; rather, Anarchy is what states make of it.⁴

Wendt believes that anarchy is not an objective reality; rather, it is the interaction of states that constructs the anarchy, legitimacy, norms, morality, and beliefs. Martha Finnemore & Kathryn Sikkink argued that norms and beliefs shaped the state's understanding of what is morally and ethically acceptable and legitimate.⁵ It also shaped the state's behaviour in the international system. Constructivists also argued that international structure is dynamic, and it is created and recreated through states' interaction with each other. Onuf explains the agent-structure relationship, which is mutually dependent on both agents and structures.⁶ The structure constructs the actors' identities and interests, and then the interaction of those actors either transforms or reproduces the system.⁷ Moreover, Wendt argued that these identities and interests are constructed through historical, cultural, and social processes among actors.⁸ The norms, identities, and beliefs in the international system evolve over time and change states' behaviour and international order.⁹ It takes time to change social realities because it is a long process. These social realities are also constructed through communication, discourse, and narrative building.

Constructivists argued that discourse plays a crucial role in shaping the political meaning that attaches to a concept because language and narrative construct states' perception about threats, opportunities, and priorities. Language, symbols, and narratives used in political speeches, writing, and discourse are important in constructing social realities.¹⁰ These realities are not objective, but rather intersubjective. Influential leaders, media channels, government websites, the education system, and digital platforms are used as tools to spread information to construct states' image at the domestic and international level.¹¹ Information also plays an important role in constructing identities and beliefs. Moreover, disinformation and propaganda have now become tools to manipulate the beliefs and perceptions of individuals and construct their realities. The narrative formation and knowledge generation are linked with power, as powerful states have control over narrative and information. Foucault said that powerful individuals and states construct reality through discourse, knowledge generation, and narrative building to influence other actors' perceptions and actions.¹² States deliberately spread disinformation to blur the line between reality and fiction; moreover, to gain their political objectives and enhance their image in the international system. Moreover, to gain legitimacy for their actions at the domestic and international level. In South Asia, India and Pakistan used discourse and narrative building to construct public perception and their policies towards each other.

India-Pakistan rivalry is best explained through constructivism because their identities, interests, norms, and beliefs are constructed through their long-time rivalry. A long history of wars, conflicts, cultural differences, and political disagreements has defined both states' perception of each other and their foreign policy. In the international system, states defined their interests and actions based on their perception of themselves and others. In the India-Pakistan context, both portray each other as a threat. India portrays itself as a rational and responsible state combating terrorism, either by non-state actors or state-sponsored terrorism.

Moreover, India portrays Pakistan as a supporter of terrorism in Indian-occupied Kashmir. Pakistan portrays itself as a victim of Indian aggression, defender of oppressed Kashmiri Muslims, and a responsible actor.¹³ These identities are reinforced through diplomatic narratives, social media campaigns, political speeches, and educational discourse. Because narrative construction is important to maintain domestic peace and legitimise states' actions in international forums. For instance, in the 2019 Balakot crisis and the 2025 May crisis, both states were involved in propagating their narratives; India was blaming Pakistan for state-sponsored terrorism and portraying itself as a defender of terrorism.¹⁴ Pakistan portrayed itself as a victim and denied India's accusations. Also, defending their national sovereignty. Through communication and narrative building, each side tries to reinforce its national interests and legitimise its actions.

Disinformation and propaganda are used by states to construct political realities because when false narratives are repeated and amplified through social media networks, writings, and diplomatic rhetoric, they will eventually become accepted truth and influence the decision-making process. In South Asia, India and Pakistan used the information domain to reinforce their interests and identities to portray others as a threat to their self-interests and existence. For instance, a report from EU DisinfoLab has uncovered a long-running disinformation campaign by India to damage the reputation of Pakistan. It was a huge network of fake media outlets, personalities, NGOs, and think tanks.¹⁵ So, information warfare is also intersubjective because, in this, the meanings are created and contested between actors to legitimise their actions and policies. In this digital era, information space has become a new platform where states reconstruct their identities and build their narrative to influence and construct the perception of the international community. In the May 2025 crisis, both states were involved in a social media warfare using memes and hashtags as weapons to demoralise the enemy's forces and destroy their political will.¹⁶ Now, war is not only physical, but it is also fought on social media using disinformation, deepfakes, and propaganda to construct domestic and international perception.

Review of Existing Scholarships on Disinformation and Information Warfare

The existing literature is organised into five major themes: information warfare and disinformation as a major non-kinetic tool of hybrid warfare; psychological operations and strategic communication as a tool of influence; digital and social media platforms becoming a new battlefield; hybrid warfare and its impact on the strategic stability of South Asia; and the role of societal vulnerabilities in identity construction and perception management. These themes explain the changing character of modern warfare in South Asia and discuss the background of the weaponisation of information, disinformation campaigns, the use of psychological operations, narrative building, and propaganda on the strategic, operational, and societal levels.

Information warfare and disinformation campaigns have become a major non-kinetic tool in modern warfare; moreover, states and non-state actors use these tools to further their political interests without a military confrontation. In the late 20th century, information warfare was only a military tool that involved electronic and cyber operations targeting the enemy's critical infrastructure and communication networks to disrupt their decision-making and protect their own electronic infrastructure to gain a strategic advantage.¹⁷ This war is based on the control of information to change public perceptions, undermine the adversary's decision-making process, and form an opinion at the international level. Disinformation is an integral part of information warfare; it is a deliberate spread of false and fabricated information to influence the behaviour of domestic and international audiences.¹⁸ Disinformation campaigns and narrative-building serve as a major tool to destroy public trust, undermine legitimacy, and weaken social cohesion. Saud and Kazim present empirical data that shows how India used disinformation campaigns to portray Pakistan as an unstable and undemocratic state, which has been targeting its sovereignty and reputation at the international level.¹⁹ These works show that information warfare is not only confined to the conventional battlegrounds but also involves the strategic manipulation by the state, ideological and religious manipulation by non-state actors. Psychological operations and strategic communication are also necessary elements of information warfare.

Psychological Operations (PSYOP) and strategic communication are major tools of information warfare to manipulate decision-making, destroy forces' morale, and shape public opinion. Psychological operations are planned operations designed to spread selected information to a specific audience to influence their perception and the behaviour of the government and organisations.²⁰ States used Psychological operations during conflict to prevent chaos among the domestic public by censoring information. It is used to shape the narrative of the audience by spreading false information. Strategic Communication is also a major tactic during psychological operations. Strategic communication is the application of communication by the state or non-state actors for the attainment of political goals and communicating their demands to the opposing party.²¹

The primary mediums of communication are diplomacy and media networks. Jannat Naseeb explains how India has been employing deception, strategic communication, and propaganda to weaken societies and influence decision-making processes of the state, particularly in defence policies like nuclear policy.²² Naseeb highlights how narrative framing and propaganda are utilised by India to influence the psychological perception of the domestic and international audience. Lavoy further explains how strategic communication and propaganda were used during the Kargil conflict to justify the state's action and strengthen the national identity.²³ These works show that Psychological operations and strategic communication are integral parts of modern warfare, which are used to manage the perception of the masses. Digital and social media are also important platforms for disinformation campaigns and Psychological Operations.

Digital and social media platforms are major platforms that amplified the impact of information warfare. The rise of social media and the internet has expanded information warfare from the military to the socio-political domain, facilitating the rapid flow of information among the government and citizens. This digital shift has transformed warfare from a physical to a digital battlefield where states spread their narrative to influence public perception, construct societal norms and beliefs, and destabilise the enemy's public.²⁴ The scholars believe that the algorithmic manipulation of social media platforms allows the quick dissemination of disinformation and involves the masses in the spread and creation of a narrative. The article by Bhat and Afshana also demonstrates that in the post-truth era, social media has fuelled political and social tensions in Kashmir by creating false political realities due to the weak fact-checking mechanism and institutions in India.²⁵ This is further supported by Zaighum and Ali, who presented social media as a multi-level weapon that uses AI bots, digital trolls, and coordinated campaigns to collect data and then analyse it for cognitive warfare.²⁶ All these studies demonstrate that digital platforms are a proactive space of communication to create a psychological impact by creating political realities.

Information warfare is a major part of hybrid warfare, which is a combination of disinformation campaigns, cyber operations, propaganda, strategic communication, and on-ground military operations. Many scholars have talked about the use of hybrid warfare by state and non-state actors to gain their political objectives without direct military confrontation. Dr Rabia Akhtar claims that hybrid warfare has transformed the character of warfare in South Asia because now the states can achieve their geopolitical objectives not only through conventional warfare but also by using non-conventional warfare, especially disinformation and disruptive technologies.²⁷ Dilawar Khan, Mehmood, and Shah have explained how cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns during 2019-2024 have contributed to mistrust and disrupted the strategic equilibrium by creating a blurred line between war and peace.²⁸ Sahibzada Muhammad Usman also describes the economic and institutional consequences of organised disinformation campaigns in Pakistan.²⁹ Non-state actors are also changing their tactics and using disinformation to gain acceptability. Abdul Basit explains how non-state actors and extremist groups in South Asia use disinformation and conspiracy theories to justify their violent actions and gain support among society.³⁰ All these studies emphasise that hybrid warfare has escalated the risks and made crisis management harder, creating instability in South Asia.

The societal and institutional vulnerabilities have catalysed the narrative and identity formation in South Asia; moreover, amplified the impact of propaganda. According to scholars, information warfare has strong roots in social norms, beliefs, and identity politics. Lavoy explains that India and Pakistan used propaganda and narrative framing to create identities of self and other (enemy) to justify their strategic actions.³¹ Propaganda is the mass distribution of false information through unknown sources or limited correct information from credible sources to confuse the enemy and make them draw wrong conclusions.³²

Propaganda is of three types: white, grey, and black propaganda, which can be differentiated based on the type of information and sources through which it is disseminated. Afridi and Usman also highlight the role of structural vulnerabilities such as political instability, ethnic tensions, and socio-economic inequalities in intensifying the effect of disinformation campaigns and propaganda.³³ Waseem Ullah et al. show that the manipulation of algorithms undermines public trust in the information ecosystem and weakens state institutions.³⁴ Abdul Azeez emphasises that digital diplomacy can influence and distort the public perception on the international level.³⁵ Information warfare works not only on technologies but also on socially constructed meaning, which emphasises the role of narratives and identity formation in strengthening national security and strategic stability.

The existing literature emphasises the transition of modern warfare and challenges its causes to states' national security. The growing use of social media platforms has undermined the credibility of the information ecosystem and created privacy issues. It also provides a new space for state and non-state actors to construct identities and their political realities. Information warfare has blurred the line between reality and fake. Digital platforms gave an unprecedented advantage to states and non-state actors to smoothly communicate with a larger audience. The societal vulnerabilities have amplified the effect of these disinformation and propaganda campaigns. The existing literature emphasises India's coordinated propaganda against Pakistan, and Pakistan's strategies are defensive to counter India's propaganda. It showed the construction of narratives and counterpropaganda in these two states. There is a lack of a constructivist approach to studying the formation of identity, norms, and interests. This study is looking at the issue of identity formation and the construction of national interest from a constructivist approach to explain how states behave in the international system and their perception of threat and security.

Methodology

This paper used a qualitative and analytical method to analyse the construction of identities, norms, beliefs, and interests by India and Pakistan. The qualitative method is best for analysing the complex dynamics of India and Pakistan's rivalry by dividing them into five themes to easily understand their behaviour towards each other in South Asia. The case study research design is used to provide a comprehensive analysis of how both states used information warfare, disinformation, propaganda, deepfakes, and AI-bots to manipulate the public perception. This study uses case studies of the 2019 Pulwama-Balakot crisis and May 2025 to analyze the use of constructed reality through social media platforms to influence the political will, decision-making, and morale of the public. Moreover, it proposes some recommendations, based on the above research, to Pakistan to strengthen its existing digital infrastructure to protect its citizens from fake information and improve its image at the international level.

The research is based on secondary data sources, which include peer-reviewed papers, websites, news articles, reports by the EU, and books. The constructivist lens is used to analyze the case studies and identity construction by both states to understand their behavior in the international system.

Historical Evolution of Information Warfare in South Asia

Propaganda and Psychological Operations have always been part of India and Pakistan's strategy; previously, they used state-controlled media to display their government positions, territorial claims, and boost patriotism in their own public. Moreover, during conflict and peacetime, they portray each other as an existential threat to their own security. Primarily, the media were used as a tool of communication during wartime to boost nationalistic sentiments in the public and the forces and to strategically communicate with the enemy and the international audience.³⁶ After the nuclearisation of both states, the media became more scrutinised, and the Indian media portrays Pakistan as a sponsor of cross-border terrorism, while Pakistan portrays India as an aggressor and repressor in Indian-occupied Kashmir.³⁷ During the 1990s-2000s, the liberalisation of media markets brought a surge in private news channels; instead of providing truth, they exaggerated the news, which intensified the rivalry between India and Pakistan. In both countries, the media became a tool for political actors to spread nationalistic narratives, provide disinformation about different events, and continue the framing of othering. During conflicts, media channels were highly biased and provided unverified claims and evidence to show their state as victorious. The Kargil conflict of 1999 and the 2008 Mumbai attacks have shown how states used media as a tool for their propaganda to influence international perception and gain a strategic advantage.³⁸ Social media brought significant changes and created an unregulated flow of information, which blurs the line between reality and fake information.

The advent of social media and digital media has evolved information warfare because WhatsApp, YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook have become primary tools for spreading propaganda, disinformation campaigns, and narrative building. Social media provides easy access to a large audience and provides a swift flow of information, enabling state and non-state actors to spread their narrative and shape beliefs, norms, and ideologies of the domestic and international public.³⁹ Now, conflicts are no longer limited to physical borders but have transcended to the digital space, and information has become a strategic weapon, so control over narrative is necessary for the national security of both states. Both states employed AI bots, coordinated networks, and online trolling to defame others and strengthen their own political agenda.⁴⁰ A report by EU Disinfo Labs in 2019 has uncovered a long-running Indian network, Indian Chronicles, comprising fake media channels, fake websites, fake think-tanks, and dead individuals, spread across 97 countries, which aims to defame Pakistan.⁴¹

Indian Chronicles aimed to portray Pakistan as a weak democracy, supporter of militancy, and a threat to the stability of South Asia, to construct a perception of the UN and EU about Pakistan.⁴² This is not the only case where India weaponised information to defame Pakistan; there are many other cases of information warfare.

India and Pakistan employed AI bots, deepfakes, big data, coordinated networks, the entertainment industry, and content-generating systems to undermine each other's sovereignty and international image. India uses its Bollywood industry not only as a tool of soft power but also as a tool of propaganda. Indian popular movies such as *Raazi*, *Uri: The Surgical Strike*, *SherShaah*, *LOC: Kargil*, *Operation Sindoor*, *Dhurandhar*, have played a major role in shaping public opinion about Pakistan as a threat and serve the Indian image as defenders against terrorism.⁴³ Pulwama 2019 and May 2025 are two major case studies of information warfare between India and Pakistan in which both states employed digital platforms, fake videos, fake news, and fake pictures to undermine the other state's legitimacy. In these incidents, both states were involved in propagating their narratives; India was blaming Pakistan for supporting and funding militant groups to spread fear in India-occupied Kashmir. Pakistan portrayed itself as a victim and supporter of the oppressed Kashmiris in India. Moreover, portrayed India as a human rights violator and aggressor in Indian Occupied Kashmir. Also, defending their national sovereignty by responding with a calculated and proportionate response. Through strategic communication and narrative building, each side tries to reinforce its national interests and legitimise its actions against the other.

Case Studies

The 2019 Pulwama-Balakot crisis is a major event of information warfare, which shows the role of traditional media in shaping international public perception, conflict escalation, and raising nationalist sentiments among the domestic public. In 2019, a suicide bomber targeted a convoy of Indian paramilitary forces in Pulwama, causing 40 deaths and several injuries to security personnel.⁴⁴ India blamed Pakistan for cross-border terrorism by supporting terrorist organisations in its state. Pakistan denied the accusation, stating that it does not support any terrorist organization, and asked India to provide evidence of its claim. This incident led to direct military confrontation, and India retaliated with air strikes on February 26, 2019, claiming that it targeted terrorist camps in Balakot. The media in both states played a major role in shaping public perception by framing the incident in a way that supports their national interests and enrage the public with nationalistic sentiments. The Indian media emphasises its claim that Pakistan is responsible for promoting cross-border terrorism in India through the dissemination of fake images and reports, which generate support for India's military retaliation from the domestic public.⁴⁵ Indian media use these tactics to reinforce the threat of Pakistan and the Muslim identity as a threat to Hindus from India and Pakistan. India used black propaganda against Pakistan to incite hatred among the Pakistani public against their government.⁴⁶

Their propaganda is mostly inclined towards war escalation and less towards peace. In contrast, Pakistani media was denying the Indian allegation of state-sponsored terrorism and highlighting that there is a lack of evidence that confirms Pakistan's link with this terrorist attack. Pakistan portrays itself as a victim of India's aggression and portrays this event as a part of Indian propaganda to justify its airstrikes in Balakot.

Social Media, WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, also play a crucial role in amplifying the effect of information warfare in the Pulwama-Balakot incident and identity construction of both states at the domestic and international level. Hussain, Shahzad, and Saud, in their article, did an analysis of 20,000 tweets during the Pulwama crisis, which shows that the common social media user and politically inclined people played a crucial role in propagating polarised information and disinformation.⁴⁷ The Indian media was more inclined towards war, while the Pakistani media was more inclined towards peace. The news media said India is playing with fire and trying to demonise the Kashmiris and bash Pakistan without proper evidence.⁴⁸ During Indian strikes near the Line of Control, Pakistan shot down Indian Air Force jets and captured Indian pilot Abhinandan Varthaman; later, he was returned to the Indian government.⁴⁹ Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said that the pilot release is a peace gesture from Pakistan. Moreover, India and Pakistan are both nuclear states, so we should avoid conflict escalation and resolve the conflict through talks. Pakistan showed a rational attitude towards conflict and asked the International community to intervene and stop the conflict. This gesture has raised Pakistan's image at the International forum.

The May 2025 conflict is a recent example of information warfare between India and Pakistan in which the intensity of disinformation campaigns and propaganda tactics was different and higher than in previous incidents. This incident is triggered by a terrorist attack allegedly linked with The Resistance Front (TRF), on April 22 in Pahalgam town, which killed 25 Hindu tourists. Modi accused Pakistan of sponsoring cross-border terrorism and said those who are responsible will be punished.⁵⁰ In response, India launched an Operation Sindoor under which India launched missile strikes in the homeland of Pakistan and Pakistan-administered Jammu and Kashmir on May 7, 2025. India claimed they attacked terrorist camps, but Pakistan rejected those claims. The name of this operation was used as part of propaganda to avenge those women who were widowed during Pahalgam.⁵¹ This was used to emotionally manipulate the sentiments of the Indian public and gain support for military retaliation. India claimed to have killed 100 terrorists during this airstrike.⁵² There were fake videos and pictures on social media that showed the Rawalpindi stadium becoming a pile of rubble after an Indian attack.

Another fabricated video showed that Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has admitted defeat.⁵³ On May 8, 2025, A fake video of Pakistan's military spokesman, admitting that they had lost their 2 JF-17 fighter jets to Indian SAMs.⁵⁴

There are many more fake videos, audios, and images that show Indian victory after this operation and serve Indian propaganda. Pakistan also used information warfare and disinformation to counter Indian black propaganda to label Pakistan a sponsor of terrorism. In response, on May 10, 2025, Pakistan launched an operation *Bunyan-um-Marsoos*, which involved precision strikes targeting Indian military installations, coupled with cyber-attacks on critical infrastructure.⁵⁵

The term is derived from *Surah Al-Saff* (61:4) in the Qur'an, meaning a solid wall, relating this to an ideological resistance and a collective response. This operation was a calculated response from Pakistan for violating its international borders by India in *Operation Sindoor*. This operation has shown Pakistan as a rational state, only targeting counter-force targets and not escalating to nuclear. Pakistan claimed that it shot down six Indian fighter jets, including a French-made *Rafale*.⁵⁶ During this conflict, both states took hard measures like blocking each other's media websites, government websites, and censoring social media content. India blocked at least 12 Pakistani news sites, and Pakistan blocked 8 Indian news websites; moreover, it issued requests to social media platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and Twitter to take down unwanted posts and close accounts.⁵⁷ Twitter received a request to take down 8000 accounts and posts collectively. The information control was aimed at controlling the crisis escalation and giving selected information to the public.

Policy Recommendation

Pakistan is more vulnerable to information systems, so it should adopt a comprehensive information security strategy that integrates digital systems, media regulation, cyber governance, diplomacy, and strategic communication. This will enhance coordination among different agencies and information companies to a timely response to any disinformation. Pakistan should also invest in strategic communication by making a team of media analysts, data analysts, and experts to create its narrative and enhance its international image, because Pakistan's narrative and image are very weak at the international level.

Pakistan should introduce a framework for detecting fake information, fact-checking, and enhancing transparency to counter disinformation campaigns. It should introduce courses and conferences to give media literacy to civilians to detect false information and report it to the government for a timely response. Pakistan should work on its digital diplomacy to create its discourse and counter hostile narratives. Pakistan should advocate for confidence-building measures at the regional level in the information domain to avoid misinterpretation during a crisis to prevent escalation. These steps will enhance strategic stability in South Asia.

Conclusion

Information warfare is a new form of warfare in South Asia, India, and Pakistan, using media channels, WhatsApp, Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and websites to propagate their narratives and identities; moreover, to counter the enemy's propaganda to construct public perception, enhance morale, and legitimacy at the domestic level. Moreover, enhance its discourse and image at the international level to legitimise its actions. The propaganda is also used to eradicate social cohesion and undermine the legitimacy of domestic institutions. Social constructivism is used to explain how both states construct their political realities, narratives, and interests through traditional media, but now it is reinforced through information space.

The use of disinformation, psychological operations, propaganda, and strategic communication is used to construct identities and gain political objectives, which is evident through many conflicts between India and Pakistan, such as the Kargil, 2019 Pulwama-Balakot incident, and May 2025 conflict. These conflicts have identified Pakistan's vulnerabilities towards information warfare due to its weak systems, ineffective policy implementation, societal vulnerabilities, and weak discourse. Therefore, Pakistan needs to make a comprehensive policy and improve the implementation of old policies to protect its information systems and enhance its narrative and image at the domestic and international levels.

References

- ¹ Asfandyar Cheema et al., "Identifying Tools and Means of Interstate Disinformation Warfare against Pakistan: An Exploratory Study," *Journal of Media & Communication (JMC)* 5, no. 2 (January 2025): 108, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://ojs.ilmauniversity.edu.pk/index.php/jmc/article/view/126>.
- ² Joseph S. Nye, "Diffusion and cyberpower," in *The future of power* (Public Affairs, 2011), 115, .
- ³ John Baylis et al., "Social Constructivism," in *The globalization of world politics: An introduction to international relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 195.
- ⁴ Alexander Wendt, "Anarchy is what states make of it: The social construction of power politics," *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (1992): 395, accessed December 30, 2025, doi:10.1017/s0020818300027764.
- ⁵ Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, "International norm dynamics and political change," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1998): 916, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2601361>.
- ⁶ Nicholas G. Onuf, "Constructivism," in *World of our making: Rules and rule in social theory and international relations* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 61, <https://books.google.com/books?id=DRopOoA-38oC&printsec=frontcover>.
- ⁷ Baylis, "Social Constructivism," 196.
- ⁸ Alexander. Wendt, *Social theory of international politics* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 115.
- ⁹ Finnemore and Sikkink, "International norm dynamics and political change," 888.
- ¹⁰ Jill Steans et al., "Social Constructivism," in *Introduction to international relations: Perspectives and themes* (Pearson Education, 2010), 188.
- ¹¹ Jutta Weldes, "Constructing National Interest," *European Journal of International Relations* 2, no. 3 (1996): 281, accessed December 30, 2025, doi:10.1177/1354066196002003001.
- ¹² Michel Foucault, *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 235.
- ¹³ C. C. Fair, *Fighting to the End: The Pakistan Army's Way of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- ¹⁴ Shabir Hussain, Farrukh Shahzad, and Adam Saud, "Analyzing the state of digital information warfare between India and Pakistan on Twittersphere," *Sage Open* 11, no. 3 (July 2021): 01, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211031905>; Roshni Kapur and Diotima Chattoraj, "Falsehoods in Conflict: Disinformation in India-Pakistan Crises and Lessons for the Future," *South Asian Voices*, July 23, 2025, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://southasianvoices.org/sec-f-oth-r-india-pakistan-crisis-disinformation-07-23-2025/>.
- ¹⁵ Gary M. Alexandre Alaphilippe, Roman Adamczyk, and Antoine Grégoire, "Indian chronicles: Deep dive into a 15-year operation targeting the EU and UN to serve Indian interests," EU DisinfoLab, last modified December 9, 2020, <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/indian-chronicles-deep-dive-into-a-15-year-operation-targeting-the-eu-and-un-to-serve-indian-interests/>.
- ¹⁶ Siham Basir, "India, Pakistan and the memeification of war," *Dawn*, May 1, 2025, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1907557>.
- ¹⁷ Patrycja Bryczek-Wróbel and Maciej Moszczyński, "The evolution of the concept of information warfare in the modern information society of the post-truth era," *Przegląd Nauk o Obronności*, no. 13 (2022): 48, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://www.defencesciencereview.com.pl/The-evolution-of-the-concept-of-information-warfare-in-the-modern-information-society,152620,0,2.html>.
- ¹⁸ Don Fallis, "What is disinformation?," *Library Trends* 63, no. 3 (2015): 401, accessed December 30, 2025, doi:10.1353/lib.2015.0014.
- ¹⁹ Adam Saud and Nehal Kazim, "Disinformation and Propaganda Tactics: Impacts of Indian Information Warfare on Pakistan," *Journal of Indian Studies* 8, no. 2 (2022): 335, accessed December 30, 2025, https://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/indianStudies/PDF/9_v8_2_22.pdf.
- ²⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, "Doctrine for joint psychological operations," The George Washington University, last modified September 5, 2003, https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB177/02_psyop-jp-3-53.pdf.
- ²¹ Kirk Hallahan et al., "Defining strategic communication," *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 1, no. 1 (2007): 03, accessed December 30, 2025, doi:10.1080/15531180701285244.

- ²² Jannat Naseeb, "Analyzing psychological operations: A case study of indo-pak hostility (2010-2024)," *NUST Journal of International Peace and Stability* 8, no. 1 (2025): 79, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://njips.nust.edu.pk/index.php/njips/article/view/187>.
- ²³ Peter R. Lavoy and John H. Gill, "Part 1 Causes and conduct of the conflict," in *Asymmetric warfare in South Asia: The causes and consequences of the Kargil conflict* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 92, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511691805>.
- ²⁴ Pramod Kumar, "The Evolution of Information Warfare: From Propaganda to Cyberattacks," *International Journal of Emerging Knowledge Studies* 3, no. 4 (2024): 152, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://ijeks.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/IJEKS-3-04-002.pdf>.
- ²⁵ Ab Rouf Bhat and Dr. Syeda Afshana, "Fake News in Kashmir: A Case Study," *RESEARCH REVIEW International Journal of Multidisciplinary* 4, no. 3 (2019): 502, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://old.rrjournals.com/past-issue/fake-news-in-kashmir-a-case-study/>.
- ²⁶ Dr. Zeeshan Zaighum and Rana F. Ali, "From Strategy to Tactics: Conceptualizing Weaponization of Digital Media Platforms across Levels of Warfare," *Lahore Institute for Research and Analysis Journal* 3 (2025): 45, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://journal.lira.pk/LIRA/article/view/45>.
- ²⁷ Dr. Rabia Akhtar, "Fake News, Dis-information and Disruptive Technology: A Pakistani Perspective on Hybrid Warfare," in *Fake News, Disinformation and Propaganda in International Relations* (Consortium of South Asian Think Tanks (COSATT), 2023), 20-21.
- ²⁸ Dr. Dilawar Khan, Wajid Mehmood, and Dr. Hassan Shah, "Hybrid Warfare Between India And Pakistan: Cyber Threats, Disinformation, And Strategic Stability (2019-2024)," *Education Genius Solutions* 3, no. 2 (2025): 64, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://rc-archive.com/index.php/Journal/article/download/147/147>.
- ²⁹ Dr. Sahibzada M. Usman, "Pakistan in the crosshairs and the rising stakes of strategic information warfare," *Journal of Research in Social Sciences* 12, no. 1 (2024): 2-3, accessed December 30, 2025, doi:10.52015/jrss.12i1.235.
- ³⁰ Abdul Basit, "Disinformation, Conspiracy Theories and Violent Extremism in South Asia," *International Centre for Political Violence and Terrorism Research* 17, no. 2 (2025): 18, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/48815456>.
- ³¹ Lavoy and Gill, "Part 1 Causes and conduct of the conflict," 41.
- ³² Areeja Syed, "Propoganda and Its Types," *Modern Diplomacy*, last modified April 29, 2020, <https://modern diplomacy.eu/2020/04/30/propoganda-and-its-types/>.
- ³³ Minahil S. Afridi, "India's Strategic Information Warfare: Challenges and Policy Options for Pakistan," *NDU Journal* 38, no. 1 (2024): 83, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://ndujournal.ndu.edu.pk/site/article/view/184>; Usman, "Pakistan in the crosshairs," 02.
- ³⁴ Waseem Ullah, Asif Salim, and Saima R. Khan, "Social Media, Disinformation, And Non-Traditional Security: Governance Challenges In The Age Of Information Warfare," *Research Consortium Archive* 3, no. 4 (2025): 141, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://rcresearcharchive.com/index.php/Journal/article/view/342>.
- ³⁵ Ismail A. Azeez, "The Influence of Digital Diplomacy on Foreign Policy," *Journal of Tourism Economics and Policy* 3, no. 3 (July 2023): 189-190, accessed December 30, 2025, doi:10.38142/jtep.v3i3.770.
- ³⁶ Zahid Yousaf, Sarmad Iqbal, and Muhammad H. Sarwar, "Analysis of Pakistani and Indian Media towards Warfare," *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 30, no. 1 (2022): 124, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://ojs.aiou.edu.pk/index.php/jssh/article/view/384/334>.
- ³⁷ Akhtar, "Fake News, Dis-information and Disruptive Technology," 24.
- ³⁸ Naseeb, "Analyzing psychological operations," 78.
- ³⁹ Saud and Kazim, "Disinformation and Propaganda Tactics," 340.
- ⁴⁰ Muhammad S. Fazal, Dr. Adeel Irfan, and Aneel W. Khan, "India's hybrid warfare strategy towards Pakistan in the backdrop of social media (2018-2022)," *Annals of Human and Social Sciences* 3, no. 2 (2022): 851, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://ojs.ahss.org.pk/journal/article/view/306>.
- ⁴¹ Alexandre Alaphilippe, Adamczyk, and Grégoire, "Indian chronicles."
- ⁴² Maheen Shafeeq, "Information operations and social media: Case study of Indian chronicles and options for Pakistan," *NUST Journal of International Peace and Stability* 7, no. 2 (June 2024): 46-47, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://njips.nust.edu.pk/index.php/njips/article/view/173>.
- ⁴³ Basit A. Qureshi, "India's hybrid war on Pakistan: Disinformation, cyber tactics, and the battle for perception," *The Friday Times*, last modified May 25, 2025, <https://thefridaytimes.com/25-May-2025/india-s-hybrid-war-on-pakistan-disinformation-cyber-tactics-and-the-battle-for-perception>.

-
- ⁴⁴ Yousaf, Iqbal, and Sarwar, "Analysis of Pakistani and Indian Media towards Warfare," 124.
- ⁴⁵ Yousaf, Iqbal, and Sarwar, "Analysis of Pakistani and Indian Media towards Warfare," 126.
- ⁴⁶ Dr. Muhammad H. Sarwar, Asad U. Rehman, and Ayesha Nawal, "Indian Press Propaganda Against Pakistan: An Analysis of Pulwama Attack and Balakot Airstrikes," *Journal of Cardiovascular Disease Research* 12, no. 3 (2021): 421, accessed December 30, 2025, <http://jcdronline.org/index.php/JCDR/article/view/1589/1550>.
- ⁴⁷ Hussain, Shahzad, and Saud, "Analyzing the state of digital information warfare between India and Pakistan on Twittersphere," 05.
- ⁴⁸ Sudipto Mondal and Showkat Shafi, "'India playing with fire': Pakistan-administered Kashmir leader," *Al Jazeera*, February 26, 2019, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/2/26/india-playing-with-fire-pakistan-administered-kashmir-leader>.
- ⁴⁹ "Abhinandan: Captured Indian pilot handed back by Pakistan," *BBC News*, March 2, 2019, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-47412884>.
- ⁵⁰ Diya Ashtakala, "What led to the recent crisis between India and Pakistan?," Center for Strategic and International Studies, last modified May 20, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-led-recent-crisis-between-india-and-pakistan>.
- ⁵¹ Sonia Sarkar, "The patriarchal symbolism of India's 'operation Sindoor'," *The Loop*, last modified 2025, <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/the-patriarchal-symbolism-of-indias-operation-sindoor/>.
- ⁵² Dr. Raja K. Janjua, "Operation Sindoor: Indian Media's Black Propaganda and Fake News Tactics and Their Impact on Public and International Perceptions in the 2025 India-Pakistan Conflict," *Pakistan Social Sciences Review* 9, no. 3 (2025): 266, accessed December 30, 2025, [https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2025\(9-III\)21](https://doi.org/10.35484/pssr.2025(9-III)21).
- ⁵³ Libby Hogan, "'Spreading like wildfire': The online deepfake war being waged by India and Pakistan," Australian Broadcasting Corporation, last modified May 24, 2025, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2025-05-24/misinformation-online-war-kashmir-conflict-india-pakistan/105318696>.
- ⁵⁴ Rimal Farrukh, "Clip of Pakistan general saying country 'lost jets' is doctored," *AFP Pakistan*, last modified May 20, 2025, <https://factcheck.afp.com/doc.afp.com.46GJ7NP>.
- ⁵⁵ Junaid A. Jalbani, "Martyrdom, Memory, and Identity: A Qualitative Discourse Analysis of Operation Bunyan-um-Marsoos in Pakistan's Strategic Culture," *Advance Social Science Archive Journal* 4, no. 1 (August 2025): 2973, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16936139>.
- ⁵⁶ "India downed five F-16, JF-17 Pakistani jets in May conflict, says Indian air force chief," *Reuters*, last modified October 3, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/india/india-downed-five-f-16-jf-17-pakistan-jets-may-conflict-says-indian-air-force-2025-10-03/>.
- ⁵⁷ Elizaveta Yachmeneva and Maria Xynou, "Information Controls in India and Pakistan During the May 2025 Conflict," *Digital Rights Foundation*, last modified September 4, 2025, <https://ooni.org/post/2025-media-censorship-in-india-and-pakistan/>.