



## Pakistan's Ordeal at the Hands of the International Media

**Dr. Asfandyar Cheema**

Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies, Institute of Business Management (IoBM), Karachi  
[ayc3093@hotmail.com](mailto:ayc3093@hotmail.com)

### Abstract

*This study aims to examine the disinformation and negative propaganda warfare waged by adversary states against Pakistan and ascertain whether the warfare was impactful. In this warfare, the media is used to build narratives against Pakistan, portraying it as a promoter of terrorism, an unsafe nuclear arsenal holder, a possessor of a rogue army, etc. The purpose is to shape the Pakistani public's opinion and international perception and, as a result, government policy in their favor. This study approached the problem through the agenda-setting theory lens based on a seminal study by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972), one of the most valuable tools for investigating the influence of the mass media on public thinking and attitude. Interpretivism was the research paradigm adopted for this study, with a basic commitment to ontological relativism and epistemological subjectivism. Although this study was mainly involved in inductive reasoning, like most qualitative studies, it partly has a validating character. A purposive sampling method was adopted to recruit participants identified through snowballing. Based on guidance from the relevant literature for predominantly phenomenological studies, this research comprised a sample size of 15 interviewees with diverse backgrounds, comprising media academicians and journalists with international affairs backgrounds and defense analysts to complement the data from various aspects of the disinformation phenomenon. Based on five research questions, in-depth phenomenological interviewing was employed to collect data in line with this study's ontological stance and epistemological beliefs. The Thematic Analysis Method was used for data integration and analysis. Employing this method, 78 codes were identified from the interview data. These codes were segregated into 24 nodes and 18 child nodes based on similarity. The nodes were later clubbed into 5 themes. NVivo version 12 was used to compile the data graphically and assign it to visual presentations. This study identified eight potential impacts that disinformation recipients could have developed. Four of these potential impacts did not happen because of the significant moderators. The remaining four impacts were diluted to varying extents proportionate to the moderators' significance.*

**Keywords:** *Disinformation Warfare, Media Agenda, Disinformation Impact, Public Opinion, and Moderators, Pakistan*



## Introduction

### Geo-Political Position

Pakistan has great geo-economic significance. Through its Gwadar Port, it can provide the landlocked Central Asian states with a passage to export their energy resources and a transit route for trade. The port can serve as the regional trade hub because of its proximity to multiple vital sea routes (Raza, 2020). Furthermore, China sees Pakistan as pivotal in its Belt and Road Initiative (B.R.I.), which focuses on regional connectivity through economic development (Khetran & Saeed, 2017). Pakistan has also been important in regional politics. For the U.S., Pakistan is important for multiple reasons, including preventing China from rising as a superpower, stopping Iran's nuclear aspirations, limiting the Taliban regime, and promoting India as a countervailing force to China. (Sindhu, 2021). In the 80s, it played a decisive role in countering the USSR with the help of the USA, and it repelled the USSR from Afghanistan. Post 9/11, in reverse mode, Pakistan abandoned support for the Taliban government in Afghanistan and had to bear the fight against terrorism as a frontline state. It deployed over one hundred thousand regular service soldiers to maintain control over the restless tribal areas along the Afghan border. While the Taliban have taken over since August 2021, the situation in Afghanistan remains fluid, which adds to Pakistan's political importance (Khan, 2019). China also has military and political interests that are to be served by Pakistan. It wants to link Gwadar with its southern provinces and better control the Indian Ocean. Other regional developments like the Chino-Russian alignment, the Middle East crisis, Iran-West tension, the border disputes, and the Kashmir issue with India augment its role in the regional power play (Gholizadeh, 2020).

Pakistan has always had a tough neighborhood. Since its creation, it has faced territorial claims from Afghanistan on its northwestern border, namely the Durand Line, which was drawn by the British in 1893. With India, Pakistan's relations have been strained ever since the partition of the sub-continent over the disputed territory of Jammu and Kashmir. Since 1998, the Pakistan-India conflict has acquired a nuclear dimension. According to Moonakal (2020), relations between Iran and Pakistan remained mostly turbulent in the post-Iranian Revolution period. Pakistan's military cooperation with Saudi Arabia amidst Iran-Saudi proxy wars in the region renders it tough for Pakistan and Iran to engage or diversify their mutual domains widely. Khan et al. (2019) maintain that the U.S. also has grievances against Pakistan. It holds Pakistan responsible for its failures and squeezes it with an often-repeated mantra of "do more." With this background, Pakistan is a ghastly entity to be contained for this group of like-minded countries at every cost. Kreft (2008) aptly argues that Pakistan's geostrategic importance has also brought problems. It is caught in highly conflicting interests with the regional and global powers. However, Pakistan is no longer an easy target due to its extraordinary combat capacity in recent decades. Swain (2016) says that both countries (India and Pakistan) have lethal nuclear weapons in their arsenal and that if Pakistan's territorial integrity were threatened, like in 1971, its army could launch a nuclear strike against India within 8 seconds. Accordingly, Yasin (2020) posits that against this backdrop, Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa stated on the eve of the country's Defense Day that Pakistan is facing fifth-generation warfare. According to General Bajwa, the purpose of this war was to discredit the state and its armed forces and stoke anarchy in the country.



Akram (2018) believes that the main tool of the hybrid war against Pakistan is disinformation through the media. The media is used to build narratives against Pakistan, portraying it as a promoter of terrorism, an unsafe nuclear arsenal holder, and an economically failed state. Warrich et al. (2021) refer to an underground network operated by India under the name of Indian Chronicles, which they explain as a horrid example of building and publishing an anti-Pakistan narrative. The network, comprising many fake NGOs and think tanks which was unearthed by DisinfoLab, a Belgian NGO, in 2019, was operating from New Delhi by the Srivastava Group with its sole purpose being to shape the opinions of the United Nations (U.N.) the European Union (E.U.), Human Rights Council (UNHRC), and the European Parliament (Machado et al., 2020) against Pakistan with its disinformation.

This scenario points toward the following research questions:

1. Has disinformation and propaganda warfare been waged against Pakistan in the last two decades? If yes, why and how is it going on?
2. Which strategic areas of Pakistan have the opposing countries targeted through disinformation offensives in the last two decades?
3. Which tools and means did adversaries use in the disinformation offensives against Pakistan?
4. How does disinformation warfare impact Pakistan in the public, diplomatic, and government arenas, including the compromises Pakistani governments made on strategic fronts?
5. Does the disinformation warfare against Pakistan go unabated, influencing public opinion, international perceptions, and government policies, or is it subject to certain moderating factors that reduce its impact?

### **Literature Review**

#### **Disinformation as the Major Tool of Hybrid Warfare**

Caliskan and Cramers (2018) say hybrid war focuses more on non-military factors, such as information warfare, propaganda, cybersecurity, and subversive and non-kinetic means. An important part of hybrid warfare is disinformation and propaganda. Deichman (2010) called it 5<sup>th</sup> Generation Warfare – battle of perception. Bennett and Livingston (2018) later argued that 5<sup>th</sup> Generation Warfare (5GW) is moral and cultural warfare that manipulates perceptions through disinformation and alters the world's context. It involves a systematic disinformation campaign aimed at strategic deceptions instead of taking isolated pieces of false news. Arif and Khan (2021) make an interesting reference to the role of media in manipulating the desired political outcomes in how it allegedly maneuvered and swayed the U.S. elections in 2016. Disinformation is primarily used as a tool for perception management – seeking to shape the public view so that the decision-makers are effectively insulated from the people, thereby letting the enemy sway the frame of mind of the target. In contrast, the decision-makers remain ignorant of this change.

#### **Pakistan Faces Disinformation Warfare Challenges from Adversaries**

Malik and Hussain (2018) view that there is reasonable evidence to believe that a chain of planned and structured propaganda offensives has been launched against Pakistan at the regional and international levels. Kumar (2014) says that India has a vast multilingual media



industry comprising almost 900 satellite TV stations, half of which are news-based. Besides, there are around 12,000 newspaper titles. Most of these media outlets have international partnerships and affiliations. Among these partnerships, the India-USA-Israel nexus is critical. Control of this troika over the international media is an open secret. In 2019, DisinfoLab, an NGO, exposed a widespread Indian network of fake NGOs and think tanks. The focus of this disinformation network was to influence the opinion of the United Nations (UN) and the European Union (EU) against Pakistan. The network was run by the Srivastava Group, a New Delhi-based entity, using hundreds of fake media outlets and the identity of a dead professor to target Pakistan.

## **Disinformation Targets of Adversaries IN Pakistan**

### ***Allegations of Supporting Terrorism and Human Rights Violations***

Zaki (2014) and Abbasi (2020) say that Pakistan is accused of supporting terrorism and providing safe havens for terrorist organizations. Such allegations were strengthened post-September 11 attacks, resulting in a global war on terror that put Pakistan in the limelight, given its proximity to Afghanistan. These allegations helped the adversaries influence international opinion against Pakistan, bringing it to the verge of diplomatic isolation. Hussain and Hussain (2017) argue that the allegation of terrorism has augmented Pakistan's problems manifold. It is ranked only after Iraq and Afghanistan in the Global Terrorism Index. Warrich et al. (2021) aptly argue that the disinforming states blame Pakistan for supporting terrorism on the one hand and accuse it of human rights violations when it undertakes counter-terrorism measures.

### ***Sabotaging the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)***

According to Assadi (2018), India has exposed the grand project to propaganda and conspiracies since its inception. It is a target of international propaganda waged by countries inimical to Pakistan and China. Likewise, Hassan (2019) argues that India, the U.S., and the Western states have been trying to sabotage CPEC from the outset, targeting it through sponsored militancy. The Gwadar Pearl Continental Hotel attack and the Chinese Consulate attack in Karachi were admittedly committed by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), a disgruntled group created and financed by India to sabotage the CPEC. Jaspal (2020) says that the promising potential of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project has distressed India and its allies. They see this project as a means for China's economic and political domination in South and Central Asia.

### ***Maligning Pakistan's Nuclear Program to Get it Rolled Back***

Azad (2020) argues that Pakistan had to conduct nuclear explosions only in response to the explosions by India. However, the Western powers have shown a skewed approach towards the matter and target only Pakistan's nuclear program, overlooking India's program altogether. The Western media and literature forward hypothetical assessments and scenarios to defame Pakistan's nuclear program. Sehgal (2018) maintains that Israel, in close association with India, has been engaged in media and psychological warfare over the years through website and social media-based disinformation about the vulnerability of Pakistan's nuclear assets.



### ***Restraining the Kashmir Issue***

Iqbal & Ali (2022) argue that a special focus of India's disinformation and propaganda campaign against Pakistan is to malign Pakistan's stance over India's occupation of Jammu and Kashmir. Alvi (2023) claims that the Indian government is spreading disinformation about normalcy in occupied Kashmir, followed by its special status under the Indian constitution. However, Kashmiri leaders are disputing this claim. Khalid (2021) says India one-sidedly rescinded Article 370 and 35-A of the Indian constitution on August 05, 2019, formally annexing Kashmir. Kuchay (2020) maintains that India's organized disinformation operation was unearthed in 2019 in Brussels. The Srivastava Group, an Indian business giant, came into the limelight for sponsoring the operation.

### ***Alleging Pakistan Army Forming a "Deep State" in Pakistan***

SRI (2019) refers to a video interview of Hilary Clinton, former U.S. Secretary of State, who said that Pakistan's actual governance remains in the hands of the military that runs it with the help of intelligence agencies and the factions in the judiciary, civil service, media, etc., with common interests. Hilary Clinton called it the deep state. Rehman & Shurong (2021) agree that Pakistan truly runs a deep state pattern of governance wherein the army, intelligence agencies, especially those working under the army, and the like-minded judiciary and bureaucracy undermine the elected government's writ. Barany (2009) endorsed this point, saying that the army has been ruling Pakistan directly and indirectly. The direct rule resulted from a coup d'état, like those in 1953, 1958, 1977, and 1999. Indirect military rule means the army's control and influence over policies about strategic matters, domestic and international, without assuming explicit control.

### ***Promoting Sectarian and Ethnic Divide and Fueling Separatist Movements – The Case of Balochistan***

Khan (2013) claims that the Indian media has poisoned Balochistan society. Nadeem et al. (2021) maintain that the adversaries use media to destabilize Balochistan, showing that Balochistan has been kept undeveloped and provoking its people against their own country. Babar & Mirza (2020) say that ethnic and sectarian conflicts in Pakistan have made the state more vulnerable to Indian disinformation and psychological warfare. Malik (2018) reported that India had launched media campaigns concerning the unrest in Balochistan using all modes of media, including social media, television, print media, films, and dramas. More saliently, it launched a multimedia website, Balochi radio service apps, and a TV news channel, "Zee Salam," broadcasting in the Balochi language, inciting the Baluch community to stand up against Pakistan.

### **Tools and Means of Disinformation and Propaganda Warfare**

#### ***The Use of Local Media Houses in Inter-State Adversarial Media Agenda-Setting***

Mitrović (2018) argues that the media houses have attained key importance in perception management. Khawaja (2018) endorses this point and maintains that the agenda-setting capacity of international media is rapidly increasing. It is also labeled the 'CNN Effect. Boyd-Barrett (2018) highlights that the media houses have developed more economic and financial stakes than providing people with healthy journalism. So, they have become more of a business



entity than a public service object. Artz (2005) highlights the role of international media houses in spreading disinformation based on their agenda. He states that international companies control the media. Tucker et al. (2018) similarly maintain that business inducements can enhance fake news and fictitious stories of rival states.

#### ***Use of Local 'Agents of Influence' in Adversarial Inter-State Media Agenda-Setting***

Sirohi (2018) refers to a gathering of Pakistani intelligentsia and activists in the US capital in September 2018. They lamented that people were disappearing without a trace, the journalists were tortured and beaten, and the censorship was so harsh that the people were unaware of what was happening in their country. ANI (2020) reported that experts and human rights activists gathered at the SAATH forum led by the former ambassador of Pakistan to the US, Husain Haqqani. They recalled the traumatic experiences dissenters suffered in Pakistan, the threats and kidnapping attempts they received, and the forced exiles they underwent. Cull et al. (2017) endorse the point and say that to achieve their purpose, disinformation strategists work through established and trusted sources of information, like think tanks, NGOs, education institutions, etc.

#### ***Use of Public Relations Networks in Inter-State Adversarial Media Agenda-Setting***

Bennett & Livingston (2018) refer to public relations networks as another tool of inter-state disinformation. These public relations networks use their own media instruments to propagate the news or provide it to the media houses as a matter of mutual arrangement to influence the target audience. Zoch & Molleda (2006) support this view and maintain that public relations practitioners shape media agendas. A prominent example of such a public relations network surfaced in 2019. The focus of this disinformation network was to influence the opinion of the United Nations (U.N.) and the European Union (E.U.) against Pakistan. The network was run by the Srivastava Group, a New Delhi-based entity, using hundreds of fake media outlets and the identity of a dead professor to target Pakistan (Machado et al., 2020).

#### ***Use of Social Media in Inter-State Adversarial Media Agenda-Setting***

West (2017) and Prier (2017) say that social media is a contemporary tool for spreading disinformation and controlling and commanding the trend by the actor states against the target states. It forms a point of infusion for disinformation and propaganda and has become the connection between information operations and warfare. Pierri et al. (2020) concur and posit that the potency and magnitude of disinformation across borders have augmented manifold in the contemporary era of social media. The enhanced assumption of social media has increased the potency of disinformation extraordinarily.

#### ***Use of Movies in Inter-State Propaganda***

Bajwa et al. (2018) maintain that Hollywood or Bollywood movies are a big tool of propaganda against Pakistan. It started with *Shersh*, *Holiday*, *BellBottom*, and *Sooryavanshi* movies. The latest movies of this kind were *Mission Majnu* and *Pathan*. This trend has now gone up to such a level that it seems impossible for Indians to love their country without being anti-Pakistan simultaneously. Ali et al. (2012) argue that categorizing, stereotyping, and labeling Pakistanis and Muslims has become Bollywood's custom. Unlike in the remote past, Bollywood movies



frequently cover Hindu-Muslim religious conflicts and India-Pakistan territorial conflicts, especially highlighting the Kashmir issue and typically targeting the Pakistan Army.

### ***The Use of Radio Channels as a Disinformation Tool***

Times of Islamabad (2018) and Daily Pakistan (2018) reported that the Pakistani Government, after banning the U.S.-funded Radio Mashal for broadcasting anti-Pakistan programs, is also intending to ban the Radio Deewa, another U.S.-funded radio channel, for the same reasons. The dailies further reported that the Pakistani government has noticed that Radio Mashaal and Radio Deewa continuously air programs that portray a negative image of the country and incite certain ethnicities against the Pakistani state.

### **Agenda-Setting Theory – Understanding Anatomy of Disinformation & Media Warfare Impact**

In 1972, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw, two young journalism professors at the University of North Carolina, published an article in *Public Opinion Quarterly* 1972, which proved to be the origin of a new research dimension in mass communications. The study established that the mass media could affect and induce audiences in the ways the media intends. The study involved 100 undecided voters in Chapel Hill to identify the most important issues near them. Followed by a simple rank-order correlation, the researchers found a nearly perfect correlation, as high as .97, between the two sets of issue salience to conclude that the mass media were molding the salience of issues. McCombs and Shaw (1972) labeled this phenomenon “agenda-setting” in their work published in 1972.

### ***Occurrence of Agenda-Setting Effect***

According to Zhong (2021), with progress in empirical research on agenda-setting theory during the last three decades, it has been widely acknowledged that agenda-setting occurs at three levels. Guo et al. (2012) argue that the first-level agenda-setting effect concerns the salience of objects advanced by the media. Here, the term object refers to the items, articles, or things an individual believes in. Vu et al. (2014) proposed the second-level agenda – characteristics, features, or traits that define the objects. For instance, if the object is a person, the attributes may be the person’s age, education, charisma, political ideology, etc. Guo et al. (2012) say some attributes are more emphasized, hence repeatedly appearing. Conversely, some receive less attention, while others receive no attention. Guo and McCombs (2011a, 2011b) advanced the third-level agenda-setting model– the Network Agenda Setting (or NAS). The NAS proposed that instead of presenting linear pictures of objects and attributes, a mental picture of objects, attributes, or a mix of both can be represented in a network-like structure.

### ***Media Agenda, Public Agenda, and Policy Agenda***

There are three types of agenda-setting: media, public, and policy. Media agenda-setting concentrates on influencing the audience. Public agenda setting is about setting the public’s agenda either through their own experience and learning or under the influence of the media agenda. Finally, the policy concerns how media and public agendas influence policymakers’ decisions (Walgrave & Van Aelst, 2006). For instance, Lang and Lang (1983) found that Watergate remained a media topic of high importance for months before it led to the public agenda. Then, it became an agenda issue for the United States government to act on. This case



is a typical example of shaping a policy through the public agenda, shaped by the media agenda. However, Rogers and Dearing (1988) argue that the interaction between media, public, and policy agendas is not linear. Instead, it is a complex process with multipronged interactions.

### **Moderating Factors for the Media's Agenda-Setting Potential**

The media's agenda-setting capacity had been overstated since the late 1970s, following the work of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw published in 1972. The subsequent studies conducted by researchers like McCombs & Weaver (2014), Berelson et al. (2009), Meraz (2009), Riaz (2008), Valenzuela and McCombs (2007), etc., have supported the point that agenda-setting does not operate *everywhere*, on *everyone*, and *always*. Messner and Distaso (2008) believe that the media's agenda-setting capacity had been overstated following McCombs & Shaw's (1972) work. Fallis (2015) also highlights the limitations of disinformation and the media outlets propagating disinformation. Lanoszka's (2019) work is pertinent and of seminal importance. Referring to the Russian campaign targeting the Baltic States and the Crimean annexation in 2014, he argues that the strategic outcomes of disinformation and propaganda are exaggerated. He rejects the linear approach toward the effect of disinformation on the target states' policies in favor of the attacking adversaries. He argues that although the common public is not completely unreceptive to disinformation, the disinforming state must overcome individual and group barriers before changing its mind.

Based on this discussion, it is concluded that the disinformation campaign must surmount, among others, the following moderating factors in its original purpose of shaping the target states' policies.

### **Research Methodology**

A qualitative research method was chosen for this study for various reasons. First, this study was context-focused (Smith & Sparkes, 2020) and assigned to derive meanings from the social phenomenon by directly talking to the relevant people instead of completing the surveys (Pickering et al., 2020; Creswell, 2013). Second, this study involved a complex issue with multiple perspectives and several dimensions (Janesick, 2015). Third, this study involved emergent processes (Holloway, 2013) and entailed an inductive approach to research (Blaikie, 2018). Lastly, it was likely to identify and develop new concepts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Interpretivism was the research paradigm adopted for this study, with a basic commitment to ontological relativism and epistemological subjectivism (Lincoln et al., 2017). Accordingly, phenomenology was considered the most appropriate research strategy to understand the immediate experiences of the occurrence under examination (Neubauer et al., 2019; Goulding, 2005).

This study primarily involved inductive reasoning as its approach since it started with the subjective data collection and moved to explanation through analysis of whether the disinformation warfare Pakistan faces at the hands of adversaries has led to tangible harm to it. However, this study, like most others, had a validating character to it (Veal, 2005). Saunders et al. (2012) endorse this view and maintain that the inductive approach does not disregard starting with theories or theory testing.



A purposive sample of 15 participants was set for this study, comprising individuals informed of external disinformation interference in the country. Previous studies support the use of a purposive sample for this study. Cresswell (2013), Barkhuizen (2018), and Tracy (2020) also agree that for phenomenological studies, participants should be purposefully chosen to fit the parameters of the project's research questions. Snowballing was used, wherein the previous participants added new participants because people with specific knowledge and experience were difficult to identify directly (Bock & Harel, 2010). Previous qualitative studies suggested similar sample sizes. Some other examples of samples in phenomenological studies are 6-10 participants (Morse, 2000), fewer than ten interviews (Moser & Korstjens, 2018), and 10-30 interviews (Gentles et al., 2015).

Because of the nature of the subject, data saturation was quickly reached. Guest et al. (2006) and Hennink & Kaiser (2021) supported it, saying that data saturation guides qualitative researchers in deciding the sample size, which can be increased or reduced depending on the data saturation reached. Participants were shortlisted with a mix of international affairs academicians, international/diplomatic affairs journalists, and defense analysts, with rich experience in their field. As a result, these informed participants with diverse backgrounds provided realistic data about the phenomenon. Smith & McGannon (2018) support employing participants with assorted backgrounds, educations, and training to produce data for a multi-aspect study like this.

In-depth phenomenological interviewing was employed to collect data in line with the ontological stance and epistemological beliefs adopted for this study. Seidman (2012) supports the use of phenomenological interviews for this study. He argues that researchers exploring direct knowledge of individuals about a phenomenon rely on phenomenological interviews. According to Vagle (2014), phenomenological interviews involve asking open questions and generating detailed narratives and descriptions of participants' feelings, perceptions, and understandings about the phenomenon.

Given the sensitive political situation in Pakistan, the study is about, none of the participants agreed to have the interview video or audio recorded. Accordingly, the data was recorded by taking notes and later transcribed into detailed text. A few participants also shared some written texts with me, mostly their blogs relating to the answers to the research questions. Initial codes were also distilled from the transcribed texts simultaneously (Guest et al., 2006).

### **3. Data Integration and Analysis**

In this study, a specific thematic analysis method designed for phenomenological studies, known as the Modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method by Moustakas (1994), was used. As a result, 78 codes were identified from the interview data of 15 participants. These codes were segregated into 24 nodes and 18 child nodes based on their similarity. These nodes were later clubbed into 5 themes. The entire data is tabulated in Table 2. Once the data had been arranged hierarchically in codes, nodes, and themes, it was fed into NVivo version 12, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), to compile it graphically and assign visual presentations. The data was rearranged participant-wise, comprising their contribution in each sub-node, node, and theme. NVivo analysed the data, taking the node as the unit. It took sub-nodes as the unit where nodes had sub-nodes/child nodes.



Table 1  
 Themes, Nodes, and Child Nodes Inventory

No.	Themes	Nodes	Child Nodes
1.	The Factors Involved in Waging Disinformation and Propaganda Warfare against Pakistan over the Past Two Decades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Pakistan has Faced Disinformation Warfare for Decades.</li> <li>▸ Pakistan’s Geostrategic Location is the Reason for the Hybrid Warfare it faces.</li> <li>▸ Pakistan’s Involvement in Bilateral and Multilateral Conflicts Makes it Face Hybrid Warfare.</li> <li>▸ India leads Disinformation Warfare against Pakistan.</li> </ul>	<p>---</p> <p>---</p> <p>---</p> <p>---</p>
2.	Pakistan’s Strategic Areas the Adversaries have Targeted in the Last Two Decades through Disinformation Offensives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Promoting Pakistan as a Rogue State</li> <li>▸ Maligning Pakistan’s Nuclear Program to Get It Rolled Back</li> <li>Sabotaging the CPEC</li> <li>Curbing the Kashmir Issue</li> <li>Fueling Separatist Movements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Alleging Pakistan for Supporting Terrorism</li> <li>▸ Calling Pakistan’s Anti-Terrorism Operations Human Rights Violations</li> <li>▸ The Theory of Pakistan’s Nuclear Arsenal is Vulnerable to Theft and Misuse</li> <li>▸ The Theory of Pakistan’s Nuclear Program Technology is Vulnerable to Proliferation</li> <li>▸ China’s Access to the Asia Pacific is Not Acceptable to the U.S. and India</li> <li>▸ The Theory of the Chinese Debt Trap for Pakistan</li> </ul> <p>---</p> <p>---</p>



	Alleging Pakistan Army and Intelligence Agencies Acting as Deep State in Pakistan	---
3.	The Various Kinds of Media Utilized by the Adversaries to Disseminate Disinformation against Pakistan	Using Social Media as a Disinformation Tool Hiring the Media Houses as Tools of Disinformation Using Public Relations Networks as a Disinformation Tool Using Radio Channels to Air Fake News Engaging the Agents of Influence as a Disinformation Tool Using Movies as a Propaganda Tool
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4.	The Impact of Disinformation Warfare on Pakistan at the Public, Government, and Diplomatic Levels	Pakistan Feels the Heat of Diplomatic Isolation Separatist Movements Aggravated Kashmiri People's Right to Self-determination came to a Standstill Pakistan Army's Credibility Compromised
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5.	The Role of Moderators in Determining the Degree of Influence of Disinformation Warfare against Pakistan on Public Opinions,	Moderators for Disinformation Warfare Impact on Public Opinion
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▸ Other Sources of Information</li> <li>▸ Existing Political and Religious Ideologies</li> <li>▸ A Weak Disinformation Source Credibility</li> <li>▸ Disinformation aims to get an Advantage at Home</li> </ul>



International  
Perceptions, and  
Government  
Policies.

Moderators for Augmenting the Impact of Disinformation Warfare on Separatism

Moderators for Disinformation Impact on State Policy

Moderators for Disinformation Warfare Impact on Pakistan's Diplomatic Standing

- Fact-checking and Exposing Disinformation
- Building a Counter-Narrative
- Engaging the Public Target of Disinformation
- CPEC is in Pakistan's National Interest
- Kashmir is Pakistan's Jugular Vein
  
- Pakistan is too Important to be Isolated Diplomatically
- Pakistan's Nuclear Program is Safe



### Theme-wise Data Compilation

Compared to the data integration process, the analysis process is arranged in reverse order, starting with the theme, the nodes that comprise the theme, the sub-nodes or child nodes under the nodes, and the qualitative data codes under the sub-nodes or nodes. The analysis also includes NVivo-drawn tabular illustrations.

#### ***Theme 1: Pakistan is the Target of Disinformation Warfare***

Most participants viewed Pakistan as a target of disinformation by certain adversary states for quite some time, mostly in the neighborhood. In their view, since Pakistan is militarily strong, no one dares to engage it in conventional battles, the way the U.S. did with Iraq or India did with Pakistan in 1971. Participants also claimed that India had been the forerunner in waging disinformation and propaganda warfare against Pakistan. Accordingly, the following four Nodes given in Table 2 emerged from the data that comprise Theme 1.

Table 2

*NVivo-drawn summary of Nodes of Theme 1 with an overall coverage of source content coded on Theme 1.*

Theme No.	Node ID	Node Title	Overall Coverage of Source Content Coded on Theme 1
Theme-1 The Factors Involved in Waging Disinformation and Propaganda Warfare against Pakistan over the Past Two Decades	N1TH1	Pakistan has Faced Disinformation Warfare for Decades.	18.67%
	N2TH1	Pakistan’s Geostategic Location is the Reason for the Hybrid Warfare it faces.	11.61%
	N3TH1	Pakistan’s Involvement in Bilateral and Multilateral Conflicts Exposes it to Hybrid Warfare.	5.36%
	N4TH1	India leads Disinformation Warfare against Pakistan.	17.26%

#### ***Theme 2: Disinformation Targets in Pakistan***

Most of the Participants talked at length about the disinformation targets the opponent states aim at in Pakistan as a part of media warfare. They posited that although media warfare against Pakistan aims to enervate the country and make it pliable to adjust to the regional and global agenda of the powerful countries, media warfare operators have identified certain areas that are to be weakened to achieve the ultimate target. Accordingly, as shown in Table 3 below, six areas and sub-areas were identified as the disinformation and propaganda targets of media warfare operated from across borders. Each was assigned a distinct node and sub-node.



Table 3

NVivo-drawn summary of Nodes and Sub/Child Nodes of Theme 2, with an overall coverage of source content coded on Theme 2

Theme No.	Coding	Nodes	Sub Nodes	Overall Coverage of Source Content Coded on Theme 1
<b>Theme-2</b> Pakistan's Strategic Areas the Adversaries have Targeted in the Last Two Decades through Disinformation Offensives	<b>N1TH2</b>	Promoting Pakistan as a Rogue State	<b>C1N1TH2</b> -Alleging Pakistan of Supporting Terrorism <b>C2N1TH2</b> -Calling Antiterrorism Operations by Pakistan a Human Rights Violation	36.68%
	<b>N2TH2</b>	Maligning Pakistan's Nuclear Program	<b>C1N2TH2</b> - The Theory of Pakistan's Nuclear Arsenal's Vulnerability to Theft and Misuse <b>C2N2TH2</b> -The Theory of Pakistan's Nuclear Program Technology is Vulnerable to Proliferation	23.37%
	<b>N3TH2</b>	Sabotaging the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) Project	<b>C1N3TH2</b> -China's Access to the Asia Pacific is Not Acceptable to the U.S. and India <b>C2N3TH2</b> -The Theory of the Chinese Debt Trap for Pakistan	37.26%
	<b>N4TH2</b>	Curbing the Kashmir Issue	---	8.71%
	<b>N5TH2</b>	Fueling the Separatist Movements	---	12.43%
	<b>N6TH2-</b>	Alleging Pakistan Army and Intelligence Agencies Acting as a Deep State in Pakistan	---	12.7%



**Theme 3: Tools and Means Used by Adversaries for Disinformation Against Pakistan**

Almost every Participant gave their view about the tools and means used by the adversaries in disinformation warfare against Pakistan. There was an agreement among the Participants that the opponents have used multiple tools and means to spread disinformation, which have evolved in utility and efficiency with time. These tools and means jointly build media agendas and systematically build disinformation campaigns to sway public opinion in the target state and pursue their geostrategic goals. Accordingly, six tools and means of disinformation and propaganda were identified, given in Table 4 below, used by the adversaries against Pakistan. These tools and means are assigned a distinct Node.

Table 4

*NVivo-drawn summary of Nodes of Theme 3 with an overall coverage of source content coded on Theme 3.*

Themes No.	Coding	Nodes	Overall Coverage of Source Content Coded on Theme 3
Theme-3 The Various Kinds of Media Utilized by the Adversaries to Disseminate Disinformation against Pakistan	N1TH3	Using Social Media as a Disinformation Tool	12.02%
	N2TH3	Hiring the Media Houses as Tools of Disinformation	13.5%
	N3TH3	Using Public Relations Networks as a Disinformation Tool	20.38%
	N4TH3	Using Radio Channels to Air Fake News	4.45%
	N5TH3	Engaging Agents of Influence as a Tool of Disinformation	11.19%
	N6TH3	Using Movies as a Propaganda Tool	19.67%

**Theme 4: Disinformation Warfare Impact**

Certain Participants identified the impact of disinformation warfare on Pakistan in various areas, like Pakistan’s diplomatic standing, separatist movements, the Kashmir issue, the disrepute of the Pakistan Army and the Intelligence Agencies, etc. Others viewed that the media warfare augmented separatist movements, like the movements in Balochistan run by BLA and the movement run by PTM in the former FATA. Accordingly, the following four areas, found to have been impacted by disinformation and propaganda warfare, are assigned a distinct Node each.



Table 5

NVivo-drawn summary of Nodes of Theme 4 with an overall coverage of source content coded on Theme 4.

Themes No.	Coding	Nodes	Overall Coverage of Source Content Coded on Theme 4
<b>Theme-4</b> The Impact of Disinformation Warfare on Pakistan at the Public, Government, and Diplomatic Levels	<b>N1TH4</b>	Pakistan Feels the Heat of Diplomatic Isolation	15.21%
	<b>N2TH4</b>	Separatist Movements Aggravated	9.33%
	<b>N3TH4</b>	The Case of the Right to Self-determination of the Kashmiri People Came to a Standstill	6.00%
	<b>N4TH4</b>	Pakistan Army's Credibility Compromised	12.62%

**Theme 5: Moderators for Disinformation Warfare Impact**

Some Participants believed that disinformation and propaganda warfare waged by the opposing states against Pakistan does not go unchecked. Instead, it must overcome certain barriers or moderators to realize the actors' objectives. Participants who spoke on this point underscored various barriers or moderators to external disinformation. Accordingly, these data are arranged in the four areas and twelve sub-areas, as shown in Table 6 below, and were assigned a distinct Node and Sub-Node/Child Node each.

Table 6

NVivo-drawn summary of Nodes and Sub/Child Nodes of Theme 5 with an overall coverage of source content coded on Theme 5.

Theme No.	Node ID	Node Title	Sub-Node/Child Node Title	Overall Coverage of Source Content Coded on Theme 5
<b>Theme-5</b> The Role of Moderators in Determining the Degree of Influence of Disinformation Warfare against	<b>N1TH5</b>	Moderators for Disinformation Warfare Impact on Public Opinion	<b>C1N1TH5</b> -Other Sources of Information	28.6%
			<b>C2N1TH5</b> -Existing Political and Religious Ideologies	
			<b>C3N1TH5</b> - A Weak Disinformation Source Credibility	



			C4N1TH5-Disinformation Aims to Get an Advantage at Home	
	N2TH5	Moderators for Augmenting the Effects of Disinformation Warfare on Separatists	C1N2TH5-Fact-checking and Exposing Disinformation C2N2TH5-Building a Counter-Narrative C3N2TH5-Engaging the Public Target of Disinformation	43.04%
	N3TH5	Moderators for Disinformation Impact on Pakistan's State Policy	C1N3TH5-CPEC is in Pakistan's National Interest C2N3TH5-Kashmir is Pakistan's Jugular Vein	37.84%
	N4TH5	Moderators for Disinformation Warfare Impact on Pakistan's Diplomatic	C1N4TH5-Pakistan is Too Important to be Isolated C2N4TH5-Pakistan's Nuclear Program is Safe	40.46%

### Discussion & Conclusion

This discussion revolves around whether the research objectives have been realized. Accordingly, it is structured around them, in relation to the themes that have been identified during the data analysis. Further down, it also delves into the impact the disinformation warfare has had on various recipients and how much of a role the moderators have played in restricting that.

#### Discussion on Realization of Research Objectives 1, 2, and 3

Theme 1, 'Pakistan is the Target of Disinformation Warfare,' is relevant to Research Objective 1. It had four Nodes. Nine participants, sixty percent of the total, contributed their views to four Nodes. All participants viewed affirmatively in line with the Nodes, and no differing or mitigating remark was received from them. So, it is confidently concluded that Research Objective 1 has been fully realized. Node 1 answered whether Pakistan faces disinformation warfare by describing the history of disinformation warfare against Pakistan. Nodes 2 and 3 highlight the factors underlying the disinformation warfare against Pakistan, and Node 4 describes that India leads this disinformation warfare.

Theme 2, 'Disinformation Targets in Pakistan,' relates to Research Objective 2. It had six Nodes. Three of these Nodes collectively had six Sub/Child Nodes, which denote the sub-areas of the



disinformation warfare targets. Thirteen participants, around eighty-seven percent of the total, contributed their views to twelve Nodes and Child Nodes. All participants viewed affirmatively in line with the Nodes and Child Nodes, and no differing or mitigating remark was received from the participants. So, it is confidently concluded that Research Objective 2 has been fully achieved. The recipients of disinformation against these targets were the wider public, the Government of Pakistan, separatists operating in Balochistan and FATA, and the international community and bodies.

Theme 3, Tools and Means of Disinformation Warfare, is relevant to Research Objective 3. It had six Nodes. These Nodes highlighted six tools and means the disinformation warmongers use against Pakistan in varying amounts. Eleven participants, around seventy-three percent of the total, contributed their views to six Nodes.

All participants viewed affirmatively in line with the nodes, and no differing or mitigating remarks were received from the participants. Ultimately, this study identified six tools and means of interstate disinformation that the actor states use against Pakistan. So, it is established that Research Objective 3 has been wholly fulfilled.

#### **Discussion on Disinformation Warfare Impact and the Role of Moderators (Research Objectives/Themes 4 and 5)**

This part of the discussion constitutes the core of this study. It deals with its primary objectives: identifying the disinformation warfare impact on the recipients and understanding the extent to which the impact of disinformation is diluted and mitigated by various moderating factors. Data gathered in this study shows that although the media warfare waged by the enemy states has hurt Pakistan in certain respects, this warfare has not delivered equivalent to the investments of the disinformation mongers. This is because of numerous moderating factors highlighted under Theme 5 in the previous chapter. This impact-moderators orientation will be discussed in this section. The discussion will involve juxtaposing the impacts with the moderators to conclude the net impact, as shown in Tables 8a and 8b.

Table 8a comprises the moderators with ambivalent to low effectiveness, which means the impact of disinformation in those cases was high. On the other hand, Table 8b consists of moderators with significant effectiveness, which means the impact of disinformation in those cases was low. Research Objectives 4 and 5 have been cumulatively addressed. Research Objective 4 is related to ascertaining the impact of disinformation warfare on Pakistan at the public, diplomatic, and strategic levels. Research Objective 5 is related to examining the moderators for the impact of disinformation.

Accordingly, it was a natural requirement to answer both research objectives by juxtaposing the impact of disinformation warfare with that of the respective moderator. This study identified eight impacts that disinformation recipients could have developed based on the targets or the focus areas. Out of these potential impacts, four did not happen because of the significant effectiveness of the moderators. Of the remaining four potential impacts, the moderators' effectiveness was ambivalent



against one and low against three potential impacts. Thirteen moderators were identified against eight impacts, which either nixed or diluted them. So, this study identified enough disinformation warfare impacts on the recipients and an even larger number of moderators. Hence, Research Objectives 4 and 5 are fully realized.

The discussion in this section will be held in two parts. Under Part I, Table 5.5a will be illustrated, focusing on four factors that impact disinformation recipients. Therefore, this section will be divided into four sub-parts. The impact of disinformation warfare identified from the data will be followed by the corresponding moderators of each impact based on the research data. Under Part II, Table 5.5b will be illustrated, examining the moderating factors that were so effective that they prevented the impact from occurring.



Table 7

*Disinformation Impact-Moderators Orientation for Low to Ambivalent Moderator Effectiveness*

Disinformation Recipients	Disinformation Targets (The areas of potential disinformation impact)	Disinformation Impact on Recipients	Impact Moderators	Moderators' Effectiveness
International Community and Bodies	Alleging Pakistan for Supporting Terrorism Calling Pakistan's Anti- Terrorism Operations Human Rights Violations	Pakistan Feels the Heat of Diplomatic Isolation	Pakistan is too Important to be Isolated Diplomatically.	Ambivalent
	Kashmir is a Dead Issue. Normalcy has been restored in Kashmir.			
Separatists	Fueling Separatist Movements	Separatist Movements Aggravated	Fact-checking and Exposing Disinformation Building a Counter-Narrative Engaging the Public Target of Disinformation	Low
General Public	Alleging Pakistan Army and Intelligence Agencies Acting as Deep State in Pakistan	Pakistan Army's Credibility Compromised		



Table 8

*Disinformation (Potential) Impact-Moderators Orientation for Significant Moderator Effectiveness*

Disinformation Recipients	Disinformation Focus/Targets (The areas of potential disinformation impact)	(Potential) Impact on Recipients	Impact Moderators	Moderators' Effectiveness
International Community and Bodies	Pakistan's Nuclear Arsenal is Vulnerable to Theft and Misuse Pakistan's Nuclear Program Technology is Vulnerable to Proliferation	Pakistan's Nuclear Program would have been Banned	Pakistan's Nuclear Program, Arsenals, and Technology are Safe	Significant
General Public	China's Debt Trap Theory Regarding CPEC	The Pakistani Public would have turned against CPEC	Other Sources of Information than Disinformation A Weak Disinformation Source Credibility Disinformation aims to get an Advantage at Home	Significant
Government of Pakistan (Directly or through Public Opinion)	Winding up CPEC To Abandon the Kashmir Cause	Pakistan would have withdrawn from the CPEC Pakistan would have abandoned the Kashmir Cause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· CPEC is in Pakistan's National Interest</li> <li>· Kashmir is Pakistan's Jugular Vein</li> </ul>	Significant Significant



## **Conclusion**

With this section, extended and prolific work comes to a close. The problem statement of this work was based on a press statement of Pakistan's erstwhile Chief of Army Staff, Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa, that Pakistan faces inter-state hybrid warfare. The literature suggested that, among other forms of hybrid warfare, Pakistan receives extensive disinformation, fake news, and propaganda from certain inimical states. The literature also highlighted that disinformation warfare and other forms of hybrid warfare Pakistan faces are owing to adversaries' lack of conventional war capability vis-à-vis Pakistan, given its ever-increasing nuclear deterrence. Based on the modalities of disinformation and propaganda warfare used by adversaries against Pakistan, as suggested by the literature, this research was founded on a theoretical framework centered on McCombs and Shaw's Media Agenda Theory (1972). Given the nature of the problem background, a qualitative study based on in-depth interaction with experts on the inter-state disinformation phenomenon was considered more appropriate. The literature was extensively reviewed, a suitable research design was established, and a qualitative study commenced, addressing five research questions/objectives, and involving fifteen experts on interstate disinformation warfare in Pakistan. As expected, a large amount of qualitative data yielded wonderful research findings. Although identifying the research targets and the tools and means of propagating disinformation and propaganda were the major research objectives, the focus of this study was to find out the impact of disinformation warfare on its recipients, i.e., the wider public, the Government of Pakistan, the separatists in Balochistan and FATA, and the international community and bodies, and the role of moderators in diluting the impact. Accordingly, this study identified eight potential impacts that disinformation recipients could have developed. Out of these potential impacts, four did not happen because of the significant effectiveness of the moderators. The moderators' effectiveness was ambivalent against one of the remaining four potential impacts and low against three. The study successfully achieved all research objectives based on the vast amount of data collected.

This study also yielded theoretical, policy, and educational implications. It vastly contributed to the existing theory by confirming many concepts, models, and study findings. Simultaneously, acting inductively, it also proposed new areas in the field of media agenda research. It differed from the seminal Media Agenda Theory by McCombs and Shaw. It suggested that, unlike the theory proposed in 1972, the media agenda is not altogether free to shape people's minds and achieve its results. Instead, the information communicated to the recipients is subject to numerous moderators. This study has contributed to policymaking in the remit of designing disinformation warfare counterstrategy, including introducing fact-checking at a vast level in the country, building the counter-narrative, raising the disinformation warfare Pakistan faces at the international forums, engaging think tanks, institutions, and media to promote Pakistan's soft image internationally, promoting media literacy at school and college levels, strengthening Pakistan's film industry and using it to counter India's propaganda against Pakistan and to take special measures to tackle the enemy's disinformation warfare in Balochistan and the erstwhile FATA.



This study is the first to examine the impact of much-talked-about information warfare waged by a cohort of states against Pakistan. It has highlighted how the citizens of Pakistan, in general, respond to the international media on critical matters. Accordingly, it will enrich the knowledge of disinformation warfare and contribute to the deficient area of research by empirically evaluating the agenda-setting theory from Pakistan's perspective. The limitations of this study have also been highlighted, and areas for future research have been suggested. This study looks forward to further research on the clues and tips given by this study about interstate disinformation warfare in the years to come.

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