

Indian Media Coverage of Operation Bunyan-ul-Marsoos: An Analysis of Propaganda and Misinformation.

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Indian media in spreading false information, misinformation, and biased narratives during the 2025 India-Pakistan conflict. The study looks into how public perceptions of the conflict were impacted by the creation and dissemination of conflict-related narratives through television news channels, newspapers, websites, and social media platforms. The study fits into the larger picture of media as a potent tool for opinion formation and transmission, particularly in times of political and military unrest. It focuses on identifying significant misinformation efforts, studying how false claims were disseminated, and assessing how Pakistani authorities, fact-checking groups, and foreign media sources contested or refuted these claims. From April 22 to May 11, 2025, media coverage of the conflict was examined using a qualitative research methodology. The study uses documented instances of disinformation as supporting evidence and looks at stories from a few Indian television networks, newspapers, websites, and social media platforms. The framework for comprehending how audiences rely on media for information, how news organizations highlight specific aspects of an event, and how media narratives can affect perceptions during armed conflict is provided by Media Dependency Theory, Framing Theory, and the idea of media and war. In order to find recurrent trends and tactics, the study also takes into account other cases of false information ascribed to Indian media. The findings indicate that misinformation and disinformation were significant components of conflict-related media coverage. The results show that misinformation and disinformation had an important role in media coverage of conflicts. AI-generated and deepfake information, statements that were reported without adequate verification, faked or altered visual content, inflated military claims, and narratives that depict one side as winning while disparaging the opposition are all identified by the study. The study also shows that selective reporting, patriotic framing, emotionally charged language, and quick social media dissemination all contributed to the spread of dubious material. Cases that have been documented also show how inaccurate or unconfirmed stories could proliferate beyond domestic audiences and possibly affect how the conflict is seen internationally. The study also looks at the role of Pakistani media during Operation Bunyan-ul-Marsoos and concludes that the conflict was continuously covered by Pakistani television and other media outlets, which emphasized military action and national defense. More generally, the results show that media activities during conflict might exacerbate public feelings, support national narratives, and make it more difficult to discern between authentic and false information. As a result, the study highlights the significance of evidence-based reporting, critical media literacy, responsible journalism, and verification in conflict settings. It comes to the conclusion that in an increasingly digital and post-truth media landscape, improving public media literacy and media accountability is crucial to mitigating the negative impacts of false information and empowering viewers to assess conflict-related content critically.

Keywords: Media framing; hybrid warfare; propaganda; misinformation; disinformation; India–Pakistan conflict; Indian media; Pakistani media; Operation Bunyan-ul-Marsoos; media literacy.

Introduction

Media refers to the channels through which information is communicated to audiences. These channels include radio, newspapers, television, the internet and books (Orlik, 2007). In this context, propaganda can be understood as purposeful communication designed to influence people's attitudes, feelings and interpretations in ways that support the communicator's objectives (Marlin, 2013, p. 12, as cited in Dodds, 2018).

(Carruthers, 2000). Jim Morison quoted that “Whoever has power to control media, has power to control the minds”.

The media, including print media, has an important role in communicating information during conflict. Its influence also creates a responsibility to report sensitive events carefully, accurately and responsibly (Ali, Mujahid, & Rehman, 2015). Because many people depend on news media to understand events beyond their direct experience, the way an issue is reported can strongly influence public perceptions.

Sometimes the propagandists may resort to lying or to use of faked documents and incidents. Thus Hitler did great job by exploiting that Jews were creating propaganda by plotting international conspiracy to rule the world. He proved this statement by citing the infamous protocol of the wise men of Zion, (Palmer & Howard, 6). Existing research tends to focus on media's bias work in general but there is lack of research on specific propaganda.

This research examines role of Indian media particularly news channels, websites, new papers in 2025 India and Pakistan conflict during operation Bunyan ul Marsoos.

The conflict started on 22 April 2025 after a terrorist attack in Indian administrated Kashmir in this attack 26 Indians were killed including shopkeepers, families, women, and children. India blamed Pakistan backed groups for this attack like, The Resistance Front (TRF) so to take revenge India launched operation Sindoor on 7 May 2025, targeting nine alleged militant bases in areas like Bandwalpur, Marilde and Shakar Garh (Fake News Watchdog, 2025, p. 7).

Pakistan retaliated with Operation Bunyan al-Marsoos on May 10, until a U.S.-China-UN ceasefire halted fighting on May 11 (Al Jazeera, 2025). This shift reflects heightened tensions between the two nations. The India did not have any evidence that Pakistan is responsible for this attack even Pakistan ordered for investigation in Pahalgam. However the shelling first started by India on 30 April 2025 in which India has banned 16 Pakistani You Tube channels, Pakistani airlines have been prohibited from using Indian airspace (Masood, 2025). The mass media-television, newspaper magazines radio, and books were used as platform for spreading propaganda among peoples. Usually in this form of propaganda the propagandists play with sentiments of peoples by presenting the best or worst possible case for any idea, process or institutions. The analysis has covered limited study about how this propaganda effected the relation between both countries (Ali, A et.al 2025).

The creating and spreading propaganda to shape the minds of people on large scale has become very easy with invention of social media, and the subjects of this type of ‘hybrid warfare’ may be exposed to just one side of an issue and have trouble distinguishing truth from falsehood (Proroković, 2024, 52). This study aims to identify and analyze misinformation disseminated by segments of the Indian media during 2025 India Pakistan conflict. It will examine specific media platforms that played role in spreading misleading information BBC (2025), Al Jazeera (2025), Zee News, Time Now Navbarat and also investigate how these platforms were identified and criticized by official news organizations and international media outlets for publishing unverified reports. The study aims to provide detailed information on Indian media's practices, separate

correct information from falsehood using evidence emphasizing the importance of responsible, fact-based journalism in conflict situation.

Objectives of the study

- a. To identify the specific disinformation campaigns run by India media during operation Bunyan ul Marsoos and to analyze how Pakistan debunked those false claims.
- b. To determine the role of Pakistani media in sharing information in operation Bunyan ul Marsoos and how international mediators admired its role in war ?
- c. To understand the effects of India's biased disinformation campaigns on Pakistan.

Research Questions

- a. What specific disinformation campaigns were launched by Indian media and how were they fact-checked by Pakistani authorities?
- b. What type of role Pakistani media played in war and how international mediators reacted?
- c. What could be the effect of India's bias disinformation campaigns on Pakistan?

Significance of Study

This study is important because it help us understand how media can influence people's thinking during conflicts. By examining how Indian media reported on operation Bunyan ul Marsoos , the research will show whether news was fair or biased and how certain messages may have been used to shape public opinion. This is useful for making people more aware so they can think critically about what they watch and read instead of believing everything blindly. The study can also help journalists and media organizations improve their reporting by encouraging honesty and responsibility, especially during sensitive situations.

Literature Review

Existing literature shows how conflict reporting can combine unverified military claims, emotionally engaging content and limited attention to peace initiatives. During Operation Sindoor, for example, reports circulated claiming that 100 terrorists had been killed, while civilian casualties such as Ayesha's death received less attention (Fake News Watchdog, 2025, p. 21). Digital platforms can accelerate this process because highly engaging material can gain rapid visibility through social media distribution systems (Parameswaran, 2020). Wolfsfeld (2004) similarly explains that wartime media commonly gives greater attention to confrontation and military activity than to peace efforts. Reporting during Operation Sindoor reflected this pattern, as ceasefire initiatives received comparatively limited coverage (Al Jazeera, 2025). Ajmal and Abbasi (2020) further place such information activity within the wider problem of hybrid threats facing Pakistan and argue that domestic political, social and economic vulnerabilities can increase exposure to these threats.

In the report of Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) it is clearly written that Indian News channels are involved in creating propaganda against Pakistan for main four reasons.

First reason is adverse portrayal of Pakistani military forces means to declare them a terrorist For example in recent 2025 India Pakistan war after Pahalgam attack Indian media disseminated false news that Pakistan's military force was responsible for attack in Indian Punjab, However they did not have any proof for it Ali.A et al. (2024). The second reason is to create fear, unrest and disorder in society. For example the army public school attack in Peshawar on 16 December 2014 which created fear and disorder among citizens. The third reason is that many Indian News channels used unverified claims about Kashmire to destroy Pakistan's image internationally like that Pakistani armed forces broke rules of LOC (Line of Control) etc.

The fourth reason is that India wanted to disrupt the development of CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor) an agreement signed with China for this purpose an attack on Chinese consulate on 23 October was carried out by India. Pakistan is surrounded by fake news aimed to distort its image internationally and its narratives also. For example 'EU Disinfo Lab' discovered that there are more than 750 media platforms aimed to threaten Pakistan by dispersing falsehood. Fake video clips, false news about attacking on Indians, supporting Taliban, declaring Pakistan as a terrorist state overwhelmed Pakistani media (Disinfo Lab 2020).

Allcott and Gentzkow (2017) note that one disadvantage of social media is that it spread any news very quickly without verifying like as seen in a fake video of PM Shehbaz Sharief was widely shared before it was proved to be fake (Fake News Watchdog, 2025, p. 33). Tandoc et al. (2018) argue that fake news spread quickly by creating strong emotions, it further says that Indian media used patriotic images and emotional language to influence audience. The Indian government has said that the purpose of terrorist attack was to scare people, destroy tourism and to heightened tensions (PTI News, 2025). After terrorist attack in Pahalgam the propaganda was created which took the advantage of communal aspect of incident blamed Kashmiris and showed them dangerous even Kashmiri Muslims completely denounced the attack ("Kashmir observes complete shutdown in protest against Pahalgam terror attack", 2025).

During war, the Indian media disseminated falsehood including the deepfake video of PM Shehbaz Shareef, arguing that India defeated Pakistan, these fake news not only effected residents but also attracted people across the world (Pakistan Social Science Review 2025) international media outlets also reinforced India's narratives (New York Time 2025).

India's another false claim was the nuclear site attack on Pakistan which raised concerns among international mediators that delays ceasefire talks (Fake News Watchdog, 2025, p. 42). These strategies of Indian media are part of hybrid warfare which badly effected friendly countries and opponents also (Singer & Brooking, 2018). There are various regional studies that could highlight baseless or harmful cultural ideas such as study of Ahmad and Mathes (2017) found that mainly in South Asia the media speaks against minorities or opponents. An example is false accusation about Bilawal Butto Zardari using drug where large people responded globally (Fake News Watchdog, 2025, p. 23). The Indian media never stop lying, the AI generated fake videos and images presented by India's Today report of fake S-400 strike which made the situation even worse (Fake News Watchdog, 2025, p. 31).

Despite this during Operation Bunyan ul Marsoos both government and Pakistani TV channels provided continues live reporting describing everything about war in a good way showing that all armed forces worked together in a responsible way (Stratheia, 2025; Ptv News, 2025). Social media platforms shared similar content praising Pakistan's ability to strike back after an attack forcing people to believe that Pakistan is strong enough to protect its state from enemies and also it could survive in hard time (Kugelman, 2025: The Guardian, 2025).

Moreover, from the very past Indian media disseminated false information against Pakistan without evidence with high confidence like Indian media disseminated falsehood after major event when US left Afghanistan and Ashraf Ghani's government was collapsed in which both India and Pakistan played role in sharing information. India saw this as opportunity to damage Pakistan's diplomatic image and highlighted that Pakistan control Taliban and also uses phrases for punishing or pressurizing Pakistan, the problem was further compounded by famous Indian anchor Arnab Goswami propagated false claim that Pakistani Army officers were directing operations from fifth floor of Serena hotel in Kabul it was totally fake news as originally there were only two floors (Dawn News, 2021). Another evidence indicates that Indian media always engaged in such activities to tarnish Pakistan's image by dispersing falsehood like, famous Indian news channel Hindustan Times showed some video clips provoking that fighter jets of Pakistan's Air Force were attacking in valley called Panjshir in Kabul. According to news of Hindustan Times Pakistan was

supporting Taliban this misinformation was exposed later by famous editor of UK defense journal George Allison who verified that it was American jet flying through Welsh valley (Sarfraz, 2021). What could be effect of this disinformation campaigns on Pakistan? Pakistan's relation with India are not good because of propaganda Indian media used against Pakistan which not only effected film industry of Pakistan but also its image abroad .For example after Pulwama and Uri incident certain sanctions were imposed on Pakistani by All-Indian Cine Workers Association (AICWA),according to which Pakistanis were not allowed to work with Indians. Many Indian movies, drams, Netflix shows, web series declare Pakistan as a terrorist state influencing people thoughts and emotions in the world (ARY News, 2019). Moreover, there exist many scandals where Indian news media emerged as paid media. Cobra post an Indian digital platform confirmed that various Indian news channels were involved in 500 crore deal aimed at promoting the Hindutva agenda during elections .Many news channels were part of this deal like Zee group, Hindustan Time group, the new Indian express group and many other which had high reputation(Cobrapost.com. 2018).Press council of India prepared a report on paid news highlighting names of channels where paid news had been published .However the PCI did not share the whole report(Press Council of India. 2010)..My findings will discover all fake news casted by Indian media during operational Bunyan ul Marsoos telling truth to world about tactics used by media instead of remaining accountable which is essential especially during conflict ridden times.

Theoretical Framework

Media Dependency Theory, developed by Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur in 1976, provides a useful basis for examining the relationship between audiences and information systems. The theory suggests that media influence can become stronger when people depend heavily on media to understand events. This is particularly relevant during conflict, when audiences may have little direct access to events and therefore rely on television, newspapers and digital platforms for updates. Greater dependence can increase the influence of media narratives, especially when audiences have limited opportunities to independently verify competing claims. According to Ajay K in Media at War, the media has always been closely connected with war. Conflicts receive a lot of media attention because they are dramatic and attract viewers. Ajai K in his journals says that Kargil conflict 99 was India's first major television war where television brought battlefield into people's home, offices and everywhere. Reporters were present at battlefield and covered fighting with the support of army. Since the media chooses what to report , some information received more attention while other facts were left out, which was biased (Ali.A et., al 2025). Media with the help of army spread (falsehood) news as the war was fought right before their eyes and cameras. Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) is about the way media present the news. This theory explains that media can influence how people understand an event by giving more attention to some facts while ignoring others. For example during Operation Sindoor , some media reports focused on terrorism allegations against Pakistan but did not equally report civilian losses such as Ayesha's death , a 34 -year-old teacher killed in an Indian strike , was wrongly described as terrorist (Fake News Watchdog, 2025, p. 26) , this report also identified 31 misinformation cases that increased tensions between India and Pakistan .

Material and Methods

This research study provides Indian media's biased information during operation Bunyan ul Marsoos from April 22 to 11 May 2025 across television (Times now, India Television, Republic TV), newspapers (Aj Tak ,Brat Express, Times of India) and social media platforms (Twitter, TikTok ,Websites)and also provide data from past that how Indian media spread false news ever in history . This study also analyzed news channels as evidence (Fake News Frenzy) that have

even accepted their biased information . Using APA style this study provides qualitative data. This study's primary data is supported by Fake News Watchdog incident report (2025) which provided 31 verified misinformation case, not relying on it only but using current sources (Zee News , Times Now Navbharat , ABP news) to separate correct information from false information, supported by (New York Times 2025) (Al Jazeera 2025). This study applied Media dependency theory (Sandra Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur 1976), Media at war (Ajai K), and Framing theory (Entman 1993) .

Indian media lost its reputation by dispersing falsehood in operation Sindoor . During the conflict, a significant volume of misinformation and disinformation was dispersed, particularly by Indian media sources, with several reports later found to be unconfirmed or fabricated..Haris Maqsood,Tymoor Hassan Shahid and Muhammad Asim Khan (2026) in their research showed that how many.. Indian news channels discriminated falsehood during operation Bunyan ul Marsoos . According to them the famous Indian news channels including India News and India TV total broadcasted 9,800 news related to war in which 9,320 news were totally false and partially 446 were correct other channel Aj tak showed total 7,800 news in which a big number of 7,600 were false and only 98 news were partially correct ,another news channel was Times Now which broadcasted total 10,700 news in which 10,610 news were absolutely false and only 87 news were even partially correct .They further declared many news channels incapable in which most famous one is Barat Express where 10,700 news were false out of 1200 and only 303 were correct .These large numbers pf fake news are enough to show that Indian does not show any accountability while delivering news to general public.

There are evidences and facts which proved that Indian media not only spread false information in recent war of 2025 but has also repeatedly spread misinformation in the past to tarnish Pakistan's image. Many Indian news channels spread false claims that Indian Air-force fighters had put attacked on Pakistan's nuclear facility along with fired two fighter jets and even claimed that they crossed international boarder however independent outlets and international media did not confirm any of these claims even some these claims were created through AI which made the situation worse than before. (Chaudhuri & Higgins, 2025; Das & K.B., 2025).The main purpose behind these false claims is to declare Indians as hero while Pakistan as villain. Michael Kugelman a well known a South Asian analyst describe the situation of war in Indian as it become the center of all fake news unpredictable in numbers . He further noticed that these false claims were mainly associated with ruling government (Das & K.B., 2025).

In another widely circulated yet baseless report, Indian media also claimed that during war Pakistani state leadership hide themselves in bunker which was totally false and denied by Pakistani government. (The Economist, 2025)

As Joseph Goebbels, a Nazi minister of propaganda said "...Repeat a lie often enough, and people may start to believe it as truth..." (Stafford, 2016). This is the reason that many countries think that Pakistan is a terrorist country. Gaillard, Martins, and Figueiredo (2021) discovered that Low digital skills or capability regarding media often leads to falsification , these incapable media persons focused on what people wants not at what is true or false .Through planning , misleading information a video was falsely presented in a way looking like India is attacking on Pakistan through missiles under operation Sindoor however the video was originated from operation Dhaka in 2024 where missiles were fired in the direction of Israel from Iran.

Accurate reporting becomes particularly important during conflict because news coverage can influence both domestic audiences and international perceptions. As Ali, Mujahid, and Rehman (2015) indicate, the media carries a responsibility to communicate public issues carefully. Media literacy therefore becomes an important means of helping audiences evaluate disputed claims rather than accepting emotionally persuasive material without scrutiny.Indian media used fabricated content showing that Prime Minister of Pakistan itself admitted defeat in war with India

through a video generated by AI and also fake video of an explosion at Karachi stadium, to show that India is winner and also influence people around the world.(Fake News Watchdog, 2025, pp. 33, 46)..There are different physical and online methods where information is shared through deep-fake AI videos to confuse people and weaken the opponent's morale (Singer & Brooking, 2018).According to DG ISPR Lt Gen Ahmed Sharif Chaudhry (2025), Pakistan did not ask for ceasefire during war with India, this shows that Pakistan is strong enough to fight with India and is not aggressive but it wants peace while it facing threat (The Express Tribune, 2025). Fairclough (1995) identifies Language and discourse used through media is strong enough to shape thinking of people or institutions. The way media used language to describe the victory was also important. As stated by Chatterjee (2024), that in conflict times media often presents the information in a way that touch peoples hearts and create patriotic feelings and huge reaction also..As stated by Caballero and Monje (2024). Equally, Ayolov (2025) refers to the media landscape today as being in 'post-truth': where emotions replace facts and disinformation can be circulated at a quicker rate as it resonates with people's emotions rather than their evidence. Halmetoja (2016) A comparative study examined that how channels like Fox News and CNN presents news about terrorism. it found that both channels showed ideological bias, but Fox News presents anti Islamic content while CNN was less direct. The near-entirely fabricated material itself (like the times now and the republic bharat) is considered to be disinformation, as per the framework proposed by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) where the entire content of such channels is deemed to be fake.

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