



## Narratives in Conflict: Media Framing and Propaganda During the 2025 India-Pakistan War

Sundas Zahra<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Muhammad Shahid<sup>2</sup>

1. MS Scholar, Riphah Institute of Media Sciences, Riphah International University, Islamabad
2. Assistant Professor and Postgraduate Program In-Charge at RIMS, Riphah International University, Rawalpindi

### Abstract

This research study explores how several media narratives developed following the Pahalgam attack in Indian-held Kashmir and the 2025 war it sparked between India and Pakistan. India ran “Operation Sindoor” and Pakistan “Operation Bunyan-e-Marsoos,” while also sparking an information battle. By examining news coverage from Indian, Pakistani and international media during the war, this research reveals that journalism became an important part of the state’s policy. Citing certain communication theories as guides, the paper looks at how media bias, misinformation and online nationalism create public opinion and influence policy decisions. According to the study, the media’s reporting was influenced by ideas and political goals, leaving emotions high and making the conflict a struggle between stories. Research shows there is a need for ethical work in journalism, thorough fact checking and growing awareness of media literacy due to today’s information warfare.

**Keywords:** Pakistan, India, Pahalgam, Kashmir, Indo-Pak War, 2025

### Introduction

Relations in South Asia were restructured because of the India-Pakistan conflict in 2025. After a terrorist attack in the Pahalgam area of the Indian-Occupied Kashmir, where 60 people died, violence broke out. Immediately after India claimed Pakistani-based militants were to blame, violence broke out swiftly. Both India and Pakistan sent forces to fight against the threat of terrorism. Seeking to demonstrate its toughness toward terrorists, India said its mission ‘Operation Sindoor’ would guarantee a safe reaction, whereas Pakistan’s ‘Operation Bunyan Al Marsoos’ was explained by them as important for securing Pakistan and the region (The New York Times, 2025; Al Jazeera, 2025). This conflict, however, moved beyond physical borders and battlegrounds. It erupted at the same time in cyber spaces, satellite communications, and global news cyclestranslating into a system of vying narratives. Traditional and new media outlets in every country became essential instruments of statecraft and citizens' action. In such circumstance, statements made by military officials are broadcast as breaking news, and images and videos, mostly unverified, flood social media sites, fueling popular opinion and nationalism (Thussu, 2002). This research deals with how different state and independent media systems produced variant renditions of the same events. The research looks at selective revelation of information, affective framing strategies used, and the flat-out omissions that dominated much of the reporting. The research also assesses the role of international media organizations like CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera, RT, and CGTN in reinforcing and counter-narratives from South Asia (Carruthers, 2011; Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

This study seeks to explore the intricate dynamics of media, state interest, and public opinion interaction during war. It is notable for the application of framing mechanisms and propaganda devices, which were not only employed towards the particular purpose of war reporting but also to influence its trajectory (Entman, 1993). Through an examination of the role of the media in the 2025 Indo-Pak war, this study adds to the expansive literature on contemporary information warfare in which wars are fought as much in headlines and hashtags as on the battlefield (McIntyre, 2018).

### **Research questions**

- How did the media in Pakistan and India construct the conflict?
- What was the contribution of global media to world perceptions?
- With what manifestations were framing and propaganda theories evident in the media landscape?

### **Research objectives**

- To examine how the 2025 Pakistan-India war was framed by Indian and Pakistani media.
- To determine the impact of foreign media on global perception formation.
- To explore the application of framing and propaganda theories in covering the war on various media sources.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Two general theories inform this analysis:

#### **1. Framing Theory (Entman, 1993):**

According to this theory, the media determine the way people understand events by selecting some details, stressing others, omitting certain details and explaining certain aspects in greater detail. How people approach a matter, how they perceive it and what decision to make is guided by framing.

#### **2. Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model (1988):**

The media content is measured using five lenses in this model: ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak and ideology. It states that mass media generally do what elite groups want, rather than reporting the truth on their own. They give us important tools to understand how journalism portrayed the wars and how truth came to be portrayed and managed during wartime.

### **Literature Review**

Studies in conflict journalism from South Asia indicate that news media mirror the national ideas and foreign goals of each country. Media on both sides during the Kargil War (1999) spoke patriotically which discouraged those against the actions within India and Pakistan. Just like after the Uri attacks, both sides—India and Pakistan—had media that overstated their side's response and the other's damage. Modern warfare, (Thussu, 2002), is shaped as much by perception management as it is by the workings of strategy. A similar argument is made by Nawaz (2015) who says the structure between the army and media was developed to carry out strategic communication agendas. It has become clear from Rao study (2014) that the media usually supports the state's story, leaving other voices in the background. Globally, Herman and Chomsky (1988) detail how Western media adopt government-friendly roles during foreign interventions. Similarly, Carruthers (2011) refers to the selective war crimes and civilian casualty reporting by Western media along national lines. (Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) promote the concept of peace journalism as a counter-narrative framework that avoids sensationalism and polarization. These

studies provide a solid grounding for researching the reporting of the 2025 Indo-Pak war and analyzing the routine patterns of narrative making, disinformation, and ideological bias.

## **Case Study: Indo-Pakistani War of 2025**

### **Domestic Media Coverage**

#### **Indian Journalism:**

Indian TV channels such as Republic TV, Times Now, and India Today were hyper-nationalist in their reporting at the beginning of Operation Sindoor. Indian media did not report civilian deaths or dissident opinion, as reported by The New York Times (May 17, 2025). All TV programming consisted of copious amounts of unverified video footage and patriotic rhetoric. Use of military press conferences as primary sources signifies adherence to the Propaganda Model's sourcing filter. Indian news channels were criticized for dramatizing unverified reports of surgical strikes and heavy casualties on the enemy side. Some well-known journalists were found to break ethical rules and work hand-in-hand with the country. The Press Council of India received complaints from readers who claimed that Indian news came with a bias against Pakistan and reported things unfairly. You notice framing theory when Indian media made sure to praise how well India responded, while paying little attention to the reaction after Pakistan attacked India.

#### **Pakistani Media**

Geo News, ARY News and Dunya News said that Operation Bunyan Al Marsoos happened in response to Indian escalations. Azad Jammu and Kashmir's destruction and the situations of people displaced were mostly mentioned by the media in Pakistan, as covered by Al Jazeera (May 10, 2025). Various accounts on the Pakistani side revealed that India played a big role in starting the most of the fighting. A lot of what ISPR showed was selected by them and published daily, complete with powerful images meant for both Pakistanis and audiences worldwide. Being able to use former diplomats and military figures made it easier for the shows to argue for the right side. Lots of online news sites based in Pakistan made use of the hashtags #IndiaAttacks and #KashmirUnderFire. The campaigns drew high attention, supplemented by the government favoring influencers and online activists.

### **Global Media Discourses**

#### **United States and United Kingdom:**

Media channels like the CNN and BBC have used moderate language in their coverage, striving to remain neutral while often reporting government announcements without adequate scrutiny. According to MSN (2025), both networks emphasized the "risk of nuclear escalation" and the "need for dialogue," hence positioning themselves as champions of peace. However, their over-dependence on official briefings from the Indian and Pakistani governments indicates a repeated alignment with the propaganda model. Interestingly, there were a few British tabloids slightly pro-Indian, probably because of the Indian diaspora and commercial interests. The American media was neutral, frequently not challenging Indian assertions aggressively but projecting Pakistan as a security risk.

#### **Russian and Chinese Media**

Radiance Weekly (2025) and CGTN both had clear pro-Pakistan framing. RT's Russia blamed the initiation of the war on India to divert attention from economic issues and internal opposition.

Chinese media, in line with Beijing's strategic alliance with Islamabad, framed Pakistan as a peace-loving country under unwarranted attack. These frames are highly congruent with state ideologies and foreign policy objectives.

**Al Jazeera:** As a relatively well-balanced but critical news agency, Al Jazeera (May 7, 2025) explored contradictions between both sides' official narratives. The news organization questioned inconsistencies in casualty numbers, timelines of attacks, and originality of social media posts. Al Jazeera's reports were part of the minority that put the war into the context of larger regional tensions and historical conflicts.

### **The Impact of Social Media on Misinformation**

One of the most noticeable elements of the 2025 war was the speed and scale of disinformation sharing. Social media sites like Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok were rife with doctored videos, photo-shopped images, and made-up quotes. In India and Pakistan, both saw an increase in digital nationalism, with people sharing unverified reports to push their country's agenda. Several dozen fact alerts were sent out by both countries' efforts each day. To be clear, they did not receive the same level of attention as misinformation did. Bots and accounts that get official approval help further spread controversial ideas. From this situation, it is clear that digital media literacy should be added to curriculum and that changes must be made to accountability regulations.

### **Discussion**

The 2025 conflict between India and Pakistan illustrates that armed action now occurs together with public relations, mainly guided by the media. This work describes how both countries' media applied thinking tactics to report facts that matched the objectives of their government and encouraged patriotism in citizens. The media in India focused on security, a strong reaction, excellent defense and listed fewer victims among the public, who remained mostly calm with only small protests from their opponents during the strike. Framing is the process that Entman's theory explains for choosing and emphasizing news aspects. Both those with experience in the military and official records agree that Herman and Chomsky's model describes how news reporting changes depending on who owns media outlets and where information is coming from. Most of the time, Indian media focused on Indian news and gave small space to opinions from Pakistan. In addition, Pakistani media highlighted the victims, their expected self-control and their viewed sense of right and wrong. By spreading emotional images from the ISPR and the media, Pakistani media exposed what Pakistanis went through and certain Indian media also followed suit. Similarly, "Psydu Kids" on both sides of the Pakistan-India border tried to blame the "enemy country" for the damage. The purpose was to win public backing and contact individuals abroad. Using hashtags and involving celebrities, young Pakistanis used social media to support digital nationalism. Media journalists from different parts of the world told stories about geopolitical alignment differently. Such programs purposely did not interrupt routine news and tended to quote officials according to what their news organizations wanted to broadcast. Most of the time, British tabloid media backed India based on their investment interest and the ties diaspora felt to the country. From the viewpoint of strategy, both Russian and Chinese media painted Pakistan as an advocate for peace and India as the party fueling disagreements. I observed that Al Jazeera discussed what was presented more thoroughly and gave a fairer report. There was a big issue because people could easily share false stories online. On Twitter and TikTok, people shared rumors and misinformation; no matter how much effort fact-checkers put in, their lies spread widely due to political splits and growing digital nationalism. Right now, people often rely on their

feelings, not facts, to form their thoughts. The 2025 Indo-Pak war proves that the media is used for diplomacy as well as fighting on the battlefield. Consequently, I think we need to pay more attention to ethical reporting, balance the play of facts from both news outlets and improve education in media to deal with disinformation during wartime. The case study explains that media plays an important part in shaping public and world views during wars today.

### **Conclusion:**

Changes in policy during the 2025 war were impacted by the media's role. The founders controlled the way information was delivered and influenced how the public saw and acted on it. Since digital media has grown so much and the industry is now more accessible, both propaganda and disinformation will likely become widespread during future wars. As a result of the pandemic, ethical journalism, fact checking, independent news outlets and informed citizens are more needed now than ever.

### **References**

- "Are India or Pakistan Telling the Truth about Attacks?" Al Jazeera. (May 7, 2025). <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/7/information-war-are-india-or-pakistan-telling-the-truth-about-attacks>
- Al Jazeera. "Operation Bunyan-e-Marsoos: What We Know So Far". (May 10, 2025). <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/10/pakistan-launches-operation-bunyan-marsoos-what-we-know-so-far>
- BBC. "Live Updates on Indo-Pak Conflict". (2025). <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cwy6w6507wqo>
- Carruthers, S. L. (2011). The media at war: Communication and conflict in the twentieth century. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.amazon.com/Media-War-Communication-Conflict-Twentieth/dp/0333691431>
- Chomsky, N., & Barsamian, D. (1992). Manufacturing consent. Montreal: National Film Board of Canada. <https://www.epoortaal.be/folders/voorjaar2024/EPO-voorjaar2024.pdf>
- CGTN. "Tensions Rise on Subcontinent Amid New Escalations". (2025). <https://www.manilatimes.net/2025/05/22/tmt-newswire/pr-newswire/cgtn-the-undersea-lifeline-the-hidden-network-powering-asia/2119038>
- CNN. "Live Coverage: Operation Sindoor". (May 9, 2025). <https://edition.cnn.com/world/live-news/india-pakistan-operation-sindoor-05-09-25-intl-hnk>
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. Journal of communication, 43(4), 51-58. [https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Robert-Entman/publication/209409849\\_Framing\\_Toward\\_Clarification\\_of\\_A\\_Fractured\\_Paradigm/links/64d62bf6d3e680065aae9c55/Framing-Toward-Clarification-of-A-Fractured-Paradigm.pdf](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Robert-Entman/publication/209409849_Framing_Toward_Clarification_of_A_Fractured_Paradigm/links/64d62bf6d3e680065aae9c55/Framing-Toward-Clarification-of-A-Fractured-Paradigm.pdf)
- Herman, E. S., & Chomsky, N. (2021). Manufacturing consent. In Power and inequality (pp. 198-206). Routledge. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781315201511-25/manufacturing-consent-edward-herman-noam-chomsky>
- "How US, UK, Russia, and Chinese Media Covered India-Pakistan Conflict". MSN News. (2025). <https://www.msn.com/en-in/politics/international-relations/how-us-uk-russia-and-chinese-media-covered-india-pakistan-conflict-nuclear-rivals-nearer-to-war/ar-AA1EvsDN>

- "India's Media and Misinformation in Wartime". New York Times. (May 17, 2025). <https://parade.com/living/nyt-strands-hints-answers-today-saturday-may-17-2025>
- ISPR. "Bunyan-e-Marsoos Updates and Media Briefings". (2025). <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2545242/dg-ispr-holds-press-briefing-on-operation-bunyan-un-marsoos-launched-against-indian-aggression>
- Lynch, J., & McGoldrick, A. (2005). *Peace journalism*. Hawthorn Press. [https://books.google.com.pk/books/about/Peace\\_Journalism.html?id=iiobAQAAIAAJ&redir\\_esc=y](https://books.google.com.pk/books/about/Peace_Journalism.html?id=iiobAQAAIAAJ&redir_esc=y)
- Nawaz, S. (2008). Crossed swords: Pakistan, its army, and the wars within. <https://cir.nii.ac.jp/crid/1130000793870676096>
- Radiance Weekly. (2025). <https://radianceweekly.net/war-of-narratives-a-comparative-analysis-of-media-coverage-in-the-2025-indo-pak-conflict/>
- Rao, S. (2014). News and national identity in India: Media and the politics of belonging. *South Asian History and Culture*, 5(4), 492–509. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19472498.2014.943609>
- Reuters. "Explosions Heard in Pakistani Kashmir". (May 6, 2025). <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/multiple-loud-explosions-heard-pakistani-kashmir-reuters-witness-2025-05-06/>
- RT. "India's Strategy: Distraction or Domination?" (2025). <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2025/03/indias-diplomacy-amid-changing-great-power-dynamics/>
- Thussu, D. K., & Freedman, D. (Eds.). (2003). *War and the media: Reporting conflict 24/7*. Sage. <https://www.amazon.com/War-Media-Daya-K-Thussu/dp/0761943137>
- "War of Narratives: A Comparative Analysis of Media Coverage in the 2025 Indo-Pak Conflict". <https://radianceweekly.net/war-of-narratives-a-comparative-analysis-of-media-coverage-in-the-2025-indo-pak-conflict/>