



Research Article

Digital Fog of War: Misinformation and Disinformation in May 2025 Indo-Pak crisis

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Abstract:

The expansion of digital media has transformed the global information ecosystem, which has led to the democratization of the information and proliferation of misinformation and disinformation. This study investigates the false and misleading narratives circulated during the May 2025 Indo-Pak crisis. The base of this study is verifiable instances of misinformation. The research is done using 68 verified instances identified by various established fact-checking organisations. Entman's Framing Theory (1993) as well as Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model (1998) were applied to analyse the narratives, to understand how they are structured, framed and amplified. The results were remarkable as they shown that misinformation is not random but embedded structurally within media ecosystems and driven by platform affordances, ideological pressures, and audience psychology.

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The research contributes by a closer understanding of how misinformation is propagated around Indo-Pak geopolitical context, while emphasizing the need for media literacy and institutional accountability.

Keywords: Indo-Pak crisis, media, misinformation, disinformation, framing theory, propaganda model

Introduction

The recent digital media transformation has reshaped the whole scenario of information production, distribution and consumption. While accessibility and connectivity have increased, it has also weakened traditional gatekeeping mechanisms, enabling the rapid spread of fake news, misinformation and disinformation. Geopolitically, India and Pakistan share sensitive relations, which is why media narratives are deeply intertwined with national identity, political ideology, and strategic interests. During periods of heightened tension, with access data and overflowing content, it becomes challenging to identify the correct data and truly process it all. This study focuses on empirically verifiable patterns of misinformation circulation, aiming to provide a rigorous and analytical ground to understand how misinformation and disinformation operate across the Indo-Pak media dynamics.

1.1 Research Problem

How the misinformation is constructed, framed and disseminated within media platforms during heightened Indo-Pak crisis.

1.2 Research Questions

1. Which platforms play a significant role in misinformation dissemination?
2. What narrative patterns characterize misinformation content?
3. How do framing processes shape audience perception?
4. How do structural media factors reinforce misinformation?

2. Literature Review

Misinformation and disinformation have emerged as central concerns in contemporary media studies. According to Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) misinformation (unintentional falsehood) is distinguished from disinformation (intentional deception), while the boundary is often blurred between them.

The contemporary digital media sphere has swarm of fake news which poses grave threat to society, democracy and erodes public trust (Balakrishnan et.al., 2022; Ceron et.at., 2021). Fake news becomes inevitable during armed conflicts, given the heightened emotional distress, polarity, erosion of institutions through fake driven narratives (Lewandowsky et.al., 2013).

The role of psychological biases in information uptake is emphasized by cognitive approaches. Pennycook and Rand (2021) quoted that individuals sometimes rely on heuristic processes rather than analytical reasoning, making it susceptible to emotionally resonate content. Lewandowsky et al. (2013)



argued how political aligned misinformation is more readily accepted, especially in polarized environments.

In contemporary digital media platforms, algorithms promote engagement, often increasing sensational or emotionally charged content (Oh et al., 2013). This amplifies the circulation of misinformation rather than verified information.

Herman and Chomsky (1988) quoted that media systems often reflect elite interests through institutional filters. Entman (1993) argued that framing influences audience interpretation by selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of reality.

There has been extraordinary effort put in by researchers and scholars to come at a conclusion and find out the reasons behind the spread and psychological effects of fake news (Lewandowsky et.al., 2012; Pennycook and Rand, 2021; Shu et.al.,2020).

This study addresses the gap in integrating these theoretical frameworks within the specific geopolitical and cultural context of South Asia, particularly India and Pakistan.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative as well as qualitative content analysis method. The method allows for both pattern identification and interpretation of misinformation narratives. The research aims to bridge empirical observation with established communication theories. This research is theory driven aiming to bridge empirical observations with established communication theories.

3.1 Data Collection Strategy and selection criteria

The database consists of 68 instances of fake news which was selected using a purposive sampling strategy of identifying the narratives that were widely circulated during May 2025 Indo-Pak crisis and debunked by verified fact checking organisation. While selection of the narrative, inclusive criteria was used: the narrative must be directly related to the Indo-Pak crisis of May 2025, explicitly identified as misleading or false, and verified and debunked by at least one credited fact checking organisation, particularly Dawn iVerify, ALT News, Press Information Bureau (PIB), D-intent Data, or AFP Fact check.

Each case included in the dataset satisfies the following criteria:

1. Verification Criterion: The narrative is identified as false or misleading by at least one credible fact-checking agency.

2. Relevance Criterion: The narrative directly relates to Indo-Pak May 2025 crisis. The content is part of the Indo-Pak military, political and national narratives.

3. Impact Criterion: The narrative shows reasonable reach, like virality, engagement, broadcast exposure.

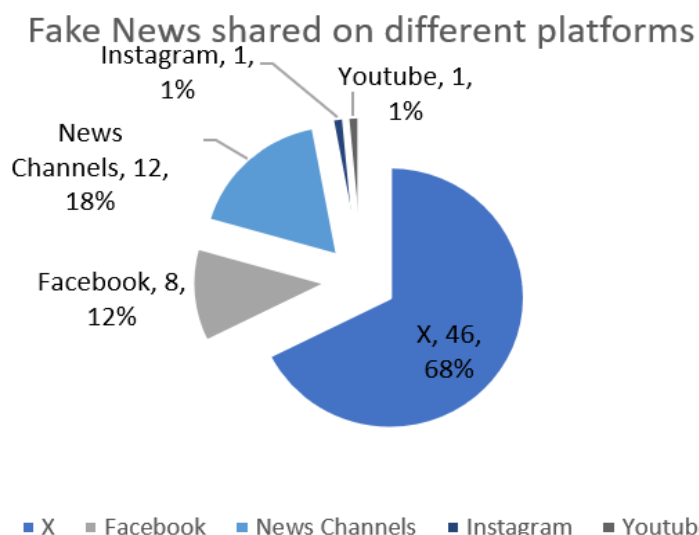


Fig 1: Fake News shared on different platforms.

3.2 Data sources include:

Social media platforms: X (Twitter), Facebook, YouTube, Instagram

Broadcast media: television news channels –Aajtak, ABP news, ABP Ananda, News live, Zee News, Times now Navbharat, NDTV News, TV9.

Fact-checking organizations: Alt News, AFP Fact Check, PIB Fact Check, Dawn iVerify, D-Intent Data

The above-mentioned fact-checking organisation are recognized as credible sources for verifying misleading information due to their institutional backing, methodological transparency, and role in debunking viral false claims across various digital platforms. While Alt News operates as a non-profit initiative under Pravda Media Foundation in India, Press Information Bureau (PIB Fact Check) is an official unit established by the government of India. Whereas AFP Fact Check is part of Agence France-Presse (AFP) which is an international agency founded in France, which works as a global fact-checking networks. Dawn iVerify is a non-partisan verification initiative launched at the Institute of Business Administration (IBA) in Karachi with the support of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). D-Intent Data is independent Indian fact checking initiative that extensively works in exposing

media content including deepfakes, doctored images, fabricated content and edited videos. A combination of both non-profit and government backed fact-checking organisation was taken which enhances the reliability of the dataset by applying diverse verification perspective, cross-border coverage, and a combination of editorial independence while addressing information.

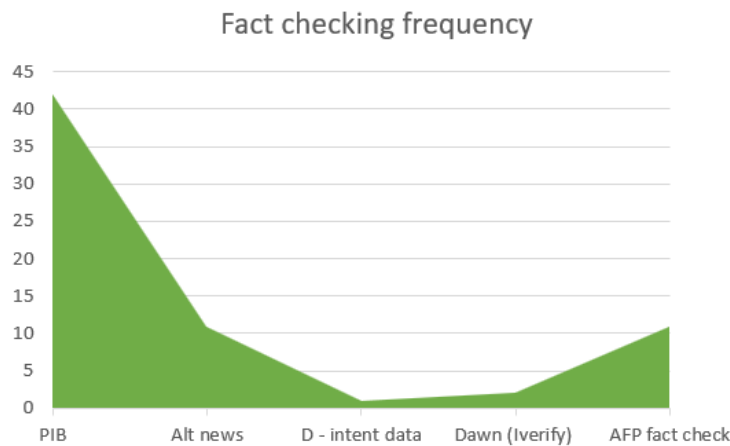


Fig 2: Fact checking frequency.

68 number of instances from fake media coverage through news channels to different social media platforms including X, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram were collected and verified using fact checking tools namely: Dawn (iVerify, 2025), ALT news (2025), Press Information Bureau (PIB), D-intent data and AFP fact check. Out of 68 fake reporting, 46 instances (68%) were taken from X, 12 (18%) from news channels, 8(12%) from Facebook, 1(~1%) from Instagram and 1(~1%) from YouTube. Most of the cases were debunked through PIB.

4. Theoretical Framework

The dissemination of fake news and forming public perception can be analysed through two theories namely framing theory (Entman, 1993) and propaganda model (Chomsky and Herman, 1998).

Framing Theory

Framing theory (Entman, 1993) explains how media shapes reality by focusing on certain angles and blaming the rival country for terrorism. In this way the public perception focuses on blaming the country or specific individuals pointed out by media under state's patronage. This theory fits the initial claim by Indian media which blamed Pakistan for the heinous, merciless terrorist attack and called upon the government to take actions against Pakistan

through several trends on twitter. Similar narrative flourished in Pakistan when few terrorists hijacked Jaffar Express in Balochistan shifting blame on India (Dawn, 11 March, 2025). Through these framing, the public does not question the security institutions how and why they fail to prevent these incidents rather asks the security institutions to attack the fellow country. As a result, whenever any terrorist activity occurs in any country, the people already are indoctrinated that the neighbouring country should be behind this heinous act. This sort of framing as a variable made Pakistan the perpetrator of terrorism in the neighbouring country and war to be an absolute solution to this act, shaping how the world should view this conflict (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974; Scheufele, 1999; Yaseen, et.al., 2022).

Propaganda Model

Media has always been the tool to serve powerful interest of the government in the form of advertising and to propagate events suited to national interests that fuel nationalism and jingoism. This Propaganda Model (Herman and Chomsky, 1998) suggests that who controls the media, through selected and carefully chosen news disseminated among them. During the Indo-Pak crisis, it was evident that the people leaned on military briefing and news coming out from news channels which convinced them that the military strikes the Indian army carried out in Kashmir were justified. This is called persuasion, not only just reporting (Herman and Chomsky, 1998; Klaehn, 2002).

5. Results and Discussion

The 68 instances of fake information are viewed through the framing theory and propaganda model. The framing theory focuses on three aspects namely: conflict frame, responsibility frames and morality frame while five aspects of propaganda model are: ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak and anti-communist ideology. All the verified news deemed misinformed or disinformed by fact checking tools is analyzed using these aspects. This information is spread through the narratives of exaggerated military achievements, fabricated enemy losses and nationalistic heroism. All of the given sources below act as sourcing as all these instances are circulated and accepted by elites to promote superiority and heroism of the respective country. The creation of fake accounts of the two mentioned personalities in (1) is reflective of the fact that people become wary of the events unfolding in the time of crises and as these military personnel and ministers are treated as heroes by their people and their enemies as villains. Hence, deep fake videos and fake account on these persons' name become common.

1) News – Fake accounts of Wg. C Vyomika Singh and Col Sofiya Qureshi

Source – X

Fact check – PIB

From the lenses of conflict frame and morality frame, which portray victory of “Us” and defeat of “Them”, (2), (4), (5), (6), (8), (9), (10), (11), (12), (14), (15), (17), (18), (20), (22) all witness how misinformation and disinformation are taken to claim one country being victorious and the other humiliated. All these also reinforces what advertising entails that the news is highly sensational, with ideology reinforcing that enemy is weak to claim ownership that the news aligns with national media agenda.

2) News – Jaishankar’s deep fake video of apologizing

Source – X

Fact check – PIB

3) News – Pakistan is planning on cyber-attack – Ajit Doval

Source – Facebook

Fact check – PIB

4) News – Modi is gifting Indians to celebrate the success of operation Sindoor

Source – X

Fact check – PIB

5) News – S Jaishankar had admitted loss of 3 Rafael pilots to Pakistan

Source – X

Fact check – PIB

6) News – CDS Anil Chauhan admitted 7 jet losses and saying asked for ceasefire

Source – X

Fact check – PIB

7) News – India plans to ground Rafael jets

Source – YouTube

Fact check – PIB

8) News – IAF Chief admits Indian lose 6 jets and one Heron UAV during may 7th Air engagements

Source – X

Fact check – PIB

Misinformation is a structural phenomenon contrary to the assumptions that misinformation is random or accidental, the data suggest that it follows identifiable patterns. These patterns are shaped by institutional media practices, platform algorithms and audience predispositions.

9) News – Deep fakes of IAF Chief Upendra Dwivedi admitting India lost 6 jets in war against Pakistan

Source – X

Fact check - PIB

10) News – False claims of IAF Chief Marshal AP Singh visiting home of missing Pilot Shivangi Singh during war

Source – X

Fact check - PIB

11) News – Indian Chief of Naval staff Dinesh Kumar Tripathi blames Modi govt. for not giving them permission to inflict any damage due to political reasons which resulted in heavy losses of IAF

Source – X

Fact check – PIB

The role of digital platforms and social media platform especially X, function as accelerators of misinformation. Their algorithmic design prioritizes engagement over accuracy, thereby amplifying content that is emotionally charged or sensational.

12) News – Pakistani accounts circulating video of India's Chief Defence staff Anil Chauhan falsely portraying "Never mess with Pakistan because their army appear to be for more superior and advance"

Source – X

Fact check – PIB

13) News – Deep fake of us President Trump making statements on the India – Pak conflict, including loss of fighter jets

Source – X

Fact check – PIB

14) News – Coup against Asim Munir

Source – ABP News (news channel)

Fact check – Alt News

15) News – Pakistani cities destroyed, PM hiding

Source – News live (regional news channel)

Fact check – Alt News

16) News – Online video of Pakistani army chief visiting disputing border are fake

Source – X

Fact check – AFP

This aligns with the findings of Oh et al. (2013), who argue that crisis situations intensify information sharing behaviours, often without verification. The speed of dissemination outpaces the capacity of correction, creating what can be described as an “Information cascade”.

News – Pakistan PM’s military retreat speech is doctored

Source – Facebook

Fact check – AFP

17) News – Clip of Pakistan general saying ‘country lost jets’ is doctored

Source – Facebook

Fact check – APF fact check

18) News – According to the Pakistan army a cyber-attack was conducted by Pakistan rendering 70% of India’s electricity

Source – X

Fact check – PIB

19) News – Letters of mass resignations are low morale in Pakistan army after Pahalgam are fake

Source – X

Fact check – Dawn (iVerify)

20) News – Old video of militant group leader addressing media surfaces after India – Pakistan ceasefire

Source – Facebook

Fact check – AFP

21) News – Deep fake video of IAF Chief breaking silence on losses

Source – X

Fact check - PIB

While closely monitoring the contents and use of deep fakes by the citizens of both the countries, we may conclude that Indian media used deep fakes more than Pakistani media did. Pakistani public used X as the platform to spread fake news as it was banned earlier, while Indian national news broadcasters were mainly involved in sharing news which was not factual. This can be described from the perspective of focus as Indian people largely follow national media and large audience gain their information from television rather than from internet or social media platforms. On the other hand, Pakistani public does not have faith in national news broadcasters and end up looking for social media platforms. In an effort to reach a wider audience, media channels sometimes disseminate large volumes of information without adequate verification.

Conclusion

The contemporary era has ample of resources from where people get information. From news in the form of electronic media and print media to various social media including X, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram etc. People are also prone to misinformation and disinformation as we have witnessed during May conflict between Pakistan and India. The article is focused on pointing out the information which is aimed at making public perception by the dint of fake reporting, misinformation and disinformation.

Although social media is seen as a watershed technological achievement, in people keeping informed and making this world a global village, given the fact that it decentralized flow of information (Hagar, 2010; Palen et.al., 2010) but this moment of success also brings the people on the verge of viral spread of rumours, conspiracy theories, and emotionally manipulative content (Brennen et al., 2021; Oh et al., 2013; Tandoc and Kim, 2023).



All the information is seen through the Framing theory (Entman, 1993) and Propaganda Model (Herman and Chomsky, 1998). All the instances of fake information are verified through various well known fact checking tools. It can be suggested that people should not take every news for granted and some sort of investigative factor should be taken into consideration. This is high time, given the prevalence of dissemination of fake news, fact checking be a priority. There needs to be a focused attention on the strategies of persuasion added to form narratives, especially how fake news is structured and produced to gather audiences' attention and psychological desires (Kim et.al., 2021; Toder Alon et.al., 2025). Consumption of news from neutral agencies also benefits most people to not fall a prey to misinformation because local media always favour their respective countries.

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