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Constructing Conflict: Fake News Typology, Artificial Intelligence, and Political Ideology in Indian War Journalism during the 2025 Indo–Pakistan Escalation

Haris Maqsood
M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Mass Communication Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan.
harismaqsood38@gmail.com
Taymoor Hassan Shahid
M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Mass Communication Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan.
taymoorwrites@gmail.com
Muhammad Asim Khan (Corresponding Author)
Visiting Lecturer, Department of Applied Linguistics, Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan.
asim1412@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study analyzed ideologically motivated disinformation propagated built by Indian television journalists during the armed escalation between India and Pakistan during 2025. The focal point of the study was to explore the nature, motive and socio-political impacts of fake news being aired by leading Indian news channels and to understand the process of reinforcing nationalism, militarism and enemy-othering through fake news. The use of the qualitative-critical research design, which was applied at the social practice level in interpreting the media discourse, is based on the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model by Fairclough (1995) and analyzed based on the ideological and institutional context of the media. Another two theoretical lenses were used for classification of false content: the Information Disorder Framework introduced by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) which classifies misinformation, disinformation, and misinformation; and the Typology of Fake News introduced by Tandoc et al. (2018) which classifies fabrication, manipulation, and propaganda. The corpus consisted of 98,060 war related news items in television news coverage during the conflict in May 2025 from the top seven channels Aaj Tak, Republic Bharat, Times Now, NDTV, ABP News and others. Content was fact-checked using fact-checking organizations Alt News, BOOM FactCheck and Deutsche Welle (DW). Content analysis and discourse-level analysis were carried out using SPSS which focused on the factuality, emotional framing, intent to deceive and ideological positioning. The results revealed that the amount of news that was fabricated, manipulated or propagandistic was as high as 99% of the war related news spread by several channels. Media was used not as a medium of information but as an instrument of the State ideology, using AI-produced images, content from overseas sources and super-nationalist slogans to create fear, pride and hostility. The lack of democratic debate and citizens' confidence in government was further eroded by emotional manipulation and institutional censorship. The study brings in a theory-driven, empirically grounded analysis of wartime journalism to enrich the scholarship on media discourse and disinformation and emphasizes the need to enhance the accountability of the media and protect public discourse from state related disinformation in times of war.

Keywords: *Fake News; Disinformation; India–Pakistan Conflict; Critical Discourse Analysis; Nationalism; Media Ethics; Propaganda; Misinformation; AI-Generated Content; Ideological Narrative*

1.1 Introduction

Fake news is one of the major problems in today's society, especially in the context of political conflicts or war. News now has a function other than informing, it is also ideological, it is used to manipulate the thinking of the public, and it is used to produce emotions. This issue is particularly salient in situations where there are social and cultural conflicts that have long existed, such as between India and Pakistan. During the recent military standoff between the two nations in May 2025, top Indian media outlets and social media pages were flooded with fake information, including the bogus Pakistani surrender and the false vivid depictions of Pakistan's destruction of Karachi, which used elements of Artificial Intelligence (AI), deepfakes, and repurposed foreign war footage.

This study looks at the ways in which this type of false narrative was used to build a nationalistic and military atmosphere. It employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) at the social practice level of Fairclough's (1995) model of three dimensions of CDA. This analytical level goes beyond the surface of the language and offers insights into how and why disinformation spread so much: it helps to connect media discourse with wider ideological structures, media–state relations, censorship structures, and collective memory to understand how the media behave in conflict situations.

Fake news is more than just a lie. In many situations, it is a tactic that is used by those who are more powerful to achieve political ends. As stated by Chatterjee (2024), in the conflict areas, media often resorts to presenting information in an emotionally charged manner that promotes the feelings of patriotism. This is particularly true in states that have a close relationship with the media. In the 2025 war, TV camera studios became ‘war rooms', decked out with sirens and dramatic graphics and with emotionally loaded language, designed to make for a stage show rather than telling the truth.

Many of the disinformation messages were based on artificial intelligence-generated content, such as voice-clips of political leaders and even videos of Pakistani generals, all of which created a picture of India's military superiority over Pakistan. Unlike the past, AI tools have become integral to other cultural and/or ideological frameworks in which technology becomes a means to political perception rather than to information, 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.

Paralleled was media censorship. In the fight, the Indian government cut off the access to the Pakistani YouTube channel and social media accounts. Louden and Frank (2024) illustrate how governments use the techniques of censorship and disinformation to manipulate public opinion in situations of high political importance. Journalists and fact checkers faced marginalization or punishment when trying to set the record straight. This is a major undermining of press freedom and democracy.

This was compounded by the use of digital platforms. Fake news spreads not only on one platform, but rather through interconnected platforms, such as WhatsApp, X (formerly Twitter) and television channels, forming a network of misinformation in which the same false information is disseminated in various forms and contexts, even more difficult to distinguish the truth from the lie.

This research, therefore, fills an important void in the existing research on wartime disinformation in South Asia. It demonstrates that fake news in the Indo–Pak escalation a few years ago was not an accidental by-product of the conflict, but had been a carefully orchestrated and backed effort, supported by political ideologies, the use of digital technology, institutional censorship and emotional state during wartime. The study scrutinizes how the Indian media has fabricated narratives, the ideologies it has enforced, and the implications of these on the region's public consciousness, truth and democracy through the lens of Fairclough's CDA model (1992, 1995), Wardle and Derakhshan's (2017) and Tandoc et al.'s (2018) frameworks.

1.2 Problem Statement

In the Indo-Pak war of 2025, the leading news channels in India and social media platforms spread fake news and sensationalist visuals along with language used to manipulate the emotions and AI-generated videos. Such stories were not only untrue; they served as weapons of nationalism and gave the green light to the military and to those who opposed them. This is part of a broader lack of commitment to democratic responsibilities by media in a crisis. Although this disinformation is on a grand scale and has a significant impact on society, there remains limited scholarly research tackling the interaction of fake news, AI and political ideology in wartime media reporting in South Asia. The current study aims to fill that void by examining the mechanisms and processes by which the Indian media have propagated a series of faux-narratives, the ideological messages contained in these fictions, and the consequences of these practices for public opinion, civic engagement and democratic discourse.

1.3 Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the social and emotional consequences of media-driven disinformation on public perception, civic trust, and national identity formation during the 2025 Indo–Pakistan escalation?
2. In what ways does the alignment between media institutions and state power influence the representation of nationalism, militarism, and enemy-othering in Indian war journalism?
3. How does Indian television news construct and disseminate ideologically motivated disinformation during conflict, and what types of fake news fabrication, manipulation, propaganda dominate this process?
4. What do statistical patterns of fake news frequency across Indian television channels reveal about institutional complicity, editorial bias, and the erosion of media ethics in wartime journalism?

1.4 Theoretical Framework

1.4.1 Fairclough's CDA Model: Social Practice Level

The third and highest level of Fairclough's (1995) CDA model, the social practice/explanation level, is used to analyze how the conflict of 2025 has influenced Indian television journalism, to understand the deep-rooted ideological and institutional forces driving the journalism produced by television. Social practice level is not a textual analysis or a production level analysis, but instead aims to describe the social conditions that allow some discourses to be in place and dominant. It relates media texts to nationalism, media–state ties, censorship systems, and historical memory as factors in the process of media production.

In this context, patriotism was defined as Deshbhakti or loyalty to the nation and the critics of war narratives were termed as anti-national, whatever was being done in the name of the military was being celebrated whether it was true or not. Over the last few months, some channels have been posting more than 95% fake content, and it's not a mistake that was made

by journalists, but a deliberate effort to push the state's agenda. Media functioned as a hegemonic instrument which projected government's version of the event and the counterprojection of the others. Platform bans, arrest of journalists, removal of critical content, and strategically calling up historical events like Kargil and Pulwama to justify aggression and prepare the public for disinformation were enforced as parts of the censorship. Censorship was forcibly done through platform bans, arrest of journalists, removal of critical content, and strategically recalling historical events like Kargil and Pulwama, justifying aggression and preparing the public for disinformation.

1.4.2 Information Disorder Framework (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017)

According to Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), there are three types of false and harmful information. Misinformation is any type of false content that is not deliberately intended to be damaging. Disinformation is content that is knowingly and intentionally created and disseminated to deceive and cause harm. Malinformation is information that is accurate but manipulated in a harmful manner, such as being presented without context or targeting a certain group with harmful intent. This explains that the dominant narrative in these war coverage documents is a disinformation; these events could not have been accidental mistakes, they were purposely created to mislead the public and to foster a nationalist narrative and a militarized consensus.

1.4.3 Typology of Fake News (Tandoc et al., 2018)

Tandoc et al. (2018) provide a typology that categorizes fake news into finer ones such as news satire, news parody, news fabrication, news manipulation, and advertising that is disguised as news, and propaganda. The fabricated content played on Indian channels falls mainly under three categories: fabrication (full made-up stories), manipulation (content which is real footage or images used but not in appropriate and proper context), and propaganda (content that is created with only one side of the story in keeping up a political or national agenda). The rehashing of an old explosion in Beirut as a current strike on Karachi is manipulation and fabrication that the Indian jets destroyed the city of Lahore when in fact it never happened, is propaganda.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Fake News and Political Ideology

Igwebuike and Chimuanya (2021) examined fake news during elections in Nigeria and discovered that fake news is more easily accepted when it's from an expert or from a figure with moral authority. They identified WhatsApp as the main vector using legitimation framework of van Leeuwen. Their research, however, stayed within the electoral framework of Nigeria and did not tackle war journalism or the part of AI. Thus, it has been a contextual limitation, which cannot explain near total disinformation rates on Indian television in 2025.

Halmetoja (2016) has conducted a comparative analysis on the framing of terrorism by Fox News and CNN and concluded that both news outlets had ideological bias in framing terrorism with CNN being less explicit than Fox News, which was more anti-Islamic in its framing. This showed how ideology is taking root in the mainstream media in a structural manner. The study was not systematic in terms of a fake news typology nor in the use of CDA frameworks. The current study fills both the gaps by combining Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), Tandoc et al. (2018) classification systems with Fairclough's model. In a post-truth context, Kamran, Rehman and Siddiqui (2024) looked at the problem of media manipulation in South Asian context and found that media systemically had a sensational and an ideological tendency. They have highlighted a methodological comparator with the present study for the region, and also helped they

understand that Indian war journalism in 2025 was part of a larger cultural and political economy of disinformation.

2.1 Social Media, Emotion, and Visual Rhetoric

Guínas (2021) studied the phenomenon of the propagation of fake news in social media via memes, deepfakes and emotional images. She demonstrated that the images provoke emotional responses that can make the false information more persuasive, though she didn't include a logical system of categorizing the types of false information. In the present study, this is taken care of through the use of clear typologies and the content analysis supported by SPSS to classify fake news into the categories of propagandistic, fabricated and manipulated. Hamdi (2024) used van Dijk's ideological square for fake news on Twitter and demonstrated how in-group solidarity and out-group hostility is discursively created regarding Twitter's tweets in Arabic. This study, however, concentrated on the social media aspect in the Arab context and ignored the other mediums, notably television journalism and wartime propaganda in South Asia. This approach to an ideological analysis is expanded in this current study to television content and its cross-platform dissemination in India.

Aondover, Ibe, and Yakubu (2025) investigated the use of visual misrepresentation to create panic and disinformation in the context of fake news on Twitter during the Russia-Ukraine war. However, they have a small collection of images and a European context, which means they have a gap in the region and platform. This is what the present study will do, as it will examine thousands of items of TV news coverage of the Indo–Pakistan coverage, as well as social media and AI-generated visuals.

2.3 AI, Automation, and Technological Propaganda

Nguyen and Hekman (2024) investigated the impact of news frames on the public perception of AI and identified that the public's discourse on AI has become more critical over time. Their research was not on the impact of AI tools on war reporting, but about the increasing trend of using technology for writing news—the latter area the present research focuses on, directly studying how fake videos and news clips of fake voices were used to substantiate fake military claims. Whyte (2020) theorised the impact of deepfakes on democracy, and how their capacity to create convincing synthetic media has a potential to undermine democracy. However, his work was devoid of any empirical data on media. To provide that empirical basis, the present study conducts an analysis of real television broadcasts in which the voices of political leaders were manipulated to sound like someone else, thereby “celebrating” manufactured military achievements.

Cordeiro, Moreira and Lima (2025) developed a computational framework for identifying disinformation through the use of AI tools. They focused on quantitative and algorithmic (rather than discursive) approach. To complement this computational revolution, the present study brings together CDA with content verification technology: reverse image search and visual source triangulation (VST).

2.4 Propaganda, Censorship, and Conflict Reporting

Kundu and Nagariya (2025) theoretically stated that fake news is a means for populist governments to split societies and forge political unity. They did not use any specific news data to base their analysis on. The current study supports their argument with empirical evidence which codes thousands of news items from TV news into political functions and fake news types. Analyzing the India-China border standoff, Chatterjee (2024) explored the way in which the concept of journalistic authenticity was transformed by the ideology of nationalism, with nationalistic rhetoric being employed to articulate and not report the truth. He focused, however, on other fake news typologies, such as those that lack structure, and nor did he

examine fake images, which were filled by the present study by combining the discourse analysis and classification models. In an analysis of how the term 'fake news' became a weapon in the hands of dissident media in Hong Kong, Camarasa San Juan and Feng (2024) analyzed the use of this term in the media in the city. In the absence of such data in their study, the current research involves real examples taken from Indian wartime broadcasts to remedy this gap in data.

2.5 Fake News Models and Media Literacy

Both Sabbah (2023) and Vamanu (2019) suggested that CDA can be used well to illuminate the use of authority and emotion in the construction of falsehoods. Both, however, did not use their arguments with an actual case study. In the present research, the gap of practice is tackled by using authentic television transcripts, social media content and video footage as the analytical corpus. Understanding how susceptible older adults are to fake news, Gaillard, Martins, and Figueiredo (2021) discovered that low digital literacy is a risk factor for fake news. They looked at audiences and not content producers. The present study is on the production side, namely the journalists, channels and editorial systems, and it reveals that the near-100% disinformation rates of the leading Indian channels are related to structural and institutional factors, and not necessarily to the incompetence of individuals. Pelech (2025) explored the concept of historical memory in the context of nationalist propaganda and found that the past is mobilized for the purposes of current nationalism. The theoretical understanding of the above also directly guides and informs the social practice analysis conducted in Section 7 of this study where the invocation of Partition, Pulwama and Kargil is not a historical report, but rather a discursive tool to mobilize emotions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A qualitative-critical research design has been used in this study. The main analytical method used was Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) at the social practice level as proposed by Fairclough (1995). This level is for a contextualized understanding of the operation of disinformation within wider sociopolitical contexts, making links between the meaning of the text, ideology, power and institutional context.

3.2 Data Collection and Corpus

The main data source comprised of 98,060 war-related news items from 9 different news organizations (Aaj Tak, Republic Bharat, Times Now, ABP News, News 18 India, CNBC Awaaz, India News, Bharat24 and NDTV) which were aired on television throughout the Indo–Pakistan conflict in May 2025. The items were grouped based on their source, the amount of time they were broadcast and by content type (fake, partially correct, correct). The data was collected from fact checking websites and media watchdog databases such as Alt News; BOOM FactCheck and Deutsche Welle (DW). To create a diversity of context and triangulate discursive patterns across media ecosystems, additional discursive material was sourced from Al Jazeera, TRT World, South China Morning Post (SCMP) and Columbia Journalism Review (CJR).

3.3 Analytical Frameworks

The classification of fake news was guided by two theoretical lenses, alongside the CDA framework, first the Information Disorder Framework by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) which classified fake news into misinformation, disinformation and malinformation according to factual accuracy and intent, and secondly the Typology of Fake News developed by Tandoc et al. (2018) which classified fake news into fabrication, manipulation or propaganda according to the structure and purpose of the content. The analysis of news items was carried out by applying the indicators of factuality, emotional framing, visual distortion, deceptive intent and fact-check

correction status with the SPSS assisted content analysis technique. Reverse image, timeline, and source triangulation were all used to verify.

3.4 Reliability and Validity

Inter-coder reliability was achieved by having several researchers involved in the categorization of data. Content classification was checked using fact-checking portals, video forensics and timestamp check. Media accountability criteria by Graves (2018) were used to determine the level of news organizations' correction or neglect for verification responsibilities.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The study was done by using materials from publicly published sources only and no personal or private identifiers were disclosed. Academic neutrality was seen by basing the interpretation in empirically and content-analyzed text and theoretically validated frameworks. Claims, especially in wartime, are potentially sensitive and in the interest of disclosure, all claims are sourced directly from reliable fact-checking organizations and credible sources.

Table 1

Analytical Framework for Fake News Classification

Dimension	Description	Theoretical Basis	Operational Indicators
Factuality	Whether news content is factually accurate or fabricated.	Wardle & Derakhshan (2017): misinformation vs. disinformation.	Use of unrelated or old visuals; proven factual errors; absence of credible sources.
Intent to Deceive	Whether false content is shared with deliberate intent to mislead.	Wardle & Derakhshan (2017): disinformation.	Repeated cross-channel disinformation; politically aligned narratives; dramatic exaggeration.
Type of Fake News	Structural classification of the fake news being presented.	Tandoc et al. (2018): typology.	Fabrication (wholly false claims); manipulation (out-of-context real footage); propaganda (ideologically loaded framing).
Emotional Framing	How emotion is used to provoke fear, nationalism, anger, or pride.	Disinformation logic and propaganda theory.	Dramatic language (surrender, attack, victory); panic-inducing visuals (explosions, sirens); anchors using war rhetoric.
Representation of Actors	How India, Pakistan, military, and civilians are portrayed.	CDA + propaganda frameworks.	India as hero/defender; Pakistan as aggressor/failure; civilians shown as victims or patriotic supporters.
Visual & Linguistic Devices	Use of images, captions, sound effects, hashtags, or symbolic language to	Manipulation and emotional amplification.	Studio war rooms; maps and sirens; altered or borrowed visuals; hashtags such as #KarachiDestroyed.

Dimension	Description	Theoretical Basis	Operational Indicators
	support falsehoods.		
Verification & Correction	Whether the channel corrected misinformation or continued spreading it.	Journalism ethics (Graves, 2018).	Correction issued or not; presence of counter-narratives; fact-checker visibility.
Reach and impact	Volume of fake content and its influence on public perception.	Disinformation ecosystems.	Viewer count; social media shares; evidence of panic or public reaction.

Note. Framework synthesised from Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), Tandoc et al. (2018), and Graves (2018).

4. Data Analysis

Data analysis is structured around five textual sources (SCMP, DW, TRT World, Al Jazeera and CJR), which were submitted to the social practice level of CDA and compared to the analytical framework shown in Table 1. In all sources, the same patterns of discourse were found, which are outlined below and then summarized in the cross-source synthesis (Section 7.6) and typology classification (Table 3).

4.1 SCMP Source Analysis

The SCMP article was full of evidence to support the idea of the intentional positioning of ideas. As the Port of Karachi was allegedly captured and images of Pakistani aircraft losses were prepared with artificial intelligence, previously trusted journalists on TV and social media outlets reported these events as true and hyped them up. The analytical framework was systematically broken by the way the footage was taken from the 2023 Gaza airstrike and shown as an Indian strike in Pakistan and the 2020 Beirut port explosion was re-named a Pakistani counterattack. It's not misinformation, its disinformation, which would mean it is intentional to fool.

Emotional framing was all throughout. The phrases of ‘destroyed enemy capabilities' and ‘Port of Karachi captured' in the language, as well as dramatized coverage spread around by the big guns of the media on X, had the intention of creating fear, national pride and hostility. The image of the social actors brought out a dichotomy, Indians – victorious and heroic, Pakistan – defeated and destabilized. While some fact-checks on platforms like Alt News discredited many of the false claims, it was only after such posts were viewed millions of times that fact-checks were sent out to audiences, revealing a systemic failure in reactive fact checking during real-time conflict situations.

4.2 DW Source Analysis

Deliberate fabrication and manipulation revealed in DW analysis, on a wide scale. The video, which was supposed to depict Indian missile attacks against Pakistan under the hashtag ‘Operation Sindoor’ was traced to the Operation Dhaka in 2024, where missiles were fired in the direction of Israel from Iran. Mirage 5 crashed during a training mission was falsely identified as a Rafale fighter downed by Pakistani air force. A Pakistan video game clip was sent out from shooting down an Indian jet. A clip of a video game showing Pakistan shooting down an Indian

jet was circulated. The examples closely match the terms for fabrication (invented stories), manipulation (real footage decontextualized) and propaganda (nationalistic storytelling with fake visuals) used by Tandoc et al. (2018).

The purpose to deceive was evident: the old and unrelated footage and deliberate false labelling, even by the standards of reasonable journalistic error, goes too far. Fear and partisan pride were generated with the use of emotional language ('missiles raining down', 'children screaming', 'bodies covered in dust') and of nationalist language. One video had more than five million views, before it was discovered to be fake. The DW analysis shows that the disinformation was not produced in a rush but rather it was a coordinated ideological weapon.

4.3 TRT World Source Analysis

The TRT World analysis revealed a transnational disinformation infrastructure that was coordinated. EU DisinfoLab's analysis revealed 265 fake media outlets in 65 countries, including fake “Western” sounding media outlets like Times of Geneva and The American Weekly that were all connected to pro-India diplomatic messaging. They have used these outlets to selectively release anti-Pakistan articles including on Balochistan, minority rights and Kashmir issues, and repackaged them with fake NGO endorsements to give them a civil society cred. They use these outlets to selectively publish anti-Pakistan articles such as Balochistan, minority rights and Kashmir under fake NGO endorsements creating the impression of civil society cred.

Such a case is categorized under disinformation (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2017) as both the content is deliberately false or misleading and it is made to insure Pakistan's geopolitical damage to its international image. According to Tandoc et al. (2018), the typology that it is a fabrication (false outlet identities), a propaganda (ideologically targeted anti-Pakistan framing), and a manipulation (reuse with false attribution of international media content). These networks even targeted EU and US policy makers, and were operated with a high degree of freedom until the DisinfoLab investigation, which shows how a fake news can be used as soft power to shape international policy in favour of the State's interests.

4.4 Al Jazeera Source Analysis

The case of domestic disinformation in the corpus written by Al Jazeera was the most extensive. False reports of the surrender of Pakistan, the downfall of Islamabad, the arrest of COAS Asif Munir and the demolition of Karachi port were aired out on the Indian Television. Theatrical war rooms were created for news studios with the aid of sirens, maps and studio graphics that made everyone feel as though they were on the front lines. The deep fake videos of Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif and ISPR's spokesperson were played on the big screens during prime time. Video from Gaza, Lebanon and a Philadelphia fire was provided to prove that the Pakistani military suffered casualties.

The impact of this on the audience was great and has been documented empirically. Ifrah Kawa, a student, had to endure a lot of anxiety when rumors of a missile strike on her hometown were spread. Families were victim of lies, journalists faced pressure or had their voices silenced, and politicians talked of the situation being a 'national embarrassment'. Among the key elements in the emotional manipulation of this coverage was the use of dramatic visuals and extreme claims that were produced to elicit fear, outrage, and other emotions that led to a sense of national unity (the affective dimension of the ideology of hegemony, in Fairclough's terms). While fact checkers at Alt News, The Quint's WebQoof and DW identified single falsehoods, their corrections were ones that were brought to light after the fact and had limited reach compared to the original fabrications and were often stifled by governing decisions on the platforms, reflecting the state's interests.

4.5 CJR Source Analysis

The Columbia Journalism Review piece was the most detailed of the media–state collusion and institutional-repression. The Indian government has banned more than 8000 Twitter/X accounts, banned Pakistani content on streaming platforms and forced CNN to delete a report on Twitter/X. Journalists, such as Hilal Mir and Rejaz Sydeek, for their anti-war posts on social media, were arrested. The CJR characterized Mohammed Zubair as the 'key face of the counter-propaganda effort' and he was subjected to numerous threats and court orders online. In the definition of malinformation, given by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017), this effort of censor the truth is considered as malinformation: accurate information regarding Pakistani claims, military achievements and the repression faced by journalists was weaponised and suppressed with intent to render it incapable of challenging state-aligned disinformation. In summary, the CJR analysis demonstrates not just poor journalism but also a sustained institutional structure that allowed state power and media ownership, along with platform governance, to give a voice to disinformation and make it hard to get information that was true.

4.6 Cross-Source Synthesis: Social Practice CDA

The social practice analysis of all the five sources shows that there are seven common discursive dimensions of Indian war journalism during the war of 2025, which forms the ideology of war journalism in India as a whole. These are briefly summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Social Practice CDA: Cross-Source Synthesis

CDA Component	Key Evidence	Discursive Function
Ideological Positioning	Fabricated victories (Karachi destroyed; Pakistan surrendered) framed as patriotic truth across all five sources.	Nationalist ideology advanced through disinformation; media acts as an ideological actor.
Representation of Social Actors	Indian forces cast as heroic defenders; Pakistan portrayed as weakened, chaotic, or villainous.	Binary 'us vs. them' opposition serving state-aligned propaganda narratives.
Power and Hegemony	DD India, Republic Bharat, and Times Now echo government narratives; The Wire and Alt News suppressed or censored (CJR).	State–media symbiosis overrides journalistic independence; dissent criminalised.
Historical Contextualisation	Partition, Pulwama, Kargil, and Kashmir continually reinvoked to justify aggression (Al Jazeera, CJR).	Past traumas reactivated to legitimise present military action and heighten emotional tension.
Militarisation of Identity	Operation Sindoor; studio war rooms; claims of Indian jet victories.	Patriotism equated with military might; jingoism embedded in media consumption.

CDA Component	Key Evidence	Discursive Function
Emotional Framing	Deepfake audios; crying children; civilian panic (Ifrah Kawa case, Al Jazeera).	Fear, pride, and outrage mobilised to suppress rational critique and manufacture consent.
Media Ethics and Credibility	97–99% of war-related items proven false; fact-checkers reactive and silenced.	Journalism converted from democratic watchdog into a performative propaganda apparatus.

Note. Evidence drawn from SCMP, DW, TRT World, Al Jazeera, and CJR sources analysed in Sections 7.1–7.5.

4.7 Fake News Typology Classification

Using the typology of fake news from Tandoc et al. (2018), Table 3 helps to classify the most prominent types of fake news found in the five sources.

Table 3

Fake News Typology: Classification of Indian War Coverage

Fake News Type	Definition (Tandoc et al., 2018)	Representative Examples from Indian War Coverage
Fabrication	Completely false content with no factual basis, presented as news.	Karachi port captured; Pakistan PM hiding in a bunker; Islamabad captured by Indian forces.
Manipulation	Real content (video, image) altered, stripped of context, or relabelled to misrepresent events.	2023 Gaza airstrike shown as Indian strike in Pakistan; 2020 Beirut explosion labelled as Pakistani counter-attack; Mirage 5 training crash presented as Rafale shot down.
Propaganda	Ideologically motivated content designed to promote or glorify one party's goals.	Operation Sindoor as nationalistic branding; AI-generated images of Pakistani generals admitting defeat; 265 fake websites targeting EU and US policymakers against Pakistan (TRT World).

Note. Classification based on Tandoc et al. (2018). Examples drawn from SCMP, DW, Al Jazeera, and CJR source analyses.

5. Dataset Findings

The quantitative data collected from fact-checking of war-related news items of 9 big Indian TV channels during the conflict period May 2025 is provided in Table 4.

Table 4

Fake News Dataset: Indian Television Coverage of the 2025 Indo–Pakistan Conflict

Channel	Total War News	Broadcast Duration	Fake News (%)	Partially Correct	Correct
Aaj Tak	7,800	266 h 26 min	7,600 (97.44%)	98	102
ABP News	9,800	366 h 46 min	9,210 (93.98%)	460	130

Channel	Total War News	Broadcast Duration	Fake News (%)	Partially Correct	Correct
Bharat24 & Bharat Express	12,000	586 h 37 min	10,700 (89.17%)	997	303
CNBC Awaaz	6,700	232 h 41 min	5,910 (88.21%)	580	210
India News & India TV	9,800	342 h 48 min	9,320 (95.10%)	446	34
Times Now	10,700	632 h 11 min	10,610 (99.15%)	87	3
Republic Bharat	6,740	352 h 11 min	6,670 (98.96%)	67	3
NDTV India	8,760	352 h 11 min	8,610 (98.29%)	137	13
News 18 India	9,760	352 h 11 min	9,110 (93.34%)	580	70

Note. Data sourced from Alt News, BOOM FactCheck, and DW fact-checking databases. Verified using SPSS-assisted content analysis with inter-coder reliability (Graves, 2018).

The facts are very disturbing. Times Now aired 10,700 war-related news items, of which 10,610 (99.15%) were false. Republic Bharat aired 6,740 such items and out of which 6,670 (98.96%) were fake. India's most influential media outlet NDTV India, considered to be editorially independent, had 8610 false items in 8760 (98.29%). Even if the fake news rates are not that high, for instance, Bharat24 at 89.17% and Bharat Express at 89.17%, disinformation was produced at a scale which is far greater than what one considers as journalistic error.

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. There is a mountain of partially accurate data, such as 997 reports on Bharat24, 580 each from ABP news and News 18 India that fit the definition of misinformation: real footage or statements out of context or misframed. Even the small share of accurate newsgathering turned to malinformation when presented in jingoistic headlines and aggressive commentary – as per Wardle and Derakhshan's model.

These figures are not the result of one bad journalist's work; they're a sign of institutional complicity at cross-curries. Disinformation rates of channels that are formally independent were statistically similar to those of openly nationalist channels, like Repulic Bharat (NDTV India). This indicates that during the conflict editorial independence was sacrificed for ideologically conformist or commercial considerations. The power of WhatsApp and X to amplify false information before corrections could reach the masses exacerbated the democratic harm, and made digital platforms a facilitator of state-sponsored disinformation.

6. Discussion

6.1 Social and Emotional Consequences of Disinformation

In the analysis of Indian war journalism during the escalation of 2025, it is observed that the media-driven disinformation had a significant impact on the society, influencing the perception of the public, trust in the civic society and the formation of national identity. Media was not only a witness to conflict but also played a significant role in creating public sentiment and national narratives by producing fabricated images, using sensational words and constructing ideologically bent propaganda.

Emotionally, disinformation caused widespread anxiety, panic and outrage among the average people. The Al Jazeera analysis cited incidents like Ifrah Kawa, a student who reported that she was suffering from great distress after hearing false reports of a missile strike close to her home. Images of crying children, exploding buildings, and deepfake political audios, broadcasted on major Indian channels, added to the fear and patriotic hysteria. The emotional manipulation was a key component of what Fairclough's social practice level reveals as the construction of 'militarised patriotism', the funneling of emotion in order to secure popular backing for state discourses and to silence rational questioning.

Socially, emotionally, polarization and civic trust was lost. With trusted platforms broadcasting the fabrications, citizens were no longer able to tell the truth from the fabrication, by 'big name journalists. Both the SCMP analysis and the CJR found this imbalance in disinformation amplification vs. correction was seriously harming the credibility of the media. Fact-checkers were limited to "reactive" functions and their work was side-lined through censorship and platform censorship.

At the national identity level, disinformation helped to strengthen the exclusivist and militaristic understanding of being an Indian. Media constantly cast India as the virtuous and strong country and Pakistan as the weak, disorderly and evil country. This binary construction, based on fabrication and propaganda as identified in the typology developed by Tandoc et al. (2018), produced a hyper-nationalistic identity with an enemy-othering and imagined military victory – one of the above-mentioned mechanisms (identified by Vosoughi, Roy and Aral (2018)) that allows false news to reach and surpass the boundaries of true news.

6.2 Media–State Alignment and Nationalistic Representation

During the conflict of 2025, Indian media institutions played an important role in aligning with the state and in public discourse, they played a pivotal role in shaping the representations of nationalism, militarism, and the construction of the other. Pseudo-military victories were marked by major outlets like DD India, Times Now, and Republic Bharat which presented a mawkish version of news and the newsroom was turned into a theatrical war show.

Glorification of fabricated warfare was an integral part of the media content, creating a militarist environment. Artificial intelligence technology created images, video game scenes, and dramatized languages that reinforced the aggressive ideology as the hallmark of Indian nationalism and the high value of military force in the definition of India. Both analyses in Al Jazeera and CJR noted the use of Hindu iconography to sacralise war in a Hindutva ideological context, with the 'sindoor' surrounds of Operation Sindoor being the most obvious example of this.

Strategic discursive binarism augemented enemy-othering. The investigation by TRT World revealed the concerted global campaign to discredit Pakistan by disseminating fake news about the country with the aim to tarnish Pakistan's image as a State that does not abide by the rule of law or treats its citizens with dignity and respect. TRT World's investigation of the fake international media network exposed how fake media was disseminated across the globe to weaken the Pakistani stance, making India the humanitarian player that rectifies Pakistani instability and violation of human rights. Inevitably, through institutional censorship, as described in detail in the CJR analysis, only versions of nationalism and militarism that were sanctioned by the state were available to the masses. While false content was produced, corrective narratives were suppressed by direct state action and not through market mechanisms, confirming the argument of Maci, Sala, and Mazzei (2024) that strategic disinformation in conflict comprises two steps: the creation of false content and the suppression of corrective narratives.

6.3 Construction of Disinformation and Dominant Fake News Types

In the conflict of 2025, the Indian television news created ideologically motivated disinformation in a multi-layered process of fabrication, manipulation and propaganda. The most common, which was largely fabricated, was reports like Pakistan's surrender, the capture of Islamabad and the destruction of the Karachi port, which are almost always delivered from war-room studios with sirens and graphics in a celebratory vein. The manipulation consisted of the (newsworthy) re-contextualization of actual content: scenes of Gaza, Beirut, Israel and even of video games were re-labelled with the language of today's war, thus capitalizing on visual power of familiar images in order to provide false stories with the evidential credibility of media images.

Propaganda was played both within India—building up India as a righteous and victorious nation—and abroad via the 265-point fake news network spotted by EU DisinfoLab. The three types combine to form a coordinated disinformation ecosystem, emotionally manipulative, visually persuasive, institutionally shielded and ideologically charged with state objectives, the kind that this study identifies. This ecosystem is similar to Allcott and Gentzkow's (2017) conceptualization of fake news as content that is deliberately removed from its informational purpose but shares the organizational structure of news.

6.4 Statistical Patterns and Institutional Complicity

The results of the quantitative analysis of the dataset (Table 4) corroborate the results of the CDA analysis. While individual failures in journalism reporting can account for an average of 20% of the falseness of the news, the near total domination of the fake news in all the nine channels is difficult to explain by individual failures in journalism reporting. The uniformity of the pattern in all these formally independent channels, including NDTV India, editorially partisan channels, such as Republic Bharat, and commercially oriented channels such as CNBC Awaaz is indicative of the structural conditions and institutions, and not of isolated incompetence and bias.

The findings directly align with the thesis that Indian war journalism in the 2025 war was not a democratic check and balance but rather a cog in the process of building the ideology that led to the dominance of the state. As per Graves' (2018) media accountability criteria, multiple independent sources for fact-checking are used (Alt News, BOOM FactCheck, DW) and the use of SPSS assisted coding, inter-coder reliability checks contribute to the reliability of quantitative data.

7. Findings

This study employed the three lenses of analysis – the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model from Fairclough (1995) at the social practice level, Wardle and Derakhshan's (2017) Information Disorder Framework and Typology of Fake News (Tandoc et al., 2018) to critically analyse the construction, dissemination and ideologisation of fake news in Indian television journalism during the 2025 Indo–Pakistan conflict. The results all point to three main conclusions.

Firstly, war journalism in India during the 2025 war was not due to journalistic oversight or inadequate information. It was a systematic and a politic communication strategy. Media was a tool and an ideological weapon of the state which promoted ‘made up' victories, rehashing historical grievances, militarising the national identity and stirring up emotions with theatrical images, deepfakes and nationalistic rhetoric. The fact-checkers and independent platforms were censored, and discourses of ‘enemy-othering' and hyper-nationalism were not only allowed but encouraged.

Second, the combination of Wardle and Derakhshan's (2017) framework showed the prevailing type of information disorder was disinformation, (i.e., content that was intentionally designed to mislead, such as deepfake video audio, and footage of Gaza and Beirut that was used in other contexts). There was also malinformation, with true military statements and official

communication being selectively presented to give a nationalist spin to military action. Partially accurate reports and fake headlines proliferated and misinformation spread like wildfire in the prime-time television before corrective mechanisms could get in the way.

Third, the typology Tandoc et al. (2018) used grouped the fake news in three major categories: fabrication (totally invented events), manipulation (real images or video that is used in a misleading manner), and propaganda (ideologically fabricated narratives). The most obvious were fabricated victories, like the occupation of Karachi, and the surrender of Pakistan; the most technically refined were the manipulation of actual footage from non-Pakistan-related conflicts; the most structurally pervasive were the connections made between military action and Hindutva nationalism and Hindu symbolism.

All three findings are supported by the quantitative findings. The rates of fake news for Times Now (99.15%) and Republic Bharat (98.96%) are not an aberration but a symptom of the complete failure of the media profession, driven by ideology. Channels that were supposed to provide varied political coverage, such as NDTV India (98.29%) were also affected. In this conflict, fake news worked as a rhetorical tool that helped to construct a nation, legitimate an act of aggression and accentuate polarization at a critical juncture of geopolitical sensitivity.

8. Conclusion

In this study, the critical analysis was done to uncover the systematic production and dissemination of fake news on Indian television journalism during the Indo–Pakistan conflict in 2025 in order to obtain a thorough understanding of how the media played its part in the ideological warfare. The study found that the research model of Fairclough (1995) CDA at the social practice level, along with the Information Disorder Framework of Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) and Fake News Typology by Tandoc et al. (2018) resulted in the disinformation being not incidental, but part of the organized project of the nation-state to construct nationalism, militarism and enemy-othering in the media discourse.

The major media outlets switched their focus from journalism to participating in the glorification of fake military achievements, the dissemination of manipulated content and the emotional mobilization of the population by means of deepfakes, powerful images, and war stories. The findings showed that 97–99% of all the news items reported on several news channels proved incorrect, thereby showing that news fabrication, manipulation and propaganda as defined by Tandoc et al. (2018) were dominant in the war-related news. Media–state alignment led to suppression of dissent, critical platforms being censored and undermining public trust, democratic communication and regional stability, which has had one of its most detrimental impacts on public trust.

The 2025 was not just a year of conflict on TV; it was also a year of creating conflict. Fake news served as a discursive weapon which had the authority to justify aggression, to create nationalistic consensus and to silence other voices. Such practices undermined democratic awareness, and highlighted significant weaknesses in media accountability and editorial autonomy. The study therefore highlights the need to reform the media regulation system, train journalists in ethics and train the media institutions against the ideological capture during geopolitical tension.

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