

# FAKE NEWS

*Unravelling the greater complexity of how  
individuals, institutions and the whole nations  
manipulate facts to create credible fake news  
to their advantage*

Collection of papers presented at the International  
conference on Fake News and Facts in our Region  
organised by the Institute of Regional Studies in  
Islamabad on April 24-26, 2019

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# **BEHIND THE TWEETS: FAKE NEWS, RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, AND ISLAMOPHOBIA**

**MARCIA HERMANSEN\***

Taking off from the Institute of Regional Studies conference theme of “Fake News & Facts in Our Region,” I will attempt to bring an American perspective into conversation with some Pakistani regional connections through the topic of “Behind the Tweets: Fake News, Religious Freedom, and Islamophobia.” I realize that this approach may push both the boundaries of “fake news” and of “our region,” but my intention is to offer both specific examples and broader theoretical framings that will address the significant themes raised by the conference topic.

I am based in the United States and my academic field is the study of Islam with regional expertise in South Asia and the Middle East. Both of these elements—the US and Islam—are salient topics in the discussion of “fake news.” As we are all aware the term “fake news”—also known as “alternative facts” came to particular prominence and public awareness in the wake of the 2016 US Presidential elections, although it had definitely been in circulation much earlier. Fake news was named the term of the year in 2016 by

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the *Oxford Dictionary* and in 2017 by the Collins Dictionary which noted that usage of the term had increased by 365% over 2016.<sup>1</sup>

Around the world, authoritarians, populists and other political leaders have seized on the phrase “fake news” as a tool for attacking their critics and, in some cases, deliberately undermining the institutions of democracy—often inspired by Trump. For example, in countries where press freedom is restricted or under considerable threat—including Russia, China, Turkey, Libya, Poland, Hungary, Thailand, Somalia, and others—political leaders have invoked fake news as justification for beating back media scrutiny.<sup>2</sup>

My presentation primarily deals with some specific initiatives of the Trump administration with regard to “religion” that are more in the light of framing information in such a way as to provoke affective support, while at the same time potentially distorting the *facts* of the situation. The concept of “framing” was famously elaborated in the wake of the surprising, for the left, victory of George W. Bush that inaugurated his first term as US president in 2004.

The UC Berkeley cognitive linguist, George Lakoff, an expert on metaphors and also a progressive intellectual and advisor to the American Democratic political party, wrote a slim volume *Don't Think of an Elephant!* that was billed as “the definitive handbook for understanding what happened in the 2004 election and communicating effectively about key issues facing America today.”<sup>3</sup> In this book Lakoff explained that the success of conservatives in strategically framing their positions—for example, as being the ones who are “pro-life” in the abortion debate. In the volume Lakoff outlined in detail the traditional American values that progressives hold, but are often unable to articulate, arguing that progressives need to learn how to present their positions in terms of values instead of programs, since most people vote on the basis of their values and identities, often against their best interests.<sup>4</sup>

Tweets, although necessarily brief, are often strategically embedded within implicit value frames. Therefore it is not surprising that more recently, in the era of Trump's fake news tweets, Lakoff has offered the following analysis that links the two elements: frames and tweets.

Trump's tweets are not random, they are strategic. There are four types: 1) Pre-emptive framing, to get a framing advantage. 2) Diversion, to divert attention when news could embarrass him. 3) Deflection: Shift the blame to others. And 4) trial balloon – test how much you can get away with. Reporting, and therefore repeating, Trump's tweets just give him more power.<sup>5</sup>

### **Fake New, Framing, and Persuasion**

Previous research has identified multiple frameworks for studying fake news including categories such as types, elements and phases,<sup>6</sup> process, product, and public; and diverse types of fake news.<sup>7</sup> Typically, three main motivations for purveying fake news have been identified: *political*, *financial*, and *social*.<sup>8</sup> The focus in this article will be on the political. Political disinformation is often called propaganda, and political actors who produce disinformation masqueraded as news intend to influence public perception, either on specific issues, individuals, or perceptions of the world. Propaganda is defined as "the deliberate, systemic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions, and direct behaviour to achieve a response that furthers the desired intent of the propagandist,"<sup>9</sup> and propaganda can thus be understood as a deliberate attempt to alter or maintain a power balance, advantageous to the propagandist. To identify a message as propaganda is to suggest something negative and dishonest, and synonyms to the word propaganda are therefore lies, distortion, deceit, manipulation, mind control, psychological warfare, and brainwashing.<sup>10</sup> The 1988 work by Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman, *Manufacturing Consent*,<sup>11</sup> took the analysis of propaganda in

the American context to another analytical level by describing the creation of popular consensus through the coalescing of the domestic and foreign policy of the state, financial interests of advertisers, and both political and financial agendas of the individuals and corporations who controlled the media with the purpose of demonstrating how to see how public opinion was manufactured.

Experts in journalism today understand the multiple challenges to their field, many of which are sadly, purely economic, but others which are the overt suppression of the truth by authoritarian regimes and even criminal elements.<sup>12</sup> In a related development, political scientists have begun to speak of a retreat of democratization in the face of rising authoritarianism around the globe, a rise that may be more gradual than in the previous more dramatic takeovers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps as a more measured and more stealthy and incremental strategy, but is no less eroding democratic institutions and practices.<sup>13</sup>

Political propaganda has been associated with terms such as *strategic narratives*, which allow political actors to articulate a position on a specific issue and to shape perceptions and actions. The proliferation of strategically placed fake news on social media at the time of the 2016 election was termed by Facebook *Information operations* in describing actions taken by organized actors to distort domestic or foreign political sentiment, most frequently to achieve a strategic and/or geopolitical outcome.<sup>14</sup> These operations use a combination of methods, according to Facebook, such as false news, disinformation, or networks of fake accounts aimed at manipulating public opinion.

The use of fake news, automated bot accounts, and other manipulation methods gained particular attention in the United States in 2016, but manipulation and disinformation tactics played an important role in elections in at least 17 other countries in 2017, among them Venezuela, the Philippines and Turkey, according to the



Freedom House “Freedom on the Net” report (2017).<sup>15</sup> The 2018 report entitled “The Rise Of Digital Authoritarianism” notes that

“Governments around the world are tightening control over citizens’ data and using claims of “fake news” to suppress dissent, eroding trust in the Internet as well as the foundations of democracy.”<sup>16</sup> Even in democracies such as the United Kingdom we find the creation of content such as blog posts, YouTube videos, fake news stories, pictures, or memes that help promote the government’s political agenda.<sup>17</sup>

In an American study about fake news’ agenda-setting power, Vargo, Guo, and Amazeen found that partisan media are intricately entwined with fake news.<sup>18</sup> During the three years studied (2014–2016), partisan media was found to be particularly attentive to fake news coverage on topics such as border issues, international relations, and religion.<sup>19</sup> In summary, political disinformation has become a major concern due to the challenges it poses for societies. New sophisticated technologies to produce and distribute political disinformation make it more difficult to detect and combat the manipulations, not only for journalists, fact checkers, and citizens, but also for civil society and established democratic institutions.

## **The affective and emotional component of persuasion**

In this article, I seek to add a dimension to the “fake news” discussion that would include the more respectable, but ultimately more nefarious or insidious element of “fake framing.” Twitter is understood to be a preeminent source of “fake news,” especially under the current US President and his administration. Tweets constitute only one component of the way in which the Trump administration is promoting a conservative agenda in America. As articulated by George Lakoff, conservatives have long developed effective strategies for framing debates in such ways that their objectives become more appealing to the masses, and in an environment conditioned to

slogans and sound bytes, choosing compelling metaphors and buzzwords can often carry public opinion and ultimately win elections and acquire political power.

My primary example of such framing in this paper, drawing on my expertise as a professor of Islamic Studies and religion is the use of the rubric of “religious freedom” in recent American political discourse and initiatives in order to promote underlying conservative and even Islamophobic values in the United States. Religious Freedom seems like a value that would be widely supported across demographics and cultures, as well as one endorsed by religious teachings themselves. This section of my paper illustrates some of the challenges that arise when a seemingly benign concept such as “religious freedom” is advocated and framed to support a particular agenda in others of whose freedom will be defended.

Religious freedom related tweets and initiatives in the American context include the campaign to bring back “Merry Christmas,” greetings on the occasion of “Religious Freedom Day,” and the May 2017 executive order called “Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty”. Islamophobic elements of fake news include the ‘birther’ movement that claimed that President Obama was not born in the USA and that he was a Muslim, as well as a variety of anti-Muslim posts shared by Trump on social media.

Drawing on theories such as George Lakoff’s formulation of framings and metaphors as driving individual political choices, and Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky’s 1988 theory of “manufacturing consensus”<sup>20</sup> now updated for an Internet and social media age, I will explore some of the tensions implicit within concepts such as religious freedom, initially illustrating how the term is being used in widely divergent ways in American politics and, in conclusion, extending some of the analysis to the case of Pakistan and some of its regional neighbors.

First we note that in the United States Jan 16<sup>th</sup> has been commemorated since 1993 as “Religious Freedom” day in the United States. In 2018 Donald Trump proclaimed on this occasion:

Unfortunately, not all have recognized the importance of religious freedom, whether by threatening **tax consequences** for particular forms of religious speech, or forcing people to comply with laws that violate their core religious beliefs without sufficient justification. These incursions, little by little, can destroy the fundamental freedom underlying our democracy. Therefore, soon after taking office, I addressed these issues in an Executive Order that helps ensure Americans are able to follow their consciences without undue Government interference and the Department of Justice has issued guidance to Federal agencies regarding their compliance with laws that protect religious freedom. No American—whether a **nun, nurse, baker, or business owner**—should be forced to choose between the tenants (sic) of faith or adherence to the law.<sup>21</sup>

There are several implicit projects embedded in this statement.

During his campaign for president, then candidate Trump promised to dismantle the Johnson amendment, which prohibits churches and other tax-exempt religious organizations from partisan speech and activities.

Once elected, in May 2017, Trump signed an executive order called “Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty,” one component of which loosened Internal Revenue Service (tax) enforcement of this ban. This was significant because this change in tax law could ultimately open the door to religious organizations raising funds and lobbying for political candidates. This would, of course, favor conservatives and alter the political landscape in their favor.

Furthermore, 2017’s “Freedom of Religion” Day was the occasion for the Trump administration inaugurating a new division

within the Department of Health and Human Services devoted to “conscience and religious freedom.”

In this case the agenda of social conservatives would be furthered through activities undertaken within this division which are anticipated to implement conscience and religious freedom protections. If this were to take place health care workers would legally be able to refuse specific types of care, like birth control or abortion, based on their religious or conscience-based objections. Critics of these initiatives anticipate that such provisions would negatively impact the civil rights of lesbian, gay, and transgendered people and restrict form of patient care. Supporters of the new unit within the government see this division as being able to interfere to protect the rights of individuals to act according to the teachings of their respective religions.<sup>22</sup>

The references to “nuns”, nurses, bakers,<sup>23</sup> and business owners in the announcement are not random but rather refer to actual cases that have incurred legal action and public debate over the rights of groups or individuals to refuse to provide services that they felt would conflict with their religious views—either directly on a principle of doctrine. Examples are Catholic institutions providing birth control or allowing abortions in their facilities—or individuals who feel that providing services may conflict with their religious principles—such as bakers not selling wedding cakes to gay couples getting married. This principle could even potentially protect business owners refusing to serve women wearing hijabs, etc.

## **What is Religious Freedom in the United States?**

It turns out that this expression has multiple valences. One perspectives reads the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution as stating that everyone in the United States has the right to practice his or her own religion, or no religion at all. The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits government from encouraging or promoting (“establishing”) religion in any way. That is why there is no

official religion of the United States. This means that the US government may not give financial support to any religion. Furthermore, the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment gives Americans the right to worship or not as they choose. The government can't penalize a person because of his or her religious beliefs.<sup>24</sup>

Often such protections are invoked to protect followers of minority religions. For example, scholars of Islam in America have been consulted in legal cases where individuals demanded the right to have extra time off at Friday noon to attend congregational Friday prayers—and they almost inevitably win these rights. In another such case, a Muslim public school teacher in Illinois requested leave during the term to go on the Hajj pilgrimage. When this was denied she claimed that she was forced out of employment because of her belief. The Justice Department studied the meaning of Hajj and the courts ruled in her favor—i.e., that her termination had been unjust and she should receive compensation and possible reinstatement.<sup>25</sup>

Interestingly, from the perspective of Muslims there are two sides to the religious freedom issue, thus there are Muslims on both sides of the debate (as there are for American Jews, and American Catholics). Conservative Muslims have some sympathy for the element of protecting individual “conscience” and the right of religions and their followers to not engage in practices that they deem “sins.” For example, not to provide abortions (I should state that doctors have not been forced to do this), defense of marriage (for clergy not to perform same sex marriage—this is not forced in the US), even the right to maintain gender segregation in religious spaces (thus far state has not interfered).

This religious minorities may be somewhat caught in between—such that Catholics (Catholic Bishops) ally with Evangelicals against abortion—Muslims may ally with American liberals on gay rights because they recognize that liberals and LGBTQ individuals are not likely to be Islamophobic.

We can also see that thus far American law has been relatively protective of religious minority rights to practice. In cases of conflict with the Obama era mandate to provide contraceptive services to students or employees a solution was crafted in 2012 whereby Catholic institutions could hand off coverage to private insurers. However some still protested this to the US Supreme Court stating that it made them complicit.

This exemplifies one approach to navigating a Catholic religious interpretation vs. a federal mandate. The Trump administration's position suggests that in future religious bodies would have less incentive to accommodate those who do not share their perspectives. We thus see emerging tensions since American secular society Catholics or Muslims want the right to act according to their conscience but do not demand that others follow their rules in terms of federal law, yet within their own institutions they do want specific religious norms to be observed by all.

Let us now reflect on the situation that while religious freedom or religious liberty has long been considered a quintessential American value it recently has become politicized, controversial, and contested. There are two reasons behind this 1) On the one hand, the politicization is based on deep disagreements on questions of sexual morality. "On abortion, contraception, gay rights, and same-sex marriage, conservative religious leaders condemn as grave evils what many other Americans view as fundamental human rights."<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, divergence on religious liberty now often centers on attitudes toward Muslims and Islam. Specifically, many outspoken advocates of religious liberty find it perfectly consistent to simultaneously deny such protection to Muslims. As noted by Asma Uddin, a Muslim lawyer and scholar specializing in religious freedom, the reasoning behind this is often couched in the claim that Islam is not a religion (it's something else — such as a "political ideology") and therefore doesn't even qualify for religious liberty protections. The

argument is bogus and alarming, but its increasingly salience in public discourse suggests that it may gain ground in the future.<sup>27</sup> Thus, in the current political climate there are two distinct valences to claims of “religious freedom” or “religious liberty.”

1) For conservatives what is emphasized in “religious freedom” is curtailing the power of the state to restrict the rights of individuals to refuse services or to participate in practices that they find objectionable on religious grounds.

2) From the perspective of liberals what is most important about religious freedom is to guarantee the protection and rights of minorities—either minority religions or groups such as LGBTQ individuals to practice their religions or follow their lifestyles.

In the case of religious minorities such as Jews and Muslims it has been questioned whether Trump’s tweets and, more seriously, his executive orders and other measures distort “religious freedom” so as to promote what is in reality white Christian privilege?

Examples of this tendency are the tweets such as “People are proud to be saying Merry Christmas again. I am proud to have led the charge against the assault of our cherished and beautiful phrase. MERRY CHRISTMAS!!!!”<sup>28</sup> and pronouncements such as “We worship God not government.”<sup>29</sup> In other words in such tweets that assert a particular form of religiosity, the views of minority religions or the non-religious are implicitly stigmatized.<sup>30</sup>

## **Fake News and Islam in Trump’s America and His Administration<sup>31</sup>**

Another glaring example of fake news and framing with links to the Trump administration was the role of 2018-19 [now resigned as Trump’s National Security Advisor] John Bolton as Chair of the Gatestone Institute. This “institute” focuses on spreading Islamophobic fake news and also collects and publicizes actual news reports that put Islam and Muslims in the most unfavorable light,

often by framing them under sensation headings such as “Belgium: First Islamic State in Europe”.<sup>32</sup>

The fact-checking website Snopes has found multiple **false viral stories** originating with Gatestone. For instance, the site claimed falsely that in London — called ‘Londonistan’ in the piece — 423 mosques were built “on the sad ruins of English Christianity,” as 500 churches closed. But the story **cherry-picked** the data to ignore hundreds of newly opened churches.

Many of the fake stories have percolated into mainstream U.S. politics. Gatestone was **largely responsible** for the **false claim** that there are “no-go zones” through Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Sweden, and other European states where Muslim immigrants have set up a parallel society in which local police no longer enforce the law.”<sup>33</sup>

Such blatant anti-Muslim views on the part of many Trump appointees indicate a lack of neutrality and fairness. Interestingly, the pattern has been that such individuals are ultimately discredited for other reasons or resign on their own, as in the case of Bolton.

## **Anti-shari’a legislation**

Another issue that links fake news, framing, and Islamophobia in recent American politics concerns the anti-sharia laws that have been proposed in 43 states and enacted in some.<sup>34</sup> In some cases shari’a is specified as a legal tradition and singled out for disfavor. This type of legislation was introduced as a ballot measure in Oklahoma and approved by voters, but ultimately was blocked by the courts. A second type lists a number of different legal traditions that are disfavored, and shari’a is one of them, along with halacha, canon law and karma (sic). The third and most common type bans all “foreign law.”<sup>35</sup>

One Muslim academic with expertise in Islamic law, Professor Asifa Quraishi, argued that banning shari’a could inhibit Muslims from their religious practice. This is due to the fact that shari’a isn’t just a set



of legal rules and in fact literally means “a path to the water,” that is, a path to a source of spiritual nourishment; it is meant to help the believer achieve the divine ideal. It does involve some rules, primarily about matters such as how to pray and wash before prayer. Proponents of anti-shari’a laws don’t highlight these types of issues but instead speak of “shari’a” in sensationalist terms, such as the cutting off of hands and the stoning of adulterers. Since these sorts of things are not likely to happen in the U.S. and certainly wouldn’t be sanctioned by any civil judge Quraishi concluded that anti-shari’a laws therefore serve no purpose<sup>36</sup> other than provoking anti-Muslim sentiment and suggesting dual loyalties on the part of Muslims.

Beyond the scope of the current paper would be a deconstruction of the above “pro-Muslim” presentation of shari’a and what it does or does not entail. The writer, an American Muslim, is glossing over issues that would be salient, in both Pakistani and American contexts. What is important to remember is there are academic, journalistic, and historical ways to attempt to understand and ultimately resolve challenges to majority and minority rights in modern and complex nation states—while falsely framing and inflaming passions around them is exploitative and can lead to violence and the marginalization of minorities.

## **The Trump Administration and Muslims**

Trump and his administration have been demonstratively anti-Muslim. In addition to a spate of Islamophobes appointed within his administration (Steve Bannon, Michael Flynn, Ben Carson, John Bolton), and immigration actions such as the Muslim ban and calls for extreme vetting, Trumps has a pattern of forwarding anti-Muslim Tweets that purvey false rumors and racializing stereotypes.<sup>37</sup>

For example, Trump shared videos that were first posted by Jayda Fransen, deputy leader of Britain First, a far-right group founded in 2011 that frequently posts anti-immigration views. Fransen had tweeted videos with the descriptions: “Muslim migrant beats up Dutch

boy on crutches!" "Muslim Destroys a Statue of Virgin Mary!" and "Islamist mob pushes teenage boy off roof and beats him to death!"<sup>38</sup>

In a sit-down interview with British journalist and TV host Piers Morgan, Trump was pressed on whether he regretted sharing the videos. "Well, you know, look, it was done because I am a big believer in fighting radical Islamic terror," Trump said in the interview. "This was a depiction of radical Islamic terror."<sup>39</sup> In other words, whether the information was true or false was not the point, but whether it contributed to a framing that the President wished to reinforce.

### **Fake news, religion, and religious freedom in Pakistan and the surrounding region**

Thus far we have broached the topics of fake news and its deployment by governments as well as other movements and individual actors to promote their own positions and agendas; and in particular the sensitivity of religion as a topic. It seems that a crucial factor in this era of the "public" is identity, and both nationalism and religion are the most affective and mobilizing elements of identity, and this primary topics of "fake news". The US and Pakistan and its neighbors—what is the same and what is different, what continues and what changes, these are the building blocks of comparative analysis.

Americans are very fond of invoking "freedom"—so much so that the buzz line "they hate our freedoms" has famously been used to explain both criticisms and attacks, whether verbal or violent, on US interests. In American political parties, the binary of individual flourishing and independence vs. the communal good has long been a primary axis of differentiation. Thus we see in the deployment of religious freedom as reflecting these polarities of what is the nation and what are its most essential values.

In the case of most of the region encompassed by the mission of the Institute of Regional Studies, defined as South and Central Asia, religion and the role of Islam in politics plays out in remarkably diverse

ways. I think a common point of inquiry is the idea of “what is sayable” in public discourse. And now, recall, everything is public and can immediately be tweeted either by one’s followers or by opponents—or by armies of trolls and bots.

At present religious freedom is sensitive in the Pakistani context, especially in the areas of religious minority status and blasphemy, two separate but at times associated spheres. Because these topics are incendiary and can lead to demonstrations and public disorder as well as targeted killings, the spreading of accusations through fake news and social media is especially dangerous and the government has therefore decried the proliferation of fake news and adopted at least some preliminary measures to try and control it such as establishing accounts where rumors could be countered or debunked. The triangle of the government, journalism, and the public as both purveyors and consumers of fake news is clearly very different between Pakistan and other countries in the region and the United States. What at least can be held as shared is the mobilizing power of religious identity and the risks involved in instrumentalizing religion on the part of those in power and those who seek to challenge that power. The ideal, unfortunately unrealized, mode of countering this weaponization of religious identity, is that of an educated public capable of assessing the veracity of what is broadcast or disseminated by platforms that are manipulated and at times either over or under regulated. Beyond the issue of true or fake news lies the more complex analysis of frames of presentation and the manipulation of public opinion for which there is no easy solution. In fact, the current American example is a sobering one for democracies and their mediascapes for which the US case was once an example of freedom both of information and religion.

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# FAKE OR FACTUAL ACADEMIC REPORTING: CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS VERSUS HISTORY OF RECONCILIATION - A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

ASMA YAQOOB\*

## Abstract

*The 20<sup>th</sup> century's assertion that two civilizations or two alternative cultural entities must need a clash can be countered by the history of reconciliation between Ottomans and Europeans. Military alliances, trading agreements, exchange of letters and persons were the standard norms of Medieval and early modern Europe. The existence of large non-Muslim communities including the Eastern Christians and Jews in the Ottoman Empire made wide interactions possible between translators, traders, missionaries, merchants and diplomats across Western and Muslim societies. This allowed many Christian states including England, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden to find their best ally in the form of the Ottomans against their regional rivals. One best example of these military alliances is the Crimean War of 1854 in which England and Roman Catholic France were aligned with Muslim ruler of Ottomans against the Tsars who considered themselves as the world's last truly Christian emperors.*

*The early modern era of the rise of western powers witnessed ample sources of reconciliation between Muslim Ottomans and Christian Europe. In fact, the history of reconciliation between early modern Europe and Ottoman Empire is mainly spread*

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*into two spheres of influence: military and culture. The elevation of France as the Ottoman Empire's preferred military ally and trading partner offered Catholic missionaries in the Ottoman Empire the institutional support which they had never previously enjoyed in their interactions with any Muslim majority society with the exception of Spain. The ethnic and cultural diversity of Ottoman Empire and its pluralistic nature in tolerating non-Muslim citizens challenged the European beliefs of reordering polity. The cultural contacts enriched each other's artistic and technical achievements, little affected by wars and conflicts of belief.*

**Key Words:** *Civilizations, Reconciliation, Ottomans, Europe, History, Muslims, Christians, Military, Economic, Cultural, Contemporary, Islam, West*

## Introduction

Fake or factual academic reporting on Islamic history dates back to the time when man began to learn to read and write. Going through the literature survey on clash or reconciliation between Islam and west, numerous scholarly reports could be explored inclining with one or another school of thought. There are those who like Karen Armstrong considers the western world liable for such fake perceptions as the conflict between Islam and west. In her words, "The theory of clashing civilizations (Islam vs the West) has long been disproven. This is a clash engineered by bad policies in the past."<sup>1</sup> Others like Robert Spencer distorts facts about Islam and relates the 20<sup>th</sup> century's fake and fabricated idea about conflict between Islam and west to the time of Crusades. For him, "the seeds of today's conflict were planted much earlier than the First Crusade."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, the academic debate on clash of civilization as a fake idea or a political myth has been as old as the Samuel Huntington's thesis itself. Many scholarly works have examined the weaknesses underlying the notion of inter-civilizational clash including the most famous one by Edward Said. In his essay, the 'clash of ignorance' (2001) Edward Said rejected the delineation of group conflicts to a cultural or religious pigeonhole.<sup>3</sup> Contesting ideas like dialogue of

civilizations have been presented by scholars like Fabio Petito for contemporary nations or civilizational identities.<sup>4</sup> The empirical results by existing scholarly research also proved negatively for the fake notion about Islam versus West or clash between specific civilizations.<sup>5</sup>

It is also encouraging to see that within west, academic initiatives have recently been taken to counter such fake ideas and theories. Since 2015, the European Islamophobia Report has been issued annually to find data on hate crimes against Muslims perpetrated due to fake academic reporting on Islam and Muslims. Comparing Islamophobia in the respective European countries, the reports stress the importance of coexistence of different cultures throughout Europe.<sup>6</sup>

A literature survey into early modern European history illustrates that Muslim and Christian rulers have both competed and cooperated with each other in the wake of territorial expansions, a classic trait of nations in the medieval ages. Many of the European historians have described Ottoman rulers<sup>7</sup> as barbaric and violent<sup>8</sup> waging wars to promote their faith based religion – Islam. However it is again the European historians who consider the expansion of Ottoman Empire as “a Greater Western World which encompassed the followers of both Muhammad and Jesus.”<sup>9</sup> It was the faith-guided tolerance of Ottoman rulers for their non-Muslim subjects which attracted Christendom in 14<sup>th</sup> century Europe towards Islamic empire for diplomatic, economic, military and cultural contacts. It is not that the relationship between Christian and Muslim societies of that period constituted a very affable image but that the intersection of two political and commercial worlds blurred the religious differences up to the point that the two sides accommodated each other for their respective faith-bound territorial conquests. This accommodation of interests was reflected not only in military alliances but also featured widespread exchanges in art and literary traditions which remain unaffected by conflicts of belief.

In the present days, this inter-civilizational interaction could be witnessed in military and economic spheres between western Christian powers and Muslim countries of Iran, Saudi Arabia Turkey and even Pakistan. Saudi Arabia has been a traditional Muslim ally of the United States in economic and military spheres. It has been a persistent policy of the USA since the Iranian revolution of 1979 to support Sunni Saudi Arabia for countering the influence of Shiite Iran in the Middle East. Due to her geopolitical importance in South Asia and West Asia, Pakistan has remained a frontline Muslim country initially for Soviet Union led war in Afghanistan and then US war against Al-Qaeda and insurgent groups in Afghanistan. Today, after 17-years of futile efforts to fight with the Afghan Taliban, the US is again banking on Pakistan to reach a political solution with insurgent groups in Afghanistan. In the case of Iran, China and European countries are avoiding US sanctions against the country and finding alternate ways to continue to trade with the nuclear regional power. The history of civilizations is thus filled with conflict and cooperation. It cannot be reduced to any ideological orientation. Necessity of relations takes precedence over socio-political or cultural identities.

The present study dwells into two areas of reconciliation: military and culture that embraced Muslim-Christian collaborations in Europe for almost six centuries. It aims to highlight areas of cooperation that marked the liaison between two great civilizations in the history to refute the recent scholarly focus on clash of Islam and West. The study also seeks to answer this important question that why the conflict of faiths which are under attack recently remained of subsidiary importance in early European diplomacy.

## **Historical Background**

The medieval and early modern European history is satiated with innumerable accounts of Christian emperors' wars and conflicts against one and other. This provided ample scope for outside military incursions. Since 1354, the Ottoman Sultans were expanding their



kingdom towards west. The Papacy assertions of Western Christendom<sup>10</sup> to unite against the Muslim rulers' invasions largely failed with the fall of Constantinople (Istanbul) to the Ottoman Turks in 1453. The mammoth invasions and victories of warrior Turks in Hungary, Vienna, Greece, Anatolia and Balkans had the major effect of establishing a non-Christian power in Europe.<sup>11</sup> It was the struggle of Catholic Europe in the late fifteen and early sixteenth centuries to establish control over Italy and the rise of Protestantism that rendered the Christian world entangled in several military conflicts against each other better known as "thirty years of war" in European history.<sup>12</sup>

Although these two episodes, religious wars and emergence of Protestantism transformed the European world altogether, the building of a Muslim Empire on their frontiers had religion as the main basis for Ottoman-European relations in the early modern Europe. The religious harmony in administrative polity offered by the Ottoman Empire<sup>13</sup> proved a haven for many apostates persecuted by intolerant Catholic emperors for their heresies including Protestantism in medieval Europe. Earlier, religion was used by Orthodox Christian empires – the Byzantine, Latin, Habsburg and Hungarian to legitimize their rule and aristocracy.<sup>14</sup> This trend was altered in Europe by the practicing resilience and flexibility of the Muslim emperors. Being a center of Christianity, the city of Constantinople long served a powerful seat for the Christian church in the Roman (later called as Byzantine) Empire.<sup>15</sup> As the successor to the Byzantine Empire, the Ottoman Turks founded a unique administrative order by fusing their very own traditions from Central Asian, Persian and Arab legacies into what was left by Byzantium.<sup>16</sup>

Belonging to warrior tribes themselves, the Ottomans employed large number of Christian soldiers from captives of conquered lands in lieu of protection granted to them by the Muslim emperors. Other non-Muslim captives were supposed to pay military tax known as *Jizya* or levy for exemption from military services. Named

as the Janissaries – the Christian soldiers of Sultan's personal army were given rewards for their loyalty in the form of lands and promotions to important administrative offices of Ottomans in the reign of Murad I (1319-1389).<sup>17</sup> The endless westwards conquests along with strong political and social infrastructure had a profound effect on Ottomans relations with the sixteenth century Europe. Two fields are of particular significance in this analysis: military and culture. While the military relationship of Ottomans with Europe is discussed widely in the history books, scholarly attention has recently been arisen in the scope of artistic and cultural exchanges for a reconciliation of civilizations above conflict of faiths.

### **Reconciliation through Culture**

The European Renaissance when viewed in international context seemed to be greatly influenced by the commercial, political and religious exchanges followed between Muslim Turks and Roman West after the creation of the Islamic Ottoman Empire on the remnants of the Byzantine Empire.<sup>18</sup> The changes in political authority brought about by the Ottomans in the geographical and cultural space of Byzantines instigated movements of people and ideas from as far east as Central and Inner Asia, and as far west as France and the Iberian peninsula.<sup>19</sup>

### **Literary exchanges**

With the fleeing of the Byzantine scholars to northern Europe, Florence and other cities of Italy in the wake of loss of Christian control over Constantinople, there was an increased transfer of Greek learning to the Latin West. The translations of Arabic and Greek texts by Byzantine and Islamic scholars as well as Jewish ones played an important role in transmitting the learning of antiquity to the West.<sup>20</sup> These were mainly the trade and commercial relations between two great civilizations that facilitated scholarship of science, culture and art

from Mediterranean to Europe and vice versa.<sup>21</sup> Trade in spices, dry fruits, cotton and grains also exchanged ideas and products of culture in neighboring civilizations of Mediterranean basin. The cultural symbiosis produced by interactions between members of different religio-civilizational orientations in the Ottoman Empire also reshaped identities some times in religious sense and at other times in ethno-national sense. This was not to per se abandoning what constituted an Arab, Spanish, Turk, Mongol, Italian, French, Albanian or Greek identity but to historically evolve as an Ottoman or Turk community overriding east and west if not Muslim and Christian.<sup>22</sup> The diplomatic relations between Ottoman state and European countries were more significant after commercial contacts in increasing cultural influence across two civilizations. For example, in France many elite famously started adopting a fashion known as *turquerie* or things in the Turkish style after the visit of an Ottoman ambassador in 1669. Different languages were introduced as professional courses to facilitate translations of important European works by the Ottomans. Again historical evidence exists to substantiate Turks' learning of French language. One of the most important ambassadors of Ottoman reform era, Fuad Pasha (1815-1869) studied French before entering the Ottoman military service.<sup>23</sup> The Ottoman palace and the Ottoman capital both became a center for learning about European culture and art.

### **Arts and architecture**

There is a semblance of cross-cultural influences on building architectures in Istanbul and Italy. The designs of churches of St Giorgio Maggiore and Il Redentore in Venice have borrowed influences from Suleymaniye Mosque in Istanbul or Selimiye Mosque in Edirne besides leaving their own drawing cultures for the Ottomans. In the words of architecture and design expert Jonathan Glancey, "Somewhere in undocumented Ottoman archives, scholars might yet stumble on correspondence between the greatest architects of Italy and Istanbul, confirming a connection between the Italian and

Suleiman's Renaissance, between the old and new Romes."<sup>24</sup> Such a cross-cultural art has its roots in what was the influence of non-Muslim subjects of the Ottoman Empire including *Sinan*, the famous Ottoman architect who was recruited through the levy system in the eighteenth century.<sup>25</sup> The travelers' accounts reveal how French inspired flamboyant architectural ornament began to appear on both royal residential buildings and mosques in the Islamic world.<sup>26</sup>

Clothing is another area which received significant exchange of ideas between the Ottomans and the West. The textile trade occurred in both directions, often copied by local manufacturers in both empires, which altered the look of clothing in two civilizations. For example, the layered clothing, the use of buttons, hanging short sleeves of coats, fur-lined outer garments and turbans historically associated with Turkish costumes became important features of dress in the European influential class<sup>27</sup> while frock coat and fitted trousers tailoring to fit each individual's body contours— a distinctive feature of fourteenth century Europe replaced traditional forms of clothing in the Ottoman palace by Sultan Mahmud II (1808–39).<sup>28</sup> Oriental carpets have been frequently depicted in European and American paintings to symbolize sophistication, education, and high social and economic status. Many of the Islamic carpets are now known by the name of the European artist in whose paintings they appear, such as Lotto and Holbein.<sup>29</sup> European drawings were also well-known in Turkey through travelers. The printed images in Biblical illustrations were soon learned by the Muslim civilization to apply to its own works.<sup>30</sup> Painting on canvas and oil painting, a European art became popular in royal families of Istanbul with Sultans and princes themselves learning and practicing painting. In 1860s military school students with talent were sent by the state to Paris to get an education in painting. The *Academie Julian*, Paris was then the main center of art education for many young talented artists from all European countries and the United States as well as the Ottoman Empire.<sup>31</sup>

The cultural coexistence of Ottomans and Europeans is too large a subject to be dealt here and should not be seen as one dominating the 'other' in history. It was the mosaic of different ethnic, religious and geographical backgrounds that shaped and diffused the art and culture of the Ottoman Empire over the course of six hundred years. The phenomenon could well relate to what is called as transculturation - a term introduced by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in 1940 to describe the phenomenon of merging and converging cultures.<sup>32</sup> Both Europeans and Ottomans relished the exchange of artists, transfer of images and art techniques, tastes and values to have this transculturation affect their respective renaissances in late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

### **Military reconciliation**

Military relations between the Ottomans and Europeans of late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries very much resemble international politics of any age where unique interests of empires or states precede religious differences. The Franco-Ottoman alliance of late sixteenth century against the Tsars was centered on Russian orthodoxy. In its support to Islam's Caliph in Turkey, Roman Catholic France was aligned with the Church of England to demonize Russian Christianity as a semi-pagan creed.<sup>33</sup> It was a fight between eastern and western Christianity on the shoulders of Islamic world which negated all differences of faith with the 'other' and what west today calls as the 'clash of civilization'. Orlando Figes, a British historian in his book, *The Last Crusade* well explains this holy war of Britain and France as "to stem Russian expansion and to bolster Islam in its fight with eastern Christianity."<sup>34</sup> This holy war is famous with the name of Crimean War of 1854 in European history and is not the only episode of military cooperation between Christians and Muslim states.

The Christian and Muslim worlds were long engaged in military cooperation long before they followed the path of attaining

military parity. The military relationship between Ottomans and Europeans encompassed multiple directions: These mainly include:

1. Christian employees of the Ottoman military force
2. Exchanges in military technology and skills
3. Christian allied states

### **Christian employees of the Ottoman military force**

The Janissary meaning new soldier or troop constituted a powerful elite corps in the standing army of the Ottoman state in the 15th and 16th centuries. The Janissary corps was originally staffed by Christian youths from the Balkan provinces who were converted to Islam before being recruited into the Ottoman service.<sup>35</sup> The Ottomans institutionalized a formal military service much before Europe to employ foreigners within the Ottoman state apparatus. The *devşirme* ("levy") system was established to create a most loyal, personal force for the Sultan. The system has been widely criticized in literature for being a tool of forcible conversion of Christian children to Islam but the practices under *devşirme*<sup>36</sup> reveals that the foremost objective of Ottoman rulers was to sustain an integrated class of corps against internal and external threats from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries<sup>37</sup> instead of religious one. Male children of conquered Christian communities were sent to military schools and received high ranks including that of Grand Vezir.<sup>38</sup>

This corps of Janissary force is well known to have received huge rewards for their loyalty and bravery during imperial fights. According to BBC, "the *devshirme* played a key role in Sultan Mehmet's conquest of Constantinople, and from then on regularly held very senior posts in the imperial administration."<sup>39</sup> The officials recruited under the *devşirme* system included high ranking Christian families. For example, the longest-serving Grand Vezir of Mehmed II (1432–1481), Mahmud Pasha (d. 1474), belonged to the Serbian family of *Angelović* and related to the Byzantine nobility.<sup>40</sup> Agoston also acknowledges the fact that 'the growth of Janissary corps was part of a

general military expansion that started under Sultan Suleyman I and accelerated during the Ottoman's Thirty years war (1578-1611) against the Safavids and Habsburgs.<sup>41</sup> Before the devshirme system, Christians could find employment in the Ottoman military without conversion to Islam and were entitled to land grants and its revenues for their military services. They were used as ancillary forces for the Ottoman cavalry. Many Christians also found their fateful careers in Ottoman navy as early as the fifteenth century.<sup>42</sup> As Mesut Uyar and Edward Erickson write about the Janissary corps as "the first permanent infantry regiments in all of Europe... founded at least 100 years before any other example."<sup>43</sup>

### **Transfer of Military Technology**

It was not only the matter of numbers and territories to be conquered that led Ottoman rulers to employ non-Muslim subjects and Christian slaves in imperial military forces, but also the technical expertise, diplomatic, linguistic and warfare expertise of German, Hungarian, Slavic, French, Venetian, Genoese, Spanish, Sicilian and English military experts including Master Orban, "the Hungarian", and Jörg of Nürnberg who helped the Ottomans in catching up with the new European military technology in firearms and cannonry.<sup>44</sup>

In the words of military historian Jeremy Black, the "(Ottomans) military system was the most sophisticated in sixteenth-century Europe."<sup>45</sup> It was the institutionalization of warfare by the Ottomans that set standards for persistent food supply through storage depots and discipline in the battle camps later to be followed by the Western European military reforms. Rhodes Murphy eloquently notes, "It was the efficient central requisitioning and distribution of military supplies in the period 1500-1700 that most set the Ottomans apart from their European adversaries. The rapid development of commissariat services in European armies during the first half of the eighteenth century eventually closed the developmental gap that had long existed between the Ottomans and the West, but it is worth remembering that

in the fields of transport and logistics it was the Ottomans who were the trend-setters and models of perfection whom the others strove to emulate."<sup>46</sup> Throughout the early modern era and beyond, the prolonged struggle between East and West to achieve military parity remained concentrated in discovery and spread of military knowledge across the Mediterranean. The transfer of gunpowder and firearms from Italy to Balkans played a key role in the diffusion of gunpowder technology to the Ottoman Empire.<sup>47</sup> In terms of early modern warfare advancement in the Euro-Mediterranean region, the Ottomans remained active participants in a shared technology rather than as passive recipients of borrowed means and methods.<sup>48</sup> The Janissaries were among the very first army units in Europe to use individual firearms.<sup>49</sup> Besides adapting to new military technologies, the Ottomans "managed to produce original concepts and practices that were, in turn, imitated by the Europeans."<sup>50</sup> For example, one of several important Christian war field tactics – *Wagenburg*<sup>51</sup> was adapted by the Ottomans as *tabur cengi* (camp battle) which relied on using war wagons successfully against rival forces.<sup>52</sup>

The import of military technology and personnel from the European states remained a key strategy in Ottoman's grand designs of territorial expansion and war triumphs which placed political and military objectives much above religious ones.<sup>53</sup> It was only later isolation<sup>54</sup> of Ottoman rulers from conflicts in Central Europe in late eighteenth century that prevented the Empire to reap the fruits of military revolution coincided with the industrial revolution in next door Western Europe.

### **Christian Allied States**

Despite several military conflicts between Christian and Muslim powers and acrimony of Church for proponents of Islam, the Ottomans contracted alliances not only with the Byzantine Empire but also with other Christian states both in the middle ages and early modern era. After the capture of Constantinople by the Turks, the



Venetians (Italy) were the first Christian powers to establish permanent diplomatic relations with the Ottoman Empire. The King of Naples also sought to attain diplomatic and military help of Ottomans against their rival states.<sup>55</sup> Seen as a mighty empire of its age, the military and political strengths of the Ottoman Empire were used as a counter balance by most of European powers in the Eastern and Western Mediterranean. The Ottomans were accepted as important diplomatic partners by Pope, French and many other parties in the Christian world.<sup>56</sup> An in-depth analysis into treaties and bonds signed by the Turks with the Christian emperors in Balkans, Italian maritime states and principalities of Rome at different times allowed historical expansion and creation of a vast Ottoman Empire in the Eastern Europe and Middle East in a short span of time. The hostile relations between different Christian states endorsed the Ottomans to exchange diplomatic and military cooperation with each of them in a unique way.

The most significant of these alliances was Franco-Ottoman military coalition in the sixteenth century against their Christian enemies. For French historian Géraud Poumarède, the French alliance with Muslim rulers of the Ottoman Empire set an important precedent for justification of alliances between Christian and non-Christian states in an age of ideology and brought a gradual decline of Christendom ideal<sup>57</sup> against infidels.<sup>58</sup> This ill-famed unholy alliance was established between the king of France - Francis I<sup>59</sup> and the emperor of the Ottoman Empire - Suleiman the Magnificent in 1536. Initially formed against a shared threat of Habsburg expansionism, the alliance was revived several times in the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>60</sup> The Ottoman fleet helped the French King to attack the dominions of Italy of their mutual enemy Charles V – the Holy Roman emperor<sup>61</sup> - in the mid sixteenth century. The two other notable episodes of military cooperation between French and Ottomans were witnessed in the Ottoman conquest of Libyan Tripoli in 1551 and the

Ottoman assistance to the French in the short-term conquest of Genoese-controlled Corsica (French island in the Mediterranean Sea) in 1553-55.<sup>62</sup> France reciprocated with political help during the Ottoman–Safavid War of 1532–1555. French ambassador Gabriel de Luetz accompanied Sultan Suleiman during Turk's campaign against Persia and the former gave Sultan important artillery placement advises during the lasting Siege of Van (Armenia).<sup>63</sup> Referred as capitulations of 1569, the political and military cooperation between Turks and French was extended into award of commercial and religious privileges to France in Ottoman dominions.<sup>64</sup> The capitulations allowed for the free passage of French ships into Ottoman waters and ports and required other European vessels to fly the French flag in order to avail these privileges. The last important episode of military cooperation between the Christian powers and Ottomans was the Crimean War (1853-1856). The war was a result of European power politics to curb Russian military prowess besides drying up its expansionist designs for holy places in the Middle East. Britain and France allied together to save the city of Constantinople by providing Turkey naval and modern military weaponry against Russia.<sup>65</sup> Although the said alliance did not last long and a new European system of nation states had its own influence in dismantling Ottoman Empire in the wake of World Wars, it is noteworthy to mention here that such alliances and truces concluded between various European Christian emperors and Turk Sultans at varying times were temporary in nature with each side being aware of their strategic aims and oblivious of religious differences.

### **Contemporary Examples of Reconciliation**

If Islam is one civilization and west is another, then it is evident from historical to contemporary times that every instance of conflict or clash between the two has eventually resulted in the form of dialogue and peace. The most recent example of this is the United States' efforts to hold dialogue with Afghan Taliban after the unsuccessful 17-year US

led war in Afghanistan.<sup>66</sup> The US-Taliban meeting in Doha in January 2019 indicates that clash of civilizations is a fake and failed idea and nations could find their interests' best fulfilled only through dialogue.

In the post-cold war era, Iran and Saudi Arabia have remained important countries for west and other non-Muslim powers to seek military relationship. The Russian-Iran alliance has long been held against US strategic influence in the Middle East. Turkey has recently joined this alliance when presidents of the three countries met in Russia in February 2019 to share common foreign policy objectives on Syria.<sup>67</sup> Although each of the three nations have overriding interests in Syria, they all aim to achieve political stability in a country suffering from internal strife. What seems striking about this newly formed alliance is that all three regional powers - Iran, Russia and Turkey have issues with the United States. Countering the US objective in Syria to oust the regime of Bashar Al Assad, Russia and Iran have succeeded in their support to the Assad government. Turkey - an erstwhile post-cold war ally of the United States is parting ways with Washington after latter's support to Kurd fighters in Syria, who pose a terrorist threat to Turkey.<sup>68</sup> By aligning with Russia and Iran – strategic opponents of the United States, Turkey is now finding common grounds with other allies in the region.

The entente of Iran-Russia and Turkey also seems to stand up against the US-Saudi Arabia coalition in the Middle East. Having been an important source of oil purchase for US industry and one of the biggest buyer of US arms, Saudi Arabia has survived 70 years of partnership with the powerful western country.<sup>69</sup> In spite of many ups and downs in this economic and military relationship, the Saudi Kingdom has remained a geopolitically strong Muslim country for the US due to former's position and influence both in the region and around the Muslim world.

Besides Saudi Arabia, the US has long been willing to bring Iran to her camp as Iran also represents strong historical connections

across Middle East culturally and socially. The United States has long been willing to forge a strategic interest based relationship with Iran. Robert Kaplan explains these interests in the following words:

“The United States needs Shia Iran to fight the extremist Sunnis of the Islamic State, and at the same time to pressure the Shia government in Baghdad to moderate its posture toward the Sunnis, in the name of internal stability in Iraq. Should the unhelpful Islamic government in Turkey grow more intractable, Iran could also prove helpful in balancing against it.... Furthermore, Iran could help steady neighboring Afghanistan in the wake of an American troop withdrawal, by serving as a buffer against pro-Taliban Pakistani and Saudi elements. The American military has already quietly encouraged Iranian involvement there.”<sup>70</sup>

Since being placed by USA in “axis of evil” alongside Iraq and North Korea immediately after Iranian Revolution of 1979, relationship between US and Iran has been facing upside down with little hopes of any thaw. The post 9/11 alliances of west against Taliban and Al-Qaeda provided both USA and Iran an opportunity to join hands against Taliban in Afghanistan. This period of cooperation was ended soon with the ouster of Taliban from Kabul. As the victories of USA in Afghanistan and Iraq proved short-lived, regional players like Iran have become important for the western powers.<sup>71</sup> The influence of Iran in neighboring countries and her strong historical and cultural linkages in the region revived American and western interests in the country. In spite of re-imposed economic and military sanctions by the USA in 2018 for Iran’s nuclear program and military activities in the Middle East, the country has been able to keep good relations with Europe and China who continue to embrace the nuclear deal signed with Iran in 2015 even after the USA has recently pulled out from the pact.<sup>72</sup> By withdrawing from the nuclear deal, the USA has drifted away from her western allies in Europe (France, Germany and Britain) who have evolved a new financial mechanism - Instex trade vehicle to serve as a

payment channel between Europe and Iran for companies having no links in the US and sidestepping US sanctions against Iran.<sup>73</sup>

Putting it in other words, the west or the non-Muslim world is forging alliances with regional powers to secure economic and military interests in the Middle East. Such a strategy is not a new invention. It was adopted by the West (Britain and Roman Catholic France) to align with the Ottoman Muslims against the Russian Christian Orthodoxy in 1854 and later with the Shiite Safavid Empire against the Sunni Ottomans. The history of empires and nations is full of endeavors where only interests - not faith or ideologies dictate cooperation and conflict.

## **Conclusion**

The hostile relations between different Christian states in medieval and early modern Europe endorsed the Ottomans to exchange diplomatic and military bonds with each of them in a unique way. If asking Ottomans for military aid and assistance was need of the hour for many Christian states of Europe at that time, nurturing military alliances with Iran and Saudi Arabia is one of the important foreign policy goals of the United States at present. Pakistan has remained one of the important military allies for USA in the latter's proxy war against Soviet Union in Afghanistan. Today, Pakistan is serving as a major facilitator for dialogue and negotiations between USA and Afghan Taliban. Iran, once an ally of the United States is currently facing toughest sanctions for her nuclear program and independent military policies in the Middle East. It is now closely aligned with Russia to secure regional interests against US influence in the region.

Nations cooperate and compete with each other in every age for strategic objectives. What becomes important is their mutual exchanges for evolutionary learning and reawakening. History always offers a space for reconciliation of civilizations without being conflicting about their respective inconsistencies. Military and cultural

reconciliation of Christian emperors with mighty Ottomans in early modern Europe and military and economic interaction between Christian and Islamic world of modern times ascertain this belief. It is just another way of looking at things rather than becoming cross-civilizational about conflicts of interests.

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# WAR PROPAGANDA AGAINST THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

ÖMER TURAN\*

## Abstract

*The First World War, which encompassed two-thirds of the world and affected many, was also a propaganda war. The Great Powers made war propaganda to justify their policies and to create a public opinion against their opponents. In this paper, Great Britain's propaganda offices will be examined and two propaganda campaigns against the Ottoman Empire during the war and the following years will be discussed. The first propaganda campaign was conducted by Wellington House, the British propaganda service during the war. They alleged that Muslims massacred Christian Armenians in Anatolia by fabricating, distorting and exaggerating news. In this way, they wanted to legitimize their battle against the Ottoman Empire, as well as to bring America, that had not yet entered the war, to take their side. The second campaign to be discussed was conducted by American Protestant missionaries in the following years. This was, again, in opposition to the Ottoman Empire and claimed that the Armenians were subjected to massacres by barbarian Muslims. Through these propaganda campaigns they aimed to raise more money for their aid organizations. In both propaganda campaigns the*

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*Armenians were depicted as oppressed victims, and the Muslim Turks were depicted as cruel oppressors. They worked for their own interests by claiming to defend the Armenians, and by pretending to defend oppressed Christians, they promoted Muslim-Christian animosity.*

**Key Words:** *First World War, British War Propaganda, Ottoman Empire, Armenians, American Missionaries, Admiral Bristol, Wellington House, Blue Book*

According to the current NATO definition, propaganda is “any information, ideas, doctrines or special appeals disseminated to influence the opinion, emotions, attitudes or behavior of any specified group in order to benefit the sponsor, either directly or indirectly”.<sup>1</sup> The First World War was defined as a total war, and public relations, censorship and propaganda were important parts of it. Both sides, the Entente and the Central powers, established special offices to produce war propaganda materials to justify their position and accuse their enemy at any level. Producing and distributing war propaganda materials, such as newspaper and journal articles, pamphlets, books, posters, pictures and films was the center of their activities. Both sides tried to convince their supporters and neutral peoples that they were right and their enemy was wrong; they were powerful and their enemy was weak; they were friendly and their enemy was cruel; they were humanitarians and their enemy was barbaric; their fight was for peace and their enemy’s fight was for imperialism etc. In order to gain the sympathy of the target groups, they used special words, values and materials. They used anything, changed and distorted facts and figures, and, when necessary, they did not hesitate to fabricate as well. It was carried out very professionally.<sup>2</sup>

Atrocities by the enemy, exaggerated or fabricated, were one of the propaganda tools both sides used during the First World War. For instance, Great Britain used “German atrocities” in Belgium to

justify their participation in the war. Germans also used the "Russian Cossacks' atrocities" to present themselves as the defenders of civilized humanity. It worked during the war, showing that the propagandists' stories of atrocities were extraordinarily effective. However, when the war ended and life normalized, it became clear that people had been fooled by propaganda, causing them to doubt these kinds of stories of atrocities. As a result, many officials were skeptical about news of Nazi atrocities during the Second World War.<sup>3</sup>

As is known, the Ottoman Empire participated in the First World War on the side of the Central Powers. The hats of German and Ottoman soldiers, spiked helmets and fezzes, were used as symbols of cruelty and barbarity among the Entente Powers. In their propaganda materials the Germans were child-butcherings Huns and the Ottomans were incapable fanatics. The treatment of non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire, especially Armenians, during the First World War was another propaganda tool used to gain public opinion in the United States which had remained neutral so far. Great Britain and Germany, both, tried to persuade neutral countries to join the war with them. Argentina, for instance, was one of the countries both sides worked hard to win, but the US was the most important neutral country to gain.<sup>4</sup> Finally, Great Britain won the race and added the US in the Allied bloc. This paper aims to look at closely at the Armenian issue as war propaganda material used by the British war propaganda office and its close ally American Protestant missionaries against the Ottoman Empire during and after the First World War.

There were different offices to advance the British position and to disparage the Central Powers such as: the News Department of the Foreign Office; the Neutral Press Committee under the auspices of the Home Office; and the War Propaganda Office at Wellington House in Great Britain during the first months of the war. These different offices sometimes competed against each other and sometimes overlapped. The War Propaganda Office became the most important institution in

terms of producing and distributing war propaganda materials in England and neutral countries. It was established by the British Minister of the Foreign Office under the directorship of Charles F. Masterman, a writer and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, at Wellington House. The War Propaganda Office was unknown to the British public. With the new Prime Minister, it was connected to Department of Information, under the directorship of Col. John Buchan in February 1917. In March 1918, it again was moved to the Ministry of Information, and headed by Lord Beaverbrook (owner of *The Daily Express*) as Britain's first Minister of Information. In February 1918, the Prime Minister nominated Lord Northcliffe, owner of *The Daily Mail* and *The Times*, to organize British propaganda efforts against the Central Powers, and established the Enemy Propaganda Department at Crewe House. They, together, switched the emphasis of Britain's war propaganda from the elites to the masses. Despite Foreign Office's objections, British war propaganda was conducted by these two press barons until the end of the war.<sup>5</sup>

"Wellington House" became the name of the War Propaganda Office due to its location. In 1917, it had 57 personnel but, when needed, could get help from other departments. Apart from the official propagandists, some academicians also worked as advisers, among them was the famous historian Arnold Toynbee. He worked for the House from 1914 to 1917. He was a member of the policy committee which met every day and set propaganda policies. In addition, Lewis Namier, J. W. Headley Morley, Edwyn Bevin were some other eminent historians who worked at Wellington House. British universities provided pamphlets and expertise as well, and some members of British patriotic organizations also cooperated with the House. Apart from George Bernard Shaw, Bertrand Russel, and a few lesser known authors, all of the distinguished British authors such as John Galsworthy, H.G. Wells, Rudyard Kipling, John Masefield, Henry James, John Buchan etc. uncritically supported the Allied cause.<sup>6</sup>



It should also be noted that during the war years new propaganda offices were also established. For instance, the National War Aims Committee (NWAC) was established as a cross-party parliamentary organization. It was supported by religious leaders from different Christian sects, members of parliament from different parties, cabinet members, mayors etc. Its aim was the maintenance of civilian morale across the country. Its operations began in July 1917 and continued until the end of the war. In these 16 months, the NWAM organized thousands of meetings and distributed over one hundred million publications. The most distributed document was Lloyd George's January speech summarizing the country's war aims. In total, 2,560,200 copies of this pamphlet were distributed in less than two months (between 10 January and 3 March 1918). In speeches and publications Great Britain and its allies were described as the guardians of civilization, while the Germans were criminals and the Turks were barbarous and slaughterers of Christians.<sup>7</sup>

While the activities of the NWAC were limited to domestic propaganda, Wellington House worked both at home and abroad. Every week Wellington House in average produced 400 articles for the world's press. According to their first report dated June 1915, about 2.5 million copies of books, pamphlets, and other written propaganda materials were distributed in 17 languages. Their second report, dated February 1916, listed 7 million copies circulated. When the war ended, the number of different pamphlets, periodicals, and other propaganda literature they distributed had reached 3000 titles, and totaled 106 million copies. Although a few of the circulated materials were official government publications, the rest were unofficial publications that were produced, subsidized, and distributed secretly. The house made sure that British involvement was not indicated in any of the publications, and all arrangements with the publishers and distributors were made through third parties.<sup>8</sup>

Wellington House's work was primarily targeted overseas countries, dominions, colonies, neutral countries, and especially the United States. As a result, its work was generally supervised by the Foreign Office. The total cost of its work was around £2 million. Wellington House's work towards the Americans was especially important. Its American branch was headed by Sir Gilbert Parker and targeted the American elite. Wellington House produced about 2.5 million propaganda items in 17 languages by June 1915. Just 12 months later it was also distributing six fortnightly illustrated newspapers and 4,000 photographs a week. They also made films and documentaries but their main job was producing news, pamphlets and books for educated people. 170,000 influential Americans received these publications in 1917 while 550 syndicated American newspapers received other materials.<sup>9</sup>

After the war, documents related to the propaganda activities of Wellington House were destroyed. A few of them which were forwarded through the Foreign Office, remain in the files of the Foreign Office. For instance, records of propaganda activities made through the British Embassy in Washington were retained in their files. Some other institutions, such as the Treasury, and some individuals like Arnold Toynbee also received some documents about the house's activities. These documents from different sources provide, more or less, an idea about British war propaganda efforts, especially against the Turks. Prof. Justin McCarthy, an eminent historian from Louisville University, found some documents related to the activities of Wellington House in the archives of the British Ministry of the Foreign Office, and revealed its war propaganda work.<sup>10</sup>

When David Lloyd George became Prime Minister for the British government in December 1916, Wellington House's anti-Turkish propaganda campaign gained momentum. However, the anti-Turkish campaign of Wellington House and anti-Turkish policy of the British government cannot be entirely attributed to his personal

feelings. When he became Prime Minister in December 1916, Great Britain and the Ottoman Empire had been fighting each other for more than two years. Nobody could claim that Lloyd George was a friend of the Turks. As a liberal, he was following Gladstone's policy, and obviously had no sympathy for the Ottoman Empire. However, while he may have accelerated British policy towards the Ottoman Empire, he had not initiated it.<sup>11</sup>

At the beginning of the war the Ottoman Caliph Sultan proclaimed Holy War against the Allies on 14 November 1914. Great Britain feared that its Indian Muslims would join in this holy war against the Allies alongside their Muslim brothers in the Ottoman Empire. Their fear was not baseless. Indian Muslims had close ties with their Muslim brothers in the Ottoman Empire. Through England, they had sent money for the treatment of injured Ottoman soldiers during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78. During Friday prayers Sultan Abdulhamid's name was read in Indian mosques.<sup>12</sup> In order to distinguish Indian Muslims from Ottoman Muslims, the British government felt that they had to present Ottoman Muslims in a bad light, making them unworthy to follow. Presenting the Turks as evil could save Great Britain from an Indian Muslim revolt. This presentation could also help to suppress the news spread in the United States about her ally Russia's persecutions of Jews. Gaining American support at any cost and turning the Americans against the Central Powers was one of the most important aims of British propaganda efforts during the First World War. Describing the Turks as bad Muslims for the Indian Muslims, and the enemy of the Christians for the Americans, could serve both of Great Britain's aims.

Lloyd George wrote a letter to the new director of the House, Buchan, in February 1917 and asked them to work on the worthlessness and iniquity of the Turks. Their incapacity for good government, their misrule, and their massacres of all the industrious populations in their empire were the topics to be emphasized. The

Turks had to be portrayed as “a blight on the whole territory which they have occupied” and the Ottoman Empire as “one of the worst empires that had ever lived because it has retained its unity only at the price of blotting out two or three ancient civilizations and of repressing its subject races with quite exceptional ferocity.” The house had to pay special attention to the Armenians. Of course, all these propaganda efforts had to be carried out gradually and the articles had to be spread over a considerable period of time so nobody would think that the British government was behind all of the news produced.<sup>13</sup>

According to the order, Buchan, the new director of Wellington House, gave instructions to his staff indicating that the propaganda campaign against the Turks had to focus on these points: “a) The ancient riches and the great prosperity of Asia Minor and Mesopotamia. b) The blighting influence of the Turks on social and commercial progress. c) The incapacity of the Turk for absorbing conquered peoples or for equitably administering subject races. For this we want a historic argument and an account of the recent treatment of Jews, Armenians, Syrians and Balkan races, et cetera. d) The impossibility of reforming the Turkish state. The Turks are a military power, nothing else, and have never shown any capacity for civil government. e) The danger of allowing a reactionary and incompetent state to control the avenue between Europe and Asia. Such a state will always be a satellite of a reactionary military bureaucracy like Germany. f) The religious element might also be pressed. Turkey at present governs a sort of museum of opposing religions, and toleration in the modern sense is alien to her theory of government. There is no necessity to present detailed themes for the future of Turkey. All we have to do is to convince people that the present situation is impossible and must be drastically dealt with.” He suggested producing series of articles, collected in pamphlets or books, about the historical futility of Turkish rule for Britain and

America. The potential of Anatolia, Mesopotamia and Syria and recent Turkish activities like the Armenian massacres, Syrian famine, and brutalities of Enver and his party Committee of Union and Progress were the subjects to be treated.<sup>14</sup>

There were some books published by Wellington House about the Turks and the Ottoman Empire according to the instructions. These books were listed in a hand-written ledger book in the Foreign Office Library. It is claimed that the list is not complete. There should be more books published by the Wellington House. Nonetheless, it is still very useful, since it proves that these books were publications of Wellington House as war propaganda. Otherwise, nobody would have known, since they were published by private commercial publishers. When we look at the list, we can see that the titles cover all the points indicated above. The Turks are fanatic Muslims, enemies of the British and allies of the Germans, dirty fighters, persecutors of the Jews and Armenians and all other non-Muslim communities past and present. The Turks are illegitimate rulers who have destroyed all the lands they ruled. They hate all Christians, and are guilty of inhuman atrocities against them. Not only Christians, but also Muslims of the Ottoman Empire look to the British for salvation because they saw how Britain has ruled Muslims in Egypt and India fairly.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the fact that these publications were merely war propaganda materials, some of them, especially related to the Armenian atrocities are still used, quoted, and referred to prove claims against the Turks. *The Treatment of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire, 1915-1916* is a production of Wellington House. Arnold Toynbee and Viscount Bryce compiled the book which consisted of 150 documents they had received. It was published in 1916 and stated that in order to protect the writers of those letters, their names were deleted, but described their position, such as professor, traveler, foreigner, non-Armenian, respected religious authority, etc. It was logical and understandable until Prof. McCarthy revealed the list of the names

from the Foreign Office Archives in 1999. Then it became clear that the compilers were not simply protecting the sources but lying. They were misleading the readers to believe that they were neutral and objective people. In reality, they were not. More than one third of the sources was missionaries and more than another one third was Armenians including members of their revolutionary organization. None of them were friends of the Turks in those days. For instance, a Greek professor at Marzofan American College was described as two different persons, once as a professor at College X, and once as a traveler not of Armenian nationality. Both of them were true, but only partly. Most of the time, the missionaries were represented as foreigners or just Americans. The Armenian revolutionary organization was defined as a reliable source, etc.<sup>16</sup>

Both of the compilers published other propaganda materials for Wellington House. Lord Bryce's *Report on Alleged German Outrages* was one of the main products of Wellington House published in early 1915, and highlighted the Belgian issue. His moral authority gave this report, based on lurid, largely undocumented and unsworn evidence, immense authority among the Allies and neutral nations. It became the source of many other pamphlets and books that British writers later wrote.<sup>17</sup> Toynbee's other books were also about the Armenians: *Armenian Atrocities: The Murder of a Nation*, (London and New York, Hodder and Stoughton, 1915); *A Past and a Future*, (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1917; New York, Doran, 1917); *The Murderous Tyranny of the Turks*, (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1917; New York, Doran, 1917). They were published by the publishers which published many of the Wellington House books and pamphlets.

In one of his books, *The Western Question in Greece and Turkey*, first published after the war, Arnold Toynbee admitted that he was employed by the British government to work for the "Blue Book which was duly published and distributed as a war propaganda."<sup>18</sup> In his memoirs, he claimed that neither he nor Lord Bryce had known the

purpose of British government in producing this book before its publication; otherwise they would not have accepted it. I do not think it is true. Both of them were working for government's war propaganda office, and they had already published books in a similar vein. They knew what they were doing. Toynbee states that the reason behind this publication was to suppress the news about Jewish massacres which Russian troops had committed while they were retreating from the Polish-Lithuanian frontier. The Germans invited about 30 American journalists and let them make news against the Russians. All these developments made the British government think that the Jews and Americans had begun to support the Central Powers. In order to suppress this news, a worse and more sensational subject from the other side was highlighted. Therefore, the book was simply counter propaganda material against the Central Powers.<sup>19</sup> Despite this, this book is still in use as a source to prove that the Ottoman government committed genocide against the Armenians.

When the Blue Book was published in 1916, Lord Bryce was 78 years old. First of all, he was the known and respected author of *The Holy Roman Empire* and *The American Commonwealth*. As a liberal, he was a friend of Gladstone, and member in his cabinet for a while. He had been the British ambassador in Washington until 1913, and was a good friend of Woodrow Wilson. His reputation was high, he was a good friend of Americans, and a good friend of missionaries. Thousands of copies of the Blue Book were sent to eminent Americans, and editors of journals. Many newspapers praised the book, and many others published news from the book. It was also published in the US. His works about the Germans and Turks played an important role in America's joining the war on the side of the Allies.

Like other Christian populations in the Ottoman Empire, the Armenians also wanted to gain their independence or autonomy after the Ottoman Russian War of 1877-78. They were a minority in Eastern Anatolia, but willing to establish their own state with the support of

Russia and the other great powers. Their revolutionary organizations attempted several revolts to get attention of these powers but achieved nothing. Therefore, they considered the First World War an opportunity, and decided to cooperate with the Allied Powers, especially Russia, against the Ottoman Empire. Some former members of parliament organized voluntary battalions and crossed the Russian border. They fought against the Ottoman forces and attacked civilians. While the Ottoman Third Army was defending Anatolia against Russian forces, they revolted in Van in April 1915, killed civilians, defeated the Ottoman armed forces, and declared their independence.<sup>20</sup>

The Ottoman government decided to relocate the Armenians of Eastern Anatolia to the southern provinces of the Empire where there was no war. It was a difficult decision but the Ottoman government had no other choice. In the following months, the Armenians of the other parts of Anatolia were also sent to those provinces. The American missionaries who had been working among the Armenians for decades, and supported the Armenian cause against Ottoman rule, described the transportation or exile as an extermination. The British government who had been looking for a chance to discredit the Ottoman Empire and the Central Powers, took the opportunity and decided to use this exile as a propaganda material. The missionaries provided more than one third of the Blue Book's propaganda material to Wellington House.

These American missionaries had been active in Anatolia since 1820. They were working among the Eastern Christians, Assyrians, Orthodox Greeks and Bulgarians, and Gregorian Armenians. Their work for the Armenians was the most successful, among the others. In 1850 they succeeded in creating a Protestant millet in the Ottoman Empire. Those missionaries had lived in the Armenian quarters of the cities for decades, and the Armenians were their neighbors and friends. They associated with Armenians, and raised Armenian youth in the schools



they opened everywhere in Anatolia. Armenian boys and girls learned liberal thought in those schools, discovered their own national identity and began to lead the Armenian national movement. The American missionaries were proud of their achievements.<sup>21</sup>

The American missionaries described themselves as unarmed crusaders, complaining that a Muslim Empire governed holy lands and its Christians. Although the Ottoman Empire allowed them to work in their lands, the missionaries were not happy with Ottoman rule. At the beginning of the First World War, these missionaries supported the Allied Powers. They supported Greek and Armenian separatist movements against the Ottoman Empire, and cooperated with Wellington House and its representative Sir Gilbert Parker in the United States. During the Armenian relocation, they led the establishment of the Armenian Relief Committee in September 1915 in New York. Later it assumed the names of the Armenian and Syrian Relief Committee (ASRC) and the American Committee for Relief in the Near East (ACRNE). Finally, it was incorporated by an act of the American Congress as the Near East Relief. It was a new and independent organization led by a group of influential Americans who were related to different American missionary organizations. James Barton, for instance, was the head of Relief and the General Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission. Apart from one Jewish member, all other members of the Board of Trustees were missionaries or related to missionaries.<sup>22</sup>

During the war and post-war years, Near East Relief (NER) controlled a huge amount of money. In the first meetings of organization the target amount of money to be collected was \$100,000. At the end of 1915 the total amount of money they received was \$176,929. In 1916 it reached \$2,404,000. It was \$6,000,000 in 1917, and \$7,022,000 in 1918. The following year it was \$19,485,000, it was \$13,052,000 in 1920, \$7,270,000 in 1921, \$10,714,000 in 1922. In addition to money collection, they were allowed to see entire files of

the Department of State.<sup>23</sup> With the charter they got from the Congress, they became federal incorporator. Near East Relief was seen as a non-sectarian, national movement receiving governmental assistance. Apart from the large amount of relief, flour and other foodstuffs worth 13 million dollars in 1919, they also used American government military personnel and ships.<sup>24</sup>

When the organization was established in New York, the United States was neutral. Since the US and the Ottoman Empire were not in war at that date, the Ottoman government recognized Near East Relief as a humanitarian organization, and let them work in Ottoman territories. The American missionaries became natural conductors and American institutions became natural centers of their work in the field. When America entered the war, diplomatic relations between the two countries were broken. In 1917, the attitude of the Turkish government toward the relief work had not changed. While American diplomats left the Ottoman Empire, American relief workers and missionaries remained at their stations.<sup>25</sup>

During the post-war years, the anti-Turkish propaganda campaign continued in the United States. Anti-Turkish journalists were constantly giving news about Armenian massacres in Turkey. They were supported by Armenians and missionaries, relief workers, etc. Nobody objected to these news reports in the US apart from the American High Commissioner Admiral Bristol in Istanbul. He had been appointed to this position in 1919 and kept it until 1927. Since he was living in Istanbul, he was able to follow the news in US journals and check their authenticity. When he realized that that news about the Turks was not true, he warned missionaries and relief workers about their attitude. In September 1919, he asked W. W. Peet, treasurer of the NER and ABCFM in Istanbul, to react against the propaganda and contradict its claims, otherwise he would think that they supported it.<sup>26</sup>

Admiral Bristol was aware of the fact that missionaries and philanthropists had dominated American foreign policy in the Middle

East during the war. He was convinced that these people were too involved in the politics. Therefore, they were putting American commercial and political relations with Turkey in danger. He asked journalists to be fair and not to publish one-sided exaggerated news. He warned the leaders of the Armenian Protestant Community and the Armenian Propaganda Committee that much of their propaganda in the US was inaccurate. If the American public realized that, they could lose their case decisively. Admiral Bristol also warned missionaries and NER workers to be fair in distributing relief to the people in need, which was not the case. Moreover, he warned them not to send exaggerated news to the US. Their reports were based on local information, and the credentials of these native informers was doubtful. He knew much more than them, and knew that the conditions were not as they were presenting them.<sup>27</sup>

Some exaggerations of NER workers were beyond the limits. In early March 1920, Peet and Dr. W. N. Chambers visited Bristol. Chambers said that he brought a letter from a reliable source that 3,500-4,000 Armenians had been killed in Marash and a total of 6-7,000 Armenians had been massacred in Cilicia. When Bristol insisted, Chambers admitted that his source was an Armenian, and not a reliable one. Bristol told Chambers that this kind of false news could harm his name. He accepted the criticism and decided to change this part of the letter.<sup>28</sup>

Kars is an important city in Eastern Anatolia, and was under Turkish rule when the Armistice of Mudros was signed on 30 October 1918. However, in the following months British forces gave the city to the Armenians. The Turks retook the city on 30 October 1920 from the Armenians, and in the following days 30 Armenians were killed. Dr. MacCallum, a NER worker in that area sent a telegram to the US and reported that 80,000 Armenians had been killed. It was not true. Admiral Bristol discussed this matter with another Near East Relief member C.T. White who could neither deny nor defend. It was

embarrassing.<sup>29</sup> Admiral Bristol sent a letter to J.L. Barton, and asked him to stop these false reports that circulated in the US claiming that Turks massacred thousands of Armenians in the Caucasus.<sup>30</sup>

In the archives of Admiral Bristol, especially in his war diary, there are other notes that he discussed that matter with the NER authorities. He said to them that the NER in New York continually followed a wrong procedure in carrying on propaganda and circulating information, and they gave one-sided information about events in the Middle East. He was told that if they had told the complete truth, they could not raise money for their relief work.<sup>31</sup> He also revealed the fact that some telegrams were first sent from New York to Istanbul to show what to write and how to write. The same telegrams were then sent back to New York and circulated there, as if they came from the field.<sup>32</sup>

It seems that the missionaries did not change their attitude, but tried, unsuccessfully, to remove Admiral Bristol from his position in 1921. In March 1923, he wrote to Allen Dulles in the State Department that "he used about one-third of his time 'trying to keep our relief organizations from getting mixed up in politics and having a detrimental effect upon our American interests.'"<sup>33</sup>

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# COMMUNALIZATION OF HISTORY IN THE INDO-PAK SUBCONTINENT

DR. SAEED AHMED RID\*

## Abstract

*Wars, invasions, settlements, sultanates, and empires were considered legitimate until the 20<sup>th</sup> century when they were delegitimized by the League of Nations and the United Nations. From Aryans to Arabs, Turks, Mughals and the British, the Indian subcontinent was invaded and ruled by rulers of different descents. But it was an English historian, James Mill who had divided the Indian history on communal lines as the Hindu period, the Mohammedan (Muslim) period, and the British period in his famous book, History of British India published in 1817. No one knew then that what havoc his book will play with the Indo-Pak subcontinent in the future. The magnificence of Mughal kings Akbar, Salim, and Shahjehan had been equally revered and admired in Pakistan and India. The love story of Mughal emperor Salim, and court dancer, Anarkali was filmed with pomp and grandeur as Anarkali (1958) in Pakistan and Mughal-e-Azam (1960) in India and people on both sides of the border had thronged the theatres. But then the era of General Zia-ul-Haq started in Pakistan and he started the project of systematically communalizing the*

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*history textbooks in Pakistan in the 1980s and then the similar project got grounds in India in 2000s when right wing Hindutva party, Bhartya Janata Party (BJP) rose to power in India and history text books were altered. In this paper, an attempt is done to study how history has been systematically communalized in Indo-Pak subcontinent to suit the political ends and what havoc it is doing with the people of Pakistan and India. This research will also explore how the upsurge of religious extremism in Pakistan and Muslim lynching in India is linked with communalizing the history into the Hindu period and the Muslim period in Pakistan and India.*

## **Introduction**

The project of communalization of history in the Indian sub-continent has given rise to religious extremism in both Pakistan and India. The religious militancy in both countries draws arguments from the communalized version of the history of the sub-continent and builds its narrative on the historical divide of Muslims as rulers and Hindus as subjects. But interestingly it was neither any Indian nor any Pakistani historian who had started communalizing the history in the region, rather it was done by a British Historian, James Mill. In 1817 James Mill in his book *History of British India* for the first time divided the history of the Indian subcontinent into the Hindu, the Muslim, and the British periods.

The communalization of history in Pakistan started under official patronage around late 1950s and early 1960s. However, it was General Zia-ul-Haq who had introduced it systematically in textbooks as part of his Islamization project. As communalization of history in Pakistan is already well researched and well known in Pakistan, therefore, in this paper focus has been on the project of communalization in India which is more recent and less known in Pakistan.

This paper is divided into three major sections. In section one, James Mill's subjectivity is discussed, and it is explained why he chose to divide the Indian history into Hindu, Muslim, and British periods. In

the second section, the process of communalization in Pakistan is discussed and in the third section communalization of history in India is discussed in detail. The third section is the longest as communalization of politics in India is the focus of this paper.

In the third section, it is explained how communalization of history got grounds in India. Especially focusing on how in the 1990s and 2000s rise of the right-wing Hindutva party, Bhartya Janata Party (BJP) in Indian politics was connected with the communalized version of history in India. Like General Zia, the history text books in India were altered by the BJP government in the early 2000s. An attempt is done to study how history has been systematically communalized in India to suit the Hindutva politics of BJP and how Muslim lynching in India is linked with communalization of history in India.

## **Research Questions**

This study starts with the question of why British historian, James Mill had divided Indian history in Hindu, Muslim, and British periods? How far his subjectivity accounted in his analysis and what might be his real motives. Then I look at how this controversial communal description of history is later used in India and Pakistan to further the agenda of communal politics in both countries. Especially focusing on the Indian case study, I look at how by changing the textbooks and creating a communal discourse BJP rose to power in India and how the Modi regime's policies of a ban on cow slaughter and lynching of the Indian Muslims are connected to the project of communalization of the history.

## **Research Methodology**

This is qualitative desk research relying on secondary data collected from primary and secondary sources. The history books, research articles, and history textbooks taught in Pakistan and India are used to analyse how history has been communalized in India and Pakistan. This research draws a theoretical insight from the theories of

Social Constructionism and instrumentalism. Historical writings especially those written with official support like by the historians who are closely associated with the state or employ of the state or empire and the history taught through textbooks are written with an agenda and a political motive.

### **James Mill and his Subjectivity**

History is always subjective to some extent as historians themselves accept history can never be completely objective. American historian Susan A. Crane says, "Historian-as agents, as historical actors-construct narratives about the past that would never exist without some amount of self-assertion, choice, desire, fortitude, and above all writing, all of which must come from somebody, a single person, namely the historian". (Crane, 2006, p. 434). Therefore, it is of immense importance that who is writing the history, what is his association with the government and the state, the timing of the writing, and the political purpose of writing the history.

One English historian, James Mill wrote a book on Indian history titled *History of British India* published in 1817. In this book he had divided the Indian history on communal lines as the Hindu period, the Muhammadan period and the British period and discussed the character, the arts, history, religion, literature and laws of the people of India (Mill, 1826). Before James Mill, no historian of India had described the Indian history in those three binaries-the Hindus, the Muslims and the British. Moreover, he not only divided the history on those communal lines but also, he put them directly in confrontation with each other. James Mill starts his book III chapter I on Mohammedans with these words,

At the time when the nations of Europe opened their communication with India, by the Cape of Good Hope, the people whom we have now described had for a number of ages been subject to a race of foreigners. That subjection, though it had not

greatly altered the texture of native society, had introduced new forms into some of the principal departments of state; had given the military command to foreigners; and had mixed with the population proportion of a people differing from them considerably, in manners, character, and religion. The political state of India, at the time consisted of a Mohammedan government, supported by a Mohammedan force, over a Hindu population (Mill, 1826, p.165).

In the paragraph above, Mill described Mohammedans (Muslims) as “foreigners” and the relationship between “Hindus” and “Mohammadans” as patron-client relationships, the Hindu subjects and the Muslim rulers. In this sentence, he makes Muslims the government, the state and the military force of the Indian subcontinent, “The political state of India, at the time consisted of a Mohammedan government, supported by a Mohammedan force, over a Hindu population.” This simplistic description of Hindus as subjects and Muslims as ruling communities glasses over many historical facts. Like what he calls the Hindu period includes the reign of great Buddhist ruler Ashoka, the great and during the Mohammedan period, the majority of the cabinet members under slave kings and Moghuls were Hindus. Moreover, Hindu Rajput tribes often provided the major chunk of the military force under the so-called Mohammedan rule. Therefore, this labelling and communalizing the Indian history by James Mill must be seen in the light of the subjectivity which he brings to his story-telling.

James Mill, the father of famous utilitarian philosopher James Stuart Mill was a Scottish historian who never set a foot on the Indian soil, still went ahead to write one of the most influential but controversial works on the Indian history. This book helped James Mill to secure a permanent position with the East India Company as he had defended the foreign invasion of the British while at the same time questioning the foreign invasions of Mohammedans in his book. Mill for almost half of his life served the British East India Company and was

considered as an “undisputed spokesperson for British imperialism” (Tunick, 2006, p.586). His book *History of British India* is a classic case of imperial self-congratulation. It contains a complete denial and rejection of the Indian culture and civilization while glorifying the civilizing mission of Great Britain as part of the ‘White Man’s burden’.

Apart from the personal benefit and subjectivity of James Mill which is obvious on the face of it. This style of history telling by James Mill had a political motive as well. His division of the Indian History into Hindu, Muslim and British periods was in line with the British policy of divide and rule in India. On one hand, this over-simplified version of history helped the British to discredit the Muslim rulers and on the other, it helped them show how benign the British imperialism was as compared to the Muslim rulers.

### **Communalization of History in Pakistan**

The communalization of history in Pakistan started in the 1950s and 1960s, as part of the nation-building process. Like leading Pakistani historian, I.H. Qureshi wrote a book, *The Muslim Community of the Indian Sub-Continent* in 1962. In this book, he argued that “If the Muslims were to forget their uniqueness and come to absorb as Akbar did, contradictory tendencies and beliefs from other religions, could the Muslim nation continue to exist as a separate nation? Akbar's policies created danger not only for the Muslim empire but also for the continued existence of the Muslim nation in the sub-continent” (Qureshi, 1962, p. 167). Similarly, S. M. Ikram (1964) and Aziz Ahmed (1964) further explained in their books that how Islamic culture and civilization are different from the Hindu culture and civilization. Hence, an attempt was made to build Pakistani nationalism on communal lines explaining the differences with the Hindu community.

However, the communalization of the history in Pakistan became more obvious after 1979 onwards when the military government of General Zia-ul-Haq introduced Pakistan Studies and Islamiyat as compulsory subjects to promote his project of Islamization.

Aminah Muhammad-Arif thinks that "Communalization of the Pakistani education system is twofold: it is prevalent both in the place occupied by religion in textbooks and in the way that India and Hindus are portrayed" (Mohammad-Arif, 2005, p.146). Zia-ul-Haq's attempt at Islamizing the medieval Indian history in Pakistani textbooks is well researched and documented.

There is some very commendable research available in Pakistan now which covers how history has been communalized in Pakistan since Zia-ul-Haq's times. K. K. Aziz wrote a book *The Murder of History: A Critique of History Textbooks Used in Pakistan* which was originally published in 1993 was the first serious attempt in this regard. In this book, K.K. Aziz points out factually wrong information which had been used in history textbooks in Pakistan to teach the Islamized version of history. In 2003 A.H. Nayyar and Ahmed Salim had compiled a series of articles on this subject for Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) titled, "The subtle subversion: the state of curricula and textbooks in Pakistan, Urdu, English, Social Studies and Civics". Apart from the above mentioned two books, Hoodbhoy and Nayyar (1985), Jalal (1995), Saigol (2002) and Rosser (2005) also discuss in different ways that how communalized version of history is used in textbooks in Pakistan.

### **Communalization of History in India**

The process of communalization of history in India was different from Pakistan because Indian National Congress (INC) stood for united India and under Nehru as the Prime Minister of India after partition, it had gradually adopted secularism as sort of state policy of India. Moreover, since independence in 1947, the Muslim minority in India had voted en bloc for Congress, therefore, communalization of history did not suit the political agenda of the Indian National Congress, the ruling party of India. Although the word "secular" itself was made part of the preamble of the Indian constitution only in 1976

by the 42nd Amendment, Secularism was the official mantra followed by the Indian state under Nehru since the early 1950s.

After independence from British rule Muslims mostly voted for Congress because they considered Congress as an only secular party, which could have saved them against the communal extremist outfits like Rashtrya Sevak Sangh (RSS) and Hindu Mahasabha in India. Especially, after the rise of coalition governments from 1967, it was believed that Muslims despite being a minority could swing the election results in India. Muslims accounted for about fourteen percent of the total population in India, therefore, they were often considered as one of the largest potential voting constituency due to the belief that Muslims could be mobilized to vote en bloc for one party or a candidate.

Although Communalism was not followed as a declared state policy under the Congress rule, still the history of India is full of communal riots between the Hindu and Muslim communities since partition of the sub-continent in 1947. There is abundant literature available on communal violence in India. Panday (1990) traces the history of communal violence in India since colonial phase in his book, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*. Apart from Panday, Brass (2004), Sharma (2000), Asgharali Engineer (2004) and Berenschot (2012) have covered the communal violence against Muslims in great detail in their books. Their accounts clearly show communal violence has remained as essential part of Indian polity over the last seventy years.

The project of communalization of history textbooks in India is some new phenomenon introduced by the BJP government in the early 2000s but communalized history books written by ultra-Hindu nationalists are surely not a new phenomenon in India. Sita Ram Goel wrote *Heroic Hindu resistance to Muslim invaders, 636 AD to 1206 AD* in 1994, *The Story of Islamic Imperialism in India* in 1996 and *Hindu Temples - What Happened To Them: Volume 1* in 1998. Hilal Ahmed

(2014) in his book *Muslim Political Discourse in Postcolonial India: Monuments, Memory, Contestation* writes in detail how communalized version of history in India which was written after 1850 had communalized the historic monuments like Qutub Minar and Jama Masjid in Delhi and the Taj Mahal in Agra. He also explains how Babri Mosque became a victim of all this communalization of historical monuments in 1992.



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# FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IS THE KEY TO COUNTERING FAKE NEWS THEME: YELLOW JOURNALISM IN OUR REGION

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## Abstract

*Since fake news is spread through the print, electronic, and internet-based social media, efforts at countering it by the government also target these media for censorship. Legislation and administrative action against the spread content labeled as "fake news" has implications for the future of freedom of expression and, thus, democratic governance, because measures against the spread of "fake news" could be misused to counter genuine news under its garb. This study argues since freedom of expression is critical for democratic governance, censorship in the name of countering fake news is detrimental to the future of democracy and public empowerment. The study further argues that promoting freedom of expression rather than censorship is the key to credibly countering the so-called "fake news."*

**Key Words:** fake news, freedom, expression, fundamental rights

The term "fake news" has been considerably popularized by the U.S. President Donald Trump. The term generally refers to the

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spread of willful manipulation of information or misrepresentation of the reality on the part of the government (local or foreign) and influential individuals or corporations (including media houses). Intent is an important element of fake news. The initiators of fake news are aware that what they are trying to spread as news is not real. The spreaders of fake news, like websites, social media pages and accounts, or individuals sharing or aggregating fake news might or might not be aware of the authenticity of a fake news but its creators are.<sup>1</sup>

Publication of fake news and its spread through modern information and communication technologies like the internet and social media is part of the modern-day reality. Countering fake news through censorship, however, could lead to the misuse of the legal clauses against fake news on the part of the powerful vested interests in a society, as well as the government itself. Legislation and administrative action against the spread of any content labeled as “fake news” by the governments in various countries could have implications for the future of freedom of expression. This is because administrative and legal instruments against the spread of “fake news” could be used to deter criticism of the actions of the powerful vested interests in a polity or the policies of the government. This study makes a case for promoting greater freedom of expression through the mainstream media outlets for countering fake news on the internet, especially the social media. By extension, the study also makes a case for promotion of responsible media and striking a balance between ensuring freedom of expression on print, electronic, and social media on the one hand and countering “fake news” on the other.

### **Evolution of and Revolutionary Developments in Journalism**

The purpose of journalism, or news for that matter, is to inform the public about the important happenings around them. Journalism relies on primary sources of information for informing the public,

which distinguishes it from more in-depth social research that takes a longer perspective and relies on both primary and secondary sources of information. Unearthing information about an issue from primary sources of information for public consumption creates new sets of winners and losers: the winners are the ones who benefit from the news—generally the public—and the losers are the ones who would not ideally want the information to be in the public domain, such as powerful vested interests and even, at times, the government. This is the reason attempts on the part of the governments to censor news content are as old as the publication of news itself.<sup>2</sup> Efforts at countering “fake news” by the governments in the twenty-first century are a continuation of this struggle between freedom of expression and censorship.

In the twenty-first century, both hard news and fake news are spread through the print, electronic, and internet-based social media. The primary conduit of the spread of fake news of late, however, has been the internet, particularly the social media. Before we discuss the dynamics behind modern-day fake news and the role played by the internet and social media in it, we need to first understand the underlying factors that contributed to the historical evolution of or revolutionary transformations in journalism, such as the transformation brought about by the rise of information and communication technologies in the late twentieth and twenty-first century. Therefore, in order to better understand the strategies employed for countering fake news in cyber age, we need to have a better understanding of how freedom of press has carved itself a space amid the efforts of governments aimed at censoring journalistic content or silencing journalistic voices in a bid to counter criticism directed against itself of powerful vested interests in the society.

While the earliest recorded instances of a journalistic products are dated to 59 B.C. Rome and Tang Dynasty China (618-907 A.D.),<sup>3</sup> the most prominent historical revolutionary transformation that

catapulted the field of journalism to prominence was the invention of the printing press in Germany the fifteenth century. Print journalism quite understandably flourished after the invention of the printing press and its popularization in the subsequent years.<sup>4</sup> First regular print publication, therefore, can also be traced to Germany in 1609, with the English language *Weekly Newes* in 1622 to follow.<sup>5</sup> The *Daily Courante*, appearing in 1702, is considered the first daily newspaper for the public.<sup>6</sup>

Government censorship of print journalism went hand-in-hand with its evolution. For instance, when newspapers started flourishing in England in early eighteenth century, the government tried to impose restrictions on it through legal instruments, such as licensing, registration, and stamp and advertising taxes.<sup>7</sup> Owners of newspaper were confident, however, that there was considerable appetite for their news among the news reading elite and that they could fight back.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the eighteenth century, in the face of the British government's efforts at supporting government-friendly journalism, the independent-minded newspaper owners developed niches for themselves in terms of the topics covered and audiences targeted.<sup>9</sup> Political developments in Europe and the U.S. in late eighteenth century and early nineteenth also influenced the print media to become more radical and independent.<sup>10</sup> This led to even harsher penalties for sedition and taxation on the press in the Britain through the "Six Acts" of 1819.<sup>11</sup> New harsh punishments and taxations did not deter the news businesses to exercise their independence as they started to appeal to the sentiments of the masses through their content.<sup>12</sup> The newspapers also took advantage of their advertisement revenues for exercising their independence.<sup>13</sup> This ultimately led to reduction of taxation on newspapers between 1836 and 1861.<sup>14</sup> Technological advances of the nineteenth century such as telegraph buttressed the reach and efficiency of journalism.<sup>15</sup>

A major revolutionary transformation of the media landscape took place with the invention of the radio and television in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, respectively. The introduction of broadcast journalism through technologies like radio and TV led to popularization of journalism and, by extension, increase in its commercialization.<sup>16</sup> The ability of TV journalism to deal with news at the moment, the print medium of journalism had to transform itself to accommodate the new reality.<sup>17</sup> By 1962, 52 percent of the people treated television as their main source of news.<sup>18</sup> The introduction of television journalism transformed it to carve itself a space in the predominantly entertainment centric medium of journalism. As Martin Conboy puts it, "[T]elevision is predominantly an entertainment genre and that as media markets converge, blurring the lines between information, education and entertainment, the tendency is to present television journalism as a complement to other entertainment on television in order to retain large viewing figures, but has the effect of compromising its journalism."<sup>19</sup>

The introduction of TV journalism in mid-twentieth century was in a way akin to the rise of internet-based journalism in the twenty-first century. While the introduction of TV journalism shrunk the element of time and space, the internet age extended its scope by further democratizing it through greater access to journalistic platforms to dissemination for all the citizens.

### **Centrality of Freedom of Expression for Democratic Governance**

It is generally said about democracy that it is rule by 51 percent and, at times, even less. It means that generally 49 percent of the population of a democratic country has neither voted in the incumbent government nor agrees with its approach toward policy and governance. Given this context, it is essential that there is freedom of expression in a democratic society so that the considerable proportion of the population that neither supports the incumbent

government nor its policies can express its opinions freely even if it is criticizing the policies of the incumbent government. Moreover, democracy is predicated upon the principle that every citizen in a state has an equal role in deciding who they should be governed by. Therefore, in order to ensure that each citizen effectively plays that role, she needs to be well informed to make an educated decision. The centrality of freedom of expression was very clear to the early pioneers of democratic governance, such as John Locke (1632-1704), Baron de Montesquieu (1689 – 1755), Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712 – 1778), Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826), and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873).

John Stuart Mill has famously observed in his classic *On Liberty*: If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind.<sup>20</sup>

At another place in the same work, Mill states:

The peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error.<sup>21</sup>

Journalism has indeed played an instrumental role in the pivotal moments of history like the American Declaration of Independence<sup>22</sup> and several other monumental historical developments that led to emancipation of humanity. True to the dictum of “knowledge is power,” journalism empowers and, thus, emancipates the public from the clutches of ignorance and deprivation from knowledge.



It is owing to this centrality of freedom of expression for the democratic process that it has also been made part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which was proclaimed by the United Nations (UN) during the third session of its General Assembly in Paris on December 10, 1948, through the General Assembly Resolution 217-A. Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.<sup>23</sup>

The UDHR in its preamble proclaims the document to be “a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.”<sup>24</sup>

Elements of the UDHR are also incorporated into the Constitution of Pakistan. Article 19 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan states:

Every citizen shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression, and there shall be freedom of the press, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interest of the glory of Islam or the integrity, security or defence of Pakistan or any part thereof, friendly relations with foreign States, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to

contempt of court, [commission of] or incitement to an offence.<sup>25</sup>

Article 19A of the Constitution further adds:

Every citizen shall have the right to have access to information in all matters of public importance subject to regulation and reasonable restrictions imposed by law].<sup>26</sup>

As we can observe that in the Constitution of Pakistan, freedom of expression is not treated as an absolute right but as a qualified one, i.e., one has freedom of expression if one is not expressing an opinion against the glory of Islam, integrity and security of the state, friendly relations with other countries, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court. The Indian Constitution also gives a qualified right of freedom of expression to its citizen through Article 19 of its Constitution.

While censorship has been an element of the journalistic landscape since its inception, the imperatives of countering fake news exacerbated with the advent of internet and social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The transformation of media landscape with the advent of this new dimension of communication is, perhaps, as profound as the invention of the printing press in the sixteenth century. The transformation has potentially enabled every literate citizen with access to the internet to become a propagator of news and ideas. Abuse of internet-based platforms for propagation of fake news has led the governments in various countries to introduce internet censorship in various forms. This has led to emergent challenges not only for countering fake news but also for freedom of expression in the face of the efforts of the government to regulate this new domain of information dissemination, which, at times, could also be intentionally misleading.

### **Countering Fake News and Freedom of Expression**

The era of the internet-based social media has not only shrunk time and space but has also further democratized expression and dissemination of information and opinion. With the introduction of new actors in the field of information dissemination, calls for regulation of this new domain comprised of a mix of responsible and irresponsible actors have been increasing. While the internet and social media have been used by both responsible and irresponsible disseminators of information, legislation and government actions aimed at regulating the sphere have to be across-the-board and non-discriminatory. Censorship comes in overt forms—such as blocking of certain news items, silencing of certain journalists, or closure of certain media outlets—as well as in subtler forms—such as “encouraging” journalists to conform to certain agendas or values.<sup>27</sup> The latter form of censorship is not only difficult to quantify but could also lead to the spread of misinformation,<sup>28</sup> perhaps more readily than in an atmosphere of a minimal state-encouraged self-censorship. This has serious implications for the freedom of expression in mainstream print and electronic media as well as the internet-based social media.

One could argue, however, that countering fake news does not mean curbing freedom of expression because it is aimed only against fake news and not at any form of expression per se. Besides, the non-discriminatory nature of regulatory laws referred to above, the agency for countering fake news almost invariably resides with the incumbent governments of the states, which, as mentioned above, do not necessarily represent the general will of the whole population of any country. In such a scenario, administrative and legal instruments against the spread of “fake news” could be used to deter criticism of the actions of powerful vested interests in a society or the policies of the government. In other words, countering fake news could actually result in censoring genuine news under its garb. After all, the term “fake news” is relative and difficult to legally specify. One person’s fake

news could be the other person's authentic news. As one of the pioneers of democratic political expression Montesquieu once famously said:

No tyranny is more cruel than the one you exercise under the cloak of the laws and with the colors of justice: when, so to speak, you drown the unfortunate on the very plank on which they were saved.<sup>29</sup>

The use of the mantra of countering fake news for silencing dissent or criticism is not that far-fetched. The approach of President Trump to so-called "fake news," a term that he has borrowed from Joseph Stalin of the Soviet Union,<sup>30</sup> is a glaring example of how rhetoric against fake news can be used for silencing criticism and dissent. He labelled media outlets that were critical of his performance "as "dishonest," "fake news," and the "enemy of the American people,"" not only during his campaign rallies but also after assuming office.<sup>31</sup> Trump has become a role-model for autocratic leaders around the world who tactfully present his stance against the media to further their domestic political agendas. For instance, the autocratic Prime Minister of Cambodian Hu Sen acknowledged that President Trump shared his viewpoint on the media that it was an anarchic group.<sup>32</sup> Poland's autocratic president has also thanked President Trump for fighting "fake news."<sup>33</sup>

Further closer to home in India, Sections 499 and 500 of the Indian Penal Code, which broadly criminalize defamation, have been used by powerful vested interests like Indian corporations to sue authors, journalists, or activists for defamation.<sup>34</sup> The clauses related to criminalizing defamation, or what could be called "fake news," were retained by the Supreme Court of India in a judgment in May 2016.<sup>35</sup> As put by the New Delhi-based political commentator Ashok Malik, "[the Indians] have the right to free speech, but [they] don't have the right to offend."<sup>36</sup> Internet shutdowns in Kashmir and slapping of

sedition charges against journalists are a common place in India.<sup>37</sup> The situation in Bangladesh is not very different. Section 57 of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act authorizes prosecution of any person on charges of electronically publishing fake, obscene, or defamatory content. It has been used by the authorities in Bangladesh to imprison journalists for months for criticizing the government.<sup>38</sup>

Therefore, while countering fake news might appear like a noble cause, challenges related to its implementation and the abuse of laws by the implementing agency, i.e., the government, makes it a rather counterproductive endeavor.

### **Countering Fake News does not Serve its Purpose**

Contrary to the assumption behind the strategies for countering fake news, government censorship through legal instruments aimed at countering fake news could actually result in an increase in the incidence of fake news. Russia, which became a powerhouse of churning out fake news during the last presidential election in the U.S. was ranked at 174 among a total of 199 countries surveyed globally in the Freedom House's Freedom of the Press Report 2017.<sup>39</sup> Macedonia, which became a conduit for the creation and spread of fake news during the same election,<sup>40</sup> was ranked at 139 in the same report.<sup>41</sup> While Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte is fond of complaining about fake news, his country ranks 84<sup>th</sup> in the Freedom House's Freedom of the Press Report 2017.<sup>42</sup> India, where nationalism is driving a penchant for fake news among the public,<sup>43</sup> ranks 83<sup>rd</sup> in the Freedom House's Freedom of the Press Report 2017.<sup>44</sup>

The proliferation of fake news does not mean, however, that it has replaced the centrality of the hard news. A research study conducted at the Princeton, Dartmouth, and the University of Exeter in 2018 concluded that fake news consumption did not crowd out the consumption of genuine news.<sup>45</sup> It found out that only 10 percent of the surveyed population in the U.S., mostly fond of conservative online

information, was susceptible to fake news during the 2016 presidential election.<sup>46</sup> As Abraham Lincoln has rightly said, "You can fool some of the people all of the time, and all of the people some of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time."<sup>47</sup> Left alone with belief in the integrity of the mainstream media, faith in the wisdom of the common man, and some gentle nudging of the more susceptible segments, fake news will die on its own.

Since journalism is a service aimed at educating the public, online or offline media outlets churning out propaganda cannot survive for long in this particular service industry. Sooner or later, the public that wants to be informed and educated realizes where to go for authentic news. Airing of news content through radio and TV was a transformation of the journalistic media landscape somewhat similar to the transformation brought about by the internet.

The primary purpose of TV, just like the internet, was not to educate but to entertain. Therefore, initially the more information/education-inclined public relied on published newspapers and their associated TV channels for authentic news. Similarly, in the age of the internet, the more information/education-inclined public still gravitates toward established media houses for news on the internet, which makes them less susceptible to fake news.

The problem essentially is not that the established media have started to propagate fake news all of a sudden, but that the new medium of internet has been misused by certain governments and non-state actors for propagation of fake news. Therefore, the focus needs to be more on public education about this new medium of the spread of information rather than its regulation through censorship of the content on this new medium of propagation of news.

## **Conclusion**

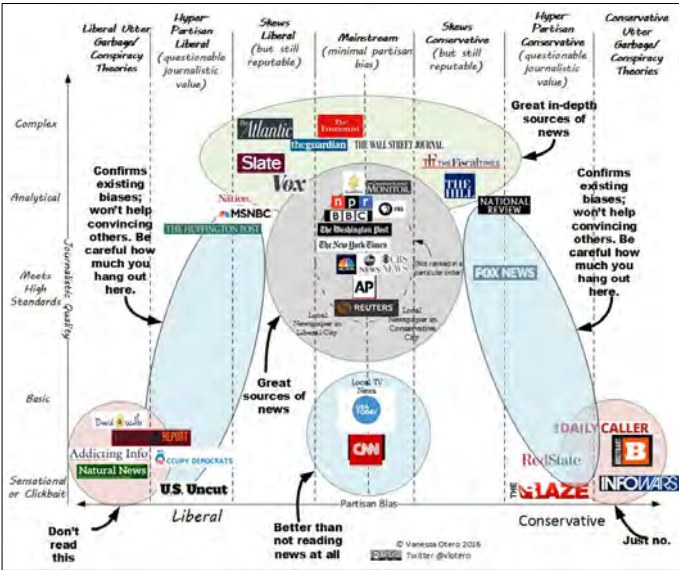
It is interesting to note that fake news outlets and authentic news outlets operate in the same legal and administrative structure. It implies that a lot of other variables are at play in determining whether

a news outlet chooses to propagate genuine or fake news. Figure 2 below gives a comprehensive roundup of various news outlets available to U.S. audiences and grades them vertically on their standard of reporting from basic to complex and horizontally on their level of partisanship.

It is an informative illustration of the conservative as well as liberal biases of certain media outlets and the news sources that could be highly relied on by audiences. Besides that, however, the figure illustrates that both the partisan media outlets—that at times churn out fake news—and the more reliable news outlets operate in the same legal and administrative structure.

This could suggest that despite operating in similar legal and administrative structure, we could see a great amount of variance in reliability of news outlets. In other words, the reliability of news outlet does not depend solely on the laws governing freedom of expression in a polity.

Figure 2



Source: <https://www.adfontesmedia.com/the-reasoning-and-methodology-behind-the-chart/> (last accessed on March 21, 2019)

As mentioned in the discussion above, quite contrary to the policy discourse in certain countries, high levels of censorship have generally led to higher incidence of propaganda or fake news because in a state and society with relative freedom of expression, fake news cannot survive for long. If the truth-seekers are not afraid of expressing their views, notwithstanding how strong a constituency in a state they might offend, they are likelier to come out in the open and confront the propaganda with authentic information and reliable sources of information.

Wayne LaPierre, the Chief Executive of the U.S. National Rifle Association, once said, "To stop a bad guy with a gun, it takes a good guy with a gun."<sup>48</sup> I would say, to stop a bad guy with a pen, it takes a good guy with a pen. Instead of focusing on censorship for countering the so-called "fake news," state authorities would be well-advised to rely on news outlets with strong internal mechanisms ensuring the authenticity of the news to expose the producers of fake news. The government could couple this refrain from censorship with citizen education campaigns. The citizen education campaigns could focus on alerting citizens against sensationalism, conspiracy theories, baseless claims and in favor of critical thinking and cross-referencing of any hard to believe news coming their way. Even if the government would not educate the citizens, slowly and gradually the news media and the citizens would regulate themselves in an atmosphere free from government control.

As showed by the recent study referred to above, there is ample evidence that fake news is a much smaller problem in scale than curbs on freedom of expression, which could result in deprivation of the whole population from authentic news, whether they agree with it or not. Provided the space for free speech without excessive censorship, the mainstream media outlets will also need to step up to the plate and take responsibility for informing and educating the citizens through authentic news and discrediting fake news. As in the



words of Alexis de Tocqueville, "There is nothing more fruitful in wonders than the art of being free; but there is nothing harder than apprenticeship in liberty."<sup>49</sup>

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# **THE MYTH AND REALITY OF SURGICAL STRIKES**

**MOONIS AHMAR\***

## **Introduction**

With the modernization of technology and the art of war in the last 100 years, one can observe a sea change as far as the proliferation of information in the form of news is concerned. More distressing for a reader in an era of information technology is to distinguish between news which is fake and which is genuine. Revolution in print and electronic media is however post-Gulf war phenomenon when Cable News Network (CNN) based in Atlanta, United States was the first 24/7 news channel to provide information and images of the U.S. led attack to liberate Kuwait from the occupation of Iraq in January 1991.

For the reader and the listener, it became a big challenge to absorb enormous information and news from different sources. The authenticity and credibility of news and information is however the responsibility of the publisher and media houses owning different TV channels. It is not only print and electronic media which is a major source of providing information to readers and viewers but from more than a decade social media in the form of Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp tends to provide information and news to millions of users. Ironically, what has happened in the unprecedented flow of

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information is confusion because of the dissemination of information and news which tends to be far from the truth.

As rightly pointed out in an editorial, "Fake news & war hysteria" in Pakistan's English daily *Dawn*, "in the age of social media and citizen journalism, fake news has become a powerful and extremely dangerous tool in the hands of state and non-state actors, where misinformation and outright lies are peddled shamelessly to mislead the public. Lynch mobs have murdered people over WhatsApp rumors while conspiracy theories and others of their ilk have found an open field for feeding people lies through social media.<sup>1</sup>" The proliferation of rumors is so speedy that by the time it is dismissed as the fake and uncalled for the damage is done.

The editorial, while stating about fake news & war hysteria in the context of India and Pakistan, laments that "the media on both sides has indulged in peddling propaganda and airing fake news. At the outset of the crisis, India claimed killing 300 militants in the Balakot strike; as independent observers later noted, Delhi was hardly truthful in its assertions, Moreover, armchair 'generals' on prime time talk shows egged on their respective establishments towards the war; the Indian media particularly vitriolic in its shrill-anti-Pakistan pronouncements."<sup>2</sup> It was during the February crisis over Pulwama and Balakot episodes that the phenomenon of fake news reached its peak. In its essence fake news could be described as "fake news" is a term used to refer to fabricated news. Fake news is an invention – a lie created out of nothing – that takes the appearance of real news with the aim of deceiving people. This is what is important to remember: the information is false, but it seems true."<sup>3</sup>

In the last 30 years, one can see the surge of TV channels, newspapers, and magazines. The online edition of the print media also emerged as a source of information to readers who are largely inclined towards a soft copy of the newspaper which is usually free. Today, to get news about crisis and conflict from a far flunked country like Fiji is



not an issue. But what matters is to seek clear and objective information amidst the surge of social media which is no doubt playing a role in shaping both negative and positive perceptions among people on various issues.

The phenomenon of surgical strikes is not recent but denotes a situation in which a swift military attack is launched inside the 'enemy' territory with precision to damage the identified target. In the case of India and Pakistan, the very notion of surgical strikes came into the limelight when on September 29, 2016; New Delhi claimed that it conducted surgical strikes against militant hideouts inside the Pakistani side of Line of Control.

In response to Indian claims, Pakistani side termed surgical strikes as a myth and devoid of reality and that no such event took place. Islamabad referred to the so-called Indian surgical strikes of September 2016 and February 2019 as false and fabricated. Even in India, questions were raised about the claims and credibility of surgical strikes terming these as mere part of a propaganda campaign of the Modi regime to exert pressure on Pakistan.

More than two years after the so-called surgical strikes launched by India against what it called militant hideouts on the Pakistani side of the line of control, it is time to analyze why New Delhi raised the 'bogey' of such claims and how it got exposed because of the absence of any hardcore evidence of its claims of surgical strikes.

This paper will examine in detail the myth and reality of Indian surgical strikes against Pakistan by responding to the following questions:

1. What is meant by the concept of surgical strikes and what are the historical instances in the recent era of the use of such *tactics* in different parts of the world?
2. What were the objectives of Indian *claims* of launching surgical strikes against Pakistan and how such ambitious aims were responsible for exposing such claims?

3. How the assertions of Indian surgical strikes were *dispelled* by Pakistan?
4. Why since September 2016 India has pursued a policy of claiming surgical strikes against Pakistan and after the shattering of the myth of surgical strikes since Pulwama attack will India refrain from such type of tactics against Pakistan in the future?
5. What are the *implications* of the so-called Indian surgical strikes against Pakistan?

Furthermore, the paper will also highlight how the myth of Indian surgical strikes was challenged by some Indian circles. That to what extent tactics like 'hot pursuit' 'preventive strikes' and 'surgical strikes' are used by the combatants to psychologically demoralize each other will also be discussed in this paper.

## **Why Surgical Strikes?**

What is meant by surgical strikes and why it is conducted? To what extent surgical strikes can be termed as an attempt to avoid an all-out war between the two adversaries? The very term surgical strikes in the context of India and Pakistan got popular when New Delhi claimed to have conducted surgical strikes across the line of control in the aftermath the terrorist attack at Uri in the Indian held Kashmir in September 2016 which killed scores of soldiers.

The preventive strike is a concept which is older than surgical strike, although both tend to achieve a similar objective i.e. to launch a surprise attack against the enemy territory in order to prevent further cross border infiltration. Linking the U.S doctrine of a pre-emptive strike against Iraq during the administration of George W. Bush, an Indian writer argued that "when dealing with Pakistan, India claimed her right to launch pre-emptive strikes against Pakistan and this was demonstrated by India's External Affairs Minister's reaction on Pakistan in the aftermath of the killing of 24 Kashmiri Pundits by terrorists in Kashmir. Participating in the discussion in Rajya Sabha, the upper

chamber of the Indian parliament he remarked that, India has a much better case to go for preemptive action (against Pakistan) than the US had over Iraq.<sup>4</sup> However, the United States rejected the Indian attempt to draw a parallel between Iraq and Kashmir situations. For instance, "Pakistan's Ministry of Information circulated a report by the *Washington Post* which quoted State Department spokeswoman Joanne Prokopowics as saying that the circumstances that made military actions necessary in Iraq do not apply in the subcontinent and should not be considered a precedent."<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the U.N charter neither sanctions preventive nor surgical strike and these are conducted by some states unilaterally without seeking any authorization from the United Nations.

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, surgical strikes mean, "a carefully planned military attack that does not damage the surrounding area."<sup>6</sup> The attacker, instead of going for a full-fledged war with the adversary selects a target that is perceived to be a sanctuary of carrying out cross border infiltration. Collins English Dictionary defines surgical strikes as, "a military action designed to destroy a particular target without harming other people or damaging other buildings near it."<sup>7</sup> Cambridge English Dictionary defines surgical strikes as a: type of military attack that is made in an exact way on a particular place.<sup>8</sup> According to Vocabulary.Com dictionary surgical strikes has been defined as "an attack (usually without prior warning) intended to deal only with a specific target. An attack that is intended to seize or inflict damage on or destroy an objective."<sup>9</sup> The Free Dictionary defines surgical strikes that it is "an attack that is intended to seize or inflict damage on or destroy an objective."<sup>10</sup> Macmillan dictionary defines surgical strikes as, "a military attack, especially by air, that is designed to destroy something specific and to avoid wider damage."<sup>11</sup>

In its essence, a surgical strike carries an element of surprise mostly carried out early dawn with the precision of hitting the target. If

these two requirements are not met, the outcome may be dangerous and lead to adequate retaliation from the other side. According to USLegal, surgical strikes means, "an attack usually without prior warning intended to deal only with a specific target. Generally, this is an attack using guided weapons to hit one specific building, with minimal damage to the surrounding area. Surgical strikes are often employed in urban warfare and counter-terrorism operations. The use of precision-guided weapons minimizes collateral damage and civilian casualties."<sup>12</sup>

From the above definitions on surgical strikes, one can deduce three conclusions. First, a surgical strike is conducted in retaliation of the enemy's cross border intervention with a purpose to destroy bases across the border that are perceived to be used for terrorist acts. The country aiming for a surgical strike feels that it is the only option which is left as other options ranging from diplomatic and political channels seem to have exhausted. Second, an element of surprise is a pre-requisite for conducting a surgical strike with precision in hitting the required target. The surgical strike should not be conducted with a warning because such a situation may alert the other side and the very objective of destroying bases and hideouts of cross border infiltration may not be achieved. Most important collateral damage must be avoided to minimize the chances of escalation of the conflict. Third, surgical strikes can be counter-productive because if the other side gets an early warning and takes a pre-emptive action the very purpose of launching a surgical strike may fail. There is always an element of risk and chance of miscalculation for the initiator of surgical strikes.

Is a surgical strike a viable option for the states possessing nuclear weapons and other means of mass destruction or it is a strategy that is used in a situation when there is a powerful asymmetry between the warring states? Certainly, nuclear weapons, because of their zero-sum capability, have effectively avoided war since the end of the Second World War. Vertical and horizontal nuclear proliferation

however promotes proxy and limited conventional war while drawing a line that the armed conflict must not be escalated to an extent that can threaten the use of nuclear arsenal. Yet, surgical strikes cannot be ruled out as far as the two nuclear states are concerned because the objective is to strike at particular and specific targets without escalating the situation.

According to an Indian source, surgical strikes means “a military attack that is designed to destroy something specific and to avoid wider damage. It's a type of military attack that is made in an exact way on a particular place. It's a military attack which results in only damage to the intended legitimate military target and no or minimal collateral damage to surrounding structures, vehicles, buildings, or the general public infrastructure and utilities.”<sup>13</sup>

The concept of surgical strikes is considered as a less risky option in a conflict situation than engaging in an all-out war. One can figure out three different possibilities in the pre and post-surgical strike situations. First, in the pre-surgical strike situation, the scenario may reflect warning and threats by the country facing cross border infiltration. Since crossing the regular border may lead to the outbreak of an all-out war, the side facing infiltration tries to deter the accused of launching surgical strikes to destroy which it calls ‘command and control’ infrastructure of non-state actors perceived to be involved in facilitating armed incursions into the territory of another state. It is another matter if the other side is least receptive to threats and continues sponsoring infiltration and terrorism against the other state. In that case, the initiator of a surgical strike gets a reason to proceed with surgical strikes against specific targets. Second, when no action is taken to stop infiltration and terrorist attacks, the victim state launches surgical strikes to destroy the hideouts and the command and control infrastructure of groups allegedly involved in cross border terrorism. It is another matter if surgical strikes are in the form of ground or air attacks or face immediate retaliation or not. The possibility of collateral

or less collateral damage in surgical strikes will determine the level of retaliation or no retaliation. Drone attacks, which were quite common a decade ago when U.S drones used to carry lethal attacks of what was perceived as terrorist sanctuaries or 'safe heavens' in the tribal areas of Pakistan. Drone attacks also carried an element of surprise and despite claims of hitting targets with precision used to cause collateral damage.

Third, in the post-surgical strike situation, both parties are engaged in intensive propaganda warfare to prove their positions right. In April 1970, the U.S forces attacked Cambodia to destroy what American forces alleged command and control infrastructure of Viet Cong. The U.S also launched strikes against Laos suspecting Viet Cong's guerrilla sanctuaries involved in attacking American and its allied forces in South Vietnam. Surgical strikes of Saudi Arabia and the U.A.E in Yemen in the form of air attacks against Houti targets is another manifestation of cross border infiltration aiming to eliminate their sanctuaries.

When the Soviet forces were in Afghanistan, there were frequent incidents of Afghan warplanes violating Pakistan air space and trying to target what they stated hideouts of Mujahedeen groups inside Pakistan. Recently, Iran has accused Pakistan of not taking action against 'Sunni' militant groups responsible for the abduction of 14 Iranian revolutionary guards in October 2018 on its southeastern border with Pakistan. Tehran warned Pakistan of attacking what it called "terrorist camps" inside Pakistan.<sup>14</sup> On 13 February 2019, 27 Iranian revolutionary guards were killed in a suicide attack in the Iranian Sistan region of Irani Balochistan. Jaish-al-Adal took up the responsibility of that suicide attack for killing Iranian revolutionary guards travelling on a bus. On February 17, Iranian Foreign Ministry summoned the Ambassador of Pakistan and handed over a protest note stating that "the Islamic Republic of Iran expects Pakistan's government and army to seriously confront the terrorist groups active

on its borders with Iran.<sup>15</sup> Earlier, Pakistan condemned that attack, and a Foreign Office spokesman stated that his country was “shocked and grieved to hear about the suicide attack on IRGC bus near Zahidan today, in which many lives were lost. Pakistan condemns in the strongest terms all acts of terror.”<sup>16</sup> For Pakistan, it is double jeopardy because of Indian and Iranian threats of surgical strikes on account of their allegations of cross border infiltration.

### **Uri and Pulwama: Indian Surgical Strikes and Pakistan’s Response**

The phenomenon of surgical strikes in the context of India and Pakistan surfaced when on September 18, 2016, India claimed to have launched in retaliation of terrorist attack in Uri, located in its controlled parts of J&K. Since long, India has been threatening Pakistan of ‘hot pursuit’ to eliminate what it alleged ‘terrorist camps’ across the line of control. India immediately blamed Pakistan for sponsoring those responsible for the Uri attack, an allegation which was promptly rejected by Pakistan.

India took a couple of days to respond to the Uri attack by claiming to have launched surgical strikes. According to the Director General of Military Operations of India, Lt. General Ranbir Singh, “based on very specific and credible information which we received yesterday that some terrorist teams had positioned itself along the Line of Control, the Army carried out surgical strikes last night at these launch pads. The operations were focused to ensure that these terrorist do not succeed in endangering the lives of citizens in our country. During the counter-terrorist operations, significant casualties have been caused to terrorists and those who were trying to support them. The operations have ceased.”<sup>17</sup> Pakistan outrightly rejected the Indian claim of launching surgical strikes across the line of control and termed it as a hoax. No evidence of casualties was provided by India.

Director General Inter-Service Public Relations (ISPR) of Pakistan Lt. General Asim Saleem Bajwa ruled out the Indian claims of

surgical strikes and called these as the Indian shelling along the LoC. He asked that, “how is it possible that the target of a surgical strike has no idea it took place? It was simply an episode of cross LoC fire that they (India) have been doing. Small arms and mortars were used in the fire, similar to what has been used before. We gave a befitting response.<sup>18</sup>” Pakistan’s military in a statement asserted that “the notion of surgical strike linked to alleged terrorist bases is an illusion being deliberately generated by India to create false effects. The quest by the Indian military establishment to create media hype by rebranding cross-border fire as a surgical strike is a fabrication of the truth. Pakistan has made it clear that if there is a surgical strike on Pakistani soil, the same will be strongly responded.<sup>19</sup>” Was the Indian announcement of surgical strikes against Pakistan fake news? Why India was not able to counter the Pakistani assertion that there were no surgical strikes and had New Delhi ventured on such an adventure it would have got an even handed response?

The Uri incident and the Indian claim of surgical strikes across LoC need to be examined from three angles. First, to deal with the embarrassment from the Uri attack in which many Indian soldiers were killed, the BJP government blamed Pakistan and threatened to take action against what it termed as ‘cross border terrorism.’ Responding to the charged environment led by the right-wing Hindu nationalists, the ‘drama’ of surgical strikes was staged which however proved to be counterproductive and a source of embarrassment for India. Second, the Modi regime wanted to put Pakistan under a psychological pressure so as to show to the world that it possesses the capability to take action against what it termed ‘terrorist training camps’ across the LoC. But, India failed in accomplishing such an objective as Pakistan was able to expose the bogey of surgical strikes. Third, the timing of Uri attack and so-called surgical strikes by India coincided with the holding of the 19<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit scheduled to be held in Islamabad in November 2016. India used that opportunity to boycott the SAARC



summit under the pretext of non-conducive environment for the holding of that SAARC. India was also able to convince Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Bhutan not to participate in the SAARC summit. As a result, four out of eight members of SAARC refused to participate in the 19<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit which was to be held in Islamabad. Hence, the SAARC summit became a casualty of the Uri attack and the escalation which resulted from that episode. It was after the Uri attack that the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi threatened to isolate Pakistan in the region and in the world.

Between Uri and Pulwama, Indo-Pak relations remained tense with some ups and downs. The Pulwama terrorist attack coincided with the holding of Indian elections scheduled from April 2019 and New Delhi under the Modi regime thought that it should seize the opportunity for creating anti-Pakistan hype for political consumption. When Modi threatened that India will 'avenge' Pulwama attack and Pakistan will have to pay a heavy price for its involvement in acts of terrorism, Pakistan warned India of resorting to any sort of adventure which will result into immediate retaliation. But, the situation which was created after the Pulwama attack was far serious than the one which existed at the Uri attack. After the Pulwama attack, India withdrew the Most Favored Nation (MFN) status which it had granted to Pakistan in 1996 and recalled High Commissioner from Islamabad. Reacting to the Pulwama attack claimed by the banned terrorist organization *Jaish-e-Muhammad*, the Indian Prime Minister on February 15 stated, "our blood boils at what happened," and those behind the attack would "pay a very heavy price for their actions."<sup>20</sup> He further asserted, "It's time to repay Pakistan in its own coin"<sup>21</sup>. Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman said that his country "always condemned heightened acts of violence in the valley. Pakistan strongly rejected the insinuation by elements in the Indian government and media circles that seek to link the attack to Pakistan without investigation."<sup>22</sup> Regretting India's negative response to the

offer of Pakistan's Prime Minister to India to hold an impartial inquiry about New Delhi's allegations of his country's involvement in Pulwama terrorist attack, *The Economist* (London) maintained that, "it is understandable, too, that India scoffed at a call for dialogue made by Imran Khan, Pakistan's prime minister. In a televised speech four days after the attack, Mr. Khan scolded India for being hasty to blame its neighbor, promising that if Mr. Modi had any evidence, Pakistan would be happy to aid the investigation.<sup>23</sup>" Perhaps India waited for around nine days to retaliate against Pakistan because of the visit of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman to Pakistan and India.

The war hysteria created in India after the Pulwama attack prompted "bellicose news anchors for revenge. Even liberal-minded Indian commentators, who would usually favor talks with Pakistan, demanded that something be done. Mr. Modi did something. A dozen or so fighter jets, equipped with 1,000 lb bombs, took off from Gwalior air base on February 26<sup>th</sup>, crossing both the line of control. The planes struck an alleged facility in Balakot in the state of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, undisputed Pakistan territory. India claimed that hundreds of jihadists had been killed. Pakistan snorted at this self-serving, reckless and fictitious claim. India, it said, had crossed only a few miles into Pakistan and pounded uninhabited jungle for theatrical effect.<sup>24</sup>" Even before Pulwama, the notion of surgical strikes was referred when in January 2019, according to the news reports, "Indian media carried speculative reports attributed to intelligence source alleging that Pakistan Army commandos and Lashkar—Taiba fighters were together planning to carry out a major 'surgical strike' against Indian posts along the Line of Control (LoC). It was further claimed that an attempt by a Pakistani Border Action Team to attack the Indian Army's forward posts was foiled on December 31."<sup>25</sup> Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi while talking to reporters "categorically rejected claims in Indian media that Pakistan is planning a surgical strike against India and warned that irresponsible

statements by its (Indian) leadership could hurt regional peace. Indian government wanted to distract its public's attention from its internal problems by spreading malicious propaganda against Pakistan. It was for the world to take notice of these reckless actions."<sup>26</sup> On the other hand, Director General ISPR was quoted by *Radio Pakistan* saying that, "if India dares to launch a surgical strike inside Pakistan, it will face 10 surgical strikes in response. Those who think of any misadventure against us should have no doubt in their minds on Pakistan's capabilities."<sup>27</sup>

For a long period, India tried to portray its claims of launching surgical strikes against Pakistan a reality but it turned out to be a myth and that myth was finally shattered when on February 26, 2019, New Delhi claimed to have conducted surgical strikes in retaliation of the Pulwama terrorist attacks against what it called terrorist camps of Jaish-e-Muhammad across the Line of Control. Before the so-called surgical strike in Balakot, the Pakistan Prime Minister had warned India of retaliation in case his country faced any Indian attack. In a news conference, the Indian Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale said that "the strikes had killed a large number of militants, included commanders, and had avoided civilian casualties. Credible intelligence information was received that JeM was planning more suicide attacks in India. In the face of imminent danger, a pre-emptive strike became absolutely necessary."<sup>28</sup> Pakistan immediately refuted Indian claims of causing physical casualties in its Balakot air attack and challenged New Delhi to show evidence in this regard. Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan in an emergency meeting of national security chiefs stated that "once again the Indian government has resorted to a self-serving, reckless and fictitious claim. This action has been done for domestic consumption, being in an election environment, putting regional peace and stability at grave risk."<sup>29</sup> On February 26, Director General ISPR, Pakistan warned India that "It is your turn now to wait and get ready for our surprise. The Indian jets had dropped their bombs in an

empty forest area. No infrastructure got hit, no casualties.<sup>30</sup> Pakistan claimed to have shot down two Indian planes and arrested a pilot Wing Commander Abhinandan Warthaman on February 27 who was later released and handed over to Indian authorities at Wagah/Attari check post on March 1.

Since February 14 when the Pulwama terrorist attack took place till February 26 when India claimed to have conducted 'surgical strikes' against the alleged camps of JeM in Balakot, the Indian media and right-wing Hindu nationalists joined the bandwagon on blaming Pakistan for sponsoring cross border infiltration. But, the situation changed on February 26 when the Modi regime failed to provide evidence about the casualties of its so-called surgical strikes in Balakot. The situation got ugly and worse for the Indian government when Pakistan targeted unpopulated areas across the Line of Control and Pakistan Air Force shot down two Indian fighter planes on February 27. Not only the morale of the Modi regime went down but also from within India people started questioning the claims of the government of killing 300 'terrorists' in Balakot.

Pakistan's surgical strikes on February 27 in retaliation of the Indian surgical strikes of February 26 proved to be more effective because Islamabad unlike New Delhi didn't claim casualties and was able to lure the Indian Air Force on its side of the line of control resulting into the shooting of two Indian planes. The mockery of Indian surgical strikes was made worldwide including in India. The Indian government failed to provide any evidence of its much claimed hundreds of casualties in Balakot. Initially, there was euphoria in India about conducting so-called surgical strikes endorsing the threat given by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to avenge the Pulwama terrorist attack. For instance, in an editorial published in leading Indian newspaper *The Hindu*, it was proudly stated that "the Indian Air Force's strikes on a Jaish-e-Mohammad terror training camp in Pakistan's Balakot delivers a robust but calibrated message. The latter is manifest

in New Delhi's diplomatic utterances. While the strikes followed the Pulwama attack by a couple of weeks, Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale referred to the action as non-military pre-emptive strike. The phrase indicates the action was based on an assessment of an imminent threat and had ensured that Pakistan's military personnel and infrastructure were not targeted, and civilian casualties were actively avoided.<sup>31</sup>

The Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee questioned the claims made by the Modi regime about killing terrorists in Balakot surgical strikes. She asked: "How many terrorists were neutralized in the air strikes? Has anybody been neutralized at all. I have read foreign press coverage which say that not much damage was done. I am in complete solidarity with the armed forces. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't know the truth."<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, 21 opposition parties of India in a statement issued after their meeting in the parliament house New Delhi on February 27, 2019, questioned the claims made by BJP President Amit Shah during an election rally in Gujarat that 250 terrorists were killed in air strikes on Balakot. Unlike Uri when Modi regime got the support from people about the so-called surgical strikes, the situation reversed after Pulwama and Balakot. Will India learn lessons from its false claims of surgical strikes and will refrain from such type of so-called retaliatory measures which only invite domestic and international criticism?

## **The Way Forward**

Can there be a policy at the governmental level to prevent the launching of fake news or reports? How sensational and scandalous news tends to wrongly motivate the listeners and viewers? How far better education and awareness can help prevent fake news?

The phenomenon of surgical strike can rightly be called as a test case to determine the authenticity and credibility of news which is released by the official and non-official media. Starting from 2016 or even before, Indian claims of launching surgical strikes against what it

termed as 'hide outs' and 'training camps' of infiltrators across the line of control, the myth of such strikes has been shattered. Particularly, since the beginning the claims after the so-called surgical strikes in Balakot killing hundreds of terrorists proved to be a non-starter.

Unfortunately, because of vested interests of some media houses and the government, it seems the phenomenon of 'fake news' related to surgical strikes will continue. Absence of a code of ethical conduct determining the reality of any news is responsible for spreading not only rumors but also disinformation among people. The negative use of technology particularly 24/7 news channels in order to enhance their rating among viewers was reflected in the Indian electronic media following Pulwama terrorist attacks. Not only some news anchors were spreading fake news against Pakistan but also political parties and civil society groups joined that bandwagon.

More lethal than print and electronic media is social media where 'fake news' gets a huge constituency. Episodes of Pulwama and Balakot proved how social media can penetrate in the minds of people and cause violent reaction. The news of Pulwama terrorist attack became an ammunition for fanatic Hindu groups who used social media to instigate retaliation against Kashmiri Muslims in different parts of India. As a result, hundreds of Kashmiris, particularly those studying in different Indian educational institutions were beaten up by violent mobs as they were held responsible for the killing of 40 Indian Reserve Police personnel. Therefore, the wave of anti-Kashmiri and anti-Muslim violence, which was unleashed in many Indian states against Kashmiris following the Pulwama episode, was the direct outcome of highly provocative and hostile information released from some media houses.

Where is the way out to restrain 'fake news' and provide authentic information to viewers depends on the policy to be formulated and implemented at the government level which can bind electronic, print and social media not to disseminate items which are

not only sensational and fake but may be responsible for arousing negative sentiments among people against a particular community. 'Fake news' also hardens enemy images against a particular country or group as is the case of news released about cow slaughter by Muslims in India resulting into severe backlash from fanatic Hindus. Till the time there are unresolved issues between India and Pakistan, the two countries will have to live with periodic outbreak of hostilities, fake news and surgical strikes.

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- <sup>14</sup> <https://kalingatv.com/world/iran-warns-pakistan-of-surgical-strike-over-cross-border-terrorism/> accessed on March 12, 2019.
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- <sup>17</sup> Suhasini Haider and Kallol Bhattachaerje, "Target Terror: Strikes across LoC," *The Hindu* (New Delhi), September 29, 2016. He further substantiated his argument by stating that, "the option of surgical strikes was taken in the wake of increase in infiltration bids. Terrorists had begun gathering in large numbers along the LoC



- with the objective of crossing the border and targeting locations in Jammu and Kashmir, as well as other metros. In such a scenario, surgical strikes were considered the best option to deal with the threat." See *The Economic Times* (New Delhi), July 12, 2018.
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# FALSE NEWS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF WAR

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## Abstract

*Most militaries of the world consider surprise as one of the essential principles of war. Influenced by the dictum that all is fair in love and war, sages like Kautilya, Sun Tzu and Machiavelli have recommended the use of stealth and chicanery in warfare and statesmanship. Military commanders are trained in staff and war colleges to do the unexpected and appear at the time and place least expected to dominate the battle space. The non-state actor has more flexibility in this regard because he follows no rules.*

*Surprise in war can be achieved through subterfuge, ruses and deception. A number of means including propaganda is used to spread false news to condition the minds of the enemy. This includes covert means like rumor mongering and whispering campaigns by fifth columnists and agents. More traditional means include psychological operation themes (as part of the broader information warfare) perpetuated through print and electronic media. The advent of social media has become a force multiplier in waging a malicious propaganda campaign. The purpose of spreading false news is to lower the morale of the troops and the nation. If a nation is convinced that it cannot win a war it will sue for peace even before the war has*

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*started. A credible propaganda can weaken nation's moral fiber and erode its resolve to resist a foreign invasion.*

*This paper posits that false news must be countered by improving the lot of the nation. No amount of contrived positive narrative can succeed, if the basic human needs of the common man are not fulfilled. In order to survive the toxic effects of false news, the citizen must have faith in the leader's ability to rise to the occasion and ably lead them within a benevolent state system.*

**Keywords:** *fake news, rumor, psychological operations (psy ops), national morale, counter narrative*

## Introduction

Whereas, professional armies train with the aim of winning wars, victories are only possible if the entire nation supports the war effort. Nations having little faith in their top leadership both civil and military are not likely to become part of what they may deem as a lost cause. The national will in fact is the center of gravity of any campaign (military as well as non-military). If it is damaged before or during the war, the war effort will crumble.

The collapse of the national will can be triggered, if doubts are sown in the mind of the common man. A defeatist narrative can sap the spirit of the people and can become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Spreading a damaging narrative can be done through multiple means. The more traditional way is by the clever use of the regular print or electronic media. It can be done more deviously through the rumor mill or the social media. The new phenomenon of the social media has to be taken seriously because it can spread news instantly with the mere click of the button and false or fake news spread through this medium not only reaches far and wide, it is also taken very seriously by the recipients. To counter such disinformation a very strong and effective counter narrative needs to be built. A plot that is believable can stem the ill effects of a malicious and damaging propaganda

campaign. Clearly, it requires a lot of planning and research. A hastily mounted counter offensive will not gain traction with a wary public.

A purist may argue that fake or false news, disinformation and propaganda are different in nature. In my opinion, the purpose is the same i.e. to defeat a nation in its mind. The aim of this paper is to discuss the toxic effects of fake/false news, disinformation and propaganda on a nation's morale.

## **Surprise**

One of the cardinal principles of warfare calls for surprising the enemy. The element of surprise is most essential at levels of planning i.e. strategic, operational as well as tactical. Military leaders at all tiers of command are taught the art of surprise in their staff and war colleges. However, it takes more imagination than text books and class room lectures to practice and perfect this difficult skill of employing a successful stratagem.

Surprise is often achieved by moving and positioning forces in a manner that the enemy is deceived. Catch the enemy at his weakest moment is possible by springing a perfectly timed surprise. In 218 BC during the Second Punic War, Hannibal moved his war elephants across the snow covered Alps bypassing the Roman land garrison and navy to achieve perfect surprise. In May 636 AD, the celebrated Muslim commander Khalid bin Al Waleed moved rapidly and deployed his mobile columns to defeat the lumbering Roman Army in the decisive battle of Yarmouk in modern day Syria.

Surprise is also achieved, when the adversary is not willing to believe that something wrong can happen to it, ignores clear signals and gullibly laps up fake information. It happened to the Americans, when they were caught off guard in Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 and again on September 11, 2001. For the Pearl Harbor attack, the Japanese had an elaborate ploy to deceive the Americans. They generated a lot of misleading wireless chatter and news to disguise their actual intentions. The US analysts primarily based their

intelligence estimates on the Japanese diplomatic communication intercepts. The Japanese were able to feed the US intelligence enough credible signal traffic to depict the false intent that they were preparing for a main military offensive not against Hawaii but down South against British Malaya, and US possession of Philippines and the Dutch East Indies. This wasn't far wrong but the Japanese main effort was actually poised against their naval base in Hawaii in north Pacific. It is quite a mystery, how the Japanese were able to hide the movement of their naval fleet comprising six aircraft carriers, two battleships and three cruisers, across 3,700 perilous miles before breaking cover. The Americans were in a state of denial and did not want to believe that the Japanese could launch a large scale naval attack on their Pacific base. As a result, the Japanese naval forces were able to wreak havoc with the American ships deployed in the harbor. Five ships (Arizona, Oklahoma, California, West Virginia and Nevada) were sunk and three (Pennsylvania, Maryland and Tennessee) suffered damages. 26 Japanese submarines prowled the harbor to destroy survivors. Over two thousand sailors and marines were killed. Some were on ships and others were on shore duty. Another thousand were killed on the ground. The air cover had been denuded because a large number of US aircraft had been sent to defend their colony in Philippines, and minimum air defense was available in Hawaii to counter the Japanese attack. The element of surprise was complete and the Americans had suffered their first defeat in the opening round of the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> This day was forever remain etched in their national psyche as the "day that will live in infamy."<sup>2</sup> The Americans would exact revenge for their humiliation by dropping nuclear bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki towards the closing days of the Second World War. Although Americans argue that the nuking of the Japanese cities was to save lives of their soldiers, in my opinion it was more out of hubris rather than any real military gains.

Israelis were deceived in the October 1973 Arab Israel War, when the Egyptians were able to convince them that they were not about to attack them. Naturally there were those, who could sense the lull before the storm but dissent or advice that all was well was summarily rejected by the higher echelons of the Israeli officials. As a result the Egyptian military assault across the Suez Canal smashing the Bar Lev Line defense works came as a complete surprise. The Egyptian Army had inured the Israelis into complacency by coming close to the Suez Canal each year for mock maneuvers and then withdrawing. To make their disinterest in any kind of military venture seem more credible, the Egyptians expelled their Soviet trainers and advisors just before the war. They also sent troops on leave as per peacetime norm. This news was widely publicized and the Israelis swallowed the bait. The guards were down on 26 October, which the orthodox Jews that year were commemorating as Yom Kippur (the day of penance and fasting). For the Muslims it was the holy month of Ramadan during which they also fast and pray and refrain from mundane worldly chores. A war breaking out that day was least expected.<sup>3</sup> The assault was swift and caused so much damage to the Israeli reputation of invincibility that it brought the otherwise iron willed Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir to the verge of tears. Her defense minister, the fearsome Gen Moshe Dayan with his iconic eye patch pleaded with the Americans to help retrieve the situation. For a dangerous moment, the Israelis toyed with the idea of going for the Samson's option of using the nuclear weapon if the Americans did not come to their aid. The prompt American military aid and satellite information of the Egyptian dispositions across the Bar Lev Line did eventually help the Israelis to retrieve the situation and end the war more or less evenly poised.<sup>4</sup>

In the examples quoted above it was more often than not the case of deception at a grand scale to dupe the leadership of the opponent into believing what may or may not happen? Now the target audience has shifted to the nation at large. Famous French

strategist Andre Beufre described strategy as the dialectic of opposing wills. Now this will is not that of the commander anymore but that of the entire nation. So the defeat of a country means breaking its national will.

## **Fake News**

As the strategic landscape of perception has changed, so have terms used in the domain of psychological operations (psy ops) and information warfare (IW). Fake news was given wide currency during Mr. Trump's during his election campaign (2016). He used it so often that it became known as one of his favorite oral and twitter expressions. So much so that it was declared the word of the year for 2017.<sup>5</sup> It gave Axel Gelfert the opportunity to define fake news as "the deliberate presentation of (typically) false or misleading claims as news, where the claims are misleading by design."<sup>6</sup>

Fake news follows the famous dictum that all's fair in love in war. Wise sages such as Kautilya, Sun Tzu and Machiavelli have recommended the use of stealth and chicanery in warfare and statesmanship. Chanakya (also identified as Kautiliya or Vishnugupta), the fourth century BC advisor in his political treatise *Arthashastra* advised Chandragupta, the first Mauryan emperor and his cohorts to employ all tricks of the trade to gather information and browbeat the enemy through insidious means. In the Chinese ancient military treatise *The Art of War* Confucian thinker and strategist Sun Tzu (roughly fifth century BC) states:

All warfare is based on deception. Hence, when we are able to attack, we must seem unable; when using our forces, we must appear inactive; when we are near, we must make the enemy believe we are far away; when far away, we must make him believe we are near.<sup>7</sup>

In his sixteenth century political treatise *The Prince*, Italian diplomat and political theorist Niccolo Machiavelli openly advocated the use of deception to fulfill a political (or military?) agenda. Nothing was considered wrong or morally unethical in such kind of advice and

it was often accepted by those wanting to deliver a death blow to a more powerful political (or military?) enemy.

In the past stratagems and ruses have been spun out using the medium of propaganda and rumor to effectively cause consternation in the enemy's camp. Fake news is just a new name to disinformation being planted in the minds of the enemy leadership and it's public to cause dismay and hopelessness. Fake news is not entirely untrue and is rarely created from thin air. It is an exaggeration of the existing situation but it does in such a way that it can increase a sense of fear, foreboding and impending loss or gloom and/or perceived relative deprivation among the target audience.

George H.W. Bush, the US President at the time of the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001 attacks (popularly known as 9/11) used fear as an overriding emotion to shape public opinion at home and abroad.<sup>8</sup> A nation fed on overwhelming fear was led to believe that terrorists were lurking everywhere and they could pounce upon unsuspecting common man not bearing arms at his or her workplace, in the shopping malls, in the places of entertainment, at the places of worship and even in their homes. PATRIOT Act was enacted to encourage neighbors to report on each other if they found anything suspicious. All this was done in the name of patriotism. The world at large was told to abide by the UN Security Council Resolution 1373 (September 28, 2001), a counter terrorism measure passed in the wake of the 9/11 incidents. This also gave Bush blanket cover to execute his Global War on Terror. The infamous prison Guantanamo Bay soon filled up with stateless warriors with no rights, as promised to a prisoner of war under Geneva Conventions. After two decades, random incidents of sabotage and bombing are still labeled as acts of terrorism but the appeal or horror of such happenings has begun to recede and non-state actors are no more the demons that they were made out earlier. Sometimes they are just referred to as fringe lunatics or lone wolves.



As mentioned earlier Donald Trump made the use of fake news a part of everyday vocabulary. He would reject every allegation of his political opponents as fake news. He continued the use of the term fake news in international relations once he was sworn into office as the President of the US. During his election campaign Trump's camp was able to gauge the public opinion through the data harvested by Cambridge Analytica by harvesting personal preferences of the voters gleaned from social media platforms such as Google, Snapchat, Twitter and Facebook. Intensive survey research, data modelling and performance optimizing algorithms were used to target 10,000 ads to different audiences in the months leading up to the elections. These ads were viewed billions of times to make credible opinions.<sup>9</sup> Trump used the slogan of America first and appealed to white supremacists to vote for him after the two term presidency of Barak Obama – the first black president of USA. Trump an unlikely candidate was able to correctly gauge the mood of the electorate and won the elections despite poor personal reputation.

### **Spreading Fake News**

Fake news finds traction with target audience when it resonates with their emotions and passions. To strike the right chords, the message must be plausible. It is always best to build up on an existing grievance.

East Pakistan broke away from the West after nearly 25 years of joint existence because of a growing feeling of perceived relative deprivation (PRD). This grievance, a genuine one was built up on the unfair treatment being meted out to them by the West Pakistanis.<sup>10</sup> Most of their complaints were legitimate. Bangla, their mother tongue was only reluctantly given the status of a national language after the riots of 1952 resulting in the death of student demonstrators.<sup>11</sup> They wanted more representation in decision making positions. They were upset because despite being larger in numbers, the West Pakistanis were occupying all positions of authority in the civil and military

bureaucracy. Even their enrolment at the entry level in the armed forces fell short of the recruitment target.<sup>12</sup> The East Pakistani elite perpetuated the myth that all the foreign exchange earnings through the sale of jute were being spent for building a new capital city in West Pakistan.<sup>13</sup> In 1955, in a keynote address, Gen Ayub Khan, who had served as the commanding general of 14 Division in East Pakistan in 1948, in his dual position as the commander in chief (C in C) of Pakistan Army and defense minister of his country had explicitly stated that "The defense of the East Pakistan did not lay in that part of the country."<sup>14</sup> After the 1965 India Pakistan War, it became quite clear to the East Pakistanis that Pakistan Army planned only to fight and defend their core areas in West Pakistan and leave them at the mercy of the aggressor. So in 1966 Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman came up with his famous six points demanding greater autonomy. He wanted that the federal government only be responsible for defense and foreign affairs and all residual matters be devolved to the federating units.<sup>15</sup> He also demanded the right to maintain provincial militias and wanted the Naval HQ to be moved to East Pakistan.<sup>16</sup> The West Pakistanis believed that the Bengali was not martial material and the East Pakistanis thought that the Punjabi was the usurper living off the wealth generated by Sonar Bangla (golden Bengal). As general mistrust between the East and the West grew, Indians decided to capitalize on opportunity developing and they pounced on it. Hatred against West Pakistan was fanned through incendiary propaganda. The hatred grew to phenomenal levels leading to a civil war in 1971. This was openly supported by the Indians.<sup>17</sup> The secession of East Pakistan from the West was completed after the Indian forces moved in and extracted the surrender document from the beleaguered Pakistani military contingent on December 16, 1971.

Taking a leaf from the Bangladesh example, enemies of the country have from time to time tried to rouse ethnic passions. They have found a sympathetic audience among the Muhajirs residing in

the metropolitan city of Karachi, among the Sindhis living in the hinterland, among the Baloch and Pushtun nationalists. This has resulted in the creation of entities such as the Muhajir Qaumi Movement (MQM), Jeay Sindh Quami Movement (JSQM), Baluch Liberation Army (BLA) and the Baloch Republican Army (BRA), Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Pashtun Tahafuzz Movement (PTM). Each of these movements has claimed to be the legitimate mouthpiece of their ethnic interests. Some of these actively preached and practiced violence for the fulfillment of their demands and some openly spoke of secession.<sup>18</sup>

Incendiary literature produced by separatists has been recovered by law enforcement agencies from time to time.<sup>19</sup> Magazines, brochures and booklets to fire the passions of the cadres and to raise funds has been sold openly and supplied covertly to the zealots. With the rapid advancement in technology, Internet has been actively used to spread the words of hate. Smart phones are routinely used to spread the messages through Whatsapp. The government blamed hostile countries and their intelligence agencies for sponsoring these outfits. As per the National Action Plan (NAP) made in consensus with all parties in the aftermath of the 16 December 2014 attack against the Army Public School (APS) in Peshawar to root out terrorism. One of the 20 points states that hate speech being spouted by militant organizations be completely stopped.<sup>20</sup>

Some of these organizations like the MQM have fractured and dissipated or have lost appeal among their followers but others like JSQM are still alive and kicking. From time to time religious organizations like the Jamat ud Dawa (JuD) and Falah-i-Insanayat Foundation (FIF) have been proscribed as far back as January 2002 but many have reinvented themselves and reappeared with new names and symbols. The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) is hard put to close down their social media accounts by writing to those companies providing them these services.

In 2016, Kulbhushan Jadhav, a commander of the Indian Navy serving in the ranks of their intelligence agency Research & Analysis Wing (RAW) was caught in the restive province of Balochistan. Jadhav had disguised himself as a businessman with a Muslim name and was operating out of the Iranian port city of Chahbahar. It was alleged that Jadhav was actively fomenting terrorism and was actually involved in sabotaging the projects of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). He was talking to Baloch separatists and directly motivating them to bear arms and indulge in anti-state activity. Jadhav was arrested and court martialed. India took up the issue with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to get their spy released but what they got was only consular access. Irrespective of what becomes of Jghadev, it is a fact that for years he was able to cross the border without difficulty and sow the seeds of hate among the unsuspecting youth of Balochistan.

### **Narrative and Counter Narrative**

One way to counter fake news and false propaganda is by building up a counter narrative. Like fake news a counter narrative must be plausible. A concocted and farfetched story is unlikely to resonate with a wary audience. One example is the botched 'counter terrorism' strike by Indian fighter planes against a seminary building allegedly used for training 'militants' in the village of Jabba in Balakot district Khyber Pukhtunkhwa province employed in the raid against the Indian Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) in Pulwama in occupied Kashmir on 14 February 2019. The Indian planes released their payloads in a hurry and went back doing no harm but damaging a few trees. A day later a Pakistani Combat Air Patrol (CAP) was able to lure in two Indian aircraft into their own airspace and shoot down a Mig 21 Bison and an SU30. An Indian pilot was captured and later released. The Indian media went ballistic and called for revenge. To drum up war hysteria, they produced fake news at an industrial scale.<sup>21</sup> Since the news was entirely fictional, they were neither able to convince the

domestic audience nor the world at large that their aerial counter attack had actually not met its target and in fact had gone terribly awry. The stuff of Bollywood films could not be replicated and the public was left wondering why the Indian Air Force despite all its expensive hardware was not able to deliver. It was clear to everyone that instead of responsible journalism, the Indian media had been parroting BJP's party line.<sup>22</sup> On the flipside, a media campaign short on facts and loud on fury failed to cause a war because a legitimate *casus belli* was lacking.

So a counter narrative must be built on plausibility and credibility. It should be backed up by incontrovertible proof. In the digital age, evidence can be cooked up and photoshopped but even this requires expertise. An amateur and clumsy production is always caught out. The whole story has to be built up on some essential facts. Fiction cannot be created entirely out of thin air. Hostile propaganda and psy ops themes are to be prepared carefully and executed imaginatively. German propagandist Joseph Goebbels used all the resources of the Third Reich to build a narrative of the racial superiority of the German nation. He was also a staunch anti-Semite. To his credit Goebbels was an extremely well read man. He had done his PhD from the University of Heidelberg in 1921 and had written 14 books. As the propaganda minister he made intelligent and extensive use of radio, press and films. To control the German media, he exercised strict censorship and allowed only that material to be published and broadcast that was in the interest of the Nazi party. Goebbels painted the Nazi leadership in heroic colors. Germans were the master race and Hitler was the Führer (Great Leader). The Jews were bad and they had an evil stranglehold over the economy. The propaganda line appealed to the common German and it followed party pronouncement without question and participated party rallies enthusiastically.<sup>23</sup>

Goebbels is not the only one to have made extensive use of propaganda to extol the virtues of the leadership. Dictators and

absolute monarchs encourage their minions to use the state organs to propagate their qualities of their leadership styles. The public is exposed to so much propaganda, day in and day out that they started believing in it. Many of them have their books of public utterings published at state expense and made compulsory reading for school children and adults as a means of indoctrination. The late Muammar Al Gadhafi perpetuated his personal aura as an absolute ruler through his *Green Book*. This book was published internationally as well to give Libya watchers a glimpse of Gadhafi's style of managing his state and its vast oil resources.<sup>24</sup>

When the Kim Jong-il (the father of the current North Korean leader Kim Jong-un) died, the common man wept unabashedly. The people, despite their lives of privation were totally beholden to the late Kim and believed in the state propaganda extolling the virtues of their leader. They wholeheartedly believed in what they were told. For them their leader was demi god and criticize him or his dynasty was blasphemy. Literature churned out by the state machinery portrayed the Mount Paektu *Bloodline*, signifying the three-generation *lineage of North Korean* leadership descending from the country's first leader, Kim Il-sung was next to divinity in a godless system. So far, the state propaganda machinery has been able to keep the myth of the Kims alive and the regime afloat.<sup>25</sup> The people are not allowed to think that another system can improve their lives. They pin their hopes entirely on the ruling dynasty and the state narrative is accepted as gospel truth.

A mystique is also created around the personality of military leaders by war propagandists. American generals are especially fond of publicity. Some of them like Patton and MacArthur had a flair for self-projection. Patton would wear his steel helmet with his general's star prominently displayed and carried fancy pistols with ivory hand grip. He created an image of a hard driving general hell bent on advancing on to the enemy and not afraid of speaking his mind. MacArthur wore

his peaked cap at a jaunty angle, mostly wore crumpled khakis and made a display of smoking a corncob pipe. He was so fond of being photographed that he reenacted his landing on the island of Corregidor to publicize the fulfillment of his famous "I shall return" promise. This hunger for publicity and self-created glamor have been evident in the recent wars in the Middle East. The propaganda eulogizing national pride and prowess has been packaged so slickly that the gullible public wholeheartedly supported unwinnable wars.<sup>26</sup>

In the modern age of crass commercialism, the Americans have mastered the art of marketing and publicity. They can sell any idea to the world thanks to Hollywood – the greatest propaganda machine in the human history.<sup>27</sup> Although the Indian film industry produces the most number of picture annually, American production houses such as Disney production dominate at the box office.<sup>28</sup> In fact the propaganda produced by Hollywood has no match. The pop culture and history spawned by Hollywood has global appeal and is accepted unquestioningly. Over a century of its existence it has spun it has spun out an international narrative and image that transcends the language barrier and physical boundaries that has replace history books and genuine research. The images created by Hollywood are forever etched in the minds of the young and impressionable. It creates demons and glorify characters that it wants to John Wayne will always ride tall, the super heroes will always save the world and villains often depicting Asians or Africans will always lose. One example that comes readily to mind is the Blackhawk Down incident in Somalia that took place in the early 1990s. It glorifies the grit and determination of the besieged American Marines and blots out the courageous effort of the Pakistani troops to rescue them.<sup>29</sup>

The only entertainment industry that is nearly as powerful in conditioning and influencing minds as Hollywood, is India's Bollywood.<sup>30</sup> It creates an image of a 'shining' and 'inclusive' propped on a formulaic doze of song and dance and colorful cultural content. In

this manner it crafts a patently false image of a country that is caste ridden, poverty stricken and intolerant of other people's beliefs. It glosses over gory images of a crowd lynching a Muslim for allegedly slaughtering a cow and gangs of uncontrollable men raping a lonely woman. Instead it shows India as a secular and protective society that safeguards the interests of the minorities and vulnerable segments of the society. Also Bollywood consciously dishes out an image of Pakistan as the state sponsoring terrorism. Bollywood films are not only screened all across the globe but also in Pakistan adding to the already overwhelming doze of cultural onslaught to impact the minds of the impressionable youth. Unfortunately there is no counter to either Hollywood or Bollywood.

One place, which provides a relatively even playing field is the social media. Also it is quite possible to counter and rebut a wrong story on this medium. Plausible and acceptable stories spread through the social media can influence own people as well as others. A citizen journalist is always at hand to capture the moment with his smart phone and any video clip which has the potential of mass appeal can go viral at the click of the button. News spread on the social media has a very short life and a 'feel good' doesn't last very long if not followed by tangible work to make the state of the people better. In fact winning the hearts and minds needs real effort. If the government is sincere and creates conditions for its people to progress and prosper, it won't need a counter narrative. Action speaks better than words. Investing in the people and making policies in the best interest of the common man can inspire confidence in the state.

## **Conclusion**

Countering fake news is important because it can quickly erode national morale and break the collective spirit to resist any challenge or calamity. A war can be lost in the mind if it is not countered in the strongest possible manner. Any nation that hopes to survive the rigors of adversity must train its masses to be able to bear



the onslaught of hostile propaganda and onslaught of fake and fictitious news. The maintenance of national will is a cause that needs national attention. A national policy to monitor and counter negative propaganda must be made as a result of a realistic threat assessment. Necessary resources and manpower should be made available to combat negative news but more than that the government must invest in the people so they have full faith in the state and are able to sift the chaff from the grain and believe in the truth and not in malcontent deliberately sent their way.

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# FAKE NEWS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF HYBRID WAR

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## Abstract

*Communication has historically played a pivotal role in violence and war. However, modernity with its emphasis on popular consent and availability of cheap technologies to reach the public space has deeply transformed the nature of wars together with the associated art form of communication. To wit, contemporary wars are not only a military activity but more importantly a hybrid enterprise encompassing all dimensions of the social and cultural reality. While militaries conceive, plan and fight battles on the ground to capture and control resources and reshape geographical boundaries, communication is aimed at winning the hearts and minds of people on both sides of the divide. Communication precedes and coincide war and plays a significant role after the violence ends. The general populace of the launching state has to be convinced of the necessity of war to the point of its full ownership and cognitive involvement. In contrast, the villains are targeted for persuasion, co-optation, fragmentation, surrender, and psychological and physical defeat. Truth is potentially the highest casualty under the circumstances. All forms of fake news – satire, parody,*

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*fabrication, manipulation, advertising and propaganda – are employed to justify violence. In brief, communication is weaponized. This paper examines the continuously evolving theatre of modern war through the lenses of recent academic literature and how it is shaping and being shaped by the associated communication arena. A short exploratory study of the role of fake news in the geostrategic dynamics of South Asia will be undertaken with the view to mapping theoretical constructs to actual practice.*

## **Introduction**

Communication has historically played a pivotal role in violence and war. However, modernity with its emphasis on popular consent and availability of cheap technologies to reach the public space has deeply transformed the nature of wars together with the associated art form of communication. To wit, contemporary wars are not only a military activity but more importantly a hybrid enterprise encompassing all dimensions of the social and cultural reality. While militaries conceive, plan and fight battles on the ground to capture and control resources and reshape geographical boundaries, communication is aimed at winning the hearts and minds of people on both sides of the divide. Communication precedes and coincide war and plays a significant role after the violence ends. The general populace of the launching state has to be convinced of the necessity of war to the point of its full ownership and cognitive involvement. In contrast, the villains are targeted for persuasion, co-optation, fragmentation, surrender, and psychological and physical defeat. Truth is potentially the highest casualty under the circumstances. All forms of fake news – satire, parody, fabrication, manipulation, advertising and propaganda – are employed to justify violence. In brief, communication is weaponized. This paper examines the continuously evolving theatre of modern war through the lenses of

recent academic literature and how it is shaping and being shaped by the associated communication arena. Accordingly, the remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section II examines the concept of hybrid war. Section III investigates the role of mass media as a weapon of hybrid war. The idea is to provide a context within which one can locate, define and examine the use of fake news in section IV. Section V provides a short exploratory study of the vulnerability of Pakistan to propaganda along the fault lines of political fragmentation, bad governance and unequal governance. Finally, some conclusions are drawn in section VI.

### **What is a hybrid war?**

War and conflict has been a perpetual feature of human history. However, the nature of war has kept changing in synch with the political objectives of war, technology at hand, and, the will, dexterity and resourcefulness of adversaries. Yet, the humbling experience of the US in its 20<sup>th</sup> century wars in Asia, gave rise to the notion of a 'Western Way of War' vs. the 'Eastern Way of War'. The Western Way of War, it is argued, is primarily 'direct' and typical of the five hundred years of 'Vasco de Gama era' (1497-1997). It rests on five pillars:

'a systematic exploitation of technology to compensate for numerical inferiority, the importance of discipline and drill, a preference for pitched battles, continuous innovation due to the existence of a comprehensive state-system, and development of mechanisms for the state financing of war ... [above all] the synergy between these five pillars that explains Western military supremacy in history.' (Corn, 2011)

In contrast, the 'Eastern Way of War' is said to be primarily 'indirect' and consisting of surprise, evasion and delay. The lineage of this construct can be traced to the Chinese general and military

strategist Sun-Tzu (545 B.C. – 496 B.C.), who in his *Art of War*, distinguished between the orthodox (*cheng*) and unorthodox (*ch'i*) ways of war. The contemporary Chinese doctrine of 'unrestricted warfare' appears to have taken inspiration from the writings of Sun-Tzu. The indirect approach and predatory tactics also figure prominently in the Afghan and Middle Eastern traditions. Crone (1996) quotes a Roman commander depicting Arabs prior to the advent of Islam as:

'The Saracens ... whom we never found desirable either as friends or as enemies ... in a brief space of time laid waste whatever they could find, like rapacious kites which, whenever they catch sight of any prey from on high, seize it with a swift swoop, and ... make off' (p.4)

More recently, Corn (2011) talks about the challenges faced by the US 'direct approach' at the hands of the Islamist 'hybrid' approach:

'A decade after 9/11, the absurdity of the US grand strategy in the Long War is never better illustrated than by the fact that Washington currently spends \$100 billion dollars a year in Afghanistan chasing a grand total of 100 Al Qaeda fighters (one billion per terrorist). ... [A]s Sir Ernest Rutherford famously said in a different context: "We are running out of money, gentlemen. It is time to start *thinking*."' (p. 30)

And, at last, the thinking did start in the US with a debate on the pros and cons of the direct vs. the indirect or as they say, the Clausewitzian vs. the Liddell Hart paradigm. It is now admitted that with the wider nuclear proliferation and military interactions, the competitive edge of the Western world in technological superiority and innovative strategic thinking is gradually eroding. Also, with the rise of new economic powers, the state system and financial back-up required for long wars is not the sole monopoly of the West. The time



is therefore ripe for hammering a fresh doctrine of 'war as the continuation of realpolitik'.

'Hybrid war' is a conceptual construct to depict key strategic features and tactics of the wars fought in the latter part of the twentieth century and continuing evolution of these wars into the twenty-first century. Hoffman (2007) captures the essence of these wars in the following words:

'Hybrid wars incorporate a range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder. These multimodal activities can be conducted by separate units, or even by the same unit but are generally operationally and tactically directed and coordinated within the main battlespace to achieve synergistic effects. ... While they are operationally integrated and tactically fused, the irregular component of the force attempts to become operationally decisive rather than just protract the conflict, provoke overreactions or extend the costs of security for the defender' (p. 29)

The key components of the hybrid war construct above are drawn from a wide range of real and cold war doctrines formulated by US, British, Australian, Russian, and Chinese scholars and actual war experiences across the globe but more recently in Afghanistan and the Middle East. Hoffman (2007) typically discusses 'fourth generation warfare', 'compound wars', and 'unrestricted warfare' as potential intellectual lineages to the concept of hybrid warfare. In contrast, Frunzeti (2017) traces the roots of 'hybrid warfare' to the theory of 'subversive war' propounded by the Russian theorist Every Messner in his title, 'The face of the Contemporary War' published in 1959. Subsequently, the Russian Military Academy introduced the concept of 'hostile activities', which is an intermediate stage between peace and war involving all spheres of public life including politics, economy,

social and cultural spheres. Referring to this wider intellectual input then, the key components of the evolving hybrid warfare can be deconstructed as follows.

*Blurring war and peace:* There is lack of a clear distinction between war and peace. In other words, one key feature of hybrid wars is a state of existence marked by persistence conflict.

*Blurring combatants and non combatants:* There is lack of clear distinction between the combatants and non combatants in hybrid wars. Regular forces, partisan organizations, popular movements and the general populace all constitute the targets of a hybrid conflict.

*Omni-directionality of Conflict:* The multi-dimensionality of conflict between states means that the battlefield potentially extends to all aspects of military and social organization. Thus, ground, sea, air and outer space as well as political, diplomatic, economic, cultural, and moral spaces are to be considered likely areas for subversive activities. In particular, the psychological dimension of warfare focuses on affecting the mood of the enemy population – creating confusion and ambiguity about target country's political governance and sponsors of subversion, denigrating and destroying symbols and objects of psychological and material value, neutralising the active component of resistance and co-opting the enemy's enemies. Increasing importance of actions in the information spectrum is also to be noted.

*Convergence of multiple modes of warfare:* Hybrid warfare employs or blends a range of irregular, catastrophic and disruptive means (in addition to regular forces) to achieve political objectives. For instance, using asymmetric or unconventional means, small irregular forces or (allied) non-state actors could challenge the will and the writ of the much bigger adversarial state causing chaos, social strife and breakdown. Catastrophic effects can be created using lethal and brutal means or WMDs. And, breakthrough technologies could disrupt the international balance of power.

*Strategic and temporal synchronisation of multiple modes and battlefields:* One defining feature of hybrid warfare is the strategic synchronisation, operational integration and tactical fusion of the multi-modal and multi-dimensional conflict with the temporal co-extension so as to achieve desired results by simultaneous action or action at designated times (Hoffman 2007; Frunzeti 2017).

While the above features provide an overview, the desire is to learn from far and wide i.e. trans-culturally to develop the art of 'hybrid war' to its perfection. Note also that examining some US literature one regrettably takes an impression that elements of Islamophobia are driving the search for new forms of grand strategy and war tactics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. To wit, Corn (2011) writes:

'Since 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review as well, the Pentagon's adoption of concepts like "hybrid wars" and "persistent conflicts" constitutes an endorsement in all but in name of the view, put forward by Samuel Huntington in the aftermath of 9/11, that ours is the Age of Muslim Wars. Yet, the ongoing turmoil in the Middle East seems to have vindicated that view, U.S. war colleges appear less interested in examining the various "Muslim Ways of War" than in celebrating an allegedly timeless "Western Way of War" (one so selective as to exclude the study of past encounters between the West and Islam).'(p.2)

'if the two pillars of "the West" are the Judeo-Christian and the Greco-Roman legacies, there is no reason a priori not to consider Byzantium a full-member of the Western family, and the Byzantium Way of War as an integral part of the Western Way of War. ... [F]or about a thousand years, it is the Byzantine "indirect approach" (not an alleged Western "civic militarism") that kept Muslim armies at bay and prevented Islam from over-running Western Europe.'(p.9)

To sum up then, hybrid warfare is not a new form of war but rather a new form of strategically directed hostility, which keeps all

facets of social, political, economic, cultural, and military order of an adversarial state under perpetual threat of conflict, disruption, chaos and breakdown employing a range of conventional, combative, subversive, asymmetric and unconventional modes of engagement.

### **Communication and Mass media as weapons of hybrid war**

Over the last some seventy years, there has been a dramatic growth in the penetration of mass media into people's lives. In fact, mass media has increasingly assumed a role akin to the central nervous system of the society conveying messages from one entity or social group to another through the use of mutually understood signs and symbols. From a functionalist perspective, the role of the mass media is to integrate the general populace into the institutional structures of the larger society. Thus mass media occupy our leisure time, act as agent of socialization, enforce social norms, confer social status and collect and distribute 'facts' about a variety of events performing surveillance of the social environment. However, as Schaefer (2004, p.139) asks, 'what exactly constitutes a "fact"? Who gets portrayed as a hero, a villain, a patriot, a terrorist?' On these questions, conflict theorists have a point.

Conflict theorists argue that in a world of concentrated wealth and class conflict, powerful social, political and economic actors need to economise on the material cost of dominating the world. Mass media serves this purpose by manufacturing consent and keeping dissent within limits. Thus systematic propaganda on mass media becomes an important component of total policy - together with political, economic, social, diplomatic and military arrangements - to protect the privileges and interests of the dominant class. In this larger context, mass media is required to transmit only those messages, which virtually construct or portray reality in accordance with the cultural beliefs and practices of the dominant private interests and government. According to Herman and Chomsky (1988), the modus

operandi used is to pass the information through a set of filters. These filters are:

‘first, the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms, second, advertising as the primary income source of the mass media [and economic compulsion to promote the political agenda of the advertisers], third, the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and “experts” funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power, fourth, “flak” as a means of disciplining the media, and, fifth, “anticommunism” as a national religion and control mechanism.’

One may argue that the last filter i.e. anti-communism could change to align with the ideological paradigm being targeted as the ‘enemy’ or the ‘other’ – a possibility admitted by authors in their later writings. Given such gatekeepers and filters, mass media can, and, indeed it has served as an ideal platform for obtaining the soft objectives of hybrid warfare i.e. influencing the perception, cognition and the behaviour of target populations.

The above propaganda model has been criticised for focus on the context rather than the message and for exclusive emphasis on propaganda as a tool for vested interest. In comparison, Ross (2002) proposes an Epistemic Merit Model, which splits communication into three fields, viz., sender, message and receiver. Modern propaganda is a persistent, enduring effort to create or mold events to influence the relations of the public to an enterprise, idea or group (Bernays, 1928). Propaganda occurs when four conditions provide a specific context to these communication fields. First, there is this intention on the part of the sender to persuade, second, that the communication is from or on behalf of a socio-political institution, third, the messages produced are targeted to an identifiable social group, and, fourth, the communication happens within an epistemic struggle to challenge

the thoughts of a targeted group, thereby, potentially containing valuable information for the targeted group. Seen through the lenses of the epistemic struggle model, propaganda assumes an important role in the structural transformation of the public sphere *a la* Habermas (1962 [1989]) as politicians and non-governmental organisations represent themselves before the voter by working at the cognitive level of the individual, who is assumed to be involved in a rational decision making process.

The cognitive emphasis of the epistemic merit model is in conflict with the bounded rationality theory of Simon (1991), which argues that when individuals make decisions, their rationality is constrained by three factors, viz., the limited amount of information available on potential alternatives and their consequences, cognitive limitations i.e., limited capacity of mind to evaluate and process information and limited amount of time available to make decisions. Under these circumstances, the resulting decisions are not optimal but geared to quick gratification of immediate wants. More importantly, given its emphasis on the cognitive aspects of propaganda, the epistemic merit model risks missing the rich insights based on the 'social constructionist' or 'discursive psychological' perspective on human behaviour. Here, Foucault (1972) becomes relevant, whose emphasis on the role played by language and social practice in articulation of power relations provides greater explanatory power in connecting propaganda with discourse and translating people's thought into their behaviour.

Many years ago, Lippmann (1925[1993]), a journalist by profession, having experienced and witnessed manipulation of public opinion in World War I, denied the possibility of anything called an independent public opinion. In his view, the reality is too complex and uncertain for public to grasp a 'fact' as 'what is'. Instead, people simplify reality through categorization and generalization and in this process the pseudo-environment plays an important role. In particular,

distortion occurs not only because of our emotions and ego but more importantly because of stereotypes. Stereotypes are the favourable or dis-favourable beliefs, images, and generalizations that we hold about the traits and behavioural patterns of a social group. From a sociological perspective, stereotypes are present in our culture and individuals absorb them through the process of socialization. From a Freudian psychological perspective, stereotypes reflect our inner prejudices or frustrations that influence our behaviour. From a cognitive perspective, given people's limited capacity to absorb and process information, elected authority selects what is important to feed in our heads as we choose to acknowledge information that reinforces stereotypes in our minds and ignore information that does not. Other prominent contributions to this line of thought come from Allport (1954[1979]), who focuses on prejudice as the driver for influencing generic public attitudes, the prejudice being understood as a faulty, inflexible or unjustifiable generalisation that generates negative attitude toward an outgroup or its members. Also, Le Bon (2002) analyses the preconditions for using stereotypes and prejudice for persuasion, in essence, psychological organization of people in generic group identities – crowds - with common traits, values, and attitudes such that people's objective and conscious evaluation of a person is replaced by an archetypical crowd opening up the way for turning feelings and thoughts in a desired direction. This is based on an understanding that crowds behave impulsively and are readily amenable to persuasion, they are intolerant of differences, they do not give way to doubt, and they overwhelm self-interests of the members.

Social media, in particular, can play a special role in supporting hybrid warfare since in addition to overt and covert dissemination of information to influence target populations (PSYOPS), it facilitates collection of intelligence, identification of potential targets, cyber operations, defence and command and control (Nissen, 2015).

To summarise then, because of emotions, ego, bounded rationality, wilful crowding, stereotyping and prejudice, so dupes are the generality of humankind that they do not necessarily see first and then define but instead, define first and then see. These insights drawn from a range of scholarly disciplines, place all the categories of human thought at the disposal of the modern state and private interest for manipulation and re-engineering through mass media making the latter a potent weapon for obtaining the objectives of a hybrid conflict.

### **Fake news as an instrument of hybrid war**

Propaganda and false information have been recurring features of human communication since at the least the Roman era whereby Gaius Octavius, the first Roman Emperor waged a propaganda campaign against Mark Antony that was designed to smear his reputation (Kaminska, 2017). The introduction of the printing press in 1493 rapidly increased the distribution of distorted news, delivering the first mass level news deception – ‘The Great Moon Hoax’ of 1835 (Thornton B 2000). In the years to follow, civil and world wars, regime changes and catastrophic world disasters became markers for media propaganda and disinformation. Rapid technological developments in the 21st century saw the weaponization of information on an unprecedented scale.

The concept of fake news begs the question of how to interpret what constitutes as real news. Notable scholars have defined news in various ways to include narratives of recent, interesting, and significant events that affect individuals, (Kershner 2005 and Richardson, 2007) to dramatic accounts of untypical or unique occurrences (Jamieson and Campbell 1997).

News is evaluated as an output of journalism whereby the provision of “self-governed, reliable, accurate, objective, and comprehensive information” is expected (Kovach and Rosenstiel 2007, 11). Despite that, news is a social construct and journalists



often apply subjective judgment on which parts of information to include and exclude (Herman and Chomsky 2002; Tuchman 1978). It is a unique commodity sold to news audiences, that are then sold to advertisers (McManus 1992), making this information highly vulnerable to market forces that have manipulated it throughout history.

The manufacturing of news is not only at risk of journalists' subjectivity (White 1950), but also external agencies, such as the government, multinational corporations, advertisers and the wider public (Shoemaker and Reese 2013). Therefore, journalists have maintained a powerful and influential position in society, namely one that can magnify and grant legitimacy to any kind of reported material (Schudson 2003).

'Fake news' is a product of distortion in reported material and is highly instrumental in the arsenal of mass media propaganda. The EU High Level Expert Group (2018) defines this concept as false, inaccurate, or misleading material that is deliberately designed and distributed to coerce individuals and cause public harm for profitable gains.

Others position fake news within the larger framework of misinformation and disinformation, aligning it with the latter (Wardle 2017). Misinformation is explained as the inadvertent sharing of false information, whereas disinformation refers to the development and sharing of deceptive information with manipulative or malicious intent" (Wardle 2017, para. 1).

Whilst both forms are highly problematic, disinformation or fake news is particularly dangerous as it is strongly resourced and frequently reinforced by automated technologies.

Whilst the term has a long legacy, its definition has shifted over the last decade. In order to understand how fake news affects public discourse, it is useful to review the ways in which the term has

been defined and operationalised through an analysis of published academic studies.

*News Satire:* Mock news programs hold an important position within the media ecosystem and are produced with transparent humorous motivation that is used to inform and entertain through critiques of political, economic or social affairs. Satirical programs significantly shape public discourse, opinions, and political trust (Brewer, Young, and Morreale 2013).

*News Parody:* The provision of direct commentary on current affairs is refrained from and non-factual information is employed to inject humour into fictitious news stories instead. Parodies are developed by highlighting the absurdity of issues where the content is fabricated. In some instances, the parody is subtle and blurs the lines between real and fake news, often to be picked up and receive coverage in mainstream news. Viewers are often deceived by the apparent credibility of the material and share it without understanding the actual premise.

*News Fabrication:* Material published without factual evidence with the clear intention to misinform. It is normally presented in the style of news articles that draw on pre-existing biases and social tensions, weaved into narratives that the reader legitimises. As this material is also published by non-news organisation or individuals with an authentic façade, its verification becomes challenging. As demonstrated by Flanagan and Metzger (2007), website visitors who are unfamiliar with its brand tend to use the complexity of the website as a mental measure to judge its credibility. As a result, fake news outlets build readership and advertising revenue through content creation that closely matches those of legacy news organizations. Once the reader suspends credulity and accepts the legitimacy of the source, they are more likely to trust the item and ignore the necessity to verify it. When a population has trust in an institution or a person, they will be less likely to accept stories that are

critical. However, if there is social tension of a critical sectarian, political, racial or cultural nature — then individuals become more receptive to fabricated news. Another prominent issue with fabricated news is the extensive use of digital news bots. Fabricated items not only seem authentic due to their content and format but also the illusion that they are widely circulated (Albright 2016). This gives the reader the impression that others are also reading (and eventually liking) the item and if they go to another site to verify the item, they will likely find it there. However, the reality of the authors intentions are in stark difference to what is conceived as they are motivated with strong economic and political gains.

*Photo Manipulation:* The manipulation of true images or visual content to create false narratives. This is much more frequented in the context of citizen journalism and social media platforms that are marked by the abundance of information causing growing difficulty in its verification. Whilst many legacy news media outlets action against image alteration to create inauthentic narratives, others do not enforce such standards, especially social media.

(Edson Et al 2018).

*Advertising and Public Relations:* Advertising materials cleverly concealed in genuine news reports and media releases that are published as news. In this context, fake news is defined as “when public relations practitioners adopt the practices and appearance of journalists in order to insert marketing or other persuasive messages into news media”. Whilst news agencies determine the extent of consumption of this material, its obscure origins may mislead audiences into believing that the news produced is free of bias. A clear distinction between public relations or advertising-related fake news and other types is the focus on financial gain (Edson Et al 2018).

*Propaganda:* Narratives that are created by political entities, public figures, organisations or government institutions to influence public perceptions to benefit their own cause. In a similar vein to advertising, propaganda is often based on facts, but includes bias that strongly promotes a certain perspective. Whilst this material is developed with considerations to persuade rather inform, the intent hides behind the appropriation of objectivity (Edson et al 2018).

To summarise, the types of fake news can be understood across two parameters namely, facticity, which refers to the degree to which fake news relies on facts and secondly, the author's immediate intention, referring to the degree to which the creator of fake news intends to mislead.

### **Vulnerability of Pakistan to propaganda as a weapon of hybrid war**

We have discussed above some select theoretical frameworks within which propaganda can be conceived as a tool of hybrid warfare. Naturally, when it comes to fault lines across which propaganda can be directed and has been directed in history, the sky is the limit. A question arises as to how could one possibly measure the susceptibility of a nation state to propaganda? On this issue, there is a possibility to shed light from three angles. First, one may take inspiration from research on state fragility and select fault lines along which a state is most vulnerable to propaganda. Second, one may take a cue from research on governance and map it to the domain of propaganda vulnerability. And, third, one may look at the filters elicited in the propaganda models presented above and locate the national position with respect to these filters. Given the lack of data at hand, we restrict our discussion below to state fragility and governance.

#### *State fragility and vulnerability to propaganda*

In his famous book, *An Introduction to History: The Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406

C.E.) (1967) defines the scope of political authority as below:

‘Royal authority, in reality, belongs only to those who dominate subjects, collect taxes, send out (military) expeditions, protect the frontier regions, and have no one over them who is stronger than they. This is generally accepted as the real meaning of royal authority.’ (p. 152)

‘(To exercise) political (royal authority) means to cause the masses to act as required by intellectual (rational) insights into the means of furthering their worldly interests and avoiding anything that is harmful in that respect.’ (page 155).

Contemporary academics and practitioners tend to add to this above list another dimension, that of legitimacy, which may be considered as a proxy for what Ibn Khaldun called as *asabiyyah*. Vulnerability along one or more of these three dimensions of statehood – authority, legitimacy and capacity (A-L-C) – then opens the doors to fragmentation and fragility (Call, 2010, Carment *et. al.*, 2008 and 2013, Hurd, 1999). Depicting the signs of a failed state, Zartman (1995) suggests the following:

‘As the decisionmaking centre of government, the state is paralysed and inoperative: laws are not made, order is not preserved, and societal cohesion is not enhanced (Badle and Brinbaum 1983). As a symbol of identity, it has lost its power of conferring a name on its people and a meaning to their social action (Dyson 1980; Migdal 1987). As a territory, it is no longer assured security and provisionment by a centr(e) ... (Poggi 1978). As the authoritative political institution, it has lost its legitimacy ... (Weber 1958; Ferrero 1942). As a system of socioeconomic organization, its functional

balance of inputs and outputs is destroyed; ... with neither traditional nor charismatic nor institutional sources of legitimacy, it has lost the right to rule.' (page 5)

Based on the A-L-C framework, Carment *et al.* (2013) finds Pakistan vulnerable on authority owing to political fragmentation; on capacity, due to bad governance, highly unequal economic development, lack of an equitable and efficient tax system and environmental degradation; and, on legitimacy due to lack of transparency and accountability. Likewise, the Fund For Peace (2017) rankings highlight very high group grievances and polarised elites. A cursory look at media reports and debates on Pakistan would confirm many of these shortcomings becoming the subject matter of manipulation and propaganda.

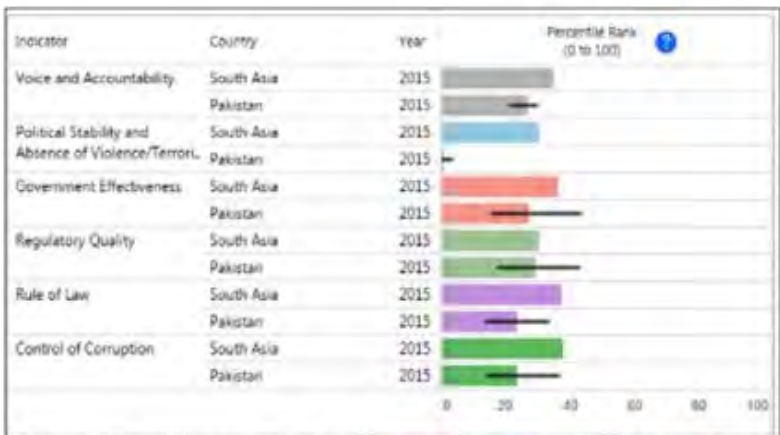
Another framework used for assessing fragility is developed by OECD (2016), which criticises the above approach as too narrowly focused on the Western concepts of formal governance, which are state-centric by their very nature. Instead, this new framework links fragility with a combination of risks and coping capacities in a system, territory, polity, society or community. The idea is to create space for the stability and resilience that informal institutions and hybrid forms of governance can provide in the absence of a fully functioning state. Accordingly, fragility is the combination of exposure to risk and insufficient coping capacity of a social system to manage, absorb or alleviate those risks. Five key dimensions of risks considered are: economic, environmental, political, security and societal, which are interpreted as below. Each of these dimensions is further divided into many subcategories. On all these dimensions, Pakistan has avoided being bracketed in the 'extreme' risk category.

Dimension	Description
Economic	Vulnerability to risks stemming from weaknesses in economic foundations and human capital including macroeconomic shocks, unequal growth and high youth unemployment
Environmental	Vulnerability to environmental, climate and health risks that effect citizens’ lives and livelihood. These include exposure to natural disasters, pollution and disease epidemics.
Political	Vulnerability to risks inherent in political processes, events or decision; lack of political inclusiveness (including of elites); transparency, corruption and society’s ability to accommodate change and avoid oppression.
Security	Vulnerability of overall security to violence and crime, including both political and society violence.
Societal	Vulnerability to risks affecting societal cohesion that stem from both vertical and horizontal inequalities, including inequality among culturally defined or constructed groups and social cleavages.

Arguably, one missing dimension in the above dimensions of risk is the critical computer systems and information infrastructure that supports utilities, transport, the banking sector and all sorts of large and small businesses. Vulnerability of these networks to cyber-attack and hybrid warfare is a key risk in modern economies.

**Governance quality and vulnerability to propaganda**

Regrettably, bad governance has been a perpetual feature of Pakistan’s national ethos. Such record frequently figures in propaganda both in the sense of Epistemic Merit model as well as Conflict models mentioned above. Below, we compare the performance of Pakistan with South Asia based on World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators, 2017.



The World Bank Group, Worldwide Governance indicators, available at <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#ams>, viewed, June 5, 2017

To sum up then, state fragility framework provides a starting point to assess vulnerability of a populace to propaganda as a tool of hybrid warfare. Researchers have also employed Chomsky’s five filters to examine vulnerability as also a range of individual attributes such as age, education and religiosity to hypothesize propensity to propaganda. These threads provide scope for expanding and enriching this paper further in due course.

**Conclusion**

This paper has examined key features of the evolving hybrid warfare and investigated how communication is conceived and theorised as a weapon of mass influence in such conflict. It has also



speculated that state fragility frameworks can be used for identifying or prioritising the vulnerability of a nation state to propaganda techniques. Applying this insight to Pakistan, political fragmentation, bad governance and unequal development figure out prominently as soft spots. This research is expected to be extended further mapping Herman and Chomsky's (1988) five filters model to the information landscape of Pakistan.

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# FAKE NEWS & FACTS IN OUR REGION

PROFESSOR DR. SAIDA BENNANI\*

## Abstract

*"Fake news" is a controversial topic in academia. While there is, apparently, a unanimous agreement about its spread in media, as an inherent part of cybercultural practices and productions; researchers from different disciplines are facing increasing challenges in measuring the scope of "fake news.", analyzing its local, regional and global complex impact and rethinking strategies to counter its institutional exploitation, at a large scale. This sentence is really long.*

*My (cannot use first person in formal writing) This paper explores "fake news", in cultural and critical media studies perspectives, focusing on current research on communication ethics. I intend to investigate potential processes of reconceptualization of art/ibda'; truth/haqq/sidq; knowledge/ma'arifa/'ilm; education/tarbiyya; agency/maslaha; among other notions pertaining to ethics in general and islamic ethics/akhlaq in particular. Moreover, this paper is a tentative contribution to the crucial emergence of communication ethics, embedded in a post-secular discourse, and concerned with individual human dignity and collective stability, within the pluralist regional and global era in the making.*

*Key words: fake news; Islamic ethics/akhlaq Muhammad Iqbal;art/ ibda'; islamic ethics/akhlaq; truth/haqq/sidq;*

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*knowledge/ma'arifa/'ilm; education/tarbiyya; agency/maslaha; community/umma.*

## Introduction

"Fake news" FN is a controversial topic in academia. While there is, apparently (somehow this does not sound right, could use different words), a unanimous agreement about its spread in media, as an inherent part of cybercultural practices and productions; researchers from different disciplines are facing increasing challenges in measuring the scope of FN, analyzing its local, regional and global complex impact and rethinking strategies to counter its institutional exploitation, at a large scale. (also you've used the exact same words and language here, could paraphrase it, as it's the same as above) My paper deals with FN, in cultural and critical media studies perspectives with a focus on current research on communication ethics. I (again, I don't think you should be using first person) intend to investigate potential processes of reconceptualization of art/ *ibda'*; truth/*haqq/sidq*; knowledge/*ma'arifa/'ilm*; education/*tarbiyya*; agency/*maslaha*; among other notions pertaining to ethics in general, Islamic ethics/ *akhlaq*, and Muhammad Iqbal's ethics theory in particular. I (here too) argue that Iqbalian ethics framework is critical, innovative and challenging for 21<sup>st</sup> scholarship on ethics, media and FN issues. Duly investigated and implemented, it is a potential alternative contribution to the crucial emergence of global ethics and communication ethics, embedded in a post-secular discourse, and concerned with individual human dignity and collective stability, within the pluralist regional and global era in the making. In this process, I will investigate the current debates on FN issues, and inquire how FN can possibly be addressed respectively in media and global media ethics, Islamic and Islamic media ethics, and Muhammad Iqbal's Islamic ethics. Its always best to use shorter sentences and use grammatical signs like colon, semi colon. The longer the sentences are the person loses their trail of thought.

## **FN: Issues & Prospects**

The phrase fake news has become of commonplace use in everyday language (instead of saying everyday language, use colloquial or another way to describe, doesn't sound academic), and cyberworld. Although the literature on FN, related to digital media, is relatively recent, yet it is rapidly increasing in parallel with the significant development of digital media scholarship in general. Researchers from various disciplines have addressed FN definition and conceptualization issues, FN production and impact, and countering FN, among other issues.

I have selected Kalsnes and Gelfert's FN definitions bellow, because they seemingly provide a synthesis of the different terms generally used to refer to FN: *"Manipulation, disinformation, falseness, rumors, conspiracy theories—actions and behaviors that are frequently associated with the term—have existed as long as humans have communicated...Fake news has typically been studied along four lines characterization, creation, circulation, and countering"* (kalsnes 2018). Gelfert recapitulates FN different definitions and argues that FN should be reserved for cases of deliberate presentation of (typically) false or misleading claims as news, where these are misleading *by design*. He concludes that FN *"main purpose is to feed off our cognitive biases in order to ensure its own continued production and reproduction"* (Gelfert 2018).

## **FN Impact**

FN dangers have been considerably monitored and evaluated by nonprofit research institutions, media outlets, on a regular basis etc. A 2017 Pew Forum surveys and polls warn of the persisting spread of FN and its negative impact on social polarization, privacy, freedom of speech and media truthfulness<sup>1</sup>. Media professionals have criticized FN pernicious influence on the validity of media for readers. Revealing examples about FN in a changing media landscape were published by

the New York Times articles and publications, not only about American media: “as fake news spreads lies, more readers shrug at the truth”, but also in global media landscape. *Fake news: read all about it*, by the NYT editorial staff on the nature, multiple aspects, effects and FN political manipulation by FN in the US and worldwide (The NYT Editorial Staff 2018). While many researchers admit the new democratizing norms of knowledge production, in the digital era, thanks to the spread and use of social networks, Facebook, Twitter, among other, etc., others critique the validity of knowledge based on such practices and question the label of the post-truth era, and its risk of authoritarianism (Sismondo 2017). In this post-truth era, scholars seemingly convene that the main domains of controversy, besides propaganda and election expertise (Vargo & al. 2017) are tobacco, fossil fuels, and pharmaceuticals, among others<sup>2</sup> (Sismondo 2015). (You’ve used the word seemingly a lot, maybe omit it or use an alternative)

## Countering FN

FN Countering Literature relates to the complex technological challenges and the invisible uncontrollable and unpredictable dimensions of FN (Pasek 2017). Researchers question “conspiracy theories”, the evasive and pervading monopoly of technology business corporations such as Google and Facebook, and their power over our cognitive and digital practices (Sumpter 2018; Young 2018; and Douglas 2017). Such concern has resulted in a vast production of a battery of tips, “suggestions on how to function in a posttruth world”, and new habits and requirements for the world citizen (Hand 2018; Azzimonti & Marcos 2018; and Cooke 2018). Combating FN has also been addressed by psychological and sociological studies, particularly analyzing the cognitive tendencies and sociological practices with regard to gossip, and addiction to FN, among other digital addictions (Bergmann 1993; and Braucher 2016).

However, the bulk of FN countering literature and activism, in theory and practice, has been apparently (again you’ve used



apparently a lot too, you could say allegedly or not use it as often) the focus of journalism educators and professionals alike. Resultingly, they have produced numerous publications ranging from handbooks, textbooks, institutional guidelines, codes and even tips, online and in print, and offering specific technical instructions and tools that demand digital literacy training, etc; (Luhtala & Whiting 2018). However, the challenges in combating FN in the sector of Journalism educators voice concerns about teaching media law in a post-truth context (Pearson 2017), and verification processes, besides teaching accuracy and balance (Richardson 2017).\_Some western journalist academic institutions have taken the lead and have enacted referential guidelines in the field. Specific instructions have also been published by Educators and librarians (El Rayess & al. 2018), as well as publishers of juvenile literature (Jeffries 2019).

At a global level, the UNSECO, among other international institutions has been involved in educating about FN, and has issued *Journalism, 'fake news' and disinformation: a handbook for journalism education and training* for an international audience<sup>3</sup>. Governments and institutions have also been responding with laws and policies in this context (Klein & Wueller 2017). Examples of collaborative organizational activism to counter FN are Fake News Challenge. It is a grassroots effort of over 100 volunteers and 71 teams from academia and industry around the world. They attempt to develop tools to help human fact checkers identify hoaxes and deliberate misinformation in news stories using machine learning, natural language processing and artificial intelligence (fakenewschallenge.org)<sup>4</sup>. Dhruv Ghulati, Factmata co-founder, on the other hand, initiated “factmata—artificial intelligence for automated fact-checking”. Hence, researchers indulged in archiving “vulnerable” data, as a reaction to the post-truth era in Canada, for example<sup>5</sup>. Other studies have focused on FN in a global context, enriching the literature, with a multicultural and universal scope, and with alternative solutions, enumerated at best

(Haciyakupoglu & al. 2018). Some studies have been devoted to survey the emerging scholarship on FN and assess its multiple aspects, issues and dimensions, engaging new research avenues, meant to ground research on the topic (Jankowski. 2018)

Countering FN has not been the exclusive interdisciplinary concern of academics, news industrials, and politicians, etc. Major think tanks have warned about the alarming technological development of FN in the near future. Brookings Institution has published several analyses, in collaboration with Facebook, in some cases, and with experts from different domains, to address FN future prospects as well cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, troll farms, and bot armies. According to 2017 Brookings report, entitled *How to combat fake news and disinformation*, advances in artificial intelligence, automation, and machine learning, together with the growing availability of big data, open the door to a frightening brave new world... welcome to the world of deep fakes, virtual interactive worlds, and weaponized big data". In this report, West enumerates specific solutions, advocating a dynamic collaboration between government, business and consumers: *Governments should promote news literacy and strong professional journalism in their societies. The news industry must provide high-quality journalism in order to build public trust and correct fake news and disinformation without legitimizing them. Technology companies should invest in tools that identify fake news, reduce financial incentives for those who profit from disinformation, and improve online accountability. Educational institutions should make informing people about news literacy a high priority. Finally, individuals should follow a diversity of news sources, and be skeptical of what they read and watch* (West 2017). Villasenor also argues that technology, legal remedies and improved public awareness are the three avenues to address deepfakes (Villasenor 2019).

Therefore, professionals of news industry, technology business, journalism educators, and media practitioners at large have addressed

the negative impact of FN and have creatively responded with technical and practical strategies to combat FN, we notice that these solutions generally neglect ethical considerations and lack the coordination and necessary consensual commitment at a transnational level. Conversely, the suggested solutions neglect the complex multicultural digital landscape and the digital divide, among other aspects, requiring inclusive, flexible and innovative measures. Therefore, to what extent can ethicists and digital media ethicists engage such challenging issues, theoretically and practically? We shall attempt to answer this question, next. (Don't use I, my, we etc)

### **FN and communication and digital media ethics**

Scholars of philosophy, critical cultural studies, communication and media ethicists have joined the current debate on FN and digital media. They analyze the cyber world cultural diversity and prospects, and reflect about the changing nature of individual and collective identity, and the interaction between man, machine and society in general. Additionally, they investigate how FN, as a typical phenomenon of ubiquitous cyber media, is revealing of new digital practices and products worth studying from an ethical perspective. While theorizing on FN dilemmas, some ethicists and media ethicist have also embarked in applied ethics, issuing practical solutions, hence enriching the literature on cyber culture and FN in particular and opening new vistas for further research.

A rapid(why rapid?) literature review of communication and media ethics<sup>6</sup> in the west shows a great concern with studies on the history of media ethics, mainly in the west in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Harsin analyses the historical and socio-political context of the emergence of posttruth, PT, in its new popular forms, and notes the similarities with reference to western past practices of political persuasion and questions of ethics and epistemology, with reference to Plato and the Gorgias. He stresses the impact of "influence industries" *that were increasingly accepted not just by business but also by (resource-rich)*

*professional political actors. Their object was not policy education and argument to constituents but, increasingly strategically, emotion and attention management*". While Harsin argues *"that PT can usefully be understood in the context of its historical emergence, through its popular forms and post-truth and critical communication studies"* (Harsin 2018), Christians advocates *"an agenda for communication ethics in terms of global media technologies"* (Christians 2000). Such studies betray the void in the literature on media ethics histories in other regions in the world. Researchers have scrutinized the epistemological shifts and paradigms with regard to PT and FN in particular (Goldman 2008 and Rini 2017). Besides, philosophers and ethicists have been concerned with internet research ethics, digital media, social networking and ethics, many of whom have engaged ethics theory and tested applied ethics theories on media and communication as sub fields of ethics theory, through the lenses of virtue ethics, deontological, instrumental, consequential among other western and alternative ethics theories (Sugiura 2014, Sullins 2018, Buchanan & Zimmer 2018, Eribo 2019, Fox & Saunders 2019 and Patterson & al. 2019). (Change font to times) Charles Ess, the prolific digital media ethicist has indulged in a critical analysis of the relationship between the internet and democracy. He insists on resistance and emancipation in the name of democracy, yet, he also considers the importance of intercultural dialogue in solving ethical issues of the cyberworld (Ess 2018, Ess 2017 and Ess 2015).

In another context, Intronat presents an insightful synthesis of the current theoretical ethical approaches to technology/ society relationship, which he enumerates in a chronological order, as the artifact/tool approach the social constructivist approach, the phenomenological approach. He notes that when such relations are first conceived as an artifact/tool approach, *when tools become incorporated in practices it tends to have a more or less determinable impact on those practices, the task of ethics is to analyze the impact of*

*technology on practices by applying existing or new moral theories to construct guidelines or policies that will 'correct' the injustices or infringements of rights caused by the implementation and use of the particular technology. In the social constructivist approach, technology and society co-construct each other from the start, the task of ethics is not to prescribe policies or corrective action as such but to continue to open the 'black box' for scrutiny and ethical consideration and deliberation; yet, in the phenomenological approach that he endorses, technology and society co-constitute each other from the start. The task of ethics is ontological disclosure. To open up and reveal the conditions of possibility that make particular technologies show up as meaningful and necessary (and others not). It seeks to interrogate these constitutive conditions (beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, moods, practices, discourses, etc.) so as to problematize and question the fundamental constitutive sources of our ongoing being-with technology (Introna. 2017)*

Within educational material and resources to counter FN, there is a limited yet significant share of textbooks and handouts specifically addressing communication ethics (Cheney & al. 2012) in general and journalism ethics in particular. Student newspapers also cover events related to FN on their campus, such as *UMCK University News* (Moffett. 2018). There is an increasing body of online journalistic and media ethics organizations resources dedicated to media ethics that are regularly updated and enriched by studies and polls, particularly targeting media professionals (White 2016)

## **Global Media Ethics**

In the context of metaethics, some scholars have addressed media issues and human rights (Pandey & al. 2017), while others have approached SNS social networking services and media issues. Vallor reviews the wide range of metaethics theories ranging from ethical traditional theories, Philip Brey's novel disclosive ethics, Ess's pluralistic "global information ethics", renewed approaches, such as pragmatism,

virtue ethics, feminist or care ethics, intercultural information ethics, among other theories. Vallor evokes the crucial debate about “the practical concerns” and the possible ethical impact of philosophers on SNS. But to whom else can, or should, these ethical concerns be directed: SNS users? Regulatory bodies and political institutions? SNS software developers? How can the theoretical content and practical import of these analyses be made accessible to these varied audiences? What motivating force are they likely to have? The profound urgency of such questions becomes apparent once we recognize that unlike those ‘life or death’ ethical dilemmas with which applied ethicists are understandably often preoccupied (e.g., abortion, euthanasia and capital punishment), emerging information technologies such as SNS have in a very short time worked themselves into the daily moral fabric of virtually all of our lives, transforming the social landscape and the moral habits and practices with which we navigate it. The ethical concerns illuminated here are, in a very real sense, anything but ‘academic,’ and neither philosophers nor the broader human community can afford the luxury of treating them as such (vallor 2016)

Scholars in global media ethics engage comparative approaches between cultures, religious affiliations, and geographical spaces (Hafez 2003) and would generally consider religious ethics as relevant and valid alternatives for world faith communities as an example, Fortner suggests a Christian theory of communication (Fortner 2007), and Campbell investigates digital religion and presents a critical overview of media practices of the world five religions, addressing ethical issues, among other (Campbell 2013). Other researchers have contributed to studies on global media ethics from an Islamic perspective (Abdulla & Abou Oaf 2013 and Tibi 2013). Some media outlets also investigate privacy issues, as the New York Times Privacy Project, launched worldwide (NYT April 11, 2019)

Commenting on communication ethics key ethical issues, such as distributive justice, cultural diversity, violence, and invasion of privacy, Clifford G. Christians advocates cross-cultural global media ethics: "As true of professional ethics generally, communication ethics ought to become comparative in character. In place of its largely European and North American, gender-biased, and monocultural canon, media ethics of the future must be ecumenical, gender-inclusive, and multicultural. A diversified comparative ethics, with a level playing field rooted in equal respect for all cultures, is by no means unproblematic and involves an act of faith. The claim that all cultures have something important to say to all human beings is an hypothesis that cannot be validated concretely. Yet it serves as an open horizon for moving comparative, transnational study forward in an interactive mode. Of the various types of applied and professional ethics, communication ethics has its roots most deeply in language, culture, and dialogue. In that sense, a multicultural style is required for its own authenticity" (Christians 2005).

On the other hand, Stephen Ward (Ward 2015, Ward 2015a) demands a radical new framework for radical media ethics in a global approach: "We need to rethink the basis of media ethics from the ground up. The tweaking of ideas and re-formulation of rules, as seen in recent revisions of codes of ethics, is a temporary, localized fix. It does not address the larger conceptual swamp in which we find media ethics....the media revolution undermined the framework...I put forward a code of global digital ethics... I follow Dewey and other pragmatic philosophers in defining philosophy as social and reformist (Ward 2015a). Thus he proposes four imperatives and ways of applying them in increasingly prevalent areas of journalism:

Charles Ess adopts an inclusive intercultural approach to digital media ethics "DME further employs both ancient ethical philosophies, such as virtue ethics, and modern frameworks of utilitarianism and deontology, as well as feminist ethics and ethics of care: DME may also

take, for example, Confucian and Buddhist approaches, as well as norms and customs from relevant indigenous traditions where appropriate. The global distribution and interconnection of these devices means, finally, that DME must also take on board often profound differences between basic ethical norms, practices, and related assumptions as these shift from culture to culture...Nonetheless, as with the somewhat more recent issues of online friendship and citizen journalism, an emerging body of literature and analysis points to initial guidelines and resolutions that may become relatively stable. Such resolutions must be pluralistic, allowing for diverse application and interpretations in different cultural settings, so as to preserve and foster cultural identity and difference (Ess 2017). Though Ess suggests practical progressive convened ethical codes and guidelines to meet urgent ethical issues, one wonders whether ethicists and digital media practitioners would agree with his ethics priority listing.

Global ethics scholars have also been concerned with the relationship between religious and secular global ethics (Sullivan & Kymlicka 2007), digital religion and media ethics (Johns 2012) and the role of spirituality in global ethics at large (Masaeli 2017). There are collections of digital media global ethics gathering researchers from different countries and diverse religious, and cultural backgrounds, across disciplines and research fields. Such publications present theoretical and practical ethical treatments and competing discourses, enriching the current ethics debates and enhancing intercultural conversations. (Gyekye, 2011; Fortner & Fackler 2014; 'A'yish & Shakuntala 2016)

## **Islamic Ethics**

A rapid (Im having trouble understanding what "rapid" literature is) literature review of Islamic ethics reveals the broad and complex multicultural range of vibrant and competing, traditional, renewed traditional, critical, feminist and applied, minority ethics,



comparative and global perspectives. Islamic ethics has become an unavoidable section of reviews and comparative studies of religious ethics and practices (Kelsay 2005; Bucar & Stalnaker 2016; and Schweiker 2012), and more specifically, comparative contemporary Muslim and Christian ethics (Winckler 2012).

Renowned scholars have reviewed the literature on the origins and history of Islamic ethics (Reinhart 2012) and reached new insights in classical Islamic ethics (Vasalou 2016 and Kane 2017). Other researchers have published important overviews of Islamic ethics addressed to large audiences (Sajoo 2012; Al-shaar 2014 and Mardini 2017) and critical accounts of contemporary multicultural competing Islamic ethics theories and practices worldwide (Cornell 2007, Kamrava 2007; Ramadan 2009; Moosa 2012, Sachedina 2012; Denny 2012; Moosa 2015; Hefner 2016; and Ourghi 2019).

More specifically, scholars have addressed the dynamic relations between Islamic ethics and Islamic law<sup>7</sup> (Murata & Chittick 1994; Rahman 1985; Hourani 1985; Syed 2017; Filali-Ansary 2018; and Sajoo 2018); ethics and sufism (Chiabotti & al . 2017); and Islamic ethics and art (George 2010). An emergent feminist Islamic theoretical and practical ethics focus on pluralist and competing discourses in a global era (Kynsilehto 2008; Hidayatullah 2014; Taylor 2016; Lies 2017; Anwar 2018 and Ayubi 2019). At a limited scale, in comparison, scholars concerned with Muslim minorities in general have enriched the literature by focusing on the dynamic, innovative and controversial field of Islamic minority law, *fiqh al-aqaliyyat* radically reshaping global Islamic ethics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Abou El Fadl 1994 ; Césari 2004; Rohe 2007 and Hellyer 2009).

When it comes to identifying Islamic values, embedded in the Qu'ran, Sunna, and inductive reasoning, Azim Nanji describes Islamic ethics foundational value, *taqwa* as “god-wariness, one of the most highly praised human qualities in the Koran”. Closely connected to *ihsan* as the ideal ethical value, a quranic term, that occurs in its various

forms two hundred times in the Qur'an (Nanji 1991). It is a grounding value for both the individual and society, based on the most often cited quranic verses: *"O humankind! We have created you out of male and female and constituted you into different groups and societies, so that you may come to know each other - the noblest of you, in the sight of god, are the ones possessing taqwa."* (49: 11-13) more specifically, when addressing the first Muslims, the Qur'an refers to them as *'a community of the middle way, witnesses to humankind, just as the messenger (i.e. Muhammad) is a witness for you'* (2: 132) (Nanji 1991).

Moosa (Moosa 2005) presents a synthesis of the pre-islamic genealogy, epistemologies and historical trends of Islamic ethics that he roots in its Abrahamic background. While Moosa enumerates *"the discipline of ethics synonymous nomenclatures in Muslim culture... as the "science of innate dispositions" ('ilm al-akhlaq), the "science of comportment or conduct" ('ilm al-suluk) or "science of mysticism" ('ilm altasawwuf)*, he rapidly concludes that the emphasis is almost exclusively focused on the formation and cultivation of individual practices. I disagree with this interpretation and I will later argue how Muhammad Iqbal, reconceptualized the individual and collective ethics dynamic. Moosa summarizes the epistemological development of EI: *"two terms, rich in semantic signification, shape the debate on ethics: "character" (khuluq, pl. Akhlaq) and "civility" or "etiquette" (adab, pl. Adab). The word khuluq has deep roots in arabic culture and its use is preserved with its early semantic field. The prophet Muhammad is described as being given an "extraordinary noble character" (Qur'an 68:4). The word khuluq, say lexicologists, means "religion" (din), "nature" (tab') and "natural disposition" (sajiyya), "chivalry" (muruwwa) or even "habit" ('ada). Essentially, says the Indian encyclopedist Tahanawi (d. Ca. 1777), khuluq "is a habitus or disposition (malaka) with which the spirit produces certain acts spontaneously, without need of reflection, seeing, and pretense." The other key word is adab, meaning right conduct or norms of right conduct. A standard definition is: right conduct (adab) constitutes*

*the sum of prudential knowledge that shields one from all error in speech, acts, and character. It signifies all the arabic sciences, for they cumulatively promote etiquette. Adab is thus a habitus or disposition (malaka) that protects one from disgrace. A perfectly urbane and cultivated person (adib) is one who possesses this habitus. Therefore it is said: "the way to ultimate reality is through [the practice of] right conduct." (khanzada 1980: 4) any disciplinary practice that results in the cultivation of a virtue is called norms of right conduct. Ethics is thus the cultivation of this disposition through education and practice.*

After dealing with the significant development of ethics in subsequent Islamicate cultures, Moosa evokes the prophet Muhammad as the model for the Muslim individual and community, with reference to the Qu'ran "indeed you have been endowed with a noble character" (Qur'an 68:4) and Tradition. He summarizes how ethics individual and collective agency is institutionally rooted in Muslim thought and practices *numerous prophetic reports place an extraordinary emphasis on the need to cultivate good character, husn al-khuluq. It appears as if the aesthetic quality of beauty (husn), inherent in good, serves as an antidote to sinful behavior. Muslim ethics is a responsibility-based ethics, invoking reciprocal rights and duties. Thus a range of social actors from parents, teachers, and professionals to every individual is an active moral agent. Ethical discourses are part of all the major disciplines of religious thought, ranging from the teachings of the Qur'an, the prophetic reports, juridical literature, theology, and mysticism to philosophy and literature proper (Moosa 1985).*

Moosa enumerates the leading early ethicists categories and argues how for many: *"Law and ethics are inseparable"*: Haroun Miskawayh (d. 1030), abu Hayyan al-tawhidi (d. 1023), and abual-h. Asan al-'amiri (d. 992); political ethicists, abual-h. Asan al-mawardi (d. 1058), pietist ethicists like Harith al-Muhasibi (d. 857), 'Ali bin Muhammad ibn Hazm (d. 1064), Raghib al-Isfahani (d. Ca. 1108), and Abu h. Amid al-Ghazali (d. 1111), historian 'Abd al-Rahman ibn

Khaldun (d. 1406). Haroun also stresses the impact of Sufism in Islamic ethics: *"The professionalization of the law estranged it from its deeper ethical and moral impulses. It was the mystics who tried to revive ethics in its embodied form with an emphasis on autonomous intuitive cognition or aesthetic sensibility (dhawq), cultivated through extensive ascetic practices (mujahada) and exercises in self-examination (muhasaba)".* (Moosa 2005)

In his conclusive appraisal of Modern Islamic reformist ethicists, Moosa gathers modern Muslim ethicists in one single traditionalist/ progressive instrumentalist trend and questions "the potential inventiveness of future Muslim ethicists", to meet ethical challenges, without offering a theoretical and practical alternative. Abou el Fadl, on the other hand, enumerates the diverse complex theories of modern reformist Islamic ethical framework: *"In response to the challenges of modernity, and the oppressiveness of doctrinal absolutism, a number of Muslim reformers have gravitated towards theories that focus on the instrumentalities of knowledge and law. By instrumentalities of knowledge and law, I mean theories that function on the idea of overlapping consensus as a way of establishing truth and reaching determinative results. Others have focused on empowering autonomy and personal agency while emphasizing communal pluralism. Still others emphasize cumulative communities of interpretation and tradition as an instrumentality to devising a way out of the problems of modern alienation and relativism. Other theorists have adopted pragmatic and positivist approaches where they place a great deal of emphasis on shared public interests or the public good... All of these approaches are instrumentalities for a functional solution to the problem of knowledge and truth; however, they are philosophically and intellectually non-responsive* (Abou el Fadl 2015).

Abou el Fadl does not only critically convene about this instrumentalist reformist trend, but he elaborates a tentative ethical framework (Abou el Fadl 2005 and 2014), apparently embedded in

Muhammad Iqbal's legacy. Moosa and Abou el Fadl's general conclusions about Islamic ethicists might seem a bit hasty, with regard to the complex orientations expressed in Islamic feminism, post-colonial, global; and emerging innovative Islamic applied ethics, in particular Islamic media ethics that we are addressing next.

### **Islamic Media Ethics: IME**

Islamic media ethics, IME can be considered as part of the diverse applied Islamic ethics and applied ethics at large. Defining IDE is complex and revealing of the challenging issues pertaining to Islamic ethics in general, and to applied ethics in Muslim and non-Muslim contexts. Scholarship in this interdisciplinary field is emerging in parallel with the great concern with digital media issues and disinformation, FN, hate speech, Islamophobia, etc. A rapid display of IME literature review below confirms an expected wide range of its geographical and virtual landscape, competing theories and applications. Hence, some scholars contribute in comparative media ethics from an Islamic perspective (Hafez 2003), others study the ethics of Muslims' representation in digital media (Sisler 2013) and Islamic ethics in digital religion (Echchaibi 2013). Muslim media scholars contribute to Islamic media ethics and engage processes of reconceptualization of *bid'a*, as an innovation and creativity theory (Zarif & al 2013).

Islamic Feminist ethics applied to media ethics deal with competing digital discursive practices, empowering women in some contexts, and inaugurating radical changes in women's positions in virtual space (Jones 2010; Mir-Hosseini 2016; Kraeplin 2017; Makboul 2017; Pramiyanti & Baulch 2017; and Piela, 2018). In her study of women and the internet, nisa applies a critical IME theory. The internet has enabled Muslim women users more visibility, freedom and diversity of expression, and indentity construction extensions: *"the proliferation of diverse cyberactivism expressions ranging from those who use the internet and social media platforms to voice their concerns*

*regarding gender inequality to those who use it to accentuate their versions of true expressions of Islam the digital platforms have also led to an increased fragmentation of authority in Islam. Islamic discourses are no longer monopolized by religious elites or ulama, especially male elites. The online environment has boosted the presence of the voices of these women – voices that reflect diverse, segmented, and fragmented Islamic public spheres”* (Nisa 2019). Emergent Islamic feminist ethics informs scholarship on Islamic media ethics, and media ethics at large. Further research in the context should be encouraged to shed light on the changing Islamic ethical theories and practices, in comparison with other religious and secular ethics framework. Such global comparative ethics and media ethics should enhance the research scope and pertinence on privacy, public/private, sacred/ non sacred, men/ women, individuals and community relations, which are currently being reconstructed, and in some cases, radically renegotiated in the cyber world.

Muslim media scholars and professionals have been involved in current debates on media ethics and the required productions of applied codes and guidelines, and have contributed in countering disinformation, FN and other alarming media issues. Global media ethics has been enriched by the significant global intergovernmental institutional guidelines and codes of ethics pertaining to human rights: *The Islamic Media Charter* adopted by the First International Islamic Mass Media Conference, in Jakarta on 1-3 September 1980. *The Islamic Mass Media Charter* is an integral part of *the Jakarta Declaration*. *The 1999 OIC/Cairo Declaration on Human Rights In Islam*. Cultural diversity (*UNESCO universal declaration on cultural diversity* 2001), and the OIC organization of Islamic cooperation agreement on cultural diversity (*ISESCO Islamic declaration on cultural diversity* 2004) and on the ISESCO endorsement of religious dialogue (*The ISESCO/IFO Fes call for the dialogue of cultures and religions, Appel de Fès pour le dialogue des cultures et des religions* 2013).

Salam Abdallah analyzes ICT issues from Islamic ethics perspectives and inquires about the potential application of Islamic ethics in moralizing ICT and contributing to Information ethics. He investigates how Islamic law and ethics can be applied in the field of information ethics. He selects "Islamic legal maxims" that can possibly be implemented in ICT. He concludes that his study "shows glimpses of the shari'ah laws and reasoning processes of the Islamic ethical methodology for deriving moral judgment as used in the Muslim world to bring benefits and repel harms. The system respects both collective and individual's perspectives and can be conceived as being a synthesis between deontological, consequentialist and virtue ethics theories." Salam stresses the potential of applied Islamic ethics to ICT research as an alternative to "moral imperialism" and a contribution to "universal ethical theories" (Salam 2010). While communication and media ethics scholarship is predominantly grounded in western ethics, a new trend of innovative applied studies has been initiated by Salam among a young generation of Muslim media academics and scientific experts, with reference to the Islamic ethical/legal framework (Tahir & Sohail 2012).

### **Muhammad Iqbal's Ethics: alternative responses to FN and media issues**

To address FN and Iqbalian Islamic ethics, we have comprehensively discussed the impact of fn and its issues in present day global public discourse. Moreover, we have briefly covered current scholarship orientations on western and global media ethics, Islamic ethics and Islamic media ethics to pave the way for a contextual approach to Muhammad Iqbal's ethical framework as a theoretical and practical alternative, contributing to global media ethics, fn and media issues in the changing the digital era. In this section, i argue that Muhammad Iqbal initiates a theoretical and practical framework that proves creative, innovative and potentially enriching for the current

debates on fn and media ethics debates pertaining to religious/ secular; western/ Islamic; universal/ local; imperial/plural dichotomic theories.

Muhammad Iqbal is a versatile and charismatic unique figure. He has been duly celebrated over a century, worldwide as the spiritual father of Pakistan (syed 2017), the committed political leader, the leading 20th century poet and philosopher of the muslim world. A selective literature review on current Iqbalian scholarship in the English language mainly, reveals an enduring interest and new insights on his thought, poetics and political activism. The cumulative scholarship on his prolific production is broad, complex and pluralist in nature; and remains challenging on different levels. As follows a sampling of some of the recurrent research topics on iqbal: transnational comparative studies (lahbabi 1964; williams & bengtsson 2018; diagne 2011; diagne 2011a and; ozturk, 2018). Iqbal in recent studies on religion, political science, and philosophy, pluralism (hillier & koshul 2015; moosa 2015; and yaqin 2016). Anthologies of iqbal in world studies (malik 2015). Iqbal's ethics and political thought (Iqbal & hashimy 1988). Iqbal's educational philosophy (roslan & bahroni 2011; and karodia 2016) Iqbal's arabic translations and comparative scholarship in the arab world (Hanafī & Iqbal 2009; 'imārah 2012; and jawwād 2017) and french scholarship on iqbal (bidar 2010). Surprisingly, there has been scarce concern with a thorough and systematic investigation in Iqbal's ethical framework and at a lesser degree with his project of applied ethics in communication. (All author's names should start with caps)

### **Iqbal's theory of ethics**

Iqbal's ethical framework is inherently grounded in Islamic tawhid and shahada, testimonial unicity: la ilaha illa allah, muhammad 'abduhu wa rasuluhu: "there is no god but god and Muhammad is his prophet". On this qur'anic basis, Iqbal elaborates a tripartite ethical doctrine of the individual ego; the collective ego; and the perfect man



in relation to the perfect community. His vision of man in relation to the community and to god is shaped by the negation of submission to any deity shirk, of any kind; submission to none but god, and the actualization of servitude, represented by the prophet, the perfect model, ‘abduhu. In this schema, iqbal situates man and society in a continuous and dynamic process of elevation and perfection, through the three dimensions of religion, din: islam, iman, and ihsan.

**A table of Iqbal’s ethical theory**

- 1) Obedience of God’s law: Islam
- 2) Mastering the ego: affirming one’s individuality, iman
- 3) The perfect man: god’s vice-gerent, ihsan

Obeying the law Ego love
Mastering the ego The other spiritual poverty
Vice- gerence God immortality

Iqbal repeatedly reminded (this doesn’t sound right, can say “focuses” or “emphasizes”) of his re-conceptualization of the word ego, as a foundational notion in his ethics of individual and collective life in relation to the ultimate Reality:

“In my writings the word *khudi* (ego) is used in two meanings, ethical and metaphysical... If you have found any of my poems un which the concept of khudi is used in the meaning of pride or haughtiness, then please inform me about it ... I have shown only that side if the problem of self the knowledge of which was, according to my ideas, necessary for the Indian Muslims of this age, and which everybody can understand”. (Maktubat II – 238 (letters) in Gabriel’s Wing. A. Schimmel p104)

Iqbal clarifies his rewording of the ethical ego in opposition to traditional Sufi language and western thought:

“The ideal of Islamic Mysticism according to my understanding if not the extinction of the “I”. The Fana un the Islamic mysticism means not extinction but complete surrender of the human ego to the

Divine Ego: The ideal of Islamic mysticism is a stage beyond the stage of fana and baqa which from my point of view is the highest stage of self-affirmation. When I say "Be as hard as the diamond" I do not mean as Nietzsche does callousness of pitilessness. What I mean is the integration of the element of the ego so that it may be able to obstruct the forces of destruction in its means towards personal immortality". (Thoughts and reflections of Iqbal. Ed. by S.A. Vahid p244)

For Iqbal, his ethical doctrine is revolutionary:

"O Bell of the caravan, awake to awake the travelers" (Secrets of Ego p58)

"My dynamic pen,

By dint of high thought,

Cast abroad the secrets

Of these nine curtains

That a Drop may become

Co-equal with the Sea

And the grain of Sand,

Grow into a Desert!" (Secrets of Ego p60-61. Even though the Qur'an mentions seven skies, these include "Arsh" and "Kursi" they are therefore nine).

"I unveiled the mystery of "Ego"

And revealed the Secret

Of the miracle!

Eventually, Love chiseled me

And I became a Man

Now I gained the Knowledge

Of the origin and nature

Of the Universe !" (Secrets of Ego P58-59)

Once the stage of obedience is realized, mastering the ego provides man with strength and power: "The entire structure of Existence is and effect of "Ego",

And whatever you see in the world

Is a secret of Ego !" (Secrets of Ego p63)

"If the gem had been more

Solid and Strong by nature

It would not have suffered "wounds" !" (Secrets of Ego p69)

However, Iqbal rejects blind and passive and unfruitful obedience: "It is here that religion becomes a matter of personal assimilation of life and power; and the individual achieves a free personality, not by revealing himself from the fetters of the law, but by discovering the ultimate source of the law within the depths and his own consciousness" (Reconstruction p.181)

The perfect Ego's, al insan al-kamil, is the highest rank in the universe:

"Since the existence of Universe

Depends upon the Power of "Ego",

The Life on an Individual

Is in proportion to this Power!

When a Drop learns the lesson

Of "Ego" by heart,

It makes its worthless existence

A valuable pearl!" (Secrets of Ego p67)

"Throughout the entire gamut of being runs

the gradually rising note of egohood until it

reaches its perfection in man" (The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam p71-72)

In Iqbal's theory of ethical knowledge, man has the potential to reach perfection through improving his knowledge of the ecologic sacredness of nature, history and the self:

"The Qur'an sees signs of the Ultimate of Reality in the sun, the moon, the lengthening out of shadows, the alternation of day and night, variety of human color and tongues, the alternation of the days of success and reverse among peoples', - in fact in the whole of nature as revealed to the sense – perception of man. And the Muslim's duty is to reflect on these signs and not to pass by them 'as if he is deaf and

blind', for he who does not see these signs in this life will remain blind to the realities of the life to come'." (The Reconstruction of religious thought in Islam p.127, 128 cf. Secrets of collective life p159,166. Cf. Qur'ân (III, 187,188).

"Knowledge must begin with concrete. It is the intellectual capture of and power over the concrete that makes it possible for the intellect of man to pass beyond concrete" (The Reconstruction of religious thought in Islam p.131)

In this context, Iqbal is a fervent advocate for science and scientific progress regulated by ethics of public maslaha: "I believe that Empirical Science – Association with the visible – is an indispensable stage in the life of contemplation. In the words of Qur'an, the Universe that confronts us is not "Batel" (vain). It has its uses, and the most important use if it is that the effort to overcome the obstruction offered by it sharpens our insight and prepares us for an insertion into what lies below the surface of phenomenon... A keen insight is needed to see the non-temporal behind the perpetual flux of things." (Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal p.114).

Yet, Iqbal asserts that reason should be completed with intuition: "In the interest of securing a complete vision of reality, therefore, sense-perception must be supplemented by the perception of what the Qur'an describes as 'Fuad', or 'Qalb' i-e Heart". (Reconstruction p15)

In sum, Iqbal's ethics theory is embedded in his valorization of practical ethical action: "Death of heart of religion:

"Our heart has died

And religion died

By its dying.

We bought two deaths

In one bargain" (Gift from hijâz p204)

"Contemplation without action is death" (Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal p78).

"In great action alone the self of man can become united with God without losing its own identity, and transcends the limits of space and time. Action is the highest form of contemplation" (The Reconstruction of religious thought in Islam p.154)

Iqbal's applied ethics: institutional codes and guidelines

Iqbal launches a practical radical ethical framework for the three institutions that are responsible, according to him, for the backwardness and the suffering of the individual and the community. They are accused of spreading ignorance, injustice, inequality and despotism.

### **The scholar/mulla**

Iqbal advocates a reform in of the institutional role of the scholar. He condemns his vices of stubborn ignorance, laziness, hypocrisy, and unprofessionalism.

"Short of vision, blind of taste, an idle gossip,  
His hair splitting arguments have fragmented the community,  
Seminary and Mulla, before the secret of the book  
Are as one blind from birth before the light of the Sun." (Javid Nama p 65.)

"The mullah's resurrection is the splitting of the tomb and  
the trumpet's blast,

Tumult arousing love itself the dawn of resurrection." (Javid Nama p65.)

### **The politician**

Iqbal denounces the ignorance, greediness, unfaithfulness and immoral selfishness of illegitimate politicians, ready to betray their communities. He advocates that politicians should become knowledgeable about the Islamic constitutional principles so as to be able to implement them for the benefit and the political freedom of the citizens:

"The gaze of Muslim kings was solely fixed on their own dynastic interests and so long as these were protected, they did not hesitate to sell their communities to the highest bidder" (Stray Reflections in Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal p58).

"But it is absolutely necessary for these political reformers to make a thorough study of Islamic constitutional principles, and not to shock the naturally suspicious conservatism of their people by appearing as prophets of a new culture. They would certainly impress them more if they could show that their seemingly borrowed ideal of political freedom is really the ideal of Islam, and is, as such the rightful demand of free Muslim conscience" (Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal p 75)

Iqbal announces (could use a different word) another practical requirement for the political leader who must implements the Islamic values of equality, solidarity, and freedom:

"The essence of tawhid, unicity of God... is equality, solidarity and freedom. The state from the Islamic standpoint is an endeavor to transform these ideal principles into space-time forces, an aspiration to realize them in a definite human organization. It is in this sense alone that the state in Islam is a theocracy, not in the sense that it is headed by a representative of God on earth who can always screen his despotic will behind his supposed infallibility"

## **The mystic**

In his famous letter to Nehru: "Reply to questions raised by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru" (Thoughts and Reflections of Iqbal. p 257-290.), Iqbal approves with no doubt that the major reformists such as Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Jamal ad-Din Afghani, Muhammad Abdu and Zaghlul Pasha had focused all their energy to incite revolts against mystic trends (Ibid p 278).

"Today one will scarcely find any more ignorant Muslim than the mystical leader" (Maktubat. I p231, 1938 in Gabriel's wing p146)

## **FN in Iqbalian ethics perspective**

In our previous sections devoted to FN and media ethics issues, we remarked that many researchers convene that countering FN should involve a collaborative effort of professionals from different sectors, such as scholars, politicians, business, news industry, communities and individuals. (This sentence is too long and needs to be rephrased also) We argue that Iqbal's critical approach to three main institutions of scholars, politicians, and spiritual leaders, and proposal for a radical reform of their institutional ethical framework is potentially useful for resolving FN and media issues in general. A drastic re-conceptualization of the social responsibilities of the three institutions would lead to a reform of their respective roles for the public good, maslaha/agency.

Muhammad Iqbal was deeply concerned with the predicament of his own community and the world community, because of imperialism, prevailing intolerance, injustice, unethical scientific progress, and despair at the loss of human dignity. His ethical framework is not only addressed to the Muslims but to the

"Religion which is higher manifestations is neither dogma, nor priesthood, not ritual, can alone ethically prepare the modern man for the burden of the great responsibility which the advancement of modern science necessarily involves, and restore to him that attitude of faith which makes him capable of winning a personality here and retaining it hereafter. It is only by rising to a fresh vision of his origin and future, his whence and whither, that man will eventually triumph over a society motivated by an inhuman competition, and a civilization which had lost its spiritual unity by its inner conflict of religious and political values" (Reconstruction p189). His ethical framework is not only addressed to the Muslims but to the global community. In that sense, we could easily affirm that his project is still relevant and valid for current global ethics, media ethics and FN in particular.

## Recommendations

Hence, I tentatively recommend an experimental application of Iqbal's broad ethical institutional guidelines to FN issues: (This sentence needs to be changed) For example, "The following are recommendations based on Iqbal's ethical institutional..."

- The scholar: The necessary paradigm shift of knowledge and current processes of knowledge production should be informed by Iqbalian ethics of a dynamic interaction of reason and intuition. Scholars from different academic fields should be responsible for collaborative theorizing and implementing innovative strategies and curricula for digital practitioners, not only in digital literacy but also in religious literacy, intercultural literacy, etc.
- The politician: Iqbal's Islamic ethical re-conceptualization of agency, *maslaha* in a global context, tends towards a dialogic, dynamic and consensual of national and global welfare. Politicians are required to address *maslaha*, public interest without discrimination, to decrease the digital gap, and regulate technology business mischievous monopoly to guarantee justice, equality, freedom of expression, at local and global levels. They should enact policies to foster digital peace and welfare.
- The spiritual/religious leader: Iqbal's re-conceptualization of the pursuit of beauty, *ihsan*, achieved after the stages of God's submission and mastering the ego's vices, endorses enlightened vice-gerant action to reach the ultimate Reality. In this stage, man and society are endowed with the power to master their destiny. The responsibility of the spiritual/religious leader according to Iqbal is to engage with other scholars in a scientific study of religion and religious experience to develop a spiritual pedagogy and ecology of the digital era for the benefit of world citizens.
- Last but not least, other institutional practitioners should be involved and coordinate with the politicians, the scholars and the religious leaders for a rapid and efficient countering of the



negative issues of digital media and FN in particular, so as to foster a peaceful, dynamic and inclusive global digital space.

## Conclusion

**This paper explores the issues related with FN and the current debates in media.... It presents an Islamic.**

In this paper, I first reviewed FN issues and the current debates in media ethics and Islamic ethics. I have attempted to present an Islamic Iqbalian theoretical ethics based on the dynamic character building of the individual and collective ego. I have also dealt with Iqbal's practical ethics addressed to the politician, the scholar and the religious leader. To address FN, I have recommended an experimental application of Iqbal's ethical radical reform of the political, educational and religious institutions. I consider that Muhammad Iqbal's ethics is a unique project that could be potentially valid for present day global media ethics and FN in particular. Further scholarship on Iqbal's ethics is required to analyze to what extent, Iqbal's spiritual media ethics, seemingly dialogic, universal and interculturally oriented can counter FN and foster freedom of speech, privacy, human rights and human dignity in the digital era?

I don't think you should end with a question.

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- <sup>4</sup> Fakenewschallenge.Org
- <sup>5</sup> At the university of toronto, the project: (<https://envirodatagov.org/event-toolkit/>) and the politics of evidence working group (<https://politicsofevidence.wordpress.com/>). A group of harvard university scholars initiated a blog under the title 'first 100 days: narratives of normalization and disruption', to monitor "the recent us presidential election and related electoral trends around the world and 'issues of expertise and democracy'" (<http://First100days.Stsprogram.Org>, Including The Call For Proposals For Posts).
- <sup>6</sup> *Media ethics bibliography*. A list of more than 400 books devoted to media ethics and accountability systems. <https://accountablejournalism.org/references>.
- <sup>7</sup> Quraichi warns against the very common confusion between *Fiqh* and *Shari'a*: "*This epistemological foundation is reflected in the terminology used in classical Islamic legal literature. Muslim jurists referred to the collective body of their ijihad conclusions as "fiqh," derived from the Arabic word "faqaha," meaning "to understand." The word "shari'a," on the other hand (which is today often translated into English as "Islamic law") denotes the ultimate law of God which the jurists' fiqh understanding always strives to achieve, but which*

*remains ultimately unknowable in this world... the body of fiqh as a whole is the physical collection of rules and principles developed by Muslim legal scholars seeking to articulate god's law (shari'a) in concrete terms" (Quraishi 2006).*

# UNDERSTANDING THE INTERNATIONAL PROPAGANDA PATTERNS AGAINST PAKISTAN

DR. TAHIR MAHMOOD AZAD\*

## Abstract

*There is a deliberate propaganda campaign against Pakistan at an international level. There are various propaganda patterns to change the global perception about Pakistan. From national security to individual security, Pakistan is confronting numerous challenges. Herman Edward, Noam Chomsky and Oliver Barrett's propaganda models better explain the contemporary propaganda patterns and its implications for Pakistan. Foreign-sponsored media houses are continuously portraying Pakistan's image as a declining state. Additionally, there is "buying out" of individual journalists to target Pakistan's sensitive matters in the name of freedom of expression. Journalistic stories, a series of propagandas, one-sided approach and biased research studies have been conducted to malign Pakistan's image. India's strategy to isolate Pakistan raises many questions on its involvement in international media campaigns against Pakistan. However, it is a proven fact that India has been actively involved in*

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*portraying Pakistan as a terrorist state on one side and on the other side sponsoring terrorism to create unrest in the country. This paper comprehensively discusses the international propaganda patterns and its implications for Pakistan's national security. This paper further suggests policy options for Pakistan to counter these propaganda campaigns and how it should bring up its international image.*

**Keywords:** *Propaganda Models, Pakistan, India, International media houses, Implications, Policy Options,*

## **Introduction**

To attract people, to win over people to that which I have realised as being true, that is called propaganda.

**Dr. Paul Joseph Goebbels**

Propaganda has always remained a political strategy or war tactic throughout the human history, however, propaganda techniques and patterns have evolved with the passage of time. The ultimate objective is to achieve the anticipated goals. Propaganda techniques and persuasive tactics have been utilized to inspire people to accept, trust and lead them to the desired direction whilst at the same time demoralize the enemies and their people. It is a basic instinct of humankind that they develop different strategies and plans to win, control and sustain their position.

Media proxy wars have blown out of proportion and these attempts are beyond a states' control. Additionally, social media particularly WhatsApp, Facebook, Google, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter etc. have added fuel to the fire. Fake news, repetition of false statements, harmful and treacherous contents are easily accessible to mobile and internet users. They are adding frustration, anxiety, anger and hate towards their opponents. Use of media propaganda, fake news and disinformation have become critical organs against

opponents especially during election campaigns and wars as they have serious implications. Post-Truth politics and digital transformation has comprehensively changed the global politics. Post-Truth politics wave, whereby facts and evidence are relegated to secondary importance, and talking points in media, especially social media, become the primary consideration. Oxford Dictionaries declared “post-truth” its 2016 word of the year, and defined it as “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.”<sup>1</sup> The World Economic Forum (WEF) has recognized a global danger from “digital wildfires,” in which the viral spread of deceptive and fake information can result in grave real-world consequences.<sup>2</sup> In her speech in December 2016, Hillary Clinton stated that “it is now clear that so-called fake news can have real-world consequences”.<sup>3</sup> In adverse case situations, states use fake news to spread propaganda against rivals to achieve a psychological advantage. After the September 11, 2001 incident, the New York Times published a series of articles including an account in 2001 that was “never independently verified” of a camp where “biological weapons were produced”.<sup>4</sup>

A very recent case scenario, where after the Pulwama attack in Indian Occupied Kashmir (IOK) on February 14, 2019,<sup>5</sup> the Indian media proves it is the BJP’s propaganda machine.<sup>6</sup> Pakistan has always remained in the mainstream global politics because of its geostrategic location and also as one of the strongest states in the Asian region. There are various reasons to believe that there are a series of organised propaganda campaigns against Pakistan at all levels such as national, regional and international. These campaigns are aimed to create sense of insecurity, hate, misperception and ultimately isolate Pakistan from the global politics. Pakistan’s traditional rival, India has always been involved in such activities which could harm, weak, isolate, destroy and ultimately eliminate Pakistan. As stated by Prime Minister Modi

that “we will leave no stone unturned to isolate Pakistan in the world”.<sup>7</sup> There is a history of Indian aggression against Pakistan. Since the USA with its NATO allies came into Afghanistan, India has left no space to malign Pakistan. Through its continuous media campaigns and conspiracies, India has tried to turn the Afghan people against Pakistan.

Pakistan has been trapped in the middle of hybrid warfare since 1980.<sup>8</sup> As it is clear from its meaning, hybrid warfare is not a direct war but irregular strategies, and media propaganda, fake news and information are the strategic tools of it. Pakistan is confronting numerous challenges on its multibillions China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. At regional and international levels, states like the USA take it as a major challenge to their regional and global agendas. According to Amb. (r) Munir Akram, “the hybrid war against Pakistan is focused on Baluchistan, the former FATA region, Gilgit-Baltistan and the CPEC”.<sup>9</sup> Media propaganda has been utilized among local people that “China is trapping Pakistan through this project”.<sup>10</sup>

India has an expanding, multilingual media industry which has international partners and affiliates.<sup>11</sup> Their economic interests and interdependency has provided India the chance to propagate against Pakistan.

India-USA-Israel nexus<sup>12</sup> and their control over global media is an open secret. According to Mearsheimer and Stephen, “pro-Israel organizations work hard to influence the media, think tanks, and academia, because these institutions are critical in shaping popular opinion.”<sup>13</sup> India strategic partnership with Israel has also provided it more influence in the Western media. They not only control the big media houses such as Fox News, CNN, Washington Post, BBC, New York Times and almost all Indian channels, but they also suppress other media houses for their interests.

More importantly, USA’s complete control over media reporting in wars in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya is the prime example

of the above.<sup>14</sup> Western media continuously propagated against Saddam Hussain that he has weapons of mass destruction and he would eventually use them against the West.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Western Media has also played a very biased role in projecting Afghanistan's real situation since 2001 (after the US-NATO war).

This paper intends to highlight such propaganda campaigns against Pakistan. Who is propagating against Pakistan and how are they propagating? What are the motives behind these propaganda drives? This paper also tries to explain how international media is portraying Pakistan at a global level? Additionally, the role of Indian lobbyists promoting Indian perspective to malign Pakistan is discussed.

### **Propaganda Models- Conceptual Understanding**

The mass media has established itself as a vital organ in the making and breaking of public perceptions in the contemporary world. The role of the media has become very crucial in global politics. The propaganda model has been employed to study, explore and analyses the international propaganda patterns against Pakistan. The Propaganda model presented by Edward. S. Herman and Noam Chomsky, has been used to understand how mainstream media is manipulated to project vested interests of influential actors. In 1988, Edward and Chomsky, in their book, *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, introduced five propaganda models.<sup>16</sup>

They explained that "A propaganda model emphasis on this inequality of wealth and power and its multilevel effects on mass-media interests and choices. It traces the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news fit to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their messages across to the public". Herman and Chomsky call the factors which misshape news as filters. The news is being filtered by each of

these factors before it reaches its audience or the general public. These five filters are: Size, Ownership and Profit orientation of mass media, Funding, Source, Flaks and Anti-communism. A five-filter propaganda model to explain this phenomenon is a model that fits well with the sociology of mediated communication:<sup>17</sup>

- i. The size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation;
- ii. Advertising as the primary income source;
- iii. Reliance upon information provided by government, business, and “experts” by primary sources and agents of power;
- iv. “Flak” as a means of disciplining the media<sup>18</sup>; and
- v. *Anticommunism* as a national religion and control mechanism.

These five propaganda models demonstrate understanding of the most imperative structural constraints that affect the practices of media operations. Herman and Chomsky referred to this “ideological agreement principally in the context of anti-communism.”<sup>19</sup> The global powers’ interests and competitors have not changed. Media houses and organisations, including newspapers, television (TV) and radio channels, news agencies, publishing houses, magazines and most importantly journalists are functioning under the organised agenda and economic interests. Powerful agents only project the information which is in their personal interests. State-sponsored media houses have also become a tool of political and propaganda campaigns. In Oliver Boyd-Barrett’s point of view, “today, that might be expressed as ideological convergence between the establishment and the media with respect to the supposed benefits of neo-liberal global capitalism.”<sup>20</sup> He further introduced the “sixth filter”, the direct purchase of media influence by powerful sources, or the “buying out” of individual journalists or their media by government agencies and



authorities.<sup>21</sup> By introducing the sixth filter, Oliver Boyd-Barrett has tried to highlight a new way of war against a state in modern times. In the name of the threat from Iraq's supposed weapons of mass destruction, the USA invaded the country. By late June 2003, it had become increasingly clear to most commentators that the Bush administration had lied about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq in order to justify their marched invasion.<sup>22</sup>

How are these filters being used against Pakistan? By analysing the current regional and global media campaigns against Pakistan, it has been established that the same exercises have been carried out against Pakistan. There are expert spin doctors to trim the news according to their needs. There are various motives to malign Pakistan to create its negative image. The Indian lobbyists and Western media networks are instrumental in making such propaganda against Pakistan worldwide.

Pakistan's case scenario can easily be analysed with propaganda campaigns during the last two decades. Hybrid warfare and Non-Kinetic resources have been operationalised against Pakistan. Who wants to distort Pakistan's image at an international level? In real terms, who wants to destabilise Pakistan? The international media, mostly Indian backed media organizations, has been successful in creating misperceptions about Pakistan that it is not a secure place and it has become a "safe haven" for terrorists. "There are nearly 800 licensed Indian satellite TV stations, around half of these are news-based outlets and there are around 12,000 newspaper titles."<sup>23</sup> Additionally, Indian media association with international media houses are also spreading anti-Pakistani narrative. Journalistic stories, a series of propaganda, fake news and documentaries, one-sided approach and biased research studies have been done to malign Pakistan's global image.

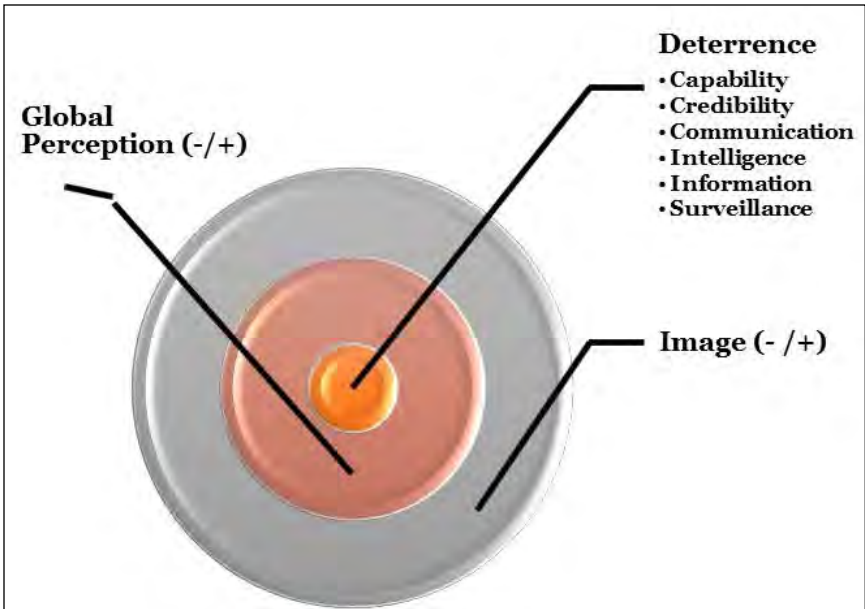
Western media is also in full swing in anti-Pakistan campaigns. Additionally, there are various books, articles and newspaper stories

that have been written during the last few years to malign Pakistan. These books and articles lack the primary source of information and usually are written on the basis of newspapers stories and hypothetical assumptions. These books and articles are based on narrative rather than reality. Most of the stuff is journalistic and the source of information is not in the public domain. It is not collected through the proper procedure required for data collection in social sciences. The propaganda model fits in explaining this situation. The international media has been trying to create a perception that Pakistan is an insecure state. According to Tom Bryder:

Persuasion is built on the ability to organize the perception of reality and experience for those who are about to be persuaded, so that these views and actions that the propagandist has established in a pre-persuasion (priming) appear natural and self-evident when a direct propaganda-message is framed.<sup>24</sup>

A state's image at the global level is very important. This helps a state to formulate its policies and strategies to engage itself with the international community. In the following figure (1), effort has been made to highlight how the media makes and breaks the perception of a nuclear weapon state:

**Figure 1: Media in Making and Breaking Global Perceptions**



In the above figure (1) “Media in Making and Breaking Global Perceptions” deterrence strategy is the center of gravity for any nuclear weapon state. There are many components which help to establish an effective deterrence. In the age of influential media, which may make or break the state’s image, global perception plays a vital role in determining the state image in the global arena. To project its soft image, states utilize media power. States also use media against their adversaries to create negative images about them. If we take the example of Israel and North Korea, it would be understandable how the media campaign changes the global perception and how various perceptions shape any state’s image. “North Korea defends its pursuit of nuclear deterrent to counter what Pyongyang deems existential threats posed by the United States.”<sup>25</sup> The next step for North Korea is to keep its nuclear weapons safe and secure to ensure effective deterrence. The international perception about North Korean nuclear

weapons is not positive and the country is thus facing global sanctions at various levels. North Korea has the capability of nuclear deterrence, but it fails to maintain its image in a “positive” way in the global community. On the other hand, Israel has non-declared nuclear weapons capability. But it has been successful in maintaining its positive nuclear image in the West in particular.

International media has portrayed Pakistan image as a single state with many serious problems. These agenda-based reporting cossetting negative impression about Pakistan. From national security to individual security, Pakistan has been described as a failed state. International news channels, media reporting, documentaries and articles are continuously spitting fake information against Pakistan and building fear and anxiety amongst people.

### **Propaganda Patterns against Pakistan**

It is very important to understand the international propaganda patterns and how they are being utilized against Pakistan? In the contemporary world politics, media has become a vital source of propaganda and particularly social media has played a dangerous role in spreading propaganda based fake news. According to Dr. Paul Joseph Goebbels, a Nazi propaganda master:

If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.

Traditionally, states were using propaganda to demoralize their opponents and gaining support, loyalty and trust of their own

people. However, in the modern time, objectives are almost the same, but propaganda patterns have been advanced. Now media wars have been essential to present negative image of the adversary to the international community and gain sympathy and moral support for national interests. Innovative technologies and tools have completely changed the propaganda strategies. Pakistan has established reliable defense capabilities to deter its traditional rival India's nuclear and conventional aggression. However, the West and India are utilizing all non-traditional and non-kinetic means to destabilize Pakistan. Understanding the present danger to Pakistan, Army Chief Gen. Qamar Bajwa has expressed that "We are now confronting hybrid conflict where focus is shifting to subversion on religious, sectarian, ethnic and social issues."<sup>26</sup> Pakistan's opponents especially India enjoys considerable expertise in media and information technology, cyber and narrative construction which includes 'fake news', subversion and sabotage. India is exploiting the ideological, ethnic and social clashes amongst Pakistan's provinces and communities, and building and encouraging different narratives about Pakistan's security institutions.

During the last two decades, innumerable propaganda tactics have been materialized to distort Pakistan's image regionally and internationally. Various propaganda patterns have been discussed to understand its implications for Pakistan. These propaganda patterns are discussed in detail below.

### **Building Misperception against Pakistan**

There are always hidden agendas to achieve through waging propaganda campaigns. Modern technologies and media outlets especially social media have completely changed the discourse of propaganda patterns. However, "communications management, propaganda, mass media shaping of public opinion and social engineering became more devastating lethal weapons than tanks or rockets."<sup>27</sup>

An effort has been made to change the global perception about Pakistan. Any single incident which can create a negative impression against Pakistan, becomes the headlines of regional and international media channels. Additionally, fake news circulates through social media for psychological impact. There are key areas which are being manipulated by global and Indian media to deteriorate Pakistan's image:

- A narrative through media campaigns has been established that Pakistan is a "safe haven" for terrorists or that Pakistan is harboring terrorists.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Pakistan has no capacity and capability to challenge these terrorists' outfits. On one side, it has been projected that Pakistan is harboring terrorists and on the other side it has been propagated that Pakistan is an insecure and dangerous place to live.
- The other concern which has been repeated in international media is that Pakistan is a declining or failing state. Pakistan is usually comprised in most ponderings of "failing states" that pose the extreme threat to international security.
- Pakistan's Military, which is the backbone of the state, has been portrayed very negatively and ruthlessly. Pakistan's military has been blamed for militancy in the region and sympathizers of non-state actors. It has also been added that Pakistan's military controls the state's institutions for the sake of its supremacy. Furthermore, Indian leadership has always blamed Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) for any incident that occurs in its territory or in Indian Occupied Kashmir.

### **Ownership/ Buying out of Media Houses & Journalists**

Media houses have become the key element of modern day propaganda warfare and propaganda has become a strategic means of hybrid warfare.<sup>29</sup> Media houses or journalists are the important

components in shaping and presenting information. These media houses are linked with various public and private businesses for economic interests. It is a fact that most of the Western media houses run agenda based programmes. The Jewish community holds roughly 60% of the media control in America which has a worldwide projection.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the biggest media company in the world was formed in 2018 by the merger of America On Line and Time Warner which hold Home Box Office (CNN, Turner Broadcasting), music (Warner Music), movies (Warner Brothers Studio, Castle Rock Entertainment, and New Line Cinema), publishing houses (Time, Sports Illustrated, People, Fortune)<sup>31</sup> and leading newspapers such as the New York Times, Wall Street Journal and other print media houses. These ownerships and their influence have strong impact in public perception building. Additionally, buying out of individual journalists for the sake of agenda-based reporting has been done during the Afghan and Iraq wars. Oliver Boyd-Barrett has highlighted this issue in his paper "Judith Miller, The New York Times, and the Propaganda Model,".<sup>32</sup> As discussed earlier, Israel has a strong influence on big international media houses and India as its strategic partner takes the benefits of this partnership. However, India also has a big media industry which comprise of nearly 892 satellite TV stations, around half of these are news-based outlets<sup>33</sup> and there are around 12,000 newspaper titles. Western and Indian media alliances have created propaganda campaigns on various issues.

### **Mis-information/Fake News: Social Media**

As media technology is advancing and social media such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Google, Instagram and WhatsApp etc. have become favourite sources of information and entertainment, fake news and misinformation has increased during the last few years. Unfortunately, social media has made it very easy to spread fake news and propaganda. Fabricated, fake and misinformation against Pakistan

is being spread through social media worldwide. Without any authenticity, million users of social media receive fake news within seconds. In 2018, it was estimated that there were 326 million users of social media in India.<sup>34</sup> These huge number of users have psychological impacts of misinformation spreading worldwide. After the Pulwama attack on February 14, 2019, the Indian government and military officials shared fabricated news and information with their people and those who were opposing official claims, were sacked.<sup>35</sup> Even Indian officials claimed that Indian Airforce has shoot down Pakistani F-16 but India could not prove its claim. Additionally, India could not prove its claim of killing 350 militants in Pakistan. There are several other examples of fake news generated by India earlier on such as the surgical strikes after the Uri attack in 2016.

### **Sponsored and Organised Media Campaigns**

There are various organised media campaigns that have been launched regionally and internationally to created anxiety, anger and fear against Pakistan. Once, Pakistan was one of the favourite tourists' destinations, but during the last two decades, Pakistan has been projected as one of the most dangerous and insecure places to visit. Although, Pakistan has been successful in breaking such narration international tourists are still in an uncertain situation and unwilling to travel to Pakistan.

Through an organised propaganda campaign, Afghanistan has been turned against Pakistan. Strong foothold of Western and Indian media has turned most of the Afghani people against Pakistan.

Moreover, there are propaganda strategies against CPEC, Baluchistan and China's friendly role in Pakistan.<sup>36</sup> Fabricated facts and figures have been circulated by Western and Indian media to sabotage the Pakistan-China economic engagement.



#### **4. Motives behind Propaganda: Objectives**

There is need to understand the motives behind these international and Indian propaganda techniques against Pakistan. These drives are meant to achieve core objectives in Pakistan. International media campaigns have slowly and gradually changed the international perception about Pakistan.

##### **Nuclear Weapons' Programme**

Nuclear weapons are the source of strategic stability in the region. Conventionally superior and mighty economic strength gives India leverage to other regional states. Pakistan has successfully deterred Indian aggression with its nuclear weapons. However, Western powers have always shown biased approach towards Pakistan's nuclear weapon programme. Various hypothetical scenarios have been developed to underestimate Pakistan's nuclear weapons capability and organised campaigns have been launched against Pakistan's nuclear weapons programme. Hypothetical assessments have been given regarding Pakistan's nuclear weapons security. Concerns have been shown by the international media and literature that Pakistan nuclear weapons could fall in the wrong hands or there could be unauthorized use of these weapons during conflict with India. Estimation regarding the numbers of nuclear weapons have been given by Western think tanks and newspapers. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has estimated that Pakistan has about 140-150 nuclear weapons.<sup>37</sup> Some other Western think tanks have also estimated a similar number. There is no credible source of this data. Furthermore, Pakistan has been labeled as the fastest growing nuclear weapon state and by 2025, it would be third largest nuclear weapon state in the world.<sup>38</sup> The ultimate objective of this propaganda against Pakistan is to terrorize the global community regarding Pakistan's nuclear weapons. However, there is no accurate

parameter to calculate the exact number of nuclear weapons of any state until this is disclosed by the state itself.

### **Indian Global Aspirations and Kashmir Conflict**

Indian leaderships have never accepted Pakistan by the core of their heart. They have always tried to destabilize Pakistan, deteriorate its international image and standing. With the help of its Western allies, economic and strategic partners, India has launched series of propaganda campaigns against Pakistan. Indian leaderships take Pakistan as a challenge to India's global aspirations. Without resolving the Kashmir dispute, India can never obtain its global agenda. Until and unless, a strong Pakistan exists, India cannot fulfil its dreams. To accomplish its objectives, India has taken various steps including sponsoring terrorism in Pakistan particularly in Baluchistan, creating unrest at the Western borders with Afghanistan and using propaganda techniques as a strategic means of hybrid warfare.

### **Pakistan-China Friendship: CPEC**

China-Pakistan economic corridor (CPEC), a multibillion project, has never been applauded by the US, other Western powers and of-course India. The United States takes China as a competitor who has the capability and capacity to replace the US in the near future. Pakistan and China are not only all-weather friends but also strategic partners. China has always supported Pakistan at an international level and has provided all its assistance during Pakistan's crisis time. CPEC is a game changer and it will start a golden era for Pakistan and also give advantage to China in the global market. CPEC is also attracting other regional powers like Russia, Saudi Arabia and Central Asian states. In this scenario, it has become unbearable to the US and India who are taking this as a challenge to their hegemony in the region as well as globally.

To sabotage the CPEC project, propaganda mechanisms have been launched by the US and India to create suspicions not only in

Pakistan but regionally and internationally. With these propaganda campaigns, the motives of the United States and India are very clear that they are not pleased with this project.

## **Consequences**

We can ignore reality, but we cannot ignore the consequences of ignoring reality.

Ayn Rand

It is a bitter reality that because of massive media propaganda worldwide, Pakistan has faced numerous challenges which ultimately have led to serious consequences. During the last two decades, non-kinetic warfare means have been carried out by some Western powers, and India has taken advantage of these propaganda campaigns. However, these campaigns have seriously affected Pakistan as discussed in detail below.

## **Negative Image and Trust Deficit**

These propaganda campaigns have created serious consequences for Pakistan's global image. Pakistan's image has been promoted as a declining state, religiously intolerant, a "safe haven" for terrorists, suppressing minorities and the most dangerous state where nuclear weapons are insecure. Pakistan has sacrificed more than any other country during the war on terror, but it did not get the proper acknowledgment and appreciation as it should have and is still being told to do "more".

State image is very important to gain global attraction in various sectors. Unfortunately, media propaganda has deteriorated Pakistan's image worldwide. As discussed earlier, a deliberate propaganda campaign has been launched to create mistrust for the State of Pakistan. Western and Indian media has continuously reported exaggerated news, incorrect facts, and misleading information against

Pakistan which has changed Pakistan's image negatively at a certain level globally.

### **Socio-Political Implications**

Propaganda campaigns also have socio-political implications within Pakistan as well. Video clips, fake news and information are circulating through the internet and social media from outside Pakistan. These campaigns are not only creating distance amongst different communities in Pakistan, but also serious reactions have been seen at various places. Even sensitive issues have been circulated to create ethnic and religious violence in different provinces.

### **Isolating Pakistan**

Indian leadership has openly stated that now India will isolate Pakistan from the global community. It will not only jeopardize Pakistan's international standing but also take military strikes within Pakistan. Somehow, Indian leadership has proved its war mongering behaviour by crossing international borders and violating Pakistan's airspace on February 26, 2019. However, Pakistan responded equally and warned for any serious consequences. Indian lobby has actively carried out its global campaigns to give Pakistan tough lessons and isolate it from the international community.

India is trying to build its narrative through diplomatic, Western allies especially the US and Israel to weaken Pakistan's international standing.

### **Policy Options**

Western and Indian propaganda joint-venture has highly affected Pakistan and it has created a difficult position for Pakistan. However, Pakistan has all the potential and capacity to counter such challenges. In the past, Pakistan has confronted various serious threats and countered them bravely. Pakistani youth is very vibrant and intelligent and the current government under Imran Khan's

premiership has a great vision to lead the country. There are a few policy options which would be useful in addressing the international propaganda campaigns against Pakistan.

### **Restructuring National Media Strategy**

There are 89 Satellite TV channels in Pakistan<sup>39</sup> and PEMRA is also issuing licenses to 76 new channels.<sup>40</sup> Additionally, there are 235 radio stations who have been given licenses in which there are 175 commercial licenses.<sup>41</sup> Media is fully independent and vibrant in Pakistan. However, Pakistan should restructure national media strategy.

Pakistani media has proved its credibility and maturity during the recent crisis with India. However, Pakistan's government should adopt a comprehensive media strategy to counter fake news, propagandas and misinformation. TV programmes, movies, talk shows should be designed to promote Pakistan's narrative.

### **Capacity Building of Personnel in Media Industry**

Media industry is rapidly growing, and huge numbers of human resources are linked with this industry which has been known as the fourth pillar of the state. However, it is the government's responsibility to facilitate them and provide them with the proper training, capacity building and educating them on the standards and code of ethics. This would help them to understand the national interests with better sense and develop standard policies to enhance the public awareness and information. Usually, untrained, unskilled and less informed media personnel do not perform well, unconsciously cross limits, and cannot project information in the way they should which is deemed to be helpful for the country. Their proper capacity building would be useful for national interests.

Languages are very important to broadcast/ convey messages to the different states. Pakistan's narrative should be promoted in different languages to the international viewers. Pakistan government

should facilitate private TV channels in providing facilitates in news and information translation into different languages.

### **Designing Regional-International Media Policy**

Pakistan should articulate its regional and media policy. By developing sturdy media policies, it would provide opportunities to Pakistan to establish its national interests accordingly. It would help Pakistan to promote its positive and healthy relations with regional and international players. A strong media policy would also be helpful in countering propaganda campaigns against Pakistan.

### **Formation of Media University/ Institutions in all Provinces**

Pakistan has a vast diversity of cultures, history, traditions and languages. Pakistani youth all over the country is very talented and intelligent. Setting up media universities and institutions would be very effective for Pakistan. They will not only produce highly trained media professionals but also be very useful in national cohesion. Later, they can also play their roles in national policies and image building.

### **Placement of Pakistani Nationals in Various International Electronic and Print Media Houses, Academic and Research Centers Abroad**

This is the most important step which Pakistan's policy makers should think about seriously. Almost, in all major international academic institutions, universities, think tanks, research centers and media houses, Indian origin people are working. They are not only systematically developing narratives against Pakistan but also bringing international media houses closer to Indian media houses. Due to this, there are many disadvantages Pakistan is confronting because of Indian lobby in the West.

Pakistan should help its nationals in inducting/ placing them in various international electronic and print media houses, academic and research centers abroad. Whenever, Pakistanis have got the

opportunities, they have proved their capabilities and potential. However, current international environment does not facilitate Pakistani origin scholars for jobs and placements. Their presence will definitely change the discourse and their interactions internationally would certainly develop the optimist approach for Pakistan and would help to build a positive image for Pakistan.

## **Conclusion**

It has become a reality that there is an organised propaganda campaign against Pakistan at national, regional and international levels. There are various implications of these propaganda campaigns, which are not only spoiling Pakistan's image but also fueling further challenges for Pakistan. In the age of digital media/ social media, fake news, sensitive and emotional contents are being utilized to misinform and misguide the public. These propaganda campaigns have very serious consequences for Pakistan in the long term. Western and Indian led propaganda against Pakistan has seriously impacted on its international relations. Pakistan should address these issues very seriously and there is a need to strategize its policies to counter them. Pakistan should promote its narrative and its methodology. Pakistan must rebuild its global image by portraying its soft image and efforts in bringing peace and stability in the region by investing in its own media houses and youth.

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# **DATA-DRIVEN WARFARE – COMPUTATIONAL PROPAGANDA AS A TOOL FOR UNDERMINING DEMOCRACY & FUELING TRANSNATIONAL CONFLICTS**

**SYED ALI SHEHRYAR\***

More than a quarter of the world's population is actively engaged on social media. The information shared on these social media platforms is susceptible to information cascading whereby people pass along information shared by others without bothering to check if it is true. At the same time, these social media platforms have the ability to segment people according to personality traits, religions and political beliefs and demographical predisposition. Used together, the social media platforms have optimized themselves in micro-targeting the right group of people with the right kind of information to ensure maximum user engagement and have allowed the free flow of information that was not possible before. One of the end results has been that falsehoods and fake content can now spread faster than before.

State and non-state actors, even individuals now have the ability to create indiscernible fake content and ensure its global outspread with tools and techniques that were previously only available to government agencies and film studios. The paper

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discusses existing as well as emerging tools and techniques in the computational propaganda arsenal that will shape future conflicts, the risks they pose to democratic processes and policy measures that governments can take to control the spread of disinformation that is becoming ubiquitously rampant.

## Introduction

Behavioral change and intelligent manipulation of habits and opinions has become an important element of a society. Governments have used propaganda to change public opinion on a policy matter, to incite war, or trade wars, among a myriad of use cases to establish hegemony over other nations.

With the evolution of the Internet and its transition from connecting organizations to connecting individuals through social media, a new channel for mass manipulation has emerged, collectively known as computational propaganda. Computational Propaganda is defined as the concurrent use of algorithms, automated tools and human oversight to purposefully “manage and distribute misleading information over social media networks”<sup>1</sup>. Fake news and fake content can now reach a wider audience at a fraction of the time it would have taken to go viral through traditional means. Malicious marketers, often at the behest of governments and intelligence agencies run junk news factories that create this fake content and use computational propaganda techniques to serve their agenda.

Perhaps an apt example to explain this predicament could be the analysis of events following the Pulwama incident.<sup>2</sup> On 26<sup>th</sup> February 2019, The Indian Airforce encroached Pakistan’s territorial airspace and claimed to have destroyed a “large militant camp” in Balakot – a part of Pakistan’s Khyber Pukhtunkhwa province. The evidence, captured by local and international non-partisan media agencies, pointed to the contrary. It was nothing but an act of aggression in futility. Yet the Indian media, without any official statements or proof reported that 300 terrorists were killed.<sup>3</sup> This

fictitious account was promoted by nearly all major Indian media outlets, including India Today, NDTV, News 18, the Indian Express, ANI and Mumbai Mirror among others.<sup>4</sup> Indian celebrities and officials augmented the efforts to spread this misinformation, fueling passions to an extent that it brought grave embarrassment to India at the end, albeit at the cost of bringing two nuclear armed nations at the brink of war.

There was method to this madness, and this method could be described as a textbook implementation of computational propaganda for mass public manipulation. For Bahartia Janata Party (BJP), the ruling party in India, the Pulwama incident was a political disaster, especially since it took place during an election year and that it highlighted the Kashmiri frustration with their Indian occupiers, their struggle for self-determination and possibly a ploy to avenge hundreds of Kashmiri civilians who have been killed in gun battles by the Indian paramilitary.<sup>5</sup> BJP, in an effort to maintain their popularity and secure another term in the office had to divert the public scrutiny from events in Kashmir, and from the allegations of corruption that were becoming so loud, built an alternative narrative with the help of their news agencies to shift the blame on Pakistan.

Through news agencies, blogs, forums and social media platforms, a completely false news – that of an Indian Airstrike destroying a major terror camp in Pakistan had become one of the most trending topics on the Internet. Criticism for the internal failings of Modi government were soon buried under praises and toxic nationalism. And while this euphoria was shortlived, it showed the true extent of possibilities that are now at the disposal of individuals and nation states.

### **Why and how does fake news spread?**

The human brain is genetically wired for optimal utilization of glucose – one of its primary energy sources. As such, the human brain positions itself to rely on past experiences, historical data or

information and analysis it can draw from other sources. This genetic makeup allows it to minimize neural synapses associated with thinking and with finding and making new neural connections<sup>6</sup>. However, this whole predicament makes the human brain susceptible to cognitive biases – the errors in judgement human beings consistently make.

It is pertinent to highlight the cognitive biases or innate human limitations that make humans susceptible to falling for fake news in the first place:

- i. **Blind spot:** It is what makes people think that their opinion is balanced and without bias.
- ii. **Third-person effect:** People have a strong tendency to believe that mass communicated media messages affect others but does not affect them.
- iii. **Authority bias:** The tendency to attribute greater accuracy to the opinion of an authority figure without authenticating the veracity of that opinion and being influenced by it. An example could be taken from why people believe Khadim Rizvi and whatever he says, making claims as far – fetched as seeing people rise from the grave and having interacted with ghosts and poltergeists despite questioning the authenticity of such claims.
- iv. **Confirmation bias:** The tendency to search for or interpret information in a way that confirms one's preconceptions<sup>7</sup>.
- v. **Bandwagon effect:** The tendency to believe things because many other people believe the same<sup>8</sup>. It is one of the reasons fake news spreads so quickly within social networks.
- vi. **Availability cascade:** Availability cascade is a self-reinforcing process in which a collective belief gains more and more plausibility through its increasing repetition in public discourse. This is the reason behind how fake information goes viral the more it is shared.

- vii. **Continued influence effect:** The tendency to believe discredited information even after it has been corrected<sup>9</sup>.
- viii. **Hostile media effect:** The “hostile media effect” happens when opposing partisans believe independent news coverage of an issue by a non-partisan entity to be biased against their side and views.

These biases and shortcomings in the way humans analyze information have existed since long, which is why fake news is not a new phenomenon. Social media has accelerated the ability for fake news to become viral at a rate that was not conceived of before. And the algorithms that govern modern interactions on the internet can be gamed by experts with the right tools to ensure the spread of disinformation becomes faster than the ability to curtail or control its spread.

To understand how fake news spreads, one needs to understand what the modern day propagandists have – that the cognitive biases that exist in human reasoning compel them to experience the world through sources available to them than through direct interpretation. They understand the possibilities that exist with having 4 Billion internet, 3.2 Billion social media and 5 Billion mobile phone users<sup>10</sup>. To change the perception of a greater proportion of these hyper-connected users, a propagandist or curator of fake news will manufacture fabricated stories, documents posited as leaked by “anonymous sources” and rely on rhetoric. The propagandist will share this information with their immediate network and will get endorsements from authority figures that share their partisan views, often through these authority figures sharing the fabricated information within their networks. Algorithms that govern social networks get to decide what is shown to its users. As they are designed to ensure a user sees only those links and media that is in line with their views, the fabricated news ends up on their social feed. As it aligns with their beliefs, they share it further and propagation



continues until it becomes viral. This mechanism creates a perceived state of the world that flips the views and preferences of individuals, and also serve to bring those individuals whose views can easily be swayed within their partisan perspective.

Computational propagandists go a step further. They model individuals, groups and communities through the vast amounts of data they generate. Their demographics, political and religious beliefs, buying preferences, interactions on social media, credit history, debt and the place they live are some of the examples of data computational propagandists can use after purchasing it through data brokering agencies<sup>11</sup>. Based on this information, the population can be classified to fit a certain persona which can be micro-targeted with curated disinformation to play on their confirmation bias and program their beliefs in a way that makes them think about the act as one confirming their own belief set.

An apt example can be taken from the recent Brazilian presidential run. Several companies supporting Jair Bolsonaro's presidential campaign spent millions of dollars to blast targeted WhatsApp messages against his opponent Fernando Haddad. The plan was to infest WhatsApp with inflammatory rumors a week prior to voting. From there on, a chain spreading effect could be achieved with one entity forwarding these manufactured messages to everyone in their contact list and then the contacts forwarding it to theirs. Aos Fatos – a Brazilian fact checking organization crowdsourced from over 6000 WhatsApp more than 700 false or misleading posts shared on the instant messaging application. These rumors distorted at least three key categories of information by playing on human biases:

- Statements by political candidates (Bandwagon Effect)
- News of electronic voting and legislation (Authority Bias)
- The nature of protests and outcomes of opinion polls (Authority Bias)

These messages were targeted towards Bolsonaro's key constituencies: right leaning political groups, conservatives and religious people, people with libertarian views, military groups, trade and business associations. While this may just be one of the tools in an arsenal of thousands, it did help in electing Jair Bolsonaro to Power in 2018.<sup>12</sup>

## **Modern Tools and mediums of Transmission**

It is necessary to highlight the kind of tools and techniques computational propagandists use to spread misinformation.

### **Trolls**

Trolls constitute postings (made by humans or artificially intelligent auto responders) of controversial nature intended to provoke voluminous reaction and responses. It could be a frivolous contradiction of common knowledge, an insult, an attack on a person's beliefs, or a sardonic response to information or message shared by someone. The intent of a troll post is to drown the original message or conversation under a barrage of responses so overwhelming that the original message gets forgotten. A more malicious intent of a troll post is to attack the person who shares that message, relying on ad hominem argumentative strategy.<sup>13</sup>

### **Memes**

Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins describes memes as genetic "ideas, behaviors or styles that spread from person to person within a culture". In other words, anything culturally relevant on the internet that is 'share-worthy' and elicits a reaction can be defined as a meme. Memes allow people to share a message, idea or a theme in a fun and harmless way that has the ability to reach millions in an instance. The humor in memes suspends the scrutiny of premise of the text that is shared as a part of meme. Memes become a more 'memorable' way of spreading falsified information.



An anti-refugee meme purporting to show men entering the UK in 2015, when the photo was actually taken in Australia in 2013

## Bots

Bots are artificially intelligent beings that have been trained on large datasets consisting of conversations, news stories and media corpus to generate a conversational response on their own. With the advances in machine learning techniques, bots are now capable of starting conversations with humans on social media without their human counterparts realizing that they are talking to a bot.

Bots allow computational propagandists to scale their propaganda attacks. For example, a human 'handler' can train thousands of bots to spread the message they have created, share it among themselves to generate traffic around it and then ensure that it

reaches their intended human audience. Additionally, bots give the advantage of anonymity to their handler, allowing them to remain unknown.

Seasoned propagandists have trained bots with the ability to maintain parallel presence on several social media sites which lends them an aura of credibility. They are capable of mimicking human lifestyles, adhering to human – like sleep – wake cycle that defines when they will be active on social media which makes them even harder to distinguish from human generated traffic on the internet.

### **Big Data**

SAS, a leading data analysis company defines Big Data as a “term that describes the large volume of data – both structured and unstructured – that inundates a business on a day-to-day basis. But it’s not the amount of data that’s important. It is what organizations do with the data that matters. Big data can be analyzed for insights that lead to better decisions and strategic business moves.” The emphasis within computational propaganda context is on Big Data’s Achilles’ heel – the data being analyzed for decisions.

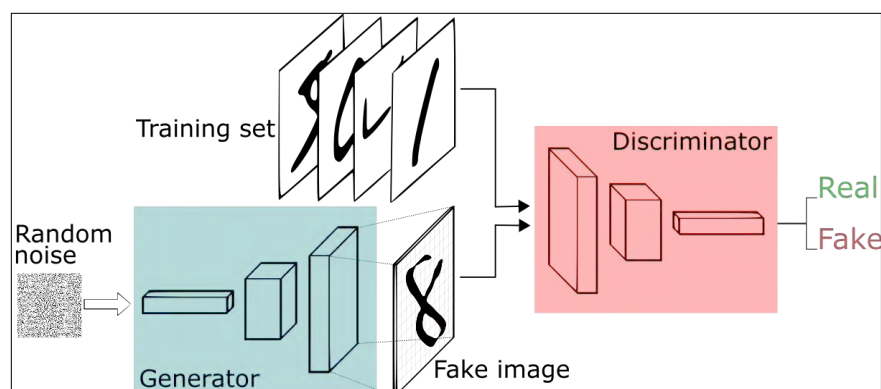
Large corporations, stock markets and even governments use Big Data tools and algorithms to drive decision making and insights. A grave problem arises when propagandists contaminate the data being fed with faulty facts that leads to poor decision making. In 2013, the Associated Press Twitter account was hacked and later used to post a fake tweet implying that President Obama was injured in an explosion in the White House. The high frequency trading algorithms interpreted the tweet as true and executed massive sell orders that resulted in \$135 Billion being shaved off the stock market.<sup>14</sup>

### **Deep Fakes**

A relatively new and one of the most potent method of creating and propagating fake news involves the use of deep fakes –

highly realistic and difficult to detect digital manipulations of audio, video and static images.

Deep fakes employ a machine learning technique known as Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs)<sup>15</sup>. An adversarial network consists of two algorithms: Generator that creates content modeled on sourced data while the Discriminator tries to find artificial content within the content created by the Generator and offers feedback in a way that both the Generator and Discriminator train against each other in a way that allows Adversarial networks to produce highly realistic yet fake content, be it audio, video or static images.



Generative Adversarial Network Framework. 2018  
<https://medium.freecodecamp.org/an-intuitive-introduction-to-generative-adversarial-networks-gans-7a2264a81394>.

Deep fakes can be used to create unusually effective lies capable of inciting violence, discrediting leaders and state institutions or even tipping elections in favor of a candidate that an adversary thinks would suit their agenda.

Audio and video data from a person of interest can be modeled and fed into a GAN to produce a deep fake, indiscernible from reality. For example, a political leader could be blackmailed into carrying out the agenda of foreign governments or even deep state actors by having their face inserted into a pornography video whilst

using adversarial networks that make it exceedingly difficult for the public to distinguish its veracity.



Cimpanu, Catalin. 2019. "Nvidia AI Bot Creates Random Lifelike Human Faces".

Deep fakes could potentially be exploited by non-state actors, such as insurgent groups to create and distribute fraudulent yet credible video or audio content to further their agenda and push for recruitment.

As a result, this particularly dangerous facet of computational propaganda puts the very essence of democracy at risk by giving undue power to state and non-state actors that are willing to use such techniques against domestic and foreign state and non-state actors.

### **Targeted Advertisements**

Targeted advertisements use in depth (and often complex) data to reach different segments of audiences separately and provides them individual messages with an exceptionally high buying probability. For example, during an election year, voters from Karachi and Sindh can be compartmentalized based on why they choose to vote for a particular party. Then, their preferences can be used to target their belief sets and persuade them to vote for a favorable candidate not belonging to the party they would have otherwise voted for.

## **Social Media**

Social Media can be used both as a tool and a medium of spreading falsified information for malicious gains. Social media platforms are susceptible to information cascades, whereby people pass along information without verifying its authenticity and making it appear more credible in the process. The end result is one of social media being an excellent channel for spreading falsehoods faster than ever before.

As a tool, social media websites are collecting troves of data on individuals and aggregating the data by binning like – minded users in a way that makes it easier for marketers to flood the right group of users with the right kind of curated message and product. Political marketers, even foreign adversaries understand this phenomenon and can game it at will.

Deceptive civic propaganda campaigns that use social media as a tool for micro targeting individuals or groups pinpoint vulnerable voters with fear mongering campaigns yet at the same time can keep those advertisements from the eyes of those appalled by such kind of messaging<sup>16</sup>.

## **Threat scenarios**

### **Fueling Sectarian violence & divide in Pakistan**

Pakistan is among those countries that rank the highest in religious, racial, sectarian and cultural intolerance<sup>17</sup>. A small incident with religious sentiments attached to it has the potential to spark violence and civil unrest at an unimaginably fast rate.

An adversary can employ the techniques and tools mentioned above to manufacture falsified information regarding the beliefs of one sects pitched against the other.

Similarly, the adversary can manufacture convincing audio and video content that adds merit to the previously released false claims. The synergistic effect of this disinformation campaign can potentially cause sectarian violence that gets difficult to control effectively.

### **Foreign Meddling in Pakistani elections 2023**

It may not come as a surprise to see foreign state actors use computational propaganda to interfere in Pakistani elections of 2023.

Pakistani population is expected to grow to 220 Million by 2023 with 57% of the population within voting age or approximately 124 Million voters would potentially participate in the electoral process. As of January 2019, there are 44 Million active internet users, about 154 Million own a mobile and about 36 Million active Pakistanis on social Media<sup>18</sup>. A growth of 5.7% annually will put the number of active social media users to 47 Million by 2023 or about 38% of the voting population.

An adversarial state actor will be in a position to target 38% of the voting population through social media and nearly the 46% of it through cellphone and instant messaging services like WhatsApp. By targeted messaging, and a coherent disinformation campaign that makes use of convincing fake content, a foreign state actor would be in a position to sway the voters towards the candidate of their choice and that serves their agenda.

### **A third adversary igniting war between Pakistan and its neighbors**

Motivated by economics or in an effort to influence the regional power dynamics, a third adversary – state or non-state, will have the ability to use computational propaganda as means



to ignite war and fuel war hysteria between Pakistan and countries hostile to it.

Perhaps the recent spat between India and Pakistan, as mentioned earlier serves as an excellent example of how it were the political ambitions of Narendra Modi and the media power houses that back him that brought Pakistan and India towards a full scale war.

## **Remedial measures**

### **Commissioning a National Cyber Command**

Pakistan faces imminent threats from India and other adversaries, including terrorist groups and criminals who with time are equipping themselves with modern tools and are using Internet and computational propaganda techniques to organize, recruit, gather intelligence, inspire action by their followers and coordinate operations. Cyberspace has become a domain that puts Pakistan under continual threat from state and non-state actors that can harm its national interests. As a result, the criticality of cyber space to every aspect of national security means cyber superiority can help Pakistan establish not only superiority in other military domains, but in preventing and curtailing the spread of disinformation and disinformation campaigns started by its adversaries.

Establishing a National Cyber Command can help Pakistan achieve and maintain superiority in the cyberspace, defend forward its national interests and pre-empt any major adventure by hostile nation states. But the benefits drawn from it would not end there. With the right set of expertise drawn from military, academia and civil law enforcement apparatus, all under one roof, a national cyber command can help monitor

social media and pre-empt the spread of fake news that negatively affects its national interests. It will also serve as an authority on cyber security environment of Pakistan, addressing systemic vulnerabilities and providing key leadership on national cyber security issues, including laying out defensive measures to protect its critical infrastructure and the networks that support it from cyber-attacks.

### **Engaging International Watchdog Agencies**

Independent international media and journalism watchdogs such as the Knight Foundation can help work with the government to develop strategies that educate people and organizations on how to distinguish between facts and fake news.

One way these agencies are countering fake news is by promoting the concept of “technocognition” – a term coined to describe the idea that by designing technology in a way that accounts for psychology of human nature, and that compels people to ask for evidence and form their interpretations instead of relying on external sources – the spread of misinformation can be reduced while the quality of information present can be increased<sup>19</sup>.

### **Employing Digital Forensics**

The concept of digital forensic techniques to analyze information on social media and the internet for authenticity is not new. The U.S Department of Defense started a project with the name of ‘MediFor’ specifically for the purpose of undertaking automated forensic investigation of material floating on the information superhighway.

The purpose of digital forensics is to automatically analyze photos, documents and videos to detect any manipulations and alterations.



DARPA

The figure above shows an orange race car that was not a part of the original image but was doctored into it. A digital forensic tool can detect such anomalies as is shown in the image on right.

Tools like these can be embedded within social media platforms and search engines to flag fake content before it makes its way to the social feeds of individuals.

### **Policy Measures**

Ministry of Information & Broadcasting and the Ministry of Information Technology can work together, perhaps a create a digital lab with the aim of introducing simple policy measures to counter fake news.

Measures as simple as educating people through public service messages about not believing everything on the internet the moment they see it can go a long way in preventing unrest

and unintended consequences that result from spread of culturally sensitive fake news. Additionally, the ministries mentioned can work with social media platforms to authenticate content and add a buffer time between the time content is shared on social media and the time it eventually appears on social media. The added buffer time can be used to verify the veracity of content and discard falsified information.

Government(s) in the future might also start to offer authenticated alibi services for high profile individuals – a service that would record every instance of their life to prove where they were and what they said at any given time in order to counter deep fakes that could be manufactured to blackmail them.

### **Blockchain and the Distributed Ledger Technology**

A Blockchain is a distributed, decentralized digital ledger that is immutable and every transaction that has ever taken place within nodes that collectively form that Blockchain network.

It would be appropriate in the future to watermark content at the time of its creation with a digital signature appended to it. The digital signature along with the content's metadata can then be logged immutably on a Blockchain ledger to verify and maintain its integrity. But a premise for development of a system of this magnitude rests on (a) recreating the whole internet or (b) upgrading the existing internet infrastructure in a way that puts decentralization and Blockchain technology at its core – a byzantine and extremely expensive task that cannot be achieved without the collective effort of all nation states.

## **Conclusion**

The hyper-connected world of today is becoming increasingly complex and people are experiencing this new world indirectly, through the Internet, social media, and the information they are flooded with from the time they wake up to the time they sleep. Pakistan is not different. In fact, when it comes to human interactions via the internet, no country or no human is different. And modern day propagandists know this – which is why they have become so effective in their disinformation campaigns. With computational propaganda, they are capable of gaming the world of today that relies on automation and algorithms to function. They can change the fate of candidates on elections, spark wars, blackmail politicians and high net worth individuals. Computational propagandists can ignite civil unrest, dissent and unwarranted revolutions with a degree of anonymity and ease that could not have been fathomed before.

Owing to its dangerous efficacy, a country like Pakistan needs to take immediate steps in the right direction to address the problem of fake news becoming the mainstream news. And Pakistan cannot do it without having the creation of a strategic body to monitor content for its integrity and authenticity, albeit whilst keeping in mind the civil liberties and freedom granted to its citizens as their constitutional right. Nevertheless, it is imperative that a strategic cyber command, one that can protect Pakistan's economy and its people from being affected by computational propaganda led disinformation campaigns, one that helps preserve peace and advance Pakistan's influence in the region be commissioned lest Pakistan and its democratic institutions get shaken to the core by its enemies.

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# **EFFECTS OF FAKENEWS AS LETHAL TOOL OF CYBER PROPAGANDA: AN OVERVIEW OF CHALLENGES FACED & COUNTER STRATEGIES**

**DR. SHAHZAD ALI\*& FARYAL SOHAIL\*\***

## **Abstract**

In this study the term “fake news” is explored and how it gives rise to an impolite social phenomenon of “manipulation” on social media. The far reaching and rigorous effects of “fake news” are lethal for society. Social media is the powerful uncontrolled medium for newest information and the practice of fake news through this medium affects the society more than any other traditional media platforms. The effects of “fake news” globally and locally are elaborated in this article. This argumentative paper mainly includes the study of fake news on social media to study the different standpoints of fake news trend on social media and various dimensions of this phenomenon are explored. During recent years of ever increasing consumption of social media, has led people to rely on this medium for news and information. The easy access and unchecked dissemination of news on social media has enabled the spread of “fake news” through this platform. This is a problem for the society because fake news

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is being generated and being disseminated by automated technology which becomes dangerous if it is over regulated. This diffusion of fake news through immediate platforms like social media works as a propaganda and risks the credibility of any kind of information. All these factors are analyzed in this research. Different cases around the Asian region are studied in this article. This exploitation of information on social media is a challenging problem which needs to be addressed. It also discusses the solutions to counter this issue. The challenges faced due to inadequate factual news reports on social media and how it can be tackled with counter measures is studied. The imposition of regulations based on cyber laws and media literacy programs are discussed to recognize the possible efforts to curb down the dissemination of “fake news” on social media. This is concluded with illumination on the cyber responsibility factor in order to be able to detect the fake news and discourage this practice.

**Key Words:** Fake News, Cyber propaganda, Social Media, Media literacy

## Introduction

In recent years, Social media platforms have outrun the traditional media with increasing number of users seeking out information and interaction. Social media platforms are easy to access as compared to other traditional media to get information. Social media is now overtaking the place of traditional media because it is easy to provide and share news on social media. Despite the fact that social media is faster and a convenient platform to get the news, there is a high probability of news content being fake or unauthentic. In this ecosystem of information on social media one can't assure the authenticity due to various possible reasons. The fake news dissemination affects people's perceptions and beliefs. It makes them

believe the unauthentic content. It changes the way individuals understand certain issues because they are manipulated with false information. We may say that fake news is created to manipulate and confuse people which ultimately risk their abilities to scrutinize any information they get.

### **“Filter Bubble”**

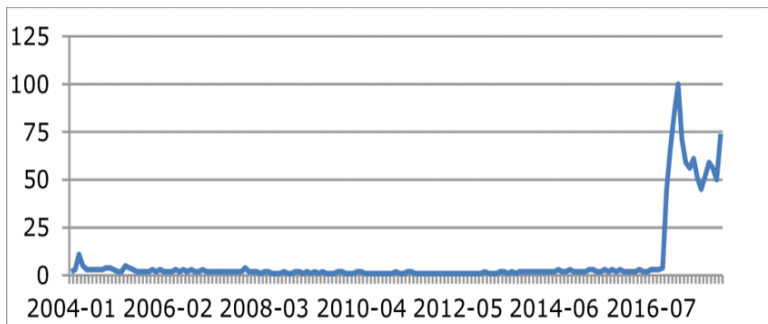
An internet activist Eli Praiser stated an idea of “Filter Bubble”, which was associated with cyber space. The concept of filter bubble means when online platforms provide the opportunity and options to use the internet according to their own behaviors and create personalized accounts with personalized content. This gives a rise to the creation of various groups and sub groups who don’t understand each other and fight because of difference of opinions. Therefore these kinds of platforms are prone to fake news and conflicting beliefs with higher probability of less scrutiny.<sup>1</sup> However, there are few conditions which may escalate the spread of fake news over social media accounts, for example; the under defined criteria for fake news and authentic news; the lack of skepticism for media content and how people don’t have the antagonistic opinions for media. There is also a factor of flooding digital information and no counter mechanism to control this information. Social media users have selective and repetitive patterns.

The term fake news is not a new phenomenon; it goes back to 16<sup>th</sup> century when printers would print the accounts of strange incidents. For example, in 1654 a news book printed the news of a monster with “goat legs, seven heads and arms with a human body”. In 1611 another story was published in a pamphlet about a woman who lived 14 years without eating or drinking. There is no way that these stories could be proved as true or provide any evidence of truthfulness.<sup>2</sup> This is the era of internet and social media have endless streams of inauthentic information. When you click on a catchy headline, you sometimes end up with manipulated content. These are

bogus stories and appear as news disseminated on internet or any other medium. This fake news is created to build up political opinions or just for fun. Even the satirical news can also be categorized as false which are published for refreshment of audiences. Fake news is totally made up content. News could either be factual but or “spun” for propaganda. There are various dimensions of fake news such as misinformation, when false news is disseminated with no intentional harm. Another aspect of false news is when disinformation is created just to cause harm.<sup>3</sup> The Edelman Trust Barometer traced an intense deterioration of trust in popular institutions like government and media. This happened after the global financial crisis in 2008. After the elections of US in 2016 and Brexit issue, 19 out of 28 countries surveyed are now categorized as “Distrusting States.”<sup>4</sup> Consequently, the fake news trend intensified and people around the globe got to know about the influence of this phenomenon after the US presidential elections and when Donald Trump got elected because of an anti-Hillary Clinton propaganda. A research<sup>5</sup> analyzed 171 million tweets from five months pre elections and 30 million tweets were from 2.2 million people linked with media forums. Out of those 25% of the tweets were not factual. This is how the tradition of fake news became a phenomenon of propaganda around the globe.

Google trends reveal that after US presidential elections in 2016, the frequency of fake news phenomenon grew abruptly. The terms of “*Alternative facts*” were created and deliberate falsifications in news material were created to influence the political landscape.

**Figure: The frequency of “Fake news” from 2011-2018.**



Source: Global Trends

### **Philosophy of Fake News and Cyber Propaganda**

Social media has strange standards of authentication. For instance, on social media platforms like Facebook, people don't always mean the things they say. There is a casual slogan on twitter saying “*A retweet is not an endorsement*”, which means when people re-share fake news intentionally, they claim that it doesn't hurt their own credibility because this news is from someone else. Somehow information looks so tempting that people can't resist sharing it even if it is false. The term “Fake News” may have different agendas behind it but it can be safely said that it is associated with illegitimate ideology and propaganda. Propaganda is a public discourse meaning to manipulate masses for political agendas or other ideologies. Propaganda is associated with various kinds of manipulation, either good or bad. Consequently, philosophy of fake news can be ambiguous but it has propagandistic traits.<sup>6</sup> Fake news requires tools to manipulate the content, for example, paid followers on social media. Similarly, online fake polls are created and sometime owners on social media are paid to take down the stories or create fake stories.

There are tools for cyber propaganda on social media platforms. Various tactics are used to make these propaganda campaigns successful like paid followers, likes etc. Owners or administrators of social media accounts/pages are forced to work

according to the terms and conditions of people involved in cyber propaganda. News stories are taken down if they are hurting any powerful elites. Fake stories are created to manipulate the facts and get the desired results. This is not a simple procedure; cyber propaganda is highly involved in manipulating the target audience.

### **Misinformation for Domestic Political Agenda or Revenues**

Political agendas are achieved through viral fake news to shape a certain kind of rhetoric or opinion. Similarly, to get through the Brexit referendum in UK and make it a success the exaggerated news were shared to uplift the “leave campaign”.<sup>7</sup> There were news about refugees overflowing the country and also statements of £350 million received by Brussels from UK. It was also claimed that this money could be saved if “Leave Campaign” became successful. An American company named “Disinfomedia” has many fake sites called WashingtonPost.com.co, USAToday.com.co, NationalReport.net and its owner claimed to hire people as writers for these fake websites.<sup>8</sup> There are other incalculable fake news websites creating satirical fake news, for example farzinews.com, fakenews.com etc. Sometimes fake news is created to favor some candidates or to make perceptions of people about certain issues. This is how this kind of fake news is made viral through different tactics.

### **Fake News to entertain people**

There is an emerging trend of false news phenomenon of giving it a name of satirical content or parody just to amuse masses. Individuals try to mainstream their radical thoughts on social idea with hidden agendas using exaggerated and overstated news. Similarly, on social media everything has become less sensible and people don't pay attention to serious content unless it's funny. There is always a hidden absurdity in this kind of content.

That is why the trend of exaggerated satirical news is on the rise. There are major websites that function as satirical websites creating fake news in the name of humor. According to a magazine<sup>9</sup>, “On the other hand, only satire can cut through the lies to get to the nub of the truth. Satire is the real fake news, using exaggeration and hyperbole to get to a truth that the real news cannot. In an age of fakery, the hyper-bogus can become inverted as truth”.

According a story by Guardian magazine the fake editions of “Washington Post” were published and sold with a fake headline that Trump left the white house. A group of activists were behind this and they claimed it was all satirical.<sup>10</sup>

### **The different forms Fake news may take**

The European Association for Viewers Interest (**EAVI**,)<sup>11</sup> a nonprofit organization to empower citizens, defined ten types of fake news. These work differently, according to their genres. This is how we can say that fake news can come in various shapes. It could be a tactic adopted by governments and huge corporations to influence the attitudes of masses.

Moreover it is also any biased interpretations of news which is claimed to be impartial and to make an impact, on the audience, emotional words are used. It could also be some sensational and grasping headlines of news stories to get attention of the audience which ends up misleading the readers. Fake news could also be a conspiracy theory constructing the unnecessary fear or supposition of a conspiracy and is believed to be true by its believers.

For example, misinterpreted and exaggerated science facts refuting the experts on any climatic matter. It may cause humiliation amongst readers who are willing to trust this fake news.





Figure 1: Types of fake news by EAVI, 2007.

**Fake news trend in Asian region**

Asian region is no exception when it comes to dissemination of false news and rumors. Like any other region, fake news phenomenon is a part of political and social issues in this region.<sup>12</sup> Philippine’s Presidential elections were won due to deceptive portrayal of Philippines as a “Narcostate” by President Rodrigo Duterte. This

term was used to explain the illegal killing of 7000 people which ended up forming an ill reputation for the president of Philippines.

Same trends were seen in Indonesian elections where fake news was used to emotionally stimulate the elections in Jakarta. Basuki Tjahaja Purnama, known as "Ahok", a Chinese Indonesian Christian, was charged with blasphemy during the campaign for elections. A video of him was circulated using Quran as a reference to discourage and condemn Non-Muslims as leaders. This video was apparently treated to use as propaganda against Ahok and few seconds were taken out of context from the long speech.

Chinese cyber space is not an exception for the proliferation of fake news. The superstores in Beijing fell short of iodized salt after the circulation of false news that it can protect the people from radiation poisoning. After this incident, Chinese government felt it necessary to cope with fake news. Due to this, in 2015, around 200 people were arrested for spreading fake news about chaos in the stock market and explosion in the city of Tianjin. In 2016 the cyberspace administration of China issued a notice against any kind of rumor or imaginative content in news material because it leads to distortion of facts and social chaos.

Myanmar is also highly prone to fake news phenomenon. There was news circulating about the burning of Rohingya villages and it was shown that Muslims were burning down their own houses. BBC journalists went there and they were given information by the officials that Muslims were "caught in the act", but it turned out to be a fake news.<sup>13</sup>

Figure 1: Rohingya village on fire.



Figure 2: The same woman was found in Hindu community (BBC)



These types of fake news are uncompromisingly being spread in cyber space of Myanmar. Which creates the scenario of fear and hatred towards each other and people are afraid to speak against it so they fall into a spiral of silence.

### **Report of India, Nigeria and Kenya**

In recent times, the spread of fake news is a huge problem around the globe. BBC researched fake news trends in various regions.<sup>14</sup> The posts, images, texts and comments were analyzed to understand the phenomenon of fake news.

## **Case of Nigeria and Kenya**

According to the report of BBC, there is lack of digital literacy in the countries of Kenya and Nigeria.<sup>15</sup> In the rural areas, social media is seen as just another internet website where everything is considered authentic by Nigerians and Kenyans. According to the statistics of this research, in Nigeria, 19% of individuals are unemployed and 6.2% of the false news shared, via WhatsApp, is employment scams. Therefore, it is obvious that social anxieties and desires are often the content of fake news stories shared via social media accounts or any other messaging apps. Furthermore, 3% of the fake news content is based on terrorism reflecting the fears of Nigerians about militants.

In Kenya social media accounts users lack an understanding of the difference between authentic and false news content. Fake news regarding technology and money forms one third of the false news in Kenya, which is mostly spread via WhatsApp. Similarly, people keep spreading fake news from all kind of sources believing that they are spreading authentic news without any attempt to verify it. In countries with low digital literacy rate, people are over confident about knowing the difference about fake news and authentic news. In Kenya, most fake news stories were about technology and money, while in Nigeria, most fake news were about terrorism. In both countries people visited both types of news, fake and authentic but they were unable to distinguish between them.

Another case of depressing images being circulated on Nigerian social media was reported by BBC.<sup>16</sup> There were pictures of homes burnt, corpses and pictures of dead children with open wounds. A picture of a baby with knife wounds across his head and jaw was viewed more than 11000 times. These pictures were apparently labeled as a massacre in a district of Nigeria but it was fake news. Most of the pictures were out dated and not even from Nigeria. There was a video being circulated of a man's head cut open, which was also not from Nigeria, it was a video from South Africa. However,

this fake news instigated a wave of agony and insecurity against the ethnic group of Fulani and killed a man called Ali Alhaji Muhammed.

Figure 3: Ali Alhaji Muhammad(BBC report)



Ali Alhaji Muhammad was a potato seller in the city of Jos and went to another town called Mangu. When he was coming back in a taxi people blocked the road and a mob of people with knives, looking for Fulani people, dragged Ali out of the taxi and killed him mercilessly. His body was so badly damaged that his family refused to see it. On the same day 11 other men were killed by these mobs. This is not the first time content on social media became the reason of killings and massacres of innocent people.

### **Case of India**

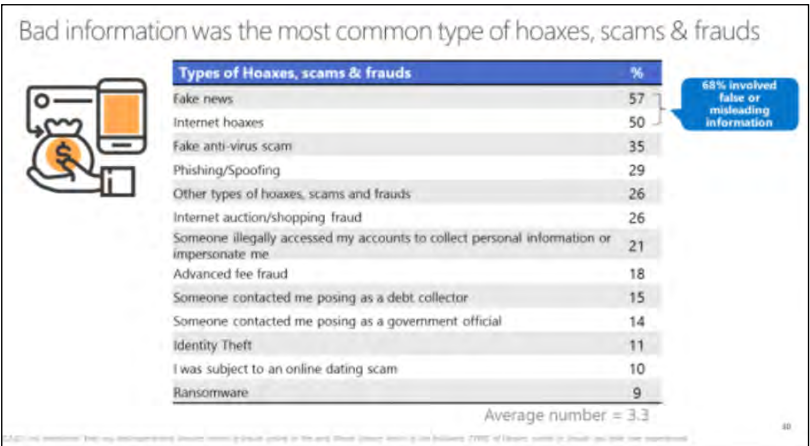
The wave of fake news about child abductors on Facebook in India became the reason of a tragic incident. When people started forwarding and sharing false news about child abductors, it turned into a horrible incident. As per Aljazeera<sup>17</sup> a young artist and his businessman friend were beaten to death with rocks, sticks and knives. The viral fake news of child abducting on Facebook and WhatsApp led to the lynching of these two young men.

Figure 4: The young men Nitopal and Abhijeet who were lynched in Asam, India



This is not the only incident in India, this past year more than 24 people were killed in India because of fake news on social media. According to a recent Microsoft survey<sup>18</sup> of 22 countries, including India, 60% of the Indians encounter fake news which makes Indians more prone to fake news than anyone else in the world. 42% of the respondents from India said that they encounter hoaxes and 28% of the Indians are prone to these kinds of online risks.

Digital civility report of Microsoft (2018)



Source: Microsoft.com

## **Fake news scenario in Pakistan**


Like any other country around the globe, Pakistani social media is far more democratic than any other media platform. Individuals openly share information across social media without any state control or scrutiny. The fake news trend gets more intense in the days of elections in democratic states like Pakistan. It works like propaganda to stimulate and create a situation of win-win during the elections. Headlines are exaggerated, images are framed, statements are attributed out of context and content is circulated without any verification. Similarly, like the big political rallies in metropolitan cities, the social media trends and hashtags do the work these days. This is how a diverse population raises their voice using social media and it has a strong impact on the society.

According to statistics Pakistan has the population of 198.9 million as of 2018. Out of this, 47.5 million uses internet and out of those 32 million actively use Facebook, 5.2 million use Instagram and 3.5 million have twitter accounts.<sup>19</sup> It is also estimated that by 2019 there would be 2.77 billion social media users around the globe.

There was news reported by Tribune about a Chinese company wishing to invest in Pakistan. As Pakistan has always been in good relations with China this news was easily trusted by the audience.<sup>20</sup> After this fake news, a largest cement making company in Pakistan had to publish a clarification that there is no truth in this news. Above all, this fake news got strengthened because a fake letter with cement company's letter head, with all the official signatures, was being shared on social media and was sent to Pakistan stock exchange. This issue got serious and the cement company in Pakistan had to rebut the entire fake notice with a rebuttal letter.



Figure 5: The 'fake letter' (Source: The express tribune)



**NISHAT**

**D.G. KHAN CEMENT COMPANY LIMITED**

Head Office: Nishat House, 53 - A, Lawrence Road, Lahore - Pakistan  
UAN: (92 - 42) 111 113 333, Tel: (92 - 42) 36360154, Fax: (92 - 42) 36367414  
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SECY/STOCKEXC/357

December 13, 2017

1) The General Manager,  
Pakistan Stock Exchange Ltd,  
Stock Exchange Building,  
Stock Exchange Road, KARACHI.

2) The Executive Director,  
Corporate Supervision Division,  
Securities & Exchange Commission of Pakistan,  
8<sup>th</sup> Floor, NIC Building, Jinnah Avenue,  
Blue Area, ISLAMABAD.

PUCARS/TCS

Fax No. (051) 9100454, 9100471 / TCS

Dear Sir,

**CLARIFICATION / REBUTTLE REGARDING A FAKE / FABRICATED LETTER CIRCULATING ON SOCIAL MEDIA/WHATSAPP**

It has come to our knowledge that a letter titled "Material Information" stating permission of due diligence to Anhui Conch Cement Company Limited, China for acquiring 40% shares of D. G. Khan Cement Company Limited ("the Company") is circulated on social media/WhatsApp.

We hereby clarify that it is entirely a **Fake/Fabricated Document**. The Company has neither issued any such letter nor has received any such interest from any of the Chinese or other investor.

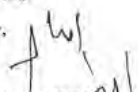
We request Pakistan Stock Exchange and Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan to carry out necessary investigation of this **Fake/Fabricated Letter** which is a cyber crime.

We reserve the right of legal action against the culprits for his/their malafied intentions and damaging reputation of the Company.

Please circulate for information of all concerned.

Thanking you,

Yours truly,



**KHALID MAHMOOD CHOHAN**  
COMPANY SECRETARY

**Factory Sites:**  
Khotli Sattai, Distt. Dera Ghazi Khan - Pakistan. UAN: (92 - 64) 111 - 113 - 333 Tel: (92 - 42) 36360153, Fax: (92 - 64) 2585010  
Khairpur, Tehsil, Kallar Kahar Distt. Chakwal - Pakistan. Tel: (92 - 42) 36360152 Fax: (92 - 54) 650231



Figure 6: The clarification letter about the fake news (Express Tribune)



## Taliban propaganda

Talibans have embraced social media and started using it to get in touch with masses. Talibans know the power of social media and they use social media as a propaganda tool to share their news and any information. The official Spokesperson of Taliban is on Twitter and he keeps tweeting about operations. This is how different media outlets get in touch with him for interviews of Taliban leaders. Similarly, high profile interviews have even taken place without

revealing the identity of the journalists. Unauthentic news and leaks on social media from Taliban are not a new phenomenon. The Taliban spokesperson's account on Twitter is an active account and may be used for propagandas to influence the minds of people. A lot of statements come from this account which is then used for official purposes by media houses. There is no scrutiny and no effort of authentication of these news items or statements.

Figure 7: Twitter account owned by Spokesman for Taliban



## Lynching of Mashal Khan

Fake news stories are the reason of real life violence around the globe. Similarly, fabricated truths on social media have been the cause of loss of many lives and Mashal Khan case is one such example. He was a student of Journalism from Abdul Khan University Mardan. Unfortunately, he was beaten to death on 13 April, 2017, in the premises of his university on account of sharing "blasphemous content" on his Facebook profile. Rumors about his attempting blasphemy went viral on social media which led to his lynching.

Figure 8: Mashal khan



Around December 2014 he posted, “I don’t have another Facebook account and if someone sends you a request with my ID and display picture, please report to me,” Then there was another status of Mashal Khan stating that someone is using his name to spread a negative image on social media.



Thousands of cruel students were responsible for the murder of Mashal Khan. He was tortured, dragged and beaten to death on

account of rumors only. Till now there is no evidence of his alleged blasphemy. This incident is a warning that fake accounts lead to manipulated information which cause chaos and violence. These kind of violent acts are frequently happening in our society and lead to distressing results. These kinds of cases of viral fake news give rise to extremism and indecent consequences.

### **Anti-Muslim Propaganda on Social Media**

Islamophobic content has been a major part of twitter since the US elections in 2016. It was a type of propaganda against Muslims. In November 2017, a list of accounts came out on twitter investigated by itself, those accounts were used for elections campaign of America and Islamophobia was spread through those accounts. There are messages about Muslims and Islam on social media accounts creating an image of some alienated entities. The facts and figures about Muslims are heavily skewed. Manipulated data against Muslims is made viral on social media accounts.<sup>21</sup>

For example, the picture of a woman with headscarf went viral on social media in March 2017, on the day of Westminster attack. In that picture she is seen walking while looking at her cell phone when victims are lying around helping each other. A twitter account, @Southlonestar, stated that that “Muslim” woman is indifferent to the victims and lacks empathy towards them. This is how this truth is generalized to all the Muslims around the globe that they are heartless and ruthless people. Later clarifications came from the photographer and that woman herself that she wasn’t indifferent to the sufferings of victims.



According to “Hope not hate” magazine, in past few years this propaganda against Islam has been growing and Islam is projected as a threat on social media. Controversial American activist, Pamela Geller, who is famous for her anti-Islamic writings around the globe, has been engaged on twitter to spread anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic messages frequently.



Figure 9: Pamela Geller’s tweet against Muslims without any facts and figures



Figure 10: Irresponsible headline with misleading content against Muslims by Pamela Geller



The automated and semi-automated accounts are linked with controversial accounts like Pamela Geller. This is how these tweets get viral in seconds. These kinds of accounts are growing rapidly where hate against Muslims is visible. It has become a matter of public interest now, and this is why this phenomenon is unstoppable because anti-Muslim websites and Twitter accounts keep increasing.<sup>22</sup>

### **Digital Literacy and Laws for Fake News**

It is an undeniable fact that Social media has gained power to influence the masses on a larger scale. After the US elections of 2016, social media has emerged as a game changer for the political and social landscape. Therefore, after the US elections, social media became a highly manipulative platform and has had credible impact on users. In this scenario social media platforms have been engaged to create the opportunities for transparency for users. For instance Facebook has introduced tools for third party scrutiny. User ratings and page information with details have been made visible to fact check the credibility of Facebook pages and authenticity of admins who are dealing with those Facebook accounts.<sup>23</sup>

Twitter also has been working on its credibility. New tools and approaches have been introduced to put restrictions on unnecessary actions on Twitter and to make sure the transparency bots and unverified accounts have been removed to a great extent. On the contrary, there are still uncountable fake accounts on Twitter. A group of researchers examined around 10 million tweets from 700,000 accounts and found that all those twitter accounts were linked to 600 fake accounts. This research also analyzed that during the US elections 6.6 million tweets were tweeted by fake publishers and even after the elections, 4 million tweets were found to be from fake resources. Similarly, 80% of the fake accounts, which were active during the US election, are still active on Twitter.<sup>24</sup>

The main issue is the lack of digital literacy among social media users. Participants of social media don't bother to question the content and go with anything they see online. For example, a video went viral in Italy of a Muslim climbing up the statue of the Virgin Mary. Without knowing the truth, people started sharing the video with the caption that a Muslim refugee climbed onto the statue of Virgin Mary and baby Jesus in order to destroy it.

Figure 11: Video received more than 1.1 million viewers.





People showed anger over that video but it was misplaced as it was not a video of a Muslim refugee in Italy ruining a religious statue but it was a video of a man vandalizing a naked statue, in Algeria, because it was indecent. This is the lack of digital literacy due to which people don't bother to look for the authenticity of the content and trust the fabrication. This works in a loop where people try to exaggerate the headlines or captions while re-sharing the information. Therefore, it can be said that people lack the capability to refute or question the content on social media. Users don't make efforts to fact check the content of different forms on social media.

### **Fake News Laws of Southeast Asia**

The developments and improvements have been taking place around the world including Southeast Asia. This is the region with one of the world's highest diversity in terms of political systems, legal influences, cultures, languages and religions. Some of the countries, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam are paying consideration to legislation to handle the issue of fake news. The focus of this great effort is to formulate the laws that could render the dissemination of false information as a criminal activity and provide legal grounds to remove such questionable content from the World Wide Web.

An attempt to regulate the dissemination of fake news, in Southeast Asia, may result in two situations. In one scenario, this could be perceived as government's weapon to silence the criticism and dissent; on the other hand the discourse could be open-ended with a wide range of possibilities. According to a report Malaysia's overwhelming "Anti-Fake News Act" was sanctioned by parliament in April 2018.<sup>25</sup> This Act declared it a criminal activity to intentionally create, offer, publish, print or disseminate any fake news. The Act defines any content wholly or partially false as fake news. This law

somehow got annulled by the government, demonstrates that how legislation against fake news can be abused for political gains.

In case of Cambodia and Vietnam, it is speculated that fake news legislation would largely benefit those in power. Cambodian government has issued a ministerial directive measures against the websites where certain content is published termed as “fake news” and can potentially create chaos, damage national defense and security, incite discrimination and impact national culture and customs. Vietnam, ruled by the Vietnamese Communist Party, started the “Cyber-security Law” and declared that it’s a crime to spread false information.

In case of Thailand, the situation is complicated and mixed. Thailand’s Computer Crime Act ordained in 2007 offers provisions to criminalize the distribution of false information. The law was later amended in 2017 by the current military regime, which is ready to enact a cyber-security law. There are indications that existing provisions have been used against political opponents. This fact demonstrates the ambiguity and potential abuse of these laws.

The Philippines made headlines in world news, largely due to President Rodrigo Duterte’s highly conflict-ridden and questionable “drug war” and the country’s removal from the International Criminal Court. Duterte administration enjoys broad parliamentary support for his policies, and even the Philippine Supreme Court appears to play by his whim. The other issues which are of importance are fragile peace process in Southern Mindanao, with the communist forces and the planned federalization of the country. In this political climate, several bills to tackle fake news have been put forward. They all invoke democracy, unity and trust in institutions as their goals

The recent developments in Singapore are particularly of interest. The parliament’s Committee on Deliberate Online Falsehoods made its final report public after holding extensive hearings with the

professionals from diverse backgrounds. The committee recommended a multi-faceted approach comprising of improved education, digital media literacy, support for independent and quality journalism. It also includes containment of online falsehoods by adopting correction mechanisms and measures that can ensure the omission of objectionable and questionable content or shut down the problematic social media accounts.

In brief, the Southeast Asian region demonstrates how the debates pertaining to fake news laws may offer a deeper look into the political and social discourses. Gradually, these continuous processes will help form a definition of tolerable and unacceptable false content. Therefore, the question arises that to what extent the domination through fake news will continue to be a tool to enforce national narratives and identity. It's yet to be seen whether there will soon be tolerable and intolerable versions of problematic facts that can be labelled as fake.

### **Challenges Regarding Fake News**

A broad framework and strategy to systematically understand fake news is of paramount importance. This interest brings together the researchers mastering knowledge and technologies in allied areas to work on fake news projects. The issues and challenges pertaining to fake news ought to be explored to guide the future researchers on this subject. In order to prevent the impact of fake news on democracy, journalism and economies, it's demanded of researchers to understand and detect fake news.

"Fake news" includes a wide variety of content and behaviors. The communities are struggling to evaluate the authenticity of widely published content most importantly on social media such as Facebook. Fake news content has various shapes and forms like hoaxes, conspiracy theories, partisan content and state sponsored disinformation. The matter gets worse when the people present on the network become a tool to spread the false information intentionally or

un-intentionally. The first issue with fake news is the problem of identification of fake news content. Several attempts were made to come up with a unanimous definition of “fake news” and subcategorize other kind of content like hoaxes, forgeries of news sites or merely propaganda. However, another school of thought focused upon identification of fake news by the nature of the content.<sup>26</sup>

The focus always remained on the content of the “fake news” when approached cognitively. As per this approach the definition of “fake news” is a news article intentionally placed to spread false information or news that is designed to persuade consumers to accept biased or false belief or written intentionally to mislead the readers. According to this misinformation and disinformation could be identified easily where misinformation is the unintentional spread of false information and disinformation is deliberate.<sup>27</sup> The emphasis upon the intent of the fake news rather than the authenticity of the content raises red flags about the objectivity of favored political motivation. Nonetheless, this definition of fake news poses significant problems to evaluate the content as the information required for this may not be accessible, which is the ideology behind the fake news producer and motivations of those individuals who share this false information.

In the realm of online content it particularly becomes impossible to ascertain the author’s intent which in turn brings us to another complicated situation where it’s hard to differentiate between a satire or parody or deliberate deception. According to a concept called Poe’s Law that without a wink smiley or any other obvious humor demonstrations it is hard to identify the nature of satirical or honest content.<sup>28</sup>

There are few approaches to “fake news” which organize the complicated content into categories. These approaches clear the complications in identifying the fake news that censors and mediators ought to have different responses to different types of “fake news.”

Hoaxes, trolling and propaganda mislead the audience but satire and humor are called as “cultural commentary”. There are different demonstrations of fake news content like scam websites that copy the original name of sources like NYTimes.com.co. Some of the content is totally fictitious such as “Pope Francis Endorses Donald Trump”, which could be called propaganda. Another major aspect of fake news is exaggeration; click bait, deceptive content or biased content, though it is difficult to draw clear lines between all these types of online fake news content. Audience is vulnerable to all these ambiguous types of fake news and it has become difficult to identify between these complicated sorts of fake news.

In this cyber space one cannot know with certainty that what is humorous, sarcasm or fabrication. Even with the help of Poe’s law, it is complicated to know the demarcation between different kinds of fake news. For instance, to make the satire understandable, disclaimers could be added to refrain from any legal litigation. For example, the popular satirical website “The Valley Report” uses a disclaimer that reads “2,000,000 hits per month and all of these stories are fake. Don’t be stupid.” Few months later another disclaimer was posted saying “Some of these stories may be exaggerated, embellished, or an outright work of fiction. Use proper judgment when reading anything on the internet.” Therefore, these tactics for identification of certain content can be useful by systems or human moderators to identify potential “fake news”.<sup>29</sup> All these challenges define our inability to understand the difference between real and fake news.

## **How Human Cognition Works in Detecting Fake News**

Fake news has the power to falsify the beliefs of people because it has propagandistic traits. People find it hard to reject fake news because their attitude gets adjusted with the biased information and the influence of fake news can’t be undone that easily because of the lower cognitive ability they have. The people with low cognitive

ability continue to stay with the misinformation even after revealing the truth to them during the research. Hence, it is obvious that cognition matters in order to process any kind of information.

Cognitive aging theory explains the fact that with aging older people become more prone to fake news. The vulnerability to fake news is also related to educational background of a person because an individual may develop cognitive skills to scrutinize things which help in coping with the misinformation. The famous comedian, Stephen Colbert, discussed about the concept of “Illusion of Truth Effect”. This means that repetitive exposure to information makes it believable enough and this is how fake news becomes believable. After getting to know the approach of illusion of truth effect, one should become capable enough to check for facts. It becomes necessary to question the repeated information in order to claim if it’s true.

## **Fighting Fake News**

False information is not easy to spot until you learn techniques to make yourself aware of the fake news. According to a BBC<sup>30</sup> report, just like pedagogy experts involve their students in practical learning, Cambridge researchers discovered a practical solution to this problem of fake news. They introduced the idea of making people aware of the strategies used in creating the fake news to make them learned enough to spot the fake news. These researchers invented a game in which four characters could be played from “Alarmist” to a “Click bait tycoon”. This game helped to launch a fake news website where characters become editors. They purchase bots networks and strategies to limit and fact checking technique. This game had the vision to make individuals learn the major techniques which are used by fake news websites widely. These techniques are imitation, emotional manipulation, biasness, conspiracy, scandal and spinning. Therefore, the main idea of this whole scheme was to develop a model which may be helpful for people to understand the fake news and

disregard it. This maybe a long term solution and help people to act sensible when come across doubtful news.

## **Basic Strategies**

### **Academic reforms**

It is of great importance to develop tools to evaluate and identify fake news, in order to avoid spillage into the social and academic settings. There should be an emphasis placed upon teaching the digital literacy at every age. Only a look at initiatives is not enough to promote media literacy but major role could be played by teachers to educate students about digital literacy because media has become the part and parcel of education system. The teachers must deal with the challenge to teach the students about why and how people engage with media. They should also teach about the understanding of the material they consume and how individuals can be affected on long term basis by the digital media consumption.

However, the most important task is to teach students about how to distinguish the fake from real. So, there is a need to develop the critical thinking towards media along with the extensive research and the conception of approaches regarding media. Consequently, there is a need to understand the depth subject matter and the proper guidance towards the different types of media content. It's of great importance to take concrete steps in this direction with functional environment of academics, policymakers and media experts involved for desirable results.

### **PR strategies**

PR experts can employ reactive PR methods to counter online fake news. PR experts ought to keep the suspicious content with misleading headlines under strict scrutiny.

Three types of approaches could be used to cope with false information. PR specialists could use "*attack, threat, and denial*" as a way to counter this dubious content. For an instance, PR specialists

can contradict the content if the opponent attempts to misinform the individual in online environment. In this strategy, the organization could easily refuse to accept the blame and claim that the problem didn't exist and could prove it.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, if the responsible entity fails to withdraw the misinformation or make an apology for mistake, this could negatively affect the reputation of organization and a threat of a legal action for defamation could be used. The opponent's influence could be curbed by the use of embarrassment by the PR experts.

### **Detection of Fake News on Individual Level**

There are ways to curb and identify fake news on individual level.<sup>32</sup> Emotional and sensational words used in news articles are always dubious. The exaggerated and promotional headlines point out towards misleading information. Furthermore, the critical thinking about the news articles could be helpful in understanding the content. One should try to know about the source of the news and the producer of the news. Try to know about the sensational news, satirical or biased content.

Moreover, news outlets and social media copy the news and there should be a scrutiny to check if the news has been copied from unidentified sources. Read the complete news and be skeptical about any visual or written content. It could be possible that image is photoshopped or from another event. Likewise, users can always check the profile of the person who is sharing the story and lastly, if the story includes hyperlinks, click on them and check the material. Most probably misleading content have lots of links to external sources. In a nutshell these skeptical methods could be used to detect the fake news on a personal level.

### **Conclusion**

The fake news dissemination affects people's perceptions and beliefs. It makes them believe the unauthentic content. It changes the



way individuals understand certain issues because they get manipulated with false information. We may say that fake news is created to manipulate and confuse the people, which ultimately risk their abilities to scrutinize any information they get. In this ecosystem of information on social media, one can't assure the authenticity due to various possible reasons but with due awareness and laws this hazardous phenomenon can easily be curbed down.

In the case of Pakistan, in October 2018, government took this matter seriously and The Ministry of information and Broadcasting launched an account on twitter named as "Fake News Buster", which is officially used to expose the misinformation and fake news content going around the media outlets. Disseminating fake news is not only unethical but illegal and this issues needs to be addressed seriously by every institution of state and equally by society.

The act of prevention of electronic crimes was passed in 2016 by the parliament of Pakistan and there are few provisions for misinformation. Under its section (11) anyone who intends to make illegal claim or title or commit fraud by any exertion, suppression and alteration of data resulting in inauthentic data is considered to be illegal and shall be punished. Sections (22) and (23) also interpret the frauds and misinformation offences which are named as Spamming and Spoofing. In Spamming, anyone who intends to harm another person with misleading, illegal or unsolicited information is a criminal and Spoofing describes the offence that, any individual or any organization, setting up a website with dishonest intentions and aims to be believed as truthful content, commits a crime and shall be punished.

Great deal of people use internet and maximum of them have social media accounts. These social media platforms hold extreme power; hypothetically these cyber space platforms possess more power than the authorities. But with great power comes great responsibility. Hence, it is necessary to take benefit of internet with the

feeling of liability. There should be an innovative, productive and humanistic way of using the cyber space platforms. Similarly, there are ethical responsibilities which ought to be followed by individuals and societies at large. The reckless use of internet causes emotional and physical damage to the audiences. People have overstepped the liability to use the social media and do violations on regular basis. Not all of the users are naïve; they know what is right and wrong but still don't act decently.

The fight for fake news is crucial for the society and individuals must think about this issue hypercritically. The ever-increasing consumption of social media and easy access to news has enabled the spread of "fake news" through this platform which ends up misleading the individuals and affects the society at large. But there are positive steps being taken by States to fight this phenomenon, to some extent. Above all, it is the responsibility of individuals to get literate about the media and use this liberated medium of information called as "social media" with a critical and enlightened approach. We need to build the ability to scrutinize, assess and evaluate the media in order to become a learned user of social media or any other media platform.

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# **YELLOW JOURNALISM IN AFGHANISTAN: THE ROLE OF FAKE NEWS IN SHAPING THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE**

**S. JAMALUDDIN FIROZI\***

## **Abstract**

*Manipulation of the news is not a new phenomenon in the political arena of Afghanistan. The false news has been used by politicians to gain the public support or to blame the opposite parties during the elections campaign. At least during the last two decades, the fake news has been used in the country as an instrument of conflict or instrument of gaining power. For instance, some politicians have used the social media and mass media to blame the other parties for instability in order to increase their followers. False news in media especially in social media sometimes has forced the government officials to resign through public protest or through pressure by parliament. This article attempts to evaluate the role of false news in shaping the political discourse in Afghanistan and tries to answer the following questions; why yellow journalism is very effective in shaping the political discourse in Afghanistan? And why the public do trust such media without checking their credibility? And how people can differentiate between fake news and real ones in Afghanistan? The hypothesis of the paper is that the yellow journalism has very strong effect on political discourse in*

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*Afghanistan and there are some politicians who are benefited from such media.*

**Key-words:** *yellow journalism, fake news, Afghanistan, politicians,*

## **Introduction**

During the Taliban regime there was just one radio station broadcasting in Afghanistan but after the new regime came to power in 2001, more than 100 Radio stations, TV and newspapers have been established and begun their broadcasting through all corner of the country. Freedom of speech and freedom of press is one of the most important achievements of the post-Taliban era in Afghanistan. The constitution and the law on mass media has guaranteed the freedom of speech in the country. According to the press freedom index, Afghanistan is on the top of the list in South Asia regarding freedom of the mass media and freedom of speech.<sup>1</sup> The freedom of speech and freedom of the press has experienced ups and down in recent years. However, the government of Afghanistan has ratified the law on the right to access the information which provides the opportunity for research reporters and mass media to access the correct information from the government sources at any time. Besides that, in the last decade, young generation has accessed to social media and other news websites. So, this abundance of the radio, television, and social media has forced some media to use the yellow journalism to attract more customers to increase their profit.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, yellow journalism and fake news have become a concern for politicians, journalists, news organizations and government authorities in recent years. Many news organizations attempt to distinguish themselves from fake news broadcasted through social media and the internet. However, in Afghanistan there<sup>3</sup> are some politicians and government officials who have used the yellow journalism to achieve their political goals. This paper tries to

find out how the politicians and government officials have used the yellow journalism to change the political discourse and change the public opinion according to their political agenda.

The yellow journalism has become a challenge for media and politicians as well. Some of these have been used to attack the political competitors or tell lies to people for different reasons. Many researchers believe that these kinds of media are not concerned about professional values and ethics but just thinking how to increase their profits and make more money.

### **Yellow journalism in Afghanistan**

There are more than 70 visual media operating in Afghanistan and expectation is that after 19 years of free operation, they could form a culturally different society than that of in the past decades. Still, people in their homes, offices, and in their public relations act with aggression, putting their trashes on roads and there are many other abnormal behaviors which need to be changed. It seems that after almost two decades of operation to free the media, the media could not bring positive changes to the society. Many believe that is the responsibility of media to normalize the good behavior in the society. The irony is that when some media themselves became a factor to promote and spread abnormal behavior in the society. Unwanted promotion of violence, distrust between members of family, feeling superiority and social insecurity is the result of some television programs in Afghanistan.

The media in the country know how difficult it is for them if they don't follow the ethical standard and professionalism. The most important cost would be the loss of the society belief on media. However, "the steady drip of media scandal, mistakes and beat-ups has eroded so much of the community belief in journalism."<sup>4</sup> The loss of community belief is the result of unprofessional and unethical work of some media which is called yellow media. The Yellow media is actually those types of the media which the public are interested in

and the people like them very much despite the people don't trust them as professional media. The yellow media has its own characteristics but also follow the general principles of mass media and use the profession of the journalism. In this type of journalism, the ultimate goal is not providing information for public nor cultural construction but their goal is to increase their circulation and gain more profits. The Afghan economy is market economy and that is why the media also following the principles of the market economy like other industries to increase their wealth and gain more money. In such environment, it is very natural that the owners and managers of yellow media attempts to gain more profits. Thus, they need more customers and in order to have more customers they need to publish what is the desire of people and have to respond the demands of the public. Basically, attracting the attention of customers is more important than the other values of journalism such as accuracy, credibility, and public trust on them. In contrast to qualitative media in which they don't try to attract the low level classes to read their publication, the yellow media attempting to respond to the demands of those who are not the customers of the qualitative media and have less education. Some tricks are used by yellow media to attract more readers in Afghanistan, for instance they are creating exciting news, spreading the rumors and fake news, and writing the news in simple ways.

The yellow media in Afghanistan do not care about the standards and principles of journalism and their subjects are controversial, sensitive, and emotional in order to attract the public attention. This type of media with large headlines for less important issues and writing the subjects without considering the principles of journalism invoke the emotions of their readers. For instance, Jomhor news wrote on its first page a large headline on March 15, 2019 that a wife and husband attempting to seduce people and put the photos of President Ashraf Ghani and the first lady of Afghanistan under that headline.<sup>5</sup> This was an insult to the president and the first lady and also

attractive for the readers of this newspaper. These types of media don't care about the necessity of the people but just portrait less important issues and also exaggeration is the best way to sell their insignificant subject to their readers. A very small event which doesn't have any impact on public life has been shown by such media in an exaggerating way that it became the most important event in the society right now.

Many researchers in Afghanistan believe that the yellow journalism pay less attention to professional ethics. Thus, the topics in the mass media are low level and not based on qualities. They publish the news without considering the standards and values or without checking the news being authentic. So, the government should ratify laws and ethical and professional principles for such journalism because they are not analyzing the news accurately nor attempting to ask why such events happen in the society, but looking very superficial to the events in the society. The costumers of yellow media in Afghanistan are more young people and they are not the permanent costumers.

Since 2001, private media are allowed to operate alongside the government sponsored media in Afghanistan. The private media has tried to get funds from different dinners including domestic and foreign organizations. Some of these media don't care about the ethics and principles of journalism and they are engaged in telling lies or generating the fake news for political purposes or to receiving more money from donors. In recent years, social media such as; Facebook, twitter and YouTube are used by fake account users to create fake news for political reasons. Fake accounts in social media try to create such news which has emotional impact on target groups, such as; ethnic or linguistic groups in the country.

The yellow media was influenced and shaped by many factors in Afghanistan including the ethnical linguistic tension, government, politicians, and terrorist organizations. On the other hand, the yellow

media also had its impact on societal and political discourse that is why the government, politician, and terrorists organizations have paid their attentions to influence the mass media and particularly the yellow media in the last decade. The following is an attempt to examine the relationship between the mentioned factors with the yellow media in the country.

### **The Yellow media and ethnical/linguistic tension**

Around five years ago, one of the visual media released a video from domestic war in 1990s. This video seemed to be downloaded from the internet and was published very unprofessionally by a TV station in Kabul. In this video, some of the Mujahedeen leaders were talking against each other and blaming the other parties for destruction of Afghanistan. It was clear that the goal of this visual media was to get more audiences however; some other people suggested that it was not the only goal that this type of media was looking for. They were trying to divides the nation on the ethnic or linguistic lines.<sup>6</sup> Because, no one can imagine that by releasing such video, this media intended to enlighten the people about the issues which happened during the domestic conflict in the 1990s.

It seems that publishing such video and pictures from the domestic conflict in the 1990s by a visual media was an attempt to divide the nations and behind this act was a certain political goal. This video showed cut of some speeches from the leaders of the parties in the conflict. According to the video which published by this media, it looked like that there was only some particular parties which were responsible for all destruction in the country and other parties were innocent. It was clear that the aim for publishing such video by this media was nothing else except to divide the people of Afghanistan on ethnical lines to empower certain political parties and exclude some groups of Mujahedeen from power.

Though, it should be the responsibility of the media to connect and unite the ethnic group together through highlighting the national



interest. There is no doubt that in the 1990s, the ethnic conflict happened in the country and thousands of people died and Kabul was destroyed. This conflict creates a deep distance between different ethnic groups and damaged the social solidarity and integrity of the people. So, the yellow media without considering past events in the country, only attempts to get more clients by publishing emotional news reports such as ethnic conflict in 1990s.

Such types of news reports from the past which was not complete but manipulated by the media aimed to blame certain parties for destruction of Kabul and to exempt the other parties in the conflict. Some believe they are paid to publish such news and other believe that they need more consumers that is why they publish manipulated, sensational and controversial topics despite it has negative impact on the society and divide the nation on ethnical line. However, by publishing such sensational video, this media has changed the political discourse for many days in the country. For weeks, the politicians and analysts were talking about the events on the media especially social media which happened in the 1990s. This particular issue became the main political discourse among the politicians and people because it was published by a TV channel to attract more viewers.

### **The yellow media and the government**

There are certain government departments which provide financial assistance to some media including the users of social media. Especially, the social media got the attention of some departments in the government to push its policy through Facebook users in recent years. On the other hand, there are some analysts who suggest that the government institutions should allow the independent mass media to shape the public opinion through criticizing the government and providing the information without any pressure or financial support from certain departments in the government.<sup>7</sup> Injection of money to some media and users of social media is not profitable for

the society. Those media which receive money from government institutions cannot do their job professionally and don't have efficiency in terms of changing the society in a positive manner. It is now clear that there are some media and Facebook users who receive money from certain government institutions.<sup>8</sup>

The government institutions ignore this fact that those type of mass media or social media which receive money from them, have no expertise on how to propagate on behalf of their sponsors. Thus, people understand which media is receiving money and are pro-government and which one is funding by opposite parties because such media cannot propagate in a professional way to hide their inclinations for certain institutions or entities. It is obvious from the first page of some newspapers and websites that government bodies or political entities provide financial resources for them. In other countries, government intuitions also provide financial support to certain mass media, but they do their job professionally that the costumers cannot find their inclinations out easily, and it is not apparent that they are paid to propagate for certain institutions. Nonetheless, in Afghanistan everything is apparent. Therefore, the government should allow the free media to operate by themselves and the public opinion should be shaped naturally. The people are supporting the democracy and they are proud of the national security forces and no one is pro the Taliban regime to change the current government in Kabul. So, there is no need to inject money in the mass media or social media in the country, instead of that the government can encourage the media to be more responsible and provide more quality reports. The government should not be concerned about the media if it adopts a strategic and proper propagation agenda and provide on time information for media. This approach will shape the public opinion towards the national interest of Afghanistan. It is believed that the government should allow the media to operate naturally in the market which is based on competition, it will give the

opportunity for all sort of media to find their on position in the society. This policy will improve and enhance the media system in Afghanistan and also shape the public opinion towards supporting the young democracy in the country.

As mentioned above, some departments in the government has tried in many cases to shape the political discourse by social media or those media which are receiving funds from certain departments in the government. For instance, when the main political discourse was about the government failure on security issues, suddenly some media published the intervention of external powers in the domestic issues of Afghanistan. The new issue became the main political discourse for days and the people forgotten the government failures on the security issues in the country. Such issues happens in many cases in the country through the mass media or social media to change the political topics according to the interest of certain departments in the government or certain parties/ political figures.

### **The yellow media and terrorism in Afghanistan**

One of important tool for terrorists to communicate with people is the media's attention in the country. This tool does not have any cost for them but spread the capability and power of the terrorists widely. Their acts and political agenda will be introduced through mass media to the public. Also, the attention of media will provide opportunity for terrorists to follow up their political goals. Without accessing to mass media they have no place at social or political discourse in the society. "The irony is that many Afghan and international media, while understanding the propaganda value for terrorists, still continue to broadcast those attacks generously, in most cases, even giving priority to their activities."<sup>9</sup>

Many media has covered terroristic attacks unprofessionally, without considering the emotions of their victims and the cost for community. For instance, when journalists and employees of Tolo TV in Kabul were attacked by the terrorists in 2016, some media coverage

of this event was unethical and unprofessional. "A Taliban suicide car bomber detonated explosives near a bus carrying staffs from TOLO TV in Darulaman Road in Kabul on Wednesday evening, killing at least seven staff members – including three female employees - and wounding 26 others".<sup>10</sup> This event was covered by many media inside and outside the country.

The BBC Persian and Pashtu radios' coverage of this terrorist attack angered many journalists and people in the country. Many experts believed that the BBC Persian and Pashtu radio and TV by covering this event provided a tribune for the Taliban and terrorists to propagate their agenda throughout the country. The BBC Persian radio immediately after the event interviewed the Taliban spokesperson who claimed responsibility and praised the attackers and also encouraged the Taliban followers to attack such media which are against the Islamic values in the country. This coverage of BBC Persian and Pashtu divisions was criticized widely by media experts and journalists in the country for providing a free tribune for Taliban and other terrorists to spread their political agenda.<sup>11</sup>

It is obvious that the mass media needs their audiences and costumers in the country, so if there is any activity by terrorists the media will cover and publish their activities with excitement. Some media in Afghanistan attempts to sell their products by publishing such excitement news in their headlines, however, for these types of media it is very easy to find its audiences. Furthermore, there is no need for deep analytical reports but can change very easily the political discourse in the interest of certain political factions in the government or in opposition parties. The yellow media publishes such events to pressure the government as well to get fund or receiving other support from different political parties. Publishing an exciting event such as terroristic attack in many cases has changed the political discourses in the country. Sometimes, it has put pressure on certain departments in the government and sometimes it has caused a reason

to support the government against the external cause of terrorism. In some cases, the government has benefited from publishing such news to cover up other failures or to put pressure on opposition parties. However, the yellow media has manipulated some news to please the certain government departments or to satisfy some political parties by creating the fake news on social media. For instance, a bomb exploded inside the rally in Dehmazang in 2016 which killed 90 and wounded around 300 people. The ISIS took the responsibility for the attack but many Facebook users held responsible the certain department in the government for facilitating and supporting the terrorists to target the demonstration. The fake news was spreading around the country that a certain government department has facilitated the terrorists to attack the demonstration in Kabul, thus the fake news changed the political discourse and the fake accounts on social media got many followers.

### **The yellow media and political discourse in Afghanistan**

There are many experts who believe that the fake news and yellow media has its impact on social life, democracy and political discourse in the society.<sup>12</sup> Especially, the yellow media attempts to reach out more audience, thus spreading emotional fake news to attract the attention of the readers and viewers. "As may be inferred from the shift in referent of the term 'fake news' from satirical TV shows to fabricated stories on the Internet, the concept is slippery and subject to changes over time".<sup>13</sup> In recent years, the social media such as Facebook and twitters has been used by different parties to spread the fake news in the country. "Social media, in particular, has enhanced the spread of fake news due to their ability to share, yet these efforts have the potential of undermining democracy"<sup>14</sup>

It is clear that the freedom of speech and freedom of press is the red line for the government and the president of Afghanistan. The government is committed to perpetual cooperation and support of

the mass media in the country. The government expects that in mutual cooperation with mass media it can change the political and cultural environment in order to flourish the society and provide the correct information in the interest of the people. However, despite the goodwill from the government side and good policy to have the free media in the country, there are some media which misuse such opportunities for different political or profitable reasons. Besides that, as mentioned above, some institutions in the government attempts to influence the media and provide financial support for them in order to propagate for the interest of the government. This approach, create and enhance the yellow media because they don't care about professionalism. Such media will spread that type of news which changes the political discourse in line with the benefit of certain politicians in the government.

There are many researchers who believe that yellow media are not concern with the political issues and their ultimate goal is to increase their profits. However, still many yellow media in Afghanistan have used the political topics to put pressure on government or certain politicians. According to law of the country, the mass media has the right to access the information from all government sources including president palace and ministries and there is no barrier for them in this regard. Despite the freedom of the press and having an access to the government data, still they are eager to spread the fake news. Some experts believe that the mass media in Afghanistan is very young and need more time to generate more qualitative news. While, many others believed that this is the right time that the mass media should pay attention to their qualities and professionalism.<sup>15</sup>

The people pay attention to such minor issues in the society because the mass media has its impact on public opinion. On the other hand, it is the responsibility of the mass media which should not be influenced by the public opinion to spread only emotional issues which do not have any qualities for changing and enhancing the

political and cultural issues in society. If the mass media instead of guiding and analyzing the political and cultural events just be influenced by the public opinion they will lose their positive efficiency and will be downgraded as rumor making and yellow media in the country.

In the last decade, there have been some media in Afghanistan which used the minor issue to change the political discourse and divert the attention of the public from the important issues to much marginalized issues. There are many events which the public attention has been diverted through the media, intentionally or unintentionally. For instance, president of Afghanistan traveled to Northern provinces and he gave a speech to national security forces regarding how to defeat the terrorism in the country. The content of his speech was diverted by some media to much marginalized issues. President said that the security forces can defeat the enemies of Afghanistan and the security forces should not care what the media says about them because the media just telling nonsense issues but the Afghan national security forces defending the country. This statement became the main topic for discussion among the social media users as well as mass media for many days and the media did not pay attention to the main message of president in his speech. So, the yellow media had the ability to change the political discourse just by making the headline one sentence of his speech in the event.

In the mean time, there are many programs which is published by the media in Afghanistan which are temporarily attractive for the people, however, according to academic research, it has a negative effect on the society in the long run.<sup>16</sup> For instance, some TV serials are spreading violence or unethical behaviors which are not good for families and children in the Afghan traditional society. Many experts believe that such media is responsible for violence among children in schools and other irregular behavior like suicide attempts, kidnaping, treachery, and rubbery.

It is unprofessional and unethical if the media chooses their programs according to the verve of the audiences or to attract more customers and clients. It appears as if the media in Afghanistan determines their red lines according to the reactions from their clients, if there is no negative reactions from the society then they continue to publish violent and treachery programs which do impact the society badly.

It is obvious that majority of people do not trust such media but still they are the subscribers of yellow media because the tricks which are used by them are very attractive and pleasant for ordinary people in the society. The people know that those media are manipulating the news but still watching or listening to them. For instance, last year the Radio Free Europe (Radi Azadi in Persian or Pashtu) broadcasted the false news for many times and there was a camping against the Radio on social media to force it to abandon its unprofessional behavior in Afghanistan. Despite this campaign against the Radio, people still listen to this radio every day in the country. It means that people like the yellow media even they know about their unprofessional and unethical conducts in the country. The people can differentiate between professional and yellow media in Afghanistan but it seems that they like the rumors and fake news because they are sensational and exiting for the public.

## **Conclusion**

In the last two decades, both the freedom of speech and freedom of press have been guaranteed by the law in Afghanistan; however, there are some Medias which misused this opportunity for many reasons. They have used the fake news which has been sensational in order to reach out to more people. The yellow media don't consider the outcome of their actions in the community. Though, the yellow media lost their credibility but they still have their customers in the country. The media which misuse their right to freedom is mostly attempting to obtain more clients and increase their



profits by publishing the manipulated, superficial, sensational, and fake news. Some of the yellow media is paid by government institutions, political parties/figures to change the political discourse in line with the interest of the donors.

The political discourse in the country in many cases has been shaped by yellow media including social media such as Facebook users. This is worthy to mention that the yellow media was influenced and shaped by many factors in Afghanistan including the ethnical/linguistic tension, government, politicians, and terrorist organizations. These factors on the one hand pushed the yellow media to enhance their presence in the country and on the other hand, the yellow media profited from those factors to attract more clients and gain more wealth in recent years.

Some experts suggest that the government institutions and political parties/figures should allow the independent media to operate without any financial or political influence in order to shape the public opinion towards national interest and national unity. This policy will help the media to seek professionalism but it is not an effective way to decrease the yellow media in the country. The yellow media will continue to operate and will shape the political discourse in the country in the future as well. There are many governmental and non-governmental actors which gain profits from the yellow media because they can change the political environment according to the demands of those actors in the society. That is why the yellow media specially the Facebook has broadcasted rumors and fake news to change political discourse in Afghanistan in recent years.

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# FAKE NEWS DETECTION IN REGIONAL EVENT REPORTING

AMMAD FAROOQ\*

## Abstract

*Social media has become an important source of news. The news, however, people get from this source is not always authentic and can result in propagation of "fake news," i.e., the news with intentionally false information. The spread of fake news can have extremely negative impact on people's behaviour, and on a society as whole. Therefore, the detection of fake news on social media has become an important emerging research topic which is attracting tremendous attention. The detection of fake news on the social media presents unique characteristics and challenges that make existing detection algorithms used for traditional news media ineffective, and/or not applicable. First, fake news is intentionally written to mislead readers to believe false information, which makes it difficult and nontrivial? to detect based on news content; therefore, we need to include auxiliary information, such as user social engagements on social media, to help make a determination. Second, exploiting this auxiliary information is challenging in and of itself as users' social engagements with fake news produce big data, which is incomplete, unstructured, and noisy. In this paper, I propose a*

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*method for the detection of “fake news”. This method uses Naive Bayes classification along with a regional events model to predict whether a post will be labelled as REAL or FAKE. The results may be improved by applying several techniques that are discussed in the paper. Received results suggest that the problem of detecting fake news can be addressed with machine learning methods.*

## **Introduction**

The internet has made our lives easier by making access to information just on one click. But this information can be generated and manipulated by anyone and the spread of such information is foolhardy due to the presence of social media. Social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp and Twitter have allowed all kinds of “news”, be it true or fake, to reach wide audiences without authentication. Social media users’ bias towards believing what their friends share and what they read, regardless of authenticity, allow fake stories to propagate widely through and across multiple platforms and add to their credibility. Google and Facebook have now begun testing new tools to help users better spot and flag fake news sites. Google is now barring hoax sites from its advertising platform, and is testing fact-checking labels in Google News. Similarly, Facebook is implementing a new system for users and fact-checkers to report suspicious material. In this domain, computational machine learning algorithms have proven useful where data volumes overwhelm human analysis abilities.

This paper describes a detection method for fake news, based on one of the machine learning algorithms – naïve Bayes classifier and relating to regional events to help in deciding whether a certain news is fake or real. The goal of the research is to examine how naïve Bayes works for this particular problem along with regional political or state level events. Further, this technique can easily be applied to social platforms like Facebook and Twitter by adding recent news and

enhancing the dataset on a regular basis. The difference between this paper and other papers on similar topics is that in this composition naive Bayes classifier was specifically used for fake news detection along with events in the region. It has been observed that in the south asia region the rise of fake news at peak during state level events i.e Elections.

### **Rise in Fake News During Indian Election – a regional example**

Ahead of India's general elections, the role of internet and social platforms like Whatsapp and Facebook in the spread of misinformation has been under spotlight. New research has now suggested that nearly half of voters have received some kind of fake news in the month leading up to the elections.[1]

The survey of 628 voters was conducted in a joint study by Social Media Matters and the Institute for Governance, Policies and Politics (IGPP). It found out that over 53% of respondents claimed to have received fake news over various social media platforms "due to the upcoming elections". Ibid.

"It has been noted that Facebook and WhatsApp are the platforms which are being used excessively to misinform the users. An approximate one in two Indians have agreed to have received fake news," the research claimed. Ibid.

Facebook and Whatsapp are the two most popular platforms for Indians to find news. A separate study by the Reuters Institute found roughly 52% of people got their news from Facebook and/or Whatsapp with more than 200 million Indians using the latter every day. [2]

But with the surge in access to these apps has come a rise in misinformation being spread using these platforms. The Social Media Matters and IGPP survey claimed that 62% respondents expect the election to be "influenced" by fake news. [3]

**Web Scraping** is a technique employed to extract large amounts of data from different websites, and to store the same as desired. This extraction of data is used to withdraw truthful information from reliable sources which in turn will update the dataset in real time. These sources can be news websites which rely on journalistically trained “gatekeepers” to filter out low-quality content. Web Scraping (also termed Screen Scraping, Web Data Extraction, and Web Harvesting) is a technique employed to extract large amounts of data from websites. The data which is extracted from any web source is saved to a local file in a personal computer, or to a database in a table (spreadsheet) format. The data available on these websites do not offer the functionality to save a copy for personal use. The only option then is to manually copy and paste the data - a very tedious job which can take many hours or sometimes days to complete. Web Scraping is the technique of automating this process so that instead of manually copying the data from websites, the Web Scraping software will perform the same task within a fraction of the time.[4]

Here we are using the web scraping technique to obtain news articles from websites of trusted news agencies. They are labelled as “REAL”. In this way, we can update our database by keeping track events which have happened recently, and can also check the truthfulness of the freshly posted content on different news websites using the model. Basically, the use of web scraping is to modernize the dataset we have with newly happening events. Ibid.

## **Spam Messages**

### **Similarity Between Spam Messages and Fake News Articles**

Electronic spamming is the use of electronic messaging systems to send unsolicited messages(spam), especially advertising, as well as sending messages repeatedly on the same site.

Spam messages and fake news articles have a lot of common properties:

- They often have a lot of grammatical mistakes.
- They are often emotionally colored.
- They often try to affect reader's opinion on some topics in manipulative way.
- Their content is often not true (this property holds for the most of spam messages and for all of the fake news by definition).
- They often use similar limited set of words. Please note, that this claim is not about the fact that spam messages and fake news articles use similar set of words. This claim is about the fact that different spam messages often look like the other spam messages from the syntactic point of view. The same property holds for fake news articles.[5]

So, one can see that fake news articles and spam messages indeed share a lot of important properties. Therefore, it makes sense to use similar approaches for spam filtering and fake news detection. *ibid.*

## **Methodology, Related Work and my Approach**

### **Methodology**

#### **Naive Bayes Classifier and its Usage for Spam Filtering**

In machine learning, naive Bayes classifiers are a family of simple probabilistic classifiers based on applying Bayes theorem with strong (naive) independence assumptions between the features. Naive Bayes is a simple technique for constructing classifiers: models that assign class labels to problem instances, represented as vectors of feature values, where the class labels are drawn from some finite set. It is not a single algorithm for training such classifiers, but a family of algorithms based on a common principle: all naive Bayes classifiers assume that the value of a particular feature is independent of the value of any other feature, given the class variable. *ibid.*



Naive Bayes classifiers are a popular statistical technique of e-mail filtering. They emerged in the middle of 1990s and were one of the first attempts to tackle the spam filtering problem. *ibid.*

Naive Bayes typically use bag of words features to identify spam e-mail, an approach commonly used in text classification. Naive Bayes classifiers work by correlating the use of tokens (typically words, or sometimes other constructions, syntactic or not), with spam and non-spam e-mails and then using Bayes theorem to calculate a probability that an email is or is not a spam message. *ibid.*

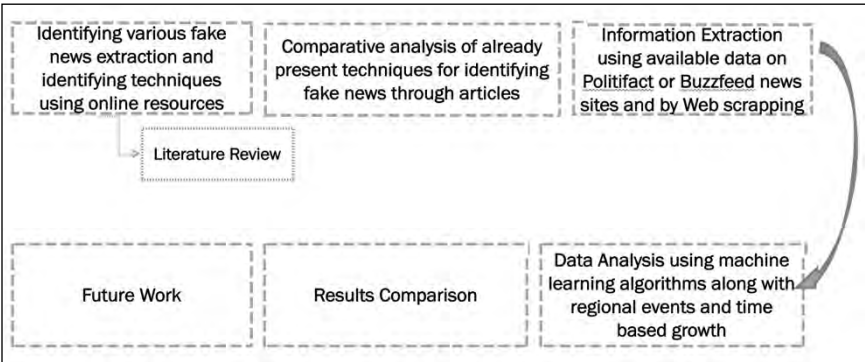
Mykhailo Granik et al [5] used a very similar approach for fake news detection which is described in more detail below.

**Naive Bayes Classifier and its Usage for Fake News Detection**

The key concept is to consider each word in the news article separately.

As has already been mentioned, fake news articles also use the same collection of terms, which may mean that the particular article is actually a fake news article. Of course, it is difficult to say that the article is fake merely because any of the words exist in it, but these words influence the likelihood of the truth.

The formula for measuring the conditional likelihood of the possibility that the news article is fake, provided that it includes a particular term, appears as follows:



$$\Pr(F|W) = \Pr(W|F) \cdot \Pr(F) / (\Pr(W|F) \cdot \Pr(F) + \Pr(W|T) \cdot \Pr(T)), \quad (1)$$

where:

$\Pr(F|W)$  – conditional probability, that a news article is fake given that word  $W$  appears in it;

$\Pr(W|F)$  – conditional probability of finding word  $W$  in fake news articles;

$\Pr(F)$  – overall probability that given news article is fake news article;

$\Pr(W|T)$  – conditional probability of finding word  $W$  in true news articles;

$\Pr(T)$  – overall probability that given news article is true news article.

This formula is derived from Bayes' theorem.

Consider that probabilities  $\Pr(F|W)$  are known for each word of the news article. Next step is combining this probability to get the probability of the fact, that given news article is fake.

The formula for this looks as following:

$$p1 = \Pr(F|W1) \cdot \dots \cdot \Pr(F|Wn), \quad (2)$$

$$p2 = (1 - \Pr(F|W1)) \cdot \dots \cdot (1 - \Pr(F|Wn)), \quad (3)$$

$$p = p1 / (p1 + p2), \quad (4)$$

where:

$n$  – total number of words in the news article;

$p1$  – product of the probabilities that a news article is fake given that it contains a specific word for all of the words in the news article;

$p2$  – same as  $p1$ , but complement probabilities are used instead;

$\Pr(F|W1), \Pr(F|W2) \dots \Pr(F|Wn)$  – conditional probabilities that a news article is a fake given that words  $W1, W2, Wn$  respectively appear in it;

$p$  – the overall probability of the fact that given news article is fake.

This formula is also used to eliminate spam. [6]

The last question is how to calculate the conditional probabilities of finding specific word in fake news articles and in true news articles. Consider there is a training set, that contains lots of news articles, labeled as true or fake. Then one can define the probability of finding specific word in fake news article as a ratio of the fake news articles, that contain this word to the total number of fake news articles. The probability of finding specific word in true news articles can be defined similarly. [5]

## Dataset

Dataset, collected by BuzzFeed News, was used for learning and testing the naive Bayes classifier.

The dataset contains information about Facebook posts, each of which represent a news article. They were collected from three large Facebook pages each from the right and from the left, as well as three large mainstream political news pages (Politico, CNN, ABC News). All nine pages have earned the coveted verified blue checkmark from Facebook, which gives them an additional layer of credibility on the platform. The smallest of these public pages has over 450 thousand followers, and the largest over 4.1 million. *ibid.*

BuzzFeed news employees logged and fact-checked each of the posts, that was published on these pages during seven weekdays. They labelled each of the posts as “mostly true”, “mostly false”, “mixture of true and false” and “no factual content”. They also gathered additional data: Facebook engagement numbers (shares, comments, and reactions) for each post were added from the Facebook API. They also noted whether the post was a link, photo,

video, or text. Raters were asked to provide notes and sources to explain their rulings of “mixture of true and false” or “mostly false.” They could also indicate whether they were unsure of a given rating, which would trigger a second review of the same post in order to ensure consistency. Any discrepancies between the two ratings were resolved by a third person. That same person conducted a final review of all posts that were rated mostly false to ensure they warranted that rating. [6]

In the end, BuzzFeed team rated and gathered data on 2282 posts. There were 1145 posts from mainstream pages, 666 from right-wing pages, and 471 from left-wing pages. The difference in the number of posts for each group is a result of them publishing with different frequencies. *ibid.*

## **Implementation Details – G1**

The relevant implementation details are the following:

- Among the fields, that are present in the dataset, only a few of them were used. They are link to the Facebook post with the text of the news article and the label of the text. [5]
- Text of the news articles was retrieved using Facebook API. *ibid.*
- News articles with labels “mixture of true and false” and “no factual content” were not considered. Couple of the articles in the dataset are broken – they do not contain any text at all (or contain “null” as a text). These articles were ignored as well. After such filtering data set with 1771 news articles was obtained. *ibid.*
- The dataset was randomly shuffled, and after that divided into three subsets: training dataset, validation dataset, test dataset. Training dataset was used for training the naive Bayes classifier. Validation dataset was used for tuning some global parameters of the classifier. Test dataset was used to get the unbiased estimation of how well the classifier performs on new data (it is a well-known fact, that it is not correct to only have training and test datasets

when parameter tuning is performed, because received results on test set will be biased in this case).ibid.

- For the unconditional probability of the fact that any news article is correct all of the values from interval [0.2; 0.75] with step 0.01 were considered. For the true probability threshold, all of the values from interval [0.5; 0.9] with the same steps were considered. The best results on the validation dataset were received with the unconditional probability of the fact that any news article is correct being equal to 0.59 and the true probability threshold being equal to 0.8.ibid.
- The global parameters, that were tuned, are the unconditional probability of the fact that any news article is correct and the true probability threshold. The true probability threshold is such a value that every article with probability to be true news article bigger than the threshold would be considered by the classifier as a true news article, and all other articles – as false news articles.ibid.
- Consider the classification procedure of the naive Bayes classifier. When iterating through the words of the news article that is being classified, a corner case is possible: some specific word might not be present in the training dataset at all. For all such words, it was decided to define the probability of the news article being fake given that it contains this word as 0.5. Equation (4) won't be affected in such case: indeed, both nominator and denominator get multiplied by 0.5. Basically, current implementation just ignores such words.ibid.
- If all of the words in the news article are unknown to the classifier (never occurred in the training dataset), the classifier reports, that it cannot classify given news article.ibid.
- If some word occurred in the news article several times, it contributed to the total probability of the fact that a news article is fake exactly the same number of times.ibid.

- Equation (4) is computationally unstable if calculated directly. This is caused by the fact that lots of probabilities get multiplied, and the result of such multiplication becomes close to zero really fast. Most of programming languages do not provide the needed degree of precision, and that’s why they interpret the result of multiplication as exactly zero. Let  $p$  be the probability of the fact that a given news article is fake. One can calculate the value  $1/p - 1$  instead, and after that receive the value of  $p$  quite easily. The following equation holds:
- $1/p - 1 = p_2 / p_1 \quad (5),$
- where  $p, p_1, p_2$  are the same as in (2), (3) and (4).  $p_1$  and  $p_2$  can be calculated in more stable way using logarithms and exponentiation.

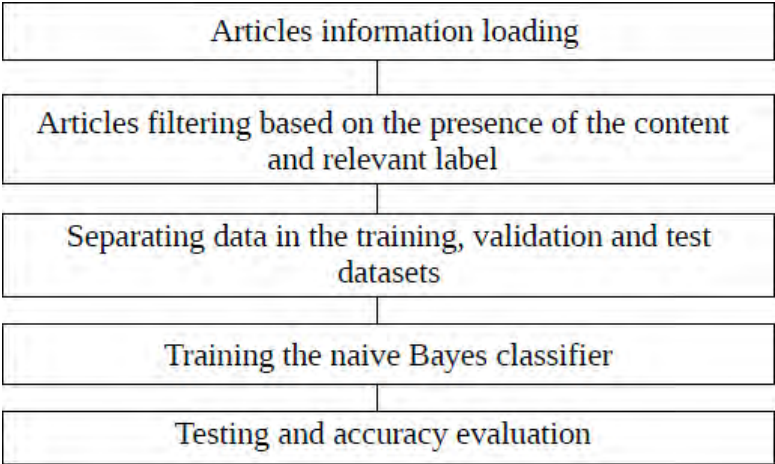


Figure 1 shows the generalized scheme of the used algorithm. *ibid.*

**Received Results**

The results, that were received, are shown in the Table 1.

The classification accuracy for true news articles and false news articles is roughly the same, but classification accuracy for fake news is slightly worse. This may be caused by the skewness of the dataset: only 4.9% of it are fake news.

Let's consider the result as positive, when the classifier classifies the news article as fake. Then:

- The number of true positive examples is the number of news articles, correctly classified as fake;
- The number of false positive examples is the number of news articles incorrectly classified as fake;
- The number of true negative examples is the number of news articles, correctly classified as true;
- The number of false negative examples is the number of news articles incorrectly classified as true;

The precision of a classifier is calculated as follows:

$$\text{Precision} = \text{tp} / (\text{tp} + \text{fp})$$

where:

tp – number of true positive examples; fp – number of false positive examples.

The recall of a classifier is calculated as follows:

$\text{Recall} = \text{tp} / (\text{tp} + \text{fn})$ , (7) where fn is a number of false negative examples.

The precision for the given classifier equals to 0.71; recall, on the other hand equals to 0.13. Such a low value of the recall, once again, is caused by the skewness of the data in the test dataset. We believe that precision is the most important characteristic of the given classifier. *ibid.*

**Table 1 Received Results**

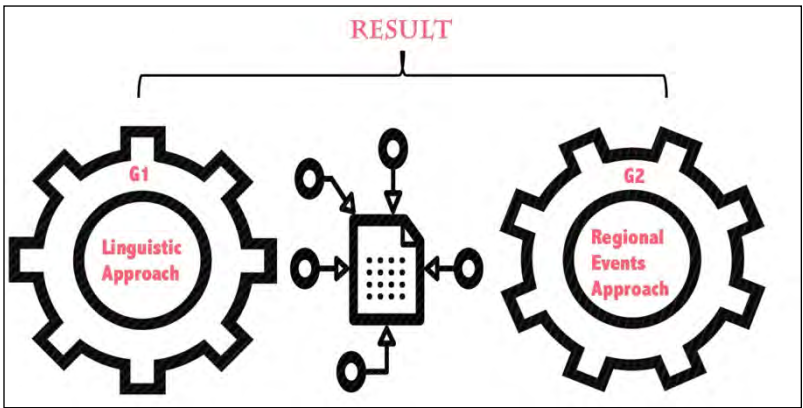
News article type	Total number of news in test dataset	Number of correctly classified news	Classification accuracy
True	881	666	75.59%
Fake	46	33	71.73%
Total	927	699	75.40%

Source: Mykhailo Granik et al [5]

**Proposed Approach**

(For this paper, two different processing approaches with new data set which contains 1000 articles (500 fake and 500 true) are used, and combined them to get a more accurate result.

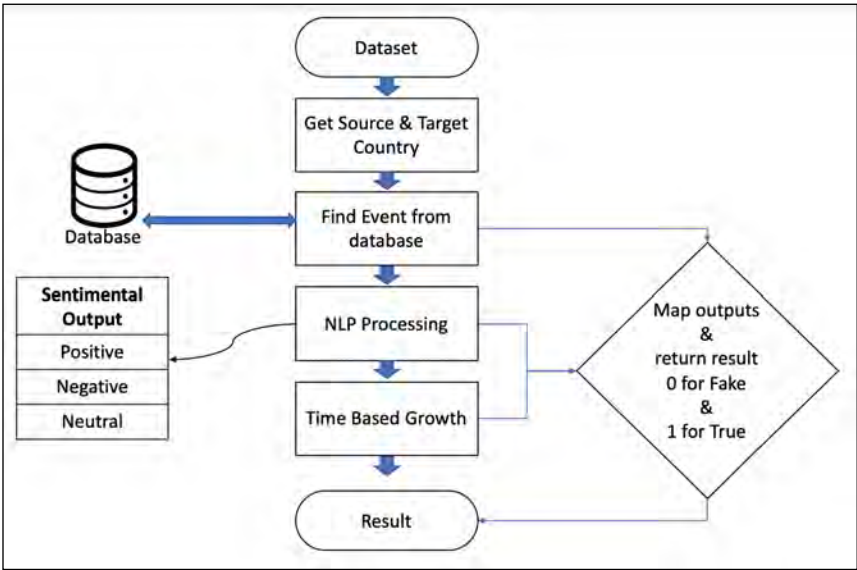
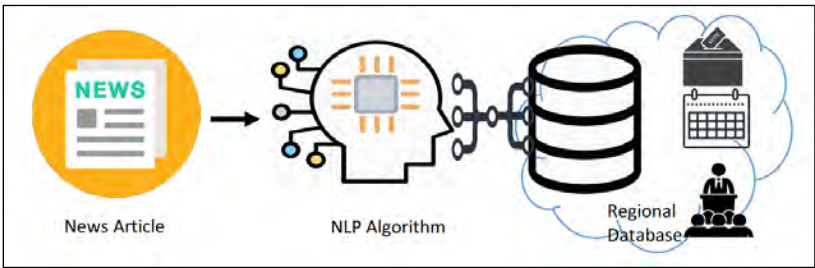
- One is the linguistic approach, which we have gone through in the last section. I used already trained Naïve Bayes Classifier for testing new dataset.
- The second is the regional events approach in which we use NLP for sentimental analysis and to map it to regional events along with time-based growth to decide whether the article is fake or real.





Implementation Details – G2

- G2 finds the claim source and destination using keywords i.e India, Pakistan.
- Then it performs text analysis using Natural Language Processing (NLP) algorithm which tells either article is negative, positive or neutral.
- At the end, it will map it to regional events database and time-based growth which helps in deciding as to whether either claim is biased or not.



**Results – G1**

News article type	Total number of news in test dataset	Number of correctly classified news	Classification accuracy
True	500	380	76%
Fake	500	290	58%
Total	1000	670	67%

Source: Authors own

**Results – G2**

News article type	Total number of news in test dataset	Number of correctly classified news	Classification accuracy
True	500	260	52%
Fake	500	410	82%
Total	1000	670	67%

Source: Authors own

**Combined Approach Result**

News article type	Total number of news in test dataset	Number of correctly classified news	Classification accuracy
True	500	350	70%
Fake	500	460	92%
Total	1000	810	81%

Source: Authors own

Comparison

News article type	Linguistic Approach	Regional Event Approach	Overall Result
True	76%	52%	70%
Fake	58%	82%	92%

Suggested Ways to Improve

We can improve the performance of classifier by adopting the following steps:

- Get more data and use it for training. In machine learning problems, it is often the case when getting more data significantly improves the performance of a learning algorithm. The dataset, that was described in this article contains only around 1000 articles. This number is really small, and we believe that a dataset with a couple of millions of news articles would be of a great help for the learning process. Unfortunately, such a dataset is not freely available right now.
- Use the dataset with much greater length of the news articles. The news articles that were presented in the current dataset were usually not that long, because they often were just a preview to a longer news article, available on the website, and different from Facebook. Training a classifier on a dataset with larger news articles should improve its performance significantly.
- Remove stop words from the news articles. Stop words are the words that are common to all types of texts - such as articles in English. These words are so common that they don't really affect the correctness of the information in the news article: so, it makes sense to get rid of them.

- Use stemming. In linguistic morphology and information retrieval, stemming is the process of reducing inflected (or sometimes derived) words to their word stem, base or root form – generally a written word form. Such technique helps to treat similar words (like “write” and “writing”) as the same words and may improve classifier’s performance as well.
- Monitor online growth of news. Rapid growth of any news article is also characteristic of fake news.
- Use web scrapping to retrieve updated data from social media sites and train naïve classifier periodically.
- In addition, the relevance between headline and news texts is very interesting which also helps to differentiate between fake and real news.

## **Conclusion**

The research showed that even quite simple machine learning algorithm (such as naive Bayes classifier along with NLP, regional events and time-based growth) may show a good result on such an important problem as fake news classification. Therefore, the results of this research suggest even more, that machine learning techniques may be successfully used to tackle this important, and growing problem.

## **Limitations**

- Used small regional dataset
- Need to maintain all regional events database which may be expensive.
- Language Constraint

## **Future Work**

The spread of fake news has raised concerns all over the world recently. This fake political news may have severe consequences. The identification of the fake news grows in importance. The proposed

model in this paper has strong expandability, which can easily absorb other features of news.

The dataset in this paper has focused on the English news only. We will crawl more data in other languages. It's also a promising direction to identify fake news with much social network information, such as the social network structures and the users' behaviours. As the development of Generative Adversarial Networks (GAN) the image can generate captions. It provides a novel way to evaluate the relevance between image and news text. With an expanded data set and stronger ground truth comes the ability to do more sophisticated classification and more in-depth natural language feature engineering, all with the hope to stop the spread of malicious fake news quickly. With more data and more in-depth features, our arguments could be made much stronger. Second, we would like to conduct user studies to more directly capture the persuasion mechanisms of fake and real news. For user's studies such as this to be valid, careful planning and ethical considerations are needed. It is hoped that this work helps the academic community to continue to build technology and a refined understanding of malicious fake news.

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