

**RESEARCH PAPER****Strategic Communication in Countering Disinformation Campaigns in Pakistan****<sup>1</sup>Muhammad Imran\* <sup>2</sup>Jannat Rashid and <sup>3</sup>Jannat Naseeb**

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**\*Corresponding Author:** F2023389008@umt.edu.pk**ABSTRACT**

This paper aims to analyze the effects of disinformation campaigns and importance of strategic communication by creating public awareness to counter disinformation campaigns in Pakistan. Neglecting strategic communication can leave room for external powers to influence narratives and divert attention from important social, economic, and political issues and creates a threat to human and national security in the country. By examining the impact of these campaigns on public sentiment and internal matters, the research offers suggestions for addressing disinformation through strategic communication. This research incorporates exploratory research because it deals with the casual relationship between disinformation campaigns and Strategic Communication. The Secondary form of research was conducted through articles, journals, books and newspaper for the fulfilment purpose of this study. The results emphasize the requirement for a holistic strategy in strategic communication, encompassing media literacy, public knowledge, and policy actions to nurture an informed and resilient society in Pakistan.

**KEYWORDS** Disinformation Campaigns, Media Literacy, National Security, Public Sentiment And Policy Actions, Resilient Society Public Awareness, Strategic Communication

**Introduction**

In the present quick moving and globalized world, communication assumes an essential part in forming the progress of associations, people, and social orders. Strategic Communication, specifically, has arisen as a basic part of organizational strategy, empowering entities to accomplish their objectives, construct connections, and explore complex conditions. Strategic communication refers to the deliberate and efficient exchange of data and thoughts between associations, partners, and public to accomplish explicit objectives and targets. It envelops a scope of communication disciplines, including public relations, crisis communications, brand management, digital communications, content marketing, corporate communications reputation management, stakeholder engagement, change management communications and stakeholder engagement. Strategic communication is a proactive and versatile methodology that use different communication channels, including, digital platforms, social media, traditional mediator reach and influence target audiences.

In order to accomplish goals, organizations need to effectively communicate targeted messages, objectives, and values to relevant audiences. This is why strategic communication is crucial. This could entail managing a crisis, influencing public opinion,

or garnering support for a particular programme or policy. In addition to making messages visible to targeted audiences, effective strategic communications also establish and preserve a solid rapport with clients, which raises dependability, accountability, and responsibility. Internally, employee engagement is positively impacted by communications that are focused and clear and are used to uphold and accomplish business goals.

To achieve national objectives, strategic communication requires a thorough strategy. It refers to developing a 'shared attitude' across all sectors and assisting institutions in generating a proper flow of desired common goals.

Unfortunately, the establishment of a strategic communication culture in Pakistan has been neglected while dealing with national and international objectives that provided a huge space for the external powers to implant their narrative and to distract from our social, economic, and political dimensions. One of the most important elements in strategic communications is its deliberate posture, as it is not something in a vacuum. The strategic portion involves the proper systematic description of a policy or the aims at the national or international level. Whereas the communications portion involves the supporting agents that disseminate information and promote and support actions to achieve the objective. To consolidate the objectives, words generate a narrative that is always dependent upon strong and credible action.

### **Literature Review**

Haque (2017) noted that disinformation in Pakistan covers a wide range of topics, from trivial matters to those with national and regional importance. This includes false security warnings, fake official papers, rumors regarding high-ranking military officials, and organized online assaults that include accusing news organizations of spreading false information. The author referenced a survey of readers by Dawn.com, where most of the 1,705 participants highlighted "fake news" as a significant issue in Pakistan. Nearly 45% of the respondents acknowledged falling for misleading information, believing it to be true (Muzaffar, Yaseen. Safdar, 2020; Haque, 2017).

Rehman, Hussain & Durrsheshwar found at least 72 instances of "fake news" on Pakistani social media in the three months following the general elections in 2018. This misinformation was centered on international relations, politics, military, judiciary, economy, and religious matters. It demonstrates that the harmful spread of false information is impacting all aspects of the State and society in Pakistan. The extensive propagation of fake news across Pakistani social media platforms is a troubling trend that has permeated various sectors including international relations, politics, military affairs, judiciary system, economy, and religious matters.

Ghani and Khan (2020) inspected the manner in which Pakistani individuals see and manage on the web and disconnected falsehood, utilizing a review of 503 people that addressed the country. As indicated by the overview, around 75% of respondents detailed experiencing falsehood no less than one time each week, while roughly 60% said they were simply ready to now and again recognize it. Respondents referenced that they regularly distinguished falsehood in the wake of looking for supporting proof on the web or contrasting news from various Television slots. They likewise demonstrated unknown virtual entertainment accounts as normal wellsprings of deception. Also, most overview members (70%) expressed that Facebook was the most often involved stage for spreading falsehood in Pakistan. These discoveries feature critical worries about disinformation in Pakistan and its effect on different areas including worldwide relations, legislative issues,

military undertakings, legal executive capabilities, economy political choices' making cycle religion among others. Jahangir (2020) offered extra examples of bogus data in Pakistan from 2018 to 2020, for example, a disdain crusade on Twitter focusing on a neighborhood tuition based school, a modified picture of President Arif Alvi, and tricky news content imitating the web composition of a conspicuous public media source.

Health-related false information in Pakistan occurred before the Covid-19 pandemic. One significant example is the fake anti-vaccine videos in 2019 which aimed at Pakistan's polio vaccination effort and resulted in arson, violent assaults on health workers, suspension of the vaccination program, and more than two million children not receiving vaccines (Bhattacharjee & Dotto, 2020).

### **Material and Methods**

This research incorporates exploratory research because it deals with the casual relationship between disinformation campaigns and Strategic Communication. It deals with the domino effect of disinformation campaigns on the domestic affairs of Pakistan. The Secondary form of research was conducted through articles, journals, books and newspaper for the fulfilment purpose of this study.

### **Rational or Necessity of Strategic Communication**

The rationale for adopting strategic communication as a unifying framework to analyze organizational communications is supported by the significance of these examples, at least for four key reasons.

**First**, Communicators are finding it increasingly difficult to distinguish between traditional communication activities and their impacts. While IMC has emphasized the coordination of different functions, many of these functions are themselves being redefined. For example, public relations professionals now often use paid advertising to convey important messages on topics such as corporate reputation and social issues. Meanwhile, marketers are leading cooperative programs and cause-related marketing efforts that were previously associated exclusively with public relations. The reason is clear: these strategies are effective in an era where organizations must set themselves apart, and audiences assess organizations from various angles including their products/services, expertise, service commitment, and societal accountability. Claims of exclusive responsibility for specific activities within an organization are increasingly being questioned in many organizations.

**Second**, the key transformations in public communication are shaped by advancements in technology and changes in media economics. Digital innovations like the World Wide Web and instant messaging have made it challenging to distinguish between advertising, publicity, sales promotion, or e-commerce. Technology is merging various communication channels and universities now provide courses in Multimedia Journalism or Media Convergence to equip aspiring journalists for careers within integrated media settings. Similarly, profit-focused media companies globally are blending traditional genres of public communication with advertorials, product placements, and sponsorships into a hybrid mix of messages. This serves as a significant, yet often neglected, illustration of postmodernism influencing communications.

**Third**, organizations employ a wide range of approaches to shape the behaviors of their stakeholders - influencing what people know, how they feel, and how they act in relation to the organization. As a result, people's perceptions of organizations are shaped

by their overall experiences, making it increasingly difficult to isolate the effects of individual communication activities. People may not distinguish between different types of communications that organizations utilize. For instance, there is a distinction between advertising and publicity. Therefore, it is crucial to approach an organization's communication efforts strategically and holistically.

**Fourth**, Strategic communication acknowledges that the primary objective of organizational communications is to exert intentional influence. While some fields are primarily focused on providing information (e.g., technical communication) or nurturing positive relationships (public relations), these aspects are essential but not entirely adequate for organizations to accomplish strategically significant objectives. Presently, communication theory and research should emphasize how communications support an organization's core purpose.

### **Impacts of Disinformation**

Disinformation, the deliberate spread of false or misleading information, can have severe effects on a country, impacting its political, social, and economic fabric. The effects of disinformation can be far-reaching, influencing public opinion, undermining trust in institutions, and threatening national security.

#### **Effects of Disinformation:**

- Disinformation might conceivably increment political parts, provoking the plan of secured, shut off conditions and the help of past inclinations, likewise tangling attempts to spread out shared perspectives.
- Disinformation might disintegrate trust in government, media, and various foundations as people become dubious of the information they are given.
- Disinformation might fuel violence, advance contempt talk, and stir up unhostile weakness by spreading deceiving information that triggers convincing sentiments and heightens pressures.
- Disinformation can potentially act as a strategy for unacquainted intercession, influencing political decisions and debilitating public safety.
- Disinformation might conceivably impact monetary sufficiency through the dispersal of wrong information about money related markers, achieving market unconventionality and causing weakness among monetary benefactors.

In Pakistan, the usage of trickiness to affect online political discussions addresses an enormous test. Before the 2018 general races in Pakistan, it was clear that philosophical gatherings were utilizing on the web amusement stages to control residents. This disinformation was by and large spread through made campaigns on relational associations. For example, certain gatherings would misleadingly help politically charged hashtags on Twitter to make them moving subjects inside the country. An examination of famous hashtags connected with the 2018 Pakistan races showed broad robotization, and a few records engaged with advancing political plans were likewise found dispersing deception and can't stand discourse. Disinformation can prompt suggestions and disarray, discouraging the general population from getting to valid wellsprings of data. Blaming columnists and word associations for getting out counterfeit news is progressively normal in Pakistan, frequently utilizing hurtful created

messages like photoshopped pictures to ruin them. The hashtag Capture Against Pak Writers in 2019 exemplified this hurtful pattern. In August 2020, a gathering of Pakistani female columnists gave an aggregate assertion to upbraid the web-based provocation focusing on ladies writers and pundits. The writers involved government authorities and allies of the decision party as agitators of these internet based assaults. They likewise noticed that misleading news and claims were being utilized via virtual entertainment to slander and target them. These coordinated disinformation campaigns and cyber bullying assaults seem intended to erode public trust in the media and hinder access to impartial critical news reporting. According to recent research, a majority of Pakistani journalists believe that misinformation has diminished public confidence in journalism, while accusations of spreading fake news have made them more cautious about sharing information out of fear.\* Disinformation has had significant adverse effects on public health during both before and throughout the Covid-19 pandemic in Pakistan. False medical claims circulated through social media have impeded people's ability to make informed decisions concerning their own or their children's well-being.

### **Case Study of Pakistan**

Pakistan has been facing a massive 'disinformation insurgency' in the post-global war on terror (GWOT). This disinformation insurgency has been armed through social media tools to spread hatred, disorder, lawlessness, and foul language culture with the aim of creating unrest. The most dangerous side of this type of insurgency is its self-destructive nature, once it crosses the threshold. By and by, the disinformation insurgency is a bigger challenge than zoonotic disease and terrorism that needs immediate securitization.

There are five attributes of this disinformation insurgency in Pakistan. First, to create and fuel political polarization which results in immature and hatred-based political communications among the leadership. The second is the fragmentation of institutional reputation to fracture constitutional balance. Third, crippling the defense regime of the state through an aggressive narrative based on false information. The fourth, and most dangerous, is to challenge the ideological foundations of the state through the insertion of buried philosophies.

To counter this dis-info insurgency, Pakistan needs a counter strategy based upon well-defined 'strategic communication'. This includes a systematic understanding of the problem, description, and proper action of relevant portions of statecraft. To change the direction of the affected society, strategic communication also demands a two-way process based on target responses. It also includes assessment of damage, execution of communications, and then analysis of response.

The 21st century is the century of 'information warfare' and nuclear capabilities have reduced the risk of traditional warfare between or among the states. The states are now less frightened of traditional external attacks and thus need a 'new army' with 'new arms'. This new army must be equipped with the ability to counter psychological operations, social networking tactics, countering propaganda, strategic negotiation techniques, diplomatic channeling, and information technology understanding. This will ultimately enhance the effectiveness of strategic communication and ensure protection for national security.

## **How Public Awareness Can Be Created**

Public mindfulness can be made through essential correspondence to battle disinformation in the open arena by:

- Creating a direct and clear storyline that stresses the dangers of deception and the meaning of depending on proof based information.
- Using different correspondence channels like online entertainment, regular media, and drawing in with the local area to grow our range.
- Joining forces with solid figures locally, powerhouses, and experts to fortify the message and lay out trust.
- Making convincing and instructive material, as infographics, recordings, and digital broadcasts, to draw in interest and energize sharing.
- Empowering the general population to distinguish and report deception, cultivating a sensation of responsibility and possession effectively.
- Incorporating media proficiency and decisive abilities to reason into instructive educational plans and local area drives.
- School educational plans and local area projects ought to coordinate media proficiency and decisive reasoning abilities.
- Facilitating social events, rallies, and instructive missions to increment mindfulness and spread proof based data.
- Utilizing information investigation to screen the examples of falsehood, pinpoint helpless crowds, and designer informing appropriately.
- Empowering individuals to confirm data prior to sharing and advancing a culture of decisive reasoning.
- Giving easy to understand truth checking apparatuses and assets, similar to program additional items and versatile applications.
- Teaching people in general about how to fundamentally evaluate data, perceive predispositions, and distinguish solid sources.
- Collaborating with government, non-governmental organizations, media, and technology sector partners to enhance the message and utilize resources

## **Conclusion**

The paper uncovers a critical coarseness of disinformation campaigns in Pakistan, causing different areas like governmental issues, legal executives, military and general well being. Disinformation campaigns disintegrates public confidence and undermines public safety. The contextual investigation features a "disinformation rebellion" pointed toward making political polarization, sabotaging institutional standing, and testing the philosophical ground works of the state.

Key correspondence arises as an urgent device in battling disinformation, underscoring the requirement for clear informing, multi-channel commitment, and media education. Strategic Communication incorporate framing a multi-partner team, executing media proficiency programs, supporting free truth, implementing responsibility for spreading misleading data and working together with global accomplices.

All in all, essential correspondence gives a retroactive structure to address disinformation campaigns in Pakistan, requiring an organized exertion from

government, common society, media and innovation stages. By ensuring the aforementioned recommendations and implementing the retroactive measures by formulating strategic communication and enhancing public awareness, the impact of disinformation can be mitigated.

### **Recommendations**

Considering the countermeasures mentioned earlier, here are some policy recommendations to counter disinformation through strategic communication in Pakistan:

- The system for regulating online content in Pakistan is unclear and unpredictable, posing a concern for human rights advocates who fear that authorities might use misinformation as a pretext to monitor the lawful online communication of citizens. Therefore, it is crucial that guidelines for regulating online content and policies against disinformation are developed in accordance with human rights law, and any restrictions on expression due to disinformation are implemented transparently.
- Research from around the world suggests that fully eradicating false information through technical means may not be achievable. As a result, it's crucial to raise awareness about the dangers of disinformation and promote safe internet usage among online users. Including media and information literacy skills in educational programs and public outreach efforts can play a key role in educating people about how to respond to online disinformation.
- Elderly or less educated groups in society are vulnerable to misinformation on social networks and messaging platforms such as WhatsApp. The government should create specific media and information literacy programs for these populations, as they may not have access to MIL initiatives within the formal education system. These particular projects could incorporate local area commitment and the usage of conventional media and expert organizations to advance computerized proficiency.
- Advanced innovation firms actually need to zero in on diminishing the spread of bogus data on their foundation. While informal organizations have teamed up with and supported reality checking endeavors, the test frequently lies in pursuing substance balance choices. These organizations ought to begin by executing worldwide common liberties regulation as an establishment for their substance balance rules. Furthermore, they should focus on advancing straightforwardness in publicizing and record proprietorship affiliations, going to lengths against clients and records associated with persevering dispersal of bogus data, and empowering clients to report deluding content.
- The Main Draft contextual analysis on enemy of immunization deception in Pakistan features the test for specialists when tech stages eliminate misleading data. Admittance to these eliminated messages is significant for concentrating on the stream and effect of disinformation on the web. Giving admittance to scientists while keeping up with security conventions can uphold the assessment of disinformation patterns, adding to the advancement of systems and answers for address online deception.

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