"Media and Hybrid War: Political influence and Disinformation"

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ABSTRACT

The 21st century has seen an expansion of information communication. The Internet and its confluence with information technology have increased accessibility to media, especially social media. On the one hand, it has facilitated the people; on the other, it has created complexities in warfare because these modern media tools have become dangerous weapons for many states and non-state actors. Modern media tools have made it easier to launch online battles and influence events at national and global levels. The mode of war has seen a dramatic shift as media has entered the domain of warfare and become one of the main components of modern warfare. Manipulation of opinion through modern media tools has played a significant role in altering the outcomes. The Russian interference in the U.S. presidential election, the role of media in the French election, and Brexit show how media plays its role in changing perceptions. Some countries and non-state actors are employing media as an instrument of warfare for their political goals. Modern media tools have emerged as power instruments to influence a democratic process and promote negative propaganda to achieve the desired goals. The study aims to explore the role of media in hybrid warfare in a global context and examines emerging challenges of Media as an instrument of modern action against Pakistan arising from external and internal actors.

Introduction

The Internet and advancement in information technology have led to many positive developments in the modern world. It has led to the creation of modern media tools such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp, etc. Besides, the expansion of information technology and the Internet have increased the access of individuals to these modern media outlets. On the other hand, technological advancement has created complexities in the security domain. It has created complexities in warfare because these modern media tools have become dangerous weapons for many states and non-state actors. Modern media tools have made it easier to launch online battles and influence events at national and global levels. (Svetoka, 2016)

The increasing access to the Internet and modern media tools has made it easier for states and non-state actors to launch online battles denying the geographical barriers. These media tools have become an effective weapon as it has the potential to affect important events at the national as well as international level. Over the past two decades, the role of media in warfare has grown, with many states and non-state actors employing it as a tool to pursue their political and military goals. Cyber-attacks, diplomatic and economic pressure, and information (propaganda) campaigns have emerged as warfare tactics by many states and non-state actors. Virtual communication platforms have become a critical part of warfare strategy. Conflicts in Syria, Libya, and Ukraine demonstrate an augmented role of social media in coordinating actions, collecting information, and, most importantly, influencing the beliefs and attitudes of target audiences, even mobilizing them for action. (Svetoka, 2016) Hoffman (2007) has defined hybrid war as "information warfare is and why it is so a powerful and dangerous tool in international affairs. Information warfare is a subpart of hybrid warfare. Hybrid war is the combination of multiple types of warfare used simultaneously to flexibly fit the political goals in particularly circus mantes". (Hoffman, 2007)

The digital revolution, expansion of information, and the growing dependency on the Internet have dramatically shifted, influenced, and manipulated. In addition, cyber-attacks, subversion, and sabotage have added more complexity to security planning in this age of modernization (Buchanan, 2020). Social media tools are employed as spyware, propaganda amplifiers, and tools of hybrid war. Cyber-attacks and smartphone tweets are spreading without geographic barriers, manipulating opinions and destabilizing cohesion. (Rosenberger, 2020) In a digital, social-media-oriented society, fake news and Disinformation have become dangerous weapons.

The world in which we live is labeled as a post-truth era. In this era, alternative relatives have been created, which makes people believe in fake realities. Modern media tools generate dramatic, sensational, and emotional content damaging social cohesion and democratic norms. In addition, modern media tools have become dangerous warfare tools, which has brought a shift in the traditional way of fighting by shifting the mode of warfare. Media has emerged as a critical tool used in modern warfare, known as hybrid war. Modern media tools are used to fight against a rival state for strategic goals (Mitrovic, 2018). Hybrid warfare is waged to damage the peace and stability of a state, particularly a nuclear state such as Pakistan. Hostile countries, particularly India, use hybrid warfare strategies to exploit Pakistan's domestic fault lines, such as political, social, and economic, to weaken the country internally.

Over the past two decades, the role of media has increased in hybrid warfare. Social media tools such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, etc., are employed as instruments of hybrid war. The emergence of these modern media tools has made it easier than before to promote propaganda and spread fake news. There is no media ethics and code of journalism for these modern media tools, thus making them a

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source of unethical journalism, and unjustified news is spread without authenticity verification (Singer & Brooking, 2018).

This research attempts to address the critical question of the research: What is the role of media in hybrid war? Why media has become an effective instrument of hybrid war. What are the social and political implications of media war, especially in the context of Pakistan?

Political Influence and Disinformation as a tool of Hybrid War

In this age of digitalization and information, alternative relatives have been created, which makes people believe in fake realities. Modern media tools generate dramatic, sensational, and emotional content damaging social cohesion and democratic norms. In addition, modern media tools have become dangerous warfare tools, which has brought a shift in the traditional way of fighting by shifting the mode of warfare. Media has emerged as a critical tool used in modern warfare known as hybrid war. Modern media tools are used to fight against a rival state for strategic goals (Mitrovic, 2018).

In the contemporary era, digital information and its role in warfare have been the focus of governments and academia. It got more attention during the Russian invasion of Crimea in the year 2014. Russia used Disinformation as an instrument of warfare for its broader strategic goals. About the Russian media role in the Crimea conflict, a top military official of NATO stated that "the most amazing information warfare blitzkrieg we have ever seen in the history of information warfare" (Frolova, 2015). Many countries have adopted media war as a preferred warfare strategy in the modern world. Russia, the United States, China, Israel, India, etc., have integrated social media platforms into military operations that are utilized for propaganda (Galeotti, 2015; Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2015).

The hasty development of Information Technology has dramatically altered the information environment of the twenty-first century (NATO, 2015). Countries with imminent advantages would have won the war if conventional wars were fought with sticks and stones. However, modern warfare is a high-tech battleground where social media has emerged as a powerful weapon. Russian interference in the. U.S. election to online recruitment for terror groups such as ISIS, false news, and fake accounts are used to create hype, incite violence, and manipulate outcomes (Singer & Brooking, 2018).

Mass media are essential to democratic society; when we relate it to the war on terror, the results are evident by reshaping the perspective of public opinion (Simons, 2010). There are many instances where a shift in public opinion has occurred; one recent instance is monitoring the Trump election through cyber operations. State actors and non-state actors alike have used the power of the media to sway public opinion. Although the way that mass media is utilized to persuade people is unique, there have been numerous instances where this tactic has been employed repeatedly. It is now seen as the critical component of warfare, as conflicts have historically involved more political than military action. Remember, mass media are more likely to achieve personal and objective goals today. (Nadeem, Kakar, Khan, & Mustafa 2021).

The independence of the Media is a contentious topic in and of itself because it goes against a state's national interests to allow for the free flow of information relative to the role of the general populace and the non-state players engaged. However, concerning warfare, the phrase mainly refers to the non-kinetic conflict that excludes the use of military force. Hybrid warfare came into existence when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 (Centner, 2019). On September 12 September 12, 2000, Vladimir Putin, the current president of Russia, signed the Doctrine of Information Security. This doctrine's initial impact was to prevent Misinformation regarding state policies and perceptions of the Russian outlook from reaching the worldwide audience. This new law paved the stage for media censorship.

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Most nations share Russia's policy of not jeopardizing their national sovereignty. This is because it will likely be used against them by non-state actors.

The dimension of warfare has changed in the past decades, and media has entered the domain of warfare. (Ferrara, 2017) Hybrid warfare includes cyber breaches, paramilitary troops funding, electoral interference, Misinformation, false news, murder and abduction, and encouraging religious and political groups to increase social tensions and violence (Marovic, 2019). Hybrid warfare is now the new domain that states employ to achieve their motives without engaging directly. Hybrid warfare tactics differ from military engagement, where conventional strategies are in play; however, states employ irregular and cyber warfare tactics. Russia has used hybrid warfare way more than any other state. Hybrid warfare is a matter of concern for states. (Renz, 2016)

In recent times, war has been indirect in approach, i.e., weakening the enemy from the inside than actually confronting them (Faber & Faber, 1927). This has been observed in the proxies war in the cold war and in recent times in Afghanistan, Syria, and during Arab Spring, where the authoritarian regimes were brought down to their knees, paving the way to democratic norms. The strategy proves effective where the cultural differences are weak, and the masses can be persuaded to accept what is right and what circumstances dictate. Resultantly achieving the outcomes without engaging in war and even losing the troops.

The terminology of "fake news" got the prominence during the U.S. presidential election of 2016. Fake news is defined as intentionally false news to cause mislead society. (Yerlikaya & Aslan, 2020 On the other hand, the term misinformation is defined as propagating wrong information. In this way, the argument that we have entered a "post-truth" era when the truth has lost importance is strengthened by how fake news distorts social reality and how heavily it is used. In the post-truth era, perceptions are more significant than facts, and it is much easier to manipulate and spread false information to large audiences. (Yerlikaya & Aslan, 2020).

With the emergence of the digitalized world and a new media environment, fake news has become the potential source that effectively influences global events. It is widely believed that fake news played a decisive role in Donald Trump's victory in the presidential election of 2016. In addition, social media was instrumentalized in the Brexit referendum. U.K. Fake news and Disinformation were spread massively on social media platforms and deemed a grave threat to the democratic process. According to an official report of the British parliament, social media applications were used to influence the prejudices and fears of the masses and eventually impact the voting process. During the voting process, the campaign exploited the rising populist wave across the globe and made content regarding the economy and immigration. For example, fake accounts about Turkey and its people were created and used. For instance, a story propagated that twelve million Turks would come to the U.K.U.K. and change the country's demographics. (Press T.V., 2018) Another prominent example illustrating the employment of socio-media as a weapon of manipulation is the French presidential election in 2017. During the election, fake news on social media outlets greatly influenced the election. It was alleged that Russia was spreading false information to influence the elections to produce a particular result. A few days before the elections, false information was spread on social media to influence the outcome. Fake news stories have become an essential topic of discussion not only in France but also around the world. (Yerlikaya & Aslan, 2020)

Pakistan and the Media war

Over the past two decades, negative campaigns through the media have intensified against Pakistan. Hostile countries and non-state actors are employing

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media tools to weaken Pakistan internally. Pakistan's arch-rival India has long been involved in a media war against Pakistan. By disseminating misleading and fake news, India is using the Media as a weapon of hybrid warfare against Pakistan to tarnish, destabilize, and harm its reputation in the international world. The Indian Intelligence agency created the fictitious front company Srivastava Group (S.G.) in 2005, with its corporate offices in New Delhi. For the previous fifteen years, this group has been in charge of running the propaganda network. The group's primary objective is to promote misleading information against Pakistan via fabricated stories, as ANI, a prominent Indian news organization, reported. (Baloch, Mustafa, Kakar & Kakar, 2021)

A 15-year-old Indian disinformation network that ran hundreds of fake news sites to indoctrinate the European Union and the U.N. with anti-Pakistan content was revealed in 2019. The network was responsible for a defamation campaign against Pakistan, planning and executing social media attacks each year during meetings of the U.N. Human Rights Council. During the 42nd session of the U.N. Human Rights Council, the "Pakistan Stop Genocide" campaign was held on September 10, 2019, in front of the U.N. Additionally, the network included phone N.G.O.s that spread false information. The report by EU DisinfoLab says: "we have uncovered an entire network of coordinated UN-accredited N.G.O.s promoting Indian interests and criticizing Pakistan repeatedly. We could tie at least 10 of them directly to [the] S.G. family with several other dubious N.G.O.s pushing the same messages" (Machado, Alaphilippe, & Adamczyk, 2020).

It has become popular to use anti-state movements on social media to generate buzz. India has built a sizable network of websites promoting false information about Pakistan. Unfortunately, some organizations in Pakistan cooperate with adversarial nations, and they are frequently observed promoting trends in social media against the country. India's National Investigation Agency (N.I.A.) supports these trends."

(Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2021).

In addition, for a long time, the Indian government has been trying to destabilize Balochistan province. The Indian National Media has always been found involved in disseminating fake news about the province. (Baloch, Mustafa, Kakar & Kakar, 2021). The Indian Media is promoting false and misleading information about Balochistan to further its government's political goals, which include harming Pakistan's reputation abroad. It publishes articles that attempt to shine a light on Pakistan's purported Balochistan crisis and disseminates false stories about the "deep-rooted and festering political, economic, and human rights concerns of Balochistan." It also highlights militant strikes and bombings in the region. (Baloch, Mustafa, Kakar & Kakar, 2021)

Way Forward

Social Media is being exploited to distribute fabricated information for malicious reasons. Social media networks are vulnerable to information cascades, in which users spread information without confirming its validity. Social Media is becoming a powerful instrument for disseminating false information more quickly than before. A key weapon in warfare in the twenty-first century is social media. The information age's methods have altered as a result of technological growth. Social media changes both war and peace.

On the one hand, it raises awareness and is essential for advancing social and economic development. However, it has also changed the danger landscape from conventional to hybrid, causing difficulties for national security. (Prier, 2017). This trend is likely to increase in the future.

Presently, unfriendly nations use the Media as a weapon of war against Pakistan. In this situation, India is waging media campaigns that support the policies of the Modi-led B.J.P., which views war propaganda as a tool for gaining political advantage. Indian Media is prejudicial towards Pakistan, especially against the

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Muslim identity. These tactics must be changed to guarantee long-term peace and stability. The role of the global community is vital in this situation. It must create a standard code of journalism and play a role in promoting nonviolent reporting.

Conclusion

A key conclusion of the study is that Media has become an effective instrument of hybrid war. Over the past two decades, the role of media has increased in a hybrid war; mainly, social media has emerged as a powerful tool of this modern warfare. The Internet, combined with technological advancement, has made it easier to spread false information and misleading reports through media outlets, especially social media, to achieve the desired goals. The Russian interference in U.S. presidential election reveals how the democratic press is influenced, and public opinions are changed through fake accounts.

Pakistan is also facing the severe challenges of hybrid warfare. Almost all the instruments of hybrid warfare have been imposed against the country. Media has become an effective instrument of warfare for rival states and non-state actors to damage the country's social cohesion by spreading fake news and misleading reports. These fake news and propaganda campaigns are aimed at damaging the country's national unity and creating resentment among the population. Media war has become a preferred strategy for hostile countries. India has been employing it as an instrument of warfare against Pakistan. The hostile countries have imposed indirect warfare against Pakistan, targeting the country with modern tools of war, particularly disinformation campaigns launched to weaken Pakistan internally, which have social-political, economic, and political implications for the country.

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