

Original Article

REPRESENTATION OF INFORMATION WARFARE ON SOCIAL MEDIA: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF FACEBOOK REGARDING THE RECENT TENSIONS BETWEEN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This study intends to analyze the representation of information warfare on Facebook in the context of the recent tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Within the framework of developments in the digital age, social media platforms have the role for shaping public perception and narrative competition. Using a quantitative content analysis approach supported by interpretive analysis, the study examined 107 Facebook posts from three selected pages during a one-month period at the peak of the tensions. Data were coded based on a designed codebook and analyzed through descriptive statistics and inferential tests.

The findings show that the representation of tensions is predominantly framed through confrontational, security-oriented, and nationalist perspectives, while peace-oriented frames occupy only a minor share. Nationalism and enemy construction also play a major role in directing content, and the opposing side is frequently represented as an “enemy.” The results further demonstrate that information warfare operates in a complex and indirect manner, while emotional and visual elements significantly contribute to increasing user engagement. Overall, Facebook can be understood as an active arena within the field of information warfare.

Keywords: Information Warfare, Facebook, Representation, Afghanistan and Pakistan, Nationalism, Content Analysis

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, war and conflict no longer occur solely on physical battlefields; rather, they continuously unfold within informational, media, and cognitive spaces as well. The transformation of communication technologies and the expansion of digital platforms have caused information, narratives, images, and news-framing techniques to become active and influential elements in conflicts. Under such conditions, controlling meaning, directing perception, and shaping narratives have become as important as controlling territory. Therefore, in contemporary literature, information warfare is no longer limited merely to the dissemination of misinformation; instead, it is defined as a strategic practice aimed at influencing public perception, political legitimacy, social trust, and audience decision-making Whyte et al. (2020), Velchev (2025).

The expansion of social media has further complicated this process. Features such as rapid dissemination, simultaneous user participation, low content-production costs, and content-amplification algorithms have transformed these platforms into suitable environments for the spread of propaganda, misinformation, and influence operations. In this environment, messages are not only disseminated rapidly, but are also reinforced and reproduced through mechanisms such as sharing, liking, and commenting, enabling them to reach broad segments of public opinion within a short period of time. Furthermore, the networked structure of these media

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platforms facilitates the transfer of messages from limited circles into the public sphere and their transformation into dominant trends [Prier \(2017\)](#). For this reason, social media can be understood not only as a communication tool, but also as a battlefield and even a weapon in information warfare, where various actors are able to engage in narrative competition and influence public opinion at relatively low cost [Preda \(2021\)](#).

Moreover, the user-centered nature of social media has largely blurred the boundary between producers and consumers of information. In such an environment, every user can function as an active agent in producing, resharing, and reinforcing content. This characteristic has enabled unverified information, rumors, and subjective interpretations to spread more rapidly than through traditional media, thereby creating favorable conditions for the dissemination of fake news, the distortion of reality, and perception management [Babacan and Tam \(2022\)](#).

Meanwhile, tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan have not remained limited to diplomatic or border-level disputes; rather, they have also gained extensive visibility within social media spaces, particularly on Facebook. These representations are often constructed through competing narratives, emotional nationalism, labeling, enemy construction, and the legitimization of one side through the delegitimization of the opposing side. Within this environment, users, media organizations, and political actors simultaneously participate in the production and reproduction of content, thereby transforming cyberspace into a secondary arena of conflict. Related experiences also demonstrate that, during times of crisis, social media can intensify perceptions of threat, facilitate the spread of fabricated content, and contribute to the polarization of public opinion.

Accordingly, analyzing Facebook content concerning the recent tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan can provide a deeper understanding of how information warfare is represented and reproduced. This type of analysis makes it possible to identify dominant patterns in content production, the use of language and emotional expression, framing strategies, and the role of visual elements such as images and videos in shaping narratives—elements that play an important role in directing messages and influencing audiences within social media environments [Prier \(2017\)](#). In this context, social media can become a platform for narrative competition and influence over public opinion [Preda \(2021\)](#), while information itself functions as a source of power and a tool of influence in conflicts [Van Vuuren \(2018\)](#), [Abdyraeva \(2020\)](#). Therefore, in this study, Facebook is considered not merely as a reflector of events, but as one of the active spaces involved in the production, reinforcement, and circulation of narratives, and consequently as part of the conflict itself.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Recent developments demonstrate that social media platforms are no longer merely tools for information transmission; rather, they have become arenas of narrative, psychological, and cognitive competition. Within the framework of information warfare, the objective is not simply the dissemination of information, but the promotion of a particular narrative, the weakening of rival narratives, the creation of cognitive instability, and the direction of public opinion. In this networked environment, the audience is not merely a passive recipient of messages, but also plays an active role in producing, resharing, and reinforcing content—an issue that contributes to the faster spread of misinformation and its various forms, including distorted and fabricated content [Dowse and Bachmann \(2022\)](#).

Within conflict settings, users are typically situated within like-minded networks and are more likely to accept messages that align with their pre-existing beliefs. Under such conditions, the influence of messages increases when they correspond with already-established narratives, and perceptions of truth become grounded less in objective reality and more in consistency with subjective beliefs and trust in the source [Prier \(2017\)](#), [Dowse and Bachmann \(2022\)](#). This situation suggests that information warfare is focused less on proving reality than on competing to shape perceptions and capture the minds of audiences.

Empirical evidence from regional conflicts further demonstrates that social media can contribute to the intensification of emotional nationalism, media bias, and narrative competition among actors [Hussain et al. \(2021\)](#). Nevertheless, despite the expansion of such studies, only limited research has specifically examined how information warfare is represented on Facebook within the context of the recent tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan. This research gap indicates that there is still no coherent understanding of the dominant content patterns, framing strategies, and persuasive techniques operating in this context.

Accordingly, the central problem of this study is to determine what kinds of frames, themes, persuasive techniques, and emotional patterns Facebook reproduces in representing information warfare surrounding the recent tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The importance of this issue lies in the fact that, within fragile societies, media representations may go beyond merely reflecting crises and can instead contribute to intensifying feelings of insecurity, fear, and social division. Increased exposure to political information on social media has likewise been associated with heightened fear of conflict.

SIGNIFICANCE AND NEED FOR STUDY

The significance of this study can be explained from four perspectives. First, from a theoretical standpoint, information warfare has become one of the key dimensions of contemporary conflicts, in which information functions as a tool for influencing perception, legitimacy, and social decision-making [Whyte et al. \(2020\)](#). In this context, social media platforms, as “amplifiers” of this process, facilitate the rapid and widespread dissemination of narratives [Velchev \(2025\)](#).

Second, from a social perspective, social media platforms under conditions of tension can contribute to the intensification of collective fear, polarization, and distrust. Within this environment, the spread of misinformation and distorted content obscures the boundary between truth and falsehood for users and increases vulnerability to deception even among informed audiences [Ivančík, and Nečas \(2022\)](#), [Moldovan et al. \(2025\)](#).

Third, from a political and security perspective, understanding the mechanisms through which conflict is represented on platforms such as Facebook carries practical significance in fragile societies. Such understanding can contribute to strengthening media literacy, improving responsible journalism, and designing policies to counter misinformation, particularly in light of the role of social media in decision-making processes and social cohesion [Babacan and Tam \(2022\)](#), [Nissen \(2016\)](#).

Fourth, from a research perspective, the limited number of studies focusing specifically on Facebook’s role in representing Afghanistan–Pakistan tensions reveals an important research gap. By concentrating on this platform and regional context, the present study can contribute to the development of the existing literature and provide a basis for comparison with other conflicts.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

GENERAL OBJECTIVE

To analyze how information warfare is represented on Facebook regarding the recent tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To identify the major themes and content frames in Facebook posts related to the recent Afghanistan–Pakistan tensions.
- To examine how actors, victims, enemies, and national interests are represented in these contents.
- To identify signs of information warfare such as propaganda, misinformation, polarization, and perception management.
- To analyze persuasive and emotional techniques used in texts, images, and Facebook narratives.
- To provide an analytical framework for understanding Facebook’s role in intensifying or reproducing regional tensions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How is information warfare represented in Facebook content related to the recent tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan?
- What themes, keywords, and interpretive frames are emphasized in these representations?
- What signs of propaganda, misinformation, enemy construction, and perception management can be identified in these contents?
- How are the principal actors in the conflict represented in Facebook content?
- What linguistic, visual, and emotional techniques are employed to influence public opinion?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Since this study is based on content analysis, the hypotheses are formulated as follows:

- 1) Facebook content concerning the recent Afghanistan–Pakistan tensions relies more on confrontational and security-oriented frames than peace-oriented frames.
- 2) Representations of the enemy and emotional nationalism are more prominent than balanced and verified information.
- 3) Signs of information warfare, such as simplification of reality, polarization, and reproduction of biased narratives, appear in a significant portion of the examined content.
- 4) Emotional and visual elements on Facebook play a major role in strengthening the impact of information warfare messages.

DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

In this study, “information warfare” refers to the strategic use of information and communication technologies to influence audience perception, decision-making, and behavior; a process in which information may be employed for misdirection, legitimization, destabilization, or the construction of political narratives [Whyte et al. \(2020\)](#), [Velchev \(2025\)](#).

“Social media” refers to interactive digital platforms that enable the production, redistribution, and rapid dissemination of content and, under conditions of conflict, may function as tools for propaganda dissemination, polarization, and perception management [Prier \(2017\)](#).

In Stuart Hall’s perspective, “representation” is defined as the process of producing and exchanging meaning through language and systems of signs. In other words, individuals use words, images, and symbols to communicate their concepts and mental perceptions of the world to others and to assign meaning to objects, individuals, and events. Within this framework, representation is not merely a reflection of reality; rather, it itself plays a fundamental role in the construction and production of meaning [Hall \(1997\)](#).

“Misinformation/Fake news” refers to content that appears similar to authentic news but is, in reality, false, distorted, or misleading, and is often produced and disseminated with the intention of influencing audience perception or deceiving users. This type of content may include entirely fabricated news, manipulated content, propaganda, or even promotional material that imitates the format and style of news media in order to gain apparent legitimacy and spread rapidly, particularly on social media platforms [Tandoc et al., \(2017\)](#).

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The thematic scope of this study is the representation of information warfare on Facebook. The temporal scope focuses on a specific wave of tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, while the spatial scope is limited to cyberspace, particularly selected Facebook pages.

The limitations of the study include the deletion of some posts, the difficulty of verifying the accuracy of certain contents without independent fact-checking, and the restriction of the sample to three selected Facebook pages. Nevertheless, limiting the study to selected pages and critical time periods also constitutes a methodological advantage, as it enables a focused census of all relevant posts and makes the study realistic and feasible.

LITERATURE REVIEW

INFORMATION WARFARE: FROM A SECURITY CONCEPT TO THE COGNITIVE DOMAIN

Information warfare was initially understood primarily in connection with issues of national security, psychological operations, and cyber warfare. However, recent literature demonstrates that this phenomenon extends far beyond mere cyberattacks. Whyte and colleagues distinguish between *cyber war* and *information warfare*, emphasizing that in information warfare, information itself becomes a weapon, and the principal objective is the manipulation of perception, legitimacy, and social judgment [Whyte et al. \(2020\)](#). Velchev likewise conceptualizes information warfare as a strategic phenomenon that employs information management and communication technologies to gain advantage over an adversary [Velchev \(2025\)](#).

Abdyraeva situates this phenomenon within the context of hybrid warfare and explains that information warfare is designed to influence public perception, belief systems, and emotions [Abdyraeva \(2020\)](#). Van Vuuren further demonstrates that information and power have become increasingly intertwined, with polarization emerging as one of their consequences [Van Vuuren \(2018\)](#). Rosenzweig also emphasizes that modern wars combine informational instruments with forms of non-physical influence [Rosenzweig \(2016\)](#).

SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ARCHITECTURE OF CONFLICT

The evolution of Web 2.0 and the socialization of content production have transformed the architecture of conflict. Prier demonstrates that, due to trending algorithms and network structures, social media platforms have become primary tools for the dissemination of narratives and influence operations [Prier \(2017\)](#).

Preda emphasizes that, because of the speed of dissemination and the difficulty of source verification, social media platforms provide a favorable environment for propaganda and fake news [Preda \(2021\)](#). Erbschloe also refers to “social media warfare” as a condition in which all actors are capable of becoming active participants within the information domain [Erbschloe \(2017\)](#). Nissen further demonstrates that social media can influence citizens’ perceptions and political behavior while disrupting social cohesion [Nissen \(2016\)](#).

PROPAGANDA, PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT, AND EMOTIONAL INFLUENCE

Propaganda has acquired a more complex form in the age of social media. Babacan and Tam demonstrate that during the Russia–Ukraine war, fabricated content spread rapidly during the early stages of the crisis [Babacan and Tam \(2022\)](#). Velchev also highlights the role of social media in radicalization and polarization [Velchev \(2025\)](#).

[Dowse and Bachmann \(2022\)](#) explain that the success of a message depends on the interaction among media, message, and audience, and that information warfare increasingly resembles a war over “minds” [Dowse and Bachmann \(2022\)](#). Whyte and colleagues likewise describe information operations as a combination of persuasion, deception, and confusion [Whyte et al. \(2020\)](#).

MISINFORMATION, THE POST-TRUTH CONDITION, AND THE CRISIS OF TRUST

[Dowse and Bachmann \(2022\)](#) demonstrate that social media platforms provide environments highly susceptible to the spread of misinformation and propose classifications such as *false context* and *fabricated content* (pp. 5–7). Kalpokas, in discussing the concept of *post-truth*, argues that audiences pay greater attention to the consistency of information with their beliefs than to truth itself [Kalpokas \(2024\)](#).

Moldovan and colleagues show that even informed individuals remain vulnerable to *fake news* [Kalpokas \(2024\)](#). Ivančík and Nečas likewise conceptualize misinformation as part of hybrid threats [Ivančík, and Nečas \(2022\)](#).

ECHO CHAMBERS, POLARIZATION, AND COLLECTIVE FEAR

Prier explains that social media platforms reinforce like-minded narratives (pp. 70–75). Guan demonstrates that such environments can intensify fear of conflict [Guan \(2025\)](#). Hussain and colleagues further show that, within regional conflicts, social media can intensify nationalism and narrative competition [Hussain et al. \(2021\)](#). Velchev likewise points to the role of these platforms in exacerbating polarization [Velchev \(2025\)](#).

THE NEW GENERATION OF INFORMATION WARFARE

Hartmann and Giles demonstrate that artificial intelligence and synthetic media are shaping the future of information warfare [Hartmann and Giles \(2020\)](#). Whyte and colleagues likewise explain the evolution of information operations into the digital sphere [Whyte et al. \(2020\)](#).

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Unlike the literature review, which focuses on explaining concepts and theoretical frameworks, this section is devoted to examining empirical studies and research evidence related to information warfare on social media. A systematic review of these studies demonstrates that information warfare, particularly within the context of social media, has become one of the central themes in communication, security, and political science research. Nevertheless, in terms of thematic focus and analytical approach, this body of literature exhibits identifiable patterns as well as limitations that require critical examination.

At the international level, a considerable portion of the literature has focused on analyzing information warfare within the context of major crises, especially the Russia–Ukraine war. For example, [Babacan and Tam \(2022\)](#) demonstrate that during the early stages of the war, a large volume of fabricated and distorted content circulated on social media platforms, transforming these platforms into the primary environment for the dissemination of misinformation (pp. 84–86). These findings indicate that, under crisis conditions, the logic of speed tends to prevail over the logic of accuracy, thereby pushing the information environment toward instability and ambiguity. However, the primary focus of these studies remains on the “detection and spread of misinformation,” while paying less attention to the question of how such content produces meaning and shapes audience perceptions through representation, framing, and discursive elements.

At the regional level, studies such as that of [Hussain et al. \(2021\)](#) demonstrate that social media platforms, within geopolitical conflicts, become arenas of narrative competition among nationalist discourses, where users act as active agents in resharing and reinforcing aligned messages (pp. 1–2). These findings highlight the significance of user participation and network dynamics, showing that information warfare is not directed solely by formal actors, but is also reproduced through interactions among users. Nevertheless, these studies often focus on platforms such as Twitter and pay comparatively limited attention to Facebook—which possesses distinct interactive structures, algorithms, and audiences. Moreover, their focus is directed more toward “patterns of interaction” than toward an in-depth analysis of “content representation.”

Alongside these studies, another group of research has examined the cognitive and emotional consequences of exposure to information on social media. [Guan \(2025\)](#) demonstrates that exposure to political information within these environments can intensify fear of conflict and feelings of insecurity among users (pp. 1–2). [Moldovan et al. \(2025\)](#) likewise show that even highly

informed users remain vulnerable to misinformation and tend to accept information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs. These studies emphasize the emotional and perceptual dimensions of information warfare; however, they focus more on the “consequences” than on the “mechanisms of meaning production,” and therefore provide limited explanation regarding what forms of representation generate such effects.

From a conceptual and theoretical perspective, studies such as those by [Ivančík, and Nečas \(2022\)](#) conceptualize information warfare as part of “hybrid threats,” in which misinformation is employed as a tool for achieving political and power-oriented objectives (pp. 344–345). Similarly, [Kalpokas \(2024\)](#), within the framework of the “post-truth” condition, argues that in the contemporary media environment, perceptions of truth depend less on objective reality than on the degree to which information aligns with subjective beliefs. Although these approaches provide profound insight into the conceptual foundations of information warfare, they often lack contextualized empirical analysis concerning how this phenomenon is represented within specific media environments.

RESEARCH GAP

A critical review of previous studies demonstrates that although the existing literature has addressed important dimensions of information warfare, several major limitations and gaps still remain.

First, there is the dominance of the misinformation approach, in the sense that the primary focus of many studies has been on *fake news*, while information warfare is a broader concept that also encompasses framing, representation, and perception management.

Second, there is a limited geographical focus, as most studies have concentrated on major global conflicts, whereas regional contexts such as Afghanistan–Pakistan tensions have received comparatively little scholarly attention.

Third, there is the neglect of Facebook as a primary platform. Although Facebook plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion in many societies, particularly in developing countries, its contribution to empirical research remains limited.

Fourth, there is the absence of a combined analytical approach, meaning that relatively few studies have employed a combination of quantitative content analysis and qualitative interpretation in order to simultaneously understand statistical patterns and structures of meaning.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to address these gaps by focusing on the representation of information warfare on Facebook within the context of Afghanistan–Pakistan tensions. By employing quantitative content analysis supported by interpretive analysis, this study not only identifies patterns in the frequency of content, but also attempts to demonstrate how such content contributes to the production and reproduction of meaning—and ultimately to the shaping of public perception—through framing, emotional and visual elements, and the representation of actors.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the combination of several complementary approaches, each of which explains a particular dimension of information warfare on social media. This theoretical synthesis enables the study to move beyond mere description and toward a deeper analysis of the mechanisms of representation.

INFORMATION WARFARE THEORY

According to [Whyte et al. \(2021\)](#), information warfare refers to the deliberate and strategic use of information to influence audience perception, judgment, and decision-making (pp. 1–2). Within this framework, information is no longer merely a medium for transmitting messages; rather, it itself becomes the “object of conflict” and functions as a tool for gaining advantage within arenas of competition.

[Velchev \(2025\)](#) further develops this concept in the context of contemporary warfare and demonstrates that information management and communication technologies have become major sources of power, such that control over narratives and public perception now plays a role comparable to traditional instruments of power (pp. 171–172). This theory suggests that the study of Facebook should focus not only on content itself, but also on “how content influences perception.”

PROPAGANDA AND PERCEPTION MANAGEMENT THEORY

Within the framework of propaganda theory, [Babacan and Tam \(2022\)](#) demonstrate that under conditions of conflict, messages are designed not for neutral information dissemination, but rather for directing the minds and perceptions of audiences (pp. 79–80). This perspective aligns with the approach of [Dowse and Bachmann \(2022\)](#), who argue that the success of information operations depends upon the interaction among three elements: “media, message, and audience” (pp. 6–7).

Within this framework, meaning is constructed not directly, but through selection, emphasis, and modes of presenting information. Consequently, even a message that may be factually correct can still be presented in a way that directs audience interpretation toward a particular perspective. This approach emphasizes that the analysis of information warfare should go beyond determining the truth or falsehood of information and should also include analysis of form, framing, and persuasive techniques. In other words, the focus should be on “how the message is communicated,” not merely on “what is communicated.”

ECHO CHAMBER AND HOMOPHILY THEORY

Prier (2017), emphasizing the networked structure of social media, demonstrates that these environments function in ways that expose users primarily to viewpoints aligned with their existing beliefs (pp. 70–75). This phenomenon, known as the “echo chamber,” reinforces homophily and limits the diversity of perspectives.

Guan (2025) further demonstrates that this condition can intensify fear, polarization, and perceptions of threat among users (pp. 1–2). Under such circumstances, messages do not merely reflect reality; rather, within a feedback cycle, they reinforce existing emotions and beliefs.

This theory helps explain why certain messages spread more rapidly on Facebook and how collective emotions are formed.

REPRESENTATION THEORY

Stuart Hall’s theory of representation Hall (1997), within the framework of cultural studies, conceptualizes representation as a constructivist process in which meaning is produced and exchanged through language, signs, and discourses (pp. 4–7). From this perspective, media do not merely reflect reality; instead, through systems of signs, they interpret, reconstruct, and assign meaning to reality.

Hall emphasizes that representation is always connected to power and ideology, meaning that the manner in which phenomena, individuals, and events are portrayed can either reinforce or challenge relations of power. Consequently, what appears in media is not “reality itself,” but rather “a meaningfully constructed version of reality” shaped within specific discursive frameworks.

In the context of information warfare, this theory holds particular importance because it demonstrates that social media platforms such as Facebook are not merely reflective of political tensions; rather, through particular forms of representation, they contribute to the production of narratives, the construction of enemies, the reinforcement of collective identities, and the shaping of public perception. Therefore, the analysis of Facebook content in this study is, in essence, an analysis of the “process of meaning production within the context of conflict.”

INTEGRATED RESEARCH MODEL

Based on the combination of the above theories, an analytical model for this study can be formulated as follows:

- **Message Production** (Propaganda and Perception Management)
- **Meaning Construction** (Representation)
- **Networked Dissemination** (Echo Chamber)
- **Cognitive and Emotional Influence** (Information Warfare)

This model demonstrates that information warfare on Facebook is a multi-stage process that begins with message production and culminates in the formation of collective perception. Therefore, the analysis of Facebook content should examine this cycle in an integrated manner.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH APPROACH AND TYPE

This study is applied in terms of purpose and is methodologically based on quantitative content analysis supported by interpretive analysis. In this research, Facebook posts were manually collected and coded according to a designed codebook. After being entered into SPSS software, the resulting data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential tests.

This approach is consistent with information warfare studies, as identifying content patterns and analyzing frequencies and relationships among variables are of central importance in this field.

STUDY POPULATION

The study population consisted of posts published on the following three Facebook pages:

- TOLONews

- Afghanistan My Passion
- Ahmad Saeedi

during the period from 21 February to 21 March 2026, all of which were directly related to the tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

This selection was designed to include both news media pages and analytical/personal pages, thereby allowing comparison of representation patterns across different types of pages. Such a combination is consistent with the literature concerning the differing roles of formal and informal actors in information operations.

RESEARCH TIMEFRAME

The data for this study were collected during a one-month period, from 21 February to 21 March 2026. This timeframe was selected because it coincided with the peak of tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, as periods of heightened conflict are typically associated with increased production of media content, particularly emotional and confrontational content.

SAMPLING METHOD

This study employed purposive sampling. For each day within the selected timeframe, up to two posts with the highest level of engagement (likes, comments, and shares) were selected from the relevant posts published on each page.

Furthermore, preference was given to posts published during evening hours, as preliminary observations indicated that such posts attracted the highest levels of user engagement.

However, due to differences in the activity levels of the pages:

- On the *TOLOnews* page, approximately two highly engaged related posts were selected each day;
- On the *Afghanistan My Passion* page, in some days only one related post was available;
- On the *Ahmad Saeedi* page, during certain days within the selected timeframe, no related posts were published.

Overall, after applying these criteria, a total of 107 posts were selected as the final sample and analyzed.

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Publication of the post on one of the three selected pages;
- Publication within the specified timeframe;
- Direct relevance to the tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Posts lacking thematic relevance, as well as promotional or repetitive content, were excluded from the analysis.

UNIT OF ANALYSIS

The unit of analysis in this study was each individual Facebook post. Each post—including text, image, or video—was treated as an integrated unit because meaning on social media is formed through the combination of these elements.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

The data collection instrument was a coding form (codebook), which recorded the following variables for each post:

- Basic information (page, date, content type);
- Post topic;
- Dominant frame;
- Tone;
- Orientation;
- Representation of Pakistan;
- Representation of the victim;
- Enemy construction;
- Information warfare indicators;

- Type of misinformation;
- Emotional intensity;
- Nationalism;
- Visual element;
- User engagement level.

These variables were designed based on the theoretical literature of the study.

MAIN VARIABLES AND THEIR OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

The principal variables were operationalized as follows:

- **Dominant frame:** the prevailing perspective of the content (security-oriented, nationalist, enemy-centered, peace-oriented, etc.);
- **Tone:** the manner in which content is expressed (aggressive, emotional, informational, etc.);
- **Orientation:** the position of the content toward the parties involved in the conflict;
- **Enemy construction:** the presence or absence of hostile language;
- **Information warfare:** the presence of indicators such as polarization, distortion, or perception management;
- **Nationalism:** emphasis on national identity and national interests;
- **Emotion:** the intensity of emotional content.

CODING PROCEDURE

The coding process was conducted manually. To increase accuracy, an initial pilot-coding phase was first carried out, after which the final data were coded. In cases of ambiguity, decisions were made according to the definitions provided in the codebook and accompanied by explanatory notes.

DATA ANALYSIS IN SPSS

After being entered into SPSS software, the data were analyzed at two levels:

1) Descriptive Analysis:

- Frequencies and percentages;
- Bar charts.

2) Inferential Analysis:

Chi-square tests for examining relationships among variables;

Nonparametric tests (such as Kruskal–Wallis) for analyzing user engagement.

These analyses made it possible to examine content patterns and relationships among variables associated with information warfare.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

To enhance validity, the operational definitions of the variables were developed based on established literature. In addition, pilot coding was conducted to reduce potential errors.

With regard to reliability, efforts were made to maintain consistency in coding through the use of precise and standardized definitions.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The data used in this study were collected from publicly available Facebook content. In the analysis and reporting of findings, direct reproduction of sensitive or inflammatory content was avoided, and the emphasis remained on the analysis of broader patterns.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In this chapter, the data collected from 107 Facebook posts related to the tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan are analyzed. The analyses were conducted at two levels:

First, descriptive analysis was employed to identify general content patterns; and second, inferential analysis was conducted to examine relationships among variables and test the research hypotheses. The data were analyzed using SPSS software.

DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE DATA DISTRIBUTION OF POSTS BY PAGE

The results indicate that out of the total 107 posts, 53.3% belonged to the TOLONews page, 33.6% to Afghanistan My Passion, and 13.1% to Ahmad Saeedi. This distribution highlights the prominent role of news media in representing these tensions.

TYPE OF CONTENT

The most common type of content was “text accompanied by image” with 62.6%, while “text + video” constituted 28%, and purely textual content accounted for 9.3%. These findings demonstrate the important role of visual elements in content production.

MAIN TOPICS OF THE POSTS

The most frequent topics included “casualties and victims” (26.2%) and “border clashes” (22.4%). In contrast, topics such as diplomacy (2.8%) and refugees (0.9%) accounted for only a very small proportion. This pattern indicates that the content primarily focused on conflict-oriented dimensions.

DOMINANT FRAME

The “security” (24.3%) and “enemy-construction” (23.4%) frames were the most frequent, whereas “peace” (1.9%) and “humanitarian” (5.6%) frames were highly limited. This finding suggests that the dominant representation reinforced a confrontational environment.

TONE OF THE CONTENT

Aggressive tones (19.6%), emotional tones (18.7%), and informational/news-oriented tones (13.1%) appeared most frequently. This combination demonstrates the coexistence of emotional and confrontational elements alongside information dissemination.

CONTENT ORIENTATION

A total of 37.4% of the posts were supportive of Afghanistan, while 24.3% were anti-Pakistan, whereas only 25.2% were neutral. This indicates the predominance of partisan orientations within the content.

REPRESENTATION OF PAKISTAN

Pakistan was represented as an “enemy” in 61.7% of the cases and as “responsible/blameworthy” in 20.6%. This demonstrates the prominent role of enemy construction within the representations.

ENEMY CONSTRUCTION AND INFORMATION WARFARE

Enemy construction was observed in 52.3% of the posts, while indicators of information warfare appeared in 29% of the content. This finding suggests that information warfare is a narrower and more complex concept than enemy construction alone.

MISINFORMATION

In 72.9% of the posts, no indication of misinformation was identified; however, 16.8% of the content was categorized as “suspicious,” indicating the existence of ambiguity within part of the content.

EMOTIONAL INTENSITY

A total of 38.3% of the posts contained a moderate level of emotion, while 27.1% exhibited a high level of emotional intensity. This finding indicates that emotional content plays a considerable role in these representations.

NATIONALISM

Approximately 78.5% of the posts contained indicators of nationalism. This high proportion demonstrates the important role of nationalist discourse in the representation of the conflict.

VISUAL ELEMENTS

A total of 87.9% of the posts contained visual elements, highlighting the importance of images in message transmission.

USER ENGAGEMENT

The mean number of likes was 15,660, while the median was 5,761, indicating a skewed distribution. The same pattern was observed for comments and shares, suggesting that some posts received exceptionally high levels of engagement.

INFERENTIAL ANALYSIS

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PAGE TYPE AND CONTENT ORIENTATION

To examine the relationship between page name and content orientation, a cross-tabulation table and Chi-square test were employed. The results demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between these two variables ($\chi^2 = 21.526$, $df = 6$, $p = 0.001$). This indicates that the orientation of the content published across the studied pages was not uniform.

The row percentages indicate that on the TOLONews page, the largest proportion of content was supportive of Afghanistan (45.6%), whereas on the Afghanistan My Passion page, anti-Pakistan orientation (41.7%) was the most frequent. On the Ahmad Saeedi page, both pro-Afghanistan and neutral orientations each accounted for 42.9% of the content.

These findings suggest that the type of page plays a significant role in shaping the representation of Afghanistan–Pakistan tensions and the orientation of related content.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENEMY CONSTRUCTION AND THE REPRESENTATION OF PAKISTAN

To examine the relationship between enemy construction and the representation of Pakistan, a cross-tabulation table and Chi-square test were used. The results demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between these two variables ($\chi^2 = 24.828$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 1

Table 1 Enemy Construction * Representation of Pakistan Crosstabulation							
			Representation of Pakistan				Total
			Enemy	Responsible Party	Normal	Unspecified	
Enemy Construction	Absent	Count	19	17	13	2	51
		% within Enemy Construction	37.30%	33.30%	25.50%	3.90%	100.00%
		% within Representation of Pakistan	28.80%	77.30%	81.30%	66.70%	47.70%
	Present	Count	47	5	3	1	56
		% within Enemy Construction	83.90%	8.90%	5.40%	1.80%	100.00%
		% within Representation of Pakistan	71.20%	22.70%	18.80%	33.30%	52.30%
Total		Count	66	22	16	3	107
		% within Enemy Construction	61.70%	20.60%	15.00%	2.80%	100.00%

% within Representation of Pakistan	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%
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Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	24.828 ^a	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	26.024	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	18.831	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	107		

Analysis of the row percentages indicates that in posts containing enemy construction, Pakistan was represented as an “enemy” in 83.9% of the cases, whereas in posts lacking enemy construction, this figure was only 37.3%. In contrast, in the absence of enemy construction, representations portraying Pakistan as “responsible/blameworthy” (33.3%) and “normal” (25.5%) were considerably more common.

These findings suggest that the presence of enemy construction significantly increases the likelihood of portraying Pakistan as an enemy and plays a key role in the polarization of narratives.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATIONALISM AND CONTENT ORIENTATION

To examine the relationship between nationalism and content orientation, a Chi-square test was conducted. The results revealed a very strong statistically significant relationship between these two variables ($\chi^2 = 38.058$, $df = 3$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 2

Table 2 Nationalism × Orientation Crosstabulation							
		Orientation				Total	
		Pro-Afghanistan	Anti-Pakistan	Neutral	Both		
Nationalism	ندارد	Count	0	7	16	0	23
		% within Nationalism	0.00%	30.40%	69.60%	0.00%	100.00%
		% within Nationalism	0.00%	26.90%	59.30%	0.00%	21.50%
	دارد	Count	40	19	11	14	84
		% within Nationalism	47.60%	22.60%	13.10%	16.70%	100.00%
Total		% within Nationalism	100.00%	73.10%	40.70%	100.00%	78.50%
		Count	40	26	27	14	107
		% within Nationalism	37.40%	24.30%	25.20%	13.10%	100.00%
		% within Nationalism	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	38.058 ^a	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	44.587	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	7.926	1	.005
N of Valid Cases	107		

Analysis of the row percentages shows that among posts lacking nationalism, 69.6% of the content exhibited a neutral orientation. In contrast, among posts containing nationalism, only 13.1% were neutral, while a substantial proportion of the content leaned toward pro-Afghanistan (47.6%) and anti-Pakistan (22.6%) orientations.

These findings indicate that nationalism plays a decisive role in directing Facebook content and reinforcing polarization.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INFORMATION WARFARE AND ENEMY CONSTRUCTION

To examine the relationship between information warfare and enemy construction, a Chi-square test was conducted. The results demonstrated a statistically significant relationship between these two variables ($\chi^2 = 12.314$, $df = 1$, $p < 0.001$). However, the findings also indicate that information warfare frequently operates indirectly and through mechanisms more complex than explicit enemy construction alone, and therefore cannot simply be reduced to the presence or absence of hostile language.

Table 3

Table 3 Information Warfare × Enemy Construction Crosstabulation				
		Enemy Construction		Total
		Absent	Present	
Information Warfare دارد	Count	23	8	31
	Construction within Enemy %	74.20%	25.80%	100.00%
	% دشمن سازی within	45.10%	14.30%	29.00%
ندارد	Count	28	48	76
	Information Warfare within %	36.80%	63.20%	100.00%
	Construction within Enemy %	54.90%	85.70%	71.00%
Total	Count	51	56	107
	Construction within Enemy %	47.70%	52.30%	100.00%
	% دشمن سازی within	100.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.314 ^a	1	0		
Continuity Correction ^b	10.863	1	0.001		
Likelihood Ratio	12.664	1	0		
Fisher's Exact Test				0.001	0
Linear-by-Linear Association	12.199	1	0		
N of Valid Cases	107				

The direction of the relationship demonstrates that among posts containing indicators of information warfare, only 25.8% also contained enemy construction, while 74.2% did not. In contrast, among posts without indicators of information warfare, the rate of enemy construction was reported at 63.2%.

These findings suggest that enemy construction is not necessarily a direct indicator of information warfare, as this phenomenon may also function through more subtle and indirect mechanisms.

THE EFFECT OF EMOTIONAL INTENSITY ON USER ENGAGEMENT

To examine the effect of emotional intensity on user engagement (comments), the Kruskal–Wallis test was employed. The results indicated statistically significant differences among emotional levels in terms of the number of comments received ($H = 8.351$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.015$).

Table 4

Table 4 Ranks for Comments by Emotional Intensity			
	Emotional Intensity	N	Mean Rank
Comment	Low	37	60.38
	Moderate	41	43.01

	High	29	61.4
	Total	107	

Test Statistics ^{a,b}	
	Comment
Kruskal-Wallis H	8.351
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	0.015

Analysis of the mean ranks demonstrates that posts with high emotional intensity (Mean Rank = 61.40) and low emotional intensity (Mean Rank = 60.38) received greater user engagement compared to posts with moderate emotional intensity (Mean Rank = 43.01).

These findings suggest that the emotional intensity of content can play a significant role in shaping user reactions. This pattern further indicates that the emotional impact of content is not necessarily linear; rather, highly emotional content (whether strongly emotional or, in some cases, emotionally minimal) may provoke stronger reactions than content with moderate emotional intensity.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

- Hypothesis 1 — Confirmed**
Confrontational and security-oriented frames are dominant.
- Hypothesis 2 — Confirmed**
Nationalism and enemy construction are more prominent than balanced content.
- Hypothesis 3 — Largely Confirmed**
Indicators of information warfare are present, though they operate in complex and indirect forms.
- Hypothesis 4 — Partially Confirmed**
Emotion affects user engagement, although this effect is nonlinear.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings of this chapter demonstrate that the representation of Afghanistan–Pakistan tensions on Facebook is predominantly constructed within confrontational, nationalist, and emotional frameworks. Enemy construction and nationalism emerge as two key elements in shaping narratives, while information warfare operates in a more complex manner. Furthermore, emotional intensity significantly influences the level of user engagement.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted with the aim of analyzing the representation of information warfare on Facebook regarding the recent tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan. In this chapter, the findings are discussed in light of the theoretical framework and previous research. Subsequently, an overall conclusion is presented, followed by recommendations for future research and practical applications.

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS
DOMINANCE OF CONFRONTATIONAL AND SECURITY-ORIENTED FRAMES

The findings demonstrated that security-oriented and enemy-construction frames constituted the largest share of Facebook content. This result is consistent with the perspectives of Whyte et al. (2021) and Velchev (2025), who define information warfare as a tool for shaping perception and reinforcing confrontational narratives. This finding is also consistent with Prier (2017) analysis, which demonstrates that, due to their networked structure, social media platforms tend to reinforce polarized and confrontational narratives.

In other words, Facebook in this context does not merely reflect reality; rather, it actively contributes to the reproduction of a confrontational environment.

THE KEY ROLE OF NATIONALISM IN DIRECTING CONTENT

One of the most significant findings of this study was the very strong relationship between nationalism and content orientation. In the presence of nationalism, content moves significantly toward partisan orientations.

This finding is consistent with the perspective of [Hussain et al. \(2021\)](#) regarding the role of nationalism in regional conflicts. It also aligns with [Prier \(2017\)](#) “echo chamber” theory, which demonstrates that users within like-minded environments reinforce aligned narratives.

Thus, nationalism here functions not merely as a content characteristic, but as a mechanism for producing orientation itself.

ENEMY CONSTRUCTION AS A TOOL OF REPRESENTATION

The results demonstrated that enemy construction is directly associated with the representation of Pakistan as an “enemy.” This finding is consistent with the theory of propaganda and perception management [Babacan and Tam \(2022\)](#), which emphasizes that messages are designed to shape audience perceptions.

In other words, enemy construction is not merely a linguistic technique, but also a tool for constructing the image of the “other.”

THE COMPLEXITY OF INFORMATION WARFARE

Contrary to initial expectations, the findings demonstrated that information warfare is not always accompanied by direct enemy construction. This result is consistent with the perspective of [Dowse and Bachmann \(2022\)](#), who conceptualize information warfare as a multilayered and complex process.

Consequently, information warfare may operate through:

- Framing;
- Selection of information;
- Or emotional emphasis;

without necessarily employing explicitly hostile language.

THE ROLE OF EMOTIONS IN USER ENGAGEMENT

The findings demonstrated that emotions significantly influence the number of comments, although this effect is not linear. This result is consistent with the studies of [Guan \(2025\)](#), which show that emotions play an important role in shaping user reactions.

In other words, emotional content can:

Attract attention;

Generate reactions;

But the relationship is neither simple nor direct.

THE ROLE OF VISUAL ELEMENTS

Given that nearly 88% of the posts contained visual elements, it can be concluded that images play an important role in message transmission. This finding is consistent with [Preda \(2021\)](#), who conceptualizes social media as a tool for narrative amplification.

OVERALL CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- 1) Facebook’s representation of Afghanistan–Pakistan tensions tends to rely predominantly on confrontational and security-oriented frames.
- 2) Nationalism and enemy construction are two key elements in shaping narratives.
- 3) Pakistan is primarily represented within the framework of an “enemy.”
- 4) Information warfare operates in complex and multilayered ways and is not always directly observable.
- 5) Emotions and visual elements play significant roles in increasing user engagement.

- 6) Overall, Facebook can be understood not merely as a reflector of events, but as part of the battlefield of information warfare itself.

PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS

- Use language responsibly and avoid excessive enemy construction;
- Strengthen balanced and reality-based narratives.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

- Develop media literacy programs;
- Establish mechanisms for countering misinformation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR USERS

- Increase awareness of propaganda techniques;
- Avoid resharing emotional content without verification.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Examine other platforms such as Twitter and TikTok;
- Conduct deeper analysis of visual and video content;
- Employ qualitative methods such as discourse analysis;
- Compare findings with other regional conflicts (e.g., India–Pakistan).

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The data were limited to three Facebook pages;
- The difficulty of definitively identifying misinformation;
- Dependence on manual coding;
- Focus on a specific timeframe.

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