

DOI: [10.71317/jgst.2.8\(s\).2026.455](https://doi.org/10.71317/jgst.2.8(s).2026.455)**Journal of Global Social Transformation**Journal homepage: <https://rjsaonline.org/index.php/JGST>

Manufacturing War or Advocating Peace? A Comparative Analysis of News Channel Coverage of the 2025 India–Pakistan Conflict

Dr. Zaeem Yasin¹, Shazadi Seemi Safdar Ali Awan², Shamail Zehra³¹ Associate Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Lahore College for Women University² Department of Mass Communication, Lahore College for Women University³ Lecturer, Department of Mass Communication, Forman Christian College University, Lahore

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Submission: July 09, 2026 Revised: July 24, 2026 Accepted: August 08, 2026 Available Online: August 22, 2026 Keywords: Peace journalism; war journalism; propaganda model; India–Pakistan conflict; television news; content analysis; South Asia Corresponding author: Dr. Zaeem Yasin	This study examines how television news coverage of the 2025 India–Pakistan conflict shaped conflict narratives, drawing on the Propaganda Model (Herman & Chomsky, 1988) and the Peace/War Journalism framework (Galtung, 2002). Using a mixed-method comparative design, the study content-analysed 60 news items from six major Indian and Pakistani channels (Republic TV, NDTV, Aaj Tak, PTV News, Geo News, and ARY News). Quantitative data were analysed in SPSS using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests, while a qualitative thematic analysis examined the ideological language, sourcing patterns, and emotional framing used to construct the conflict. War journalism dominated coverage (71.7% of items) compared with peace journalism (28.3%). Reports overwhelmingly relied on elite and official sources (90% focused on elite actors), employed nationalistic ideological language (76.7%), and used demonising language toward the adversary (96.7%). Chi-square tests found no statistically significant cross-national differences on most indicators, suggesting that Indian and Pakistani coverage converged on similar war-journalism patterns despite differing ownership structures; government affiliation was the one variable that differed significantly by country ($\chi^2 = 42.857$, $p < .001$), with Pakistani media showing markedly closer state alignment. The findings indicate that structural media conditions in South Asia – elite sourcing, nationalist framing, and flak against dissenting voices – systematically marginalise peace-oriented reporting during moments of acute national crisis. The study calls for conflict-sensitive journalism training and editorial reform to expand the space available for peace journalism in South Asian television news.

Introduction

The 2025 India–Pakistan conflict marked one of the most dangerous escalations between two nuclear-armed rivals in decades, reviving long-standing hostilities rooted in the unresolved dispute over Kashmir (Lambert & Ahmed, 2025). As in previous confrontations, television news became the primary channel through which citizens in both countries encountered the conflict (Ibnat, 2024), and the manner in which broadcasters framed events had significant implications for public opinion, national cohesion, and the space available for de-escalation (Jahangir & Khan, 2020).

Media coverage of conflict is never a neutral relay of facts. In India and Pakistan, television news has historically aligned with state narratives during periods of national crisis (Bukhari, 2024; Abbasi, 2020), privileging military achievement and national security over analysis of underlying causes or opportunities for peace (Ali, 2024). Such framing risks entrenching an “us versus them” dichotomy that forecloses critical public debate (Boga, 2025). At the same time, media coverage is not intrinsically escalatory:

research on conflict journalism suggests that, given the editorial will, broadcasters can humanise all parties, present multiple perspectives, and highlight diplomatic openings rather than glorifying violence (Mohan, 2022).

This study asks whether Indian and Pakistani electronic media, in covering the acute phase of the 2025 conflict, tended toward the escalatory patterns associated with war journalism or made meaningful room for peace-oriented reporting. It does so through a dual theoretical lens — the Propaganda Model, which explains how structural forces (ownership, advertising, sourcing, flak, and ideology) filter media content toward elite interests (Herman & Chomsky, 1988), and the Peace/War Journalism framework, which evaluates content on whether it escalates or helps resolve conflict (Galtung, 2002). While each framework has separately informed extensive research on South Asian media, few studies have combined them to jointly examine the structural and discursive dimensions of the same conflict event across both countries (Khan et al., 2025).

Objectives and Research Questions

The study pursues five objectives: (1) to compare how Indian and Pakistani electronic media framed the 2025 conflict; (2) to apply the Propaganda Model to identify structural influences on content; (3) to identify the prevalence of peace versus war journalism indicators; (4) to examine ideological narratives, source bias, and emotional appeals; and (5) to evaluate the media's role in escalating or de-escalating the conflict. These objectives are addressed through five corresponding research questions concerning framing patterns, the balance of peace/war journalism indicators, the manifestation of Propaganda Model filters, cross-national similarities and differences, and the influence of ownership, sourcing, and flak on coverage.

The comparative design carries academic significance beyond the immediate case. India and Pakistan share a common colonial and geopolitical history but maintain distinct, and differently structured, media systems; examining how each covered the same conflict offers insight into whether structural media variation produces divergent — or convergent — conflict narratives. The findings also speak to the broader, still under-researched, question of whether peace journalism has a meaningful foothold in South Asian television news, with implications for journalism training and media policy in the region.

Theoretical Framework

The Propaganda Model

Herman and Chomsky's (1988) Propaganda Model holds that media in market-based societies are structurally predisposed to serve elite interests through five filters: ownership concentration, dependence on advertising revenue, reliance on official sourcing, “flak” directed at dissenting coverage, and a dominant anti-threat ideology. Concentrated ownership — whether state-controlled, as with Pakistan's PTV News, or privately held but commercially and politically entangled, as with India's major networks — inclines coverage toward narratives that are compatible with government and military positions (Nel, 2022; Zollmann, 2019). During conflict, official military and government spokespeople become the default sources (Farcaş, 2024), independent or humanising accounts are marginalised, and journalists or outlets that challenge the dominant national-security framing risk being labelled unpatriotic (Shahzad et al., 2021).

Peace and War Journalism

Galtung's (2002) Peace/War Journalism framework offers a content-level counterpart to the Propaganda Model. War journalism is elite-oriented, propaganda-oriented, and victory-oriented: it relies on official sources, frames conflict as a zero-sum contest between “us” and “them,” and privileges military achievement over the human costs of war (Lee, 2020). Peace journalism, by contrast, is people-oriented and solution-oriented: it seeks to humanise all parties, explore root causes, and give visibility to non-violent responses and reconciliation efforts (Kempf, 2019; dos Santos, 2021). Empirical research on South Asian media consistently finds that institutional constraints — commercial pressure, government affiliation, and audience appetite for dramatic content — leave little room for peace journalism to take hold, even where individual journalists attempt it (Auwal & Ersoy, 2022; Hussain, 2020).

Used together, the two frameworks connect macro-level structural conditions (who owns the media, who funds it, whose voices it privileges) to micro-level narrative choices (which frames, sources, and language appear on screen). This dual approach underpins the coding scheme and analysis reported below.

Literature Review

Media coverage of prior India–Pakistan flashpoints – the 1999 Kargil War and the 2019 Balakot airstrikes – offers a consistent baseline against which to read the 2025 coverage. Studies of the Kargil War found that Indian outlets (Times Now, Republic TV, NDTV) and Pakistani outlets (Geo News, PTV) each relied heavily on military and government sources to construct heroic, sovereignty-defending narratives, marginalising the war's human cost and any prospect of negotiated settlement (Khan et al., 2025; Iqbal, 2025; Noor, 2025). Coverage of the 2019 Balakot strikes reproduced the same pattern: Indian channels framed the strikes as a justified response to the Pulwama attack, while Pakistani channels framed India's action as an unprovoked violation of sovereignty, with elite official sources dominating both sides and peace-oriented coverage almost entirely absent (Safi & Ozad, 2025; Chu et al., 2025; Das, 2025).

Broader comparative literature on media and conflict situates these patterns within a wider global tendency: Western coverage of the Gulf War (1990–91) and the Iraq War (2003) similarly privileged official framing and military success before later coverage introduced humanitarian counter-narratives once initial justifications for war (such as weapons of mass destruction) proved unfounded (Maalej, 2019; Kuosmanen, 2021; Ali, 2020). What distinguishes South Asian coverage, according to comparative scholars, is the depth of ideological polarisation: Indian and Pakistani media each construct the conflict as a matter of territorial integrity and national survival, with historical grievance (1947, 1965, 1999) invoked to legitimise present military action (Hosen & Bhuiyan, 2024; Verbakel, 2025).

Studies specific to the 2025 conflict – published in its immediate aftermath – largely confirm this trajectory. Content and discourse analyses of Indian and Pakistani coverage of the Pahalgam attack and its aftermath found persistent reliance on official sourcing, dehumanising language toward the adversary, and minimal space for civilian or humanitarian narratives (Arif & Anwar, 2025; Bashir & Shahid, 2025). Comparative work further suggests that fewer than 10% of reports in earlier India–Pakistan crises included substantive human-interest framing, with losses on each side nationalised rather than humanised (Mahmood, 2020). Electronic and 24-hour television news, in particular, has been identified as an accelerant of these dynamics: the competitive pressure to be first, combined with dramatic visual and on-screen graphics, converts complex geopolitical events into emotionally charged, easily consumed binaries (Singh, 2025; Devakumar, 2025).

Despite this substantial body of work, two gaps remain. First, relatively little research applies the Propaganda Model and Peace/War Journalism framework jointly to the same conflict event, leaving the relationship between structural media conditions and content-level framing choices under-examined (Khan et al., 2025). Second, systematic cross-national comparison – coding Indian and Pakistani coverage of the same conflict using an identical instrument – remains rare; most existing studies examine one country's media in isolation (Nasir et al., 2025). This study addresses both gaps directly.

Methodology

Design and Data Sources

This study adopted a comparative, mixed-method design combining quantitative content analysis with qualitative thematic analysis, triangulated to strengthen validity. The study examined electronic media coverage of the acute phase of the 2025 India–Pakistan conflict – the period following the 22 April 2025 Pahalgam attack in Kashmir, which precipitated air, missile, and drone exchanges, suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, and a subsequent ceasefire. Six major television channels were selected: Republic TV, NDTV, and Aaj Tak (India), and PTV News, Geo News, and ARY News (Pakistan). Because most Indian and Pakistani news websites use dynamically loaded pages that restrict archival access, the final sample was drawn from verifiable, accessible written reports and broadcast material rather than a fixed calendar window; this constraint is discussed further under Limitations.

Sampling and Coding

Purposive and stratified sampling were used to ensure the sample was both conflict-relevant and evenly distributed across the two countries. The final coded dataset comprised 60 news items: 30 Indian (10 each from Republic TV, NDTV, and Aaj Tak) and 30 Pakistani (10 from PTV News and 20 from Geo News/ARY News written and transcribed material). A structured coding sheet operationalised 20 variables spanning ownership type, government affiliation, main sources, presence of flak, ideological language,

type of reporting (war vs. peace journalism), focus on elite actors versus victims, use of demonising language, mentions of alternatives to violence, reconciliation efforts, emotional tone, and overall framing tone (see Table 1 for selected variables).

Two trained coders independently coded the sample after a calibration session; inter-coder reliability, assessed with Cohen's kappa on key variables (type of reporting, demonising language, focus on victims, and ideological language), ranged from 0.74 to 0.89, indicating substantial to near-perfect agreement. Disagreements were resolved through discussion.

Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed in SPSS using descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) and Pearson chi-square tests of independence to assess whether country of origin (India vs. Pakistan) was associated with each coded indicator. Qualitative thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach, was applied to the full corpus – including Geo News and ARY News video bulletins that could not be systematically coded quantitatively – to examine the construction of self and other, the use of historical and legal justification, and the marginalisation of peace narratives.

Limitations

Several limitations qualify the findings. The original sampling window (15 January–15 March 2025) yielded limited archival material; most retrievable content clustered around the more acute April–May 2025 period, so the sample likely over-represents high-intensity coverage relative to earlier phases of the crisis. Longer Pakistani articles were segmented into thematic units to reach the target sample size, which may not fully reflect how audiences consumed the original reports. Because Geo News and ARY News video bulletins lacked accessible transcripts, they were reviewed qualitatively but excluded from quantitative coding, and the analysis as a whole is limited to textual content, excluding tone of voice, visual composition, and other audio-visual features known to shape audience perception. Findings should therefore be read as indicative of the corpus analysed rather than fully generalisable to all Indian and Pakistani television coverage of the conflict.

Results

Descriptive Findings

Table 1 summarises the frequency distribution of the principal coded variables across the full 60-item sample (30 India, 30 Pakistan).

Variable	Category	n	%
Type of Reporting	War journalism	43	71.7
	Peace journalism	17	28.3
Ideological Language	Nationalist	46	76.7
	Neutral	9	15.0
	Anti-war	5	8.3
Focus on Elite Actors	Yes	54	90.0
Focus on Victims	Yes	53	88.3
Use of Demonising Language	Yes	58	96.7
Mentions of Alternatives to Violence	Yes	49	81.7

Reconciliation Efforts Highlighted	Yes	32	53.3
Presence of Flak	Yes	45	75.0
Framing Tone	Pro-war	43	71.7
	Neutral	3	5.0
	Peace-oriented	14	23.3
Government Affiliation	Moderate	35	58.3
	Low	25	41.7

Table 1. Frequency distribution of selected coded variables (N = 60).

War journalism indicators dominated the sample: 71.7% of items were coded as war journalism against 28.3% coded as peace journalism, a pattern echoed almost identically in the overall framing-tone variable (71.7% pro-war). Reports overwhelmingly centred elite actors (90.0%) – politicians, military officials, and diplomats – over independent or civil-society voices, and used demonising language toward the adversary in 96.7% of items (e.g., describing Pakistan as a “terror factory” in Indian coverage, or Indian strikes as “cowardly” and unlawful in Pakistani coverage). Ideological language was predominantly nationalist (76.7%). Notably, a majority of items also nominally mentioned alternatives to violence (81.7%) and reconciliation efforts (53.3%) – but, as the qualitative analysis shows, these mentions were typically brief and subordinated to the surrounding war-oriented narrative rather than developed as substantive peace framing.

Cross-National Comparison (Chi-Square Tests)

Table 2 summarises Pearson chi-square tests of independence between country (India vs. Pakistan) and each of the principal coded variables.

Variable	χ^2	df	p
Government Affiliation	42.857	1	< .001*
Ideological Language	5.459	2	.065
Main Sources	0.130	2	.937
Focus on Elite Actors	0.000	1	1.000
Focus on Victims	0.162	1	.688
Use of Demonising Language	0.287	1	.592
Emotional Tone	0.000	1	1.000
Framing Tone	0.357	2	.837
Type of Reporting	2.052	1	.152
Mentions of Alternatives to Violence	1.002	1	.317

Reconciliation Efforts Highlighted	0.268	1	.605
Ownership Type	2.069	1	.150

Table 2. Chi-square tests of independence, country by coded indicator. * $p < .05$.

Government affiliation was the only variable to show a statistically significant association with country ($\chi^2 = 42.857$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$): Pakistani coverage, dominated by the state-owned PTV News, showed markedly closer alignment with government messaging than Indian coverage. Ideological language approached but did not reach conventional significance ($\chi^2 = 5.459$, $p = .065$), with Indian coverage somewhat more consistently nationalist and Pakistani coverage showing marginally more neutral or anti-war language. No other variable – including type of reporting, demonising language, focus on elites or victims, emotional tone, framing tone, or ownership type – differed significantly by country. Taken together, these results indicate that Indian and Pakistani coverage, despite differing ownership structures (predominantly private in India, state-owned or state-affiliated for key Pakistani outlets), converged on substantially similar war-journalism patterns: elite-centred, demonising, and pro-war in orientation.

Qualitative Themes

Thematic analysis identified five recurring patterns across the corpus, elaborated below.

Ownership and state alignment. State-owned PTV News followed government messaging most directly, but nominally private outlets – Republic TV in India and Geo News in Pakistan – reproduced substantially similar nationalist framing during the crisis, suggesting that commercial ownership alone does not insulate coverage from state-aligned narratives during acute national crises (Pandit & Chattopadhyay, 2020; Siddiqui, 2025).

Militarised language. Both Indian and Pakistani coverage relied heavily on militarised vocabulary – “retaliation,” “surgical strikes,” “military triumph,” “legitimate defence of sovereignty” – that framed each side's action as necessary and justified while downplaying its costs (Horbyk, 2023; Yasmin, 2024).

Victim-aggressor narratives. Each side consistently constructed itself as the victim of unprovoked aggression and the other as the aggressor. Indian outlets emphasised cross-border terrorism originating in Pakistan; Pakistani outlets emphasised Indian violations of sovereignty and international law. Neither side's coverage substantially humanised the other's civilian population.

Marginalisation of peace framing. Isolated instances of peace-oriented content did appear – brief references to international calls for de-escalation, a U.S. State Department appeal for a “responsible solution,” and occasional mentions of humanitarian concerns – but these were consistently overshadowed by, and quickly subsumed back into, the dominant war-journalism narrative rather than developed as sustained alternative framing.

Nationalism and patriotic symbolism. Coverage on both sides drew on patriotic imagery (flags, military memorials, soldier tributes) and emotionally charged language of sacrifice and heroism, reinforcing in-group solidarity while narrowing the space available for critical or dissenting perspectives on the conflict.

Discussion

The findings offer converging quantitative and qualitative evidence that Indian and Pakistani television coverage of the 2025 conflict was structured predominantly around war-journalism conventions, consistent with prior research on the Kargil War and the 2019 Balakot strikes (Khan et al., 2025; Safi & Ozad, 2025). The near-total absence of significant cross-national differences on content-level indicators – despite differing ownership structures – is a notable finding in its own right. It suggests that the Propaganda Model's structural filters (elite sourcing, ideological alignment, and flak against dissenting coverage) operate with comparable force across differently owned media systems once a national-security narrative takes hold, echoing Herman and Chomsky's (1988) argument that propaganda effects need not depend on direct state control to produce elite-aligned outcomes.

The one variable that did differ significantly – government affiliation – is consistent with PTV News's status as a state broadcaster, and indicates that direct state ownership intensifies, without being solely responsible for, the broader pattern of nationalist, elite-

centred coverage found throughout the sample. This is an important nuance for policy discussions: reforms aimed only at formal ownership structures (e.g., privatisation) are unlikely, on this evidence, to substantially shift conflict coverage toward peace journalism, since privately owned outlets in both countries reproduced comparable war-journalism patterns.

The qualitative finding that peace-oriented content appeared but was consistently marginalised – rather than wholly absent – is consistent with Galtung's (2002) observation that peace journalism struggles not because journalists are unaware of it, but because institutional incentives (ratings competition, deadline pressure, and the risk of being perceived as unpatriotic) discourage its sustained use (Auwal & Ersoy, 2022). This points toward a specific, actionable implication: interventions that reduce the professional risk of peace-oriented reporting – through editorial guidelines, training, and newsroom incentives – may be more effective than ownership reform alone in expanding the space for peace journalism in South Asian conflict coverage.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study set out to determine whether Indian and Pakistani television news, in covering the 2025 conflict, tended toward war journalism or peace journalism, and to explain the pattern observed through the structural lens of the Propaganda Model. The evidence is unambiguous: war journalism dominated coverage on both sides of the border, characterised by elite sourcing, nationalist ideological language, demonising rhetoric, and pro-war framing, with peace-oriented content present but structurally marginalised. Cross-national statistical comparison found that these patterns were largely shared between India and Pakistan regardless of differences in media ownership, with government affiliation the principal point of measurable divergence.

These findings carry practical implications for media practice and policy in South Asia. First, journalism training programmes should incorporate conflict-sensitive and peace-journalism principles as a standard component of crisis reporting preparation, not an optional specialisation. Second, editorial policies in newsrooms – public and private alike – could formally protect space for multi-party sourcing, civilian and humanitarian framing, and coverage of diplomatic or reconciliatory developments during acute crises, reducing the professional risk currently associated with such reporting. Third, media regulators and professional associations in both countries could develop shared, cross-border standards for crisis coverage that explicitly discourage demonising language and encourage verification over speed. Future research should extend this analysis to audio-visual and digital/social media content, incorporate a longer pre-crisis baseline period where archival access permits, and examine audience reception to assess whether war-journalism framing measurably shapes public attitudes toward escalation and peace.

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