STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION IN PAKISTAN, FRAMEWORK, STRATEGIES AND MANIFESTATION

Mr. Atta Ullah

Research Assistant, Balochistan Think Tank Network (BTTN), Quetta

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a multi-stakeholder framework (MSF) for strategic communication based on public-private partnership for addressing fake news/narratives and misperceptions in an age driven by mainstream social media. The framework espouses a two-pronged strategic communication: first, two-way communication between state institutes and all the stakeholders to build consensus domestically on national narratives and, second, to establish international coordination with the tech companies that are engines of misinformation and fake news that endangers national security and social cohesion of the country. Domestically, the focus should be on consensus-based narrative-building to reduce the trust deficit among various stakeholders. Secondly, to counter misinformation, fake news, and misperceptions that threaten national socio-political cohesion, it is crucial to enhance international cooperation with tech companies. The MSF strives to serve as Pakistan's strategic communication hub. This study follows the mixed methods approach and analysis of the ongoing debate in Pakistan regarding the impact of social media on national cohesion and the possible ban of tech companies to prevent such threats. The literature review for this paper comprises expert opinions and input from a range of stakeholders on prevailing crises that emerge from social media misinformation campaigns and propaganda.

Key Words: Strategic Communication, Multi-Stakeholder Framework, Consensus-based National Narratives, False Narratives, Countermeasures.

INTRODUCTION

Fake news, false narratives, and Misinformation hinder Strategic Communication (SC) and dilute National Narratives in Pakistan. However, a lack of consensus among the stakeholders regarding national narratives could be the biggest obstacle, and an equally important part of the problem is the trust deficit which hinders cooperation among all the stakeholders in the country. In this way, conveying correct information (widely accepted narratives) is vital to countering misinformation and propaganda. On the other hand, the lack of consensus-based (widely accepted) narratives provides much room for false narratives, fake news, and misinformation. So, to counter the latter, it is essential to bring about the former, and to have the former it is vital to counter the latter. Both these factors, though unparalleled, go hand in hand.

Major stakeholders, such as mass media, lawyer groups, human rights organizations, civil society organizations, opposition political parties, etc., always suspect governments when they implement countermeasures to combat fake news and misinformation, as they may misuse these laws, violate fundamental rights, and stifle societal freedoms. The controversies and heated debates regarding Media Laws in the country promulgated by the PTI (Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf) led government, in 2020, is an important case in consideration. On the other hand, fake news/false narratives and misinformation campaigns, if left unchecked, can threaten national cohesion and damage the social edifice in Pakistan. Similar issues arise when contrasting versions of national narratives circulate throughout the country, leading to confusion regarding national values, specifically national identity. Nonetheless, the genesis of the problem lies in a lack of consensus and trust among the stakeholders to find common ground where they can address national-level issues.

This paper is organized into four major sections. The first section focuses on problem identification, primarily addressing the lack of trust and consensus

among major stakeholders. The second section on Concept Design is the structure of a multi-stakeholder framework for strategic communication at the national level. The third section is on the functions and Manifestation of this framework: This refers to the direct and practical application of the framework, involving individuals who assume the role of stakeholders and carry out some of their associated responsibilities. The last section is based on Composition and Recommendations, followed by a conclusion on the effective implementation of the MSF. The intended aim of this framework is to create a comprehensive ecosystem of strategic communication that can effectively address both internal and external challenges that arise in the form of false narratives and misinformation campaigns. This framework has the potential to enhance information integrity and foster a more informed society in Pakistan.

1.   Problem Identification

The fundamental problem in tackling mainstream social media mass campaigns is a lack of consensus on countering such challenges. On the other hand, those very opposing stakeholders, if left unaccountable and unanswerable, can generate fake news and create unnecessary hype and sensationalism that may damage the national cause. In this way mass media, for example, if left unaccountable can switch from fourth to fifth (Hutchison, Marc L., 2016). However, if controlled by the government, it can turn into a devil's advocate, too. Consequently, we cannot deny its responsible role in society, as it is considered the fourth pillar of the modern state. However, we cannot regard it as the sole defender of freedoms and rights, as it prioritizes its corporate interests over crucial public ones. so, the best possible course of action is to give it a stake in National level narrative building (in strategic communications) as well as a defined Role and Responsibility towards society. the debates over Sub Judice matters, for example, are not allowed in the media to avoid controversies regarding cases in the court of law. The same could be done for before-the-time decisions or institutional matters, i.e., the previous hype and unnecessary sensationalism regarding the selection of the DG-ISI (2022), as such things within an institute may take time to process. Therefore, making such things a matter of daily headlines and stressing the nerves of the public does not serve any purpose except for sensationalism,

which could be tantamount to chaos and unrest in society with its negative psychological impacts. To make media houses stockholders in such a process is to make them responsible actors that serve a social cause, rather than damaging it.

 The same goes for the other stakeholders. For example, governments around the world, if left unaccountable, have the potential to mislead people about policy matters or unnecessarily control or manipulate public perceptions. In this way, domestically, the practice of 'controlling thought process' through 'engineering consent' of the public intensifies when governments implement policies that are opposed by the general masses (Noam Chomsky, 2004). Similarly, to borrow from George Orwell's 'Ministry of Truth' (1984), the Digital Dictators (Andrea Kendall-Taylor, Erica Frantz, and Joseph Wright, 2020) may attempt to suppress opinions at home and silence dissent in the name of National Security (NS). Particularly, in Pakistan this has been one of the reasons for opposing the government's attempts aimed at legislation to counter fake news and misinformation campaigns. Particularly, in Pakistan this has been one of the reasons for opposing the government's attempts aimed at legislation to counter fake news and misinformation campaigns. Previously, legislative efforts, such as the Removal and Blocking of Unlawful Online Content Procedures, Oversight, and Safeguards Rules (2020), Prevention of Electronic Crimes (Amendment)Ordinance (2022), Defamation Ordinance (2002), and Protection of Citizens Against Online Harm Rules (2020), Defamation, Privacy and Data Protection Ordinance (2022), just to name them, have invited genuine as well as unnecessary criticism across the board due to inherent flaws as mentioned above. In addition, interestingly, most of the criticism and opposition over such legislation revolves around the 'fears' (Anmol Irfan, Sharjeel Khalid, 2022) of potential misuse of these laws against the journalists, political opponents, the layers, and human rights activists in the Country. In addition, interestingly, most of the criticism and opposition over such legislation revolves around the 'fears' (Anmol Irfan, Sharjeel Khalid, 2022) of potential misuse of these laws against the journalists, political opponents, the layers, and human rights activists in the Country.

Reports indicate that opponents have used these legislative measures as political tactics, so these fears are not unfounded. However, the issue lies not in the

legislation itself, but rather in the mistrust and suspicion that surround it. Therefore, this means the problem is not with the laws but rather their true and impartial implementation, which would require consensus among all the stakeholders, without any doubt of them being misused. Because, even if there is any unwarranted strictness in legislation by the government, there still must be some room left for cooperation to build consensus among all the stakeholders. Otherwise, just condemning and criticizing any legislation in the name of being draconian may not be the solution.

Similarly, political parties, when in opposition, may oppose such legislation simply because they are in opposition. So that has to do with their politics and becomes an issue of their political code of conduct, rather than that of the legislation or governance. Therefore, to overcome such a dilemma, there needs to be a balance of Rights and Responsibilities (duties) among all the stakeholders in society.

Thereon, sanity is to establish a balance of roles and responsibilities among all the stakeholders and make them responsible actors for a greater national cause. While doing so, all the actors shall be given a say (stake) in the process of narrative generation as well as can be made responsible stakeholders in the strategic communication in the country. This could also alleviate their genuine grievances. Likewise, this would create a balance between the Government's ability (as the legitimate representative of the people) to counter fake news and misinformation as well as responsibility for the inviolability of constitutional rights and freedoms. Because in the end, it is the government in the country entitled to protect the people from the harm of misinformation and propaganda. This can be achieved by bringing all the stakeholders under a national umbrella, to solve differences, remove apprehensions, and build trust for cooperation. Additionally, such an effort would require consensus regarding the exercise of an individual's rights and freedoms (of criticism and expression) vs respect for other's rights and freedoms, and prevention of hate speech, defamation, derogation, etc.

Otherwise completely disarming the government's ability to protect the public from such a harm of misinformation and fake news would render national values and interests in jeopardy. Therefore, "raising a voice for protecting freedoms and rights must not hinder the government's ability to function in this regard" (Sadaf Liaquat, Ayesha Qaisrani, and Elishma Noel Khokhar, 2016). Conversely, those voices and actors, instead of assuming the authority in their hands to protect the rights and freedoms, must be supportive of measures that a government, the legitimate representative of the people, initiates legitimately.

Media laws and organizations in Pakistan have faced opposition due to two major problems. First, the unquestionable authority entrusted to a politically motivated head of such a body inculcates the abuse of power against opponents. Secondly, inherent loopholes and gaps in legislation justify the interpretation of a law to punish dissent. For instance, most people believe that Punjab's recent anti-defamation bill (Azwar Shakeel, 2024) serves as a tool for punishing political opponents The PTI-led government established the Media Authority, which the next government subsequently rolled back. The recent Digital Rights Protection Agency (DRPA) would, likely, not be able to make any difference unless the inherent problems are solved, as stated above. Pakistan's problem is not a lack of legislation or expertise in implementation; rather, many of the problems arise due to the lack of consensus among the stakeholders on legislation and the impartial exercise of authority for the implementation of laws.

2. Research Objectives

- The objective of this research is to provide an effective framework for strategic communication in tackling the challenge of false narratives, misinformation campaigns, and other propaganda driven by mainstream social media that may threaten social cohesion in the country.
- This proposed framework aims at bridging the trust deficit among various stakeholders in the country to develop consensus-based national narratives and widely accepted counter-narratives.

3. Research Methodology

The research is based on secondary data, which includes research papers, books, and other sources, to understand the role of social media in information dissemination in the Pakistani context. This research employed a qualitative methodology, utilizing an analytical and interpretative approach to the existing literature and problem identification, which aided in the resolution of a related issue.

4. Concept Design

Based on the concept of public-private partnerships (PPP), there should be a multi-stakeholder framework (MSF), a formal platform, to develop consensuses regarding generating narratives and strategic communication. The Societies Registration Act of Pakistan can institutionalize such a platform as a non-profit organization. Though various institutes and think tanks are working on similar lines, these organizations lack public-private partnerships and inclusiveness. For instance, fact-checking on a large scale would require hiring the services of IT companies or experts first. Secondly, a near absence or lack of input from a range of stakeholders in the policy research conducted at these institutes only serves a narrowly defined policy objective. This results in a lack of consensus on a certain national-level issue among a range of stakeholders who may be affected by the enactment of a law.

Despite being state-of-the-art command centers, the NEOC (National Emergency Operations Center) for polio and the NCOC (National Command and Control Center) for COVID-19, to name a few, are still case-specific and temporarily operational until they are needed. Therefore, it would be more effective to establish a comprehensive and permanent platform for strategic communication within the country, construct narratives based on consensus, and combat misinformation. Equally important is the fact that such a platform must be accessible to all the major stakeholders plus the case-specific experts, if any, for a certain national-level debate or dialogue. radicalism and extremism in society.

We should use the same platform to combat fake news and misinformation. The platform can facilitate collaboration between social media companies and the Pakistani government. This would be helpful to restrict hate speech and counter false narratives, fake news, misinformation, and other malicious propaganda spread through social media against. (Baloch, M. S., Bashir, S., Zarrar, H., Aslam, A., & Muneera, 2023). Pakistan. Otherwise, these corporations have time and again refused to cooperate with the government due to credibility issues—the supposed fear that cooperation with the government may result in strengthening it and suppressing dissent at home (Aiza Tariq, 2022). Establishing a legitimate framework in the country to handle credibility issues can address these concerns.

The country's citizens, not social media companies, should determine the government's credibility in safeguarding fundamental rights and preventing their infringement. Therefore, they should collaborate with the country to tackle the real threats posed by fake news and misinformation campaigns, rather than relying on foreign entities to make decisions for the country.

Afterwards, a Standing Committee of the Senate or Parliament can oversee such a platform and establish it as a permanent entity, independent of the current government. Placing it under the Senate's Standing Committee on Information and Broadcasting, for example, would ensure the credibility of such a mechanism to function independently. Such an arrangement would be an initiative of the county, not the government of the time. In Pakistan, political party-led governments frequently reverse the efforts of their predecessors. So placing it under the jurisdiction of a parliamentary committee would make it legitimate as well as a permanent forum. Alternatively, a parliamentary act could legitimize the establishment of a permanent national-level institute, recognizing the urgent necessity for the nation to address various threats. Today's wars, propelled by mainstream social media, not only occur across borders but also in people's hearts and minds, often at the subconscious level of perceptions (Zach Bastick, 2021). The general masses, unknowingly and unintentionally, fall prey to misinformation and propaganda, even when it is directed against their own country. Furthermore, in such a war of perceptions, the propaganda authors are masters at manipulating the psyches of the naive masses that they target. Given the asymmetric and exploitative nature of misinformation campaigns, it is the government's utmost duty to protect the country and its masses from such grave harm. Therefore, digital literacy can be the best counter to false narratives, misinformation, and propaganda.

Such an effort would ensure its independent functioning, credibility for strategic communication within the country, and cooperation with social media companies. which, otherwise, refuse to work with the government or have even threatened to leave (Ramsha Jahangir, 2020) if coerced, and would not bother about any request by the government of Pakistan to address fake news and misinformation campaigns that damage the national cause of the country The irony lies in the fact that if these social media companies fail to assist countries in curbing

fake news and misinformation, how will they effectively combat hate speech and fake news? These companies own a cloud space where these events occur virtually. Similarly, if these tech companies have complaints against a government, there must be a mechanism to resolve them, which would only be possible through contact and cooperation (C-C) between both parties. Alternatively, numerous countries, such as India, have successfully persuaded these social media companies to comply with the host country's demands, even when those countries violate their community guidelines (Deborah Brown, 2022).

In this regard, two specific cases are worth mentioning. For instance, the Meta recently approved anti-muslim hate speech during the Indian general elections, despite its policy guidelines indicating otherwise (Hannah Ellis-Peterson, 2024). Secondly, in the wake of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Meta willingly suspended its community guidelines on anti-Russia content in favor of 'democratic' Ukraine (Munsif Vengattil and Elizabeth Culliford, 2022). These incidents show that the Community Guidelines or policies that social media companies make are not verses of the Bible. If the host country can modify these policies in other countries, even when they violate them, then why not apply the same recommendations from the Pakistani government to combat misinformation and fake news? To solve issues like these, we need a broader national consensus and ownership from all stakeholders in the country.

5. Manifestation

Once there is debate over which narratives are in the interest of the nation, what should be communicated to the masses, or what should not, then only consensus-based narratives that reflect national interests and values will be disseminated by the press and mass media. A Press and Publication (PP) wing could carry out this task within such a framework.

Secondly, before releasing certain news to the public, an out-sourcing mechanism (OM) should be in place to fact-check misinformation and verify its authenticity. Should swiftly filter and remove unauthentic information from social media, potentially a component of a well-planned malicious campaign against Pakistan, following a thorough verification process. would require collaboration with IT experts and companies. The rapid algorithmic dissemination of misinformation and fake news often results in irreversible damage, even upon removal following thorough verification.

Thirdly, it would be crucial to establish a content moderation mechanism in collaboration with social media companies to restrict the spread of hate speech and remove offensive material before it reaches the public. The best way to do so would be to pursue social media companies (Meta platform, Twitter/X, YouTube, etc.) to establish their offices within the country (Ibid., 2022) and place all the data of the Pakistani people on servers inside Pakistan to avoid exploitation and manipulation of national-level data and information by any other country. Previously, all these companies declined to comply, fearing that the local government could use them as a tool for mass exploitation, potentially suppressing basic human rights. In the absence of any deterrent, the government has been powerless to pursue these companies. Furthermore, to the point of violation of rights and freedoms, it must be left to the people of the country to decide what constitutes a right or what is not, what qualifies as a violation of that right or what is not a violation, and make laws accordingly to be followed by these companies rather than them setting standards of norms and values for Pakistani society. Therefore, once we have established a legitimate platform with the necessary authority to address these issues, we should delegate decision-making authority over human rights and freedoms to local stakeholders, not the companies themselves.

In addition, these companies have established their community guidelines aimed at limiting hate speech, fake news, and misinformation (Niam Yaraghi, 2019), and they adhere solely to these guidelines, not the laws of any country. However, the real issue lies in the subjective nature of concepts such as human rights, freedoms, hate speech, fake news, misinformation, and propaganda, which are not defined by any legal framework. Furthermore, information is always susceptible to varying interpretations and manipulations, creating ambiguities and gray areas that can be exploited. For example, fake news for one country can be authentic news for another; someone's freedom of speech can violate the rights of others; and propaganda against one country can be a politico-military strategy for another. In such a scenario, social media companies simply fail to provide any credible solution to these issues. Similarly, we cannot universally apply the norms and values of one society, or those of social media companies, to every other society with its

unique norms, values, and traditions. Therefore, the country and its stakeholders should take the lead in determining the norms, values, rules, and regulations to address the problem of fake news and misinformation, rather than these companies. The public and stakeholders in the country should take on the responsibility of deciding and informing these companies about the established norms and values that are crucial for maintaining social harmony and integrity in the country. Therefore, they should respect and uphold these values when regulating social media in Pakistan.

By now, these companies should have no choice but to work with Pakistan to combat fake news and misinformation, both of which pose serious threats to the country's national security and social integrity, or face suspension from the country.

Furthermore, there must be an overarching categorization and dissemination of all types of information for different sectors. We can categorize and forward criminal defamation and hate speech-related information to law enforcement agencies or police for additional action. It can help improve the quality of criminal case investigations. Mass media or the PP wing can communicate information relevant to the general population. Think tanks, academicians, researchers, and policy experts should receive another category of policy-related information for further research and informed policy-making that reflects ground realities. This would require a Research and Investigative (RI) wing comprised of research experts.

To add to it, such a need for an overarching collection of data and investigative research should arise at this stage because most of the laws in the country have loopholes or the institutions dedicated to the task have limited jurisdiction that covers only 'Certain Cases' (Gazette of Pakistan, Federal Investigation Agency Act, 1974). Moreover, the recently developed National Cyber Crime Investigation Agency (NCCIA), established in May 2024, still has to have a broader mandate or legal framework (Syed Iran Raza, 2024). Therein, it would be hard to cover every aspect of misinformation, false narratives, and fake news in a complex environment driven by mainstream social media. For example, some cases of misinformation and fake news may not be criminal or out of bounds for law enforcement, but they could be equally harmful and cause damage to society. This could be a topic for research and discussion in a public forum or formal platform, to raise general awareness and educate people about the prevalence of misinformation in mainstream social media.

6.   Composition of such a Platform

All stakeholders, including the current government, can participate in this forum, ensuring equal representation. Such representation can be with an equal weight of members (1-3) by all the aforementioned stakeholders, i.e., experts from media houses and press associations, representatives from layer groups, members from civil society organizations, and participation from human rights organizations (PHRC). For instance, the PT-led government's creation of the Pakistan Media Development Authority (PMDA) has faced significant criticism for its rigid centralization and absolute power (The News, 2021).

So, in essence, creating a decentralized framework with equal stakes for all major actors would eliminate such hurdles and create a healthy environment for cooperation. This would provide an appropriate platform for all the stakeholders to solve issues like the supposed harassment, torture, and mistreatment of journalists, lawyers, politicians, and human rights activists. The government could also present its stance on these issues while pretending to represent the aforementioned actors. This would be a better way to move towards genuinely resolving conflicts of interest and solving problems, rather than playing name-and-blame games against each other. Because conflict of interest has been the essence of mankind since its inception, having a conflict of interest must not be seen as a problem, but rather the absence of the right way to solve it, or at least to minimize those differences among all the actors involved, is the real problem.

By the same token, all the functional positions, if not administrative and management, in such an arrangement, must be filled by every major stakeholder or any representative on a rotatory basis without any discrimination against any sector. This could be for a short period of 2–3 years to ensure equal participation by all the actors involved. This would mean that once all stakeholders have the right to participate in the strategic decision-making process, they will act as responsible actors and work for the betterment of the country, rather than blaming it for every wrong that happens to them.

7. Recommendations

In the country, strategic communication should be two-way communication between the public, government representatives, and state institutions. The government should use this platform to interact with citizens, while also using it to engage the public in discussions about pressing societal issues. Such debates can be held on a rotatory basis in parallel with National Assembly (NA) sessions, dialogues, and formal meetings, presided over by an appointed stakeholder who represents a specific segment of society.

The agenda for such a debate or session could be on varying issues vital to national interests while at the same time building consensus regarding the problems prevailing in society that, in one way or another, may hurt national values if left unaddressed. The following issues could serve as examples of matters of concern at this level, along with recommendations for building consensus, generating narratives, and effectively communicating at the strategic level.

- Firstly, the public's perception of religious extremism and radicalism, for instance, significantly diverges from the official policies of the country. Specifically, the Pakistan Army engages in jihad by adhering to the Islamic doctrine of warfare. However, the TTP and other terrorist groups also engage in what's commonly known as jihad, but perhaps with different contextualization and manifestation that may contradict what is commonly perceived. The question is: which narrative, if any, is the one the public should accept as legitimate? Sometimes a terrorist for the country is a hero for the public, or a hero for the public becomes a most wanted terrorist overnight, for example. This state of contrasting narratives and perceptions creates significant confusion among the public and leaves the general masses vulnerable to manipulation by malicious actors. People today engage in wars of perception, both within and against one another, akin to a subtle form of warfare. From a security perspective, the dominant side in these perception wars often emerges victorious. It must be the foremost job of all the stakeholders to make efforts at the national level to counter such prevailing perceptions with a rational approach. Deconstructing misconceptions about the Islamic concept of the 'use of force' (Doctrine of Jihad) should be the priority. According to Islamic doctrine, only a legitimate authority has the right over the use of force, and the same authority can call it off as and when required (Niaz A. Shah, 2013). This would restore the legitimacy of the use of force by the state, discrediting non-state actors and religious groups from using religion to justify their actions.

- Similarly, in the country, there is ongoing controversy about the dichotomy of interference vs. conspiracy (the Lettergate debate 2022). For instance, following a thorough institutional verification process, the National Security Committee (NSC) determined that there had been instances of 'undiplomatic language use' that amounted to interference in the country's internal affairs. Thereafter, it becomes a matter of political interpretation whether to term it a conspiracy or not. Therefore, rather than dragging institutions into such political games of interpretations and misinterpretations, institutions, after having done their due job, must not be dragged into such debates. Because it is something that erodes their credibility, at worst. Therefore, we should debate such matters on public platforms to bring clarity to the general understanding of the masses and to depoliticize state institutions.

- Likewise, in Pakistan, perceptions and narratives regarding Pakistan's ideology, Pakistani identity, and national identity have varied across the spectrum. Masses, at times, even question the very existence and purpose of the country or its masses as one nation and its ideology. The issue may stem from the superficial and inconsistent narratives that government policies promote across the country's educational system. At this stage, one may ask, "Why has it become difficult to make people understand that they are 'the citizens of this country, and it is their country'?" Being a Pakistani requires a strong sense of national identity. Therefore, we should address these matters at the national level, avoiding complexity and ambiguity, and opting for greater clarity.

- Moreover, this has the potential to alter the custom of forming emergency judicial commissions, whose findings remain

unpublished under the guise of national security. Such an institute can independently research and investigate any case of national importance, making it public in a much more appropriate way. Similarly, the culture of all parties' conferences on national issues and other such committees that debate, and forget' everything they do can be replaced with an equally important platform where even politicians from varying parties can sit and have a consensus regarding national issues. i.e., the Charter of Economy. Alternatively, they could direct their political disputes, which they consistently express interest in, to the 'People's Court': this should be the designated forum for such matters.

- It is a well-established fact that political stability plays a crucial role in ensuring economic and social stability within a country. However, the question of why we lack political stability, which lies at the core of so many problems, and how to bring it about, if it is a magic stick that can set everything right, remains unattended. Most of the time, the problem arises from the way political leaders conduct their politics, which causes political disputes that hold the whole system of governance hostage to personal feuds. Apart from legal matters, there's no political, social, or moral accountability to hold them responsible for their actions. The present blame game of 'destroying the economy', for instance, keeps fluctuating between the government and the opposition. However, only the public is suffering from the surge in inflation and economic hardships. On the other hand, the political leaders appear to be comfortable with their vested political interests, even beyond a few statements and press conferences about the country's economic crisis. Therefore, to bring political stability, which would lead to socio-economic stability, it is crucial to have a Political Code of Conduct (PCC) in the country. Only such a PCC can promote political accountability and responsible political conduct for the greater good of society. This would also aid in preventing political disputes from infiltrating the realm of governance.

- The coexistence of various ethnic groups within one political system, known as inter-ethnicity, has made the whole process of decision-making controversial in the country. For example, all ethnic groups require representation in the political system and participation in the decision-making process because they cannot trust a representative of any other group to protect their legitimate interests. This has much to do with individual abuse of power and dishonest exercise of authority, not system failure. For example, whenever there is an abuse of power, people are quick to blame the individual for being a Punjabi, Sindhi, Pakhtun, or Baloch for causing the wrong—the ethnic dimension—rather than ensuring an impartial and honest exercise of the authority that has been entrusted to them as a sacred trust.

- Furthermore, no conceptual framework for policy implementation in Pakistan has included human security, despite it being an important subject of the National Security Policy (NSP 2022-26) and a state objective in the National Internal Security Policy (NISP-2018). This lack of conceptual clarity would impede the implementation of any human security policy, regardless of the enthusiasm behind the initiative. Therefore, there should be a conceptual framework and implementation mechanism for policies on human security.

- Last but not least, the Social Contract in Pakistan, based on the balance of rights vs. duties in the Constitution (1973), has not seen the day of implementation due to the imbalance of duties to the corresponding rights. Even the constitution-backed social contract, based on patronage or kinship, has failed to cater to any segment of society (Anatol Lieven, 2011). Therefore, there is an urgent need to rewrite a balanced social contract that is unique to Pakistan, based on the concept of human security. This new social contract would foster a healthy relationship between the individual and society, ultimately leading to the state's success. Thus, developing a shared social contract that comprises the individual, society, and state should be of utmost

importance on a national-level platform that is inclusive of all the stakeholders in society. Most importantly, before implementation, we must institutionalize this social contract.

8. Conclusion

Pakistan has been grappling with the challenge of false narratives, fake news, and misinformation campaigns propagated through mainstream social media that threaten social cohesion and national integrity. Authorities have enacted nearly a dozen laws and established several regulatory bodies to address these threats. However, none of these efforts has been successful in rooting out the core problems inherent in these initiatives. Every regulatory body faces the risk of misuse and abuse of authority, leading to the silencing of dissent and the punishment of opponents. Similarly, almost all legislative measures face the challenge of misinterpretation and inherent loopholes, which can be exploited to retaliate against opponents or unnecessarily restrict legitimate rights and freedoms.

Recently, the government proposed banning social media in the country to address the aforementioned issues without considering the potential commercial and economic losses such a move could bring. Therefore, instead of outright banning these means of communication and curbing the economic opportunities that these technologies bring, it would be wise to develop an alternative framework to solve the problems of false narratives, fake news, and misinformation campaigns. Therefore, we need to institutionalize a framework of strategic communication in the country, based on nationwide consensus, for effective implementation.

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