

Fake News and Real Tensions: The Impacts of Misinformation in South Asia | Center for Media Engagement

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India and Pakistan are two nuclear powers locked in a decades-long border conflict with spurts of cross-national violence ranging from terrorist operations to full-blown war. In February 2019, a suicide bombing by a Pakistan-based terrorist organization killed 40 paramilitary police officers in Kashmir. Two weeks after the attack, India launched retaliatory action against what it claimed was a terrorist camp within the rival state's borders. Pakistan then shot down an Indian fighter plane and captured the pilot in response. The pilot was later returned to India.

Throughout the rising tensions and violence reflected in this episode was a relatively new element of the contemporary Indo-Pakistani conflict: fake news. Both national governments, news media in both countries, and social media accounts operated by citizens and trolls alike engaged in widespread and unchecked dissemination of misinformation. The fake news included inflated body counts, mislabeled photographs from previous conflicts, and manufactured gore like an image of a "bucket filled with mutilated body parts, mislabeled as the remains of a dead Indian soldier" (Bagri, 2019).

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