

INFORMATION BATTLESPACES: NEW MEDIA'S ESCALATING INFLUENCE ON MODERN WARS

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Abstract

Today, new media is more than a communications tool and has become a weapon that has changed the nature of information warfare. Various encrypted messaging services, social media platforms, and digital media outlets have become powerful instruments for state and non-state actors to set the narrative, influence global perception, and spread propaganda. As the new media does not undergo frequent editorial scrutiny like traditional media, the dissemination of real-time information further plays a crucial role in escalating problems like spreading misinformation, radicalization, and conflicts. For example, digital warfare played a key role in the Russia-Ukraine war. Social media was used to spread propaganda, international support, and guide military strategies. They both used narratives using platforms like Telegram and Twitter also deep-fake and AI-generated videos further increased the tensions between the two countries. Even during the Israel-Palestine war, public opinions were shaped worldwide by making viral images and videos, and similarly, during the Syrian civil war, extremist groups like ISIS raised funds and recruited through social media platforms. Hence shaping the global opinion through social media platforms by creating fear from graphic content became quite easy. In the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict or the Rohingya, crisis in Myanmar misinformation on Facebook became the main cause of ethnic violence. Similarly, in the India-China border clash or the U.S. Capitol riot, the new media has become a powerful information tool everywhere.

The engagement of countries like China, America, and Iran-Israel in cyber conflicts has challenged the infrastructure and the country's security. Even terrorist organization groups have used encrypted data platforms to bypass traditional surveillance systems. While modern media has become a means to access real-time information, it has the potential to instigate disinformation, polarize societies, and escalate digital warfare. Hence address these issues through stronger regulations, media literacy initiatives, and international cooperation. The topic is the need for time to address the concerns regarding new media and its impact on contemporary war and peace worldwide.

Keywords: Misinformation, New Media, Digital Warfare, AI technology, Conflict, Propaganda.

INTRODUCTION:

With the evolution of human beings, interconnectivity in the world also became important. The media acted as a messenger for engaging a large audience, and the New Media played a key role in reaching the mass audience in real time. But in contemporary times, the media has gone far beyond just sharing information, now a days it also works to shape or change people's opinions or manipulate the content, every government has started using the new media as tools of weapons. Earlier the purpose of the media was to transfer information to a large audience through news, educational content, entertainment and advertisement in an unbiased manner which is changed in contemporary times. There are two main types one is traditional media, and the other is new media. Traditional media was largely focused on one way communication while today new media is the opposite to it. The new media started in the 1960s. As the internet expanded, the new media also rapidly transformed into digital media, new media, and social media and today media plays a vital role in every person's life. Statista records, data states that out of total population of the world, which is 8.2 billion, approximately 5.2 billion people from the globe are internet users which is 67.5% of the total world population (Statista, 2025).

Unlike traditional media, new media is digital, dynamic, user centric, target-based and provides real-time information to greater audiences, instantaneously and helping dissemination. It provides facilities like, like-dislike, commenting, sharing the content, also providing a platform to showcase their talent. On the one hand it has proved to be positive for bringing out new talents, while on the other hand its profound effects are unavoidable. It acts like a double-sided sword, where on one side it promotes democracy, peace, culture and awareness of the country, while on the other side, its consequence can have an extremely dangerous impact on the social status of the society and on geopolitical tensions. This age of new media has completely changed with global belief. It not only affects the persona of the common people but also challenges the country's national security. Current issues between the countries have shown

the profound impact of new media on the international relations of the countries. Through cyber warfare or espionage, confidential government data is being breached, and critical infrastructure of other countries is being damaged (Nye, 2010; Rid, 2013). For example, during the 2016 U.S elections, the U.S accused Russia of hacking and misusing data, which strained relations between the two countries.

Apart from this, hatred is spread in society by spreading radicalization, misinformation, disinformation and propaganda by extremist groups, state-sponsored narratives, has challenged the international trust cooperation (Castells, 2012; Woolley & Howard, 2016). Similarly, through digital media, interferences from foreign countries are also being made to topple or form governments by meddling in other country's elections (Margetts et al., 2016). For example, in the Russia-Ukraine war, attempts were made to unstablize the Biden government and shape global perception by both countries through social media platforms.

Rationale and Significane of the study

This research shows that new media has become so powerful today that it now influences political narratives, social perceptions, and international relations. Sending Information has become much faster in the digital and social media age, where many times the information is shared without fact checking, which further turns into misinformation, disinformation, conflicts and further fueling into war. The main purpose of this study is to understand the role of media and how it helps in turning conflicts between countries into war and its effects on international relations. In many countries like Russia-Ukraine, Israel-Palestine crisis, Syrian war, India-Pakistan war, North Korea and South Korean war, and in many other countries, the media spread propaganda, manipulated public opinion, breached information and contributed to escalating disputes. Now, through its active participation, the media is playing a huge role in shaping situations and setting narratives. Due to fast and real time information, and live streaming, many times unverified and emotionally charged content also goes viral, which increases misunderstandings, fear among people, and aggression and reinforcement among nations. How media creates hybrid warfare and plays a key role in it. Similarly, non-state actors twist and turn the facts, make unethical use of platforms to recruit, fund raising, carry out psychological operations, promote fake narratives or control real narratives and spread radicalization. We will also understand how pressure is built on soldiers and civilians due to new media at the time of war. Apart from this, we will also understand the role of media in cyber warfare or digital espionage or digital surveillance. And the growing arms race due to all this and the problems growing due to it will also be discussed in detail through some case studies and real-world examples, for a deeper understanding of how media has become a tool to escalate war.

This paper aims to provide a theoretical framework and strategies to understand how the new media is acting as an agent in fueling the fire of contemporary politics. By analyzing the real-world case studies across the globe where the war escalated with the help of digital transformations. What strategies can be developed to solve these problems which will reduce the negative effects of new media and help in finding ways to resolve conflicts? Our aim through this paper will be to promote digital and responsible communication, media literacy and cyber tools.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It adopted a qualitative approach and conducted cases of new media using descriptive or analytical methods. To conduct this research, mainly secondary data has been used which includes latest peer-reviewed journals, research papers, and books, government reports, policy documents, think-tank publications, reports of international organizations bodies like UN, NATO. Apart from this, real time videos, viral posts, propagandas, information warfare official videos, conferences and seminars of recent international countries like Russia-Ukraine war, Israel-Palestine, North-South Korea, Armenia-Azerbaijan have also been seen and understood.

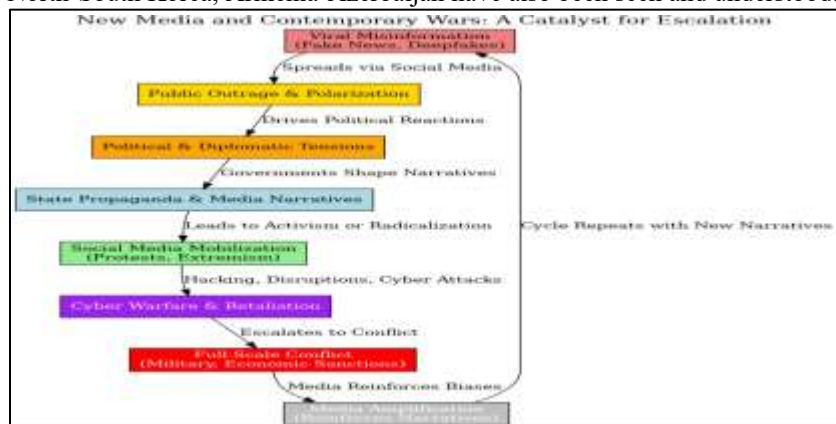


Fig.1. Visual Depiction of New Media Narratives, Misinformation, and Escalation Cycle.

Fig.1 is a visual depiction of New Media showing the cyclic nature of media in escalating tensions where the cycle begins with misinformation, to building narratives, escalating through public outrage, polarizing the society, creating

state propaganda, evoking political tensions, mobilizing social media through online protest, and extremism. This further escalates the conflict through cyber warfare and retaliating it which leads to full-fledged conflicts and this cycle keeps continuing.

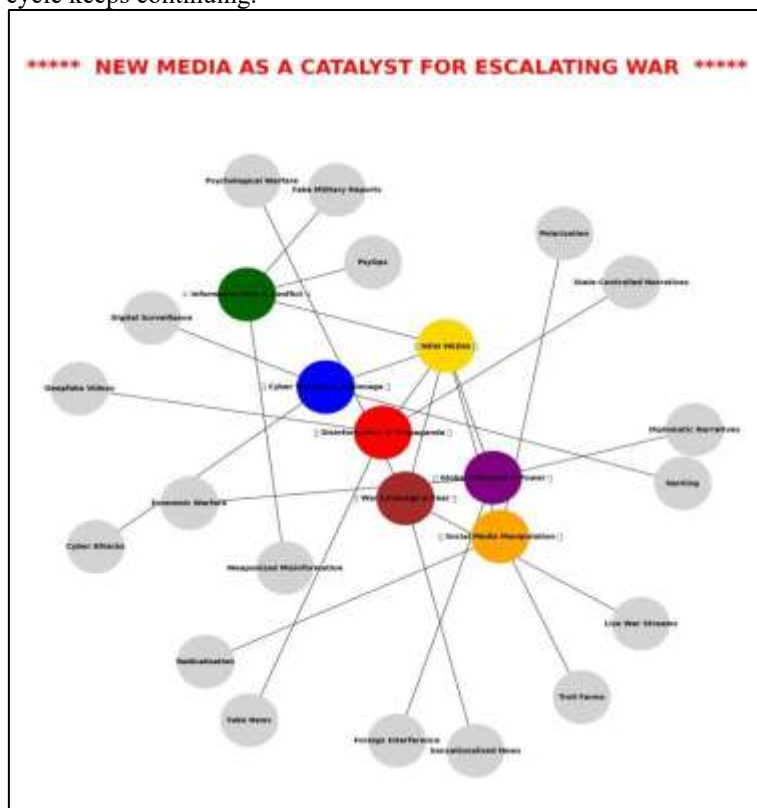


Fig.2. An Infographic depiction of How new media acts as a catalyst for war?

Fig.2 Is an infographic depiction of New Media that explains how various problems occur with it. It has power to influence the dynamics of modern warfare, transcending the conventional media. Publishing fake military reports, psychological operations(psyops), and weaponizing misinformation to assert, pressure, fear, and mistrust among the civilians are linked with Information war and conflicts. Similarly, Data breaching, digital surveillance, and hacking are done through cyber warfare & espionage to destroy the infrastructure and destabilize the government systems, even personal data without any physical aggression. Unlike others, disinformation and propagandas are designed to manipulate the public opinion with its state-controlled narratives, deepfake videos, and fake news. Sensationalized headlines are made to create fear in the nation through its war coverage which fuels the conflicts. Today social media manipulation is done by using troll farms, bot accounts and live war streaming are further fueling the emotions which further raise radicalization and extremism. Moreover, global influence and power projections are achieved from economic warfare, diplomatic narratives, radicalizing, and polarizing society. All the above are web of new media that makes strategic use of misinformation, psychological influence, and cyber tool to increase instability and tensions in society and even serves as a catalyst for war.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As New media has become the basic source of information. Dependency on the media has made people unable to understand the fact. Earlier the media used to provide information in an unbiased manner but in today's time the situation seems to have completely changed. Today the media seems to be involved in various unethical practices. It has not only remained as a means of reaching information to people. Fake narratives, propaganda, and shaping opinions are often spread by the new media. It poses a threat to a country's security, infrastructure, and international relations, whose future impact can likely to be negative. This literature review will highlight the key aspects with the help of some scholarly works ranging from evolution of new media, distortions of data, and war escalation.

Global conflict has shifted from the traditional military boundaries to modern warfare. Qiao and Wang (1999) explained in the book "Unrestricted Warfare" that future wars will not be fought through military means but through technology. Economic manipulation, cyber-warfare, and media manipulation with non-military strategies will work as tool arsenal for both state and non-state actors (Qiao & Wang, 1999). New media came into existence at the end of the 20th century and social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube started in 2000. Additionally, to understand its evolution Castells, (2009) book "The Rise of Network Society" played a significant role in

understanding the role of societies in the digital age. He argues that networks play a crucial role in shaping, influencing, political discourse. And networks do not directly exercise control but are influenced by communication inflow. In this way it also reshapes sociological, economic and political aspects. And because of rapid information transfer misinformation spreads many times (Castells, 2009). Similarly, the explanation given by Eli Pariser (2011) in his influential work "The Filter Bubble" explains how social media platforms mislead. For him filter bubble is a situation where algorithms show only personalized content and create bubbles through which people form their biases after seeing limited information. So, the chances of misleading, distortion of information, shaping narratives, becomes easier with the filter bubble effects, and can polarize society and international relations (Pariser, 2011). There is a similar book Cathy O'Neil's "Weapons of Math Destruction" (2016) where O'Neil has also explained that algorithms spread misinformation and propaganda by showing sensational content. By introducing the concept of "weapon of mass destruction (WMD)", he says opaque information's can lead to reinforce political propaganda, and further me contribute to war escalation (O'Neil, 2016). Similarly, we come to know from Conway's (2017) "Online radicalization theory" that by running fake propaganda, extremist groups propagate their fake ideologies and recruit people (Conway, 2017). Similarly, in "Cyber War", Richard A. Clarke (2010), explains cyber war and espionage, also said how one country creates threat and fear in other countries by doing cyber espionage. He further views cyberspace as a new battleground for modern warfare, war is not just military conflicts or hacking, it is more about controlling the narratives without any physical confrontations (Clarke, 2010). In this way the governments of other countries can also be toppled. Further in the book "Cyberwar is coming!" John Arquilla & David Ronfeldt (1993) gave "Information Warfare Theory", in this book they explained that controlling information becomes as important as controlling a territory. They further explained that information dominance shapes people's perceptions and it can also become a reason for instability of a country, like it happened during the Arab Israel conflict or the Russia Ukraine conflict (Arquilla & Ronfeldt, 1993). Some selective measures for these problems have also been given by prominent scholars such as W. James Potter's in "Media Literacy" (2013) suggested people to learn analytical thinking is necessary for understanding critical information in media (Potter, 2013).

Similarly, some scholars have also suggested the solution to the problem occurred by new media. Johan Galtung's "Cultural Violence" (1990) book provides insight to understand the hidden violence in society. He also suggested from his peace journalism theories that media should shift its focus from sensational news to conflict resolution (Galtung, 1990). The UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) CyberPeace Institute's 2023 Report on the Cyber Diplomacy Framework suggested that rules and regulations will have to be introduced in cyber space for keeping international cooperation and diplomatic dialogues for promoting peaceful coexistence in cyberspace (UN GGE CyberPeace Institute, 2023). And similarly, Paulo Freire's in "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" (1970) gave "Dialogic Communication Theory dialogue", he supports individual to develop dialogical and participatory approach for critical thinking, that can help to understand socio, political and economic aspects so they can take immediate action to stand against such oppressive structures. Cooperation and mutual respect can be a key medium through which conflict can be resolved and peace can be achieved (Freire, 1970).

To understand the theoretical framework Below are some prominent theories that have appeared from media, political science, or conflict studies. This will help us understand the role of new media as a catalyst for conflicts.

Here, through some different theories, it can be understood how new media plays a significant role in escalating wars between countries. Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs, Shaw, & Weaver, 2018) states that the media itself decides the topic of what to show, it does not let people think, for example, it focuses less on the tensions in the Global South and highlights the Israel and Palestine conflicts more. Similarly, Media Dependency Theory (Ball-Rokeach & DeFleur, 1976) states that too much dependency on media for access of information can increase the chance of spreading misinformation, as happened during the Arab Spring. Framing Theory (Entman, 1993) explains how the media shape's public opinion by highlighting specific narratives, creating polarization or propaganda. Similarly, Hypodermic Needle Theory is given by Harold Lasswell, 1927 and Lippmann in 1922 explains how the media can easily inject its content to passive, homogenous, and impressionable audience, as ISIS did through propaganda and recruitment. Network Society Theory (Castells, 1996) explains how the new society is network-based, interconnected through digital platforms, and this quickly escalates conflicts, as non-state actors also come into play. For example, digital propaganda and cyber warfare were shown during the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Spiral of Silence Theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) says that people begin to hide their views when they realize that their opinions are biased. Similarly, during the Iraq War (2003), dissenting voices got less importance in the media. Post-Truth and Fake News Theory (McIntyre, 2018) explains how deepfake videos, viral posts and technology together increase conflicts in today's digital age. For example, chemical attacks took place in Syria due to fake news. Similarly, Cyber-Conflict Theory (Rid, 2011) tells us that cyberspace has become a new era's battlefield and weapon; just as an attempt was made to destabilize the country's government through Russia's interference in the 2016 US elections; it shapes and escalates conflicts very quickly.

Contemporary Prolonged Wars: Influence of New Media

Manuel Castells explains through "Network Society Theory" (1996) that today human beings are living in a "network society" where information flow is happening fast. Today, through this network, new media is largely involved in shaping the global power structure through engagement of new media in escalating modern conflicts, diplomatic

tensions, and decentralized communication. That is, today war is not just fought in the battlefield but has become online and “mediatized”. And through cyberspace, social media and digital propaganda, international tensions are not only being created but also are being shaped (Castells, 1996). These things can be understood from some examples of various countries across the globe.

1. South China sea and territorial disputes:

Today new media has brought the conflicts of neighboring countries to a global level. China, Vietnam, Malaysia, Brunei and Taiwan continue to assert their rights over the South China Sea or Yellow Sea. New Media have helped to make this dispute a global dispute. This cross-border dispute got polarized through the media. It has popularized the claim of all on South China Sea. China is more powerful than all these countries, so to fulfill its national interest China is using continuous aggression and force whenever needed (Chitadze, 2024). China creates fear on the other nation with realizing its missile testing videos through state-controlled media.

2. Israeli Palestinian Conflict:

The dispute between Israel and Palestine is like a Pandora’s box with the intervention of Arab nations and United States. Even the agreement between Israel and all these nations seems less effective as the conflict between them continued even after a decade. (Yadav & Tekchandani, 2024). New media played a significant role in fueling the war here too. Both countries promoted their own narratives, Israel gained support by being self-defensive while on the other hand Palestinian media gained support by showing civilian suffering. All of these are sensitive issues in themselves because Israel displays its military presence in Gaza and Golan heights and hence these regions are in the grip of war. Even after the intervention of the U.S, the conflict turned into war, which is a sensitive case for the entire world. The ongoing Israel Palestine war has mostly affected the women, children, seniors (Spitka, 2023). Cyberspace, hacking or digital surveillance was also used in this. Cryptocurrency became a means of fund raising for Palestine. Both sides took the help of media by putting edited videos or photos, fake narratives, #Hashtag campaign or viral posts and videos to shape people's opinions. As a result, Israel got the support of western nations, and Middle East nations supported Palestine. Voices are being raised from the east many of them have also been given the name of genocide which has not yet been considered official according to international law. They both used the media to play victim cards and gained support, aid, funds, while showing the other side as aggressors.

3. Russia and Ukraine war

In contemporary times, new media has played a key role in promoting this Russia and Ukraine war. Ukraine expressed its desire to become a member of NATO, which Russia was not acceptable to Russia at all. Even after Russia's warning, Ukraine under the influence of the West released the signal to install nuclear weapons, which became a security concern for Russia and hence the war started. During this period, both the countries not only leaked each other's intelligence data but also shared battlefields live updates and strategic information through encrypted platforms of new media like Telegram for their own benefit. In this way, both the countries kept sharing fake disinformation against each other and Ukraine gained the support of the West by showing Russia's attacks and human sufferings on that social media. Equivalently Russia, through its social media platforms, portrayed Ukraine as a Nazi state. Due to media intervention, Russia-Ukraine war did not just remain as a battlefield. It was fought through tanks and tweets, missiles and memes, propaganda, information, narrative, psychological war, cyber-attacks. This two-year Russia-Ukraine war can be called a multifaceted war, one of the most media driven war in modern history in which apart from the humanitarian crisis, with the tangible and intangible impact. Understanding its direct consequences has become especially important to prevent such future conflicts (Badawi & Zreik, 2024).

4. Kashmir Dispute between India and Pakistan:

Just like the issues of some other countries of the world like north-south Korea or Arab and Israel, Kashmir is also a long-standing dispute between India and Pakistan (Adlina, 2024). Even after the abrogation of article 370 and 35A by India, Pakistan is regularly raising its voice through media. Exchanging hate speech, showing each other as a radical nation and creating fear among the minorities of each were done through media has further created tensions among the nation. After the Pulwama attack in 2019, the media on both sides created a rift in the relationship between the two by spreading fake information, cyber-attacks, stealing and making allegations of stealing data against each other. Apart from this, psychological surveys were also conducted through digital media like fear, uncertainties, distrust. Sometimes new media also add “*spicy tadka*” while publicizing the information. Even after four wars, several proxy wars, and skirmishes going on between the two countries, the media never let us forget the Kashmir issue. Even after 75 years of independence, the media has made Kashmir a contentious issue (Kamboh, MK. 2021).

5. North Korea and the South Korea tensions:

Unlike other countries, there are political, ideological, territorial, or military conflicts between North Korea and South Korea. In this 21st century, North Korea creates fear in South Korea by showing its nuclear missile testing videos in the media (Son et al., 2024). Due to ideological differences, both countries keep making allegations against each other. Apart from this, they made allegations against each other through the media, also accused them of data stealing through cyber threats. North Korea has always tried to keep dominance over South Korea and in response South Korea also created its K-pop activism which got worldwide popularity. Even though North Korea does not use the internet, there are many digital platforms from where public opinions are shaped and voices have been raising in support of North Korea through new media.

6. Taiwan and China relations:

War between communist party and nationalist party from 1927-1949 increased the tensions between China and Taiwan. After the victory of the communist party, nationalist leaders consider Taiwan as their independent state (Rigger, 2016). China opposes this claim under China's "One China Policy" (Bush, 2013). China controlled media has also shown Taiwan as a part of China on its map. Moreover, if any conflicts arise between China and Taiwan, the media spreads sensational headlines like "China prepares war for Taiwan" or "Taiwan on the Brink of invasion" and puts Taiwan under threat. Today Taiwan has also become strategically important for China because of its world class technology where the US invests. Taiwan has today become the biggest technology hub in the world (Tung, 2023). China by doing its missile testing, military drills, and fighter jet intrusions, it always creates a threatening atmosphere in Taiwan and increases the tension with such propaganda, threats, misinformation, cyber-attacks not only in Taiwan but also in the US. Due to the media fueling the fire, such disputes have become global level disputes.

7. Armenia and Azerbaijan dispute:

Unlike the Kashmir issue between India and Pakistan, there is a contentious dispute between the Nagorno-Karabakh region and Azerbaijan. Nagorno-Karabakh officially it is a part of Azerbaijan but the ethnic population living in it is Armenian. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, these Armenian people wanted to become a part of Azerbaijan. And this also became the reason for the first war (1988-1994) between Armenia and Azerbaijan. In contemporary times, a second war broke out between them again in 2020 with the involvement of media too. Their information warfare was going on social media platforms like Telegram, leaking each other's information's, hacking governmental data has no longer made it just a territorial dispute, but a battle of narrative, belief, information warfare. New media is used as a powerful weapon which turns any issue into a global issue which affects other countries as well.

8. Turkish, Greek, and Cyprus dispute:

Basically, there are three primary concern first the division of Cyprus, second the maritime boundaries in the Aegean Sea, and third the conflict over control of natural gas resources in the Eastern Mediterranean. New media has played the role of patrolling these conflicts. The media of all countries are engaged in spreading propaganda, misinformation, cyber-attacks against each other by blaming themselves for being victims and others for being aggressors and gaining support for other nations of the world by portraying themselves as victims. New media intervention has made this regional issue into a global issue affecting diplomatic relations, national sentiments, and international policies. In this era of new media, it has become difficult to talk peace or choose right from wrong because of the shaping of people's opinion (Rostomyan, 2023).

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The 21st century has seen New Media as a first source of information. It is seen that the country which has more internet users. New media has become powerful equipment which not only provokes the people to create conflicts but in fact even countries. Misinformation, disinformation, Cyberwarfare, or digital espionage can also lead to the modern Arms Race. It has the power to enlarge even the regional issues to a global platform. There are no such guidelines for ethical use of new media.

Unlike conventional warfare, new media is as powerful as it can create war without bullets. influence mind without any physical contact and shift the global power dynamics with just viral posts and videos. Now war is just not up to battlefield, in fact a new war has appeared with every smartphone and screen. In the era of new media, we can understand from the examples of many countries how by running state sponsored narratives it not only shapes people's opinions but also shapes their psychology, which can emerge as a big problem in future. In the era of new media, it seems difficult to decide between right and wrong because every country, big and small, is using new media to prove themselves right. The wars of this era are much more dangerous than the conventional wars which are being fought without guns and weapons. This is a hybrid war where data breaching, narratives and information are used which can either build or spoil the image of any country on a global platform whose long-term impact can be damaging. To solve the problems caused by such new media, governments should involve the media for global cooperation. In this, media literacy and cyber rules should be made so that the mistakes of new media can be minimized in future.

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