

FIFTH-GENERATION WAR AND HIGHER EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN: FACULTY STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING CRITICAL INFORMATION LITERACY

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ABSTRACT

Fifth-generation war is characterized by narrative challenges, disinformation, psychological influence, and digital propaganda. It increasingly shapes the cognitive environment of Pakistani university students through social media. This qualitative study investigates university faculty perceptions of integrating Fifth-generation war awareness into academic curricula and their role in countering such narratives among university students. Drawing on Agenda-Setting Theory and Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model, the research is based on semi-structured interviews with 34 faculty members from ten public and private universities in Islamabad. Data were analysed thematically using NVivo 15. Findings reveal that faculty members view themselves as frontline actors who function as alternative agenda-setters and disruptors of propaganda filters. They emphasise curriculum integration of Fifth-generation war concepts, especially in social sciences and media studies. Faculty also enhances the need of systematic promotion of media literacy and critical thinking, in the classroom as a structured counter-narrative. Faculty consistently stress that individual efforts are insufficient without institutional and policy-level support. The study positions higher education institutions as strategic sites of cognitive resilience and offers policy recommendations for curriculum reform, and faculty development into Pakistan's educational and national security frameworks.

KEYWORDS: Agenda-Setting Theory; Cognitive Resilience; Counter-Narratives; Critical Thinking; Curriculum Integration; Digital Propaganda; Disinformation; Fifth-Generation War; Higher Education; Media Literacy; Propaganda Model; University Faculty.

INTRODUCTION

The nature of war has changed. Traditional military involves strategies of multifaceted ideological, psychological, and digital war. However, fifth-generation war relates to influencing public opinion and, therefore, represents a war of narratives, disinformation and digital propaganda. That is why youth are heavily exposed to digital media environments. In the context of 9/11, Fifth-generation war has grown in Pakistan due to the rising influence of digital narratives. They actively participate in political debate and opinion formation. University students constitute an important element of society. Their impressions of political identity can be greatly influenced by their exposure to unreliable information and misinformation (Khan, 2021). To counter this narrative, university professors play a crucial role in refuting student narratives about the Fifth Generation War. The academic setting becomes a strategic setting for fostering democratic principles. In fields like journalism, mass communication, political science, international relations, and social sciences, where conversations about media narratives, propaganda, identity politics, and information war are directly related to the academic curriculum, the role of faculty becomes even more important. University faculty are addressing these issues inside Pakistani educational institutions (Krishnan, 2024). The research aims to contribute to scholarly debate on media literacy, strategic communication, and counter-radicalisation within the Pakistani context.

It investigates the faculty's role in narrative resistance and intellectual engagement. The instructional function of university professors in fostering media literacy and critical thinking throughout academia could help us understand classroom debates, which this study examines with the help of semi-structured interviews with university academics. What teaching methods do they use that challenge fifth-generation war narratives in higher education? In addition, how do the faculty see these methods as essential for assisting university students in challenging sources and identifying the framing strategies used to present (mis)leading information? This instructional engagement was seen as predominantly important given university students' dependence on social media. In Pakistan, digital platforms are used by a variety of players, such as foreign organisations, political

parties, radical groups, and ideological movements, to affect societal attitudes and public conversation. Universities must raise awareness about false information, psychological tricks, cyber propaganda, and narrative building. However, official academic material covering media literacy, information verification, cyber awareness, and the strategic aspects of digital conflict is still lacking in many university curricula.

Faculty members have a significant influence on how students see political, social, and cultural realities (Maisaia, 2024). Scholarly research on the precise function faculty should play in refuting Fifth-Generation War narratives in academic settings is still lacking, nevertheless. Thus, the current study aims to investigate the significance of integrating Fifth-Generation War narrative awareness into the academic curriculum and to analyse faculty members' roles in challenging such narratives among university students. The study is important because it highlights the responsibility of universities in producing knowledgeable and socially responsible citizens to address such issues provided by digital propaganda, ideological manipulation, and disinformation in higher education backgrounds (Qureshi, 2019). It also provides in the end policy suggestions for faculty development, curricular reform, and the multi-stakeholder integration of media and information literacy into Pakistan's educational and national security frameworks.

Statement of the Problem

Due to their extensive use of digital media, university students are particularly susceptible to being exposed to polarising narratives, disinformation campaigns, and extreme ideological material (Spohr, 2017). There has not been much focus on how higher education institutions might increase students' comprehension of and resistance to Fifth-Generation War narratives. Academic curricula at many universities are deficient in digital literacy, media literacy, information verification, cyber propaganda, and psychological war awareness. University students still lack a real understanding of how academics may combat Fifth-Generation War myths. There are still questions concerning how educators can promote critical thinking, responsible media consumption, and awareness of digital manipulation and propaganda without compromising free speech and academic freedom. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate the importance of including Fifth-Generation War narrative awareness into academic curriculum and to investigate the role of faculty members in challenging such narratives among university students. The goal of the project is to close the knowledge gap about how educational institutions can help students become more resilient in the digital age against false information, extremist narratives, and psychological influence operations (Tucker et al., 2017).

Research Objectives

1. To examine university faculty perceptions regarding the inclusion of Fifth-generation war awareness in the academic curriculum
2. To explore the perceived role of university faculty in countering Fifth-generation war narratives among university students.

Research Question

1. Should fifth-generation war narrative awareness be included in the academic curriculum?
2. What role should faculty play in countering Fifth-generation war narratives among university students?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Two fundamental theoretical frameworks in media and communication studies, the Agenda-Setting Theory and the Propaganda Model, allow for a meaningful understanding of the literature on Fifth-Generation War narratives in educational settings (Inam et al., 2024). Both frameworks offer a solid analytical basis for investigating the organisation, prioritisation, and ideological shaping of information in digital and institutional communication contexts, especially for Pakistani university students and the instructional function of faculty. According to the Agenda-Setting Theory, which was initially presented by McCombs and Shaw in 1972, audiences' opinions are greatly influenced by the media's determination of the importance of certain problems in public debate rather than being told what to think. This idea becomes extremely pertinent in the context of fifth-generation war since modern influence operations mostly focus on using digital platforms, social media trends, and algorithm-driven visibility to shape issue salience. Second-level agenda setting and framing studies focus on how people's opinions and thoughts are influenced by the media (McCombs, 2004).

In this sense, fifth-generation war narratives depend heavily on framing. Opposing participants often provide interpretations that are identity-based, emotionally fraught, and politically controversial. Faculty participation through media literacy training and critical discourse analysis becomes essential in these circumstances. The Propaganda Model is another essential lens for understanding how information systems operate within systemic power relations (Cheema et al., 2024). The five filters that affect mass media content are ownership, advertising, source, flak, and ideology (MacLeod, 2019). In contemporary digital situations, these filters have evolved. Propaganda has expanded into decentralised digital networks in the context of the Fifth-Generation War. It makes clear how institutional, political, and economic institutions may influence media narratives. Conversely, other

perspectives could be excluded. By highlighting how algorithmic governance, platform capitalism, and data-driven personalisation influence information exposure, university students are encouraged to encouraging critical examination of media sources (Fuchs, 2018; van Dijck et al., 2018).

Particularly relevant to fifth-generation war narratives is this connection. Disinformation strategies, emotional manipulation, and identity politics are often included. To assist students in developing a critical understanding of how social media shapes visibility and affects their perspective, the faculty's educational role becomes increasingly important. Together, the Agenda-Setting Theory and the Propaganda Model offer a comprehensive analytical framework for this study. The propaganda model describes the institutional and structural conditions. On the other hand, university students are deeply ingrained in complex networks of information (Dzagal, 2020). Faculty members therefore become essential mediators in this process. They are able to challenge prevailing agendas and introduce university students to critical, reflective, and diverse ways of viewing information. Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), Herman, and Chomsky's Propaganda Model (1988), two fundamental communication theories, are the main sources used in this research work. Using agenda-setting theory, the media influences the public's perception of the importance of certain problems rather than telling them what to believe. The second level of agenda setting looks at how issues are portrayed in the media. The mechanics of agenda setting have grown increasingly complicated in the digital era. This progression is especially pertinent to fifth-generation war. Faculty members can act as alternative agenda-setters in the field of education. This is consistent with second-level agenda formation, where students are trained to assess deceptive narratives critically through framing. The five filters of the Propaganda Model are described in Manufacturing Consent (1988). It explains how systemic biases in mass media serve elite interests. These filters support strong actors and marginalise opposing viewpoints (Pedro, 2011). The Propaganda Model sheds light on how state and non-state actors weaponised narratives through repetition, emotional appeals and selective framing to erode national cohesion in fifth-generation war contexts. Propaganda becomes increasingly widespread through social media's acceleration. By opposing manufactured consent and encouraging informed citizenry, this places educators in the role of "cognitive resistance" agents. Through curricular reform, ethical modelling, and classroom participation, they undermine propaganda filters. In the context of Pakistan's information war, this synthesis puts universities as key locations for developing cognitive resilience.

The research expands the body of literature from conventional and digital media impacts to the particular field of faculty-led educational responses in a fifth-generation war-vulnerable society by basing the study on these ideas. It highlights the legislative requirements for systemic integration while addressing requests for education as an instrument for national security. The theoretical framework for the study's methodology, thematic analysis, and policy suggestions is established by this evaluation of the literature (Brooks & Porter, 2020).

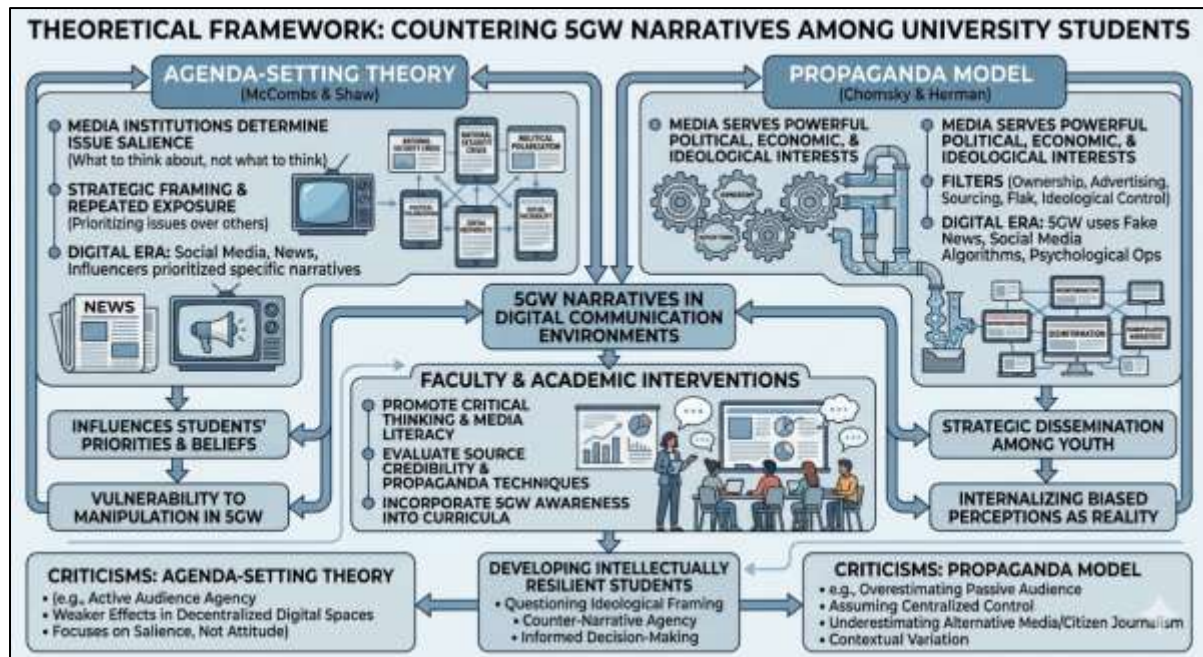
Research Gap

There are still a lot of gaps in the literature, especially when it comes to the Pakistani context, even though Fifth-Generation War has drawn attention that is more scholarly recently, notably in the areas of national security, cyber operations, hybrid threats, and digital propaganda (Nawaz et al., 2023). The majority of earlier research has focused on macro-level aspects such as military tactics, foreign disinformation efforts, state-level reactions, internet radicalisation trends, and the wider social effects of false information. Despite their value, these works mostly ignore the pedagogical and educational frontlines at the micro level where narratives are actively disputed or internalised and young minds are formed. Some international literature discusses media literacy and counter-radicalisation in educational settings (Bibi & Meer, 2023). University students are heavy reliance on unregulated social media platforms, so there is still much to learn about the relationship between national security narratives, strategic communication, and higher education in Pakistani academic settings. In order to close these gaps, this study especially examines how university faculty members feel about the inclusion of fifth-generation war awareness in the curriculum as well as their perceived and prospective role in challenging students' manipulative narratives.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Propaganda Model and Agenda-Setting Theory serve as the theoretical foundation for this investigation (Manzoor et al., 2019). It examines how academics might refute Fifth-Generation War narratives among university students and the significance of incorporating these narratives into academic programs. Through intentional framing and regular exposure, these tales influence students' perceptions of societal instability and ideological conflicts as well as public attention. In the context of the Fifth-Generation War, agenda-setting strategies are commonly employed. Students at universities are particularly vulnerable to the influence of narratives that are driven by agendas. It makes clear how digital media may influence university students' priorities, opinions, and perceptions of social and political reality. The second primary theoretical framework that guides this investigation is the Propaganda Model developed by Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman in their book *Manufacturing Consent*. Information is often framed and filtered by media outlets to influence public opinion and ideological goals. According to the theory, some of the filters that influence media content include ownership structures,

business pressures, sourcing techniques, ideological control, and political interests. The Fifth-Generation War propaganda strategy uses psychological tricks and social media algorithms to sway perceptions and impose ideological influence. Social media narratives are used to purposefully disseminate ideological narratives, falsehoods, and misinformation to audiences (Hakan, 2016).



This theoretical perspective highlights the importance of educational institutions in promoting critical awareness and resistance against propaganda-oriented communication. In order to challenge Fifth-Generation War narratives, students' media literacy, critical thinking, and intellectual engagement are essential. Teachers can help pupils recognise propaganda strategies (Gillani et al., 2021). They contest the formulation of ideology. Students' understanding of information war and digital propaganda can be enhanced by Fifth-Generation War expertise. These instructional strategies can assist university students in developing cognitive resilience and the ability to engage critically with media content. Consequently, faculty can be important counter-narrative actors against Fifth-Generation War influences, and the Propaganda Model and Agenda-Setting Theory together provide a strong theoretical foundation for understanding how media narratives and propaganda mechanisms affect students' perceptions.

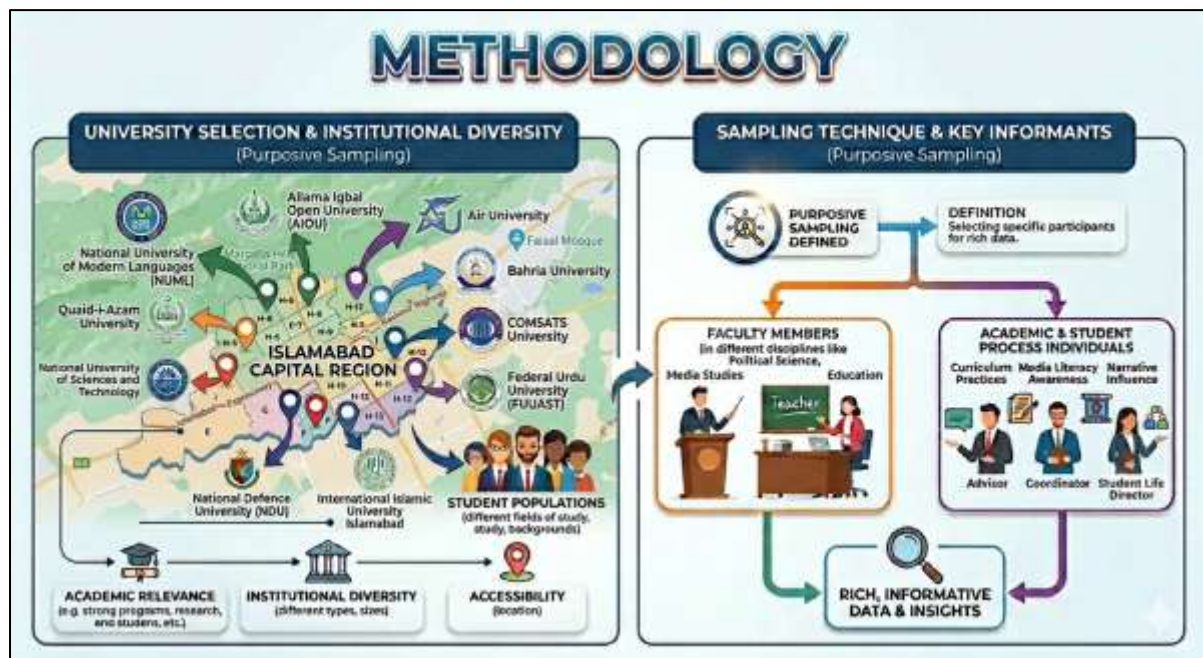
However, the Propaganda Model by Noam Chomsky and Edward S. Herman has also received a lot of flak. The technique and viewers' critical thinking abilities, according to critics, may undervalue audience disagreement and agency. Critics argue that not all media outlets consistently serve elite goals, but the propaganda model also overlooks the diversity and complexity of media systems in favour of structural domination by political and power elites (Zollmann et al., 2018). According to some scholars, the model may not fully take into consideration media practices in non-Western societies. Moreover, critics claim that the theory occasionally adopts a deterministic perspective by implying that propaganda processes operate uniformly for all audiences and circumstances. Both the Propaganda Model and Agenda-Setting Theory are nevertheless very useful for examining media impact, digital propaganda, and story production in modern society in spite of these objections. Their combined use offers insightful information about the creation, dissemination, and internalisation of Fifth-Generation War narratives in digital communication environments, especially among university students.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research technique to examine the role of faculty in challenging Fifth-Generation War narratives and assess the need to incorporate knowledge of propaganda and perception manipulation into academic courses (Aziz et al., 2024). In-depth analysis of how academic stakeholders perceive and respond to ideological influence, misinformation, and digital propaganda in a university context was made feasible by the research design. In mid-June 2024, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data for this study. Semi-structured interviews maintained participant homogeneity while allowing for flexibility in investigating novel topics. This method allowed respondents to provide detailed information regarding how they saw the Fifth-Generation War, the influence of the media, and the role that educators play in fostering students'

critical awareness (Alam et al., 2024). To ensure participation from both public and private higher education institutions, ten universities in Islamabad were selected for the interviews.

The universities included in the research were selected based on academic significance, institutional diversity, and accessibility. The ten universities are Bahria University, Quaid-i-Azam University, National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), National Defence University (NDU), National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Air University, COMSATS University Islamabad, International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI), Federal Urdu University, and Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU). Because these schools together represent a wide range of academic specialisations and student demographics, a deeper understanding of the study issue within the capital area's higher education environment is made feasible. The selection approach used in this study was purposeful sampling, and participants were selected based on both their relevance to the study's objectives and their capacity to provide rich, informative data. Key informants were faculty members and, where applicable, anybody involved in academic and student interaction processes who may provide important insights regarding media literacy expertise, narrative influence in university settings, and curricular procedures.



The collected data was examined using NVivo 15, a qualitative data analysis program. Thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse, and understand patterns that surfaced in the interview transcripts. Thanks to NVivo 15's methodical arrangement of qualitative data, the researcher was able to categorise responses into major themes such as awareness of the Fifth-Generation War, the role of faculty in narrative construction, exposure to digital propaganda, and the necessity of curriculum integration of media literacy and critical thinking components. Ethical concerns were thoroughly evaluated throughout the whole study process (Khan et al., 2024). Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and their agreement was obtained to conduct interviews. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained to ensure that participants could freely express their thoughts without fear of identification or institutional consequences. Additionally, the study ensured that data were exclusively used for academic purposes in compliance with the ethical norms for social science research (Gill et al., 2024). Overall, this methodological framework provided a structured but flexible approach to understanding the complex relationship between digital propaganda, academic consciousness, and faculty participation in addressing Fifth-Generation War narratives at Islamabad's higher education institutions.

ANALYSIS

The fifth theme of this research study is conceptually grounded in Agenda-Setting Theory and the Propaganda Model. Together, these ideas provide a dynamic theoretical framework for understanding how academics at universities counter Fifth-generation war narratives. In terms of agenda setting, university scholars act as alternative agenda-setters who may challenge the supremacy of internet narratives. Academic courses are incorporating fifth-generation war knowledge, and instructors are discussing it in class. Faculty also direct students' attention toward agendas with a strong analytical base rather than overblown media agendas. This strategy aligns with second-level agenda setting, when teachers influence the subjects that students feel important as well as the manner in which those subjects are delivered. Conversely, the propaganda model explains why faculty involvement is structurally necessary. Filtered information flows, conceptual framing, and digital media

content reflect the propaganda filters described by Herman and Chomsky in their propaganda Model. Faculty members act as disruptors of these filters by exposing university students to counter-frames embedded in social media narratives. Faculty engagement serves as a form of cognitive resistance, and it is reducing the effectiveness of propaganda.

Methodologically, Theme five of this research work arose through inductive qualitative analysis of semi-structured faculty interviews using NVivo software after the collection of data. Nodes from empirical findings related to curriculum integration, faculty responsibility, and classroom engagement during lecture showed high coding density and frequent co-occurrence. These nodes indicate that respondents consistently perceived faculty intervention as dominant in countering fifth-generation war narratives. Background coding queries revealed a strong connection between codes related to media literacy and a decrease in social media polarisation. It further confirms the interconnected nature of educational and ideological resistance strategies across academia. The faculty of the chosen university sample also explained how these duties are carried out through instructional strategies. Instead of evaluating the reliability and analytical depth of the results, this methodological approach ensured that Theme 5 represents sustained academic experiences. Overall, the combination of theory and methodology shows that preventing Fifth-generation war is an educational as well as governmental problem. It is situated at the nexus of knowledge creation and university student socialisation, according to faculty members. It is humanising the strong intellectual groups that can wage war on perception.

Interpretation of Theme

The strong and consistent perception of university students opposing Fifth-generation war narratives is revealed by qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews from 10 chosen institutions in Islamabad. NVivo coding from the chosen data also indicates high reference concentration around curriculum integration and ethical responsibility. According to respondents, instructor interference in the classroom is both essential and genuine. Academic programs are the first line of defence against fifth-generation narratives, according to faculty members from a few universities. Additionally, several of the sample's respondents contended that fifth-generation war awareness had to be methodically included in pertinent courses, especially those that fall under the social sciences and media studies categories. It was believed that this curricular integration was crucial to giving pupils a conceptual grasp of the fifth-generation war narrative. NVivo nodes linked to media literacy and fifth-generation war awareness, suggesting that respondents believe these components are essential.

Theme five concerns critical thinking and media literacy. Faculty members described their role as controllers of analytical reasoning. It also highlights the mentorship and ethical role of faculty members in universities. These practices were framed as everyday educational responsibilities. Respondents also highlighted practices such as encouraging source verification and analysing framing techniques. They stressed the importance of objectivity, balanced debate, and avoidance of ideological imposition of information flow. NVivo codes related to ethical accountability were particularly prominent in discussions. Classroom interaction between university students has emerged as a counter-narrative space. Faculty described that open discussions reduce ideological rigidity. It suggests that the classroom serves as a strategic forum for conversations in addition to being a place where knowledge is transmitted. Lastly, respondents emphasised the necessity of strong institutional backing. Teachers acknowledged their own obligations. They placed a strong focus on combating fifth-generation war. Respondents see fifth-generation war as a crucial issue that cannot be resolved at the individual level. Overall, this theme shows that faculty members are active participants in the Fifth-generation war narrative. They actively work to refute war myths of the fifth generation. Teachers help create resilient student groups and reshape agendas. It supports the study's main contention that, in the digital era, institutions have a strategic role to play in refuting the war narrative. The fifth theme's nodes and subthemes are shown below.

Sub-Theme

- Sub-Theme 1: Integration of Fifth-generation War Awareness into Curriculum
- Sub-Theme 2: Promotion of Critical Thinking and Media Literacy
- Sub-Theme 3: Faculty as Guides and Intellectual Role Models
- Sub-Theme 4: Classroom Engagement as a Counter-Narrative Space
- Sub-Theme 5: Institutional and Policy-Level Support for Faculty Roles

Explanation of Sub-Themes

The fifth subtheme of this research study's fifth theme is "Institutional and Policy-Level Support for Faculty Roles". Fifth-generation war integration, the first subtheme of theme five in this research study, is awareness in the curriculum. Faculty opinions that Fifth-generation war awareness ought to be explicitly included in academic courses are reflected in this sub-theme. The respondents emphasised that fifth-generation war is a modern type of war that is closely related to higher education since it uses digital media, psychological influence, and information manipulation. Students can comprehend how contemporary war expands beyond actual battlegrounds into cognitive and informational realms by including fifth-generation war concepts in courses. Curriculum integration,

according to faculty, is a preventive measure that gives students the conceptual tools to identify propaganda, misinformation, and perception control strategies before they absorb them without question. The second subtheme of this research study is the promotion of media literacy and critical thinking. The instructional role of faculty in helping students develop their analytical skills. Respondents emphasised that media literacy skills are necessary to resist fifth-generation war narratives.

Faculty members indicated that developing evidence-based thinking is a crucial educational obligation. The goal of this method is to change students from being passive information consumers into reflective and active interpreters. The fifth research study's subtheme is "Faculty as Guides and Intellectual Role Models." This sub-theme presents teachers as moral and knowledgeable role models. Respondents emphasised neutrality, balanced viewpoints, and avoiding ideological imposition. Instead of dictating opinions, faculty saw their job as assisting students in making their own decisions. Teachers' foster intellectual maturity and resistance against emotionally charged or identity-based narratives linked to fifth-generation war by modelling critical inquiry, courteous discussion, and academic integrity. The fourth subtheme of theme five in this study is classroom engagement as a counter-narrative space. According to this sub-theme, fifth-generation war narratives are actively resisted in the classroom.

In order to dispel false information and lessen ideological rigidity, faculty members reported utilising dialogic teaching, debate, and discussion-based learning. When properly managed, classroom interaction gives students the chance to interact with a variety of viewpoints, challenge presumptions, and hone their arguments in a disciplined academic setting. The significance of institutional and structural support for faculty attempts to refute fifth-generation war narratives is emphasised by this sub-theme. Respondents pointed out that without supporting university policy, faculty training, and academic freedom, individual actions are insufficient. Sustained media literacy instruction, multidisciplinary cooperation, and knowledgeable discussion of delicate subjects are made possible by institutional support. Faculty emphasised that preventing fifth-generation war is a shared academic duty that calls for policy-level acknowledgement of information war as a threat to national resilience and educational integrity.

NVivo Codes:

Inclusion of fifth-generation war concepts in course content

- Teaching information war and perception management to university students
- Curriculum-based media literacy education
- Linking fifth-generation war with national security and society
- Teaching students to identify propaganda and disinformation
- Evidence-based reasoning in classroom discussions
- Ethical responsibility in correcting misinformation
- Open dialogue on fifth-generation war-related issues
- Addressing student misconceptions in real time
- Encouraging respectful disagreement

Explaining NVivo Codes

According to faculty opinions, Fifth-generation war notions should be formally included in university curricula. Fifth-generation war is a modern reality that has an immediate impact on students' cognitive backgrounds. It is essential for academic significance. Faculty hope to give students conceptual clarity about information war and non-kinetic war by integrating fifth-generation war principles into university campuses. "Inclusion of fifth-generation war concepts in course content" This code summarises the educational importance of explaining how contemporary wars function. University course content is emphasised by faculty to ensure its proper inclusion related to fifth-generation war information. "Teaching information war and perception management to university students", the Faculty emphasised that students can lessen their vulnerability and susceptibility to perception manipulation.

"Curriculum-based media literacy education" code emphasises how academic syllabi are used to systematically build students' media literacy abilities. Teachers saw media literacy as a fundamental skill that enables students to analyse framing strategies. Awareness campaigns were shown to be less successful than integrating these abilities within the curriculum and academic programs. "Linking fifth-generation war with national security and society" code represents academic attempts to place fifth-generation war in larger national and social contexts. Respondents emphasised that by relating fifth-generation war to social cohesion and national security, university students are better able to comprehend its practical ramifications. "Teaching students to identify propaganda and disinformation": This code is a fundamental teaching method designed to enable students to spot false fifth-generation war narratives. To help students evaluate course material critically, faculty members discussed many educational strategies for spotting propaganda strategies, misleading claims, and (mis)information patterns.

"Evidence-based reasoning in classroom discussions" reflects the faculty's focus on using verified evidence to support classroom discussions. "Ethical responsibility in correcting misinformation" was seen by respondents as

a counterbalance between ideologically and emotionally motivated narratives, encouraging students to cite reliable sources. Faculty understanding of their moral duty to rectify misleading material emphasised correcting false information in a fair and non-aggressive way. "Open dialogue on fifth-generation war-related issues" emphasises the use of inclusive and transparent discourse. Faculty believed that this discourse was crucial. Fifth-generation war is transformed from an unchallenged narrative into a topic of critical scholarly investigation. "Addressing student misconceptions in real time" indicates faculty efforts to actively step in during classroom discussions to avoid the interpretation of misleading information. By providing contextual clarification, this technique was seen as particularly critical. "Encouraging respectful disagreement" summarises faculty tactics as an inescapable and crucial teaching strategy. Faculty can reduce ideological rigidity and emotional escalation by creating an atmosphere where students can openly question ideas without being personally challenged.

Explanation of the NVivo Hierarchy Tree

The main theme, Faculty-Led Educational Responses to Fifth-Generation War Narratives, positions universities as vital venues for cognitive resilience and informed community. It emphasises education as a strategic response to the fifth-generation war narrative. The formal educational combination of fifth-generation war doctrines is the topic of Sub-Theme 1 of the fifth theme. It is the integration of the fifth-generation war narrative awareness into the curriculum. The nodes show how faculty are attempting to include conversations about perception management into current curricula. This sub-theme highlights how curriculum design contributes to institutionalising awareness towards contextual comprehension of modern non-kinetic wars. The second sub-theme, "Promotion of Critical Thinking and Media Literacy," discusses skill-based teaching methods to improve students' analytical abilities.

University students are most of the time assumed to have useful skills for navigating contentious information environments through curriculum-based media literacy and training in spotting propaganda and (dis)information. In classroom discourse, the focus on evidence-based argument supports academic standards of logic and reasoning. The ethical duties of faculty are emphasised in sub-theme three. Academic leadership is established in academic authority. Faculty members actively disprove misinformation and resolve misconceptions in real time. This sub-theme illustrates how faculty behaviour itself becomes counter-narrative to false information. The fourth sub-theme, "Classroom Engagement as Counter-Narrative Space," views the classroom as an interactive space where manipulative and dominating narratives may be challenged. Respectful disagreement promotes tolerance for different viewpoints. On the other hand, the open discussion on fifth-generation war-related concerns promotes participatory learning between students. The structural fundamentals for maintaining faculty-led interventions are also summarised in Sub-Theme 5, "Institutional and Policy-Level Support for Faculty Roles". This sub-theme highlights the necessity of institutional support to promote and enable faculty to successfully confront fifth-generation war narratives. This NVivo hierarchy tree provides a thorough model for academic resistance to perception.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results obtained from the 34 faculty members show that faculty members saw themselves as practical and accountable proxies in combating fifth-generation war narratives. According to the respondents, fifth-generation war is seen as an information and perception-based problem. It directly affects university students' political opinions and thoughts. Fifth-generation war narratives have infused everyday academic life. This is evidenced by the majority of faculty respondents' information that university students often bring social media content and conspiracy theories into class discussions during academic sessions. Faculty participants acknowledged that these fifth-generation war narratives had the potential to mould unconventional false information toward reliable sources in the absence of prompt academic intervention. Consequently, the respondents stressed that their instructional role includes more than just lecture delivery. It also involves critical analysis of media messages and narrative explanation. Results from 34 faculty responses from ten leading universities in Islamabad show that faculty members actively saw themselves as front-line participants in the fight against the fifth-generation war narratives. These narratives are being spread among university students. University students are already exposed to aggressive narratives of fifth-generation war through social media before they even reach the classroom.

"University students often come to class already informed and influenced by social media war narratives, especially conspiracy-based and misinformation-led content. They are inclined to repeat it as factual unless challenged academically," a faculty member number three said in his point of view.

As another respondent, number 8, pointed out, *"The fifth-generation war is not an abstract idea for university students. This idea shapes their political opinions and daily routine life through digital platforms."* These critical and repeated answers show that the faculty of the ten selected universities also acknowledge the classroom as a crucial setting where false information and perception manipulation may be supported. According to respondent number 10's version, faculty involvement is mostly planned, with an emphasis on reframing narratives rather than roasting debate. He argued that

"I do not stop university students from expressing controversial views. Most of the time, I ask them to justify the source and purpose behind the war-led narrative." A senior professor, same as previous one, also clarified, *"This war-led information method displays an educational agenda-setting role. Faculty members deliberately shift university students' focus toward analytical evaluation and assessment by emphasising conversations on media trustworthiness and strategic communication"*.

Respondent number nine emphasised that.

"If we do not highlight the fifth-generation war narrative about how narratives are constructed and manipulated, the university students will continue to focus only on social media viral content instead of understanding why it is circulating."

Responder number seven also pointed out his point and said, "Making a clear connection between agenda-setting and Propaganda model narratives, faculty members serve as an alternative to agenda-setters; they are balancing the prevailing agendas pushed by digital media controlled by digital algorithms". The figures and statistics also show that the agenda-setting, framing and propaganda model by faculty practices are strongly aligned with fifth-generation war narratives. Respondents commonly cited narrative repetition, emotional appeals, and selective framing as characteristics managed through fifth-generation war content. These narratives rely on fear and anger. A faculty member also noted that.

"I explain to students how propaganda works by showing them how certain narratives exclude context and silence alternative viewpoints."

By saying,

"If we do not highlight how narratives are constructed, students will continue to focus only on viral content instead of understanding why it is circulating,"

One responder clearly connected this to agenda setting. These results imply that faculty members develop alternate agendas in opposition to the prevailing agendas imposed by digital media powered by algorithms. The results also show that the propaganda model and faculty practices are highly aligned. Respondents cited characteristics that define fifth-generation war narratives, often-citing repetition, emotional appeal, and selective framing.

"Most fifth-generation war content relies on fear and anger; students assume it must be true when they see the same message repeatedly,"

Another faculty member noted. "I explain to students how propaganda works by showing them how certain narratives exclude context and silence alternative viewpoints," said the second responder.

"My responsibility is to deconstruct these narratives academically; otherwise, misinformation becomes normalised," respondent three clarified. "Most students do not realise they are consuming propaganda; they think it is independent opinion," noted respondent 4. *"I purposefully bring these narratives into discussion to expose their hidden agendas,"* respondent number five continued. All of these answers point to faculty members' perceptions of themselves as active counter-narrative actors rather than passive educators. Respondents often reported deliberate agenda-setting techniques in the classroom.

"If we do not prioritise media literacy in our lectures, students will prioritise whatever is trending online," said respondent number six. *"I decide which issues deserve serious academic attention so students understand what truly matters,"* said respondent number seven.

"I shift students' focus from emotions to analysis by repeatedly highlighting narrative framing," respondent eight clarified. "Agenda setting occurs in class when we emphasise critical thinking over sensationalism," stated respondent number nine. "Faculty can counter digital agendas by creating an academic agenda based on evidence," said respondent 10. Agenda-setting theory is explicitly reflected in these answers, which show how teachers intentionally shape problem salience and divert students' focus from manipulative narratives to organised academic inquiry. The propaganda hypothesis is also substantially supported by faculty answers. *"Fifth-generation war narratives rely on repetition, and students often mistake repetition for truth,"* said Respondent 11. *"I show students how selective facts are used to manufacture consent,"* said Respondent 12.

"Most propaganda works by excluding context, and once students see that, the narrative loses strength."

Respondent 13 clarified. *"I explain how power and interests shape information flows,"* Respondent 14 said. *"Students become less emotionally reactive when they understand who controls narratives,"* said Respondent 15. Using the propaganda model, these results show that faculty members are well aware of propaganda filters. According to Respondent 16,

"Emotional framing must be addressed academically because fear-based content affects students' ideology and philosophy deeply." *"Students are psychologically targeted through individuality narratives, and faculty must counteract it,"* stated Respondent 17.

Respondent 18 said, *"I tell students that emotional manipulation is the core weapon of fifth-generation war."* *"Once emotions are removed and detached, the history collapses,"* Respondent 19 continued, anticipating Respondent 20. *"Students use academic discussion as a psychological and emotional shield"*. These answers show that faculty members actively oppose the fifth-generation war's psychological and emotional strategies. They are strengthening both agenda-setting and propaganda resistance strategies.

Moreover, faculty respondents saw noticeable shifts in students' perspectives. "After constant discussion, students start questioning even their favourite online influencers," said respondent 21. "*Students become more cautious before sharing content,*" according to respondent 22. "*They start asking about sources instead of accepting claims,*" respondent 23 clarified. "*Critical questioning increases significantly after classroom interventions,*" said respondent 24. "*Students gradually disengage from conspiracy narratives,*" said Respondent 25. These answers imply that by interfering with narrative dominance and consent formation, faculty interventions reduce the impact of propaganda. Faculty narratives showed a high emphasis on institutional and ethical responsibilities. "*Countering fifth-generation war is part of our national responsibility as educators,*" said respondent 25. "*Faculty silence allows propaganda to thrive,*" stated respondent 27.

"*Universities must act as counter-narrative spaces,*" respondent 28 clarified. "*Education is the strongest defence against information war,*" said respondent 29. "*Faculty must guide students intellectually, not politically,*" respondent 30 continued. These answers present teacher participation as a social and scholarly duty. Lastly, respondents emphasised how faculty-led counter-narratives have long-term effects.

"*We are not just correcting misinformation; we are shaping critical citizens,*" said Respondent 31. "*Students trained to analyse narratives remain resistant beyond university,*" said Respondent 32. "*The classroom becomes a site of resistance against digital propaganda,*" stated Respondent 33. "*Faculty engagement is essential to neutralise fifth-generation war at the cognitive level,*" concluded Respondent 34. Overall, the respondent-based findings show that faculty members purposefully employ agenda-setting processes to reframe the importance of problems and embrace propaganda model-consistent concepts to expose manipulation strategies. Students' opposition to Fifth-Generation Faculty reactions that function as a coordinated counter-narrative force through ongoing academic engagement, narrative deconstruction, and critical framing significantly reinforces war narratives in academic settings. In conclusion, the thematic analysis shows that fifth-generation conflict is a ubiquitous reality that is actively influencing Pakistani university students' cognitive and behavioural environment rather than just a remote national security issue. Continuous exposure to social media-driven fifth-generation war narratives has been shown by faculty members to cause cognitive disturbance, selective information processing, behavioural polarisation, and increased psychological insecurity in students.

With pupils displaying ideological grouping and a decreased tolerance for opposing views, classroom conversations have grown more divisive. At the same time, the results emphasise how important and proactive university teachers are in combating these deceptive myths. By integrating fifth-generation war awareness into the curriculum, encouraging media literacy and critical thinking, modelling intellectual integrity, and promoting open but disciplined classroom discourse, faculty members see themselves as important agents of resistance. They see universities as essential venues for developing cognitive resilience and dispelling conspiracy theories, propaganda, and misinformation. Overall, this chapter shows that Pakistani universities are fighting a fifth-generation conflict. Although students' thinking and conduct are severely challenged by fifth-generation conflict, faculty-led educational interventions present a viable option to produce future citizens who are knowledgeable, critical, and resilient. These observations offer a solid empirical basis for the discussion chapter, where the results will be further analysed in light of theoretical frameworks and wider implications for higher education policy and national security.

CONCLUSION

In line with the Propaganda Model's applicability in digital and educational contexts, faculty intervention functions as a type of "cognitive resistance," revealing systemic biases in information flows. The local significance of these dangers is shown by research on fifth-generation war perception among students (e.g., at Punjab University) and the media's involvement in the India-Pakistan hybrid conflict. As respondents pointed out, appeals for education as a national security instrument are echoed by faculty silence or inactivity, which permits propaganda to normalise (Aziz et al., 2023). By concentrating on faculty perspectives and self-perceived roles in a fifth-generation war-framed setting inside a concentrated higher education hub (Islamabad), this study builds on earlier research. This study emphasises faculty as frontline implementers and the need for policy-level assistance, even though many initiatives directly target students (Sub-Theme 5). It reaffirms the concerns made in more comprehensive counter-disinformation policy guides that individual initiatives are ineffective without institutional support, training, and academic freedom. Here, qualitative detail on long-term cognitive resilience and persistent academic socialisation addresses limitations in previous research (Basit et al., 2024).

According to the research, universities serve as "sites of resistance" in fifth-generation war, fostering national resilience through the development of cognitive defences. This has obvious policy ramifications: incorporating fifth-generation war awareness into general education, media studies, and social science curricula in addition to faculty development initiatives. Education creates critical citizens who are resilient beyond graduation, as one responder pointed out. According to this qualitative study, fifth-generation war narratives are perceived by Islamabad University professors as having a widespread impact on students' thoughts and actions through digital propaganda, false information, and perception manipulation. Thematic analysis (using NVivo) reveals faculty

members as proactive actors using media literacy, ethical modelling, curricular integration, and agenda-setting and propaganda deconstruction strategies.

Herman & Chomsky's Propaganda Model and McCombs & Shaw's Agenda-Setting Theory are experimentally supported by these practices, which also corroborate global data on the effectiveness of long-term educational efforts in combating misinformation. The study emphasises the strategic significance of higher education at the nexus of national security, student socialisation, and knowledge generation. A potential, human-centred approach to developing resilient, analytically capable citizens is provided by faculty-led responses. Future studies could examine certain curricular sections or extend quantitatively throughout Pakistan. In the end, preventing fifth-generation conflict is presented as a cultural and educational necessity that calls for institutional commitment. The results of this qualitative study, which was based on semi-structured interviews with thirty-four faculty members from ten prestigious institutions in Islamabad, provide light on the crucial role those faculty members in higher education play as frontline players in refuting myths about the Fifth Generation War.

Respondents frequently presented themselves as alternative agenda-setters and propaganda filter disruptors, promoting media literacy, curricular integration, critical thinking, ethical role modelling, and open communication in the classroom. While expanding on earlier empirical studies on educational interventions against deception, these views clearly correspond with Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972 and Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model (1988). Second-level agenda-setting (framing) is reflected in faculty comments of shifting students' focus from emotionally charged, algorithm-driven social media material to evidence-based analysis. Their focus on dissecting emotional appeals, power interests, selective sources, and repetition is similar to the filters of the Propaganda Model. These actions provide global data on the propaganda model as a successful defence against hybrid threats. For example, research conducted in Pakistan and India shows that long-term curriculum-based interventions enhance students' capacity to recognise false information and lessen their dependence on dubious sources. By focusing on faculty attitudes and self-perceived duties in a concentrated fifth-generation conflict setting inside Pakistan's capital-region higher education system, this study expands on earlier research. It highlights the fact that, despite their value, individual faculty efforts are still limited in the absence of systemic support, filling a need identified in several short-term intervention studies.

Policy Implications

- The study's conclusions have important ramifications for Pakistan's national security strategy and higher education. Faculty frequently emphasised that institutional and policy-level support is necessary to combat fifth-generation conflict; it cannot continue as an individual or ad hoc academic endeavour. This highlights important inadequacies in existing frameworks and is in line with ongoing national and international activities.
- Fifth-generation war awareness while information literacy is acknowledged to varying degrees in national education policies, propaganda modelling and fifth-generation war awareness are not explicitly and mandatorily integrated across disciplines. According to this study, courses in the social sciences, media studies, and general education should have specific modules on perception management, propaganda detection, source verification, and narrative deconstruction.
- Respondents emphasised the importance of funding, faculty training, and academic freedom. Faculty should be required by policy to participate in professional development courses on fifth-generation war dynamics and counter-narrative pedagogy.
- Universities need explicit policies on how to manage polarisation in the classroom while preserving free speech. This might be encouraged by HEC through financing for resources, curriculum approval requirements, and institutional performance indicators.
- A more comprehensive national policy encompassing HEC, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, and security organisations should include the use of education to combat fifth-generation conflict. Reports on disinformation in Pakistan reflect suggestions for education-based remedies, public awareness initiatives, and partnerships between academia, civil society, the media, and the government.
- Longitudinal assessment should be used to track how curriculum changes affect students' critical thinking, polarisation reduction, and resistance to false information. Important ethical measures include safeguarding academic independence and preventing misuse for ideological control. These policy measures would develop critical, informed citizens who can promote social cohesion and national security by turning universities from passive information producers into active "sites of resistance" against perception manipulation.
- This thematic analysis of faculty interviews reveals that fifth-generation war narratives, which are mostly spread through misleading information and digital propaganda, penetrate the cognitive landscape of Pakistani university students, influencing their attitudes, behaviours, and classroom dynamics. Teachers see themselves as proactive counter-narrative agents who utilise disciplined speech, curriculum

integration, media literacy promotion, and intellectual modelling to set agendas and debunk false information.

- The study emphasises the strategic role that higher education plays at the nexus of national security, student socialisation, and knowledge generation. It is supported by empirical research and is founded on well-known communication theories.
- The most important conclusion is the urgent need for policy intervention: individual efforts against emerging hybrid threats will be insufficient without comprehensive curriculum change, faculty development, institutional support, and multi-stakeholder collaboration.
- Pakistan may develop long-term cognitive resilience by institutionalising fifth-generation war awareness. Future studies should expand regionally and assess deployed modules quantitatively. In the end, supporting academics and universities is a human-centred, long-term investment in Pakistan's ability to withstand the information era.
- The psychological and media components of fifth-generation war necessitate a concerted academic response in Pakistan. Inter-Services Public Relations should initiate coordinated faculty development programs and specialised workshops for university faculty and researchers in disciplines such as international relations, mass communication, psychology, defence and strategic studies, and digital defence studies.
- These courses can help instructors understand modern propaganda techniques, hybrid war strategies, information manipulation, and the impact of digital platforms on public opinion and national narratives. By incorporating academia, Inter-Services Public Relations can develop a research-focused strategy to counter hostile narratives that target Pakistan's national security, ideology, and social cohesion in the era of fifth-generation war, as well as increase critical media literacy and intellectual resilience among students and faculty.

Ethical Considerations of This Research Work

- The accepted ethical guidelines for social science research involving human subjects were followed critically in this study. All participants were fully informed about the aim, goals, and methods of the research and the interviews, and participation in the study was voluntary. Faculty members received an informed consent form outlining their rights, including the freedom to refuse participation or leave the study at any time without facing any repercussions. No personally identifiable information was included in the research records to maintain confidentiality and anonymity.
- Pseudonyms and coded identities were given to participants for data analysis and reporting. In order to preserve their professional identities and promote candid dialogue about delicate topics pertaining to fifth-generation war, propaganda, and higher education policy, the names of specific faculty members were kept anonymous. Particular emphasis was given to minimising any psychological, professional, and reputational risks to participants due to the potentially delicate nature of debates about national security, political narratives, media influence, and ideological manipulation. Instead of focusing on individual ideological stances, interview questions were created to highlight professional experiences, pedagogical viewpoints, and educational methods. Participants were advised that they might decline to respond to any question they felt was sensitive or uncomfortable.
- Every interview was done in a courteous and non-coercive way. Interviews were audio recorded with participants' consent only for transcription and analysis. Only the researcher had access to password-protected devices. All information gathered was utilised solely for academic reasons, and data security measures were put in place in compliance with recognised research ethical guidelines. To reduce personal bias and guarantee the validity and reliability of the results, the researcher remained impartial throughout the data gathering and analysis procedures.
- The actual interview data served as the basis for the interpretation of the participants' opinions, and member-checking techniques were used as necessary to improve authenticity and accuracy. The study ensured that participants' dignity, privacy, and academic freedom were adequately respected throughout the research process by adhering to the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. This version complies with worldwide research ethics requirements frequently mandated by Scopus-indexed journals and is suitable for a qualitative study comprising 34 faculty members from Islamabad universities.

STATEMENTS

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

- **Muhammad Kaqbad Alam:** Study Concept and Design, Acquisition of data, Analysis and interpretation of data, Drafting of the manuscript
- **Syed Irfan Ashraf:** Study supervision, Critical revision of the manuscript for important information

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- The article and supplementary material contain the original contributions given in the study; additional questions can be addressed to the corresponding author or authors.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

- The author or authors stated that they had no financial or commercial ties that might be interpreted as creating a conflict of interest when conducting this work.

GENERATIVE AI STATEMENT

- According to the author or authors, this manuscript was not created via generative AI. The authors have used artificial intelligence to construct any alternate text (alt text) that is included with the figures in this article. Reasonable steps have been made to assure correctness, including author review whenever feasible.

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