

# Role of Strategic Communication in the National Security Strategy

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## Abstract

*Over the past two decades, strategic communication has evolved from a corporate public relations tool to a crucial element in national and foreign policy. Its significance is particularly crucial within governmental organizations as they seek to engage citizens on diverse issues, transcending its traditional role. This research investigates the pivotal role of strategic communication within national security strategy. It aims to explore how strategic communication serves as both a preemptive tool for anticipating threats and engaging with disenfranchised social segments, and as a resource for promoting social cohesion and stabilization. The study addresses the challenge of incorporating strategic communication effectively into national security strategies. It contends that traditional security responses must be expanded to include communication as a comprehensive and inclusive pillar, on par with military, political, legal, economic, societal, and diplomatic resources. This study highlights the importance of purposeful communication in aligning with national security strategies to foster social cohesion. The study employs a comprehensive approach to analyze the multifaceted dimensions of strategic communication within the context of national security with special reference to Pakistan. It takes qualitative method to explore diverse functions, effectiveness, and impact on societal perceptions and resilience against evolving threats.*

## Key Words

Strategic Communication, National Security, Digital Media, Strategic Narratives, Social Cohesion

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## Introduction

Strategic communication is a sophisticated way for crafting and disseminating narratives with the intention to shape the behaviour and perspectives of the targeted audience. The nature and scope of strategic communication underlines a systematic and targeted communication effort toward the stakeholders and audience. Originally the term was used in reference to the organizations communicating with their employees to outline the organization's objectives. The term was first coined by Roger D'Aprix in 1982 in the management domain, and since the concept has been widely applied in public relations, marketing, and advertising domains.<sup>1</sup> In recent times, applicability of strategic communication has gained relevance and has evolved from being an instrument just for public relations, marketing and management sciences.

In 2007, the article '*Defining Strategic Communication*', Kirk Hallahan, argued that strategic communication is a process in which 'organizations communicate strategically as a social actor to advance their mission'. This definition implies that strategic communication is purposive communication aimed at achieving desired goals by the organizations through its leaders and communication practitioners.<sup>2</sup> Definitions coming out of other disciplines and fields of communication research, conceptualize strategic communication having no boundaries, giving a multidisciplinary perspective about it.

Predominantly, public relations, interpersonal communication, media, organizational communication, political science, socio—cultural theory, and narrative theory are many among the disciplines contributed to theoretical and conceptual understanding of strategic communication.<sup>3</sup> In the recent years however, strategic communication is being used in various capacities such as crisis communication, health communication, risk communication, and to even counter hybrid threats and war of narratives in order to counter propaganda to promote social cohesion. For example, during the course of any crisis, a general perception about the crisis and

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<sup>1</sup> Roger D'Aprix, "Communication of Management: Connecting the Workplace with the Marketplace," *New York: HarperCollins*, (1982), 4.

<sup>2</sup> Kirk Hallahan, Derina Holtzhausen, Betteke Van Ruler, Dejan Verčič, and Krishnamurthy Sriramesh, "Defining Strategic Communication," *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 1, no. 1 (2007), 35.

<sup>3</sup> Kelly Page Werder, Howard Nothhaft, Dean Verčič, and Ansgar Zerfass, "Strategic Communication as an Emerging Interdisciplinary Paradigm," *International Journal of Strategic Communication* 12, no. 4 (2018), 335.

the reputation of the organization communicating about the risk are at stake.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the most important function of any organization is to manage the information to the audience. This includes the media management, reaching out to the stakeholders and motivation of the employees.<sup>5</sup> Whereas, during a health emergency the communication is focused on dissemination of prevention and cure message through interpersonal, intrapersonal, organizational and mass media communication means.<sup>6</sup> As an interdisciplinary concept, strategic communication has been defined in the scholarship of media studies, public relations, and organization management to name a few.

Derina Holtzhausen, point out that the communicating entities include wide array of institutions and agencies including economics, politics, sports and social activism.<sup>7</sup> For all of these institutions and agencies, their reputation is imperative among the stakeholders. Strategic communication thus serves the primary objective of reputational management of the communicative entity in the public sphere.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, communicative entities need to engage with their stakeholders to communicate core objectives and address the concerns.

Mauri Huhtinen et al, argue that in the age of digital neoliberalism, where societies are connected through various forms of media, especially social media, strategic communication needs to be adopted as an analytical tool to counter warfare in public information spaces like social media.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> T. W. Coombs, "Crisis Communication: A Developing Field," in *Handbook of Public Relations*, ed. R.L. Heath (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2010), 478.

<sup>5</sup> R. Drezen, "The 18 immutable laws of corporate reputation: Creating, protecting, and repairing your most valuable asset," (2004), 86.

<sup>6</sup> B. Signitzer, "Approaches and Research Field in Health Communication," in *Moderne Gesundheits Kommunikation*, ed. A. Hurrelmann and A. Leppin (Bern: Huber, 2001), 25.

<sup>7</sup> Derina Holtzhausen, "Strategic Communication," in *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*, ed. Wolfgang Donsbach (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Derina Holtzhausen, Ansgar Zerfass, "Strategic Communication, Opportunities and Challenges of the Research Area," in *Routledge Handbook of Strategic Communication*, ed. Derina Holtzhausen, Ansgar Zerfass (Routledge: New York, 2015),

<sup>9</sup> Aki-Mauri Huhtinen et al., "Information Influence in Hybrid Environment: Reflexive Control as an Analytical Tool for Understanding Warfare in Social Media," *International Journal of Cyber Warfare and Terrorism (IJCWT)* 9, no. 3 (2019), 20.

Similarly, Rupinder Mangat in his work claimed that warfare in social media needs to be securitized and comprehensive strategies need to be employed in order for state to win hearts and minds of the public, and to avoid any uprising against national and foreign policy matters.<sup>10</sup>

Singer and Brooking argued that, ‘as the [social media] feed became more personal, it became more political’.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, there is a growing need for states to employ strategic communication as a national security strategy in countering hybrid threats and promoting social cohesion.

Peru-Bălan and Calugaru have emphasized the role of strategic communication in public diplomacy, by providing a detailed correlation between the two concepts, and claim that strategic communication is a modern foreign policy tool.<sup>12</sup> Building on the literature, this study employs a comprehensive approach to analyze the multifaceted dimensions of strategic communication within the context of national security.

This research is qualitative in nature, where secondary data has been analyzed to investigate the role of strategic communication in national security strategy, with particular emphasis on the modern and evolving challenges faced by states in the highly globalized era. The secondary data reviewed encompass academic literature and relevant scholarly work that allows an in-depth exploration of the multifaceted dimensions of strategic communication. Furthermore, the study employs an explanatory approach to provide insights about the role of strategic communication in the evolving landscape of national security. The central problem statement underscores the importance of incorporating strategic communication as an important security apparatus alongside other political, economic, societal, diplomatic and military instruments of security, in order to resourcefully address the evolving challenges faced by states.

To effectively define strategic communication and to explain its application and scope, the study draws on a multidisciplinary perspective, as it incorporates insights from political science, organizational communication, marketing, public relations and socio-culture theory. This has enriched the understanding of the evolution of strategic communication, from its origins in

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<sup>10</sup> Rupinder Mangat, "Tweeting Generals: Making the Case for Increased Public-Military Engagement through Social Media," in *Communication and Conflict in Multiple Settings*, ed. Rupinder Mangat (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 231.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Warren Singer and Emerson T. Brooking, *Likewar: The Weaponization of Social Media* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> Aurelia Peru-Bălan and Corina Calugaru, "Strategic Communication and The New Public Diplomacy: Consubstantiality and Perception in the National Public Space," *Administrarea Publica* (2021), 113.

organizational communication to its vast application in crisis communication, health communication and in addressing hybrid security threats to promote social cohesion.

## **Strategic Communication and National Security Strategy**

National Security Strategy can be conceptualized as a key process through which the ends are established, while means and ways are determined by allocating the requisite resources. Traditionally, the concept of any national strategy has been associated with military and security domains. States mainly rely on traditional power resources such as military, economic, diplomatic, and cultural means to achieve strategic objectives. Whereas, communication has traditionally been a subordinate resource to achieve the desired national objectives. There has been a narrow focus on communication, especially through media, and has not been used properly to promote national security agendas.<sup>13</sup> As a result communication was not considered to be at par with the other resources of national power. However, in the recent years' states have recognized the importance of influence through communicating strategically and using it to synchronize and implement national strategies. The notion of influence renders strategic communication as central to 'strategic planning, policy preparation and implementation.'<sup>14</sup>

States are now recognizing that the strategic application of communication is pivotal due to its wider societal application. Appropriate response to the growing segmentation of responsibilities both during the peace and conflict requires state to maintain uninterrupted communication with its citizens. Adhering to the definition which is the purposeful use of communication by an organization to fulfil its objectives, requires states to engage its public at large. Strategic communication helps states to navigate through strategically formed narratives which are befitting to their national interests. These narratives are framed by the governments at the three levels; individual level (concerning society), state level (concerning national security) and systemic level (regional and global issues).<sup>15</sup> At all three levels, the governments are communicating their perspective on the complexities, challenges, and concerns to the citizens and the external audience.

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Cornish, Julian Lindley-French, and Claire Yorke, "Strategic Communication and National Security," *Chatham House Report*, September 2011, 4.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Neil Gerard Verrall, *Strategic Communication and the UK Integrated Approach: Developments, Communications and Conflict* (Ministry of Defence United Kingdom, 2013), 2.

Furthermore, communicating strategically enables the government to set out the agenda and help the audience understand the requisite course of action to achieve the desired outcomes.<sup>16</sup>

## Changing Security Environment

The contemporary security landscape is becoming complex. The definition of security is overlapping with the non-traditional security threats reshaping the understanding of war, conflict, and peace. The information and communication mediums together with the complex social media ecology have amalgamated to form a new security challenge. Geographical boundaries are penetrable in the digital domain with little threat from being detected. The enemies can muster 'cyber warriors' armed with formidable 'clickbait' and 'chatter bait'. Narratives can be strategically navigated through cognitive dissonance to exacerbate existing polarization within societies. In the 2010 Arab Spring also known as the social media revolution, the youth took on to the streets enabled by the digital connectivity across the region. Social media mediated in shaping the political and economic discourse into organized protests across the Arab states.<sup>17</sup> Even though the demands of the protestors were not met, it brought down authoritarian regimes and threatened political stability across the Arab world.

Similar trends were observed during the 2020 Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests which sparked outcry across the United States against the police mishandling of the Black community. As a prominent outlet for the Black Americans, social media hashtags and keywords spiked the black community outreach across the US and beyond.<sup>18</sup> Online political activism within the black community triggered a ripple effect in the transmission of powerful messages, ultimately leading to the emergence of a 'co-opted activism' across the United States. This grassroots movement gained momentum and evolved into what can be described as one of the largest right movement in the United States history.<sup>19</sup> Ensuing discourse unwrapped deep sociopolitical polarization and questioned the American social contract which was termed as a 'Racial Contract'. For a democracy

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<sup>16</sup>*Strategic Communication: MCOM Guide*, Government Communication Services, Strategic Communication (London, 2018), accessed December 12, 2023, <https://gcs.civilservice.gov.uk/publications/strategic-communication-mcom-function-guide/>.

<sup>17</sup> Philip N. Howard et al., "Opening Closed Regimes: What was the Role of Social Media During the Arab Spring?," *Project on Information Technology and Political Islam*, Working Paper, 2011, 2.

<sup>18</sup> Travis Campbell, "Black Lives Matter's Effect on Police Lethal Use of Force," *Journal of Urban Economics*, September 2023, doi:10.1016/j.jue.2023.103587.

<sup>19</sup> Ho-Chun Hurbert Chang et al., "#justiceforGeorgeFloyd: How Instagram facilitated the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests," *PLOS One* 17, no. 12 (2022), 2.

like the United States, such social mobilization may not be trivial as it has shifted the racial question at the heart of public discourse towards structural racism.

An important lesson from these two events is the power of social media platforms in transcending a political grievance into a social movement. While the political elite must address the social, economic and political grievances, societal fissures remain vulnerable to disruption and unrest mediated by the digital technologies. Mediated channels of communication could be used to exploit the social fissures by a third party/parties.<sup>20</sup> Various types of research have shown the growing role of mediated communication in the socio-tropic issues of public importance such as voting behaviors, opinion on climate change, and migration, etc.<sup>21 22 23</sup> The alleged role of the Russian interface in the US presidential election of 2016 through the use of social media in promoting Donald Trump against Hillary Clinton is an important case in point. Through the use of fake accounts and disinformation campaigns, social media was used for fabricating stories and impacting voter choices during the elections.<sup>24</sup> The inward flow of framed information contributes to a communication spiral, shaping societal perceptions on critical issues. Hence, the new information technology and communication mediums have made geographical boundaries permeable in the digital age.

## **Importance of Communicating Strategically for States**

Today the states face plethora of crisis on day-to-day basis. Since its inception, the modern states are undertaking innumerable responsibilities towards its people. Modern states are mandated to provide for its people beyond food and physical security. In addition, the growing numbers in population requires states to be more responsive to the physiological vulnerabilities that influence

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<sup>20</sup> Mediated channels of communication serve as intermediary platforms between the sender and the receiver. They include the digital technologies, mass media and social media platforms.

<sup>21</sup> Adam Shehata and Jesper Strömbäck, "Mediation of Political Realities: Media as Crucial Sources of Information," in *Mediatization of Politics: Understanding the Transformation of Western Societies*, ed. Frank Esser and Jesper Strömbäck (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 103.

<sup>22</sup> Mike Schäfer, Peter Berglez, Hartmut Wessler, Elisabeth Eide, Brigitte Nerlich, and Saffron O'Neill, *Investigating Mediated Climate Change Communication: A Best-Practice Guide* (Jönköping University, School of Education and Communication, 2016).

<sup>23</sup> Kira Kosnick, "Mediating Migration: New Roles for (Mass) Media," *In Media: The French Journal of Media Studies* 5 (2014).

<sup>24</sup> Andrew RN Ross, Cristian Vaccari, and Andrew Chadwick, "Russian Meddling in US Elections: How News of Disinformation's Impact Can Affect Trust in Electoral Outcomes and Satisfaction with Democracy," *Mass Communication and Society* 25, no. 6 (2022), 811.

the wellbeing of its people.<sup>25</sup> These physiological vulnerabilities stem from insecurities that can trigger a collective response to the external stimuli if not addressed. Recent studies have shown a deep linkage between the collective actions driven by systematic communication.<sup>26</sup> Both the bottom up and organizational driven communication have influenced collective actions across societies.<sup>27</sup> The rise of social movements globally can be a reaction of a collective social anxiety that transcend into a movement or identity driven mobilization on ethnic and nationalist basis.

For the past two decades strategic communication has been part of national security vocabulary of great powers. Countries like United States, United Kingdom, and Russia have adopted strategic communication as a key component of information/communication warfare and psychological operation. Whereas, security organization like North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) have Center of strategic communication to enunciate their core message to stakeholders. Similarly, the United States in the wake of the 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, Washington was finding it hard to communicate its foreign policy agenda with the foreign publics in a changing strategic environment.<sup>28</sup> Mainly this task was performed by the military branches to influence foreign publics with someone little success. It was the time when strategic communication became a buzz word to communicate American foreign policy objectives overseas.<sup>29</sup> Since then the strategic communication offices and bureaus have become integral feature of the US civil and military agencies to pronounce government's policies to the stakeholders.

The spectrum of ever-evolving globalized world, strategic communication has gained relevance as an important component of national security apparatus. Strategic communication is a crucial instrument for regulating social control in a society by promoting social cohesion, in order to

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<sup>25</sup> Richard G. Jones, *Communication in the Real World: An Introduction to Communication Studies* (Flat World Knowledge, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> Eric Alden Smith, "Communication and Collective Action: Language and the Evolution of Human Cooperation," *Evolution and Human Behavior* 31, no. 4 (2010): 231-245.

<sup>27</sup> Rafael Obregón and Thomas Tufte, "Communication, Social Movements, and Collective Action: Toward a New Research Agenda in Communication for Development and Social Change," *Journal of Communication* 67, no. 5 (2017): 635-645.

<sup>28</sup> John A. Robinson, "A Brief History of Strategic Communication," in *Strategic Communication and the United States Air Force Since 9/11: Communicating Airpower*, ed. John A. Robinson (Alabama: Air University Press, 2011).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.



overcome political unrest from the hybrid nature of threats.<sup>30</sup> It is a comprehensive strategy through which state bodies design mechanisms and networks to identify propaganda being spread in society to timely intervene and properly communicate with targeted communities and build sustainable narratives to counter propaganda.<sup>31</sup> In modern societies, especially democratic ones, having diverse political landscapes and freedom of expression, 'the combination of propaganda, disinformation, psychological pressure, and attacks on information and communications system pose a danger no less than conventional armament'.<sup>32</sup> This highway of disinformation designed by the propaganda machinery can significantly disturb the social cohesion of any society leading to political unrest and the rise of unstable elements within that society. Therefore, through strategic communication, an audience whose ideas and concepts have directly been influenced by disinformation campaigns can be influenced to diffuse any form of societal unrest.<sup>33</sup>

## **Digital Media Landscape, Hybrid Warfare and Strategic Communication**

With the globalization of digital technologies, societies are exposed to this 'digital neoliberalism', where a variety of state and non-state actors are involved in spread of information, and extremist organizations are using these platforms to spread false narratives to fuel separatism or hostile emotions within particular communities to further their agenda.<sup>34</sup> To contain societal instability and the evolving techniques of warfare, where social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly known as Twitter) and even YouTube are being used to fuel false or hostile narratives, strategic communication can be an 'elite strategy' for counter-insurgency and conflict-resolution.<sup>35</sup> It has been observed that cyber warfare is turning out to be a crucial component of

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<sup>30</sup> Ahmed Raza Khan, Muhammad Manzoor Elahi, and Shehar Bano, "(Re-) building Social Cohesion vis-à-vis Strategic Communication: A Pathway for Pakistan's National Strategy," *Journal of Development and Social Sciences* 3, no. 3 (2022), 784.

<sup>31</sup> B. Heap, P. Hansen, and M. Gill, *Strategic Communications Hybrid Threats Toolkit* (Riga: NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2021), accessed December 25, 2023, <https://stratcomcoe.org/publications/strategic-communications-hybrid-threats-toolkit/213>.

<sup>32</sup> Olha Salnikova, Igor Sivokha, and Andrii Ivashchenko, "Strategic Communication in the Modern Hybrid Warfare," *Journal of Scientific Papers "Social Development and Security"* 9, no. 5 (2019), 142.

<sup>33</sup> James G. Stavridis, "Strategic Communication and National Security," *Joint Force Quarterly* 46 (2007): 4, accessed February 22, 2024, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA575204.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup> Khan, Elahi, and Bano, "(Re-) building Social Cohesion," 784.

<sup>35</sup> James P. Farwell, *Persuasion and Power: The Art of Strategic Communication* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2012).

the modern 5<sup>th</sup> Generation Warfare, where ‘the great game of narratives’ has the ability to disturb the equilibrium of any society. Strategic Communication is imperative to disrupt such tendencies.<sup>36</sup>

Strategic communication can be considered as a new public diplomacy tool, where a nation can employ this strategy to protect its values and ensure the protection of public information spaces that can negatively impact public opinion.<sup>37</sup> Modern terrorist organizations, like the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Islamic State Khorasan (ISK), Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA), Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), are using hybrid tactics to manipulate the social cohesion of a society leading to fear, distrust and violence. Therefore, state bodies need to work on developing effective communication strategies in order to raise awareness and to promote cooperation in the fight against terrorism and propaganda, in order to safeguard national interests.<sup>38</sup> By protecting public information spaces, promoting cooperation within a society, empowering neglected and vulnerable segments of society, states can promote social cohesion.

One such example of effective strategic communication strategy was adopted in Spain's municipality of Santa Coloma de Gramenet. A network of four city libraries was designed, through provincial technical assistance, strategic orientation, and financial support, that worked towards guaranteeing social cohesion and equal opportunities in societies with unequal social backgrounds, by employing coordinated messaging. Through Strategic Communication strategies, like knowledge management and networking, transversal workshops and shared communication circuits, Spanish authorities aimed ‘to empower vulnerable sectors in accordance with the United Nations 2030 Agenda’.<sup>39</sup>

In order to make Strategic Communication effective, the strategies applied should be people-friendly. It would promote strategic orientation and national cohesion; as a result, the territorial integrity of any state can be strengthened.

Countries like Pakistan have long been haunted by the menace of terrorism, separatist groups, geo-political rifts and territorial disputes, that have been exploited through hybrid warfare tactics

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<sup>36</sup> Khan, Elahi, and Bano, "(Re-) building Social Cohesion," 784.

<sup>37</sup> Peru-Bălan and Calugaru, "Strategic Communication," 113.

<sup>38</sup> Eugenio Cusumano and Marian Corbe, eds., *A Civil-Military Response to Hybrid Threats* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

<sup>39</sup> Daniel García Giménez and Lluís Soler Alsina, "City Library Network Knowledge Management for Social Cohesion: The Case of Santa Coloma de Gramenet, Barcelona, Spain," *IFLA Journal* 46, no. 1 (2020), 63.

like cyber propaganda.<sup>40</sup> In Pakistan, the emergence of groups such as BLA and TTP is reshaping the ideologies of vulnerable groups through religious and ethnic propaganda. Addressing these societal challenges, rooted in anti-state propaganda, requires advanced patterns of strategic communication.

The transformative power of strategic communication is evident in modern democracies worldwide, where effective methods play a crucial role in bridging the gap between the government and communities influenced by propaganda machinery. To diffuse the existing societal issues exacerbated by these groups, it becomes imperative for Pakistan to adopt and implement sophisticated strategic communication strategies. By leveraging advanced communication approaches, the government can actively engage with and understand the concerns of the affected communities. This involves crafting targeted messages that counteract the negative narratives propagated by anti-state elements. Moreover, fostering open dialogue and emphasizing shared values can contribute to building trust between the government and targeted communities.

## **Strategic Communication for Modern Democracies**

Strategic Communication is a crucial instrument for democracies to communicate effectively with the public in order to build trust, solidarity and a sense of community among the masses to gain their trust regarding certain foreign policy agendas. By adhering to key principles of strategic communication like culturological principles, contextual principles, and communicative-pragmatic principles through a systematic and professional approach, democracies can counter most of hybrid threats that can lead to unrest and uprising in the society.<sup>41</sup> For democracies to function effectively, propaganda identification mechanisms need to be instituted and strategic communication strategies need to be tailored in a way that they provide sustainable solutions rather than simply impose narratives on target communities that might trigger their anti-state sentiments.<sup>42</sup> Government communication plays a vital role in making the citizens feel included in decision-making processes and makes them feel secure that the government is accountable. This

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<sup>40</sup> Sara Ahmad, "Cyber Security Threat and Pakistan's Preparedness: An Analysis of National Cyber Security Policy 2021" (2022), 28.

<sup>41</sup> Peggy Simcic Brønn, "Strategic Communication Requires Strategic Thinking," in *Strategic Communication in Context: Theoretical Debates and Applied Research* (UMinho Editora/Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Sociedade, 2021), 43.

<sup>42</sup> Peter Denyer-Simmons and Felicity Small, "Promotion, Monitoring and Strategic Advice: Professional Communication in Australian Local Government," *PRism* 9, no. 1 (2012), 15.

way social cohesion can be promoted in a society by creating a civic-minded culture and by keeping the public informed, which is cornerstone of any successful democracy. Communication between government and local communities is the best counter propaganda measures that can empower any state to shape public opinion in their favor through strategic orientation and by shaping the pulse of the public.

Social media is a very powerful tool in the modern age, and is a propaganda and counter propaganda playground. As discussed earlier, the wave of Arab Spring, is a pertinent example where social media and strategic communication were key instruments in facilitating protests, shaping general pulse of the public, sharing information and disinformation and empowering the young generation against the state bodies and the system.<sup>43</sup> Social media is the leading tool of influence, if used in a correct manner, with the right intentions can potentially promote a positive social change in a society making it collectively tolerant.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, effective strategic communication on state level through media and all-network messaging, requires a compressive systematic approach, where state actors and leaders have to create an environment of strategic thinking. It would enable the government to draft inclusive policies keeping in account the diverse cultural backgrounds of their society, and make sure that the government communication resonates with the target audience.<sup>45</sup>

The primary purpose of strategic communication is to achieve intended objectives that even include shaping public opinion by the state itself to garner public favour towards a particular policy, in order to counter any socio-political unrest in the society. This involves analyzing the public pulse, gathering data after which the state tends to draft a comprehensive communication approach to build support for the foreign policy and to counter false narratives and misinformation that would undermine the foreign policy.<sup>46</sup>

One of the biggest examples of strategic communication being used to shape public pulse is Brexit. Most significantly, the 2016 'Leave and Remain' campaign, during the Brexit referendum

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<sup>43</sup> Araz Ramazan Ahmad, "The Role of Social Media in the Arab Spring Uprisings," in *Central and Eastern European eDem and eGov Days*, ed. (2019), 387.

<sup>44</sup> W. Timothy Coombs, Jesper Falkheimer, Mats Heide, and Philip Young, eds., *Strategic Communication, Social Media and Democracy: The Challenge of the Digital Naturals* (Routledge, 2015).

<sup>45</sup> Brønn, "Strategic Communication Requires Strategic Thinking," 43.

<sup>46</sup> Francesco Giumelli, Eugenio Cusumano, and Matteo Besana, "From Strategic Communication to Sanctions: The European Union's Approach to Hybrid Threats," in *A Civil-Military Response to Hybrid Threats* (2018), 146.

is a prime example of strategic communication tactics being applied to promote state narratives.<sup>47</sup> Targeted communication was a major tactic, through which narratives were tailored to influence different demographics, regions and interest groups. Additionally, communication across different channels, like social media, television and print media, remained consistent.<sup>48</sup> Issues like the impact of Brexit on the economy, immigration and national identity were dubbed as misinformation by the state.<sup>49</sup>

Modern observers and strategic thinkers have been stressing on the fact that information and misinformation can be instigated into the pulse of the society through cyberspaces.<sup>50</sup> Due to these reasons, the European Union has drafted a comprehensive strategic communication strategy to manage the flow of information and to identify propaganda, evaluate the public pulse and has placed mechanisms to assess the success of their communications with the government and the European society.<sup>51</sup>

## **Strategic Communication Imperative for Pakistan**

For any state, strategic communication should be a cornerstone policy to counter rising elements of extremism, by drafting models of communication that can tackle extremist narratives.<sup>52</sup> It should be taken at par with the other component of state policy in the national security strategy. Strategic communication plays a very important role in branding the nation. For developing countries like Pakistan, strategic communication needs to be an important pillar of the broader national security framework. In order to bridge the gap between state and society with an aim to instill internal cohesion especially towards countering anti-state narratives, strategic communication can amalgamate as a national security imperative. Despite being a leading state in the war against terror, Pakistan has been long associated as a 'safe haven' for terrorists.<sup>53</sup> One reason for such

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<sup>47</sup> Ron Johnston, Charles Pattie, and Todd Hartman, "Who Follows the Leader? Leadership Heuristics and Valence Voting at the UK's 2016 Brexit Referendum," *Innovation: The European Journal of Social Science Research* 34, no. 1 (2021), 43.

<sup>48</sup> J. Haynes, "Brexit, Hong Kong and the Arab Spring: Voices of the People," *E-International Relations* (2020), accessed December 26, 2023, <https://www.e-ir.info/2020/10/31/brexit-hong-kong-and-the-arab-spring-voices-of-the-people/>.

<sup>49</sup> Polina Astashkina and Dmitry Astashkin, "Media Discussions on the Topic of Brexit in Context of National Identity," *European Proceedings of Social and Behavioural Sciences* 108 (2021), 127.

<sup>50</sup> Khan, Elahi, and Bano, "(Re-) building Social Cohesion," 784.

<sup>51</sup> Giumelli, Cusumano, and Besana, "*From Strategic Communication to Sanctions*," 146.

<sup>52</sup> Mimoza Hasani Pllana, "Strategic Communication and Prevention of Violent Extremism through Education: The Case of Kosovo," *Journal of Educational and Social Research* 11, no. 2 (2021), 106.

<sup>53</sup> Khan, Elahi, and Bano, "(Re-) building Social Cohesion," 784.

narratives is Pakistan's inability to establish an effective narrative domestically and an ineffective external communication mechanism. As a result, the insurgent groups with support of foreign propaganda machinery, effectively shape anti-state narratives for both the global and local audience. Therefore, to neutralize the impact of such narratives in the psychological domain, a comprehensive strategic communication framework needs to be drafted in order to abridge growing societal polarization.

Through an all-inclusive strategic communication framework, states can mitigate the negative impact of disinformation, which can empower them to contain incidents that can put a dent in their global reputation.<sup>54</sup> Strategic communication can also help build better diplomatic relations of states by presenting their values, interests and policies in a favorable light, leading to increased cooperation, trade, tourism and can create a more favorable image of a nation abroad.<sup>55</sup> Nation branding is becoming extremely crucial in the modern globalized age, and strategic communication has become an essential component to redefine national identities. Therefore, strategic communication is complemented by public diplomacy in order to influence national and international perceptions and pulse towards a state's interests and policy choices.<sup>56</sup> By influencing public attitudes, promoting cultural exchange and favorable nation branding through strategic communication, a sense of pride and unity in the society can foster social cohesion among the masses vis-à-vis the state.<sup>57</sup> Strategic communication, therefore, can amplify the soft power resource towards cascading cohesion internally and favorable projection externally.

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<sup>54</sup> Natalia Tsvetkova, Dmitrii Rushchin, Boris Shiryaev, Grigory Yarygin, and Ivan Tsvetkov, "Sprawling in Cyberspace: Barack Obama's Legacy in Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communication," *Journal of Political Marketing* (2020), 13.

<sup>55</sup> Natalia Tsvetkova and Dmitrii Rushchin, "Russia's Public Diplomacy: From Soft Power to Strategic Communication," *Journal of Political Marketing* 20, no. 1 (2021), 59.

<sup>56</sup> Eriklenta Ymeri, "Public Diplomacy as Political Communication in Albania," *Polis* 22 (2023), 154.

<sup>57</sup> Javad Nikmoeen, "Social Cohesion: The Prerequisite for Use of Soft Power Resources in International Relations," in *Proceedings of International Academic Conferences*, no. 2603718 (International Institute of Social and Economic Sciences, 2015), accessed September 26, 2023, <http://www.iises.net/proceedings/17th-international-academic-conference-vienna/table-of-content/detail?article=social-cohesion-the-prerequisite-for-use-of-soft-power-resources-in-international-relations-0>.

## **Conclusion**

As Joseph Nye explained that “Soft power is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies. In light of this argument, states can promote social cohesion in their societies, especially in unstable territories and by including vulnerable communities in a mix through strategic communication, instead of using hard tone to diffuse any instability coming out of such segments of the society. By institutionalizing narrative building, information warfare against the state, state bodies and its citizens, can be timely identified and dealt with accordingly.

The multidimensional concept of strategic communication is becoming ever relevant in the modern globalized and technological age, where 5<sup>th</sup> Generation Warfare has expanded beyond the conventional tactics of war, and the propaganda machinery and terrorist have started to operate on more sophisticated lines. The strategic communication framework, is therefore, crucial to national security apparatus on any state. To achieve an all-inclusive effective strategic communication framework requires state institutions coming together to devise a national security strategy that would promote social cohesion and will counter any developing hybrid warfare scenarios.

Strategic communication mechanisms can improve the ability of the state to facilitate open and constructive dialogue, with other states, national interest groups and other stakeholders to reduce the risk of unstable elements that could escalate unrest in the society. In addition to this, a proper strategic communication framework, through accurate timely information will enable the state to address hybrid threats that can exploit gaps within a society and can also help build trust between state and marginalized communities, businesses and the general public. Through the right strategic communication, rights messages, right channels and by engaging the right audience can help governments to maintain a strong hold over the society and promote national cohesion to achieve national objectives and goals.