

PAHALGAM INCIDENT AS A CATALYST IN SHAPING INDO-PAK DYNAMICS: PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to offer an integrated approach to comprehending India-Pakistan dynamics after Pahalgam incident by examining the theoretical and empirical evidence on the causal relationship among Pahalgam incident framing via media, Indian nationalistic mobilization, and Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics. A research model was developed, establishing three hypotheses. The mediation analysis examined the role of Indian nationalistic mobilization as a mediator. Data was collected from N=373 participants, results indicated Indian nationalistic mobilization mediates the relationship between Pahalgam incident framing via media and Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics. This research offers theoretical and practical implications to reduce the misinformation disseminated via media after any incident or terrorist attack in India and solve

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the Kashmir conflict through peaceful and diplomatic ways to ease tensions between the two countries.

Key words: Pahalgam, media narratives, nationalism, Operation sindoor, Operation Bunyan al Marsus.

Introduction

Recurrence of past accusation patterns, India uses false flag acts to indicate Pakistan's involvement in terrorist attacks without providing any concrete evidence. India has been launching false flag operations against Pakistan from Ganga hijacking (January 1971) to Pahalgam incident (April 2025). Any domestic violence and militancy is linked with Pakistan-based groups. A consistent pattern has been adopted by India regarding "swift public attribution of blame to Pakistan" for decades. Recently, Pahalgam was attacked on April 22, 2025, killing 26 tourists in Jammu and Kashmir. Pahalgam Incident (PI) was amplified by the Indian media and the country responded with a series of retaliatory actions against Pakistan. In the absence of any verifiable evidence, India launched a political and media onslaught accusing Pakistan. These ambiguities reflect the former as a player to externalize the blame, internalize Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, and deflect from domestic political pressures (Tanveer, 2025). Public sifted the misinformation and unverified statements disseminated through the Indian media.

The PI resulted in the decline of bilateral trust and surge in geopolitical tensions between India and Pakistan.

In the aftermath of PI, the Indian government announced a Five-point Action Plan. The plan comprised of the suspension of Indus Water Treaty, closure of the Attari-Wagah Border Check Post, cancellation of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Visa Exemption Scheme (SVES), expulsion of Pakistani Military Advisors at the Pakistani High Commission in New Delhi, and reduction of diplomatic missions from 55 to 30 personnel. On 7th May 2025, a swift military campaign was started by launching Operation Sindoor with a series of missile strikes inside Pakistan (Daval, 2025). Indian missile strikes resulted in dozens of civilian deaths in Pakistan. In such scenario, Pakistan's conventional capabilities dissuaded India from instigating a severe conflict. India faced heavy costs as the former initially downed Indian fighter aircraft. In response to OS, Pakistan launched a military operation to counter the Indian attacks, 'Operation Bunyan al Marsus', involving air strikes, missiles, and armed drones against Indian military bases and infrastructure (Lodhi, 2025). Pakistan claimed that air defence downed several Indian aircraft and shot down five Indian jets. Pakistan struck against Indian military bases, hitting multiple sites across the Line of Control and interior regions. In response to Pakistan's counteractions, India admitted some soldier fatalities. Increasing artillery and mortar exchanges were leading

to a full-blown war between the two nuclear-armed neighbors. The escalated situation called for urgent attention from world leaders. Many countries turned towards both countries and offered mediation, including the US, China, Russia, UK, Japan, and Gulf states. Hence, the international response was slow at the time of need when India and Pakistan reached the brink of war. After three days' missile exchanges, a ceasefire was agreed between the two countries with the help of American President Donald Trump. Indian Directors General of Military Operations agreed to stop hostilities in response to a phone conversation with Trump. Pakistan's Foreign Minister confirmed the ceasefire between India and Pakistan, mediated by the US. After the ceasefire announcement, some violations were seen from both sides. Indeed, ceasefire is viewed as a temporary pause until the solution of Kashmir issue.

Pahalgam incident is associated with deep historical and geopolitical dynamics of the region. Media narratives played a critical role in escalating the tensions between the two countries. India's military and political response reflect a constant pattern of handling the crisis by using nationalistic rhetoric and diplomatic agenda (Haroon, Hanif, Butt, & Salman, 2025). In the aftermath of PI, India came forward to an open conflict. Further, military exchanges with missiles and drone attacks amplified the situation between the two countries. Operation Bunyan al Marsoos (OBM) followed by Operation Sindoor, called for urgent need for

revamped counter terrorism strategies. PI marks a turning point in regional peace and strains India-Pakistan relations. In this context, the present study focuses highlighting how India indicates event-based posturing ‘Pahalgam incident’s serious security concerns’ for the country using media to disseminate nationalistic mobilization; India-Pakistan missile exchanges pose a threat to regional peace; ceasefire between the two countries influences geopolitical dynamics; and presents theoretical and practical implications in Indo-Pak relations’ setting. By carrying out a survey, this study also takes the Pakistani public perceptions on ‘Pahalgam incident framing via media (PM), Indian nationalistic mobilization (IM), and Pakistan’s reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics’ (PRD).

The second section focuses on literature review and hypotheses development, the third section deals with research methods, the fourth section presents survey results, the next section offers theoretical and practical implications, and conclusion is given at the end.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Several studies have been conducted to determine Pahalgam Incident’ framing and reverberation via media (Prayogo & Sari, 2025; Vashishtha, Dhankar, & Tripathi, 2025), Indian nationalistic mobilization by launching Operation Sindoor (Ramachandran, 2025), OBM in response to Indian attacks and

the US announcement for ceasefire between India and Pakistan (Ali, Bibi, & Alam, 2025; Jalbani, 2025), but no study examines public perceptions through empirical evidence. Therefore, this study has been conducted to examine ‘Pahalgam incident as a catalyst and its impacts on Indo-Pak dynamics’ through the eyes of Pakistani public. The primary purpose of this study was to test a mediation model, which indicated the elements contributing to Pakistan’s reaction and influence Indo-Pak dynamics: Pahalgam incident framing via media and Indian nationalistic mobilization.

First, a brief overview is given on the interrelationship of the constructs in the model:

Relationship among the Constructs PM, IN, and PRD

After Pahalgam incident, Indian media reported that the PI’s victims (e.g. Hindus and Christians) were targeted after confirming their religious identity. Local accounts do not support such statements that attackers asked anyone about the religious identity of anyone. Indian authorities alleged attackers’ affiliation with The Resistance Front (TRF) was related to Lashkar e Tayyaba (LeT) (Tanveer, 2025). India alleged that Pakistan was involved in the PI. Therefore, Pakistan demanded an independent investigation or provide verifiable evidence but former did not provide any proof to support its claim. Pakistani media regarded that massacre was a false flag operation adapted to shove Modi’s election prospects. Rhetorical crossfires escalated hostilities

between the two states. Indian, Pakistani and international media coverage of the PI highlighted it from different perspectives. Media outlets (e.g. Reuters) framed the victims as “tourists” and attacker a “suspected militant”. Western electronic and printed media has reported the incident a “militant behavior, not terrorism”. *The Washington Post* reported the attackers as “gunmen” while *BBC* referred the incident “geopolitical tensions” between Pakistan and India (Yatish, 2025). Regarding an attack on Pahalgam, Indian media has played a dangerous role in shaping public perceptions. Media narratives distort facts, inflame public sentiment, and expose the fragility of peace in the region.

In the aftermath of PI, a hysterical reaction from India was seen with the suspension of Indus Water Treaty (IWT) (Ahmad, 2025), a key water sharing treaty between India and Pakistan. The later viewed this suspension could be “considered as an act of war” (Cleary, 2025) and also India’s recurring tendency to blame Pakistan for many terrorist events without any concrete evidence. Such strategies serve for India’s political and strategic objectives and reflect “reactive event-based posture” and instrumentalize to Pakistan (Tanveer, 2025). On 7th May, Operation Sindoor was launched by naming it a deterrent strike and alleging militant groups based in Pakistan. OS was started firing a barrage of missiles and launching drone strikes inside Pakistan and Pakistan administered Kashmir. Many sources do

not hold Pakistan responsible for the PI. It is mentioned “as a late April terrorist attack in Jammu and Kashmir.” The US regards “India’s military retaliation responsible for provoking Pakistan” (Dey, 2025). Primarily, Hindutva and its supporters want to rip up a centuries-old social fabric which is an unachievable challenge (Naqvi, 2025). Indian opposition leader urge the government to “move beyond the hollow claims of normalcy in Kashmir since the revocation of Kashmir’s special status in 2019” (Kaur, 2020; Schofield, 2021) India launched air strikes inside Pakistan (Times of India, 2025), leading to clashes and artillery duels.

OS connections are familiar with past Indian military escalations occurred before the general elections to achieve the electoral goals. In response to OS, Pakistan launched OBM. In retaliation, Pakistan suspended the Simla Agreement (1972). The agreement served as a peace treaty between the two countries. In the aftermath, both countries cancelled diplomatic talks, visa access, and expelled officials, and restricted the airspace to flights. Pahalgam incident exemplified into a military confrontation between the two countries. After the OS, the American role “was a continuation of past patterns”. Initially, the USA stayed hands-off and watched the crisis unfold. After the Operation Sindoor, the US regarded the Indo-Pak conflict “none of our business” and it was taken as “non-interventionist policy” (Dey, 2025). When the crisis escalated, the US helped in ease tensions between two

countries (Biswas & Panday, 2025). Before India announced to stop military action, the US president Donald Trump posted on his social media platform Truth Social "After a long night of talks mediated by the United States, I am pleased to announce that India and Pakistan have agreed to a “full and immediate ceasefire”. Congratulations to both countries on using common sense and great intelligence” (Times of India, 2025). The US efforts for ceasefire appeared productive to bring hopes of peace and stability to the region. However, de-escalation indicates a fragile respite and reflects that the truce may be temporary. Based on exiting literature, this study focuses to analyze public perceptions to investigate the mediation effect of ‘Indian nationalistic mobilization’ (IM) between ‘Pahalgam incident framing via media’ (PM) and ‘Pakistan’s reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics’ (PRD) followed by the ceasefire between the two countries.

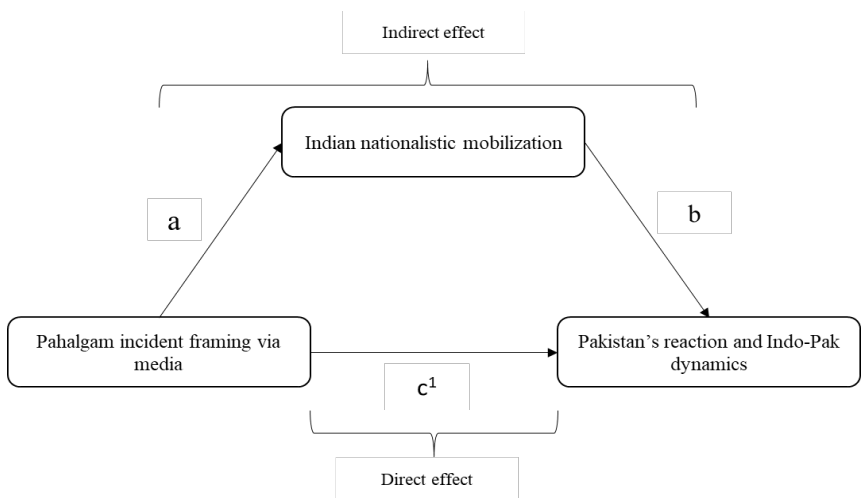


Figure 1: The Hypotesized Model

Taking a brief review of studies that examine Pahalgam incident framing via media, India's political agenda and military response, Indian nationalistic mobilization, OBM, and ceasefire between the India and Pakistan; a review of literature explores the gap on the subject through the lenses of public. Therefore, this study aims to take perceptions by carrying out surveys to test Pahalgam incident, nationalistic rhetoric and nuclear related statements via media, India's political/diplomatic agenda, OS, OBM, ceasefire mediated by the US, and India-Pakistan geopolitical dynamics followed by the PI. This study tests the relationship among Pahalgam incident framing via media, Indian nationalistic mobilization, and Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics; and Indian nationalistic mobilization's role as a mediator between Pahalgam incident framing via media and Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics. Therefore, the researcher established the following hypotheses:

H1. Pahalgam incident framing via media has a positive relationship with Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics.

H2. Indian nationalistic mobilization has a positive relationship with Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics.

H3. Indian nationalistic mobilization mediates the relationship between Pahalgam incident framing via media and Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics.

This researcher also collected data from participants who have visited India and those who have met Indians or know any Indian. The study examines the difference on opinions between visitors to India and non-visitors, and participants who have direct contact and indirect contact with Indians. To test these differences, the researcher developed the following hypotheses:

H4. There are significant differences about PM, IM, and PRD between visitors and non-visitors to India.

H5. There are significant differences about PM, IM, and PRD between participants' direct and indirect contacts with Indians.

Methods

Sampling

For data collection, self-prepared items were included in the questionnaire. The researcher designed the questions from a large number of sources including newspapers, journal articles, and books. Self-prepared items aimed to the specific research objectives. The questions were designed to address the 'Pahalgam incident framing via media' that contained 16 items, 'Indian nationalistic mobilization' comprised 14 items, and 'Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics' contained 14 items.

All the items were rated a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree=1 to strongly agree=5). All three variables had acceptable level of internal consistency (PM: Cronbach’s α =.845; IM, α =.903, and PRD, α =.851).

An online survey was conducted by using the Google Forms. The survey was conducted to take perceptions of the Pakistani public. For data collection, force option was selected to avoid the incomplete responses. A participant cannot submit the response until all the questions were answered in all sections. The aim of the survey and ethical considerations were shared before getting the demographic information and participants’ perceptions on ‘Pahalgam Incident as a Catalyst in Shaping Indo-Pak Dynamics’.

Table 1: Demographic Information of the sample (N=373)

Variables	Category	Frequency	
Gender	Male	292	
	Female	81	
Age (in years)	Less than 20	13	
	21-30	118	
	31-40	148	
	41-50	84	
	More than 50	10	
Highest Level of Education	Higher School	35	
	Undergraduate	144	
	Master	140	
	Graduate	40	

	Postgraduate	14	
Other information			
I have studied politics/political Science/International Relations/Area Studies or Asian Studies as a subject during the academic career	Yes No	373 -	
I am interested in politics	Yes No	342 31	
I have visited India	Yes No	32 341	
I have met/know Indian	Yes No	105 268	

Table 1 shows the demographic information of the sample and other information. The survey participants consisted of Pakistanis. In total, 373 participants responded to the survey including male ($n=292$; 78.3%) and female ($n=81$; 21.7%). They reported their age, less than 20 ($n=13$; 3.5%), 21-30 ($n=118$; 31.8%), 31-40 ($n=148$; 38.7%), 41-50 ($n=84$; 22.5%), and more than 50 ($n=10$; 2.7%). Their education level ranged higher school ($n=35$; 9.4%), undergraduate ($n=144$; 38.6%), master ($n=140$; 37.5%), graduate ($n=40$; 10.7%), and postgraduate ($n=14$; 3.8%). All the participants ($N=373$; 100%) have studied politics/political science, international relations, area studies or Asian studies as a subject during the academic career. A vast majority of the participants (interested, $n=342$; 91.7%, and non-interested, $n=31$; 8.3%) had an interest in politics. A few participants have visited India (visitors, $n=32$; 8.8%, and non-visitors, $n=341$; 91.4%). Almost two-third majority of participants ($n=268$; 71.8%) have

never met/know any Indian compare to those participants ($n=105$; 28.2%) who have met/know any Indian.

The collected data from the questionnaires was examined using the Statistical Package for the Social Science version 23.

Table 2: Latent Variables, Observed Variables, and Questions Items

Latent Variable	Observed Variable	Question Items
Pahalgam incident framing via media		
	PM1	On April 22, a deadly militant attack in Pahalgam which killed 26 civilians. Do you think that Pakistan was involved in Pahalgam Incident (PI)?
	PM2	Regarding PI allegations, Pakistan seems to assert its legitimacy by demanding a “transparent, credible, and independent investigation” from India

		to support its claim.
	PM3	After the PI, India promptly blamed Pakistan-based groups without any thorough investigation
	PM4	The sensationalism and politicised narratives distorted the facts and inflamed public sentiment
	PM5	India was unable to provide evidence to link Pakistan involvement in the PI, but the former launched air strikes inside Pakistan
	PM6	National biases lead to escalating tensions rather than encouraging talks between Pakistan and India.
	PM7	After the PI, Indian media has used different ways to support the national interests.
	PM8	Indian media uses national security stories for political goals more than reporting facts.
	PM9	It is unfair that Indian media broadcast PI's linkages to Pakistani-based

		organizations without neutral investigation.
	PM10	Media narratives about PI fueled hostility among Hindus and Muslims.
	PM11	Indian news media present most incidents as terrorism initiated by Pakistan.
	PM12	PI coverage by the Pakistani media led to public rage.
	PM13	The escalating military tensions expose the fragility of peace in South Asia.
	PM14	Following India-Pak missile strikes on each other's airbases, many countries' diplomatic response was slow to prevent further escalation.
	PM15	Following the cross-border strikes, US mediation helped in reducing Indo-Pak crisis.
	PM16	Kashmir conflict is root cause of strained relations between the two countries and substantial peace is not possible in the region until the solution

		of this conflict.
Indian nationalistic mobilization		
	IM1	PI unveils the false flag legacy of India.
	IM2	India uses several strategies to manage local leadership in occupied Kashmir.
	IM3	PI reflects the failure of the state mechanism in managing the violence and develop nationalistic mobilization.
	IM4	PI coverage by Indian media is affected by its national biases.
	IM5	Indian and Pakistani media highlight national security stories more than other topics.
	IM6	India uses nationalistic strategies (e.g. ahead of elections) to divert people's attention from domestic challenges.
	IM7	Indian political actors view Kashmir's security challenges as an extension of India's foreign policy tensions with

		Pakistan.
	IM8	In Hindu-Muslims relations' setting, political rhetoric and community dynamics influenced communal behavior.
	IM9	Islamabad's call for a joint investigation into PI was immediately denied by India, due to India's political agenda.
	IM10	The launch of Operation Sindoor (OS) cannot be legitimized by the Indian claim that OS is a deterrent strike on alleged militant camps in Pakistan.
	IM11	OS is associated with a familiar pattern of military escalations happening before general elections in India.
	IM12	In April 2025, the suspension of Indus Water Treaty was an extraordinary and extreme step by the Indian government.
	IM13	The Indian political leadership often uses water as geopolitical tool.

	IM14	Pakistan supports Kashmiri Muslim community due to victimization of Indian dominance
Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics		
	PRD1	Pakistan was right in launching the Operation Bunyan al Marsoos (OBM), by asserting its right to self-defense in response to Indian aggression.
	PRD2	The launch of OBM was a defensive measure aimed at protecting the civilians and territory.
	PRD3	OBM sent a message that any act of Indian aggression will be responded with a firm response.
	PRD4	OBM forecasts Pakistan's capabilities and electronic warfare by sending a strong warning to other technologically advanced enemy.
	PRD5	PI and media coverage elucidate the

		relationship between crisis communication and the conflict between India and Pakistan.
	PRD6	After the PI and launch of OS, nationalistic rhetoric disrupted peace in the region.
	PRD7	OBM called for urgent global attention and immediate de-escalation to prevent destabilization in the region.
	PRD8	Before the global actors' involvement, the conflict raised fears that India and Pakistan could spiral into a full-blown war.
	PRD9	US mediator, diplomatic backchannels, and regional actors played a significant role in pulling the nuclear-armed rivals back from the brink.
	PRD10	Trump's effort at mediation could be an indication of improving trilateral relationship (USA, India, and Pakistan).
	PRD11	Trump's mediation offer on Kashmir puts India in a tight spot and garners

		Pakistan's support in the region.
	PRD12	Experts view OS as a failure and OBM as Pakistan's edge in training, strategic thinking, and execution.
	PRD13	PI traces a sharp decline in bilateral trade and regional diplomacy.
	PRD14	A Pakistani delegation's visit to the US and OIC states, can play important role for the resumption of a comprehensive dialogue between India and Pakistan to resolve the Kashmir dispute and restoration of IWT.

Results

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of the Items

Latent variable	Observed variable	Median	(M ± SD)	Min.	Max.	Cronbach's alpha
PM						.845
	PM1	4	3.86	1	5	

			± .766			
	PM2	4	4.11 ± .582	2	5	
	PM3	4	4.09 ± .674	1	5	
	PM4	4	4.12 ± .631	1	5	
	PM5	4	4.21 ± .608	2	5	
	PM6	4	4.10 ± .656	1	5	
	PM7	4	4.17 ± .583	2	5	
	PM8	4	4.12 ± .625	1	5	
	PM9	4	4.14 ±	1	5	

			.629			
	PM10	4	4.09 ± .612	3	5	
	PM11	4	4.13 ± .614	2	5	
	PM12	4	4.16 ± .639	2	5	
	PM13	4	4.14 ± .621	2	5	
	PM14	4	4.11 ± .622	1	5	
	PM15	4	4.18 ± .609	1	5	
	PM16	4	4.08 ± .688	2	5	
IM						.903
	IM1	4	4.11 ±	1	5	

			.538			
	IM2	4	4.05 ± .661	2	5	
	IM3	4	4.08 ± .596	3	5	
	IM4	4	4.16 ± .612	2	5	
	IM5	4	4.07 ± .622	1	5	
	IM6	4	4.15 ± .616	1	5	
	IM7	4	4.08 ± .667	2	5	
	IM8	4	4.14 ± .589	2	5	
	IM9	4	4.12 ± .626	2	5	

	IM10	4	4.17 ± .617	1	5	
	IM11	4	4.11 ± .664	1	5	
	IM12	4	4.14 ± .626	1	5	
	IM13	4	4.09 ± .591	2	5	
	IM14	4	4.03 ± .712	1	5	
PRD						.851
	PRD1	4	4.09 ± .599	1	5	
	PRD2	4	4.03 ± .712	3	5	
	PRD3	4	4.05 ± .623	2	5	

	PRD4	4	4.07 ± .618	3	5	
	PRD5	4	4.04 ± .641	2	5	
	PRD6	4	4.01 ± .654	2	5	
	PRD7	4	4.03 ± .648	1	5	
	PRD8	4	4.06 ± .661	1	5	
	PRD9	4	3.91 ± .705	2	5	
	PRD10	4	3.88 ± .751	2	5	
	PRD11	4	3.83 ± .736	1	5	
	PRD12	4	3.95	2	5	

			± .723			
	PRD13	4	3.84 ± .706	2	5	
	PRD14	3	3.36 ± .907	1	5	

Table 4: Estimated path coefficients and t-results (N=373)

Paths	Estimate std.	t-value	P	Results
H1. PM- PRD	.367	6.89	.0001	Supported
H2. IM- PRD	.446	8.38	.0001	Supported

Mediation analysis

Mediation analysis was employed to examine the indirect effects of Indian nationalistic mobilization on the relationship between Pahalgam incident framing via media and Pakistan’s reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics. Three conditions were examined to assess mediation: i) the effect of the independent variable (PM) on the dependent variable (PRD); ii) the effect of the independent

variable on the mediated variable (IM) and; iii) independent and mediated variables' effect on dependent variable (Shigetoh, Tanaka, Koga, Osumi, & Morioka, 2019, p.3). Following these conditions, the researcher tested the mediation model to examine the indirect effect through the rule, if the bootstrapped values of 95% Confidence Interval do not contain 0 between their lower and upper limits; it supports significant mediation.

Table 5: Mediation analysis: The Role of Indian nationalistic mobilization as a mediator

Effect	β	SE	95%BCCI
<i>a</i> PM→IM	.671	.028	.616, .726
<i>b</i> IM → PRD	.371	.053	.265, .477
<i>C</i> (direct effect) PM→PRD	.525	.063	.402, .648
<i>C</i> ¹ (total effect) PM → PRD	.725	.037	.653, .797
<i>a x b</i> (indirect effect) PM → PRD	.353		.248, .457

Pahalgam incident framing via media significantly predicts relationship of Indian nationalistic mobilization, $b=.672$, 95% CI [.617, .727], $t=24.14$, $p=.0001$. The R^2 value indicated that Pahalgam incident framing via media explains 61.1% of the variance in relationship Indian nationalistic mobilization. For direct effect, results of regression of Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics from both Pahalgam incident framing via media and Indian nationalistic mobilization indicated that PM significantly predicts PRD even with relationship IM in the model, $b=.372$, 95CI [.266, .478], $t=6.89$, $p=.0001$; relationship

IM also significantly predicts PRD, $b=.526$, 95CI [.403, .649], $t=8.39$, $p=.0001$. The R^2 value explained 59.2% of the variance in PRD. Positive b for PM shows that as it increases, PRD also increases. For total effect of PM on PRD when the IM is not present in the model; PM significantly predicts PRD, $b=.725$, 95CI [.653, .797], $t=19.7$, $p=.0001$. The R^2 indicated 51.1% of the variance in PRD. The inclusion of IM in the model showed PM has a positive relationship with PRD.

The indirect effect of Pahalgam incident framing via media on Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics via relationship Indian nationalistic mobilization indicated, $b=.354$, 95% BCa CI [.249, .458]. The confidence interval does not contain zero corroborated Indian nationalistic mobilization really does mediate the relationship between Pahalgam incident framing via media and Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics (Field, 2018). Thus, results supported H3.

The diagram of the mediation model indicates regression coefficients, the indirect effect, and confidence intervals. Model of Pahalgam incident framing via media as a predictor of Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics, mediated by relationship Indian nationalistic mobilization.

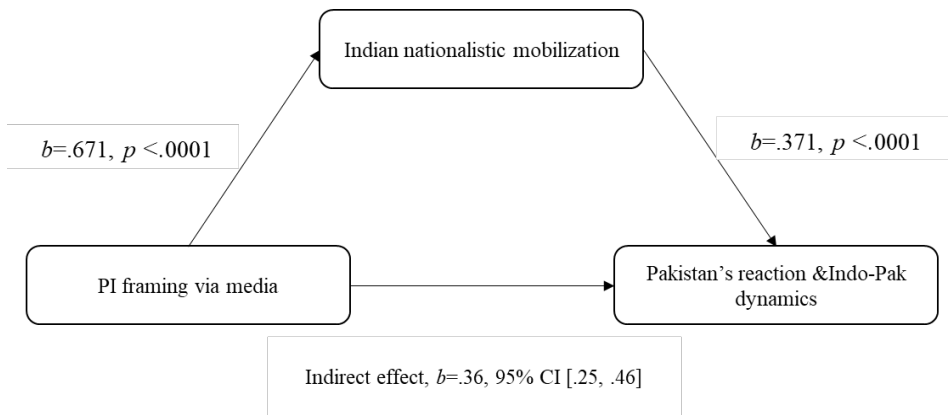


Figure 2: Diagram of Mediation Model

Table 6: T-test between visitors and non-visitors to India for their mean scores on PM, IM, and PRD (N=373)

Variables	Visitors (n=32)		Non-visitors (n=341)		T	p	95% CI	
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL
Pahalgam incident framing via media	77.4 1	2.68	64.7 2	4.45	15.9	.000 1	6.74	8.72
Indian nationalistic mobilization	68.5 6	1.27	58.4 2	2.55	19.3	.000 1	5.31	7.08
Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics	87.9 7	2.27	53.8 6	4.21	18.7	.000 1	6.09	8.2

Note: *** $p < .0001$

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare participants' mean scores on Pahalgam incident framing via media, Indian nationalistic mobilization, and Pakistan's reaction

and Indo-Pak dynamics between visitors and non-visitors to India. A significant difference was found in the mean scores of visitors ($M=77.5$, $SD=2.68$) and non-visitors to India ($M=64.7$, $SD=4.45$) on Pahalgam incident framing via media; $t(373) = 15.9$, $p < .0001$. Results also presented significant differences in the mean scores of visitors ($M=68.6$, $SD=1.27$) and non-visitors ($M=58.5$, $SD=2.55$) on Indian nationalistic mobilization, $t(373) = 19.3$, $p < .0001$; and highly significant differences in mean scores of visitors ($M=87.9$, $SD=2.27$) and non-visitors ($M=53.9$, $SD=4.21$) on Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics, $t(373) = 18.7$, $p < .0001$.

Table 7: T-test between participants who have direct or indirect contacts for their mean scores on PM, IM, and PRD (N=373)

Variables	Direct contact ($n=105$)		Indirect contact ($n=268$)		T	P	95% CI	
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL
Pahalgam incident framing via media	71.33	5.19	63.59	4.04	15.3	.0001	6.74	8.73
Indian nationalistic mobilization	61.92	4.96	55.72	3.44	13.8	.0001	5.31	7.09
Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics	60.21	6.11	53.08	3.98	13.3	.0001	6.08	8.21

Note *** $p < .0001$

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare mean scores on Pahalgam incident framing via media, Indian

nationalistic mobilization, and Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics between participants' direct and indirect contacts. A significant difference was found in the mean scores of participants direct ($M=71.4$, $SD=5.19$) and Indirect contact with Indians ($M=63.6$, $SD=4.04$) on Pahalgam incident framing via media; $t(373) = 15.3$, $p < .0001$. Results also presented differences in the mean scores of direct ($M=61.9$, $SD=4.96$) and indirect contact ($M=55.8$, $SD=3.44$) on Indian nationalistic mobilization $t(373) = 13.8$, $p < .0001$; and significant differences in mean scores of direct ($M=60.3$, $SD=6.11$) and indirect contact ($M=53.1$, $SD=3.98$) on Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics, $t(373) = 13.3$, $p < .0001$.

Discussion and Implications

This study employed the mediation analysis to investigate the relationship between Pahalgam incident framing via media (PM), and Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics (PRD) through the lens of Pakistani public. The results indicated that the relationship between PM and PRD was mediated by Indian nationalistic mobilization (IM). This study tested five hypotheses and indicated; Pahalgam incident framing via media had a positive relationship with Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics (H1 accepted). Indian nationalistic mobilization had a positive relationship with Pakistan's reaction and Indo-Pak dynamics (H2 accepted). Indian nationalistic mobilization as a mediator played a significant role between PM and PRD (H3

accepted). In addition, this study compared the participants' perceptions on PM, IM, and PRD, between visitors and non-visitors to India; and participants who had direct or indirect contact with any Indian. The researcher intended to know the difference in participants' opinions if they have visited India or met/know any Indian. A comparison between visitors vs. non-visitors revealed a highly significant difference in their perceptions on PM, IM, and PRD (H4 supported); and also a highly significant difference in their opinions having direct vs. indirect contacts with Indians on PM, IM, and PRD (H5 supported).

Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study offers theoretical and practical implications. First, the findings of the present study suggest that India's reaction on Pahalgam incident and attributing blame to Pakistan present implications for the former to rethink and urge Indian policymakers to circumvent extending their actions against Pakistan without any concrete evidence and examine their policy stance on political, social, and economic costs (Hussain, 2025) that are important for their country. PM and its aftermath challenge the regional peace due to India's corrosive pattern of accusing Pakistan, political rhetoric and media-fueled narratives without any investigation of Pahalgam incident. Indian media's myopic obsession with the latter is a part of Hindutva strategies and Hindu nationalism. Awareness about the coverage of conflict

and issue is required for editors and journalists to perform a positive role in the society. For Indo-Pak conflict, media-regulators should encourage cross-media dialogues and develop transnational forum to promote professional contacts between Indian and Pakistani journalists. Policies of protecting journalistic freedom are necessary for the forum to hold critical inquiry instead of ideological propaganda. Media should adopt “ethical, balanced, peace-oriented” approach and consider sensitive geopolitical environment while reporting about conflict and terror attacks in reference to India-Pak relations (Noor & Saifi, 2025). To reduce the tensions between the two countries, Pakistan repeatedly demanded a third-party investigation under the UN or a joint investigation into Pahalgam incident. It reflects the country’s rational diplomatic response and commitment to maintaining regional peace.

On the other hand, India claimed the Operation Sindoor as a decisive message to Pakistan through overnight airstrikes on alleged militant groups across the Line of Control (LOC). A neutral and credible evidence of Pakistan’s involvement in PI was lacking. India suspended Indus Water Treaty and initiated OS. Initially, the US was disengaged and did not appear as a mediator. Following by OS, Pakistan launched OBM in response to Indian calibrated military action. With the exchange of missile, the US engagement with India-Pak leadership appeared productive for ceasefire and eased the tensions between the two

rival states. Apart from the US, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates appeared to play a proactive role as global mediator in de-escalating the tensions and international conflicts. Hence, the Saudi Arabia appeared uncertain to play the same role like the US. It also remains uncertain about diplomatic leverage over India despite the former's strengthening relations with the Indian government (Rana, 2025). **It might be possible to prevent further escalation if international actors play their active role earlier when Pakistan was "claiming some Indian losses and an off-ramp was available" (Shukla, 2025). Pakistan's stance to provide concrete evidence through strategic communication reflects the country's position as a responsible nuclear power. It improves both "deterrent stability and strategic clarity" through the employment of credible and appropriate force.** After the launch of OS and OBM, the US applied diplomatic pressure, called for peace, and announced for Immediate and Full Ceasefire. For Indo-Pak conflict, the US role as a mediator seems blessing to de-escalate the conflict and restore the peace temporarily, but it remains fail in substantial development. It might be possible that two countries manage their affairs through bilateral negotiations, develop framework for dialogue, and long-term commitment, which are required to achieve meaningful progress on Kashmir issue (Thomas, 1992). A ceasefire has been held between the two countries. By defusing the tensions, both countries can start

“economic belt and water-sharing summits” and develop “joint economic alliance as well as hydraulic projects” (Naveed, Saeed, & Imtiaz, 2025). War is never a solution to any conflict. Therefore, both countries should negotiate and focus on diplomatic ways.

Over the decades, the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic countries, and ASEAN have played limited role for peace diplomacy between India and Pakistan. A broader global engagement is necessary to settle the continued Kashmir issue between the two nuclear-armed neighboring countries. Further, it will be good for Pakistan to embrace alliances with countries for “issue-based cooperation” and establish a minilateral forum “South Asian Quad” a forum basically resistant to Indian interventions (Khurram, 2025). This strategic forum could work for specific issues and secure national interests in the region. India’s Kashmir policy regarding the withdrawal of autonomy in 2019, has aggravated tensions. For this, the country should formulate “institutional reform” in order to prevent future communal conflicts (Sonpar, 2014). Pakistan’s supports Kashmiri Muslim community due to victimization of Indian dominance. Additionally, Pakistan seeks to declare its permissibility as it has demanded a neutral investigation of the Pahalgam incident. Its strategy “denial of culpability and moral counteraccusation” reflect Pakistan’s efforts to maintain its identity that is “defensive and ideologically valid” (Prayogo & Sari, 2025). It is necessary

to restrict disinformation through media in order to minimize nationalism urging disputes among them.

Despite the efforts, India has been unsuccessful to present Pakistan insignificant on the global stage. Following the PI, the OS was declared as retaliatory measure for self-defence by India. Due to the threat of cross-border incursions, both countries seek to increase their defence spending to modernize equipment. A number of welfare funds are diverted to the military. Accordingly, it influences the socio-economic development of both countries. Additionally, foreign companies are working in both countries. Political instability and cross-border incursions affect external capital flows and foreign investors to invest in both countries. Security situation also affects the tourism industry and its contribution to the local economy. The US has helped in the ceasefire, and conflict did not escalate into a nuclear war. The US' mediating power may help in culminating lasting peace in South Asia and solve Kashmir issue, which is the root cause of several wars between India and Pakistan. People-to-people diplomacy promotes mutual respect and understanding among diverse cultural backgrounds. Thus, two way exchanges can develop intersocietal engagements and bring peace in the region through substantive change in Indo-Pak ties. By expanding diplomatic ways, it is imperative for both countries to use soft power strategies to maintain regional security and diminish geopolitical tensions.

Conclusion

Recurrence of past accusation patterns, India uses false flag acts to indicate Pakistan's involvement in terrorist attacks without providing any evidence. India has used several strategies to manage local leadership in Jammu and Kashmir and maintain political balance which led to armed violence and instability. After Pahalgam incident (April 2025), Indian attacks inside Pakistan, political rhetoric, media onslaught against Pakistan, Operation Sindoor, and cross-border insurgencies indicate the Indian leadership's intentions to externalize the blame. Cross-media dialogues may help in defusing the misinformation disseminated through various channels. Seeking regional security at risk, the way forward is to find a neutral venue and peaceful dialogue between India and Pakistan. Indian reaction on PI is an example of past reactive event based posturing to involve Pakistan in every terrorist activity in the country. Although de-escalation has held, but truce might be temporary until the solution of Kashmir conflict.

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