**Unmasking the Deception**

**They use half-baked and bogus narratives to cause conflict and make large profits.**

[Dr Fareeda Anjum](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/dr-fareeda-anjum)

March 01, 2024

[Opinions](https://www.nation.com.pk/opinions), [Columns](https://www.nation.com.pk/columns), [Newspaper](https://www.nation.com.pk/newspaper)

In the turbulent landscape of the information age, where the boundaries between truth and fiction blur with alarming fre­quency, individuals like Haider Mehdi and Adil Raja have risen to prominence as architects of deception. Such individuals have aris­en as purveyors of dishonesty in the internet age, where the distinctions between truth and lie are often blurred. They use half-baked and bogus narratives to cause conflict and make large profits. As former army officers who have made the transition to YouTube ‘stars’, they have manipu­lated huge followings by spreading disinformation about the Pakistani army and its citizens, all the while stuffing their own pockets with money. The shoddy character of their activities was highlighted by the fact that they were involved in inciting sedition and breaking the Official Secrets Act.

Major (rtd) Adil Farooq Raja and Captain (rtd) Haider Raza Mehdi were once trusted with the responsibility of serving their country, but now they are being condemned for their roles in manipulating public perception and endangering national security. Their ap­proach is simple but effective: they obtain information, adapt it to fit their purposes, and then present it to their audience as irrefut­able facts. They use their vlogs and online platforms to propagate lies with ease, taking advantage of the blind faith of their followers and the viral nature of sensationalized content. Under the seeming display of moral anger, though, is a carefully planned scheme to ex­ploit weaknesses in a divided society.

[OIC to hold meeting on Palestine next week](https://www.nation.com.pk/02-Mar-2024/oic-to-hold-meeting-on-palestine-next-week)

Of course, Mehdi and Raja made a huge wealth because of their il­legal activities. Their huge cash cows, their attention-grabbing iden­tities and provocative thumbnails on YouTube channels draw visi­tors in with the promise of sensational scoops and exclusive content. Every click, every watch, every sharing benefits them, but at the expense of morals and honesty. The military court declared them guilty, stressing the gravity of their crimes. Serious offences that re­quire quick and forceful response include stirring discontent among army personnel, violating the Official Secrets Act, and plotting to jeopardize national security. But even though punishment is coming for them, they are staying rebellious to shield themselves from the consequences of their behaviour. They have skillfully taken advan­tage of the weaknesses of a digitally linked society in their quest of power and money, using techniques meant to trick and control their audience. Their plans go beyond simply spreading false information; they intentionally employ strategies meant to deceive their audience and continue an endless cycle of disinformation and distrust. By us­ing a combination of cherry-picked evidence, fear-mongering, and plain fabrications, they build a devoted following that will accept their twisted stories without question. Haider Mehdi and Adil Raja have become sellers of dishonesty in their ceaseless chase of wealth. They take advantage of their audience’s confidence to pad their own wallets and spread misinformation and discord in the process.

[PPP leader stresses democratic values, national development](https://www.nation.com.pk/02-Mar-2024/ppp-leader-stresses-democratic-values-national-development)

The events of May 9 serve as an important reminder of how their propaganda affects people in the real world. Mehdi and Raja were directly responsible for fuelling the flames of rebellion and creating an atmosphere of turmoil and instability with their provocative re­marks. The extent of their betrayal is further emphasized by Feroze Jamal Shah Kakakhel, the caretaker minister for information in Khy­ber Pakhtunkhwa, who has accused them of engaging in anti-state actions. They have violated the very oath they previously pledged to honour by plotting to wage war against Pakistan and encouraging mutiny among the armed forces, damaging the standing of the or­ganization they once worked for. Their criminality is clearly shown by the allegations brought against them, which include provisions of the Anti-Terrorism Act and the Pakistan Penal Code. Their acts weak­ened the pillars of democracy and free expression in addition to en­dangering national security. The abuse of sedition laws to suppress critical voices has been effectively condemned by organizations such as Amnesty International and Reporters Without Borders, but Me­hdi and Raja aren’t exactly martyrs for the cause of press freedom. To sum up, the story of Haider Mehdi and Adil Raja should serve as a warning about the perils of propaganda and false information in the internet era. They have used their platforms as crooks and profited from spreading lies, abandoning the truth for their advantage. As we work toward a better society, it is the responsibility of all citizens to guard against the schemes of these charlatans and to defend the val­ues of accountability, honesty, and integrity.

[Punjab Ombudsman resolved 35,202 complaints in 2023](https://www.nation.com.pk/02-Mar-2024/punjab-ombudsman-resolved-35-202-complaints-in-2023)

**Dr Fareeda Anjum**  
The writer is a doctorate in Cybercrime and Hybrid Warfare.