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Article:	Exploring the Coverage of Climate Change Issue in Pakistani Media
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ABSTRACT

This study examines editorial coverage of climate change in leading Pakistani newspapers at an interesting time when the country is devising adaptation and mitigations plans in the wake of growing environmental challenges. Based on Van Dijk's discursive strategies (Van Dijk, 2005), this study used critical discourse analysis to comparatively examine the predominant themes in editorial coverage of elite newspaper, The daily Dawn, The News International and The Express Tribune resulting in two themes of 'Climate Change vulnerability' and 'Climate Change governance'. While all newspapers highlighted themes of 'of 'Climate Change vulnerability' in their editorial coverage, there was appreciation regarding climate change governance in the editorials of The News International and The Express Tribune but The daily Dawn was skeptical, cynical and negative towards role of governance regarding climate change in Pakistan.

Keywords: Climate Change, Discourse Analysis, Climate Change Vulnerability, Climate Change governance

1. Introduction

In the contemporary era, the world is confronting an existential threat in the form of climate change; the serious nature of this problem has adverse implications for political and social fabric of society. Climate change has altered the existing social construction of reality on varied dimensions ranging from the comprehension of our surrounding environs to economic patterns and errands of individuals as well as the collective actors. Climate change is considered as the systematically discernible sporadic alterations of the Earth's climate persisting over a long time period and inflicted by diverse human actions such as geographical, geological, biological and chemical factors (IPCC, 2019; Jackson, 2021). By the mid-1980s and the beginning of 1990s, the climate change got traction beyond the scientific realm, environmental organizations, international development agencies, politicians, policy analysts, and more importantly the public began to exhibit great concern regarding the deteriorating environmental condition (Ungar 1992; Franz 1997).

Coinciding with scientific discourse, the climate change challenge and its major pitfalls to human beings have vividly pervaded the mass media itinerary corresponding with amplifying political and scientific attention (Moser, 2010). In relation to climate change, communication is crucial (Pidgeon, 2012). The role played by the media in keeping an eye on the depletion of natural resources and edifying the laymen and the governmental institutions regarding the deleterious ramifications of climate change on the imminent generations are of great importance. Given that, the media plays a crucial role in educating the general public about manmade environmental problems and promoting progressive behaviour change within society (Yadav & Rani, 2011). Olausson (2011) deliberates on the media, indicating that it is necessary to recognize that it serves as "the key conduit between politics, science, and the public, at the same time the primary agenda-setting for the public's comprehension on climate change" (Olausson, 2011, p. 295). Various social media platforms, television, radio, newspaper, and websites all significantly contribute to forming a public opinion regarding climate change (Sonwalkar, 2002).

The sufferings inflicted by climate change are prevalent in less advanced countries such as Pakistan, where scarcity of resources and lack of awareness further deteriorates the situation. Pakistan is ranked eighth among the world's most susceptible countries to climate change (Choudhry, 2016). Pakistan is ranked 135th in terms of carbon dioxide emissions and, regrettably, 7th in terms of climate change danger (Global Climate Risk Index 2017; Naseer, 2013). Pakistan already confronted with the problem of food security and loses a huge amount of its resources on yearly basis to the problems induced by climate change such as erosion and floods. The media despite its crucial role does not address these serious issues in an effective manner such as the increasing temperature of the earth and deforestation for development projects. Whereas the issues of politics and corruption are prevalent in the media discourse, the impending disaster that would jeopardise over 200 million lives regrettably remains unnoticed in the mass media of the country. Furthermore, in terms of climate change research, Pakistan not just lags behind European countries but also trails behind South Asian countries such as Nepal, India, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh (Kim, 2011)

Pakistan initiated concrete measure regarding adaptation and mitigation plans to climate change steps in 2008 when the Planning Commission of Pakistan established the Task Force on Climate Change. The prime objective of the Task Force was to formulate a "climate

change policy that would assist the government in pursuing the paramount goal of sustained economic growth by appropriately addressing the challenges posed by the threat of climate change” (Khan, 2011, p. 5). In 2012, Pakistan released its National Climate Change Policy and delineated a framework for the execution of the aforesaid policy which depicts the country’s preparedness for tackling the climate change issue by taking palpable actions. Billion Tree Tsunami was also a flagship tree plantation drive started by Government of Khyber Pukhtunkhaw in 2014 and it proved to be an environmental, economic and social success to mitigate harmful impacts of climate change by restoring 350,000 hectares of forests. Its success and popularity had prompted federal government of Pakistan to launch 10 billion trees in five years across the country on September 1, 2018.

Developing countries like Pakistan which despite being the most vulnerable country to the risk of climate change receives less attention and coverage from electronic media, and majority of the coverage on climate change is event-oriented. It is, therefore, necessary to identify the role played by print media in addressing the deleterious impacts of climate change (Azmi et al., 2015). In general, it is posited that print publications have a robust impact on agenda-setting as opposed to electronic media for instance information dissemination from various news channels (Boykoff, 2010; McCombs, 1977). With this in mind, this research study is aimed at analyzing how various environmental dimensions and themes are reflected in editorial coverage of elite newspapers of Pakistan. Therefore, this study is focussed on one key research question i.e. *what have been the predominant themes regarding climate change in the editorial coverage of leading English newspaper of Pakistan.*

In Pakistan, Daily Dawn, The News International and Daily the Express Tribune are the three leading English newspapers that have a reputational image in the print media with a large number of readers and have massive circulation. These newspapers provide accurate information and support constructive criticism, exhibit great concern for informing and edifying the public. English newspapers are seen as being more trustworthy and accurate (Khan et al., 2017).

2. Literature Review

Numerous studies have been done on environmental discourse, covering areas such as cultural politics, power and knowledge, environmental policy, and the appreciation of nature (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005; Boykoff, 2011; Dryzek, 2013). Among other pressing issues, the issue of climate change has got much traction from varied media platforms (Azmi, Omar, Zaid, Wahab, & Yusof, 2015). Media is playing the role of mediator between scientific and political discourse (Sampei & Aoyagi-Usui, 2009). Countries across the globe considered media as a significant source of reliable information concerning climate change (Cabecinhas, Lázaro, & Carvalho, 2009; Boykoff, 2011). During the mid-1980s, climate change became a rampant issue and occupied a prominent position on the public agenda (Moser, 2010). In comparison to the bygone years, the issue has witnessed considerable scholarly interest in recent years (Schmidt, Ivanova, & Schäfer, 2013) making it a severe problem for all concerning (Nisbet & Myers, 2007).

Several authors have emphasized the crucial role played by media in creating awareness and representing the voice of the public (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2007; Anderson, 2009). Additionally, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) reports in 2007 and 2013, and also the United Nations Climate Change Conferences (COPs), are specimens of

technical actions that have gained widespread media attention (Boykoff, 2010; Holt and Barkemeyer, 2012). Events like Hurricane Katrina and Typhoon Haiyan in 2005 and 2013 respectively and as well as numerous recurring heat waves have intensified the media coverage reading the urgency of the issue. The newspapers still play a significant role as agenda constructors and as reflectors of public interest in connection to climate change despite the media landscape becoming more convoluted and the rise of social media (Ungar, 2000; Carvalho and Burgess, 2005).

Climate change is a “global crisis” (Cottle, 2009), however coverage on the issue is disproportionate and countries across the globe differ in how and how much they cover climate change (Grundmann and Scott, 2014; Schmidt et al., 2013; Vu et al., 2019). Schafer and Painter (2020) argue that these differences are especially prevalent when comparing the Global North and South (Koch, 2020). Furthermore, cross-national research is helpful in the identification of various mechanisms that grab media attention in comprehending why climate change has been prominently discussed in the media in some settings but not in others (Anderson, 2009; Boykoff and Roberts, 2007; Moser, 2010). As per the findings of Carvalho (2007), concentrating on how Climate Change is portrayed in the British mainstream press, the author makes the case that ideologies play a significant role in how scientific assertions are discursively recreated in the media.

There is considerable scholarly work regarding the ramifications of climate change on Pakistan, particularly in regard to food shortage and security (Gorst et al. 2018; Tariq et al. 2014; Asif 2013; Rasul et al. 2011; Siddiqui et al. 2012; Ahmed and Schmit 2011). Recent studies outlined the prevailing implications of climate change in Pakistan, as the temperature is increasing at an unprecedented rate, glaciers are thawing at an exceptional rate, and unpredictable rainfalls adversely affect crop yield. The study by Sharif and Medvecky (2018) found that the primary causes for weakening climate change news on media platforms about the frequent climate changes occurring in Pakistan include three main factors: rejection, insecurity, and recklessness. A study conducted by Zahid Yousaf et al., (2013) concerning media coverage in Pakistan regarding climate change in Pakistan revealed that editorial columns and broadcasting studios across the nation do not prioritise environmental reporting. In Conclusion, the country is experiencing social, political, and war-like turmoil that prevents substantial discussion of environmental matters. Despite being a critical concern for Pakistan, climate change gets a minimal mention in the regional English daily newspapers,” Pakistan, the fifth most vulnerable nation to climate change, needs to be covered by the German-watch think tank on the subject.

Apart from coverage patterns regarding climate change among global north and global south, news content and themes or frames also differ on scientific, ecological and societal dimensions (Hase.V et al. 2021). So, it is pertinent to identify thematic variations in the editorial coverage of leading English language newspapers of Pakistan during the time period under study

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Data Collection and Sampling

This research paper has been taken from researcher’s major research venture, whereof the synchronization between media and government in context of climate change have been studied and analyzed.

Using the ‘census sampling’ and ‘data cleansing’ strategies the researcher found four editorials from “Express Tribune”, two editorials from the “Dawn” and seven editorials from the “News International”. These editorials were selected from three newspapers using key terms “Billion tree Tsunami” and “Climate change”.

Based on the specific objective of this research paper the researcher selected three editorials from each newspaper which contained the discourse regarding the “Billion tree Tsunami” and “Climate change”. Finally, the researcher employed ‘purposive sampling’ to select one relevant editorial from each newspaper during the time period under study i.e., August 02, 2018 to October 02, 2018.

This study is meant to explore and comparatively analyze the dominant themes regarding “Climate change” in the coverage by “Dawn”, “Express Tribune” and “The News International” during the specific time period to be analyzed.

3.2 Data analysis

To analyze the major themes regarding “Billion tree Tsunami” and “Climate change” in the editorial coverage by “Dawn”, “Express Tribune” and “The News International” during the selected time period the researcher has employed the ‘Consensus and the ‘lexicalization’ techniques proposed by Tuen A. van Dijk (1998). Van Dijk approaches of consensus and lexicalization works within the paradigm of the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The two approaches have been applied based on their relevance and the suitability with the intended objective of this study.

CDA is an approach that guide the researchers to explore and study the dynamics of the ideology and power and also power within a text and speech also (Matu and Lubbe, 2007 p.404).

3.3 Lexicalization

To fulfill certain goals or convey an intended point of view to the readers, certain words or lexical items are knowingly used over other words in discourses. Lexicalization is the use of semantic aspects of words to represent something or someone in a positive or negative light (Rashidi, Souzandehfar & Education, 2010; T. A. J. A. n. a. i. d. a. Van Dijk, 2005).

3.4 Consensus

Consensus is considered as a political approach and frequently used in discourse analysis on issues related to national significance or importance. Many CDA research studies have focused on the usage of language in different newspapers, to prop power or question it (van Dijk 2005; Carvalho 2008; Mautner 2008).

Based on the relevance and importance of the ‘Consensus’ and ‘Lexicalization’ the researcher has applied these two approaches from the paradigm of the CDA to analyze the editorial contents

4. Data Analysis

The Following study contains the analysis of the specific editorials, which were published in The Daily *Express Tribune* during a certain period of time. Keeping in view the objectives of the study, the researcher has answered the questions by using the lexicalization and the consensus as data analysis tools from the CDA paradigm.

The Express Tribune did not publish any editorial specifically on the climate change during the ‘non-critical time period’ i.e., from August 02 to September 02 2018.

Newspaper	The Express Tribune
Date	September 13,2018
Headline	Imminent Drought
Category/Theme	Climate Change Vulnerability & Climate Change Governance

The first editorial chosen from the selected sample was published during the ‘critical time period’ i.e., from September 02 to October 02, 2018 was designated as “Imminent drought”. It is quite clear from the headline which encapsulates the lexical items within it, creating consensus on the graveness of the climate change issue. Moreover, the newspaper has chosen two lexis i.e. ‘Drought’ and ‘Imminent’ to put stress on the ‘appeal’ made by the then incumbent Prime Minister Imran Khan to the public for ‘generous donations’ for the construction of the Diamer-Bhasha Dam.

Both the terms, ‘Drought’ which basically means ‘a period of dryness, famine, or a dearth) and ‘Imminent’ which means (about to happen, forthcoming, impending, or looming) are the lexical items used by the newspaper to acclimatize the reader regarding the graveness of the issue. The main aim of this editorial was to create a consensus among the readers on the appeal or request made by the Prime Minister.

The first paragraph of the editorial contains lexical items such as; ‘Drought’, ‘Second warning’, ‘fittingly reverberated’, ‘failing to support crops’, ‘appeal’, ‘warning to the nation’, ‘less rain’, and ‘water crises’. All these lexical items depict clear synchronization and shows evident support of the newspaper regarding PM’s appeal to the nation for the ‘generous donations’ to construct the Diamer-Bhasha Dam.

Furthermore, in terms of the discursive move ‘consensus’, the newspaper again showed its support to the PM’s appeal by highlighting that “Prime Minister Imran Khan fittingly reverberated the warning to the nation...” and by doing that “We understand that, having already experienced a water crisis and a below average rainfall of 24.4% from May to August is critical. The Sindh province during this period received approximately 70% less rain than average”. While in the second paragraph, the newspaper used lexical items such as; ‘gargantuan task’, ‘guilty’, ‘our stubbornness’, ‘doling out’, and ‘more impactful ways’ to support the construction of the dam, ensuring the safety of the water resources whilst criticizing the extra consumption of water by the public.

Likewise, the newspaper has used the ‘consensus’ as a discursive move in this paragraph to support the government policy by giving propositions in its favor as; “...’stubbornness against reducing livestock farming”, ‘More immediate measures need to be adopted’...there are more efficient ways to reduce the impact of the imminent drought PM Khan and the Met Department warned of”.

In the last paragraph, the newspaper’s use of the lexis such as; ‘laudable’, ‘conscionable move’, ‘warnings are needed’, and ‘thwarting atmospheric temperature’ while commenting on the ‘PM’s Billion Tree Tsunami campaign’ portraying that the newspaper is in agreement with the government regarding the climate change policy. In the comment; “In a conscionable move, the PM’s Billion Tree Tsunami campaign is laudable”, the newspaper has employed the ‘consensus’ discursive move to create synchronization with the government’s policy on the climate change issue.

This three paragraph editorial by *The Express Tribune* states explicit agreement with the government policy concerning the climate change. This editorial seems to be creating

consensus with their readers regarding the dire need of the construction of the Diamer-Bhasha Dam to save the water. The newspaper seems to be in synchronization with the government's climate change policy. Seeing through the lens of lexicalization and consensus it can safely be said that the under study editorial falls in the category of 'climate change vulnerability' and that the editorial supports the PM's Billion Tree Tsunami campaign.

Newspaper	Dawn
Date	September 05,2018
Headline	Seeds of Change
Category/Theme	Climate Change Governance & Climate Change Vulnerability

The editorial published by the *Dawn* newspaper on September 05, 2018 was named as "seeds of change?". The headline is a question mark in a skeptical way on the overall 'change' narrative of the then Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government and especially on its climate change policy. PTI came into government with a popular political rhetoric of 'change/Tabdeeli' in the country and the newspaper has put both, PTI's climate change policy and political slogan under question. Which clearly states that the *Dawn* is more skeptical, cynical, and critical towards the government's climate change policy and the content within the editorial also reflects a sense of criticism on the government's governance within the context of climate change framework.

Moreover, the criticism and reservation of the newspaper over government's climate change policy and governance is explicitly evident from the lexical items used in the first paragraph such as; 'sustainable', 'realistic?', 'ambitious target?', 'is it achievable?', 'ill-conceived'.

From the written expression or style and lexical items used by the *Dawn* in this main paragraph would prompt the reader to make an opinion, that the newspaper is not in agreement with the government's 'ambitious target' of '10bn trees' plantation, raising serious doubts on the feasibility of the target. In addition to this, the newspaper is also raising doubts on the government's policy making, intelligence, and thought process by raising questions on the selection of trees which are going to be planted during the '10bn trees' plantation move. The *Dawn* has not focused on the 'consensus' as a discursive move to support and synchronize with government's climate change policy and performance, instead, the newspaper has clearly raised doubts on the government's 'ambitious targets'.

The critical and skeptical editorial discourse is evident from the text such as; the government has set an ambitious target of planting '10bn trees' in the coming five years; that is roughly 5.4m trees a day! Few can deny the cause is noble but is it achievable? Are these figures even realistic? Or sustainable? While the public is enthralled by the idea, environmentalists are more cautious.

Similarly, in the second paragraph of the editorial, the *Dawn* has been critical of the government's policy and governance concerning the tree plantation move by employing lexical items such as; 'menace', 'corruption in government departments', 'alleged embezzlement of funds', 'little attention paid to the existing trees', 'not set in properly', 'scattered carelessly', 'not watered adequately'. The use of these type of lexical choices depicts that the *Dawn* is *uncertain* on the government's intentions, policy and governance regarding the tree plantation move.

In general, the editorial content in this paragraph like the previous one, do not seem to be in synchronization with the government's policy towards the climate change. The newspaper doesn't seem to be creating consensus among its readers related to the government's climate change policy which is quite evident from the comments such as; In some cases, these trees had to be cut down, less than a decade after being planted, as they were lowering the water table. Secondly, in attempting to plant the highest number of trees in the shortest amount of time, they were not set in place properly.

In some instances, 'seed bombs' were scattered carelessly. Or the trees were not watered adequately. There has been a very low survival rate of such trees. The conclusory paragraph of the editorial reflects a combination of support to the then incumbent PM Imran Khan and uncertainty over the government's governance concerning the climate change policy. The mixed editorial trend is evident from the lexical item 'sincerity' used by the newspaper for the PM's climate change agenda and from the skeptical comment; "Time will tell if that sincerity translates into sustainable change, and whether this government can learn from mistakes of the past".

Lastly, there are three paragraphs in this editorial published by the *Dawn* and these paragraphs reflects editorial's headline, which is critical and skeptical towards the government's governance and intelligence regarding the '10bn trees' plantation move. Moreover, in the second last sentence of the last paragraph, the editorial acknowledges the 'sincerity' of the PM towards the 'environment'. However, in the very next sentence, the newspaper again raises a question on the capacity and governance of his government.

Overall, the editorial falls in the category of 'climate change and role of governance' with an explicitly critical and skeptical discourse towards the government's policy of climate change. The newspaper was quite evidently raising serious doubts on the government's policy making, intelligence and thought process by highlighting issues on the selection of trees which are going to be planted during the '10bn trees' plantation move.

The newspaper has not employed the 'consensus' as a discursive move to synchronise and support government's climate change policy and performance instead the newspaper has clearly raised cynical questions on the government's 'ambitious targets'.

Newspaper	The News International
Date	September 06,2018
Headline	Ten Billion Trees
Category/Theme	Climate Change Governance & Climate Change Vulnerability

The next selected editorial sample is from *The News International* named as 'ten Billion trees', published on 6th September of 2018. The headline portrays that the newspaper has not used any lexical items with any directional meanings, also it is descriptive in nature without any slant and leanings in it. Furthermore, the editorial content favours the government, appreciating its policies in terms of countering the challenges of the climate change. Likewise, the editorial falls into the category of 'climate change governance and climate change' with an attempt to create consensus in support of the government for being more efficient regarding their policies.

Lexical items used by the newspaper in the first paragraph such as; 'worsen', severe flooding', 'admirable', and 'vital environmental issues' reflect that the newspaper attempts to

highlight the issue of the climate change. Subsequently, it is also appreciating the efforts of the then Prime Minister Imran Khan and his government for “mentioning climate change as one of the major challenges facing the government...”. Excerpt from the following lead paragraph appears to be an attempt to create consensus among its readers in favor of the government for its environment friendly efforts and policies;

“The PTI has been admirable in its focus on vital environmental issues, with Imran taking the lead by mentioning climate change as one of the major challenges facing the government in his first speech after the elections... Any attempt to reverse this trend should be welcomed by everyone regardless of political ideology”.

The second paragraph, which is the shortest among the three paragraphs of the editorial, also employs positive lexical item for the ‘Ten Billion Tree Tsunami’ such as ‘starting point’ to tackle the forthcoming ‘worse climate change’ for Pakistan. The newspaper supports the government’s initiative by giving the suggestion of ‘water conservation’ and ‘shifting power consumption’.

In terms of the ‘consensus’ as a discursive move, the newspaper’s comments and suggestions are evidence that there is an agreement of support with the government concerning the severity of the issue and good governance; “For the government, the Ten Billion Tree Tsunami should be seen as a starting point and not the final destination... and for that, we have to adapt to the challenges of tomorrow”.

The last paragraph of the editorial incorporates more explicit lexical items that highlights the climate issues whilst supports the government for its policies to tackle the issue. For instance, ‘tide of deforestation’, ‘good service’, ‘be careful’, ‘chop down trees’, ‘sincere’, ‘suitable for climate’, ‘tree-planting campaign’, and ‘should no longer be tolerated’ are the lexical choices which basically reflects the newspaper’s intention to highlight the graveness of the issue whilst supports the government’s policies to counter it.

In general, this paragraph seems to be creating consensus in favor of the government’s policies and at the same time highlights climate change as an important and grave national issue.

Following excerpt is an explicit example and evidence of the ‘consensus’ as a discursive move employed by the newspaper; “Good intentions, while a prerequisite, is only half the battle. The PTI has shown their sincerity but they will be ultimately judged on what measures they have taken to fulfil their promises”.

Altogether, this editorial falls into the category of ‘climate change governance’ wherein the predominant discourse of the editorial is creating consensus in favor of the government. The lexical items employed by the newspaper clearly highlights the serious nature of the issue and at the same time, they are encouraging the government for its intentions and policies to counter the issue. In conclusion, the newspaper’s policy seems to be in synchronization with the government’s policy regarding the climate change issue.

5. Conclusion

Based on the work of Hase.V et al (2021) on identification of thematic variations in the coverage of climate change, the researcher identified and explored the thematic variations in the coverage of climate change issue in Pakistani print media. The findings of the study shows that while covering climate change all of the three newspapers focused on climate change

vulnerability and climate change governance more frequently. Express Tribune and the News International highlighted the theme “climate change vulnerability by using terms “conscionable moves”, “laudable” and “warnings are needed”. Further Express Tribune and the news International seems to be in synchronization with government climate change policy by using the words “admirable”, “Sincere”, “good intentions” “conscionable move” and” laudable”, hence highlighting the theme of “Climate Change Governance”. Express Tribune seems to sensitize the audience and creating consensus on seriousness of issue. While the newspaper, Dawn is more skeptical, cynical and negative towards climate change governance regarding climate change. The lexical items used in dawn such as, “is it achievable”, “sustainable” and “realistic?” regarding “ten billion tsunamis”. Therefore, according to research findings, the theme “climate change governance” has been given remarkably unfavorable and negative coverage with a focus on raising cynical questions and using lexical items such as, “corruption in government department” and “alleged embezzlement of funds”.

The news international focused on appreciating the policies of government initiatives by explicitly highlighting the lexical items. The lexical items “Good intentions”, “sincere”, “admirable, vital “environmental issue”, “be careful”, “worsen” and “severe flooding”, “reflect the newspapers intention to support the government policies and highlight the severity of the issue of climate change. Therefore, the News International is positive towards both the themes “climate change governance” and “Climate change vulnerability”.

The findings of this study are different in highlighting the themes as pointed out by researchers in south Asian countries. Climate change has involved much media and political consideration in recent years. There is a lack of media research on climate change coverage in developing countries, while western media has well documented the coverage of climate change issue (Mittal, R.2012). Appearance of the theme, climate change governance positively in *The News International* and *Express Tribune*, while negatively in *Dawn*, either positive or negative focuses on priority of coverage given to specific theme.

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