

Episodic Framing in Environmental Media: Analysing Climate Change Coverage by Geo and ARY on Instagram

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Abstract

Instagram plays an important role for public awareness and empowering citizens to advocate to address pressing climate change concerns. The purpose of this study to examine GEO News and ARY News, two prominent Pakistan news channels, to identify how these channels are framed climate change using formal-stylistic approaches i.e., episodic and thematic framing. A qualitative content and frame analysis of 150 posts from January 2024 to July 2024 prevails dominant framing patterns, themes, and narrative strategies. This study reveals both channels employ episodic framing emphasizes on current events rather than a thematic frame. The outcomes presented demonstrate that news channels under analysis utilize the episodic framing, which is based on the presentation of events and their effects most of the time. While such a frequent use of episodic framing proves useful in producing stories that generate interest within the audience, it does not offer conditions for developing more contextual insight. On the other hand, Geo News use thematic framing more often to associate a climate change aspect with a larger phenomenon such as agriculture or economic losses. These

trends may explain the prevalence of episodic framing and, at the same time, indicate a potential problem of the overemphasis on episodic framing at the cost of developing a long-term climate perspective. This research points to the importance of framing strategies in capturing the interest of the target audience and promoting more effective ways of understanding climatic changes; in this context, the study posits that Instagram can serve a major function in the improvement of climatic awareness among the populace, which will in turn enable a call to action regarding the practice of sustainable living.

Keywords: Climate Change, Instagram, Episodic Framing, Qualitative Content Analysis, and Pakistan.

1. Introduction

Climate change has turned out to be one of many worlds' main issues worldwide, affecting numerous nations together with Pakistan. Increasing heat levels and erratic rainfall movements are changing the ecological conditions in South Asia due to a growing frequency of severe weather events. As climate change poses a great threat to Pakistan it confronts critical social and economic risks. Action is needed without delay to reduce the negative consequences on food production and health services as well as sustainable practices. Increasing understanding of climate change is important to combat its extensive consequences which is why social media is essential (Ishaque et al., 2022).

According to findings by Van der Linden et al. (2017) media attention to climate change significantly alters public perceptions and their inclination to respond. Findings showed that media communication about climate change enhanced people's grasp of the problem and their readiness to respond. People who lack prior knowledge of climate change reacted more to media exposure.

Hall et al. (2019) also discovered that increased attention to the news about climate change increased people's awareness and concern. The authors found out that the sample having received climate change news through the

media, had a better perception about climate change and a greater concern over its impact.

Currently having millions of active users, it has changed the way people consume and even engage with content. Through a visually appealing format, easy navigation, and convenient availability for mobile users, it has become a valuable ground for delivering important topics such as climate change. In Pakistan 95% population has smartphone accessibility, and awareness has been effectively spread through Instagram medium. New sites rely on Instagram to present bright posts that attract people's attention and stimulate a discussion in social media on the significance of environmental problems (Rocque et al., 2021).

Therefore, one of the objectives of this research is to analyse how these news channels use framing in their Instagram messages. Framing is the way, in which problems are described to affect perception by an audience. The channels utilize two main types of framing: episodic and thematic. Episodic framing concentrates in events or particular cases and is characterized for emphasizing persons and/or simple emergencies. This kind of framing is useful in reaching the viewers since it offers sentiment and realistic data. In turn, thematic framing is focused on more extensive societal patterns or system features, which lead to a more extensive approach to the problem and potential solutions for climate change. (Ngcamu, 2023).

According to Dudo and Besley (2016), the media frames play an instrumental role in shaping people's perceptions towards science and technology issues including; climate change. Boykoff and Boykoff (2019) also establish that those frames determine how people view solutions to shift in weather pattern. Thus, the authors studied that media talks of climate change have been more inclined to personal actions and technological measures and less inclined to large-scale transformations and state-based measures.

So far, the identified method of episodic framing has been evident in most of the Instagram posts of both Geo News as well as ARY News. There

is normally emphasis on the most current issues such as flooding, pollution of the air, and many more. They make the call even more compelling as these posts depersonalize climate change by explaining how it affects people in their daily lives. For example, a post about the severe damages of flood in one of the rural villages in Pakistan will help people to raise their attention level and feel concerned. It's essential to engage the community this way of framing makes the issue more personal and real for people to make them engage with the content (Frontiersin, 2023).

2. Objectives of the Study

The below is the study objective of the research:

- To understand the strategy of framing used by Pakistan climate change and environment news in the Instagram social media platform.

3. Research Hypotheses

Following are the research hypotheses of the study:

H1: Instagram is usually episodic framing about Climate change.

H2: The news stories about climate change on Instagram pages in Pakistan do not enhance climate literacy.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Climate Change Communication and Media Framing

Climate change perception among the public because of media was research widely in the recent past. Boykoff and Boykoff (2011) analysed how journalistic norms in the United States resulted in approaches to climate change coverage and underlined the importance of media in constructing environmental issues. Some pointed out that the elite frames may partly be centred on concerns such as uncertainties and political aspects, which in turn may mislead the audience about what climate science is. In the same manner, He, Liu, and Ye (2019) pointed out the importance of media in China, to show how the CCP considers climate change from the perspective of national

interests and economic effectiveness, as well as environmental policies, with emphasis on specific urgency depending on the government's priorities.

In Pakistan, climate change has been depicted as an environmental health issue and natural disasters including floods and smog (Hussain & Rao, 2024). Although the problem has been identified, people in Pakistan still require knowledge and improved understanding of climate change. These frames are intended to grab the public's eye by associating climate change with familiar, tangible concerns rather than noble policy objectives such as sustainability. This kind of episodic framing where events are described singularly instead of issues has been used much frequently within the Pakistani mediascape.

4.2 Episodic vs. Thematic Framing in Climate Change Coverage

According to Brüggemann and Engesser (2014), framing theory is made up of episodic and thematic framing. Episodic framing relates to how the information presents an issue in terms of specific events or improved episodes related to it, particularly, a flood, a hurricane, or political conflict regarding climate change policies. Thematic framing, on the other hand, is more general in its orientation, encompasses trends, policies and systems approaches. According to Brüggemann and Engesser (2014), thematic framing can help to describe the background reasons, yet they are less implemented because mass media prefer such headings that attract people's attention.

Still, altogether with the above mentioned two patterns of framing, episodic framing seems to be more prominent in narration in Pakistan. For instance, extensive media attention is paid to storms, floods, and episodes of smog, as well as the short-term effects of climate change on the economy and human health. This means that, although episodic framing can be the best way to capture the public's attention it also poses the risk of distorting issues by offering snap-shot views of them (Hussain & Rao, 2024).

4.3 Instagram in Climate Change Communication

Due to its strong tendency of visualization, Instagram provides its users with an opportunity to explore environmental issues by means of images, videos and infographics, which can be disseminated in a rather short time (Wang,

2023). As for Instagram, research has shown how the use of visual language helps to ‘dumb down’ some of the issues regarding the environment to the level that average Internet users can comprehend them and, thereby, contribute to the purpose of awareness advertising (Kumar, 2024).

In Pakistan, it can be seen that Geo news and ARY news both use Instagram to share climate change information with their followers. These outlets employ not only episodic and thematic approaches to their posts and stories. For example, the ARY News channel has a disproportionately high number of posts about specific events such as flood and smog which attract much attention due to the headline grabbing pictures. On the other hand, thematic framing is applied in Geo News now and then by addressing ongoing government policies and climate change projects (Hussain & Rao, 2024). These two modes of framing combined with the aesthetics of Instagram makes the latter ideal for fostering awareness to climate change.

4.4 Engagement and Sentiment on social media

Another advantage of Instagram contributing to climate change communication is engagement, including likes, comments, and shares. According to Wang (2023), the article’s findings indicate that posts with some form of graphic content, appealing images, and hashtags will get more engagement. About climate issues in Pakistan, some posts on Instagram discussed the posts and many people discussed the government’s inaction, environmental pollution, and demand for sustainable projects and programmes (Hussain & Rao, 2024).

In addition, through the use of Instagram, key influencers and organisations can engage with climate content to spread its reach. For example, people tagging like Malala Yousafzai and organizations like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) often repost about climate change; thus, making them more popular (De Masi, 2022). This active participation underlines the possibility to discuss not only the climate change issue on Instagram but also inspire further meaningful communication.

4.5 Challenges in Media Representation of Climate Change

Nevertheless, there is still an ongoing issue around representation regarding climate change through Instagram as a platform to raise awareness of the problem. It is for this reason that Antilla (2011) noted that the climatic change is portrayed in the media not as a centred on scientific evidence as presented, but as a debate or as an issue for discussion. This may create confusion to the public and doubt in respect to the issue to be addressed hence slows down the process of mobilization. In Pakistan, this issue is aggravated when the media portrays Climate Change issues in the episodic format which is non-conducive for the awareness and understanding of the system issue like Climate Change (Hussain & Rao, 2024).

Furthermore, although Instagram appears to provide a chance to increase knowledge about the topic, there is a lack of further thematic contextualization concerning the connection of environmental events to the overall trends and developments such as policy shifts, sustainability concerns, and climate justice ones (Kumar, 2024).

4.6 Visual Communication and Climate Literacy on Instagram

This has made the use of other forms of content, particularly graphical content such as infographics and videos as a way of simplifying such materials possible. Studies suggest that sharing climate science information through photo-based platforms such as Instagram, improves climate literacy due to its better public understandability (Kumar, 2024).

4.7 Hashtag Activism and Climate Change Discourse

Climate change has also been an active conversation on Instagram where the trending topics, that incorporates hashtag activism, share climate change contents with a wider community. There is tremendous attention on social media on hashtag campaigns like #ClimateChange, #FloodInPakistan, #EnvironmentalProtection, and others that spread awareness of environmental issues. As Wang (2023 states, these hashtags do more than simply enhance post presence; they also contribute to the creation of ONC communities worried about climate change. This has made a space for

dialogue on issues and news feed, political enjoinment for climate change, and to demand results from governments.

4.8 Audience Engagement and Sentiment on Instagram

The presence of the audience is used as the scale of the climate change posts on Instagram by counting the number of likes, comments, and shares. Hussain and Rao (2024) revealed that climate disaster, particularly the post about floods garners the highest level of engagement on both ARY News and Geo News Instagram accounts. Such comments were analysed for sentiments, which presented worries, annoyance and, on the part of students and the institution, support for measures related to climate. The posts that had images of destruction or people in pain received more emotions. meaning, that visual showcasing is a great way to evoke an emotional response.

4.9 The Role of Influencers in Climate Change Communication

Several of the popular climate change posts originate from high profile influencers like Malala Yousafzai as well as organizations like the UNDP – the latter of which reposts material from the official Instagram handle of the United Nations Development Programme. In De Masi's (2022) view, there is an effect of improving the degree of diffusion of the climate thematic because influencers interact with posts regarding this topical issue. In Pakistan, when celebrities join the bandwagon of discussing climate issues it gives the topic a form of credibility and makes the audience more aware of the government policies or no policies at all. Most of these intellectuals have a following on the common social media platforms thus their posts on the environment and the climate change can convince their followers on the need to change.

4.10 Media Shaping Policy Discourse

Although media framing is all about shaping the public's perception, it also shapes the policy talk on climate change. The episodic framing by media majorly lead to short term public concern and not so frequent policy changes (Antilla, 2011). The least but still observable in Pakistani media, thematic framing has the potential of producing more long-term public & political discourse around climate change. Kumar (2024) also believes that if more of such themes is included in social media updates, then, there would be more

informed policy discourses and system changes within environmental governance.

5. Research Methodology

5.1 Research Design

Qualitative content and frame analysis were utilized in this study to investigate the framing of the case of climate change and environmental concerns on Instagram by the two biggest Pakistani news outlets: Geo News and ARY News.

5.2 Sample Selection

Instagram posts that had information about climate change and environmental issues were collected using a purposive sampling technique. Instagram accounts of the official pages of Geo News (herein referred to as geonews) and ARY News (herein referred to as arynewstv) were sampled with six months of data collection starting January 1, 2024 and ending July 31, 2024. The sample criteria were that posts had to mention or relate to climate change or environmental issues directly or indirectly, including floods, heatwaves, smog, excessive rainfall, environmental degradation, or climate-related policies. The posts that were not related to climate-related or environmental concerns were disqualified. Instagram posts were analysed and 165 Instagram posts selected, including 75 posts of ARY News and 90 posts of Geo News.

5.3 Unit of Analysis

An Instagram post was the unit of analysis of this study. Each of them was analyzed as a whole, with the visual graphics (images or video) in it being considered, as well as the caption text and the indicators of engagement (likes and comments).

5.4 Coding Scheme

Formal-stylistic framing categories, i.e., episodic framing and thematic framing, based on the formal framing theory, were used to code the posts.

- **Episodic Frame:** It was found that posts targeted certain events or incidents like a flood, a heatwave, smog episode, or another disaster of climate change without giving more general contextual

explanations of the event in question or relating the incidence to the long-term shifts in climate.

- **Thematic Framing:** Thematic framing was also found during posts that related climate-related events to broader contexts such as scientific studies, policy discourse, long-term climate patterns, and causes of climate change.

5.5 Data Analysis Procedure

All Instagram posts have been analysed in a systematic way so that the dominant framing strategy (episodic or thematic) can be identified. The interaction between the visual elements and text in captions was considered to analyse how the climate change stories were made. Besides the type of frame, the posts were also examined in case of patterns in engagement including the extent of engagement with the audience to give contextual details about the reaction of the public. Nevertheless, engagement indicators were not statistically compared and qualitatively interpreted to aid in framing analysis.

5.6 Consistency and Analytical Rigor

In order to achieve analytical consistency, the coded posts were all done with one set of pre-determined framing criteria across the research. The code was developed based on the literature available on media framing to ensure that different areas of the analysis were conceptually sound and consistent.

6. Findings & Results

The researcher fully read ARY News and Geo News Instagram account between January 01, 2024 and July 01, 2024 and collected all the news related to climate and environment in any terms direct, or indirect. These were the Instagram news posts of the ARY news and Geo news which have been selected.

Table 6.1 *Posts on Instagram of ARY News*

ARY News (@arynewstv)			
Months	Formal stylistic frame analysis		
	Total posts	Thematic	Episodic
January 2024 to July 2024	75	30	45

During the selected time period of January 2024 to July 2024, the ARY News Instagram Total Posted 75 news stories about climate change, in which Out of 45 were episodically framed while the remaining 30 were thematically framed.

Table 6.2 *Posts on Instagram of GEO News*

Geo News (@geonews)			
Months	Formal stylistic frame analysis		
	Total posts	Thematic	Episodic
January 2024 to july 2024	90	35	55

Total of 90 news found on climate change on Geo News Instagram, in which 35 post based on thematic frame and other the rest on episodic.

Episodic Framing of Climate Change

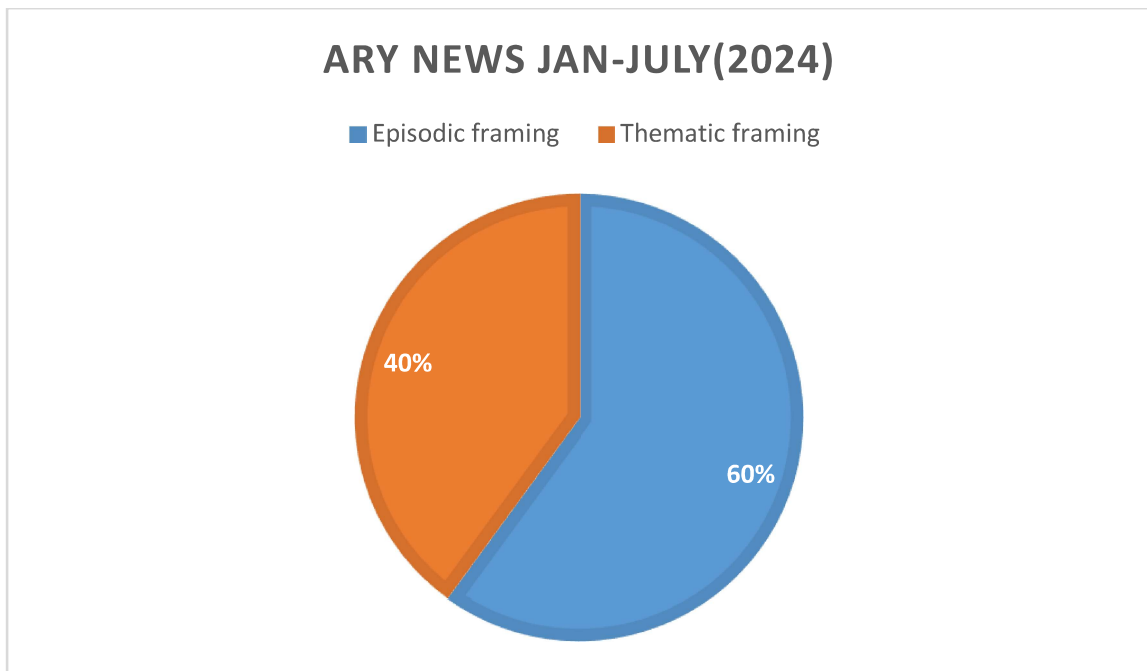


Figure 6.1 Framing in ARY News

The study found that mostly posts based on episodic framing on both ARY and GEO news accounts on Instagram, 60% in ARY and 61% in GEO.

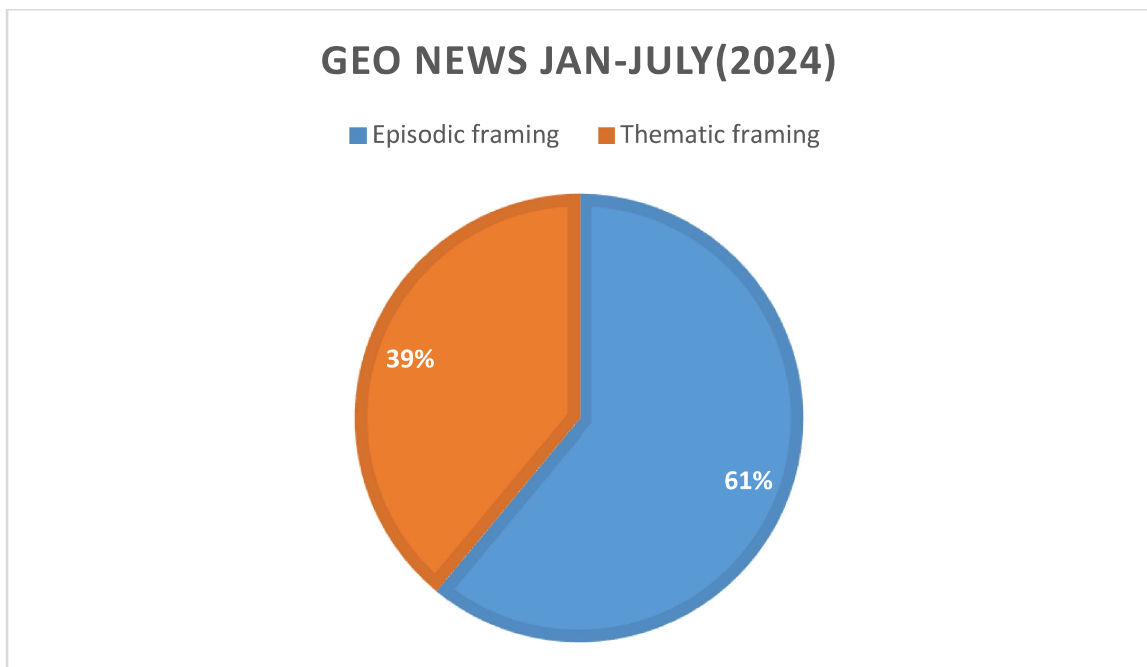


Figure 6.2 Framing in GEO News

6.1 Episodic Framing Qualitative Analysis of Data Coding

The discussion of the data gathered with the use of news posts published by ARY and GEO shows that the latter outnumber the former. The most widespread topic of the news posts coded to episodic framing theme is the report of weather extremes and its impact. Most of these news postings revolve on issues such as natural disasters, droughts, famine and smog, which are as a result of climatic changes. These articles are literally targeted at presenting the information concerning the large amount of people affected due to this issue. They also mention the infrastructure destruction and effects on the daily life impact of such climatic events.

The second most common topic of the news posts belonging to episodic framing rubric is related to the activities of political parties in climate/environmental projects. These projects include conferences, seminars, campaigns and activities that intend to deal with environmental problems at the national and global levels. The news on this issue report on the attitude of politicians and their attempt to be friendly with the environment and how they generate a contribution towards the environmental sustainability and the preservation of the environment. They give a general description of how politician had reacted to the issues in the environment and what has been done to reduce the consequences of climatic change.

Most of the examples are based on episodic framing, which is made up of news packets adjusted to the heading; intense hot weather temperatures drop in country, Karachi feels like temperature climbs to 52 degree, and devastating floods caused havoc in Sindh; displacing hundreds. To raise urgent response, authorities request citizens to act quickly before water levels go even higher." 7 dead in Gilgit-Baltistan landslide, 47 dead in Pakistan due to storms and lightning, Lahore schools closed down due to smog.

One of the news stories I came across in Dawn on June 24, 2024, and is titled, Record high in Lahore as heatwave, is a story of a record heatwave that has rocked Lahore, Pakistan where the temperatures have surpassed 47 degrees Celsius. It emphasized on the use of extreme heat which has resulted

in the deaths of some individuals and several people have been hospitalized due to the large amount of heat and became hospitalized. The news posts also touched on the effect of the heatwave to the area, which has impacted on the load in the power grid in the country.

“Ten people have died in Karachi of heatstroke and other heat-waves causes this summer, seven of them last week. It used quotations of the people who were suffering from the extreme heatwave, “it is so hot these days that I cannot figure out whether I am in Karachi”

Global warming has changed the intensity and number of the heat waves. As worldwide temperatures rise, heatwaves grow more constant and intense. Climate change boosts the chance of intense heat occurrences by raising the earth average temperature. The rising temperature of the Earth's surface is produced by greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide, that trap heat in the atmosphere.

As a consequence, heatwaves are getting more common and intense, affecting human well-being, food production, and the environment. However, the news posts cited as example above not provided the context in the posts and instead presented the event in an episodic framing.

6.2 Thematic Framing Qualitative Analysis of The Data Coding

As per the data recorded with reference to ARY news and Geo news, it would be seen that the amount of clustered coding of stories under thematic frame was minimal, but the stories were largely explained, background and useful information about climate change issues. These news entries give the information in a broader view of the problem and introduce the reader to the background information, interpretation, consequences, and the time change of the problem and the possible causes and ways to resolve these problems.

These news posts categorized using theme framing technique either feature the most recent scientific findings and research on climate change or focus on environmental challenges in a larger perspective. They enhance their material with research papers and statistics. They use the theme framing

technique to examine the effects of the study findings and give insight into global environmental shifts and their possible influence on environment and society.

According to a January 11, 2024 Geo news post, Pakistan's flood danger is anticipated to treble by 2040 owing to climate change, as reported by the World Resources Institute (WRI).

According to the WRI assessment cited in the news post, the government must invest in adapting to and mitigating the consequences of climate change. The paper indicate that the government gives priority creating water storage facilities, limiting deforestation, and strengthening soil conservation techniques to mitigate floods. The news posts used thematic framing to demonstrate the issue's connection to climate change and give comprehensive background information.

On July 20, 2024, a news post, Experts link glacier melt and climate change, urge risk assessment, also reported that a panel of experts has attributed the rapid glacier melt in Pakistan to climate change and urged it to take risk assessment. They are demanding that the risk on the nation should be fully evaluated. Scientists have complained that the melting glaciers pose a significant threat to the availability of water and food security in the country as well as the generation of energy. It is stressed that high rates of glacier melting can contribute to natural disasters of floods and landslides.

7. Discussion

As the results of the present study indicate, the dominating strategy that both Geo News and ARY News employ when covering climate and environmental matters on Instagram is episodic framing. The majority of posts revolve around individual events like floods, heatwaves, smog, and other climate-related catastrophes, and introduce them as a singular event, instead of a reflection of a larger-scale trend in climate. This aligns with past studies that suggest that episodic framing is still the journalistic strategy of choice because of its emotional appeal and imminence (Boykoff and Boykoff, 2007; Hussain and Rao, 2024).

Although episodic framing can be useful in drawing audience attention and creating engagement, its overuse is a huge constraint to climate literacy. Such framing does not provide the structural reasons behind climate change, such as greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation, and unsustainable development practices by overemphasizing the immediate effects and human suffering without sufficient contextualization. Consequently, consumers will view climate disasters as unforeseeable or unavoidable incidents instead of being the consequences of the systematic environmental degradation.

Another finding of the study is that political actors are a common feature in episodically framed posts, especially when it comes to environmental campaigns coverage, conferences, and disaster responses by the government. Despite the fact that political exposure is an indicator of institutional anxiety, when too much attention is paid to politics, climate change could be turned into a short-term policy statement and not a long-term problem. This is in line with the political perspective of episodic coverage developed by Antilla (2011), which tends to divert viewers to ignore scientific facts and structural remedies.

Thematic framing, less common, however, is more explanatory. The themed posts link climatic events with scientific literature, policy frameworks, and implications of future risks which allow viewers to perceive climate change as a cohesive and continuous process. References to research reports, melting glaciers, future flood forecasts, and environmental regulations show that thematic framing can be helpful with increasing awareness of the population and making the discussion more informed. This observation can be echoed by Bruggemann and Engesser (2014) who state that thematic framing is more productive in generating awareness that can be sustained in the long term, although it is less popular in mass media.

In addition, episodic framing predominance can also cause emotional exhaustion and lack of engagement in the population. The incessant psychic conditioning with content based on disasters, without creating a positive context or solutions, may instill a sense of helplessness and apathy and decrease the desire to act individually or collectively (Maibach et al., 2018).

By contrast, thematic framing provides audiences with agency through the mechanism of placing climate change in the context of more general socio-politic and environmental systems, thus promoting more philosophical involvement.

On the whole, this discussion reveals that as a potent tool of sharing information about climate, Instagram plays a large role but the framing methods used by mainstream media outlets play a large part in defining the understanding of climate change. Their minimal regular usage limits the potential of Instagram to be used as an instrument of promoting climate literacy. Greater balance in incorporating episodic and thematic framing might enhance the general awareness as well as long-term attention in climate change matters in Pakistan.

8. Conclusion

This paper concludes that Instagram climate news on both Geo News and ARY News are framed mainly episodically which aims at specific events instead of the overall climate conditions. Episodic framing captures the attention of the audience; however, its likelihood to prevail eliminates the progress of climate literacy. The paper identifies the importance of increased application on the thematic framing in enhancing the broader public awareness of climate change in Pakistan.

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