



## **Examining the Impact of Twitter (X) on News Sourcing and Dissemination: A Qualitative Study of Mainstream Media Editors in Pakistan**

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.24312/ucp-jmc.03.02.694>

### **Abstract**

*The growth of social media, particularly Twitter (X) has drastically influenced mainstream journalistic practices worldwide. In Pakistan, journalism is entering an emerging phase due to the use of Twitter (X) by journalists to perform various news-related tasks. This integration of Twitter (X) into mainstream journalism signifies a transformative move in the Pakistani mainstream media landscape. In the context of the importance of Twitter (X) in journalism as highlighted in a broad range of literature, the current study is an attempt to explore how Twitter (X) has brought notable changes in mainstream journalistic practices in Pakistan. By employing qualitative in-depth interviews with 12 senior editors of print and electronic*

*media, this study explored that Twitter (X) not only brought a trend of digital storytelling but also played a significant role in bringing changes in news sourcing and dissemination practices among Pakistani journalists. Findings revealed that Twitter (X) has paced up the speed of news gathering, followed by another significant change Twitter (X) has brought in mainstream media of Pakistan is the “democratization of information”, allowing journalists to rely on Twitter (X) to source news and to break exclusive news stories instead of going into the field for reporting.*

**Keywords:** Journalistic Practices, Mainstream Media, Social Media, News Sourcing, and Digital Journalism.

## **1. Introduction**

Social media, particularly Twitter (X) and other micro-blogging websites enable users to create accounts of public and private nature. These facilitate users to post messages or tweets, check tweets, retweet, and follow the profiles of other users. Twitter, currently known as X has not only become an important tool for journalists but also entered newsrooms of multiple sizes (Lysak et al., 2012; Revers, 2014). On the other side, the use of new media in journalism is still in evolving stage and is not well explored (Hermida, 2010). Even the impact of social media, specifically Twitter (X) is not well-explored in the context of the Pakistani media landscape. The current study is a step to address this gap, as researchers examined how the use of Twitter (X) by journalists changed mainstream journalistic practices in Pakistan and what the challenges faced by journalists due to the use of emerging social media i.e., Twitter (X), focusing viewpoints of news editors in Pakistani mainstream media corporations.

Studies show that Twitter (X) is highly used by journalists around the globe. As depicted in a survey of journalists, the majority of journalists (59%) acknowledged that they use Twitter (X) in their day-to-day journalistic operations (Stadd, 2013). Furthermore, Twitter (X) serves as an important information source for users as the majority of respondents in the study of Holcomb et al. (2013) reported that they use Twitter (X) to get news and updates.

In view of the extensive adoption of Twitter (X) by the journalists, Twitter (X) is also classified as a ‘central circulatory information system for reporters’ (Coddington et al., 2014). Many other studies reported that journalists utilize Twitter for various purposes, such as collecting information, generating ideas for news, source identification, audience engagement, disseminating information, sharing their own views, and creating and promoting content (Yongwhan et al., 2016; Swasy, 2016; Molyneux, 2015; Kim et al., 2015; Cozma and Chen, 2013; Burns and Burgess, 2012; Hermida, 2012; Lysak et al., 2012; Holcomb et al., 2011; Farhi, 2009; Hayes et al., 2007).

The microblogging social media platforms, such as Twitter (X) gradually exerted influence on news converge by journalists, as now they become heavy users of Twitter (X) (Molyneux, 2015; Vis, 2013; Lasorsa et al., 2012; Holton & Lewis, 2011; Armstrong and Gao, 2010). Twitter (X) serves like other social media websites, providing a unique sphere of communication where everyone like politicians, the public, and journalists is present. The dynamics of news production, allow journalists to collect data virtually by connecting with other users to make narratives via Twitter (X) (Mourão, 2014). This shows that Twitter (X) may have impact on news production as well.

Multiple studies showed that social media is highly used in journalism, specifically for news sourcing, verification, and dissemination, and to connect with the audience (Gulyas., 2013; Gulyas, 2016; Olausson, 2016). In contrast to this, Newman and Richard (2009) argued, that the number of social media platforms has increased and the entry of digital platforms in the newsrooms posed challenges for journalists.

Moreover, Kumar (2022) reported, on one hand, Twitter (X) has emerged as a significant tool in journalism, facilitating journalists in news gathering and reporting in real-time, and on another hand, it provides an opportunity for the journalists to engage with the audience. This highlights the important role of social media, specifically Twitter (X) in journalists’ work routines. This is in line with the study of Lasorsa (2012), Twitter (X) helps journalists obtain timely updates regarding events and keeps them well-informed to meet the demands of fast-paced journalism.

Alongside this, a number of investigations have demonstrated how social media has impacted journalism. As reported in the study of Burno (2011), traditional journalistic practices of news gathering and verification have been changed, resulting in the transformation of journalism. However, Deuze and Witchge (2017) suggested that journalists have to work beyond traditional journalistic practices due to the adoption of social media. This also posed a challenge for news organizations, as noted by Sehl (2018), news organizations no longer work as gatekeepers but they have to share with the audience on social media. This also underscores the shift of power towards the active audience and journalists and audiences are a mutual space of news production.

As supported by the study by Jewitt (2009), Twitter (X) has compressed the role of mainstream news channels in the battle of breaking news. Pakistan is a country where the use of social media in journalism is an emerging trend. To that end, this study seeks to explore the impact of Twitter (X) on mainstream journalistic practices i.e., news sourcing and news dissemination, along with challenges faced by journalists due to this emerging trend of Twitter (X) usage in the contemporary field of Pakistani journalism. The findings of the current study will not only provide a picture of changing trends of journalistic practices in Pakistan but also guide potential journalists on how they can effectively utilize Twitter (X) in their day-to-day work-related responsibilities.

## **2. Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to explore the influence of Twitter (X) on transforming the mainstream journalistic practices in Pakistan.

## **3. Research Questions**

The researchers formulated the following research question to guide this study and address the identified gaps in the literature. The research question for this study aims to explore the complexities of the impact of Twitter (X) on journalistic practices:

**RQ1.** How Twitter (X) has transformed the mainstream journalistic practices in Pakistan?

#### **4. Literature Review**

It is evident in the literature that journalists rely on Twitter (X) to obtain news and use this site as an important news source. Findings of a study by Hamby (2013) reported that the first thing journalists do in the morning is check Twitter (X). Furthermore, journalists monitor Twitter (X) using web services like DataMinr (McGregor, 2018), as they consider Twitter (X) as an instant source of news (Hermida, 2010). Clearly, Twitter (X) may now be counted as an important part of journalistic routines, but more research is required to be conducted to explore how this emerging platform influenced traditional journalistic practices, specifically in terms of news sourcing and news dissemination in developing countries like Pakistan.

Moreover, Donsbach, 2004 argued, that Twitter (X) and traditional news sources, both serve as streams of information for journalists. However, it is important to explore that how the new services altered the traditional practices, particularly news production. Journalists also acknowledged the use of Twitter (X) to monitor the audience and other journalists (Lawrence, 2015).

The role and importance of Twitter (X) in contemporary journalism is a rapidly evolving area of research. Hermida (2012) called Twitter (X) an “awareness system” because it provides a constant stream of information for journalists and creates an environment of “ambient journalism” which means that Twitter (X) provides mixed content made of information, news, and opinions related to current affairs. In a broader way, researchers have focused on the ways social media, particularly Twitter (X) reshaping the field of journalism, influencing journalistic practices and news production (Newman et al., 2012; Burns and Highfield, 2012; Newman, 2011). In contrast to this, other studies have specifically examined the ways journalists adapted social media. These studies focused on Twitter (X) usage as an important part of journalistic work and they have noted trends of general levels by doing an analysis of Twitter (X) accounts of elite journalists (Holcomb et al., 2011), along with narrowly focused studies that underscored different types of journalists and their Twitter (X) use, like foreign reporters (Cozma & Chen, 2012). These studies have largely found that Twitter (X) is not only used for

reporting news but also more commonly to promote journalistic products in the form of various types of content (Newman, 2011).

Many studies highlighted how the use of Twitter in newsrooms become a part of journalistic routine, specifically in terms of breaking news, and obtaining ideas for news stories, as a news source (Farhi, 2009; Posetti, 2009). For instance, UK national newspapers with more than 100 official Twitter (X) accounts, had more than one million followers (Coles, 2009), which is an indication of how rapidly Twitter (X) has emerged within journalism. As a result of this, a UK-based news organization made an appointment of a Twitter (X) correspondent to monitor Twitter (X) to obtain news stories and manage audience feedback. By doing this, news organizations become part of the “Twittersphere” (Butcher, 2009). Moreover, the existing body of literature on journalistic practices revealed the importance of social media in journalism, as Mercier and Chenyl (2014) concluded that Twitter (X) and Facebook played a significant role in introducing new journalistic practices and changed the ways journalists use social media for their work-related tasks.

An extension of the above-discussed ideas can be found in a study by Pantii (2019), journalists are active users of Twitter (X), particularly in conflict reporting. However, journalism on social media platforms is more informal, and a personalized reporting trend has been adopted by journalists, allowing them to share more opinions and showcase emotions regarding issues. This is further supported by the study of Papacharissi (2012), that users can now blend their professional experiences with personal perceptions on social media platforms. But Pantii (2019) argued that the style of news reporting has changed due to social media as Twitter (X) enabled users for more personalized reporting. Burns (2012) also supported this and argued, that journalists can gain more popularity by using social media, particularly Twitter (X) by showing their personal stance rather than playing their organizational roles.

Meanwhile, literature also highlighted the role of Twitter (X) in changing journalistic practices. As Hermida (2010) coined the term “ambient journalism”, Barnard (2014) used the term “Twitter-journalists”, Center

(2015) and Pantti (2019) referred to this role of Twitter (X) as “personalized tweeting” and “personalized reporting”.

Alongside, Rees and Shoemaker (2016) claimed that internet-based technologies have facilitated the news flow and expected journalists to multitask and produce content in a more instant manner in view of the rapid flow of information on online platforms. Additionally, journalists can now manage their presence online ahead of their employers' control. So, the authors clarified that the routine level influence in news organizations has been influenced by the culture created by digital platforms. Now, journalists can easily monitor the news in real-time, and online platforms allow them to locate the content that is popular among the audience, resulting in new news values.

## **5. Rationale of the Study**

The current study aimed to address the gap in the existing literature by exploring the viewpoints of editors of Pakistani mainstream media regarding the changes Twitter (X) has brought in Pakistani mainstream journalistic practices. Despite the wealth of research on social media and journalism, there remains a lack of understanding regarding how actually Twitter (X) usage has influenced the journalistic operation in mainstream media in Pakistan. To fill this gap, in-depth interviews were conducted with editors of mainstream media in Pakistan who are in managerial positions and actively involved in decision-making for news and journalists. This study seeks to contribute to the existing literature by highlighting the influence of Twitter (X) on the contemporary field of journalism in Pakistan.

## **6. Method**

In the current qualitative study, researchers employed an in-depth interview method, directed in a semi-structured mode with 12 editors. Total 6 editors were selected from Pakistan's leading print and 6 from electronic news organizations. The purposive sampling technique was to select participants for the in-depth interviews on the condition that they all should fulfil certain criteria i.e., participants must be users of Twitter (X) and they must be registered members of National Press Club Islamabad which is considered a prestigious body of journalists in Pakistan. The editors agreed to give

interviews with a condition to maintain their anonymity. For in-depth interviews, the saturation point was considered. Strauss and Glaser (1967) used ‘theoretical saturation’ in qualitative research. Saturation can also be defined as “when collecting data doesn’t provide any unique insight or reveal no new concept under study” (Charmaz, 1990). Mason (2010) also recommended the concept of saturation as the most significant aspect to be considered when deciding sample size in qualitative studies.

In the current study, in-depth interviews were conducted to collect important insights that can provide a broader picture of how the use of Twitter (X) influenced traditional mainstream journalistic practices. The participants’ ages were from 24-45 years having enough experience in practical journalism. A mobile phone recorder was used to record interviews with participants and overall, it took more than a month to collect data.

Transcription of recorded interviews was done by researchers and it took one day to transcribe each 20-25 minutes audio data into text. Four audio interviews were also translated from Urdu to English language. After transcribing all in-depth interviews, researchers used thematic analysis for qualitative data. Thematic analysis is commonly used in qualitative data analysis (see Braun & Clark, 2006; Roulston, 2001).

Researchers used an inductive method to identify themes in collected data. The inductive method is a way in which the researcher reads the data repeatedly and assigns codes, without taking into consideration the themes other researchers have identified in the same area (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

After the transcription of all audio interviews into text, codes were given to information. After coding, the researchers revisited codes and combined overreaching themes, and final names were given to all themes.

## **6.1 Themes**

The following themes were identified from the data to address the research question:

**6.1.1 Themes of Significant Changes Twitter (X) has brought in Traditional News Sourcing Practices in specific and Pakistani Journalism in general:**

- Enhanced the Pace of News Gathering
- Heightened Accountability of Media Organizations
- Facilitated News Collection
- Democratized the Information
- Created ease in Job-related Tasks of Routine
- Compromised Authenticity of the News

**6.1.2 Themes of Significant Changes Twitter (X) has brought in Traditional News Dissemination Practices in Pakistan**

- The Trend of Digital Story Telling
- Enabled Journalists to Directly Share News with the Audience
- Sharing of Exclusive News Stories on Twitter (X)

**7. Findings**

Semi-structured interviews contained a mix of prearranged and open-ended questions that were used to maintain a balance during interviews. This approach helped the researchers to better explore the viewpoints of editors regarding the impact of Twitter (X) on journalistic practices of mainstream media organizations.

**Table 7.1 Themes of Significant Changes Twitter (X) has brought in Traditional News Sourcing Practices in specific and Pakistani Journalism in general**

Theme	No. of Participants	References
Significant Changes Twitter Has Brought	12	62
Enhanced the Pace of News Gathering	12	41

*Twitter (X) as News Source*

Heightened the Accountability of Media Organizations	5	11
Democratized the Information	12	68
Created ease in job-related tasks of routine	8	34
Compromised Authenticity of the news	10	31

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Table 7.1 shows the responses of the participants against inquiries regarding the impact of Twitter (X) on news sourcing in particular and Pakistani journalism in general. The themes revealed that Twitter (X) has significantly paced up the speed of news gathering by journalists. Findings depict that this view was endorsed by all editors with a total of 41 instances of endorsements throughout interviews. Moreover, findings indicate that the majority of editors said that Twitter (X) facilitated news collection and created an easy for journalists' job-related tasks of routine as news is easily available on Twitter (X) now. The theme depicted in Table 1 also shows that Twitter (X) has democratized information, suggesting that information is now, not in centralized control but available to all. However, the authenticity of the news has been compromised due to the production of fake news on Twitter and this concern was raised 31 times by 10 editors during interviews. It is also evident in the findings that Twitter (X) has increased the accountability of media organizations as now they cannot hide information because there are great changes that same information may come out on Twitter (X).

**Table 7.2 Themes of Significant Changes Twitter (X) has brought in Traditional News Dissemination Practices in Pakistan**

Theme	No. of Participants	References
Changes Twitter has brought	12	62
The trend of Digital Story Telling	6	26
Enabled Journalists to Directly share News with the Audience	11	57
Sharing of Exclusive News Stories on Twitter (X)	4	13

The themes depicted in Table 7.2 indicate that 6 participants emphasized that Twitter (X) brought a new trend of “Digital Storytelling” in Pakistan, highlighting the impact of Twitter (X) on the news presentation. Furthermore, findings show that journalists in Pakistan can now directly share the news with the audience, suggesting that Twitter (X) has enabled journalists to directly interact with the audience and share news by bypassing traditional intermediaries. It was endorsed by 11 editors with 57 instances of endorsements during interviews. Moreover, it was noted by four editors that Twitter (X) facilitated Pakistani journalists to share exclusive news stories that they couldn't share through their parent media organizations. This highlights that in the Pakistani media landscape, Twitter (X) is becoming an important platform for breaking exclusive news stories by journalists. Overall, the themes highlighted how Twitter (X) has transformed journalistic practices, specifically news dissemination.

## 8. Discussion

Several inquiries were asked from the participants i.e., editors of interviews regarding the impact of Twitter (X) on traditional journalistic practices,

specifically news sourcing and dissemination in Pakistan. In response to several questions asked from the participants regarding significant changes Twitter (x) has brought in traditional journalistic practices in Pakistan i.e., news sourcing and news dissemination, eight important themes were highlighted. In order to importance, all themes are discussed here

### **8.1      Created Ease in Job-related Tasks of Routine**

The majority of participants believed that Twitter (X) has impacted journalism in a positive way by making it easy for journalists to gather information and make news stories. Given this, they said that Twitter made it easier for Pakistani journalists to gather news, specifically the breaking news. One of the participants argued that “Twitter (X) enabled journalists to follow official accounts of notable personalities and important organizations, allowing them to make news stories without visiting the field” (P 5). Similarly, another participant stated that if a journalist is not available, he or she can still follow updates on Twitter (X) using a laptop or mobile (P 11). This normally happens at the time of critical situations, such as a strike or procession (P 13). Similarly, one participant acknowledged that Twitter (X) has reduced the efforts of news gathering as now we can access important national and international updates via Twitter (X) (P 8). These statements also resonate with the study of Hermida (2012) in which the majority of journalists agreed with the notion that Twitter (X) has enhanced efficiency in their news reporting. Furthermore, the current findings are also supported by Varnali and Gorgulu (2015) that the convenience of getting information via Twitter resulted in ease in day-to-day journalistic practices.

### **8.2      Enhanced the Pace of News Gathering**

All participants in the study acknowledged the impact of Twitter (X) on increasing the speed of news gathering by journalists. They said that the use of Twitter has become common among journalists and it has been observed that most of the time journalists tend to report events soon after they happened. One of the participants said, “Twitter (X) has changed the news process and now we can get updates on any issue via our Twitter (X) accounts quickly” (P 10). Similarly, another participant said, “Now journalism has become speed in Pakistan because of social media, particularly Twitter (X)”

(P 6). Additionally, participants acknowledged the notion that “Twitter (X) enabled journalists in Pakistan to develop news stories in less time as the speed of news gathering has been increased due to high use of Twitter (X)” (P 1 and P 2). These statements of participants also resonate with the study of Molyneux (2017) that the speed of news gathering and dissemination has increased due to Twitter. The findings are also in line with the study of Broersma and Graham (2012), Twitter transformed the journalism and news cycle, enabling journalists to access and disseminate information quicker than traditional media.

### **8.3 Compromised Authenticity of the News**

Participants also highlighted a challenge faced by Pakistani news media organizations. The majority of participants showed their concern regarding the news authenticity. Participants said that “Twitter (X) made it easier to gather news but it has raised the issues of authenticity of news sources as a proliferation of fake accounts on Twitter (X) creates misinformation” (P 4, P7 & P 8). Moreover, Participants said that fake news on Twitter (X) can undermine the credibility of news organizations among the public as fake news spreads rapidly via Twitter (X). Atodiresei et al. (2018) also talked about how fake news is spread on Twitter as the findings of their study suggested that fake and unverified news are 70% more likely to be shared through retweets than factual studies. These findings along with insights from current in-depth interviews underscore an emerging challenge faced by media organizations in Pakistan.

### **8.4 Democratized the Information**

This important theme was identified from in-depth interviews, highlighting that in Pakistan, information is now, not in centralized control but Twitter (X) has democratized information and made it easily available for all. As said by one of the participants, “In the past journalists in Pakistan had to go a long way to get information regarding important happenings, but now they can access information easily because the same information is available on Twitter (X)” (P 7). Additionally, a senior editor said, “Democratization of information by Twitter (X) is a good sign for Pakistani journalism as journalists suffered a lot in the past due to involvement of non-journalist

gatekeepers in Pakistan" (P 8). These insights are in line with the arguments of Sturmer and Simon (2004) that gatekeepers in media are bypassed by social media and social media empowers people to access and disseminate information with more freedom. This highlights the crucial role of social media in making information accessible to all.

### **8.5 Heightened the Accountability of Media Organizations**

It was revealed in in-depth interviews that Twitter (X) made the media organization in Pakistan more accountable to the public. As participants said, "Same information which media organizations hide due to any reason, is reported on Twitter (X) by common users" (P 1 & P3). Similarly, another participant said that "Twitter (X) has exposed layers of filters related to ownership, personal interests, and state in Pakistani journalism which continuously influence the news flow. Now, Twitter (X) has bypassed all these filters and allowed common users as well as journalists to access information well in time" (P 5). As also noted by Ricchiardi (2012) noted that in the past, various powers used to control the Pakistani media system, resulting in high-level gatekeeping over media. But, as participants in the current study highlighted the situation is different now due to the democratization of information.

### **8.6 The Trend of Digital Story Telling**

Participants highlighted a new trend brought by Twitter (X) in the contemporary field of news media in Pakistan. Findings showed that Twitter (X) provides opportunities to journalists for digital storytelling. This is an emerging trend in countries like Pakistan. As participants in the current study mentioned journalists use Twitter (X) for news dissemination, engaging with the audience, and digital storytelling. Participants in the current in-depth interviews said, "Twitter (X) enabled journalists in Pakistan to share news content and opinions with a wider audience and hence promoted a trend of digital journalism" (P 4, P 5, and P 6). This is also in line with the existing body of literature on social media and journalism, such as Hermida (2010), due to the interactive nature of Twitter, journalists tend to adopt emerging technologies of storytelling for better audience engagement. This underscored the unique ways of storytelling that are able to increase the capabilities of

journalists to share information in a more effective manner, as noted by Varnali and Gorgulu (2015) that using multimedia techniques in storytelling on social media platforms can pointedly improve audience engagement and enhance the capacity of journalists to share complicated news effectively.

### **8.7 Enabled Journalists to Directly Share News with the Audience**

Findings clearly demonstrated that the majority of editors said that Twitter (X) provides an opportunity for journalists to share information directly with the audience. It was agreed by the majority of the participants that without any delay and waiting for news bulletins, journalists can now share news stories with the public and they can instantly share the news via Twitter (X) as soon as they cover an incident. This highlights the importance of Twitter (X) in important journalistic practice i.e., news dissemination. Moreover, a participant said, "Now Journalists using their Twitter (X) accounts instantly share news from the field at the time of covering important happenings. This is the reason the journalists who are active on Twitter (X) in terms of news dissemination, have thousands of followers" (P 10). By considering this aspect, future researchers can investigate Twitter (X) users' behaviours regarding their reliance on journalists' Twitter (X) accounts. These current insights also resonate with the study of Ahmed (2014), that Twitter facilitates journalists to obtain information in real-time and disseminate information quickly. Moreover, Ashraf and Javed (2014) also argued that journalists use Twitter to interact with audience and share news content.

### **8.8 Sharing of Exclusive News Stories on Twitter (X)**

It was identified by four participants that Twitter (X) helped journalists in Pakistan to disseminate exclusive news stories. One participant said, "Journalists in Pakistan often get exclusive news which can't be shared through their parent media channel. Now, due to Twitter (X) they easily share those news stories and it was not possible in the past because Twitter (X) was not popular among journalists at that time" (P 2). This highlighted the significance of Twitter (X) as an alternative platform, for journalists in Pakistan and align with the concept of "ambient journalism" presented by Hermida (2010), that means, Twitter (X) allows makes it possible for the journalists to report news and give follow-up stories. Another participant

mentioned, “after the popularity of Twitter (X) among Pakistani journalists, most of the journalists share exclusive videos of important happenings using their Twitter (X) accounts and their followers who are in thousands share those videos by retweets. This has made Twitter (X) a platform of breaking news in Pakistan” (P 4). These insights obtained from interviews with editors highlighted how Twitter (X) transformed journalism in Pakistan over time.

## **9. Conclusion & Limitations**

In conclusion, this study provides exciting avenues of research and contributes to the growing scholarly area of social media and journalistic practices. It offers a broad understanding of how Twitter (X) changed mainstream journalistic practices. The findings of the study highlighted that Pakistani journalists adapted Twitter (X) in their day-to-day work-related tasks and shed light on how the use of Twitter (X) by Pakistani journalists changed mainstream journalistic practices. Qualitative in-depth interviews with editors provided useful insights, highlighting the significant role of Twitter (X) in creating ease in news sourcing and dissemination by journalists and this has become an important platform for breaking news stories and digital storytelling. Digital storytelling is a new trend in Pakistan and journalists are adopting new techniques to share information with a wider audience and presence of Pakistani journalists (X) on also increasing their engagement with audience.

The emerging trend of “ambient journalism” was found in mainstream journalistic practices of Pakistan as findings showed that journalists prefer to share exclusive news stories and their supporting footage on Twitter (X) when they can't share them through their parent media channels. This raises an important research question for future scholars to further explore what are the reasons that they can't share specific information through their parent media channels in Pakistan. These insights of the current study also highlighted that Twitter (X) has democratized information in Pakistan and it has bypassed the potential filters and made information available for all. Pakistan is a country where journalism faced many challenges related to censorship in the past. The democratization of information due to Twitter (X) as highlighted in the findings is a good sign for Pakistani journalists. On the other hand, this also challenged the centralized control of media organizations over information

and made them accountable to the public in terms of the free flow of information.

Still, the use of Twitter (X) by journalists for their journalistic performances is a challenge for several reasons, for example, recently in the month of February 2024, the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) imposed a ban on Twitter (X) in view of national security and since then people in Pakistan accessing Twitter (X) by using virtual private networks (VPNs). A similar incident was observed in Pakistan when on May 09 2023, PTA restricted mobile internet and social media websites including Facebook and Instagram. Previously, many scholars discussed the potential role of Twitter (X) in facilitating media organization in various news operations, and the findings of the current study also highlighted the same. In view of this, it is imperative that journalists and media organizations should be provided with easy access to information via social media, particularly Twitter (X).

The limitation researchers faced in the current study was that most of the editors were reluctant to speak up when it came to challenges faced by journalists particularly when they were asked about the non-journalist gatekeepers in media who restrict journalists to access information and use Twitter (X). Secondly, they were less aware of how social media can be a change agent in journalism. So, researchers had to brief them first by giving answers to many general questions posed by them before the start of interviews.

Further investigations are needed to explore the new trends in digital storytelling in Pakistan. The area of ethical considerations while using Twitter (X) in journalistic practices in Pakistan is also yet to be explored. Moreover, there is a need to develop future directions for journalists and telecommunication authorities to rationally regulate social media in Pakistan to avoid misinformation and threats to national security.

## **10. Disclosure Statement**

This research study was conducted without any external funding from any organization. All aspects of this study, including collection of data, analysis, interpretations, and manuscript preparation were carried out in an independent

capacity without financial support from any external entity. The authors declare no conflict of interest related to funding sources for this study.

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## **Episodic Framing in Environmental Media: Analysing Climate Change Coverage by GEO and ARY on Instagram**

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.24312/ucp-jmc.03.02.579>

### **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*

Received June 06, 2025; Received Revision 1 on November 26, 2025; Revision 2 Received December 20, 2025;  
Revision 3 Received December 22, 2025; Accepted December 25, 2025

Available online December 31, 2025

*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 enjoinder 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 statistical 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	Total posts	Formal stylistic frame analysis	
		<b>Thematic</b>	<b>Episodic</b>
January 2024 to July 2024	75	30	45

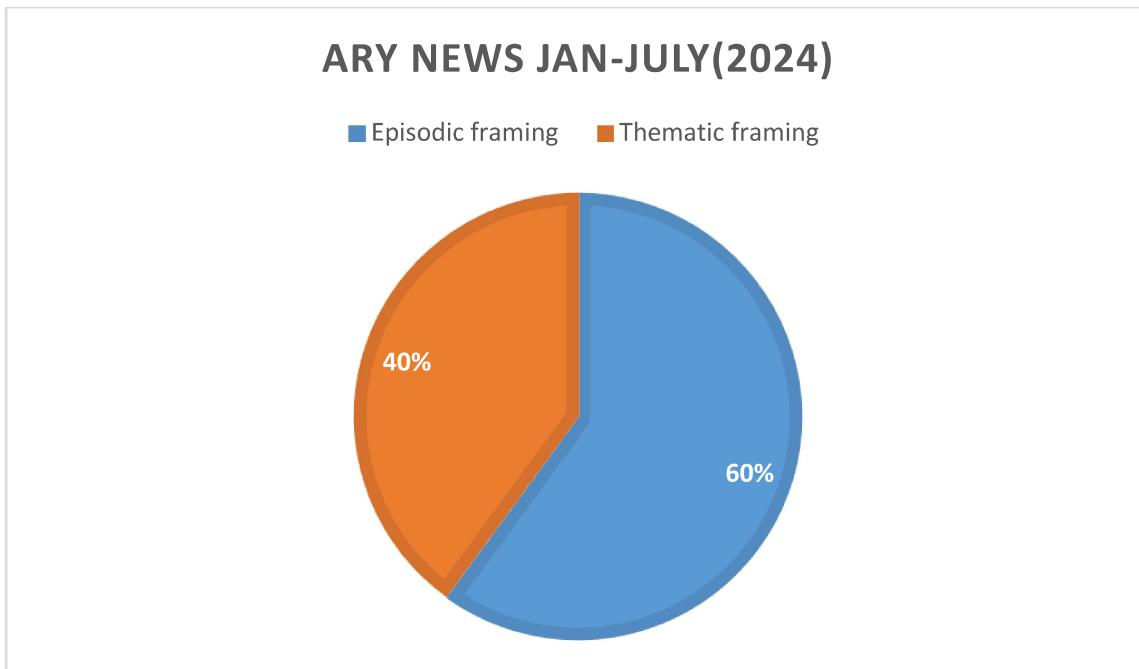
During the selected time period of January 2024 to July 2024, the ARY News Instagram Total Posted 75 news stories about climate change, in which Out of 45 were episodically framed while the remaining 30 were thematically framed.

**Table 6.2** Posts on Instagram of GEO News

Geo News (@geonews)			
Months	Total posts	Formal stylistic frame analysis	
		<b>Thematic</b>	<b>Episodic</b>
January 2024 to July 2024	90	35	55

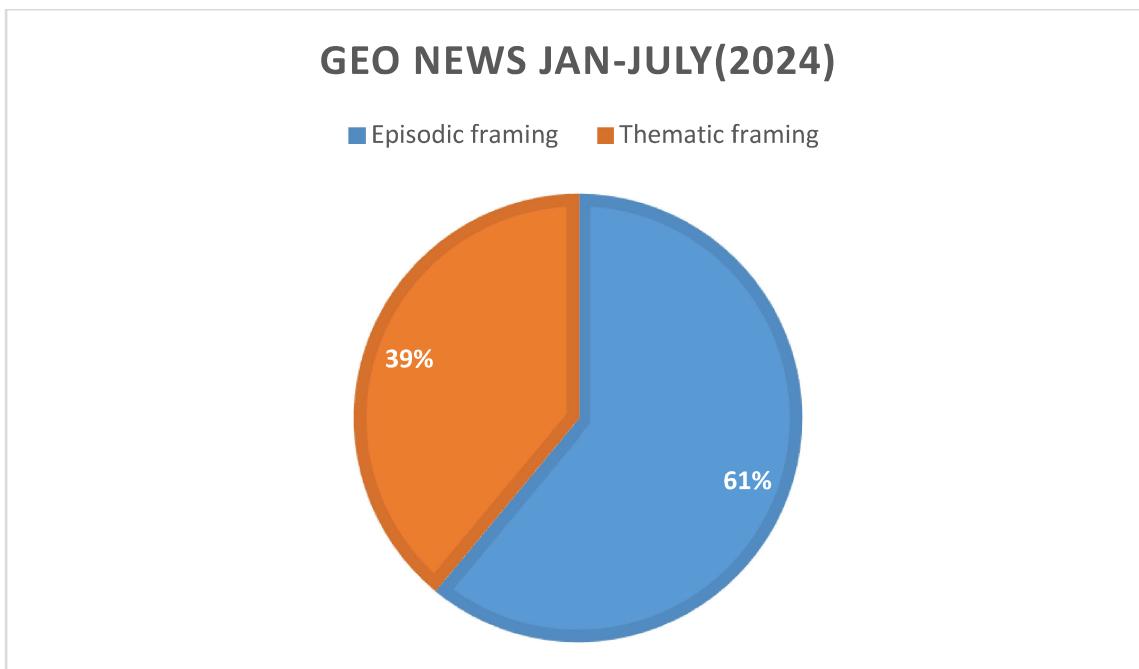
Total of 90 news found on climate change on Geo News Instagram, in which 35 post based on thematic frame and other the rest on episodic.

### *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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