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Representation of Climate Change in Pakistani Media: An Analysis of Print Media News Stories and Official Tweets

Behjat Shahid

Visiting Lecturer (Department of Media and Communication Studies)
University of Home Economics, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
Email: behjatshahid@gmail.com

Muniba Fatima Zahra

Assistant Professor (Department of Media and Communication Studies)
Government College University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan
Email: munibafatima@gcu.edu.pk

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the way Pakistani newspapers and climate ministers have framed climate change from 2020 to 2022. This research has been carried out using a quantitative content analysis. The content of news stories from English print media (Dawn and The Nation) and Urdu print media (Daily Jang and Daily Dunya). Official tweets of the Ministry of Climate Change (PTI and PDM government) regarding coverage of climate change was examined by utilizing deductive frames proposed by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). These frames include attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict, morality, and economic consequences. It was a census study. A total of 208 news stories and 149 tweets were selected for analysis from the year 2020 to 2022. The findings revealed that the attribution of responsibility and economic consequences frames were the most commonly employed frames in both print media and official tweets. Subsequent, conflict and human interest frames were more prominently featured in print media than in the official tweets of the Ministry of Climate Change. Additionally, this study also revealed that government ministries and print media placed the least emphasis on highlighting the morality frame with respect to climate change

Keywords: Climate Change, Framing, Official Tweets, News Stories, Pakistan.

1. Introduction

In today's world, people rely on media and news industry as the primary source to get updated about current events. This is because that the most of information such as news on economy, politics, sports, entertainment, weather and other critical matters exist outside of peoples' personal or communal experience (Bolsen & Shapiro, 2017). Hence, the media having inevitable influence on people shapes public opinion, transforms societies, informs and educates public, and makes them aware towards particular issue (Anderson, 2009). Climate change is one of the issues about which people become aware through the media. Climate-related issues are covered by print, electronic, and online (social) media to keep people informed about this global happening consequently serving as means of educating the general public regarding the environmental and climatic shifts and also imparting cautionary messages and promoting proactive measures (Schäfer & Schlichting, 2014; Kakade et al., 2013; Shanahan, 2011). Corner (2011) inferred that media is the main source of information to get people aware of climate change. Schmidt et al. (2013) also figured it out that increased media coverage of climate change resulted in higher public awareness and education. Public awareness and knowledge holds a critical position towards climate change response. By having significant knowledge, they have been able to influence decision-making, dealing with global warming, support change and actions (UNESCO, 2014).

Pakistan like Bangladesh, Kenya, Haiti, Nigeria and many other developing countries has been identified as the most affected countries in this regard (GCRI, 2020). Regardless of the utmost efforts to attain SDG 13 goal, in the year 2022, the country faced a series of meteorological disasters. Floods have affected over 33 million people; with approximately 8 million displaced. The floods killed almost 1,700 people, one-third of them were children (NDMA, 2022). Pakistan's glaciers are anticipated to disappear by 2035, wreaking havoc on freshwater flow. As Pakistan is an agricultural country, agriculture accounts for 21 percent of its GDP but due to climate change threats its GDP might decline by 18 to 20% by 2050 (Tribune, 2022).

Despite of the fact that that Pakistan falls among countries most vulnerable to climate change media coverage to this hot issue is quite low, resulting in rather limited public knowledge and awareness in Pakistan regarding this issue (Sharif & Medvecky, 2018). Media in Pakistan frame issues like political and military upheaval as the most important issue making climate change to be low on the list of priorities for opinions and newsrooms all over the country (Yousaf et al., 2013). Since people's perception regarding climate change is heavily influenced by media, it is very crucial to investigate the ways media presents this topic (Han et al., 2017). Particularly with respect of Pakistan which is despite its lowest contribution has regarded as the most vulnerable nations (Latif et al., 2022).

Many studies have investigated media portrayal of climate change with respect to developed countries (Han et al., 2017), but If we see the proportion of Asian researchers in the field of climate change communication we could merely find the contribution 14.2% of the total media research (Schäfer & Schlichting, 2014). Methodologically, the proportion of research papers leans somewhat towards quantitative studies (47.8%) compared to qualitative studies (44.85%), while only 7.5% employ a mixed method approach. But Pakistan's contribution to media and climate change research is negligible when compared to that of developed nations and even with some of the Asian countries like India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka (Sharif & Medvecky, 2018).

In Pakistan, some studies have examined the media portrayal of climate change (Ejaz et al., 2022; Hussain et al., 2022; Kim, 2011; Ali, 2020; Ali and Manzoor, 2021; Volkmer & Sharif, 2018; Sharif & Medvecky, 2018; Yousaf et al., 2013). But most of them usually revolve around either quantitative analysis or qualitative approach with little or no scholarly studies on online (Internet media) and electronic media coverage of climate change (Sharif & Medvecky, 2018). Furthermore, the prevailing approach in the investigation of climate change coverage within research studies has involved the utilization of framing analysis, employing an inductive qualitative method (Antilla, 2005). This paper partly focuses on analyzing media portrayal of climate change in Pakistan. It investigates the coverage of climate change through the lenses of five deductive frames defined by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) and the tweets of PTI and PDM climate ministers from the years spanning 2020 – 2022. The rationale for selecting this time period from

2020 to 2022 was that during covid-19 lockdown in year 2020 there was a significant improvement in air quality (Ilyas et al., 2022). Year 2022 is recognized as most horrific year in Pakistani history as country experienced deadly floods that affected 15% of the country's population (Bhutta et al., 2022). The present research also supplements the understanding of framing techniques utilized in prominent newspapers and official tweets with respect to climate change.

2. Research Questions

The present paper aims to examine how the five generic frames defined by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) are applied in the climate change coverage of print media news stories and official tweets of ministry of climate change in Pakistan. This research should be complemented by framing analyses of media. As we look for dominant frames in selected newspapers and tweets difference of coverage of English and Urdu newspapers. This results in following Research Questions:

RQ1: What are the dominant frames used by Dawn and The Nation for the coverage of climate change from 2020 to 2022?

RQ2: What are the dominant frames used by the Daily Jang and Dunya for the coverage of climate change from 2020 to 2022?

RQ3: What are the dominant frames used in the tweets of climate ministers regarding climate change from 2020 to 2022?

3. Hypotheses

As stated, this study looks for difference of coverage of attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict, morality and economic (consequences) frames in print media news stories and official tweets and expect Morality and Conflict frame should be reflected less in print media than tweets. In addition, this study assumes that Economic consequences and attribution of responsibility will be prominent in news stories. The human interest frame is also expected to be used more in tweets. This results in the following hypotheses:

H1: English print media covered climate issues more as compared to Urdu print media.

H2: English news sorties covered economic consequences and human interest frames more than Urdu print media.

H3: Morality frames are least likely to be covered in Pakistani print media as compared to tweets.

H4: Conflict frames are least likely to be covered in Pakistani print media as compared to tweets.

H5: Economic consequences frame is more dominant in news stories as compared to tweets.

H6: Attribution of responsibility frame is highlighted more in Pakistani print media as compared to tweets.

H7: Human Interest frames are used less in news stories as compared to tweets.

H8: There is a significance difference in the nature of frames highlighted in tweets of climate change ministers during mentioned years.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Media and Climate Change

The news media assumes a critical role as a main source of information pertaining to climate change for individuals (Hansen, 2010). But portrayal of climate change in news media should not be viewed as merely as a compilation of stories from newspapers and television segments. Rather, it should be understood as a complex social process involving several players, with the specific news items serving as mediators in this interaction (Boykoff, 2007). It is also argued that media most often utilizes climate change information strategically in order to persuade public towards a certain agenda or to endorse an objective in particular. Media disseminates information on climate change through several frames that shapes audiences' perceptions of the relevant topic (Bolsen & Shapiro, 2017).

The analysis and assessment of past studies disclosed that interests of politicians and media practitioners affect the coverage of climate change (Anderson, 2009). Antilla (2005) expounded upon many factors that exert influence on the portrayal of media with regards to climate change for instance selection & de-selection and focus of content, interests, policies, climate scepticism and dynamics of climate research, ethics and journalistic norms. This change in view point could lead to bias in media coverage about climate change (Xie et al., 2015). Feldman et al. (2012) found the coverage of climate change in US has been media biased over the years that Fox News tend to portray a higher frequency of climate change denial and other CNN or MSNBC exhibited the issue as the greater concern. Similarly, Semujju (2013) inferred that news about climate change in Uganda tend to favour the stakeholders who have media control.

4.2 Print and Twitter Media Portrayal of Climate Change

Although the general public is now conscious about climate change climate change through different source of media like electronic and digital media, but print media continues to be the significant and credible source of information for the individuals on issues like climate change (Tairo, 2011; Kakade et al., 2013). Its extensive coverage not only raises awareness regarding local level climate issues but also keep people updated regarding major global climate events as well (Azmi et al., 2015). But according to Ogbimi (2012) and Chinenye et al. (2015) print media coverage to climate change is generally event driven, even in the country like Pakistan (most vulnerable to climate change) media covers this issue only when any calamity strikes (Azmi et al., 2015; Razaque et al., 2020).

Ewart and McLean (2015) inferred that at times, print media instead of focusing on disaster management plays blame. Olausson (2009) and Young and Dugas (2011) also contended that the majority of climate change reporting is often one-dimensional, concentrating on discrete aspects of the problem and it most often focuses on a certain agenda using several frames within the framework of politics and economics. Pakistan is a country where climate change coverage is relatively low because of insecurity, disapproval, and a lack of environmental awareness (Sharif & Medvecky, 2018). Also due to

country's current social, political, military turmoil and resources constraints, editorials and newsrooms across the nation do not prioritize environmental reporting (Yousaf et al., 2013; Volkmer & Sharif, 2018; Ali, 2020; Ali & Manzoor, 2021; Hussain et al., 2022). Aside from this lack of expertise, education, Western approach and paradigm of environmental journalism also influence climate change reporting (Ejaz et al., 2021). According to Javed (2020) and Qaisar et al. (2021) print media also uses several frames for portrayal of climate change Pakistan accompanied by allocation of space.

The use of Twitter as a means to evaluate public sentiment towards a particular matter, such as climate change, has experienced a surge in popularity (Fownes et al., 2018). It has now become valuable platform for disseminating information and raising awareness about climate change (Cody et al., 2015; Maynard et al., 2017; Berglez & Al-Saqaf., 2020). Open-ended tweet posts can provide valuable insights into the challenges associated with discussions about climate change. The discourse surrounding the existence of climate change, the level of public awareness regarding the issue, and the consensus among professionals on this matter constitute a prominent and recurrent topic of discussion within the Twitter platform (Jang & Hart, 2015). A study revealed that in countries like United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and Norway tweets found to be highest in proportion to get climate change information and social networks have become a major source to grab climate related information (Kirilenko & Stepchenkova, 2014).

Akhtar et al. (2023) and Jongman et al., (2015) in their studies found social media platforms (specifically tweets) has emerged as most effective tool for taking preventive measure for disaster management in country like Pakistan. Murthy and Longwell (2012) found that during the 2010 floods in Pakistan users as well as authorities significantly favored linking to social media such as twitter. But twitter has also been found as a tool to represent climate change as a hoax than as a true phenomenon by displaying several framing techniques (Jang & Hart, 2015). Moreover, twitter coverage to climate change also found to be event driven as an increase in weather events may increase the level of attention directed towards climate change (Sisco et

al., 2017). This is why politicians' frequent tweets about any climate issue make people believe it's a hot topic (Maynard et al., 2017).

4.3 The Framing of Climate Change

Many studies focusing on coverage of climate change have studied framing utilizing inductive qualitative analysis (Antilla, 2005). Despite having numerous methods to frame climate change news journalists tend to utilize "generic frames". In comparison to qualitative inductive frame analyses, deductive investigations of generic news frames in the context of global warming and climate change coverage allow for the examination and comparison of frames as well as framing methodologies (Dirikx & Gelders, 2010). Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) identified five deductive frames that are commonly utilized in news coverage. These frames are responsibility, conflict, economic consequences, human interest, and morality frames. The presence of these general frames has been widely observed across various cultures and throughout diverse news contexts (Dirikx & Gelders, 2010). This paper will analyze these five frames in the print and twitter media coverage of climate change.

The presence of Attribution of responsibility frame occurs when news stories primarily emphasizes the source or solution of an issue or incident that impacts an individual, group, place, or country. The responsibility frame is anticipated to be extensively employed in the discourse surrounding climate change due to its emphasis on the need for proactive measures to mitigate its effects, as well as the recognition of human activities as significant contributors to global warming (Chon & Kim, 2022). Dirikx and Gelders (2010) analysed the framing of climate change coverage in Dutch and French newspapers during the annual United Nations Conferences of the Parties and found responsibility frame as the most utilized by print media. Similarly, Nagarajan and Aram (2022) studied print media coverage of the 26th annual Glasgow Climate Change Conference from October 17 to November 14, 2021, in The Hindu and The Times of India and found attribution of responsibility frame was the most prominent one highlighting government responsibilities for mitigating climate change.

The Conflict frame effectively accentuates the presence of conflict among individuals, groups, or organizations in order to capture the viewer's attention. It also accentuates the differences among political parties and individuals over the matter of climate change, with a major emphasis on the pursuit of win and defeat. Climate change conflict situations can be classified based on several aspects, including disputes regarding the genesis of climate change, difficulties related to climate funding, and the extent of commitment towards mitigating greenhouse gas emissions (Biswas & Kim, 2016). Boykoff and Boykoff (2004) argue that the prestige press provides equal coverage to both proponents and sceptic of climate change, leading to increased levels of misinformation and disagreement concerning anthropogenic climate change. Nonetheless, according to Boykoff (2007), between the years 2003 and 2006, there was a significant decrease in the amount of balanced reporting, and more recent research that was conducted along the same lines revealed little support for the standard of journalistic balance reporting. Despite the fact that these studies appear to indicate a decline in conflict over the truth and causes of climate change, additional research indicates that conflict is still the most frequently cited frame (An & Gower, 2009).

The human-interest frame approaches an issue from a more emotive standpoint; it humanizes a problem. In the context of climate change, this may involve narratives describing how individuals' lives have been affected by the phenomenon. It appeals to the individual's emotions by personalizing an issue or concern, such as climate change, to make it more relevant to their daily lives. Ford and King (2015) inferred that climate change reports often include humanistic approach in mitigating weather impacts and focused more on need to adapt than actual adaptation.

Han et al. (2017) in his studies found human interest effect were the most utilised frame by Chinese print media while covering climate change and highlighting joint global mitigation efforts. Similarly, Ogbimi (2012), during the famine in Somalia due to climate change human interest frames were determined to be the most prevalent frame. This frame emphasised the suffering of the hunger victims and their living situations in a way that stirs strong feelings of sorrow for the people. Ali and Mahmood (2013) investigated

the visual coverage of floods in the Pakistani press in 2010 and found newspapers frequently highlighted human interest frame in their coverage.

The morality frame contextualizes the event, circumstance, or issue within the parameters of religious principles or moral imperatives. As has been previously observed, journalists commonly employ this framing technique in an indirect manner. On the other hand, scholarly studies of the ethical framework employed in climate reporting mostly focus on the assessment of the environmental impact as being either significant, beneficial, or detrimental (Biswas & Kim, 2016).

This Economic (consequences) frame is commonly observed in news coverage that focuses on the economic consequences, advantages, or broader impact of an event or issue on individuals, groups, and/or organizations. The utilization of this frame can effectively generate and maintain public interest in a certain subject or event, while the magnitude of economic consequences may vary depending on the specific circumstances. Numerous scholarly studies have been conducted to analyse the way media depicts the consequences of global warming.

In February 2019, research conducted by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration revealed that a total of 14 climate disasters occurred in the year 2018. Among these disasters, Hurricane Michael was identified as the most severe, resulting in an estimated \$91 billion in losses (NOAA, 2019). Tong (2014) in his studies examined newspaper investigative stories on environmental concerns from 10 Chinese publications from 2008 to 2011. The findings revealed that these reports depicted environmental issues in ways that contradicted the national aim for economic growth.

5. Method

In order to investigate climate change coverage in Pakistan, a quantitative content analysis (N = 357) of four leading newspapers and official tweets of the Ministry of Climate Change (PTI and PDM government) was conducted from 1st January 2020 to 31st December 2022.

5.1 Content Analysis

Survey was conducted with 20 parents for this research. This sample size was chosen to provide a range of insights into how Facebook usage affects parent-adolescent interactions.

5.2 Sample

For the collection of data initially, the content of selected newspapers and tweets was retrieved through their official websites (by sing key word climate change, environment, climate), their traditional resources and twitter handles respectively. Consecutive coverage of climate change from year 2020 to 2022 was part of analysis of frames highlighted in news stories of selected newspaper and in tweets of official minsters. A total 357 news stories (208) and tweets (149) selected from respective newspapers and twitter handles of minister. 73 new stories were from DAWN, 64 from The Nation, 57 from Daily Jang, and 14 news stories were analysed. On the other hand, 62 tweets from twitter handle of PTI minister and 87 from PDM minister's twitter handle were retrieved.

5.3 Measures

A coding sheet based on deductive frames suggested by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) was prepared for the quantitative content analysis of news stories and tweets. For each news story and tweet, coders recorded formal variables including ID (unique identification number), Name of newspaper/minister of which the content is selected, Year, the language of the news stories/tweets that is either Urdu or English, and its genre. Quantitative content analysis of news stories and tweets was mainly based on content variables of five deductive frames, responsibility, conflict, human-interest, morality and economic consequences frames.

5.3.1 Attribution of Responsibility Frame

To measure attribution of responsibility frame in news stories and tweets the following 5 indicators were measured: govt. has the ability to alleviate the

problem, govt. is responsible for the problem/issue, suggests a solution to the problem/issue, individual is responsible for the issue/problem, problem requires urgent action, and govt. has the ability to alleviate the problem and Krippendorff's alpha was .77, .85, .79, .72, and .81 respectively.

5.3.2 Human-Interest Frame

To measure human-interest frame in news stories and tweets the following 5 indicators were measured: human example or human face on the issue, employing personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy, caring, sympathy, compassion, individuals and groups are affected by issues/problem, visual information that generates feelings of outrage, empathy, caring, sympathy, compassion, shows the private or personal lives of actors, and human example or human face on the issue Krippendorff's alpha was .76, .85, .90, .88, and .77 respectively.

5.3.3 Conflict Frame

To measure the conflict frame in news stories and tweets the following 4 indicators were measured: disagreement between parties/individuals/groups/countries, parties/individuals/groups/countries reproach another, two or more than two sides of the issue/problem, story refers to winners or losers and Krippendorff's alpha was .85, .73, .78, and .71 respectively.

5.3.4 Morality Frame

To measure morality frame in news stories and tweets the following 3 indicators were measured: shows any moral message, reference to morality or other religious tenets, social prescription about how to behave Krippendorff's alpha was .71, .72, and .77 respectively.

5.3.5 Economic (Consequences) Frame

To measure economic consequences frame in news stories and tweets the following 3 indicators were measured: losses and gain (now or in the future),

costs/degree of the expense involved, pursuing and not pursuing a course of action Krippendorff's alpha was .72, .81, and .76 respectively.

6. Findings & Discussion

The paper primarily focuses on content analysis of news stories of four prominent newspapers in Pakistan i.e. Dawn, The Nation, Daily Jang, and Daily Duniya and Official Tweets of ministry of climate change from year 2020 to 2022.

Figure 6.1

Genre of Text

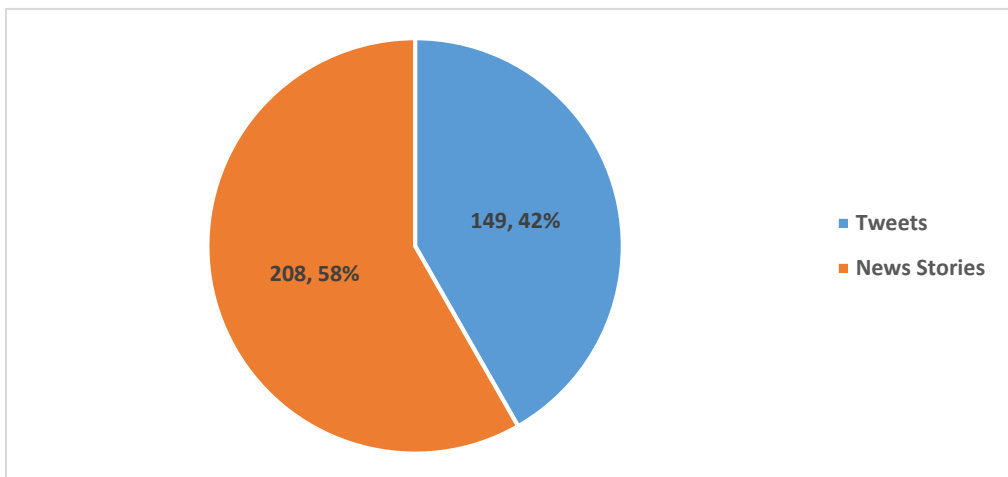
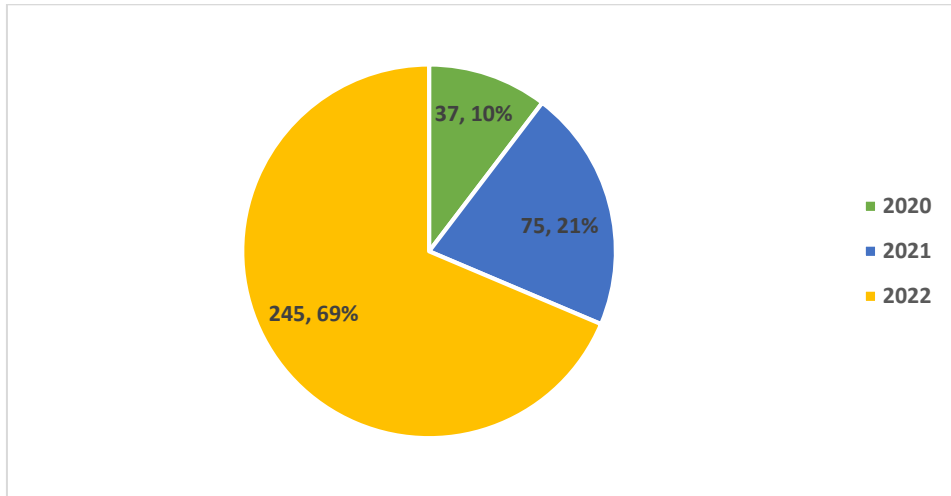


Figure 6.1 shows the genre of text selected from year 2020 to 2022. It was census study and findings show that total 357 articles including news stories and tweets were analysed. The analysis shows that news stories were published more 208 (58%) whereas 149 (42%) tweets were made regarding climate change by the ministers of climate change.

Figure 6.2

News Stories and Tweets about Climate Change Published in Selected Year



The figure 6.2 presents the number of news stories and tweets with respect to climate change appeared in selected years (2020-2022) in selected newspapers and official tweets of climate change ministry. Findings shows number of news stories and official tweets published in the year 2022 were 245(69%), in year 2021, 75(21%) news stories and tweets were made. Where as in the year 2020, 37(10%) news stories and tweets addressed climate change. So, it can be inferred that maximum news stories and tweets related to climate change were appeared in year 2022.

The frequency distribution analysis addressing RQ1 (What are the dominant frames used by the Dawn and The Nation for the coverage of climate change from 2020 to 2022) exhibited that the attribution of responsibility frame appeared most frequently in english print media but Dawn used this frame more prominently with “Problem requires urgent actions” indicator 50(68.5%) The Nation that focused “suggests a solution to the problem/issue” indicator 25(39.1%). Economic consequences frame was the second most commonly found frame in both newspapers with “losses and Gain (now or in the future)” as frequently highlighted indicator but Dawn employed it more commonly 38(52.1%) than The Nation 28(43.8%). Conflict frame was the third most frequently used frame in news stories of Dawn with with “Party/individuals/groups/countries reproach another” indicator 21(28.8%) than The Nation 15(23.4%).

In The Nation human interest received prominence as third most frequently utilized frame with “Human example or human face on the issue” indicator 17(26.6%) as compared to Dawn that commonly used “Individuals and groups are affected by issues/problem” indicator 20(27.4%). Whereas Dawn did not publish any news story highlighting morality frame, The Nation covered three news story with “Shows any moral message” indicator 3(4.7%). These findings are aligned with An and Gower (2009) who concluded that for the coverage of crisis and climate change attribution of responsibility frame and economic (consequences) frame are more frequently highlighted frame in news stories of print media. Media focuses on attribution of responsibility frame most likely to blame government and organization and economic consequences to take immediate action on climate related damage.

The frequency distribution analysis addressing RQ2 (What are the dominant frames used by the Daily Jang and Dunya for the coverage of climate change from 2020 to 2022) showed that the attribution of responsibility was prevalent frame in the news stories of Daily Jang and Daily Dunya but Daily Jang used it more frequently with “Problem requires urgent actions” indicator 36(63.2%) than Daily Dunya 12 (85.7%). Economic consequences frame was the second most utilized frame in both newspapers with “losses and Gain (now or in the future)” indicator however Daily Jang 16(28.1%) used it frequently than Daily Dunya 6(42.9%). Further analysis showed that conflict frame was prevalent in Daily Jang with “party/individuals/groups/countries reproach another” indicator 20(35.1%) than Daily Dunya 2(14.3%). While highlighting human interest frame, Daily Jang used “human example or human face on the issue” indicator 8(14%) more than Daily Dunya that covered “individuals and groups are affected by issues/problem” indicator 3(21.4%) commonly.

Daily Dunya did not cover any news highlighting morality frame whereas Daily Jang published only one with “social prescription about how to behave” indicator 1(1.8%). The findings indicated attribution of responsibility and economic consequences as the most widespread frames for coverage of climate change in Urdu print media news stories. These findings align with Nagarajan and Aram (2022) who inferred that for mitigation and on annual conferences of parties for climate change local newspapers commonly used these frame to call government attention and responsibilities for mitigating and to take necessary action for climate related economic loss.

The frequency distribution analysis addressing RQ3 (What are the dominant frames used in the tweets of climate ministers regarding climate

change from 2020 to 2022) exhibited attribution of responsibility as frequently highlighted frame in tweets of both ministers where PDM Minister mostly used “problem requires urgent action” indicator 28(32.2%) whereas PTI minister commonly used “government has the ability to alleviate the problem” indicator 23(37.1%). While utilizing human interest frame PTI minister focused on the “Individuals and groups are affected by issues/problem” indicator 14(16.1%) whereas PDM climate minister remained consistent with “human example or human face on the issue” 16(18.4%). In tweets highlighting conflict frame PTI climate minister emphasized “disagreement b/w parties/individuals/groups/countries” indicator 10(16.1%) while PDM climate minister focused “party/individuals/groups/countries reproach another” indicator 17(19.5%).

Economic consequences was fourth prevalent frame in tweets of both minister, talking about loss and gain 11(12.6%) and 4(6.5%) respectively. These findings lined up with Ghoraba (2023) who deduced that in communication of climate change of Spanish politicians on twitter depict the human race as engaged in a fight and blame game (conflict frame) with opponents against the issue resultantly portraying climate change as a natural tragedy.

Table 6.1

Difference of Coverage of Climate Issues in News Stories of English and Urdu Print Media

Variable	English Print Media (n=137)		Urdu Print Media (N=71)		<i>t</i> (208)	<i>P</i>	95% <i>CI</i>		<i>Cohen's d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
Climate Issues	3.69	1.842	3.14	1.615	2.109	.036	.259	0.035	0.317

Note: CI= Confidence Interval, LL= Lower Limit, UL= Upper Limit,

Independent Sample t test was applied to check difference of highlighting climate issues in the news stories of English (Dawn and The Nation) and Urdu (Daily Dunya and Daily Jang) print media and to test H1. The results showed English print media gave significant coverage to climate issues as compared

to Urdu print media. The findings showed that the English print media ($M=3.69$, $SD=1.842$) published more news stories on climate issues as compared to Urdu print media ($M=3.14$, $SD=1.615$), $t(208)$, $p<.05$, $d=0.317$.

The results has supported the H1 that the English print media covers climate issues more as compared to Urdu print media. It is also in line with Sharif and Medvecky (2018) who concluded that Urdu print media coverage on climate issues is comparatively less than English print media. Climate change and environmental issues receives more prominence in English print media. Moreover, Ejaz et al. (2023) found that over the years there is significance increase in English print media coverage on climate change and environmental issues.

Table 6.2

Difference of Coverage of Economic (Cosequences) and Human Interest Frames in News Stories of English and Urdu Print Media

Variable	English Print Media (n=137)		Urdu Print Media (N=71)		$t(208)$	p	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
Responsibilitiy frame	1.62	.892	1.45	.807	1.343	.181	-.079	.419	0.199
Human Interest frame	.53	.805	.32	.752	1.855	.046	-.014	.431	0.269
Conflict frame	.55	.962	.54	.859	.090	.928	-.255	.280	0.010
Morality frame	.01	.085	.01	.119	-.473	.636	-.035	.021	0.000
Economic Consequences frame	.98	.903	.82	1.060	1.092	.027	-.131	.453	0.248

Note: CI= Confidence Interval, LL= Lower Limit, UL= Upper Limit,

Independent Sample t test was applied to find the difference of coverage of economic (consequences) and human interest frames in English (Dawn and The Nation) and Urdu (Daily Dunya and Daily Jang) print media and to test H2. Result of t test showed that news stories highlighting economic (consequences) ($M=.98$, $SD=.903$) and human interest frames ($M=.53$, $SD=.805$) received more frequent coverage in English print media as compared to Urdu print media economic (consequences) ($M=.82$, $SD=1.060$)

and human interest frames ($M=.32$, $SD=.752$) , $t(208)$, $p<.05$, $d=0.248$ & 0.269 .

The result validates the H2 that while covering climate change English media highlights human-interest and economic (consequences) frame more as compared to Urdu print media. This finding also showed agreement with Ali and Mahmood (2013) who inferred that human-interest (depicting grief, misery and suffering) and economic consequences (showing loss and damage) are more prominent in English print media covering climate change and relevant environmental issues. On the other hand Urdu print media less frequently highlight these frames in their news stories while covering climate change and environmental issues.

Table 6.3

Difference of Coverage of Morality Frame in Pakistani Print Media and Official Tweets of Ministry of Climate Change

Variable	News Stories		Tweets		<i>t</i> (357)	<i>P</i>	95% <i>CI</i>		<i>Cohen's d</i>
	(n=208)		(N=149)				<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>					
Morality frame	.01	.098	.05	.212	2.001	.047	.001	.074	0.242

Note: CI= Confidence Interval, LL= Lower Limit, UL= Upper Limit,

Independent Sample t test was applied to find the difference of coverage of morality frame in print media news stories and tweets of ministry of climate change and to test H3. The result of t test showed that both English (Dawn and The Nation) and Urdu (Daily Dunya and Daily Jang) print media gave significantly less coverage to morality frame as compared to official tweets of ministers (PDM and PTI Minister). The findings showed that morality frame in news stories of print media was ($M=.01$, $SD=.098$) less used than official tweets ($M=.05$, $SD=.212$), $t(357)$, $p<.05$, $d=0.242$.

The result validates the H3 that morality frames are least likely to be covered in Pakistani print media as compared to tweets. The results are also in line with Dirikx and Gelders (2010) that print media uses morality frames only in crises that may be avoided, when there is a high degree of intentionality and controllability. When reporting on a crisis, the news media may draw attention to moral and ethical issues.

Table 6.4

Difference of Coverage of Conflict Frame in Pakistani Print Media and Official Tweets of Ministry of Climate Change

Variable	News Stories (n=208)		Tweets (N=149)		<i>t</i> (357)	<i>p</i>	95% <i>CI</i>		<i>Cohen's d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
Conflict frame	.54	.926	.39	.685	-1.806	.072	-.322	.014	0.184

Note: *CI*= Confidence Interval, *LL*= Lower Limit, *UL*= Upper Limit,

Independent Sample *t* test was applied to find the difference of coverage of conflict frame in print media news stories and tweets of ministry of climate change and to test H4. The results showed both English (Dawn and The Nation) and Urdu (Daily Dunya and Daily Jang) print media gave more significant coverage to conflict frame compared to official tweets of ministers (PTI and PDM minister). The findings showed that conflict frame in news stories of print media was ($M=.54$, $SD=.926$) more highlighted than official tweets ($M=.39$, $SD=.685$), $t(357)$, $p<.05$, $d=.184$.

Hence, the H4 'conflict frame are least likely to be covered in print media news stories as compared to official tweets of climate ministers' is not supported by the findings of this study. This finding is also supported by Dotson et al. (2012) who stated that while portrayal of climate change centred on political ideology of the media, conflict frame is more frequently used frame by media. The conflict frame was more frequently employed in a strike.

The internal conflict between the dominant party and the employee members of other parties. Some may place the responsibility for the issue with management, while others may place the blame with the unions. How the media assigns responsibility for the strike may be significant in this uncertain circumstance.

Table 6.5

Difference of Coverage of Economic (Consequences) Frame in Pakistani Print Media and Official Tweets of Ministry of Climate Change

Variable	News Stories (n=208)		Tweets (N=149)		<i>t</i> (357)	<i>p</i>	95% <i>CI</i>		<i>Cohen's d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
<i>Economic (Consequences) frames</i>	.23	.422	.02	.141	-6.692	.0	-.273	-.149	0.667

Note: CI= Confidence Interval, LL= Lower Limit, UL= Upper Limit,

Independent Sample *t* test was applied to find the difference of coverage of economic (consequences) frame in print media news stories and tweets of ministry of climate change and to test H5. The results showed both English (Dawn and The Nation) and Urdu (Daily Dunya and Daily Jang) print media gave more significant coverage to economic (consequences) frame. The findings showed that economic (consequences) frame in news stories of print media was ($M=.23$, $SD=.422$) more highlighted than official tweets ($M=.02$, $SD=.141$), $t(357)$, $p<.05$, $d= 0.667$. Thus, these findings have supported the H5 that economic (consequences) frame receives more dominant coverage in print media news stories as compared to official tweets of climate ministers.

The findings of this study also get in lined with An and Gower (2009) who stated that economic consequences is most frequently used frame when media outlets talk about loss and damage occurs due to any crisis or any environmental issue with major economic deterioration. Economic consequences are most frequently used as a reference to potential gains and losses, the necessity for quick action, and problems that may arise as a result of a crisis.

Dirikx and Gelders (2010) also discovered that in crisis news stories or covering climate change, economic consequences frame is the most utilized frame when media make reference to losses and gains that could result from not pursuing a particular course of action (the consequences frame). Media most often emphasise the necessity for quick action by government or to urge to follow a particular strategy.

Table 6.6

Difference of Coverage of Attribution of Responsibility Frame in Pakistani Print Media and Official Tweets of Ministry of Climate Change

Variable	News Stories (n=208)		Tweets (N=149)		<i>t</i> (357)	<i>P</i>	95% <i>CI</i>		<i>Cohen's d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
<i>Attribution of responsibility frame</i>	1.56	.866	.89	.663	-8.357	.000	-.836	-.517	0.868

Note: *CI*= Confidence Interval, *LL*= Lower Limit, *UL*= Upper Limit,

Independent Sample *t* test was applied to find the difference of coverage of attribution of responsibility frame in print media news stories and tweets of ministry of climate change and to test H6. The findings showed that both English (Dawn and The Nation) and Urdu (Daily Dunya and Daily Jang) print media gave more significant coverage to attribution of responsibility frame. The findings also showed that attribution of responsibility frame in news stories of print media was ($M=1.56$, $SD=.866$) more highlighted than official tweets ($M=.89$, $SD=.663$), $t(357)$, $p<.05$, $d=0.868$.

Thus, this finding supported H6 that attribution of responsibility frames get prominent space in print media news stories as compared to tweets. The findings of this study are also inline with Han et al. (2017) who concluded that when covering a crisis, the news media frequently use responsibility frame to assign blame specifically to the person or group involved and places the blame for the problem on one of the two.

This is especially true when covering crises that might have been avoided, including organisational wrongdoing, poor management, and wrongdoing that results in injuries. As a result, in crisis circumstances when there is a high degree of controllability and intentionality on the side of the actor, the news media is more inclined to concentrate on attribution of responsibility frame.

Table 6.7

Difference of Coverage of Human Interest Frame in Pakistani Print Media and Official Tweets of Ministry of Climate Change

Variable	News Stories (n=208)		Tweets (N=149)		<i>t</i> (357)	<i>p</i>	95% <i>CI</i>		<i>Cohen's d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
<i>Attribution of responsibility frame</i>	.46	.792	.28	.580	-2.568	.011	-.329	-.044	0.259

Note: CI= Confidence Interval, LL= Lower Limit, UL= Upper Limit,

Independent Sample *t* test was applied to find the difference of coverage of human interest frame in print media news stories and tweets of ministry of climate change and to test H7. The findings showed that both English (Dawn and The Nation) and Urdu (Daily Dunya and Daily Jang) print media gave more significant coverage to human interest frame as compared to official tweets of PTI and PDM climate ministers. According to findings human interest frame in news sotries of print media ($M=.46$, $SD=.792$) received more coverage than official tweets ($M=.28$, $SD=.580$), $t(357)$, $p<.05$, $d= 0.259$.

Hence, the H7 ‘human interest frames are least likely to be covered in print media news stories as compared to offical tweets of climate ministers’ is not supported by the findings of this study. The findigns of this study are also in line with An and Gower (2009) who inferred that crisis news sotries more frequently employed attribution of responsibility, economics, conflicts, human interest, and morality frames but in certain type of crisis that directly affect people human interest is the frequerly sued frame in news stories.

For instance, the human-interest frame is used to tell stories about groups of victims, to depict human suffering, and to give stories an emotional undertone. Thus, findigns of this study doesn’t support this hypothesis.

Table 6.8

Difference of Frames Highlighted in Official Tweets of Ministers of Ministry of Climate Change

Variable	PTI Minister (1) (n=62)		PDM Minister (2) (N=87)		<i>t</i> (149)	<i>P</i>	95% <i>CI</i>		<i>Cohen's d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
Responsibility frame	.95	.556	.84	.729	1.068	.287	-.105	.330	0.169
Human Interest frame	.11	.447	.39	.635	-3.133	.002	-.453	-.103	0.509
Conflict frame	.45	.717	.34	.662	.938	.350	-.118	.332	0.159
Morality frame	.08	.275	.02	.151	1.500	.137	-.019	.134	0.270
Economic (Consequences) frame	.11	.447	.22	.443	-1.425	.157	-.252	.141	0.247

Note: CI= Confidence Interval, LL= Lower Limit, UL= Upper Limit,

Independent sample t test was applied in order to find difference in nature of frames highlighted in tweets of climate ministers during 2020-2022 and to test H8. Results of t test showed that there was no significant difference in nature of frames highlighted in tweets of both ministers except human interest frame. While talking about climate change PDM climate minister utilized human interest frame ($M=.39$, $SD=.635$) more frequently as compared to PTI minister ($M=.11$, $SD=.447$), $t(208)$, $p<.05$, $d=0.509$.

Thus, H8 is not supported by the finding of this study. The findings of this hypothesis are also inline with Yu et al., (2021) Politicians from diverse parties continue to tweet about climate change to appeal to their fans, even after accounting for party differences. These tweets from politicians largely follow the same patterns and don't differ significantly. Most frequently, these politicians mention how much they value environmental policies in order to indirectly benefit their parties and win over more followers.

7. Conclusion

The present study has examined the climate change coverage in top-tier newspapers of Pakistan and the official tweets of ministry of climate change

using the deductive framing analysis described by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). It explored the difference of coverage of attribution of responsibility, human interest, conflict, morality and economic (consequences) frames in print media news stories and official tweets. The results indicated that English print media provides a significant coverage to climate change in Pakistan as compared to Urdu print media. The attribution of responsibility frame was the most frequently employed frame in both print media and official tweets. This frame was either focused on governments' responsibility to alleviate climate change, bringing its attention towards issues that require quick action or highlighting climate mitigation efforts and initiatives taken by government. This study also revealed that print media highlights conflict issues and disagreements between parties related to climate change more as compared to minister. It also gives more prominence to emotional, physical and substantial damage and suffering of people affected from climate change. But when it comes to moral responsibility and creating awareness in people regarding climate change, print media and tweets of ministers lack the professional and ethical responsibility despite of the fact that Pakistan ranks the eighth most vulnerable country to climate change.

8. Recommendations for Future Researchers

The future researchers may explore inductive framing analysis of print media news stories and tweets. Moreover, the content of other media such TV channels can also be examined by using deductive framing analysis can also be done.

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Assessing the Quality of COVID-19 Information on Social Media in Zimbabwe: Implications for Future Crisis Communication

Clemenciana Mukenge

Department of Creative Media and Communication,
University of Zimbabwe, Zimbabwe.

Email: cmukengec@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study examines the quality of COVID-19 information on social media among students in Zimbabwe, focusing on six information quality indicators (comprehensiveness, accuracy, relevance, accessibility, reliability, consistency) to inform future crisis communication strategies. An online questionnaire was administered and 284 respondents participated. Descriptive and inferential statistics (one-way ANOVA and chi-square tests) were employed to analyze the survey data. The results showed that COVID-19 social media information was perceived as accurate (mean = 4.23), accessible (mean = 4.01), comprehensive (mean = 3.89), relevant (mean = 3.65), and consistent (mean = 3.45), while reliability scored lowest (mean = 2.98). Significant associations were found between demographic factors (age and education) and perceptions of information quality. The study also revealed that social media was the primary source of COVID-19 information, with 66% (n=187) of the respondents relying on it. These findings underscore the value of social media for COVID-19 information while raising concerns about reliability. Highlighted is the need to improve credibility and trustworthiness, with emphasis on the importance of trusted channels and demographic considerations. Implications for future crisis communication include enhancing information quality and reliability, addressing information access and equity, tailoring communication for diverse audiences,

empowering public health literacy, and leveraging social media for crisis communication. Further research should explore diverse population groups in Zimbabwe for a more comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Keywords: COVID-19 information quality, social media, students, crisis communication, Zimbabwe.

1. Introduction

The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has been one of the most severe global health crises in history, with profound impacts on human health, including physical, oral, and psychological well-being (Afrashtehfar, Jurado, Al-Sammarraie and Saeed, 2023). As of May 2023, global COVID-19-related deaths had reached 6.8 million (Statista, 2024). The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared that although COVID-19 is no longer a public health emergency, it remains a persistent global threat (United Nations [UN], 2023). Ioannidis (2022) emphasizes that the pandemic's enduring consequences on health and society will likely perpetuate its legacy. Effective COVID-19 crisis communication was crucial, relying on factual and persuasive messages to facilitate prevention, early detection, and control of the pandemic (Matthews, Parker, Martineau, Gidengil, Chen and Ringel, 2022). This communication strategy was vital for promoting prevention behaviours and minimizing disease risk among the public (Dubé, Labbé, Malo and Pelletier, 2022). However, crisis communication efforts were significantly hindered during the pandemic due to the "infodemic", an overwhelming volume of unverified information and fake news, largely spread through social media (Bányász, 2023).

Social media was undoubtedly a major channel for global COVID-19 communication, disseminating both medical and general information (Mahmood, Jafree, Mukhtar and Fischer, 2021). Tsao, Chen, Tisseverasinghe, Yang, Li and Butt (2021, p. 175) noted that "With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, social media has rapidly become a crucial communication tool for information generation, dissemination, and consumption." Volkmer (2021, p. 7) agreed, stating that "Whether large or small, social media platforms have become major globalized influential communication spaces in the current COVID-19 pandemic." Given the widespread use of social media,

young people worldwide were immersed in the increasingly complex world of COVID-19 crisis communication, as they are active users of these platforms, both creating and consuming content (Volkmer, 2021). Neto, Ferreira, Domingos, Barbosa, Vilharba, Dorneles, Reis, Souza and Graeff (2022) argue that COVID-19 information on social media was often characterized by misinformation, contradictions, and ambiguity, including conspiracy theories, myths, and anti-vaccination sentiments. Although social media created opportunities to keep the public informed and safe, it also undermined the global response and control measures (Neto et al., 2022). According to Volkmer (2021), the spread of falsehoods during the pandemic highlighted the need for global standards to regulate social media platforms.

2. Research Question

This study conducts an online survey of the quality of social media COVID-19 information among students in Zimbabwe, to establish implications for future public health crisis communication. It investigates six information quality dimensions; comprehensiveness, accuracy, relevance, accessibility, reliability, and consistency. These were selected based on their wide recognition and study in health communication as indicators of health information quality (Zhang, Sun and Xie, 2015). The study addresses the primary research question “How do students in Zimbabwe perceive the quality of COVID-19 information on social media in terms of comprehensiveness, accuracy, relevance, accessibility, reliability, and consistency? The specific research questions are:

RQ1: To what extent do students in Zimbabwe perceive social media COVID-19 information as comprehensive, accurate, relevant, accessible, reliable, and consistent?

RQ2: How do demographic factors such as age, gender, and education level influence students’ perceptions of the quality of social media COVID-19 information?

RQ3: What are the implications of the findings on future crisis communication and public health outcomes in Zimbabwe?

3. Literature Review

In this study, information quality is defined as "useful data that have been processed in such a way as to increase the knowledge of the person who uses the data" (Alshikhi and Abdullah, 2018, p. 39). Information quality assessment is a subjective evaluation of information fitness for use, reflecting the needs and experiences of stakeholders (Alshikhi and Abdullah, *ibid*). Research on information quality has primarily focused on business scholarships (Jiang, Liu, Liu, Chen and Xu, 2021), raising questions about its importance in health settings, particularly during infectious disease outbreaks. The existing literature acknowledges a significant gap in research on information quality in health promotion and disease prevention (Rew, Saenz and Walker, 2018).

This gap is concerning, given the importance of evaluating the quality and effectiveness of health information to determine the impact of public health interventions. Published studies on COVID-19 information quality have mainly focused on developed countries (Stern, Georgsson and Carlsson, 2021; Brown, 2021; Joshi, Kajal, Bhuyan, Sharma, Bhatt, Kumar, Kaur and Arora, 2020; Chan, Sounderajah, Daniels, Acharya, Clarke, Yalamanchili, Normahani, Markar, Ashrafian and Darzi, 2021; Neto et al., 2022). These studies evaluate the quality of COVID-19 information and its impact on prevention, risk perceptions, and general response. To the researcher's knowledge, there are limited studies in Africa, particularly Zimbabwe, that investigate COVID-19 information quality, despite its crucial role in crisis management. This study addresses this research gap, and through tackling this topic, useful insights will be gained concerning best practices for information packaging during future disease outbreaks.

4. Method

4.1 Survey

The survey for this study was conducted during the COVID-19-induced geographical lockdowns and social distancing in Zimbabwe, hence it relied on an online questionnaire to collect data. Purposively targeting students, the survey was administered over three months, between 11 February and 13 May

2023, and took about six minutes to complete (see Appendix). Eligibility to participate in the survey involved being a student, willingness to participate, and being a Zimbabwean national, despite gender, religion, race, or ethnicity.

The online questionnaire was distributed through a link posted on 18 social media podiums catering to various student groups in Zimbabwe, specifically, WhatsApp groups (n=6), Twitter (X) platforms (n=4), Facebook groups (n=6), and LinkedIn communities (n=2). Participants accessed the questionnaire through the shared link, ensuring convenience and anonymity. Participation was voluntary and no incentives were offered to respondents. To ensure a total completion of the survey, the questionnaire was designed to be submittable only after responding to all questions. A total of 284 questionnaires were completed, constituting the study's sample.

4.2 Questionnaire

Structured questions were employed to afford quick and relatively accurate responses. The questionnaire was divided into three subsections which solicited three forms of data respectively; socio-demographic profiles of the respondents, quality of COVID-19 information dispersed via social media, and general information. The sociodemographic traits of age, gender, religion, and level of education were solicited in Section A to investigate these variables' probable influence on perceptions about the quality of social media COVID-19 information. Section B which investigated the quality of Covid-19 information surveyed six indicators of quality (comprehensiveness, accuracy, relevance, accessibility, reliability, and consistency) using a total of five-point Likert scale questions.

The general information segment, Section C, solicited data on the respondent's sources of COVID-19 information, and perceptions about the adequacy of the information attained, as well as its usefulness, using checklist questions. Overall, the online questionnaire instrument was composed of 13 closed-ended questions, ensuring a higher response rate and quicker completion for the benefit of the participants.

4.3 Data Collection

This study used a combination of descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze survey data on COVID-19 information quality. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were employed to summarize and describe the characteristics of data. These findings were visually represented using charts to facilitate clear interpretations. For inferential analysis, one-way ANOVA (using GraphPad Prism version 10.4.2.633) was utilized to compare differences between information quality variables and draw comparisons between the means of sources of COVID-19 information. Specifically, one-way ANOVA was employed to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in the perceived quality of COVID-19 information, and the use of different sources of that information, based on participant responses (n=284). Additionally, chi-square tests were conducted using SPSS version 28.0, to determine significant associations between independent variables (age, level of education, gender, and religion) and information quality variables. All statistical tests were evaluated at a significance level of 0.05, with p-values below this threshold indicating statistical significance. The results were then interpreted in the context of existing literature to provide meaning and support to the findings.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

The questionnaire instrument commenced with a brief for the respondents, indicating the purpose of the study, the significance of voluntary participation, and the need to provide accurate information. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed, and the survey instrument was young people friendly and culturally appropriate.

5. Findings

The data presented in this section encompasses the results for two research aspects covered by the survey, that is, indicators of COVID-19 information quality (comprehensiveness, accuracy, relevance, accessibility, reliability, and consistency) and general issues in relation to COVID-19 information consumption. The sociodemographic traits of the respondents are summarized

below showing a diverse representation of age groups, gender, educational levels, and religion.

5.1 The Respondents' Sociodemographic Information

The sample of 284 respondents who completed the online survey was constituted of both male and female students enrolled at universities, colleges, and high schools, pursuing various levels of education, belonging to diverse age categories and religious affiliations as captured in Figure 1.

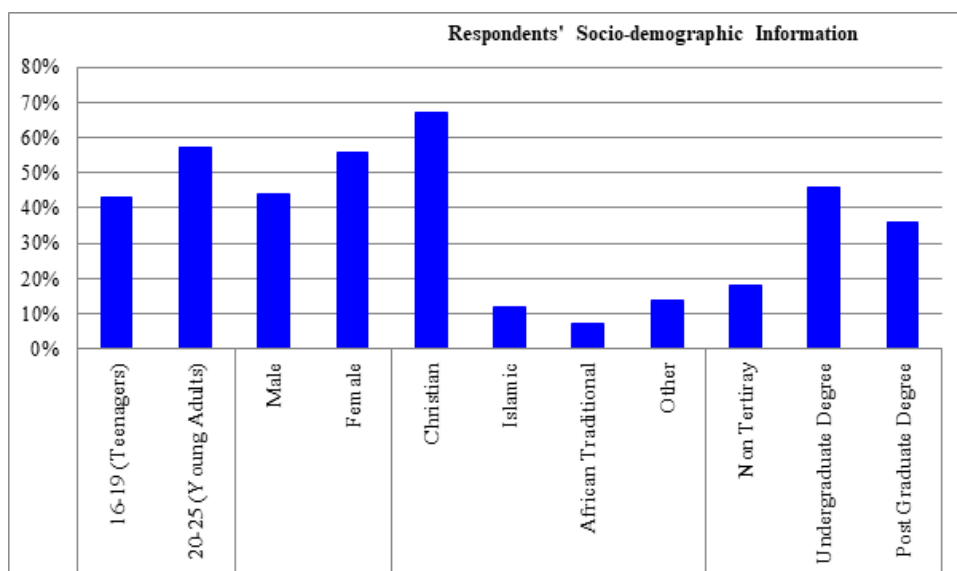


Figure 5.1 Respondents' sociodemographic information

5.2 Quality of COVID-19 Information

The survey results on COVID-19 information quality revealed the diverse perceptions. A considerable number of the respondents (62%, $n=176$) found the information comprehensive, 73% ($n=207$) believed it was accurate, 58% ($n=165$) perceived it as relevant, 67% ($n=190$) found it accessible, 56% ($n=159$) thought it was consistent, and just 33% ($n=94$) considered it reliable. Figure 2 further elaborates these results, showing the respondents' views on a Likert scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

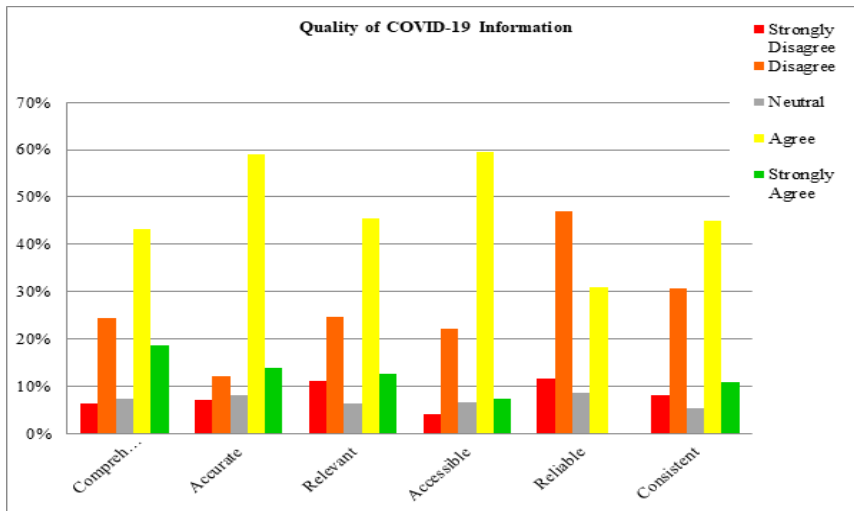


Figure 5.2 Respondents' perceptions of COVID-19 information quality.

5.3 General Perceptions

The respondents' preferences of COVID-19 information sources were assessed, and the outcome is summarized in Figure 5.3.

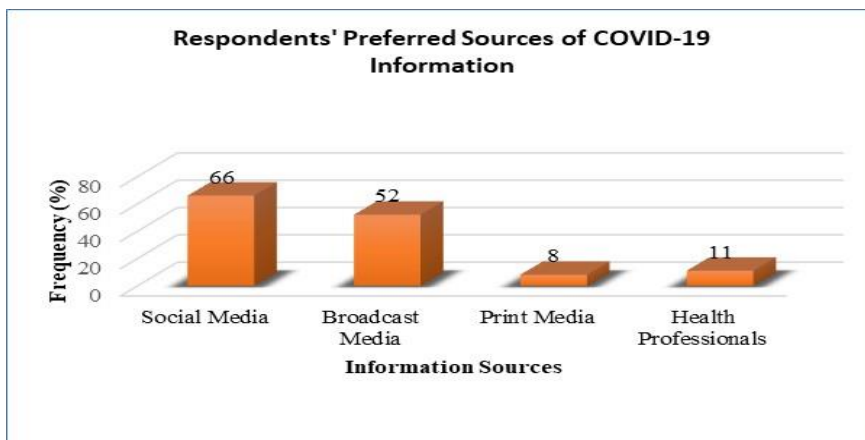


Figure 5.3 Sources of COVID-19 information among the respondents

Despite the varying sources, 57% (n=162) of the respondents perceived COVID-19 information as adequate, and a significant majority (83%, n=236) found it useful.

5.4 Inferential Statistics

One-way ANOVA results for perceived COVID-19 information quality are presented in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1 *Perceived COVID-19 information quality ANOVA results (n=284)*

Information Quality Attribute	Mean	Number of Respondents (n)	F-Value	P-Value
Accuracy	4.23	207	13.10	< 0.001
Accessibility	4.01	190	12.85	< 0.001
Comprehensiveness	3.89	176	12.20	< 0.001
Relevance	3.65	165	11.75	0.002
Consistency	3.45	159	10.90	0.005
Reliability	2.98	94	9.80	0.009

Table 5.2 presents one-way ANOVA results for preferred COVID-19 information sources.

Table 5.2 *Sources of COVID-19 information ANOVA Results (n=284)*

Source	Mean	Number of Respondents (n)	F-Value	P-Value
Social Media	4.56	187	46.20	< 0.001
Broadcast Media	3.98	148	40.85	< 0.001
Health Professionals	1.56	32	25.34	< 0.001
Print Media	1.23	23	22.07	< 0.001

Chi-square test results for statistical association between demographic variables and perceptions of COVID-19 information quality are presented in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 *Statistical association between demographic variables and perceptions of COVID-19 information quality (p-values)*

Variable	Age (p values)	Gender (p values)	Religion (p value)	Level of Education (p values)
Comprehensive	0.031*	0.063	0.231	0.007*
Accurate	0.022*	0.071	0.510	0.008*
Relevant	0.001*	0.922	0.098	0.000*
Accessible	0.046*	0.436	0.833	0.031*
Reliable	0.029*	0.701	0.067	0.001*
Consistent	0.028*	0.987	0.101	0.061

* $p < 0.05$.

The analysis revealed significant differences in perceived quality of COVID-19 information across attributes, with accuracy and accessibility scoring highest and reliability scoring lowest ($p < 0.01$). A clear hierarchy in information sources was also observed, with social media and broadcast media dominating, while print media and health professionals were less utilized ($p < 0.001$). Furthermore, chi-square tests showed significant associations between age and all six information quality variables ($p < 0.05$), and between education level and five variables ($p < 0.05$). However, no significant associations were found with gender or religion ($p > 0.05$).

6. Discussion

The findings of the current study are useful as they help identify critical gaps in accessing and sharing of COVID-19 information on social media platforms, informing communication interventions for future disease outbreaks. It is quite interesting that the majority of the students who participated in the survey perceived social media COVID-19 information as comprehensive. In health communication, comprehension is equivalent to knowledge acquisition. In turn, knowledge plays a significant role in promoting adherence to protective behaviours as it “supports effective health-related decision making” (Miller, Soederberg, and Katz, 2021, p. 2). Likewise, Jansen, Rademakers, Waverijn, Verheij, Osborne and Heijmans (2018, p. 394) make a significant observation that “health literacy has been associated with health utilization and education attainment.” Thus, the result

of this study showing comprehensiveness of social media COVID-19 information is very important as it signals the presence of information quality which permits successful health communication. Information comprehensiveness is thus analogous to young people's knowledge acquisition in relation to COVID-19, and perhaps adherence to recommended behaviours and access to healthcare services. Notably, the one-way ANOVA results confirmed significant differences in perceived quality dimensions, where comprehensiveness was evaluated positively, although not as strongly as accuracy or accessibility.

Another captivating observation arising from the study is that the majority of those who found COVID-19 social media information comprehensive were pursuing degrees. This is supported by the chi-square test results, which showed a statistically significant association between level of education and perceptions of comprehensiveness ($p = 0.007$). This outcome suggests the probable complexity of COVID-19 information shared on social media platforms, which may be difficult to decipher for those with lower levels of education. Comparatively, prior studies in health communication closely associate education attainment and health communication outcomes (Raghupathi and Raghupathi, 2020; Jansen et al., 2018). Raghupathi and Raghupathi note that "people who are well educated experience better health as reflected in the high levels of self-reported health and low levels of morbidity, mortality and disability. By extension, low educational attainment is associated with self-reported poor health, shorter life expectancy and shorter survival when sick" (p. 78).

Education attainment may thus be argued to enable successful information acquisition and implementation, as well as enhance information quality. In support of the study's outcome, Volkmer (2021, p. 4) also concurs that COVID-19 information shared on social media platforms is indeed complex, noting that it is "an ongoing flow of all types of voices, insights, comments, clips, and statements." The alleged complexity of COVID-19 information may be consequent of the scientific nature of the coronavirus disease itself and the surrounding discourses pertaining to its changing variants, preventive measures, bio-medical research and vaccinations.

It is not surprising that most respondents perceived COVID-19 information dispersed in social media platforms as accurate. The one-way ANOVA results showed that accuracy (mean = 4.23) was rated significantly higher than both reliability (mean = 2.98) and consistency (mean = 3.45), indicating strong confidence in the statistical and factual elements of the information. In Zimbabwe, as elsewhere in the world, the widely circulated COVID-19 information was statistical data (numbers and percentages) that reported on new and cumulative infection rates and related mortality cases (Dzobo, Chitungo, and Dzinamarira, 2020; Makombe, 2021). This numerical data likely influenced users' perceptions of accuracy. Although social media also disseminated narratives and debates on safety of treatments and vaccines, statistical data dominated, lending credibility to the information in users' eyes.

Relevance, which determines purposefulness of information, is a significant quality of health communication. The survey results showing a dominant perception of information relevance are positive. The Chi-square test indicated a strong association between age, education, and relevance perception ($p = 0.001$ and $p = 0.000$ respectively), reflecting demographic differences in evaluating information quality. As Miller et al. (2021) posit, successful communication is based on pre-conceived needs for information, which may result in higher information relevance perceptions. When COVID-19 premiered in March 2020 in Zimbabwe, demand for health information increased as the public tried to understand this novel disease (Dzobo et al., 2020). Thus, relevance became a basic requirement. Interestingly, female students constituted the majority of those who viewed social media COVID-19 information as relevant, although the chi-square test indicated no association between gender and information relevance perceptions. This aligns with Alsharawy's (2021) findings that women in the United States reported greater fear and higher COVID-19 risk perceptions than men.

Similarly, studies by Rodriguez-Besteiro et al. (2022) and Giordani et al. (2021) revealed heightened infection susceptibility perceptions among Spanish and Brazilian women, supporting the notion of gendered information sensitivity. The discrepancy between the negative chi-square test results and

the observed relationship between female users and information relevance perceptions may be attributed to the complex interplay of demographic factors and individual experiences, suggesting that while gender alone may not be a significant predictor, it could be influential when intersecting with other factors such as risk perception and information sensitivity.

In line with social media's widespread use among young people in Zimbabwe and globally, the survey showed that more than two-thirds of the respondents found COVID-19 information accessible via social media. The one-way ANOVA revealed that accessibility (mean = 4.01) was perceived significantly more positively than reliability. Moreover, Chi-square tests showed accessibility was significantly associated with both age ($p = 0.046$) and education ($p = 0.031$), underlining the influence of demographic characteristics on perceived ease of access. Accessibility alludes to information abundance enabled by social media interactivity. Dzobo et al. (2020), Makombe (2021) and Mahmood et al. (2021) note the rise in information demand after Zimbabwe declared COVID-19 a national disaster on 17 March 2020. This abundance was made possible by increased Internet access in Zimbabwe (Taruvunga, Chikohora, Jere and Dool, 2020). Doyle, Bandason, Dauya, McHugh, Grundy and Dringus (2021) reported that nearly all youths and adults in the country have access to the Internet and social media, affirming the survey's results. Accessibility of information is critical, as it shapes health behaviour and contributes to disease prevention.

The outcome indicating minimal perceptions of information reliability is undesirable. Only 33% of the respondents perceived COVID-19 information as reliable, and the one-way ANOVA confirmed this as the lowest-rated quality dimension. Significant associations were found between reliability and both age ($p = 0.029$) and education ($p = 0.001$). These results reflect the public's critical evaluation of the content they encountered. Agbasiere (2024) notes that misinformation was rampant in social media during the pandemic, with myths such as COVID-19 being caused by 5G radiation or vaccines being vehicles for microchip implantation. It is therefore not surprising that the majority of the respondents, bearing diverse socio-demographic traits, expressed doubt over the reliability of COVID-19

information shared on social media. In this regard, Volkmer (2021) postulates that distorted crisis content on social media is difficult to authenticate, leading to perceived unreliability. This unreliability hampers national crisis communication efforts, which depend on public trust and accurate information dissemination.

The respondents overwhelmingly agreed that COVID-19 information on social media was consistent, although ANOVA findings placed consistency (mean = 3.45) below both accuracy and accessibility. Age was significantly associated with perceptions of consistency ($p = 0.028$), suggesting generational differences in information assessment. Consistency in this context reflects the steady flow of content during the pandemic. Volkmer (2021, p. 4) observed that “COVID-19-related information is communicated continuously,” contributing to a persistent crisis communication environment. The World Health Organization referred to this period as an “infodemic” due to the overabundance of information (Pennycook, McPheters, Zhang, Lu, and Rand, 2020). The dominance of consistent information on social media helped foster a culture of health communication that shifted public reliance from traditional to informal digital platforms.

The finding that social media was the main source of COVID-19 information aligns with ANOVA results that revealed significant differences between sources. Social media (mean = 4.56) and broadcast media (mean = 3.98) were significantly more relied upon than print media and health professionals. This supports the notion that digital media dominated the information ecosystem during the pandemic. Mahmood et al. (2021, p. 2) note that “social media usage has escalated, and it has quickly established itself as a critical medium of communication.” Unlike traditional media, social media enables rapid and interactive communication. Prior studies (Jang and Baek, 2019; Mhlanga, Muzingili, Dudzai and Mhlanga, 2021) confirm that during infectious disease outbreaks, the public tends to prefer social media. In Zimbabwe, social media served to disseminate urgently needed information, reduce anxiety, and support public psychological well-being (Mhlanga et al., 2021).

Additionally, the finding that the majority viewed social media information as adequate may be attributed to its digital convenience. However, while students perceived COVID-19 information as adequate, Mhlanga et al. (2021, p. 257) reported that “In Zimbabwe, communities in marginalized and hard to reach areas are the most susceptible to infectious diseases because of insufficient information.” This digital divide led to inequitable access to life-saving information. For future health crises, strategies must be devised to ensure inclusive and equitable access to information for all societal segments, regardless of geography or connectivity. The perception of social media information as useful underlines its value in providing public awareness during a disruptive time. Tsao et al. (2021) highlight that the ability of social media to enable sharing of opinions and coping mechanisms was crucial. Volkmer (2021) emphasized the role of digital platforms in continuing education and information flow during lockdowns. The survey’s result reinforces that social media served as a critical public health communication tool that promoted knowledge, behaviour change, and virus containment.

6.1 Implications for Future Crisis Communication

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted critical issues surrounding information dissemination and quality, particularly through social media. Focusing on students in Zimbabwe, this study reveals both the strengths and limitations of social media as a source of pandemic information. The implications of these findings are essential for future crisis communication preparedness, as they offer lessons on how to improve health communication, enhance information reliability, and ensure equitable access to vital information. Some of the important implications of the study’s outcome include the following.

6.2 Enhancing Information Quality and Reliability

The study reveals a notable dichotomy; while social media was widely used and considered accessible and comprehensive for COVID-19 information, its reliability was heavily questioned by the respondents. This highlights the need for critical evaluation and verification of information on social media,

particularly for health-related topics. A mere 33% of the respondents trusted the accuracy of pandemic information on these platforms, likely due to widespread misinformation. This indicates a critical need for strategies that improve the reliability of social media content in future health crises. As highlighted by Agbasiere (2024), strengthening verification mechanisms such as fact-checking and establishing partnerships between health authorities and social media platforms can help prevent the spread of misinformation. Additionally, authorities should focus on creating verified accounts or badges to distinguish credible sources, thereby reinforcing user trust in pandemic information (Geels, Graßl, Schraffenberger, Tanis and Kleemans, 2024).

6.3 Addressing Information Access and Equity

The study also highlights social media's accessibility, with 67% of the respondents finding COVID-19 information readily available through these platforms. This ease of access likely contributed to social media's popularity as a source of information during the pandemic. However, accessibility was limited to those with internet and digital device access, highlighting digital divides that could prevent other demographic groups to obtain timely information. This issue highlights the need for a multi-platform communication strategy that integrates traditional media, such as radio and television, with digital outlets. According to Hannes, Thyssen, Bengough, Dawson, Paque and Talboom (2024), by ensuring a diverse media approach, public health agencies can promote inclusivity and bridge informational gaps, particularly in rural or underserved communities with limited digital access. Equitable access to public pandemic information is crucial for ensuring widespread understanding and adherence to health guidelines.

6.4 Tailoring Communication for Diverse Audiences

Further, the study reveals that perceptions of COVID-19 information quality differed based on educational level and age, suggesting that demographic factors influence how individuals evaluate information. For instance, university students pursuing degrees and degree holders were more likely to perceive the information as comprehensive, suggesting that the complexity of

the content may challenge those with lower education levels. This highlights the need for tailored communication strategies that adapt content to different educational backgrounds or age groups. Simplifying complex medical information without compromising accuracy can enhance comprehension and engagement (Fogwill and Manataki, 2024). This approach supports informed decision-making across diverse populations and promotes the adoption of recommended health behaviors during pandemics.

6.5 Empowering Public Health Literacy

Moreover, the study highlights a concerning gap in students' critical evaluation skills, particularly in assessing the quality of health information in Zimbabwe. This highlights the need for educational interventions that focus on developing media literacy and critical thinking skills to help students effectively navigate and evaluate online health information. Enhancing public health literacy should therefore be a priority for future pandemic preparedness. Governments and health organizations could implement educational campaigns focused on media literacy, helping individuals develop the skills to discern credible sources and debunk misinformation. For example, integrating health literacy modules into school curricula or conducting public workshops can foster a more informed and resilient public. As Khorram-Manesh, Goniewicz and Burkle (2024) postulate, in the context of pandemic response, an educated population capable of critically evaluating information is better positioned to follow verified guidelines, reducing the impact of misinformation.

6.6 Leveraging Social Media for Real-Time Updates

While the study shows some limitations, it also highlights the advantages of social media for timely information delivery. The respondents perceived the information as relevant, with 83% finding it useful, showing that social media effectively filled the need for real-time updates. In future pandemics, as also suggested by Lal, Ashworth, Dada, Hoemeke and Tambo (2022), health authorities could exploit social media's reach by using it to disseminate frequent updates and guidance. According to Lal et al. (ibid), this is critical

for early detection and diagnosis, prompt treatment, and effective control of pandemics. Using analytics to monitor trending misinformation can enable authorities to adopt social media for rapid corrective measures, maintaining public trust and adherence to health protocols (Agbasiere, 2024).

The implications of this study for future pandemic preparedness are profound. Improving information reliability, ensuring equitable access, tailoring communication to diverse audiences, enhancing public health literacy, and deploying social media are all essential steps. Addressing these areas can help the Zimbabwean government and public health agencies to create a more robust framework for future pandemic communication, ensuring that reliable information reaches all individuals, especially the students in this case, enabling them to make informed health decisions and reduce the spread of infectious diseases.

7. Conclusion

The study indicated that, although COVID-19 information accessed and shared on social media platforms in Zimbabwe was mostly perceived quality data by students, it was also considered unreliable. In essence, lack of reliability of social media COVID-19 information undermined its usability and ability to support information needs, as well as negatively impacted on the intervention efforts which depended on changing behaviour through communication. There is no fixed method for enforcing reliability of public health information, rather the ability to distinguish between falsehoods, myths, and misconceptions versus facts by social media users is essential. Further, since information quality is determined by the user's mental attributes (age and level of education) it can be viewed as a product of positive mental insights. This has implications for practice and policy in relation to strategic crisis communication, signaling the importance of considering cognitive factors such as intellectual and age diversity, in order to enhance health information quality. Moreover, given that social media was identified as the main source of COVID-19 information amongst students in Zimbabwe, intensifying its use for disseminating timely disease prevention messages in this population may be strategic and rewarding.

8. Limitations

This study has a few limitations. The first limitation is its sample, which is restricted to students, excluding the rest of the Zimbabwean population groups, who also access the same information and are active users of social media. However, a study of various population groups would have been unrealistic and too broad for the scope of this research, compelling the need to impose population boundaries. Future research should expand to include perspectives from diverse social groups, such as adults and adolescents, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the topic. This is crucial as different social groups may experience and interact with social media differently, influencing their perceptions and evaluations of COVID-19 information.

This line of inquiry may broaden our understanding of the quality and impact of social media COVID-19 information in Zimbabwe. The second key constraint is based on the research's approach to data quality assessment. Whilst data quality assessment ideally incorporates measuring three dimensions of information quality; data, data use, and data collection processes (Chen, Hailey, Wang and Yu, 2014), this study focused only on the dimension of data, concentrating on six indicators of quality. Thus, the limitation of this study rests in its exclusion of data use and data collection processes, owing to limited access to databases as well as the wide breadth of public health information. More research efforts should focus on evaluating the quality of data use and data collection processes of COVID-19 information accessed via social media in Zimbabwe or related contexts.

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Visual Digital Resistance: Examining the Humor and Hostility in Pakistani Instagram Memes Post Pahalgam Incident

Mariam Irshad

Lecturer (Faculty of Media & Mass Communication),
University of Central Punjab, Lahore.
Email: mariam.irshad@ucp.edu.pk

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Abstract

This study examines the role of memes as a form of digital resistance in response to the Indian threat following the Pahalgam incident of April 22, 2025. When geopolitical tension between Pakistan and India heightened, Instagram emerged as a platform where humour and satire were used to counter hostility. This study is based on a thematic analysis of 20 purposefully selected memes shared in a week after the Pahalgam incident. The research identifies recurring themes such as satirical nationalism, military symbolism, historical parallels, and emotional catharsis. These memes were political expression, digital resistance, and solidarity in response to Indian propaganda. The findings reveal humour and hostility in memes counter political threats by becoming “weapons of the week”. The study highlights that memes serve as symbols of resilience, determination, and unwavering nationalist spirit. This study contributes to the growing discourse on digital resilience and activism showing how Humour and sarcasm are incorporated in forms of memes to maintain peace at the time of conflict.

Keywords: Digital Resistance, Memes, Political Satire, Instagram, Humour and Hostility Pahalgam Incident.

1. Introduction

Internet availability via mobile devices has transformed social media platforms in empowering people to generate and disseminate information globally within seconds which has become a reason for the decline of traditional media outlets. The utilization of traditional media platforms experienced a reduction concurrently with the escalation of Internet consumption (Gaskins & Jerit, 2012). Internet specifically has significantly influenced the manner in which individuals acquire knowledge regarding political matters (Kleinberg & Lau, 2009) their degree of civic participation (Jennings & Zeitner, 2003) and the characteristics of political dialogue (Lawrence et al., 2010).

Social media platforms operate more rapidly than traditional media in actively reshaping the ideologies and approaches of how users perceive and engage with national and global issues. Social media platforms certainly are productive tools in operating as vital outlets for entertainment, building relationships, and expressing oneself (Nowrangi, 2022).

Social media platforms have created new opportunities and challenges for socio-political transformation and proved to be a valuable means of communication during local and global crises ranging from terrorist attacks to natural disasters by providing real-time updates with a feature to create, share, and reshare from all around the world (Rehman & Riaz, 2021).

In the wake of the April 22, 2025, Pahalgam clash provoked intensive debate on social media platforms particularly on Instagram with extensive visuals and content related to the incident being widely shared. The incident claimed 26 casualties dramatically intensifying tension between India and Pakistan. In response to this incident India executed disciplinary measures like suspending the “Indus Waters Treaty, downgrading diplomatic ties, and blocking Pakistani cultural accounts” (India Today News Desk, 2025).

In an era characterized by the growing influence of digital publics on national discourse, Instagram, a platform frequently linked to lifestyle content and visual narratives, emerged as an unanticipated venue for geopolitical

expression (Green & Martinez, 2018). As India and Pakistan relations hit boiling point, Instagram, the online space turned into a warzone of memes with citizens from both nations hurling Humor and sarcasm to rally behind their flags, especially Pakistani users used memes as a tool of digital resistance against external threats from India being digitally activist. Memes have been growing in popularity as a means of sharing knowledge, feelings, opinions, and distinctive points of view about particular topics or events, including the current state of politics (Dwivedi, 2023). Memes are powerful political expressions that transmit cultural concepts, symbols, and customs (Javed et al., 2022).

Memes challenge societal power structures with byzantine yet powerful critiques through Humor, parody, and other forms of representation (Milner, 2016). The use of Humor and satire in political discourse is not new, but the internet and social media have augmented its reach and impact with time (Bulatovic, 2019).

Following the Incident, Indian users started targeting Pakistanis and Pakistanis by sharing hostile comments and objectionable posts on social media platforms, especially on Instagram. They started framing Pakistan as a terrorist nation and wanted to wipe out Pakistan from the map of the world. Rather than remaining silent or submissive, Pakistanis used this form of engagement to push back, turning the act of roasting their opponent into a form of survival and national solidarity in the digital space. In Pakistan, memes are supposed to be an authoritative medium for reflecting the societal narratives (Abbas et al., 2024).

India's aggressive online rhetoric was efficiently contradicted by a meme from Pakistani users, who incorporated Humor, sarcasm, and visual satire in their memes. Unlike in this time, meme exchanges were a tool Pakistanis used as digital resistance. Digital resistance happens to be progressive and anti-authoritarian activities that strive to use technology to take down or challenge the dominant power structure (Couture et al., 2023).

Memes were used by Pakistani users as a way to retaliate against Indian threats showing digital resistance within the framework of digital activism. The way Pakistani users react to Indian threats via memes is distinctly showing the resistance as they are not entertaining the users but in reality, they are potent tools of resistance and national affirmation. To escape the harshness of reality, People in Pakistani society strive to find the Humorous side of every situation (Noor & Arshad, 2024). Humor plays an important role in overcoming the undesirable effects of conflicts. History has witnessed those tough periods when Humor was the only way to express views against hostility (Zelizer, 2010).

2. Objectives

- To identify the themes in the Pakistani Instagram memes regarding the Pahalgam incident
- To examine the role of memes as a form of digital resistance during times of threat and fear in the context of the Pahalgam incident.

3. Research Questions

RQ1: What are the major themes in the Pakistani Instagram memes in the context of the Pahalgam incident?

RQ2: How do these memes use Humour and hostility in communicating about political emotional opinions memes as a form of digital resistance?

4. Literature Review

Social media has elevated the internet as a source of information and influence at the same time (Hanna et al., 2011). The upsurge of social media has transformed geopolitical conflicts into hybrid battlespaces where narratives and perceptions are shaped through visuals, tweets, and memes. Social media has evolved in visuals, particularly in the forms of memes, that are manifested as a powerful tool of resilience in response to social and political issues.

Humour in conflict communication is an agent of reach and propinquity through social media platforms (Zelizer, 2010). Memes are digital artifacts used to illustrate symbolic protest and highlight social issues,

often catalysing civic engagement (Tufekci, 2017). Moreover, memes are also considered as commentary on political values as well as social critique (Campbell & Sheldon, 2021).

Memes on political situations are widely regarded as coping strategies within in repressive political environment. In such a context, Humor becomes the only viable resistance available for expressing political dissatisfaction. Memes are usually produced in large numbers and shared on the internet by millions of users, this weaponized the memes as an effective tool against political rivals (Bulatovic, 2019).

In Pakistan, cyber surveillance, censorship, and restrictions on freely discussing social and political issues have given rise to Humorous forms of resistance by social media users through memes. Memes depict and criticize the social and political system of society as a form of resistance against hostility. It generally focuses on challenging stereotypical and orthodox approaches using Humorous text with attention-grabbing visuals. In the context of South Asian digital culture, memes are used to express resistance and shape identity (Zeb et al., 2025).

Memes are cultural lexis that absurdly depict everyday life in India. They consist of visuals and text, from Bollywood celebrities to family dynamics. On the other hand, Pakistani memes have substantial political themes that act as an unseen form of resistance by echoing concerns through wit and sarcasm (Abbas et al., 2024).

Amid the cross-border tension between Pakistan and India, memes act as a catalyst that not only pushes back against the hostile narrative but also uses Humor as a strategic tool. On 22 April 2025, in Indian-administered Kashmir, Pahalgam, a terrorist attack claimed the lives of two dozen people who were there as tourists (Rawnsley, 2025). The attack, which had far-reaching repercussions across the region, further intensified the tensions between India and Pakistan. In response, the Indian government issued war threats against Pakistan and ended all mutual agreements between the two countries (Agence France Presse, 2025).

Indian media and users were trying to defame Pakistan and within no time Pakistanis launched a flood of memes with satirical images roasting their

nemesis and it flowed faster than Indus water (Ahtesham, 2025). Memes usually go viral on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook and are known as social media memes (Shifman, 2012). It acts as a medium of digital resistance in Pakistan (Zeb et al., 2025) And also serves as a path of Digital activism that stands for political, social, or environmental rights on social media platforms (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013).

This study aims to investigate the role of memes which not only served as a coping mechanism in the face of political tensions between Pakistan and India after the Pahalgam incident but also acted as an assertion of national identity and political agency and how Pakistani users militarised Humour as a strategic tool for digital resistance by using memes visual and textual language. The threatening statements made by the India made situation worse and more complicated but Pakistani users, particularly on Instagram, were involved in a distinctive approach of digital resistance particularly known as the creation of memes.

Despite growing scholarly interest in digital activism and digital resistance, this area of research focusing on the use of Humour and satire through memes as acts of digital activism and digital resistance during episodic geo-political crises is underexplored.

5. Method

This research is based on qualitative research design i.e., thematic analysis to understand Pakistani Instagram memes related to the Pahalgam incident.

5.1 Data Collection

Purposive sampling of 20 viral memes from Pakistani Instagram accounts known for their comedy and political satire made up the study's data related to the Pahalgam incident. These memes were chosen within a certain time period i.e., one week after the incident to guarantee relevancy and topicality, and they were found using hashtags related to the Pahalgam incident (e.g., #Pahalgam, #PahalgamIncident, #PakIndiaTensions).

Memes that directly or indirectly mentioned the Pahalgam incident either by direct mention or symbolic representation (e.g., using flags, figures, or well-known references related to the event) were the only ones included to

maintain credibility and contextual relevance. A variety of stylistic techniques, such as comic strips, screenshots, and picture macros, are represented by the chosen memes.

- i. **Familiarization:** Every meme was analysed several times in order to comprehend its linguistic and visual elements, such as hashtags, cultural representations, text, and imagery.
- ii. **Coding:** To create initial codes, the meme set's frequent visual components, linguistic patterns, and emotional wordings were found.
- iii. **The development of themes:** Codes were categorized into possible themes with an emphasis on digital resistance and political and emotional communication.
- iv. **Theme Review:** To make sure the themes appropriately reflect the dataset and address the study questions, they were improved. This required examining both external and internal heterogeneity.
- v. **Analysis:** The finished themes were examined in light of political comedy, crisis communication, and digital resistance theories.
- vi. **Coding:** By finding initial patterns, codes were created. The analysis stays in line with the goals of the study by focusing on how these memes: (1) convey specific themes regarding the Pahalgam incident; and (2) serve as instruments of digital resistance in times of fear and danger.

5.2 Few Selected Memes



Pahalgam Incident & Memes



5.3 Ethical Consideration

Even though Instagram makes memes publicly accessible, anonymity and informed portrayal were given ethical attention. The study does not reveal sensitive personal information or identify private individuals. Regarding the intellectual and creative expressions of content providers, every picture analysed was by fair use guidelines.

6. Findings and Discussion

6.1 Theme 1: Satirical Nationalism

This theme explores how social media users in Pakistan used memes to express their opinions and point out Indian Leader Narendra Modi's actions. The meme features a still scene from the Bollywood Film “Phir Hera Pheri” with the face of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi onto the character with the caption "votes hi votes honge" (“There will be only votes”). The meme humorously infers that all these comments and actions by the Modi government are happening for votes. The second meme shows two pictures of Upar Modi and Lower Modi: On the left side Prime Minister Modi's upper body in formal attire ("Upar Modi") while on the Right side, A woman's lower body in tight white pants and sandals ("Lower Modi"). This meme is a direct critique of the Modi government and his perception of Power as well as remarks about Pakistan.

Another meme was created in response to the news "India has suspended Indus Water Treaty with Pakistan" with a caption above that news, "Paani pawein rok do, Sonam Bajwa G ki reels nahi rukni chahei please" (“Stop the water if you must, but please don’t stop Sonam Bajwa’s Instagram reels.”). The Indus water treaty is a serious matter but here in Pakistan, the memes respond to it with Humor as an element of hostility portraying how digital satire becomes a coping mechanism while dealing with a political crisis. Since comedy enables users to voice disapproval without resorting to direct conflict, this concept is consistent with digital resistance. One of the Indian social media users posted Narendra Modi's picture with the caption “Pakistan I am telling you our leader is serious now” and in response, the meme was created, with the text “Koi baat nai sehat card pe muft ilaaj

kara denge, hojayega theek”(No worries we will get him treated on Sehat Card, he will be fine).

Sarcasm and Satire are major elements used in this meme implying that the leader needs mental health treatment, not political attention. Instead of reacting with fear and tension, this meme narrates digital resistance. Another meme states “When a baby is born in India, ismay bi Pakistan ka hath hoga” This is criticism of the Indian government as they often hold Pakistan responsible for whatever happens there, no matter what the situation is they blame Pakistan for that. Another meme that went viral was the picture of the famous historical place of India Taj Mahal with superimposed banners in Urdu on its walls featuring “Mardana Taqat (male potency) and goat selling common sights on walls in many parts of Pakistan.” With Soon written on it. In another meme, the Taj Mahal was shown in Green color with the text “Taj Mahal under Bappa Jani”. Bappa Jani is often associated with authoritarian figures and political leaders in Pakistan.

6.2 Theme 2: National Pride through Humour

A considerable number of memes devised a narrative of ongoing resistance and national pride with Humor. These memes are rich in cultural references and visual metaphors that resonate with Pakistani audiences. One of the memes features a picture of Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan with the text “Ab tak chapli kabab ban gaya hota apna agar hamara boy na hota paida” (Translation: He would’ve been turned into chapli kabab by now if our boy hadn’t been born). This meme expresses national pride and patriotism through humorous administration. Another meme used a Bollywood movie scene in the male character's face was edited with Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman's face, he is shown fearful and uttering something to women, meme has the text “Darwaza mat kholna” (Don’t open the door), Pakistani memers hai, memes bana k zaleel kerne aye hai” (It’s Pakistani meme makers, they’re here to mock us with memes). This meme was created remembering Abhinandan's past capture and release in 2019 during an airstrike incident. This clearly shows that memes in Pakistan were used as a tool of mockery, satire, sarcasm, hostility, and digital resistance.

6.3 Theme 3: Emotional Catharsis and Digital Solidarity

The memes function as an expressive emotional medium of fear and anger by fusing elements of comedy and aggression. This was particularly obvious in memes that discuss substantial political issues by using amplified scenarios or introspective comedy. When an Indian social media user commented “Indus water treaty agreement with Pakistan cancelled, ab pani kaise piyoge?” (How will you drink water now?) In response meme with a picture of a man drinking from a huge water bottle Aesay" (Like this) went viral.

Memers narrated that whatever the situation, Humor, satire, and digital resistance are firm digital weapons against the hostility of Indian social media users and the government. Pakistanis are not worried about war or the cancelation of the water treaty instead they regain digital control through Humor. A man sitting on a wheelchair with the caption “ I stand with India” is an ironic juxtaposition, One picture of an Indian political leader pleading with folded hands and a stressed face with the text “Band karo main haath jod ke aapse gujarish karta hun” (Please stop it, I request you), another meme with pictures of tea, crispy paratha and omelette with the text “Quetta Cafe Mumbai” coming soon while other a scene from famous Bollywood movie Mughal e Azam with the text “Jaldi say uth kar naha lo, paani jaanay wala hai” went viral as Pakistani were not fearful of the situation rather they were showing digital resistance and by meme they were doing catharsis and digital solidarity.

A lot of memes went viral when the Indian government announced they would start war in response to the Pahalgam incident, in response to that, Humor was used as digital resistance and hostility. One meme features the face of a boy with depression expressing and overlaying “Light nhe are, jang liyh kpray bi ready krnay hain”(There’s no electricity, and I still have to iron clothes for war) while on the other hand meme with picture “Jang ka suntay he meray ghar waloun ne safaiyaan shuru kar di hain. Inko mauqa chahiye.”(As soon as my family heard about war, they started cleaning the house. Another was “India pani khol dou meri ankh main sabun chala gaiya hn”, other featured Pakistani Political leader Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's picture with

the text “Ya Allah parosiyo ko funny kr day. Ameen”(Oh Allah, please make our neighbours funny)

They just needed an excuse.) This shows how the people of Pakistan are handling geopolitical news and tension. Mockery in memes started in response to Indian media news that they have started an airstrike on Pakistan, in response Memes on social media mock their fake news as Mr. Bean with the text “Yaar waise jume k namaz k bad aajane chahye india k jahaz sham ko PSL b dekhna e”, in the same way, the scene from the song of Pasuri by Ali sethi “ Ana si oo nhe aiya” with the text “ India walon ka jahaz” went viral with Humorous meme implying that Pakistan is not threatened from Indian aircraft, another meme was An Indian comment on Indian fighter jet with “It’s time to use these monsters Modiji” in response Pakistani meme featuring “Madini man riding a bicycle modified to look like a fighter jet, decorated in green and white, with flags and religious slogans” with the text “You will be dealt accordingly” functions as a digital satire

Memes provided a platform for expressing emotions from grief and rage to hope and satire. Even in the face of unadorned political pressures, these posts gave Pakistani users a way to express their emotions and raised solidarity by employing Humor and satire. Users were often able to tackle sensitive issues with a blend of Humor and resilience through the use of visual metaphors and textual punchlines.

The results show how these viral memes particularly after the Pahalgam incident serve as a kind of digital resistance by:

- a. Incorporating humorous content so that shared understanding can be cultivated.
- b. Using comedy as a weapon against perceived oppressors to challenge established power structures.
- c. Humour and Hostility both serve as a tool for political criticism and as a mechanism for psychological stress.

7. Discussion

Memes have transformed into a powerful digital communication tool in today’s connected world. It catalyses political opposition, societal criticism,

and emotional expression. Therefore, meme values extend beyond just amusement. Memes give individuals, predominantly young people a unique and exceptional approach to interact with complex themes and context in a clear and understandable way considering memes are simple to make circulate and comprehend.

In the context of the Pahalgam incident, the results of this study reveal the complex and diverse role memes play in digital resistance. Memes serve as an influential tool of societal expression. Memes contribute to forming a collective digital community at times of conflict, especially during the Pahalgam incident. By allowing people to express their feelings, such as annoyance, anger, or hope memes foster harmony among like-minded people and reinforce movements on digital media.

Fundamentally, the findings propose that memes are stated as a collective coping strategy at times of war, there was no tension and fear among Pakistanis. Memes support people in expressing their desolation, resentment, and optimism in a scenario where open political criticism can be hazardous. Humour is usually paired with infuriation aids in promoting harmony and reducing psychological stress. Memes are a kind of political participation that blends resistance with satire. They enable social media users to challenge power and express their views in Humour. These memes serve to reassert Pakistani pride by resisting the dominant

Indian narrative on social media with proper responses back in the form of memes with Humour and hostility. Memes prove to be an instrument in geopolitical commentary as Humour becomes a powerful tool of digital resistance. Furthermore, memes are "weapons of the weak", the use of visual metaphors and coded language helps it to get over censorship. Memes permit indirect critique as comedy becomes a kind of resistance and resiliency in this digital space.

The study reveals that memes following the Pahalgam incident are much more than digital artifacts. These culturally rooted expressions use Humour, politics, and emotion at the same time to question power structures, express disagreement, and foster solidarity.

8. Conclusion & Future Directions

Using thematic analysis this study examined Pakistani Instagram memes relating to the Pahalgam tragedy and found three main themes: Satirical Nationalism, National Pride through Humour, Emotional Catharsis, and Digital Solidarity. According to the findings, memes are more than just amusing posts for entertainment in the digital age, they are influential instruments for identity building, emotional dispensation, and socio-political participation. By analysing these memes, the study explains how common people use sarcasm, comedy, and visuals in response to complex political landscape discussions. It also highlights how social media functions as a forum for participation where different user and their generated political discourse can merge. Memes enable citizens to express their hostile feelings while hiding behind Humour gives them their strength. This study emphasizes that online memes serve as political discourse and influence public opinion in times of crisis.

This study reveals that online memes are more than just jokes they are also strategic instruments of digital resistance that affect public opinion in ways that traditional media cannot. The pressure and stressful situation was tried to be created on social media by Indian social media users and by their media by posting fake news was digitally retaliated by the use of Humour as a major element in responding.

Future researchers can study how these online resistance tactics change depending on the platform and political setting. The study adds to the literature on how social media users use innovative digital technologies to fight against hostility and fear with Humour as expression.

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Exploring the Significance of Social Media on Social Justice Movements Through the Lens of Social Activists in Pakistan

Huda Imran

M.Phil. Scholar (Department of Media and Development Communication)
University of the Punjab, Lahore.
Email: hudaimran529@gmail.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24312/ucp-jmc.03.01.525>

Abstract

Today, social media can be seen as a powerful platform for bringing marginalized voices forward and supporting people affected by injustice. As a democratic tool, social networking platforms dismantle conventional gatekeeping mechanisms and open opportunities to organize previously impossible campaigns. The current study employs in-depth interviews to explore how activists use social media to fight for social justice causes. The goal is to determine how effective these digital platforms are in garnering public attention and support and how well they can be utilized to organize protests and effect change. This study aims to get insight into the perceptions of the activists on social media's impact on social justice, how they tackle obstacles, and how they function as opinion-makers while advocating for specific causes, raising voices for the marginalized, and striving to reach a just society. Guided by the Public sphere theory, this study explores how social networking platforms have become a modern public sphere where activists can speak freely and advocate for social justice movements. The research will contribute to the existing literature and offer practical knowledge to activists, academicians, and policymakers who wish to use technology for change.

Keywords: Social Media, Social Justice Movements, Activism in Pakistan, Digital Activism, Advocacy.

1. Introduction

Over the last several years, social media has been critical in social justice movements worldwide. This helps activists disseminate information, mobilize people worldwide, and form coalitions. Many social networking platforms, including Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, YouTube, etc., have democratized activism by eliminating institutionalized hierarchical communication channels. This allows activists and marginalized people to make their voices heard, share information, and organize protests and campaigns in real time to bring social change. Social media will enable them to create, post, comment, and interact with other like-minded people in online groups (Earl et al., 2022; Uwalaka, 2024).

Activists use digital activism to call for people's participation in raising their voices and bringing change using digital tools. Activists around the world have successfully used digital activism to fight injustice. For instance, the activism against the brutality of the police and racism in the Black Lives Matter protest movement in the United States shows how activism is conducted on social media (Freelon et al., 2018). They also stated that through hashtags and online campaigns, this social justice movement kept people informed and raised awareness worldwide about the racial issues in the country. On the other hand, Pakistan ranks 150th in the World Press Freedom Index of 2023, which shows limited freedom of the press (Radio Pakistan, 2023).

The socio-political structure in Pakistan is unstable and has tight censorship and restricted freedom of speech, which affects social justice activism. Social justice activists face hurdles in communicating with people and struggle to organize people and share information through conventional media platforms under the state. This raises the need for digital activism, where people can utilize social networking platforms to fight for their causes. There are some significant examples where it has been vital to organize events to unite like-minded individuals facing similar problems, such as the Aurat March, which demanded women's rights and shared stories of oppression. (Maryville University, 2019; Auxier & McClain, 2020; Freelon et al., 2018; Dossa, 2021; Khan & Kirmani, 2018; Pakistan Press Foundation, 2023).

There is a vast body of literature on activism and social networking platforms with quantitative research. However, limited papers use qualitative research to explore activists' complex perceptions and lived experiences. This research seeks to fill this gap by providing a detailed analysis of activists' views of social media usage and how they implement various social justice initiatives. The study aims to examine the strategies employed by Pakistani activists, their perceived effectiveness, and how they handle the challenges they face using social media.

2. Objectives of the Study

- i. To explore how activists, use social media in Pakistan to highlight the issues of social injustice.
- ii. To scrutinize the advantages and disadvantages of the social media platforms, according to the activists
- iii. To analyse strategies activists employ to counter misinformation and cyberbullying.

3. Research Questions

RQ1: How are activists utilizing social media to highlight the issues of social injustice in Pakistan?

RQ2: What is their attitude toward the advantages and disadvantages of social media platforms while using them for social justice movements?

RQ3: How do activists address issues like misinformation, cyberbullying, and other challenges by sharing their stories?

This research advances the interpretive insights of digital activism with a localized approach and provides concrete strategies for activists and policymakers who want to enhance digital campaigning. It also pinpoints the tangible cues of how activists deal with issues like the slowed internet and cyberbullying (Auxier & McClain, 2020). However, this study has certain limitations as it is qualitative research, and due to the small sample size, the conclusions and findings are not generalizable. Moreover, the results may be biased as the researcher formed themes from raw data sources.

4. Literature Review

In the current literature from 2018 to 2024, several studies were conducted documenting social media activism regarding the use of social networking platforms to fight for social justice and manage campaigns worldwide and on a smaller scale. The chapter is organized by themes for detailed empirical insights about the topic. Applying the Public Sphere theory made it possible to identify how social networking platforms can be used for public debate and organizing campaigns, bypassing traditional gatekeepers and giving voice to socially excluded groups.

4.1 Early Use of Social Media in Activism

The use of social media in activism started in the early 2000s with Myspace and blogging, which gave rise to grassroots activism (Brandt & Kizer, 2019). Over time, newer platforms such as Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok embraced visual communication, and activists adopted short reels to promote their cause. These developments made information sharing more democratic, where the marginalized could be heard (McKee, 2022).

4.2 Platform-Specific Features and Hashtags for Activism

The versatility of social networking platforms makes it possible for activist groups to be present on various platforms in different ways. It becomes easy to update their following lists and use hashtags to organize the protests in real-time, as seen with the #BlackLivesMatter movement (Freelon et al., 2018). As a tool, Facebook is effective for community building as it sustains connections for a longer time and is helpful for event planning. Instagram is more suitable for storytelling and raising awareness as it relies heavily on images and videos. TikTok uses engaging short reels to capture young audiences with concise and intense messages. These platform-specific features make the approach to activism more diversified and contribute to reaching numerous audiences with different demographics (Kim & Hastak, 2018; Law, 2021).

These platforms were apparent during major global events such as the Iranian Green Movement in 2009 and the Arab Spring in 2010, which were the epitome of how social media can be used to facilitate mass protests and topple authoritarian regimes. Social media allowed activists to spread information, mobilize for protests, provide updates, and avoid state media censorship while sharing the information with people worldwide (Niakooee, 2020; Kim & Lim, 2019). Similarly, the #BlackLivesMatter social justice movement in the United States, analyzed by Freelon et al. (2018), shows how social networking platforms empower the oppressed to speak and lay the foundation to change political narratives. Social media campaigns like #SayHerName raised awareness of police violence against Black women and racism and sexism simultaneously (Jackson et al., 2020). It can be stated that social media platforms emphasize intersectionality and ensure that each marginalized group's experiences are heard and included in the formation of the overall justice concepts that can improve the efficiency of advocacy (Crenshaw, 2019).

4.3 Role of Influencers in Social Justice Movements

Influencers and micro-influencers greatly support social justice movements. Social media users, such as influencers, with a considerable number of followers, educate them on concerns, which is a form of advocacy, as observed with the Nigerian #EndSARS protest, which was supported by celebrities. Micro-influencers are highly involved with their specialized audiences, thus giving them authentic and convincing recommendations. They also debunk fake news and ensure the integrity of movements among the target groups (Uwazuruike, 2020; Teixeira, 2023).

4.4 Social Media Activism in Pakistan

In Pakistan, social media is being used in social justice movements as it plays an important role in organizing protests, telling stories of oppression, and raising support, i.e, the Aurat March and the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (Dossa, 2021; Khan et al, 2021). Social networking platforms enabled female activists to employ Aurat March to organize specific events, raise awareness,

and foster collective communion about women's rights. Likewise, these social networking sites are used by the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement to draw the attention of the global community towards the problems faced by the Pashtuns (Ahmed & Khan, 2022).

4.5 Challenges of Counter-Activism and Digital Repression

Counter-activism and digital repression also affect social media activism. Some counter-activists produce disinformation and are involved in creating memes and trolling. While engaging in activism, citizens in Pakistan experience challenges like government agencies spying and blocking accounts, restrictions on media freedom, and even the termination of internet access. Online harassment is conducted by non-state actors, which poses a risk of endangering the activists. These tactics put people in a state of fear, which hinders activism. One should form strategies and approaches to prevent counter-activism and digital repression (Shahbaz & Funk, 2020; Sinpeng, 2020).

4.6 Psychological Impact of Social Media Activism

Social networking platforms have their pros and cons. It can negatively impact the psychological state of activists by exposing them to distressing content, such as violent or graphic images, pictures, and videos of abuse, and content tagged with threats, slurs, or harassment. This can cause burnout, anxiety, and depression (Gorski, 2019). In Pakistan, female activists experience more social challenges, such as stalking and risks of defamation, as well as threats to their security, which can cause them psychological strain (Dossa, 2021). On the other hand, online communities can also act as positive mediums by offering companionship, emotional support, and advice in demanding situations, which makes activism easier to deal with (Dumitrica & Felt, 2020).

There is an emerging literature on the quantitative effects of social media and activism in Pakistan. However, there is a lack of in-depth qualitative studies that capture the personal views and participation of the activists, giving an interpretive stance. The existing literature on digital

activism centres more on general trends and effects of digital activism and less on the experiences of the activists. The current research proposes to meet the gaps by conducting a qualitative study on social activists in Pakistan. By assessing the complexity of activists, this study explores their use of social networking platforms for social justice, the difficulties they encounter, and the methods they adopt to tackle them. This approach will undoubtedly give a broader perspective of digital activism in Pakistan for scholarly debates and the advancement of social networking platforms for social justice.

5. Theoretical Framework

The Public Sphere theory, formulated by the German sociologist and philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1991), states that the public sphere is an ideal communication space where citizens come together openly, rationally, and critically to discuss matters of general interest outside the domination of either state or capital. This space is important for democracy since it forms public opinion.

Social networking platforms are the modern continuation of the public sphere, where activists can talk about issues, rally people, and fight for justice. It is helpful in the democratization of traditional gatekeeping as it represents the voices of marginalized groups and shapes the opinions of societies (Kruse et al., 2017). This framework helps understand the intricate details of opinion formation and activism in the social media environment in Pakistan. Moreover, it gives an insight into the challenges the activists face, such as misinformation/disinformation and cyberbullying, among others, and the advantages/disadvantages of employing social networking platforms to fight for justice and the rights of individuals and groups with special needs.

6. Research Methodology

This chapter highlights the research method employed to investigate the role of social media in social justice activism by Pakistani social activists. The study is based on interpretivist epistemology by focusing on the activists' perceptions. The qualitative research method followed an inductive approach

to obtain detailed information about the subjects under study, including their personal experiences and approaches.

In-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with five social media activists who represented diverse areas of activism, i.e., environment activist, Shia community activist, education activist, student activist, and women activist. The participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their background in social justice movements and social media advocacy. The study employed a small sample size, but the participants were chosen using purposive sampling to broadly represent the participants' insignificant areas of activism in Pakistan. The activists were five people who advocated environmental, women's education, student, and minority (Shia) rights. Such a strategic choice enabled the study to cover various experiences and digital advocacy practices in the Pakistani socio-political environment. Although the sample cannot be generalized, it represents diverse views of influential activist groups who participate in social justice movements on the Internet.

The data collection was cross-sectional and was gathered by conducting face-to-face interviews through Google Meet with the selected activists, depending on their schedules. The interviews were semi-structured and varied between 30 minutes; the total was 2 hours. The qualitative nature of the study made it possible for the Activists to elaborate on their subjective experiences about activism on social networking platforms in terms of raising awareness, mobilizing for rallies and policies, and tackling challenges such as fake news and harassment. The interview data were recorded digitally and analysed by familiarization, coding, and theme identification. To comprehend the data, a thematic analysis was conducted, where themes emerged, including social media use in activism, activists' strategies, and obstacles encountered. Ethical issues were considered, and the safety of the Activists was ensured. Their identities were not disclosed, and the interviews were conducted in a manner that did not emotionally harm the Activists.

Table 6.1 *Participant Details*

Sr. #	Activist	Activism Area	Social Media Platforms Used	No. of Respondents
1	A	Environmental activism	Twitter	1
2	B	Advocacy for the Shia community	Facebook, Twitter	1
3	C	Education activism	Facebook, Instagram	1
4	D	Student rights activism	Facebook, Twitter, TikTok	1
5	E	Women's rights and security	Instagram	1

7. Results

This chapter outlines the interviews analysed using thematic analysis, which entails familiarization, coding, theme identification, and reviewing and refining the data. This extensive procedure unveiled several significant themes, which helped to understand better the position and role of social networking platforms in modern activism in Pakistan.

7.1 Thematic Analysis

7.1.1 Platform Versatility and Multiplatform Advocacy

Activists use various social media platforms to increase their reach and impact. Activist A mentions that they use Twitter due to its outreach and real-time nature: “I actively engage with Twitter as it has reach and immediacy.”

Activist B uses both Facebook and Twitter: “I use both Facebook for detailed posts and building communities and Twitter for quick sharing of content and raising awareness.” Activist C mentions that they post videos on both Facebook and Instagram. Activist E mainly engages with Instagram because of the visual component, thus aligning with their professional background in design.

7.1.2. Real-Time Reporting and Mobilization

The exact nature of organization through social networking platforms entails prompt communication and rallying of groups required for ‘events’ like strikes and protests linked to climate change. Activist A emphasizes the importance of real-time mobilization, allowing activists to respond quickly to crises. Activist B elaborates on the value of updates during tragedies: “During tragedy, like the one happening in Parachinar, real-time updates are critical, and with the help of social media, I was able to document and share some of the incidents as well as raise awareness”. Activist D added, “Social networks have added a new element of speed and diffusion to the process that helps organize a protest shortly and easily while broadcasting it to the entire world.

7.1.3. Community Building and Global Reach

Social networking platforms enable activists to establish strong support systems and worldwide coverage. Activist C has accumulated a community of supporters, shareholders, and volunteers via Facebook and Instagram, which helps them fund education initiatives at the global level. Likewise, Activist D uses social media to develop a supportive student and equity-conscious community and increase global awareness and support for student rights. Activist B said, “My team is raising awareness for the Shia genocide in Parachinar and is getting support and global reach.”

7.1.4. Educational Outreach and Storytelling

Activists harness social networking platforms to pass information and share experiences that impact society. Activist A shares informational content through Twitter, and Activist C shares the stories of girls who overcame

various obstacles to get an education. They elaborated: "Storytelling is a powerful tool. Sharing the struggles and successes of girls fighting for their education may prompt others to take action." Such strategies help create a knowledge-aware society. Activist A also stated, "Educational content helps create a knowledgeable community aware of the environmental issues."

7.1.5. Collaborative Efforts and Hashtag Campaigns

Raising awareness and making changes can be done by joining forces with other activists and creating hashtags that help increase coverage. Activist A uses #ClimateActionNow to unite the community for a common cause. Activist B uses hashtags to bring attention to their cause: "Hashtags such as #StopShiaGenocide are effective tools because they ensure that our struggle is recognized on a wider scale and people are brought together under one cause" Likewise, Activist D, who uses #StudentsForRights, to get more reach and support. Activist A even supported making things graphic, if needed, "If one in real life person comes, because you posted it to your 600,000 followers, it is 1000% worth it to make that graphic, 1000% worth it to make that post". Activist E highlighted the issue of Noor Mukadam, created pink flags, and used hashtags like #JusticeForNoor.

7.1.6. Challenges of Misinformation and Online Harassment

Activists A and D claim that misinformation is a never-ending struggle that complicates their work. Activists A and B are often threatened and harassed online, especially when advocating for causes that stir up negative emotions in opposing parties or against large companies. Activists E and D describe 'stalking' and 'fake news' as constant obstacles they face. Activist E was concerned about women's safety and said, "Living through these times where you have to use social networking platforms to give live updates makes it necessary for activists to be very cautious when posting their locations as they can be preyed upon, especially women." Activist B showed the most concern as they belong to a minority and have faced various threats online and offline due to their religious beliefs. They said, "My family and I have been trolled and threatened online as well as offline because of my religious beliefs;

people can be cruel sometimes." Activist C added, "Social media has given the oppressed a gift, but once it falls into the wrong hands, bad things are bound to happen."

7.1.7. Evolution of Movements and Increased Visibility

Due to social media, small events have become significant movements, and the limelight on different causes has shifted. Activist E discusses the evolution of Aurat March from a small event to a significant movement, mainly due to social networking platforms' influence on people. They stated that social media has facilitated Aurat March to evolve from a mere cycling event: "I saw Aurat March through social media only, and it has turned into this big movement now." Activist B acknowledges that their community issues are visible today because of social platforms, and they have some impact on policy-making as well.

7.1.8. Safety Measures and Vigilance

Subjects were unanimously concerned with safety and privacy issues related to Internet use. Activists B and E encourage new activists to be safe while encouraging people to take necessary actions to avoid dangers. "New activists should always prioritize their safety and be aware of their surroundings." The threats are real and constant," says Activist B. Activist C stresses consistent engagement and building strong networks to sustain their safety. Activist E said,

"Another thing that most new activists do not know is that if you go to a protest or any public place to support your cause, you take a picture or two and share it on social media, your location can be tracked as well as the identity of anyone whose face you might have captured in that picture".

8. Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings regarding the themes generated and the research questions, while contextualizing the answers with the Public Sphere Theory.

RQ1: How are activists utilizing social media to highlight social injustice in Pakistan?

The study also showcases that activists in Pakistan are smartly using all the networking apps to get the maximum results, which depicts platform versatility and multiplatform advocacy. Each social media platform, including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, is chosen for specific reasons. People turn to Twitter primarily for real-time communication, as this platform is suitable for sharing information and discussions in the shortest time possible. Due to the symbolic nature of the platform, activists with art-related backgrounds gravitate towards Instagram as it provides a means to convey intricate messages within images and videos. Such selective and strategic use of different platforms allows the activists to connect with the target groups, develop a larger support base, and advocate for their ideas for the cause.

Another important function of networking platforms is real-time reporting and mobilization. Through platforms such as Twitter, activists can easily organize a protest and respond quickly to crises, guaranteeing that their cause gets the support it deserves. This capacity to gather communities swiftly is helpful in a country like Pakistan, where dynamics in the political and social realms can be unpredictable. Social media is helpful in community building and global reach as well, which means that through engaging supporters both nationally and globally, activists can transcend geographical limits. This global reach is essential in advocating for and garnering international support for local matters, as demonstrated by activists who reported having established a very robust network and the capability of sourcing funds to support their various causes.

RQ2: What is their attitude toward the advantages and disadvantages of social media platforms while using them for social justice movements?

Some of the issues highlighted in the study were misinformation and online harassment in navigating social networking platforms for activism. Disinformation is a common problem that challenges the credibility of

activists. Those against the cause sometimes actively spread misinformation, neutralizing activists' efforts. The ongoing battles to counter these initiatives are necessary. The different forms of abusive conduct present in online environments are primarily aimed at women and minorities. They are threatened with personal safety, which requires protective and defensive behavioral solutions.

Nevertheless, the evolution of movements and increased visibility also have advantages despite all these difficulties. Small-scale events have now turned into significant events through social media; for instance, the Aurat march has become a nationally recognizable event compared to what it used to be. The accessibility of social networking platforms allows the movements to reach a wider audience and brings key issues to the attention of policymakers to be more effective.

RQ3: How do activists address misinformation, cyberbullying, and other challenges when sharing their stories?

The campaigners use several techniques to overcome these hurdles, which can be seen from the two themes: collaborative efforts, hashtag campaigns, safety measures, and vigilance. Working with other activists and hashtags increases the potential of messages and cultivates a sense of empathy in people, making them stand against fake news and malicious intent. For instance, Activist A's #ClimateActionNow and Activist B's #StopShiaGenocide clearly show how strategic and connected campaigns bring people together to address a particular issue and gain global support. In combating various forms of cyberbullying, activists highlight the need for safety measures and vigilance. It is highlighted that users should be more careful when revealing personal information on the Internet. The findings also reveal that one has to pay special attention to females and representatives of minorities, as they often become targets for attacks. The study also points out the need to maintain contact with various agencies as a key strategy for promoting and encouraging people despite opposition.

Thus, when filtered through the Public Sphere Theory, the results and analysis highlight the importance of social networking sites in the newly emerging public sphere, especially in the socio-politically restricted contexts of Pakistan. The theory claims that social networking sites are the contemporary version of the public sphere since people in marginalized groups can freely discuss issues and seek support through reasonable debate beyond the state's or corporations' influence. The versatility of using the various platforms in real-time to mobilize, build communities, and go global also illustrates how activists utilize social media to speak for the voiceless on social justice issues. Similarly, the problems of fake news and cyberbullying prove continuous tension in keeping the information space credible and safe. Moreover, collective actions and hashtags display the tenacity of these social networking platforms. Therefore, the study supports the Public Sphere Theory by arguing that social networking platforms are important public spheres through which activists can counter hegemonic discourses, mobilize support, and seek social change.

Table 8.1 *Key Findings*

Activist	Activism Area	Key Challenges Faced	Strategies Employed
A	Environmental activism	Misinformation	Real-time mobilization
B	Advocacy for the Shia community	Online harassment, censorship	Hashtag campaigns
C	Education activism	Lack of resources, misinformation	Storytelling, community building
D	Student rights activism	Online harassment	Educational outreach
E	Women's rights and security	Online harassment, safety risks	Visual advocacy, safety measures

Table 8.2 *Themes Identified*

Sr#	Theme	Detail
1	Platform Versatility	Activists leverage multiple social media platforms to maximize reach and impact.
2	Real-Time Reporting and Mobilization	Social media enables rapid updates and community mobilization during crises.
3	Community Building and Global Reach	Social media helps build strong support networks and reach a global audience.
4	Educational Outreach and Storytelling	Activists use social media to educate the public and share compelling personal stories.
5	Challenges of Misinformation & Online Harassment	Activists face significant challenges in combating misinformation and dealing with online harassment.
6	Collaborative Efforts and Hashtag Campaigns	Collaboration with other activists and influencers and effective hashtag campaigns amplify messages and broaden reach.
7	Evolution of Movements and Increased Visibility	Social media transforms small events into significant movements and increases the visibility of various causes.
8	Safety Measures and Vigilance	Online safety and privacy are critical concerns for activists, requiring precautionary measures and vigilance.

9. Conclusion & Recommendations

This chapter summarizes the findings, implications of the study, and recommendations for future research. The activists' views highlighted the importance of social networking sites in today's activism, including the opportunities and difficulties of using social networking platforms.

The study aimed to understand the use of social networking sites in social justice activism in Pakistan, including the strategies activists employ and the challenges they face. Consequently, the study indicates that social media platforms are crucial to activism, allowing for forming groups, mobilizing, and raising awareness. There are challenges, such as fake news and cyberbullying, with which activists should be vigilant and wise. The study responded to the research questions by explaining how activists utilize social networking platforms to highlight the issues of social injustice, their attitudes toward the advantages and disadvantages of social networking platforms, and how they address the challenges while fighting for their cause. The results prove the relevance of the Public Sphere theory in the context of modern-day activism in Pakistan, as it outlines how social networking platforms can democratize the public sphere and empower minorities. This theoretical contribution helps explain the dynamics of digital activism in a socio-politically restrictive country such as Pakistan.

The study offers practical implications for activists and policymakers. It suggests strategies for activists to amplify their voices to spread their messages where local media is subdued. To counteract the challenges of fake news, activists should use fact-checking protocols, cooperate with other non-governmental organizations, and be cautious while sharing their data. This research aimed to address the gaps in the existing knowledge by conducting a descriptive qualitative study of the perceptions and experiences of activists in Pakistan. As opposed to the previous studies, which merely focused on the quantitative data, this paper ensures a better understanding of the problems faced by the activists, the steps they took, and the effectiveness of social networking sites for activism. However, this research enhances knowledge of social media platforms' usage in social justice movements in Pakistan; the

study has limitations. A significant factor that could have affected the findings of this study is the small and purposive sample size, which restricted its generalizability. Since the research is qualitative, the findings might be biased due to the researcher's perspectives. Time constraints might have also limited the scope of the study.

Future research should enlist more people in the sample and include people of varying ages, backgrounds, experiences, and genders. The quantitative approach can also help to better understand social media activism in the country with a larger sample size. Longitudinal studies can also offer detailed insights into the impact of social networking platforms on social justice campaigns. A comparative analysis between several countries can also reveal certain aspects of activism from broader perspectives.

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Food Documentaries as a Tool for Cultural Promotion of Lahore: A Tourist Perspective

Rabbia Shahzad

MS Graduate (Department of Mass Communication)

Lahore College for Women University, Lahore.

Email: rabbia_shahzad1997@outlook.com

Naveed Iqbal

Assistant Professor (Department of Mass Communication)

Lahore College for Women University, Lahore.

Email: rananaveed_2001@yahoo.com

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24312/ucp-jmc.03.01.503>

Abstract

This research examines the role of food in promoting cultural heritage, with a particular focus on how street food and food documentaries contribute to the cultural promotion of Lahore, Pakistan. The research explores how street food serves as a medium for image-building at both national and international levels, emphasizing the ways in which visual storytelling particularly through documentaries enhances cultural visibility and tourist engagement. A qualitative research design was employed, with thematic analysis conducted on in-depth interviews from three foreign and three local tourists from Pakistan. In addition, two popular YouTube documentaries “100 Hours in Lahore, Pakistan!” and “Ultimate 16-Hour Pakistani Food Tour in Lahore, Pakistan!” were analysed to understand how Lahore’s street food culture is represented to a global audience. The Fits-Like-A-Glove choice theory and the Uses and gratification theory served as the conceptual foundation for the research. Interview protocol was designed as tool for data collection for desired study. The findings of the study revealed that cuisine is closely related to cultural heritage, gastronomy plays a significant role in promoting a city's or country's culture. The analysis of the documentaries

demonstrated how visually rich depictions of street food its preparation, local context, and sensory appeal significantly amplify cultural messaging, offering an immersive pre-travel experience to potential tourists. Tourists often seek to taste the essence of a culture through its cuisine, shaped by regional variations and historical influences. Tourists look to taste the essence of a culture through its cuisine due to regional variations in climate and other variables. Street food also has significant economic importance since it promotes the preservation of the region's culinary and cultural legacy, which boosts tourism revenues and strengthened links with the territory. The cuisine of Lahore is a fusion of Punjabi cuisine, Mughal cuisine, and street-style culinary traditions emerges as both a sensory and symbolic experience for tourists. Documentaries serve as cultural artifacts that reinforce these connections, making food a unifying force and an effective tool for cultural promotion.

Keywords: Street Food, Visual Storytelling, Food Documentaries, Cultural Heritage.

1. Introduction

Food is something that not only feeds human appetites but also reflects a region's culture, way of life, organic productivity, environment, and preferences. Every region has its own distinct cuisine. People from diverse cultures are increasingly interacting more due to technological advancements. Nevertheless, they started to incorporate a lot of cultural norms and beliefs. Eating is essential. Every human being needs food to survive. Therefore, adopting values has an impact in adopting food. Since knowledge has advanced, people are now beginning to appreciate other regional cuisines, and demand for regional foods is rising dramatically (Stajcic, 2013). Lahore is one of the top food centers in the nation, serving a wide range of food to both native consumers and foreign tourists. That not only results in economic growth but also integrates several food cultures in one location. It is not much simpler to integrate culture and provide the greatest food for its region of origin (Ali, 2020).

According to a study, since it reflects historical roots, street food has social and cultural implications. Additionally, it is stated that despite the

advent of modern fast food consumption, street food is still consumed globally and traditionally (Sezgin, 2020). It is feasible to research why people travel by dividing the forces of attraction that the various tourist destinations exert on the traveler from the push factors that generate a desire to take a vacation. In the sense that society is built around food, eating is an experience that each of us has every day. You must "eat" like it in order to be one of those establishments. The meals we have had there and the people we have shared them with are what come to mind when we think of a location (Urry, 2017).

Ma et al. (2019) claims that every day, around 2.5 billion individuals consume street food worldwide. Street food production and sales have assimilated into daily life, particularly in the culture of Far Eastern cuisine. In a book named as "Street Food. Culture, Economy, Health and Governance" Part IV, (Chapters 11 and 12) examines the cultural aspect of street food trade and consumption. They are represented in society through both visual and written performances and figurative purposes. Food sold on the street occupies a special place that is straddled by history and present, urban and rural, real and virtual, and real and imagined. Societal identities and meaningful social understandings of property rights are established in this setting. Street Food According to Karim and Halim, are a culinary wonder, a fusion of Malay, Chinese, Indian, Mumak, and Nyanja cuisines. Traditional street meals continue to exist practically unchanged, despite the growing impact of western culinary tastes and flavors. Vendors who possess the knowledge of this not only gastronomic but cultural tradition guard and preserve them.

Recent studies highlight how food documentaries serve as a medium for constructing and communicating national and cultural identities. By blending visual storytelling with narratives of heritage and authenticity, documentaries such as *Street Food* (Fried et al., 2019) and *Ugly Delicious* (Capotosto et al., 2018) present cuisine as a cultural symbol shaped by tradition, migration, and globalization. These films do more than showcase food—they narrate histories, celebrate diversity, and invite audiences to engage with cultures through gastronomy. The way that food films are framed visually makes them useful for showcasing a city's food legacy to viewers around the world. This is especially true of Lahore's vibrant street food scene.

This paper examines how documentaries with a food subject can effectively promote interpersonal relationships, culinary culture, and sociocultural identities. According to Suna and Alvarez (2021), these videos serve as cultural texts that showcase regional cuisines, bring back endangered culinary traditions, and use food narratives to reflect geopolitical realities. They are more than just entertainment. These visual media enrich cultural awareness and promote regional culinary heritage by presenting food as a cultural asset. The notion that documentaries on street cuisine in Lahore can be effective cultural tools that promote both local and global appreciation is supported by this (Latip et al., 2024).

Current research emphasizes how important regional food is to maintaining cultural identity and advancing sustainable growth. Traditional culinary traditions can support regional development and cultivate cultural values (Chukwurah et al., 2025). This study investigates how street food can be used as a potent instrument for national and worldwide image-building. It draws attention to the importance of visual storytelling in raising cultural awareness and encouraging more visitor interaction, especially in culinary documentaries. These documentaries enhance national identities, draw attention from around the world, and promote culinary heritage by highlighting regional foods and their cultural relevance. This is in line with the expanding understanding that food is a cultural icon that influences stories and perceptions internationally.

2. Objectives

The research aims:

- To explore the cultural Promotion of Pakistan through documentaries based on street food of Lahore.
- To explore the tourist perspective about depiction of street food of Lahore in documentaries.
- To explore the role of food documentaries in image building of Lahore at both national and international level.

3. Research Question

RQ1: How Lahori cuisine depicted in food documentaries helps in cultural promotion of Pakistan at national and international level?

4. Literature Review

According to Callao and Ruisánchez (2018) explores in his research that food not only satisfied human appetites but also reflects a region's culture, lifestyle, organic productivity, environment, and preferences. Every country has a unique culinary heritage, and the adoption of values influences the types of food consumed. With the passage of time, people are increasingly appreciating other regional cuisines, and the demand for such foods is rising dramatically. Given food's importance to both our health and cultural identity, it is crucial to focus on understanding its cultural and social significance. The research highlights Lahore as one of Pakistan's key food hubs, offering a diverse range of cuisines to both domestic and international visitors. This not only supports the economy but also fosters the integration of various gastronomic cultures in one place.

Street food is constantly growing in its popularity, easily available for quick consumption, and offers entrepreneurial opportunities with modest startup costs. It is affordable, practical, and often made using fresh, locally sourced ingredients.

Consumptions decisions are only understandable in the context of their culture. (Rachwal-Mueller, 2024) Culture acts as a 'prism' through which people view products and define their own and others' behaviors. Culture is considered as the collective memory of society, encompassing the accumulated meanings, rituals, norms, and traditions shared by its members. These elements collectively shape culture, which in turn defines individuals, communities, social organizations, and political and economic systems.

Pervez et al. (2017) claims in his research Lahore is a special place. The colorful history of the Old City of Lahore is still very much alive today, just as it was during the reigns of Akbar and Ramjet Singh. Lahore's street culture is extremely diverse in all respects. The Old City of Lahore's cuisine,

entertainment, and professional expertise have distinctive tastes and standards that have developed over the years.

The majority of studies have determined that street food is clean, hygienic, and of acceptable quality. Young consumers had worse food safety knowledge and safe food preparation practice scores than adults, Sert and Kapusuz discovered that 75 percent of participants liked street food on occasion and 18.9% on a regular basis. While street food intake preference scores were low in participants who consumed it 1–3 times a year, they were high in participants who eat it daily in the current study (Sahin et al., 2016).

Malik (2006) stated in his research The people of Lahore are often food enthusiasts. They adore all cuisines, both traditional and trendy. Generally speaking, there are stores, carts, and even mid-shift arrangements for a variety of food items all across the city, but especially in the Old City. These things are nearly impossible to count. While Shahi Mohallah and Luxurni Chowk are also found in older areas of Lahore, Gawalmandi is known for its Food Street. The effects of visual storytelling techniques through documentary films in *A Bite of China*, focusing on the techniques which influence audience engagement with Chinese food culture. According to the study, certain aspects of the story, such as conflict, are crucial in increasing the audience's level of media satisfaction. By using compelling storytelling techniques, the documentary fosters a deeper understanding of Chinese culinary traditions and their cultural significance. This underscores the potential of food documentaries as tools for cultural promotion, suggesting that similar approaches could be applied to documentaries on Lahore's street food, enhancing its cultural visibility both nationally and internationally.

5. Theoretical Framework

The Fits-Like-A-Glove (FLAG) theory provides useful insights into how individual choices, particularly in the context of food and travel, are influenced by historical and social factors. According to Shakeel (2023), this model implies that choices are not made in a vacuum but rather are intricately linked to individual's prior experiences and the socio-cultural environment at the time. Tourists, much like locals, are motivated by their habitual choices and preferences when deciding what to eat, influenced by both their personal

needs and the social norms of their home environment. Moors (2021) further asserts that tourists' decisions are often destination-driven rather than activity-driven, meaning that they may not consciously plan for specific activities but instead engage in those that align closely with their usual behaviors or preferences once they arrive. This theoretical framework helps explain why tourists may select activities or food options that mirror their everyday routines, reflecting a connection between past experiences and current choices.

6. Methodology

This research employed thematic analysis, a qualitative technique used to identify and interpret patterns within data. Thematic analysis is a versatile method that can be used independently or in combination with other qualitative approaches, such as grounded theory or discourse analysis, allowing for a deeper understanding of how tourists engage with and perceive Lahore's street food culture (Khuram, 2024).

In order to ensure a wide range of perspectives on the function of food documentaries in promoting culture, the study focused on both local tourists visiting Lahore from other parts of Pakistan and foreign tourists living overseas. A sample of three local and three foreign tourists was selected to achieve a balanced representation of views, which is typical for qualitative studies focusing on in-depth insights rather than large sample sizes. Participants were chosen based on specific criteria, including demographic factors such as age, nationality, language, and prior experience with Lahore's street food, enabling a focused exploration of how various groups perceive the cultural significance of these culinary practices.

6.1 Research Design

In order to get complete understanding into tourists' opinions and perceptions of Lahore's street food culture and its portrayal in visual media, a qualitative technique was selected. A detailed examination of the cultural connotations, emotional reactions, and behavioural incentives related to culinary tourism was made possible by this method.

6.2 Sampling Technique and Sample Size

Purposive sampling was used to select the sample for data collection. Total Six participants were selected: three tourists were from Pakistan i.e. Peshawar and Islamabad and three foreign tourists were from the USA, Germany, and the UK. Participants were chosen based on their interaction with visual content about food and their past exposure to street food in Lahore. A balanced representation of viewpoints from various cultural and geographic backgrounds was ensured by this diverse sample.

6.3 Data Collection Methods

6.3.1 In-Depth Interviews

An interview protocol guide was designed to guide in-depth discussions with participants. Their experiences with street food in Lahore, their views on cultural identity, and how food documentaries influenced their travel and food choices were the main topics of the questions.

Table 6.1 *Inclusion criteria of Respondents*

Respondent No.	Gender	Age	Residence
R1	Female	45	UK
R2	Female	35	USA
R3	Male	30	Germany
R4	Female	25	Pakistan (Islamabad)
R5	Male	46	Pakistan (Peshawar)
R6	Male	31	Pakistan (Peshawar)

6.3.2 Documentary Analysis

The two popular YouTube documentaries titled as "Ultimate 16-Hour Pakistani Food Tour in Lahore, Pakistan!" and "100 Hours in Lahore, Pakistan!" were utilized for qualitative content analysis. The comprehensive representation of Lahore's food landscape and its broad popularity among viewers globally led to the selection of these documentaries.

These YouTube-based travel documentaries were selected for their high viewership, immersive content, and detailed visual portrayal of Lahore's street food scene. A qualitative content analysis was conducted, focusing on visual representation, narrative structure, depiction of culinary practices, and the ways in which food is framed as an element of cultural identity. Key segments featuring food preparation, vendor interactions, cultural commentary, and audience engagement were thematically analysed.

6.4 Data Analysis

Using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis, the following steps were applied:

- i. **Familiarization:** In order to gain a complete understanding, the documentaries and transcripts were reviewed several times.
- ii. **Generating Initial Codes:** Important terms and patterns were manually coded with an emphasis on sensory, emotional, and cultural aspects.
- iii. **Searching for Themes:** In order to more effectively achieve the goals of the research, codes were categorized into more general topics.
- iv. **Reviewing Themes:** The themes were improved to ensure consistency and relevance throughout the dataset.
- v. **Defining and Naming Themes:** Themes were named and described with clarity, and each was supported up by examples and quotes that served as examples.
- vi. **Producing the Report:** The final themes were combined to create an organized narrative that answered the research question.

6.4.1 Initial Codes

Following codes were generated from the initial analysis:

- Food's sensory appeal (taste, aroma, atmosphere)
- Cultural traditions and nostalgia
- Visual appeal in documentaries about food
- Social connections and hospitality
- Concerns about the hygiene of street food
- Food as a driving force behind travelling
- Instagram and YouTube's impact on food choices
- Building a national image through food media
- Food identity and regional pride

6.4.2 Themes Developed

The codes were merged into more general themes that clarify how food, culture, and media influence are related:

1. **Food as a Cultural Bridge** - Food as a means for cultural expression and experience
2. **Visual Storytelling as a Tool for Engagement** - The ability of visual media to influence how people perceive food
3. **Street Food as a Tourist Attraction** - A major motivation for travel and adventure is street food
4. **Food Diversity and Identity** - Lahore's food is characterized by its own fusion of traditions
5. **Food Documentaries as Cultural Artifacts** - Documentary stories as means of preserving and advancing culture

6.5 Ethical Considerations

Respondents were informed about the purpose and background of the study before conducting the interviews. Confidentiality and anonymity was maintained during the whole research process.

7. Findings & Results

Following are the results obtained from both interviews and documentary analysis:

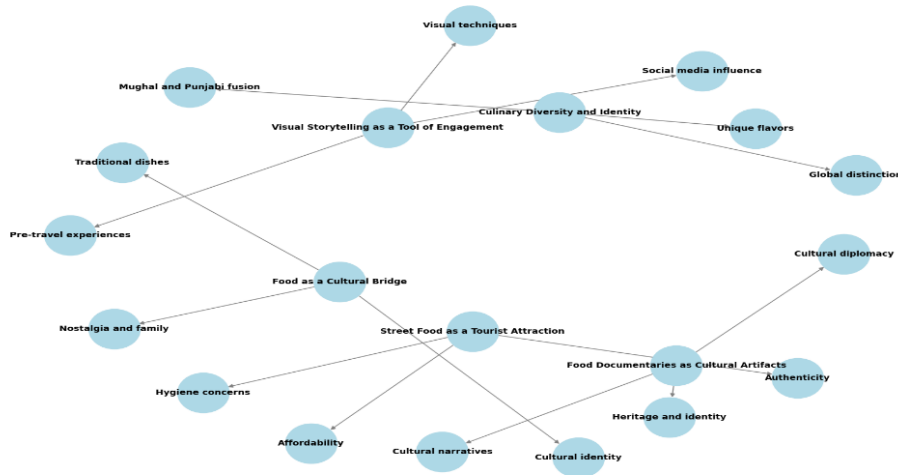


Figure 7.1 Themes Generated

The five main themes found using the thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006) are graphically represented by the thematic map. To show the layered and linked structure of the findings, each subject is shown as a central node with sub-themes spreading out from it. This framework facilitates the conceptualization of the interplay between many facets of cuisine, culture, and media within the framework of culinary tourism in Lahore.

7.1 Food as a Cultural Bridge

In Lahore, food serves as more than just nutrition; it is a vibrant expression of cultural history. According to the interviews, Tourists regard food as a means of learning about local customs, values, and hospitality. Nihari, Halwa Puri, and Murgh Choley are examples of traditional foods that have become embedded in family memories and societal customs. These dinners, which represent friendliness and warmth, are frequently the first cultural encounters for tourists. This theme also illustrates how food may strengthen bonds

between people. Tourists characterized dining experiences as bringing back fond memories of their families and homes. Sharing meals turns into a way for travelers to experience cultural interaction and become assimilated into the way of life. Thus, food serves as a cultural bridge that cuts over both language and region. The basic regular tastes come out in dhaba street meals. Food needs to be cooked properly in a clean setting that exhibits excellent taste and setting (Batool, 2025).

Food acts as a soft power tool in cultural tourism, a conveniently accessible and emotionally powerful medium for promoting intercultural understanding and national identity.

When a visitor from the UK visited someone in Lahore, they were served traditional dishes like Nihari, Paye, and Murgh Cholay, which helped them feel at home and a part of the community. Similarly, according to an Islamabadi local visitor, Food is the "prior element to welcome tourists," who emphasized its significance in hospitality and cultural representation.

Another participant talked on the ways that food ties them to family customs, saying that some foods bring back memories of feasts and festivities at home.

7.2 Street Food as a Tourist Attraction

The portrayal of street food in Lahore is one of both culture and cuisine. Tourists like its diversity, authenticity, and affordability. In addition to being places to dine, food areas like Gawalmandi and Anarkali Bazaar have become cultural hubs where history, community, and cuisine all come together.

The appeal of street cuisine is still strong despite hygienic concerns. The pure, unprocessed experience of dining open air, chatting with residents, and seeing traditional cooking techniques is highly valued by tourists. The richness of smells, sounds, and sights enhances their appeal. One of the most basic forms of cultural diplomacy is street food. It democratizes heritage access by enabling visitors to interact with culture outside of official institutions in ordinary contexts.

One German traveler gave the Taka Tak at Lakshmi Chowk high marks, stating that they went especially since they saw it in a documentary.

The street cuisine in Lahore is unrivaled in taste and atmosphere, according to a Peshawar local tourist who said they always book excursions there especially to savor it. One participant emphasized the distinctive ambiance of Lahore's food streets, citing the interplay of music, lighting, and alfresco dining as a crucial component of the experience.

Majority of them had a similar opinion that Food is nostalgic and helps us stay connected to our families. Traditional Food dishes are linked to fond family memories and A country's symbolic identity is its food (Zocchi, 2021).

7.3 Visual Storytelling as a Tool for Engagement

Tourist behaviour has been significantly influenced by visual storytelling, particularly in food documentaries and on social media. Sites like YouTube and Instagram were regularly mentioned by participants as informational and inspirational resources. In order to produce immersive experiences, the documentaries "100 Hours in Lahore" and "Ultimate 16-Hour Pakistani Food Tour" employed cinematic methods like close-ups, slow-motion views, and ambient music.

These visual cues arouse emotions and sensory reactions in addition to showcasing food. After seeing particular foods prepared and presented on TV, tourists said they were drawn to them. Travel and culinary choices are frequently influenced by the visual narrative's ability to evoke feelings of desire and anticipation.

Food becomes more than just a product; it becomes an aspirational cultural show thanks to visual media. In this way, documentaries are positioned as strategic tools for cultural branding and destination marketing. According to several participants, YouTube and Instagram videos—particularly those featuring close-ups and slow-motion images of foods like BBQ, Halwa Puri, and Taka Tak—have affected them.

A documentary that emphasized the preparation and presentation of Dahi Bhallay at Anarkali Bazaar inspired one visitor to taste it. Another individual commented that they were more excited to try the cuisine in person because of its visual appeal on television, particularly its brilliant colours and sizzling sounds.

According to one respondent, food documentaries especially those that highlight regional cuisine are essential for informing viewers about Lahore's street food options and culinary customs. For prospective food tourists, these videos offer visual narratives that emphasise the flavours, textures, and cooking techniques of food, making it more enticing and persuasive. Interviewees also shared that food documentaries create awareness about where to find specific dishes, with people from both local and international backgrounds being influenced by social media promotions to try new foods upon visiting Lahore (Bashir, 2024).

7.4 Food Diversity and Identity

This theme directly aligns with the research focus. All participants acknowledged that food documentaries especially on YouTube played a significant role in shaping their expectations. Documentaries provided a visual roadmap for exploring Lahore, highlighting not just taste but also authenticity and cultural depth. Close-up shots of spicy grilled meat or rhythmic street cooking sounds in the documentaries were cited by interviewees as motivating factors to visit specific places. One respondent stated that a particular video showing 'Dahi Bhallay at Anarkali' convinced her to try it herself.

Tourists characterized Lahore's food as a fusion of Punjabi and Mughal customs, with dishes such as Muhammadi Nihari, Daas Kulcha, and Naan Khataiyan showcasing unique regional characteristics. The perfume of spices and the "sounds of taka takk" are sensory indicators of Lahore's culinary character, according to one participant. According to another respondent, Lahore cuisine "touches all five senses," making it a culturally holistic experience.

7.5 Food Documentaries as Cultural Artifacts

The interviewees observe that each nation seeks to advertise its food while globally attracting tourism for gastronomic experiences. Local people in Lahore popularize Lahori cuisine by seeking ways to innovate traditional dishes. Central Asian salads join beef barbecue as exquisite dishes whereas Afghan Kababs stand out because of their olive addition. The typical visitor to Pakistan looks for both Lahori regional cuisine and suitable dining

locations and lodging facilities when visiting the country. According to this interview participant Pakistani heritage should motivate vacationers more than food does. Lahore serves as a destination for local residents who want food items not available in other Pakistani cities such as Islamabad and Peshawar because it harmoniously combines contemporary elements with local traditions. Outside residents from Lahore decide to visit because of their interest in Pakistani food. The interviewee came to reside in Lahore because of its Peshawar-originated Lahori cuisine (Ahmed, 2024).

Participants referred to food films as "branding tools" that tell the cultural stories of foods in addition to promoting them. Documentaries, according to one responder, helped them comprehend the social and historical background of foods, such as the connection between Halwa Puri and weekend customs.

Another traveller said the documentaries act as "visual roadmaps," directing them to particular restaurants and elucidating the cultural value of the food they're consuming.

7.6 Reason Why Food Attracts Tourists

Majority of the interviewees had similar opinion regarding food attractions. Tourists prefer to seek out cultural encounters where they can fully immerse themselves in the cuisine and way of life of the locals, according to all of the respondents. Cuisine greatly affects how you feel; if you serve nice food to your visitors, they will be quite appreciative because of a good taste. tourists want to seek out cultural experiences where they can immerse themselves in the local food and way of life. As visitors and tourists look for new foods that introduce them to different tastes, textures, and traditions, we can learn about regional customs and culture through the cuisine that we eat. Tourists desire organic cuisine from the area (Hasan, 2024).

7.7 Other Tourist Attractions

The best attraction in Lahore, according to the interviewees preferences, is food, as there are many different restaurants there. Other than food there are several bazars such as the rang mehal bazar through Shah Alam market and merely exploring the vivid variety of wholesome market, with excellent music

and a different style of providing food. These items, including handicrafts and human labour, draw tourists. The havelis, which are also popular tourist destinations, are seen when you pass through the Bhatti gate (Hussain, 2024).

The interviewees also revealed that If you travel to Italy, Turkey, or France, you can locate any gorgeous historical location in the restaurant's background. People always go out of their way to go there. The views from restaurant rooftops, the Badshahi Mosque, and all other locations within the Walled City are quite eye capturing. People always go out of their way to go there (Hussain, 2024).

7.8 Variety of Cuisines

Interviewees revealed that during their travel to Lahore, they primarily require local cuisine. One will like eating Arabic cuisine if he/she visit Arab similarly You may get Italian food to eat in Italy. Hence tourists prefer the regional food of Lahore to that of other countries. They admitted to enjoying both local street food and Lahori cuisine. Both tasting and eating them are worthwhile. One of the participant revealed that she prefers local cuisine as long as it is healthy (Ibrar, 2024).

7.9 Lahori Cuisine Distinguishes Lahore Culture from World

The interviewees had mixed opinions and perceptions about the motives which distinguishes Lahore's culture from world. They argue that It's just the manner in which the food is prepared, such as the noises of the cooking tools (for instance, if you walk along a food street, you'll hear the sounds of takka takka), and in particular, the taste and smell. The cuisine of Lahore appeals to all five senses, which helps one realise that it is a component of Lahori culture and has a distinct spice scent. Lahore has a unique style that lets it stand out and be good (Riaz, 2022).

There are numerous aspects that make Lahore one of the loveliest cities, and cuisine is just one of them. It's just the way the food is made. Lahore was referred to as the Mughal gardens. It's still active. The habit of going out on the streets is still prevalent. People are still compelled to go outside and eat in the streets. Lahore is well known for having a wide array of cuisines (Riaz, 2022).

7.10 Lahori Cuisine Worth Recommending to Tourists

Majority of the interviewees said that it was worthwhile to suggest street food of Lahore if it is properly packaged with regard to safety concerns. hygiene should be first priority. Foreign interviewees were of the view that street food is worth recommending particularly for UK residents who are unaware of mouth-watering street food culture of Lahore specially dahi bhallay (Ali, 2022).

8. Discussion

This study examined the role that food documentaries have in promoting Lahore's culture, namely from the perspectives of street food and visitor interaction. A complex interaction between food, media, identity, and tourism is revealed by the results of theme analysis of interviews and documentary material. For local companies, media producers, tourism authorities, and cultural policymakers, these findings have important implications.

According to the study, food is a powerful cultural symbol that goes over linguistic and geographical barriers. Local and foreign tourists alike view cuisine as a means of discovering a destination's values, customs, and friendliness. The sentimental and sentimental associations with traditional foods like Halwa Puri, Nihari, and Murgh Cholay support the notion that eating is an experience rather than merely a meal.

In international tourist marketing and cultural exchange programs, food can be strategically used to promote understanding and goodwill among participants. Lahore's food culture, along with its historical and architectural legacy, ought to be a central part of its tourism identity.

Tourist behavior is significantly impacted by visual media, especially YouTube and Instagram. Short-form and documentary videos provide as immersive pre-trip experiences that influence expectations and direct gastronomic inquiry. The incorporation of cinematic elements including close-ups, background noise, and narrative storytelling improves the food's sensory appeal.

Tourist agencies and neighborhood companies should spend money on excellent visual content that highlights Lahore's gastronomic scene. Giving

local chefs and sellers narrative and digital media skills can broaden their audience and democratize cultural promotion.

9. Conclusion

The thematic analysis combining interviews and documentary content revealed that visual media plays a substantial role in shaping culinary tourism. Food documentaries serve as cultural texts that not only portray Lahore's vibrant cuisine but also promote emotional and sensory engagement. Tourists are inspired not just by taste but by stories, images, and cultural meanings.

These documentaries through close-up shots, atmospheric sounds, and engaging hosts act as persuasive tools that visually frame Lahore as a must-visit culinary destination. The results validate the research hypothesis that street food and its representation through media contribute significantly to cultural promotion, identity formation, and tourism engagement.

The results from the interview protocol highlights the significant socioeconomic value of street food in Lahore, not only as a culinary tradition but also as a catalyst for tourism and community engagement. Street food plays a vital role in preserving the region's cultural heritage while simultaneously fostering economic growth by attracting both local and international tourists. However, the success of Lahore's street food industry is contingent upon addressing ongoing hygiene concerns. If these issues are effectively managed by local vendors and city authorities, there is a substantial potential for increased revenue generation and tourism growth in the city.

The research further reveals that cuisine is deeply intertwined with cultural heritage, with gastronomy serving as a powerful medium for promoting a city's or country's identity. Tourists, both local and foreign, seek to experience the essence of a culture through its food, with regional variations shaped by factors such as climate and local customs. Lahore's cuisine, which blends Punjabi, Mughal, and street food traditions, is a testament to the city's rich culinary history and its ability to offer diverse, delectable experiences. Food is a universal connector, bringing people together under shared cultural values, and traditional foods often evoke nostalgic family memories.

The study also emphasises how influential food documentaries and visual storytelling are in influencing culinary tourism and food perceptions. Participants underlined that by demonstrating the preparation, texture, and presentation of regional cuisine, food documentaries particularly those posted on social media sites like YouTube have a big influence on their dietary decisions. These documentaries employ visual strategies including close-ups, slow-motion shots and captivating storytelling to enthrall viewers and encourage them to learn more about Lahore's culinary heritage. In addition to drawing foodies, this visual narrative informs them of the cultural value of Lahore's street cuisine so solidifying its role in promoting culture and advancing tourism.

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Role of Social Media in Enhancing the Visibility and Attractiveness of Academic Programs

Saima Zaigham

Academic & Administrative Coordinator (School of Education),
Beaconhouse National University, Lahore.
Email: saima.zaigham@bnu.edu.pk

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Abstract

Viewership is changing from traditional and print media to social media, and businesses are adapting to social media for improved engagement with their audience. While there are advantages to using social media, as it offers new opportunities, there are also challenges associated with these tools available online. One of the challenges is the spread of misinformation, which leads to the fragmentation of the audience. It is important to address this issue because in higher education, social media is used as a cost-effective tool for marketing and branding and it also allows improved engagement with the students, as well as helps academic institutes in decision making (Maresova et al., 2020). However, the traditional media still struggles with revenues and audience loss, but it still provides curated content which is vastly different from social media's diverse voices (Zachos et al., 2018). Nevertheless, the rise in adoption of social media has transformed media landscapes, which require strategic adoption for the survival and success of academic institutions and businesses.

Keywords: Universities, Academic Programs, Social Media, Impact, Students.

1. Introduction

In today's world, information is conveyed through multimedia, which is vivid and dynamic. The presented media can be in the form of powerful images, captivating sounds, and videos that are engaging and provide an experience

to the user that is not only immersive but also interactive. The information delivery has evolved, and people can now learn about the world around us in a more dynamic and exciting way (Sutcliffe, 2009). The society has shifted quite significantly at the turn of the 21st century, and the impacts of this can be seen in higher education. The universities and colleges have recognised these challenges by improving their online presence and utilising social media to communicate with improved marketing and branding tactics (Maresova et al., 2020).

Higher education institutions are becoming diverse and their number is increasing constantly. Naturally, these institutions are facing competition to attract more and more students and attempting to persuade them to join their institution. To do this, these higher education institutes are utilising social media as a cost-effective tool to reach their target audience and attract a large number of prospective students. These institutions are using social media to share news, services available at these institutes, admissions information, events diary, etc. All these efforts are allowing the institutions to raise their profile and establish their presence. This, in turn, allows the student body to make an informed decision about the universities of their choosing, and it also allows them to connect with other students (Aman & Hussin, 2018). In this regard, social media has served both the institutions and the prospective student body well, leaving a positive impact on higher education in all dimensions. Thus, the use of social media for such purposes in higher education has a promising future (Zachos et al., 2018).

With the rise in number of higher education institutes, universities are developing new strategies to attract more students and to attract productive faculty members to ensure productivity within this sector. Universities are also looking to partner with sought after corporations, spark conversations for a two-way knowledge transfer. Various authors, such as Hemsley-Brown et al. (2016), Lafuente-Ruiz-de-Sabando et al. (2018), and Plewa et al. (2016) have highlighted that for universities to be adaptive and innovate in order to remain competitive. Higher education institutions (HEIs) Can allow a higher student participation in socially responsible projects that have a higher visibility and transparency to public. This will allow these a HEIs establish a

strong reputation along with loyalty trust and commitment from students towards the institution. This also allows development of an emotional connection of the student body with their institutes and they can then become a beacon of positive experiences for others – all creating a ripple effect of positive word-of-mouth communication.

While social media poses its challenges, it is also important to remember that challenges bring opportunity for growth. For example, with social media, the HEIs can improve their international presence, influence labour markets, and increase the demand for innovative teaching methods provided to students, so that the students are provided with the best possible education. Even with decreasing funding for universities, the institutions can still strive for excellence and gain a competitive edge by applying effective marketing theories and concepts. This allows HEIs to be more transparent and drive better results for both internal and external stakeholders. This ultimately improves the quality of education these institutes provide (Angulo-Ruiz et al., 2016; El Nemar et al., 2020; Foroudi et al., 2016; Miotto et al., 2020; Yu et al., 2018; Durkin et al., 2012).

1.1 The Impact of Social Media on Student Academic Life in Higher Education

Social media is a powerful tool today, which facilitates collaboration and notice construction and transfer between students, instructors, and all involved stakeholders. The use of social media can enhance the quality of teaching material at universities, which ultimately leads to productive collaboration and drives improved learning outcomes. Today, educators and researchers are constantly exploring various social media technologies to promote critical thinking skills, collaboration, and the construction of knowledge.

While there are risks associated with open social media platforms, maintaining ongoing communication with students can help address their concerns and resolve issues that arise. By embracing social media technologies, we can create a positive and collaborative learning environment that promotes growth and development for all.

2. Statement of the Problem

Over the years, promotional campaigns for academic programs in educational institutions have been shifting towards digital platforms, especially social media. The content created on social media is accessible to wider audiences. There have been studies related to the domain of advertising using digital platforms, yet the phenomenon has not been explored much within the context of the impact of these campaigns on students and their preferences for academic programs. This study will address this knowledge gap by using a quantitative survey of students to gauge the extent of social media promotional campaigns of academic programs on them.

3. Aim

The aim of this study is to establish a correlation between the role of social media in the perception of higher education institutes and its effects on future enrolments in the educational institutes of Pakistan. The study also aims to highlight the importance of social media in the strategizing the promotion of HEIs. Emphasis is given to the use of social media to: (i) improve marketing, (ii) attract more students, (iii) enhance HEIs' reputation, (iv) collaboration, (v) implementation of responsible practices, i.e., Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). The correlation will be studied to determine how social media can be leveraged by HEIs for them to remain competitive and provide quality education in an ever-changing educational landscape.

4. Objectives

The goal of this study is to make academic programmes more visible and attractive to reach more people and to connect with students so that more students apply each year to the educational programmes. The study also aims to share interesting stories learn from the data acquired and discuss the challenges associated with data privacy and fairness. These objectives help universities and colleges to attract the right students and build a positive institutional reputation.

5. Literature Review

The use of social media in marketing has opened avenues in higher education for cost-effective recruitment, branding, and stakeholder engagement. It is reported that prospective students rely on social media for gathering information about universities which greatly impacts their enrollment decisions (Boateng & Amankwaa, 2016 ; Aman & Hussin, 2018). Social media branding tactics show greater trust and engagement for the institutions as compared to those that do not (Maresova et al., 2020). Peer interactions in the form of user-generated content on social media platforms increase their trustworthiness, or credibility (Zachos et al., 2018). Social media also aids in the accomplishment of corporate social responsibility programs that positively improve the reputation of the universities. On the contrary, the absence of accurate information poses great challenges along with issues pertaining to privacy, requires a focused approach to digital marketing. In any case, social media is an asset for capturing, engaging, and retaining students in this era of advanced technology and information in education. Proper use of social media helps build institutional trust and creates dynamic experiences, proving invaluable to the higher education sector.

6. Method

Using a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, this study investigates how social media affects academic programs' visibility and appeal in higher education institutions (HEIs). Inferential statistical methods are used in the updated approach to test hypotheses and reach results that can be applied broadly.

Students in Pakistani universities doing undergraduate and graduate degrees in a range of subject areas are included in the target population. Stratified random sampling was employed to guarantee representation by institution type, academic level, and gender. 165 valid replies in all were gathered.

6.1 Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire was created that included the following:

- Demographics
- Patterns of social media use
- Academic help through social media
- Measures of engagement and institutional effectiveness

The responses were measured with binary indicators and Likert-type scales.

7. Findings

This chapter incorporates the findings generated after extensive descriptive analysis of the raw data along with the tabular display of the data. The researcher has divided the findings in the light of each variable and then shown the comparison.

7.1 Technology and Social Media

Table 7.1 *Frequency Distribution of Social Media Usage*

Variable	N	Mean	Std Dev	Most common response (Mode)
Social Media Frequency	165	3.93	0.46	Daily
Daily Hours Spent	168	2.01	1.07	2hours
Preferred platform	168	-	-	Instagram
Used for Academic help	146	0.81	0.40	Yes
Include in curriculum	132	0.86	0.35	Yes
Seek Help from communities	151	0.86	0.35	Yes

The analysis shows students at university level have embedded the usage of social media as part of their lives. According to data 93% of the respondents reported using social media on daily basis, suggesting that it is a consistent part of their routine. The average number of spent per day was approximately 2 hours with some students spending hours as many as 4 hours daily. Among the platforms, the most popular emerged is the Instagram followed by WhatsApp and YouTube. These are also used frequently for education purposes instead of using only for personal use. A significant proportion of students reported using social media for educational purposes.

Important considerations from the data is that students consider social media as valuable academic tool. This perception is highlighted from the data as 81% students take academic help from social media and 85% believe that social should be included in academic curriculum.

7.2 Perception of Social Media

Students' overwhelming reported positive influence for social media in their academic life. More than 93% of the respondents confirmed that social media had a beneficial effect on students' academic development. The mean score for 'University effectiveness' was 1.30, indicating that most students perceived their university's use of social media positively. The staff responsiveness score averaged 1.71, suggesting moderate levels of interaction. "overall effectiveness" which aggregates various measures, had a mean of 1.98 out of 3.00, showing a generally favourable view. However, despite high use, active proportion in academic discussions via social media was relatively low, with a mean score of only 0.80. This suggests that students may consume academic content but engage less in dialogue and knowledge exchange.

Table 7.2 *Frequency Distribution of Perception of Social Media*

Variable	N	Mean	Std Dev	Mode
Influence on students	149	0.93	0.25	Yes
University effectiveness	165	1.30	0.81	Score= 2
Participation in discussion	164	0.80	0.89	Rarely

Responsiveness of staff	163	1.71	0.80	Score=2
Overall effectiveness	164	1.98	0.76	Score=2
Usage for education	167	-	-	Frequently
Role in academics	168	-	-	Neutral

7.3 University Communication and Engagement

Another important aspect of the emerging role of social media in social life and university communication was also explored. As stated earlier, students considered social media a valuable tool for interaction and communication. The data clearly present that students believed that social media helps them connect more effectively with peers and institutions. Another benefit of social media for students was its capacity to share educational resources and study materials. Communication through email was also a preferred communication channel and a tradition method.

Table 7.3 *Communication & Engagement*

Variables	N	Most common response
Effective Connection	167	Yes
Benefits of social media	167	Sharing education resources
Receive updates on social media	166	Frequently
Preferred communication channel	165	Social media
Satisfaction with communication	165	Satisfied
Effective communication channels	164	Email
Engagement with university	164	Few times a week
Likelihood to attend activities	160	Moderate (score=2)

From the above findings, it is affirmed that social media has become an indispensable part of students' academic and social lives. Despite of its nature of mere distraction, its versatile tool for students to connect and grow academically. Since the benefits are clear, challenges lie in transition from passive to active participation and from informal to structured learning. The universities can strategically incorporate social media into academic and communication frameworks, institutions can not only enhance student satisfaction but also foster more connected and collaborative educational experience. The aim should not be to replace traditional methods but to integrate social media in a way that complements and enhances students learning.

8. Results

The results suggested that institutions with a strong social media presence experience higher levels of visibility and attractiveness for their academic programs, as evidenced by increased follower engagement, website traffic, and inquiries. Targeted advertising campaigns on social media positively influence prospective students' perceptions of academic programs, leading to higher levels of interest and intent to enrol. Strategic partnerships and collaborations with influencers, alumni networks, and industry stakeholders enhance the credibility and appeal of academic programs, fostering a sense of community and trust among prospective students. Institutions that utilize data analytics to inform social media strategies achieve greater effectiveness in reaching and engaging target audiences, leading to higher conversion rates and enrolment numbers.

9. Discussion

This study examined how social media enhances the visibility and appeal of academic programs at higher education institutions (HEIs) from a student-centred perspective. The findings reveal a complex landscape of interactions where social media serves not only as a tool for information dissemination but also as a means of fostering academic engagement and influencing students' perceptions of different institutions. The study highlights specific patterns of engagement, showing how social media can shape aspirations, inform decision-making, and create a sense of community among prospective

and current students.

9.1 Testing the Hypotheses

H1: Institutions with an active social media presence experience higher visibility of their academic programs than those with minimal engagement.

This hypothesis is supported by the data, which indicates that students overwhelmingly use social media daily (93%), with platforms like Instagram, WhatsApp, and YouTube being popular among university students. The reported positive perception of university effectiveness (mean = 1.30) suggests that institutions with an active and visible presence on social platforms do gain greater recognition from students, thus supporting H1.

H2: Social media engagement positively influences the perceived attractiveness of academic programs among prospective students.

The findings affirm H2, as a significant proportion of students (93%) reported that social media positively influenced their academic life, and 85% favored integrating social media into academic curricula. These numbers indicate that institutional content does affect how students perceive educational offerings, increasing attractiveness and trust.

H3: Targeted social media advertising leads to increased inquiries and applications for academic programs.

While direct metrics on inquiries and applications were not surveyed, indirect evidence such as students' appreciation of institutional updates and frequent engagement with educational resources suggests this hypothesis is plausible. The popularity of social media as a preferred channel for receiving university communication supports the idea that targeted campaigns may yield favorable outcomes.

H4: Collaborations with influencers, alumni, and industry stakeholders enhance the credibility and appeal of academic programs.

Though the study did not isolate the effects of these specific

collaborations, the literature underscores their importance. Strategic partnerships were mentioned as enhancing credibility, aligning with prior research highlighting the role of alumni and influencers in amplifying institutional appeal (Maresova et al., 2020).

9.2 Discussion of Theories

According to the Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT), students turn to social media to satisfy specific needs such as information gathering and academic support. The data confirms that 81% of students use social media for academic help, and 86% seek help from communities, demonstrating that social media fulfills both informational and collaborative functions. This aligns well with the premise of UGT that audiences are active participants in media selection based on needs (Boateng & Amankwaa, 2016).

Cultivation Theory, on the other hand, posits that repeated exposure to media content influences user perceptions. The study found that although students frequently consume educational content online, their active participation in discussions remains low (mean = 0.80). This suggests that while students are exposed to a university's image through social media, their limited engagement may inhibit deeper cultivation of brand perception. Moreover, the average usage of only 2 hours per day—with fewer students spending more than 4 hours—supports the idea that students are generally light users. This may limit the immersive impact required for Cultivation Theory to fully manifest, hence hindering the formation of a strong institutional image over time.

9.3 Key Interpretations

- Students are primarily using social media for information gathering, which reflects purposeful and instrumental usage.
- The low average hours of social media usage (~2 hours) and low discussion participation levels suggest that students are mostly light users.
- Consequently, while students consume institutional content, they do not necessarily form a robust institutional image, especially if

engagement is not interactive or emotionally resonant.

- Despite these limitations, students recognize the value of social media as an academic and communicative tool, reinforcing its potential if leveraged strategically.

10. Conclusion

The study contributes to the growing literature on the digital transformation of higher education marketing and engagement. It demonstrates that social media plays a critical role in enhancing academic program visibility and shaping student perceptions. However, the effectiveness of these campaigns depends not just on content availability but on the depth of engagement and interaction facilitated by institutions.

Despite the widespread use of social media among students, the study reveals a gap between passive consumption and active academic engagement. This gap underscores the need for universities to not only maintain a presence on social media but to adopt strategies that foster two-way communication and involvement. Without this, the impact of social media on shaping a strong and lasting institutional image remains limited. The behaviour of students can be interpreted through theories such as UGT, Cultivation Theory. For example, students use social media to meet their academic needs, which is supported by the UGT theory. However, their limited engagement suggests less prevalence of the cultivation of long-term institutional perception.

11. Recommendations

- Enhance Academic Dialogue:** Initiatives should be designed by institutions that promote students and encourage them to engage in academic discussions on aspects of social media. This includes, and not limited to, moderated forums, student-led pages, and holding digital Q&A sessions with faculty members.
- Create Interactive Content:** Use online features such as live streams, online polls, and real-time comments to improve participation, allowing enhancement in both the depth and quality of the interaction.

- iii. **Segmented Marketing Strategies:** Utilize data analytics for tailoring content that is of specific interest to students. This will allow increased engagement while minimizing content fatigue.
- iv. **Incorporate CSR and Alumni Stories:** promote alumni, their success stories, and community service initiatives. This will allow the humanization of the brand itself and will cultivate emotional ties with current and prospective students.
- v. **Integrate with AI and EdTech:** utilize AI-driven educational tools and merge them with the social media content to offer personalized learning resources, smart notifications and mentorship.
- vi. **Monitor Engagement Metrics:** assess the depth of student engagement through tracking of key performance indicators such as the number of comments, shares, time spent on content, etc.

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