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A Digital Ethnography of Gendered Memes and Symbolism in the India-Pakistan Conflict

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Abstract

This paper seeks to investigate the gendered repression and symbolism used in the creation and dissemination of social media memes during times of elevated conflict between India and Pakistan, using the example of May 2025 escalation. The research employs a qualitative digital ethnographic approach to evaluate roughly 500 memes and associated content sampled from X (previously known as Twitter), Instagram, and Facebook during the height of the May 2025 escalation. Utilizing a post-colonial feminist lens, the researcher has identified four significant thematic patterns identified within the data set: (1) the hyper-masculinization of militaristic imagery, which constructs toughness as a national virtue; (2) the instrumentalization of women's bodies as markers of honour, pride, or victimhood; (3) the systematic emasculation of male enemies, utilized as a strategy of dehumanization; and (4) developing feminist and peace-centric counter-narratives that are counter to these dominant forms of representation and production of meaning. By exploring meme warfare in South Asia through a regionally specific geographical framework, this research advances theoretical and empirical understandings in Digital Media Studies, Conflict Studies, and Gender Studies. Furthermore, it illustrates the ways social media platforms

increasingly extend their influence on contemporary interstate conflicts through the reproduction and contestation of gendered power relations in ways that are both fluids, immediate, and widely circulated.

Keywords: War, Gender, Digital, Media, Memes, Narrative, and Digital Ethnography.

1.   Introduction

The 21st century has been a time of radical change in the relations of conflict, as social media has become a frontline battlefield upon which narratives are being created, shared and fought over. The concept of digitalization has fundamentally changed the information landscape of the world because of the blurred lines between the information promoted by the state authorities and information created by the end user, thus redefining the modes by which the ideas of public opinion and national identities are formed during the emergence of the crisis (Madríd-Morales et al., 2024). This has been especially apparent in the field of digital competition between India and Pakistan in the context of social media, where information warfare, propaganda, and strategic messages have become a part of the social media competition (Hussain, 2021; Riaz, 2025). Although recent research on social media and information technology as a contributor to escalating contemporary conflict has gained more scholarly attention (Tyagi et al., 2020), the gendered aspect of weaponized ephemeral content: content that fades only to re-emerge in a politicized and repurposed form remains largely missing in the literature. Such a disjuncture is more vivid in the India-Pakistan case, an antagonism that has been rooted in historical animosity and nationalism. In recent years, the conflict has taken a volatile digital avatar, as the practice of digital nationalism and the practice of meme warfare has become major tools of narrative contestation (Irshad, 2025).

According to DeCook (2022), as he argues, memes act as a vehicle of the expression of either a personal or a collective voice, a kind of a form of grassroots propaganda that democratizes the processes of the creation of ideological discourse. However, the fact that these artifacts are brief and humorous masks the degree to which they recreate patriarchal logics, promote jingoism, and create normalized violence (Javed et al., 2022; Sen & Jha, 2024).

The intensification of the conflicts on May 7, 2025, provides a good example of how digital conflict entails the existence of cultural and gendered meanings.

The retaliatory strikes by India in the event known as Operation Sindoor, in response to the terrorist attack at Pahalgam in April, 2026 that had taken the lives of 26 civilian people, was not only a military operation but also a symbol with explicitly religious and gendered overtones: Sindoor, the powder of vermillion used by Hindu women to indicate marital status had clear symbolism attached to it. The next military action of Pakistan, Operation Bunyan al-Marsus, very soon gained digital subtexts as the Pakistani netizens trended the satirical term Operation Vidwa (widow) to make the campaign of India feminized and mocked. The struggle quickly went into the world of cyberspace as the hashtags like: "OperationSindoor", "OperationVidwa" and "BunyanAlMarsus" became popular in South Asia. Memes and satirical materials were the means of nationalist hysteria, the means of derision, and the means of ideological warfare in this setting (Irshad, 2025; Tyagi et al., 2020). This paper makes the argument that memes in the India-Pakistan war are not the minor cultural artifacts but are effective carriers of nationalist and patriarchal ideas. They reinforce a symbolic division between militant masculinity and victimized femininity and authorize violence and support exclusionary gendered discourse (Javed et al., 2022; Sen & Jha, 2024). Meanwhile, though, the fluidity and subversive option of memes offer possibilities of emergent feminist counter-discourses to destabilize these hegemonic constructs (DeCook, 2022).

This paper starts with review literature on digital conflict, meme warfare, and gender representations of war, and then theorizes from a postcolonial feminist perspective. It goes on to present the digital ethnographic approach used. The findings are then described and discussed in the following sections, with their overall implications considered thereafter. The paper ends with an overview of its contributions and suggestions for future research.

2.   Research Questions

- How are gendered narratives being made and disseminated via memes and visual symbolic content on social media in India-Pakistan conflicts?
- How gendered memes add to the spectacle of narrative warfare and nation-building?

- Are there emerging counter-narratives that counter these prevailing gendered tropes?

3.   Literature Review

3.1   The Narrative Warfare in Digital Age

Digital-era narrative warfare involves de-spatialization of the producer-consumer of information, or at minimum a de-spatialization of boundaries, leading to a more anarchic, more disputed informational landscape (Eggel, 2024). Online platforms are also created to endorse sensationalize the stories and may magnify hostilities. This overstatement of simplistic geopolitics into the binary oppositions of us/them is introduced in the report of the Institute of Integrated Transitions (IFIT) report as a source of conflict (IFIT, 2021). This lies in the very center of what scholars refer to today as digital truth-making whereby the online communities are using virality and multimedia to generate certain political truths (Bareither, 2023).

In this respect, memes have already been transformed into internet jokes and into political communication tools. Their strength must be valued in both soft power (the possibility to influence preferences by attracting them), as well as sharp power (manipulation and disinformation). Memes, as defined by the Lowy Institute, have the potential to become potent tools of information disorder by spreading radical ideologies, in the guise of real humor. This meme tool plays the same power games in such a place as India Pakistan where memes are used to carry out narrative shifting (on the one hand, in a very primitive manner, both the reflection and symptom of deeper narratives). One side resort to the dark sardonic humor to attack the other side jingoism, which adds up to an augmentation of self-referencing, and re-narrativizing the world through a satirical approach.

3.2   Gendered Representations of War

It has always been argued by feminist international relations (IR) scholars that without gender perspective, war is still a veil of silence (Oyeleye & Jiang, 2023; Enloe, 2014). So far, the narratives of conflict are split into gender binaries: the voices of men are usually preoccupied with the military tactics,

and those of women emphasize the trauma of civilians and victimization (Sjoberg & Via, 2010). This binary is in constant use by nationalist groups. Men are conditioned with the shame and emasculation discourses and urged to be literal fighters of their people. On the other hand, femininity is used symbolically. Women are portrayed as the national representation of innocence and respectability, who are objects who should be kept away of an outside, male other. This is yet another supporting element of a patriarchal narrative that strong men should be ready to employ violence to protect weak women, which is one of the main themes of nationalist constructions (GIFCT, 2025). They thrive better in such an environment in the South Asian soil where patriarchal concepts are deeply rooted (Banerjee, 2005; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

3.3   An Intersectional Postcolonial Feminist Perspective

The article focuses on these conflicting tensions using a postcolonial intersectional feminist lens. This lens is required to transcend Western feminist ideology that is inadequate to represent the overlaps of gender, nationhood, religion, and colonial histories in the global South (Strazzeri, 2024). It is opposed to the biased orientalist interpretation of South Asian women as passive victims the save the Muslim woman syndrome, which Abu-Lughod (2013) has eloquently criticized. Instead, this framework brings out agency, multiple identities, and resistance within South Asian women. Counter-narratives are then retheorized in terms of the digital feminist activism or cyberfeminism, in which women users take advantage of the same digital platforms that disseminate oppressive narratives to create space of resistance and peace-based discourse (Mohanty, 2003).

4.   Method

4.1   Research Design

The main methodological approach of this study is digital ethnography. Being a qualitative form of inquiry, it is especially suitable to investigate cultures, communities, and meaning-making systems that have arisen in digitally mediated communication (Borkovich, 2022). Unlike quantitative methods,

which tend to give precedence to surface level cues (e.g., how many times hashtags are used or how many posts there are), digital ethnography allows one to question processes that inform the meaning of digital practices. It enables a discussion not only of that which is said and shared, but of how and why certain communicative acts are to be integrated into larger socio-political and cultural frames. In more specific terms, a form of what Kozinets (2015) has called 'netnography', a modification of ethnographic research methods to online social worlds analysis, is used in this work.

Netnography is concerned with systematizing the observation and explanation of the digital interactions with a view to revealing the symbolic, affective, and ideological aspects of digital social life. Netnography, in the current study, offers a construct to trace the production, distribution and refutation of gendered conflict narratives through digital channels and give insight into discursive processes by which memes and other short-lived content serve as a carrier of nationalist and patriarchal propaganda.

4.2   Data Collection

Three main platforms were used for data collection: X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and Facebook. These platforms were chosen given the engagement of users in both India and Pakistan, the visual focus of users' content, and the platforms' record of hosting nationalist conversation. A purposive sampling strategy was employed for the source selection to include dominant voices in the Indian and Pakistani cyber-space during conflict time April 25th   when the cross broader tension started after Pahalgam attack in India till the date of ceasefire announced on May 10th, 2025. Overall, 500 different memes consisting of (#IndiaStrikesBack, #PakistanZindabad, # OperationSindoor, #SayNoToWar) and their corresponding posts, captions and a random selection of the users' comments.

4.3   Ethical considerations

The current research was carried out with full ethical considerations. All information was taken from publicly available profiles. All usernames and personal details were anonymized. Peer review was used to reduce researcher's

positionality and potential biases. In conclusion, there was a deliberate attempt to see to it that there was no unnecessary gratuitous replication of harmful imagery, and all examples used had a very specific and obvious analytical function of critical deconstruction. Due to the sensitivity of the content posted on social media about security forces of both sides, the photos of memes are not given in analysis part.

4.4 Selection Criteria

4.4.1 Inclusion Criteria

- Any content that originated from Indian/Pakistani digital spaces and is publicly available (face book, Instagram, X) in the context of conflict between Pakistan and India in 2025 between 25th April to 10th May 2025
- The content or memes specifically references the conflict in 2025, military operations, nationalistic sentiment, or opposition of another country,
- Any content available publicly on social media and has gendered images
- Any image contains visual or meme content in the form of: Images, Image/Text Composites, Short Visual Posts related to conflict-related hashtags e.g., #IndiaStrikesBack, #PakistanZindabad, #OperationSindoor and #SayNoToWar -

4.4.2 Exclusion Criteria

- Private or restricted content
- The content does not relate to the specified conflict or does not include gendered or symbolic elements
- Duplicate reposts (i.e., reposting content without original comment or context).

5. Findings & Discussion

The data was analysed using qualitative thematic analysis in six stages, as described by Braun & Clarke (2019). In accordance with classic grounded

theory, analysis was conducted in three passes: Open Coding (in which recurrent visual and textual themes were noted); Axial Coding (where codes were grouped into conceptual categories such as "Heroic Masculinity"); and Thematic Analysis (where dominant themes were synthesized). To give a quantitative overview of these qualitative findings, the distribution of the main themes among the entire corpus (N=500) was determined and is shown in the graph below:

Figure 5.1

Thematic Distribution of Gendered Memes in the India-Pakistan Conflict Sample (N=500). Data synthesized from thematic analysis, showing the dominance of patriarchal and nationalist tropes.

- Muscular Nationalism & Othering (45%)
- E-Patriarchy & Gendering of Conflict (35%)
- Peace & Humanity Counter-Narratives (12%)
- Satirical Critique & Resistance (8%)
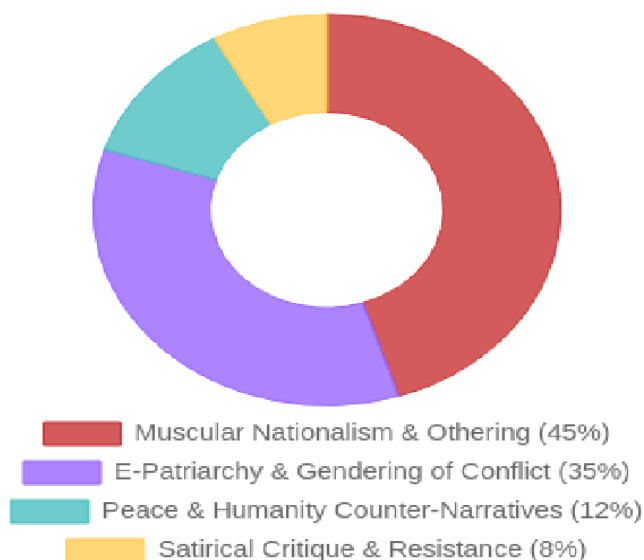
Thematic analysis identified four overarching interconnected themes that explicate the build-up of, and contestation between, gendered narratives in the India-Pakistan digital conflict space. These are consistent with the pattern from a quantitative perspective, whereby 80% of the texts analysed consisted of themes muscular nationalism and e-patriarchy.

5.1 Theme 1: The Hyper-Militarization of Masculinity

This theme explains a hyper-militarized and barbaric form of masculinity being glorified as a demonstration of national virility in some social media narrative. Memes were always embodied by soldiers and politicians as corporeal and militant in their essence. It was not only patriotism, but a demonstration of masculine pride. Sexual memes and posts that objectified and promoted Pakistan military officer as the representative of a Pakistani masculine power and nation began to circulate in the social media after the man addressed a press conference. This worship makes a warrior a national hero, or a romanticized masculinity, and an indication that one must equate military strength with power, protection, sexual strength and beauty.

5.2   Theme 2: The Nation as a Feminine Body

The rhetorical framing of the nation as a female body has been a major theme in nationalist imaginaries. The bodies of women are often used as metaphor of purity, honour and vulnerability, and the body of men is represented as defender of such honour or as forced violator of such honour (Yuval-Davis, 1997; McClintock, 1993). This has been most evident in South Asia where women have become the figurative arena through which national struggles are waged (Banerjee, 2005; Chenoy, 2004). This phenomenon is crudely depicted by the Operation Sindoor memes: Indian nationalist narratives used Sindoor, the pigment that indicates the status of married Hindu women as a symbol of military victory and reduced female marital chastity to the Indian national honour. Claiming that military victory can be equated with marking women bodies, these memes reproduce a patriarchal-nationalist logic that finds sovereignty in the chastity of women (Enloe, 2014). Even more liberal symbols are also used to nationalist ends. Viral comparisons of uniformed Indian female officers to burqa-clad Pakistani women positioned the visibility of women as a civilizational scorecard and used the rhetoric of feminism to propagate a narrative of cultural superiority. It has been observed by scholars how feminist ideals can be used selectively, appropriated into militarized discourses, to create what has since been called femo-nationalism the selective application of women rights to nationalist or exclusionary politics (Farris, 2017).

5.3   Theme 3: The Emasculation and Dehumanization of the "Other"

One of the parallel strategies is the emasculation of the enemy in ritual that undermines his masculinity by making him weak, feminized, or sexually deviant. This is quite consistent with the theory of hegemonic masculinity developed by Connell whereby dominance is not just secured through the exaltation of some masculinities but also through the subordination of others (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Memes of enemy men in bangles or saris perform a symbolic double insult, taking the mickey both at gender and at cultural identity. This kind of emasculating humour is connected to the longer traditions of colonial representations of colonized men as effeminate or inferior (Sinha, 1995). This type of humour is also intertwined with sexualized violence: the threats of kidnapping actresses as maal-e-ghanimat (spoils of war) are based on misogynistic tropes of women as property, and are echoed in both medieval images of conquest and in extremist propaganda (Ging, 2019; Mantilla, 2013). These memes reduce the enemy to a feminized and violated body and, in turn, deny adversaries their dignity and present gendered violence as a natural warfare practice.

5.4   Theme 4: Counter-Narratives and Digital Feminist Resistance

Nevertheless, alongside the dominance of memes related to patriarchy there are also counter-narratives. Hashtags such as "PeaceOverHate" or the disapproval of taking conflict as a commodity in Bollywood represent attempts at re-taking the discursive space. Such interventions are familiar to the traditions of digital feminist activism, where other voices of the marginalized disrupt the overarching discourse through irony, satire, and rejection (Mendes et al., 2019). As an example, the satirical posts of Pakistani users that twist nationalist swagger against themselves serve as evidence of humor as an element of coping and resistance to politics. According to the postcolonial feminist approach, such counter-narratives challenge orientalism approaches to the South Asian women who are portrayed as the victimized (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Mohanty, 2003). Rather, they preempt the agency of women that defy both patriarchal-nationalistic scripts and global scripts that negate subaltern subjectivities. Although small in scope, these interventions indicate the possibility that digital platforms could be used as confronted spaces where the oppressive logic can be rewritten.
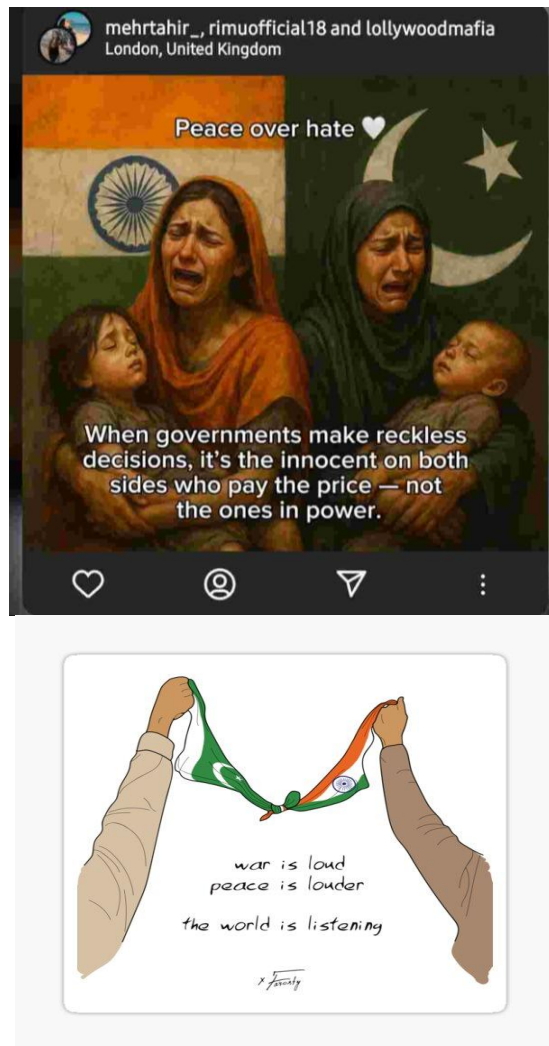
6.   Discussion

The results imply a consistent and self-reinforcing gendered conflict narrative system. The hyper-masculine protector, the feminized nation, and the emasculated other are structured in a triadic manner to demonstrate what Yuval-Davis (1997) refers to as the gendered logic of national reproduction, in which the symbolic attributes of women lay out the frontiers of nationality. This trend is supported by long-established patriarchal ideology, according to which masculinity was formed as a warrior, defender, and aggressor, and

femininity as the territory that had to be preserved (Enloe, 2014). The creation of such discursive formations is not particular to South Asia.

They are like how extremist groups across the world use gendered discourse to justify violence, which presents men as warriors and women as rewards and honors (GIFCT, 2025; Sjoberg & Via, 2010). Additional nuances are provided by a postcolonial feminist lens, which discloses how digital discourses reproduce colonial narrative patterns like the British theory of martial races, which fundamentalized some South Asian communities as naturally violent or hyper-masculine (Banerjee, 2005; Sjoberg & Via, 2010). Such historical constructs are re-coded in digital memes, which disseminate reductive types of strength and weakness, usually on national and religious grounds.

The decolonial theory also highlights how online spaces reinforce gender norms by pushing the militarized masculinity to be the ultimate signifier of the national sovereignty. Such idealized militarism replicates hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) and builds legitimacy by developing aggressive, exclusionary masculinity. Such myths persist, and therefore, guarantee that social media is not simply a mirror of conflict, but a re-creation of colonial epistemologies of gender and violence. In this regard women are marginalized twice. They are re-enrolled into colonial histories of violence, as markers of honor the violation of which warrants revenge, and the reality of their voices and conflict experiences is neglected or marginalized (Sjoberg & Via, 2010; Strazzeri, 2024). Memes tend to do little to indicate misogynous actions as normal or trivial, thus upholding what Massanari (2017) describes as toxic techno-cultures, digital spaces that introduce structural misogyny into the daily conversation of the Internet. This is consistent with the research by DeCook (2018) regarding memes as symbolic violence where humor masks aggression and de-sensitizes people.

In fact, according to Jane (2016) and Ging (2019), internet misogyny is not marginal, but central to online cultures: it seeks to legitimize the hostility against women and the maintenance of exclusionary masculinities. Burnham et al. (2022) proves that even the most ordinary memes can be used to

disseminate hateful ideologies by having small influences on the opinions of the masses. The threat is, then, a process of desensitization, whereby what is repeatedly exposed to in the form of violent humor is a decrease in the empathetic effect on individuals, a falling of the standard on policy-based aggressiveness, a normalization of the institution of misogyny. The real-world implications are enormous. The gender discourses in South Asia are militarized as mentioned by Chenoy (2004) and it is expressed as restrictions on the South Asian woman in her right to safety and autonomy. Memes are dangerous to condone more general tendencies of gender violence by culturally normalizing sexual violence or by ridiculing women as spoils of war. In these forms, not only are digital cultures reflected, but also add to gendered insecurities. At the same time, based on the emergent counter-stories discovered throughout this paper, one can see what feminist digital resistance can be. Hashtags like PeaceOverHate or satirical remarks about nationalism excesses disorient the pompous discourses of militarized masculinity.

These echo the ideas of digital feminist activism introduced by Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller (2019), according to which women and allies open discursive space of resistance. However, as researchers observe, those interventions have structural disadvantages in algorithmic-based settings that favor outrage and sensationalism (Mendes et al., 2019; Massanari, 2017). Feminist peacebuilding, therefore, faces the challenge to devise strategies that can make these counter-narratives more visible in the context of hostile platform architectures.

7.   Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has shown how the India-Pakistan conflict when filtered through the digital world is deeply gendered in its articulation and impacts. Memes do not appear as amusing or short-lived objects but as powerful discursive instruments that recalcitrate patriarchal-nationalist ideologies, justifying violence by reproducing binary oppositions between militant manhood and frail femininity. Simultaneously, the existence of counter-narratives, however, weak, implies that the digital realm has a subversive potential of disrupting the hegemonic structures. Through a digital ethnographic/netnographic methodology, the analysis has enriched an intersectional grasp of the nexus

between gender, technology, and conflict by providing a uniquely postcolonial perspective in which digital nationalism is framed within the larger geopolitics of South Asia.

Considering these results, one of the most important suggestions is the incorporation of digital literacy and feminist peace education in civic and academic settings. The ability to recognize, decode and resist gendered manipulations in online discourse can reduce the ease with which the discourse of patriarchal-nationalist beliefs spread freely. In addition, encouraging scholar-activist-policymaker partnerships to research and augment feminist counter-narratives, in both publicly visible and encrypted spaces, would enhance the ability of digital publics to counter hostility instead of reproducing it. These interventions would not only enhance the scholarly inquiry, but would also be critical civic strategies at the time when the battlefield of conflict is becoming more virtual.

8.   Declarations

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North-East Nigerian Gen Z's Perceptions of the September 2025 Gen Z Against Corruption and Nepotism' Social Media Driven Activism in Nepal

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Abstract

This study investigated the views of Gen Z Nigerians on transnational digital activism relevant to the interests of the Nepali populace. It aimed to discern the level of awareness and knowledge of the 2025 Nepali activism, the primary social media platforms used to access information about the activism, evaluative perspectives on the activism and its motivational potential, and anti-corruption sentiments in Nigeria. The study was premised on the Networked Publics Theory. This study used the survey research approach and Google Forms for structured questionnaire to target young, digitally engaged individuals in Nigeria's north-eastern states of Borno, Adamawa, and Gombe. Out of 400 copies of questionnaire distributed, 367 were used for analysis. The descriptive analytic framework used in the study employed the mean and standard deviation. It was revealed that most respondents learned about the movement through TikTok, Instagram, and X. This study confirms that social media functions as a form of activism and demonstrates, once more, the prominence of digital civic engagement tools

among the young demographic. Although respondents expressed appreciation for the movement's relevance and impact, many mentioned developing an interest in activism around anti-corruption and governance discussions primarily after experiencing the protests in Nepal. This suggests that witnessing international activism might stimulate transnational solidarity and local civic activism. The present research highlights the role of digital global activism in linking civic youth movements in developing democracies. This research also advocates for the integration of digital citizenship and the need for global citizenship for the Nigerian populace.

*Keywords***:** Social Media Activism, Youth Participation, Civic Engagement, Digital Democracy, and Corruption.

1. Introduction

The anti-corruption movement spearheaded by Gen Z in Nepal in September 2025 stands as one of the most notable instances of digital activism in South Asia. The activism was fuelled not just by politics, but by deep-seated social frustrations as well, centred around the moral and structural reform of institutions. The most active participants in the movement in Nepal were younger members of the digitally educated generation and, most importantly, they were angry about the inequity, nepotism, and governance deficits. As Barma and Thapa (2025) describe it, the movement was fuelled by discontent after decades of corruption and patronage that eroded trust and respect in democracy. Gen Z members in Nepal forged a digital community of claimers through their social media accounts, demanding the ethical and moral restoration of public trust, which they felt had been compromised. The activism demonstrated the alarming and profound absence of trust between the populace and the leaders, and showed that the South Asian youth have a proactive and transformative attitude toward the use of technology as a tool for activism, rather than for the rebellion we have come to expect with the older generations.

There is a need to understand the context to appreciate the character of this movement. The political instability and elite capture that has characterise Nepal has also propelled the 2025 protests. Contextualizing the protests within the political nested structures, Bhattarai (2025) points to

capture the dominant clan politics through the politically explosive appointment of ambassadors along with nepotism and political family of the clan. The social discontent is also triggered by the opacity and retrogressive democratic institutions, which Paudel and Phuyel (2025) captures. The differential between the lived experiences of citizens and the social contract as well as political reality is distressing. The democratic deficit is especially acute among politically and digitally globalised youth. Where the democratic deficit is felt, discontent is political, and this has configured political activism within social frameworks, as espoused through global activism on social justice and equity, on discontented platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter (X).

Protestors organising activism in new ways and using technology as a tool sparked a new form of social and political activism. The 2025 youth protests, unlike political actions tied to political parties or trade unions, were unstructured and open to all forms of participation. Barma and Thapa (2025) have noted the unique manner of coordination which took place, as the young activists worked in a unified manner while also seemingly leaderless, depicting the form of social media coordination to both serve as a web and liberating net for un-structured activism. The incorporation of humour, memes and music broadened appeal to the apathetic audience. Sultana and Sharma (2025) highlight how, in South Asia, rap, street art, and spoken word activism culturally produced as a means of political frustration. In this respect, the socially active and politically frustrated youth in Nepal and the politically apathetic audience towards the activism took cues from the social media activism practiced in other South Asian protest cultures, using the internet as a civic classroom and an outlet for creative protest.

Violations of social justice during the protests reflect deeper dissatisfaction with the inequitable distribution of political and economic power. Islam and Mohna (2025) note the region of South Asia exhibits inequitable political and economic power along with weak institutions. These weak institutions foster corruption and create hurdles for reforms. In the case of Nepal, these issues were particularly visible with the integration of personal loyalty and public office by the politicians. As Pozsgai-Alvarez (2025) points

out, this is a symptom of the corruption's multifaceted nature, not merely in the frequency and severity of the act, but also in the economic and social dimensions of corrupt acts that distorts a society. With this, the protests, for the first time, linked individual grievances with social and systemic issues. As noted by Sony, Bigler, and Thieme (2025), this is the same root that is triggering protests in the 'unfolding' health and service sectors in Nepal, exclusion and the demand for dignity. For this reason, the Gen Z movement of 2025 must not be viewed in political isolation, but as part a continuum from a broader, sectoral struggle for justice.

At the same time, the movement showcased both the promise and the limitations of digital activism. As Shrestha and Jenkins (2019) describe, youth activism in Nepal occurs against the backdrop of economic exclusion and political betrayal. For the protesters of 2025, digital means offered rapid communication and the potential for visibility. Yet, they also faced the pitfalls of apathy, misinformation, and surveillance. As Barma and Thapa (2025) describe, protest leaders used encrypted messaging and anonymous digital pages to avoid state surveillance. Still, unfounded misinformation and speculation circulated and diminished trust, a pattern persistent in other South Asian digital campaigns (Reza & Bhuiyan, 2025). These examples illustrate that while technology can assist and empower social movements, the absence of deep-rooted civic organisation and a firm base of institutional change will perennially stifle movement potential.

This movement uniquely built and expanded solidarity across different classes and geographical regions. With the growing role of civil society in Nepal as an intermediary and a bridge linking local communities to civic engagement, youth activists in the country are finding cohesion and deeper entrenchment in civil society. The protests of 2025 were a manifestation of this cohesion and entrenchment. Support extended beyond urban anti-establishment Gen-Z activists in Kathmandu to include students and small business owners from the capital, as well as diaspora communities in the United States, Canada and Australia. The global link and reference of diaspora communities exemplify the 'politics as fun' phenomenon articulated by Mazumdar (2025), the shifting of serious political discourse to a format

that is easy to consume and share, and strategic efforts to make it entertaining and viral. The integration of digital media and the creative use of humour in activism were evident and amplified the focus on the issues of nepotism and corruption.

These occurrences promoted a re-evaluation of older political ideologies. Khadka (2025) considers the Nepalese desire of constructing a socialism-oriented society mostly as a romance. This facilitates the comprehension of the younger section of the population viewing state promises as hollow declarations instead of substantive measures. In regard to the widening discussion of a politically sponsored expectations and an employment crisis as described by Adhikari (2020) which is a crisis of unspeakable magnitude. The Gen Z demonstrators articulated their protests in a way that does not reject democracy but instead calls for a renewal of it. They demanded clean political architecture, equal distribution of rights, and social equity. This character of their protests is similar to the anti-corruption protests, especially in the Global South.

As in the case of South Asia and Africa, the rise of youth activism in Africa has entered and changed the practiced political order Musya (2025) focuses on studying Gen Z movements in Kenya similar to how it was done in Nepal focusing on the morally motivated political framing of the movements, informal leadership, and digital coordination. Such cross-border similarities demonstrate how the younger generations redefine political participation as both individual and collective. This also reinforces the idea of youth movements as instrumental in the democracy as they provide a measure of its active strain.

Although the 2025 Gen Z-led anti-corruption protests in Nepal kicked-off this study, the research stretches way further than just Nepal. It examines how a youth-driven digital movement in one part of the world Nepal gets noticed, interpreted, and even absorbed by young people dealing with their own muddled political and institutional problems in a country completely different which is Gen Z in North-East Nigeria. Through comparatively studying both countries, the study treats both countries not as unequal narrative spaces. Instead, they are considered as two connected stories each

full of frustration, digital engagement, and hope for real democracy. What matters about Nepal's movement is not just what happened there, but how it sparks something recognisable for young people thousands of miles away. It shows that the language of fighting injustice and pushing back against broken systems is something young people everywhere understand, and it shapes how digital activism works across the world today.

This research utilised Networked Publics Theory, as proposed by Danah Boyd in 2008. As the basis of this study, Networked Publics Theory highlights the importance of digital technology on the social frameworks and collective action in a society. The Theory explains the internet, particularly social media, as technology which enables the formation of "networked publics" (or "networked" digitally mediated publics that emerge and dissipate in the interplay of people, technology, and practice). These networked environments make it possible for people to connect, communicate, and organise around issues that overlap by attenuating, and in some circumstances utterly removing, the social and spatial barriers of time, space, and power. Discourse at the individual level is transformed to collective discourse, and the collaboration of largely uncoordinated participants around a common concern allows the construction of digital communities that directly oppose dominant authority and amplify their collective voice.

To comprehend how digital activism can be understood as shared and borderless involves Nepalese young people as well as their global counterparts from North-East Nigeria. The entire movement was mobilised through social media platforms, specifically TikTok, Instagram, and X, which offered the spatial infrastructures for the quick and unconfined flow of ideas. In these environments, involvement breached the limits of geography and class in pursuing inequity, social justice, and the dominant digital narratives common to young people across the world. Technology notably shaped the structure and the freedom of the protests, which Barma and Thapa (2025) also discussed concerning the protests in Nepal during that year. While citizens realised the integrated and pluralistic ideals of the new public democracies, the public discourse of the nation was transformed to incorporate demands for an end to the corruption and nepotism that had long been pervasive.

Networked Publics Theory helps explain why Northeastern Nigerian Gen Zs understand, appreciate, and resonate with the activism in Nepal, despite the geographic and cultural distance. Although geographically far, Nigerian youth digitally and socially network and interact with the framings of issues that are currently being protested in Nepal, contextualizing them in local socio-political frameworks. This is an empirical manifestation of activism that transcends national borders, amplifying the digitally connected and disconnected enraged citizens. For them, social media is a public space. These are the "networked publics" that Boyd (2008) refers to. Within these networked publics, people catalyse resistance and civic participation that spans the globe to share a civic frustration. The use of this theory highlights the reality of youth activism as entirely digital, global, and participatory in nature. It influences the concepts of agency, democracy, and social change in the modern world, redefining and expanding them in the context of the digitally secured world.

In recent years, the political communication aspects of the Gen Z protest in Nepal in 2025 have garnered some attention (Barma & Thapa, 2025; Bhattarai, 2025). Nonetheless, there is still little to no understanding of how youth activism and anti-corruption protests in one region may affect other developing countries. Most of the available research seems to concentrate on the internal social structures of Nepal and the intergenerational social change. External social structures, especially concerning the politically and administratively challenged youth in Africa, particularly North-East Nigeria, have received little to no research attention. Furthermore, previous research focused on the political impacts of the protests, while the psychological and socio-cultural influences on foreign audiences of the Gen Z cohort have been neglected. Therefore, this research seeks to fill this gap by studying North-East Nigerian Gen Z's understanding of Nepal's "Gen Z Against Corruption and Nepotism" activism to contextual global digital activism and anti-elite sentiments which strengthen civic identity and accountability in other countries in the Global South on the Nepali case.

2.   Research Objectives

This study aims to address this gap by focusing on the following research objective:

1. Assess the extent of North-East Nigerian Gen Zs' awareness of the social-media driven activism in Nepal, "Gen Z Against Corruption and Nepotism," in September 2025.
2. Identify the main social media platforms through which the respondent's obtained information about the activism in Nepal.
3. Examine the perception of the audience regarding the activism in Nepal that was shared through social media platforms, particularly in relation to the focus on corruption and nepotism in Nigeria.
4. Assess whether the respondent's comprehension of social media activism in Nepal has influenced their views on the anti-corruption movement in Nigeria.

3.   Literature Review

3.1   Overview of the Nepal Gen Z Against Corruption and Nepotism Protest

In Nepal, Gen Z Against Corruption and Nepotism protests started on September 8, 2025. This was because of the release of a document showing nepotism and corruption within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Young activists started protesting on social media with the hashtags #EndNepotismNepal and #GenZForChange. This protest began as a social media demonstration and evolved into a physical protest. In less than eight days of this protest, 250,000 individuals participated in the cities of Kathmandu, Pokhara, and Chitwan, and smaller protests were held in Itahari and Bharatpur (Barma & Thapa, 2025). There were primarily 16 to 30-year-old protesters, mostly university students and unemployed graduates. While the movement was decentralised, it was social media that provided the means to organise and relay information (Bhattarai, 2025). Most of the violence other than the use of song and dance was culturally thematic, as people incorporated their culture and traditions into the activism, with events

designed for the purpose of protest (Bhattarai, 2025). Things got a lot more heated on September 14.

Riot police were deployed, resulting in approximately 67 protesters, 12 officers, and 80 police being arrested, with 90 arrests primarily in Kathmandu and Pokhara (Sony et al., 2025). As angry as they were, protesters decided temporarily not to engage in direct confrontation with the police. While the police were primarily focused on enforcement of order and the civics system, the demonstrators on site were demanding more openness, especially concerning the people, the public, and especially digital platforms.

After the government made limited concessions on 24 September 2025, the 17-day-long protests came to a halt (Barma & Thapa, 2025). So far, 17 days is the longest recorded duration of the protests. Weeks into the protests, the Ministry of Home Affairs claimed there were 1.2 million protest participants. Of the 1.2 million participants, citizens were estimated to have joined the protests virtually via hashtag activism, civic crowdfunding, and citizen journalism (Flame & Gret, 2025). In the protests early days, government officials stated that 'foreign radicals' were guiding the protests, but they never explained what they meant by 'radical.' This led many elites to think that the government was implying that they were 'foreign radicals' to incite mass protests (Bhattarai, 2025). The mass protests prompted the proposed revisions on the abuse of authority and the accountability and transparency legislation. The government had no option but to promise accountability and bureaucratic as well as meritocratic restructuring by the end of October, prompted by a social government petition that had over 460,000 signatures.

It is likely, as Odoh and Olagunju (2025) mentioned, that in Nigeria, that such reforms will get stuck. Unfortunately, accountability without liberation still remains the same in Nepal. Protests organised by Gen Z have initiated important economic and societal changes. One study notes that some public demonstrations resulted in a slowdown of business activities and contributed to a 0.6% loss of the nation's GDP in September (Soegiono et al., 2025). Around 150,00 people were subjected to civil disorder and public transport was disrupted for a week while schools and universities in the entire

Kathmandu valley were shut down (Barma & Thapa, 2025). On the social front, the movement delivered and revitalised faith in civil action for what Nsau, Ndiga, and Kitonga (2025) termed 'digital civil vigilance' advocated for by the Kenyan students' transparency networks. Public outrage led to the resignations of 3 cabinet members and the suspension of 12 more for several weeks on corrupt abuse of power. These members of the ruling class and judiciary were the focus of public pressure (Paudel & Phuyel, 2025). Culturally, #GenZNepal was the center-piece of the #GenZNepal protests, using music, art, and storytelling as forms of peaceful defiance. Digital creativity and construction were encouraged.

The aftermath of the protests reflected the enduring challenges of digital disinformation, called the fragmentation of the political sphere, and the exploitation of the politics of the protests themself. These are the growing pains of democracies. But, to be fair, a significant portion of the activists, more than 70%, showed remarkable civic engagement in supporting the online petition to continue monitoring the cases. Most analysts such as Soegiono et al (2025) agree that, in a sense, the protests of September 2025 demonstrated a change as incremental as it may be in the public's protest expectations from the state in terms of accountability and responsibility after years of inaction. In this regard, for the first time, Nepal demonstrated to the rest of South Asia the power and potential of digital activism. This was a key moment for anti-corruption protests in other developing democracies.

3.2 Social Media Usage in Campaigns Against Corruption and Nepotism in Developing Democracies

Activism using social media in developing democracies is a form of defiance and calls for real openness and accountability activism (Bhattarai, 2025). From advanced democracies, where traditional activism strategies have been hijacked by the powers, to developing democracies with weak institutions and limited civic access, social media activism is a brilliant innovation (Odoh & Olagunju, 2025). Activism on social media is the only form of activism that allows the simultaneous exercising of the watchdog role and the mobilising tool activism role. This uniquely integrated activism allows citizens in real time and in real activism on the ground to report corruption, advanced

accountability discourse, and asked for accountability. Information access by citizens has been predominantly passive while information control is vertical. This is no longer the case. Citizens can control the discourse, access real information, and control dialogue. Social media in developing democracies closes the accountability vacuum by letting citizens document the abuse of power, organise for accountability, and summon accountable public holders (Odoh & Olagunju, 2025).

Political favouritism and other forms of cultural hegemony shapes the digital environment; it shows uneven contests between the reformist citizens and the ruling elites (Bhattarai, 2025). The 'anti-corruption' campaigns on social media speak to the digital democratisation phenomenon. The linkage between the innovations of civic influencers, systematic corruption, and open databases (blockchain and other forms of civic transparency) is well articulated in (Anagu, et al, 2024; Soegiono et al. (2025). Nonetheless, technology does not seem to assist in these losing movements the civic enthusiasm that the online movements mobilise. Njau et al. (2025) speak about students' online activism of resource allocation transparency in African universities; its impact is largely defined by the government's disposition to respond. Ihuoma (2025) similarly observed how campaigns like Nigeria's '#EndBadGovernance' experienced struggles at home, in spite of digital support and visibility. Threat perception by the state sparked the implementation of counter measures. This is typical of developing regions, where the governments' anti-corruption strategy relies on surveillance, misinformation, and other subversive means. Electronic activism, contradictory as it is, shows how empowered and terrified citizens have become.

Even with the challenges that come with it, political communication through social media is one of the best options available in developing democracies. Research done in Ghana, Indonesia, and Nigeria emphasises the importance of social media in helping citizens 'name-and-shame' public officials, track government contracts, and lead youth civic reform rallies (Inobemhe et al., 2024; Njau et al., 2025; Odoh & Olagunju, 2025). Barma and Thapa (2025) researched social media activism in Gen Z protests in Nepal

and underscored the importance of social media not just for the activism it fuels, but for the sense of community it creates. Digital activists see and feel corruption as an injustice that strips a person of their dignity. They sense intergenerational rage, transforming governance from an abstract construct to a tangible, felt experience, a visceral reality to many people across the globe. For the activism to remain effective, it should be supported by systems that include legislation on free speech, schooling systems that teach digital citizenship and literacy, and a social norm of accountable governance within a democracy. Soegiono et al. (2025) contend that, without these systems, digital activism is just a performance and will not bring any meaningful change.

In emerging democracies, social media activism brings a new perspective to the discourse of accountability. The greatest challenge, though, is enacting meaningful institutional change that addresses the anger displayed online (Bhattarai, 2025). This reveals that social media activism's transformative potential is primarily driven by change that needs to happen at the institutional level.

4.   Methodology

The survey research design was adopted for this study. It is a cost-effective way of obtaining research data. It also allows for the collection of data that captures the sentiment, attitudes, and behavioural intentions of respondents across multiple locations at a given moment (Asemah & Nwaoboli, 2024). For this study, data was predominantly collected using a structured instrument that we developed based on the objectives of the study. This included several sections that analysed awareness along with information sources and perceptions of civic participation, and attitudes regarding civic participation. The researchers ensured that the instrument received validation from one political communication scholar and one social research scholar regarding.

The focus of this study was on Generation Z in three states of North East Nigeria: Borno, Adamawa and Gombe. These states are comparatively younger with regards to population structure, socio-economic challenges, and digital activity, especially with regard to unemployment, bad governance and

insecurity, which resemble the challenges facing the youth in Nepal (Odoh & Olagunju, 2025). Borno State has an estimated population of 6,850,000, Adamawa State 4,350,000, and Gombe State 3,450,000, totalling approximately 14,650,000 (Weber, 2018).

Population projections by the National Population Commission (2023) for Nigeria, Nigeria demographic survey estimates of the National Bureau of Statistics, and Nigeria population mapping studies, for the Generation Z population of age 16 to 29 which constitutes 32% of the total population, estimated the Generation Z population in these three states to be 4,688,000 (32% of 14,650,000). For the sample size, the calculation technique by Taro Yamane (1967) was used: $n = (N)/(1+N(e)^2)$. For this case, e, the margin of error was taken as 0.05. Thus n = 4,688000/11,720.01 = 400 (rounded to the whole number) which served as the sample size 400. To ensure representativeness, this was proportionately allocated across the three states by population size.

The researchers created a survey using Google Forms to collect responses from Gen Zs. WhatsApp, Facebook, and X were used to distribute the google form because the target population is active on these platforms. Before taking the survey, participants were asked for informed consent and assured that their responses would be confidential. The study examined relationships within the framework of attitudinal activism. It comprised awareness attitudes, perceptions of activism, activism effectiveness in regard to anticorruption, and activism change. Descriptive statistics was used to study relationships among the framework variables and supplemented with regression analysis. This methodology was chosen because the study centred on respondents' perceptions and behaviours regarding transnational digital activism.

To strengthen the methodological rigour of this study, after expert validation, pilot test was carried out with thirty (small group) of Gen Zs outside the main sample. The resulting data was used to ascertain internal consistency. The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) showed a 0.70 result which is solid and confirms the items measures the required constructs with sufficient stability and coherence. For the sampling, the study proportionally

spilt the survey by state Borno, Adamawa, and Gombe, using each state's actual share of the Gen Z population. That way, the sample matched the demographics of digitally active Gen Zs and made it easier and more direct to reach a balanced, representative group across all three states.

5.   Findings

Out of the 400-given questionnaire, 367 were completed and returned, giving a return rate of 91.8%. This return rate is acceptable for general quantitative social research. The researchers focused on descriptive (mean and standard deviation) coding to determine and define the trends of opinion within the group. A five-point Likert scale rating was used. Those items which generated a mean score of 3.00 and above were accepted while those which scored below 3.00 were rejected.

Table 5.1 *Determine the level of awareness of North-East Nigerian Gen Zs about the September 2025 social media driven activism in Nepal*

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD	Decision
I am aware of the September 2025 'Gen Z Against Corruption and Nepotism' activism in Nepal.	54.2	29.7	10.2	5.9	3.92	0.86	Accepted
I have watched short videos or posts on social media about the Nepal activism.	49.0	34.6	9.5	6.9	3.78	0.94	Accepted
The activism was well covered by online influencers and youth pages I follow.	46.3	32.1	12.8	8.8	3.66	0.97	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 5.1 illustrates considerable awareness of the activism in Nepal, as reflected in the overall mean score of 3.79. Social media, particularly online videos and influencer content, was the main source of activism awareness for respondents. It highlights the trend found in developing nations whereby social media serves as the primary means of awareness for Gen Z.

Table 5.2 *Identify the main social media platforms through which respondents learned about the activism*

Platform	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD	Decision
TikTok	51.5	28.9	12.3	7.3	3.83	0.98	Accepted
Instagram	48.7	30.0	14.4	6.9	3.76	0.91	Accepted
Twitter/X	44.4	33.5	13.1	9.0	3.64	0.96	Accepted
WhatsApp	41.1	36.8	13.6	8.5	3.59	0.95	Accepted
YouTube	35.7	31.1	17.2	16.0	3.36	1.01	Accepted
Facebook	33.1	28.3	20.9	17.7	3.14	1.08	Accepted
Television	21.2	23.4	27.6	27.8	2.38	1.04	Rejected
Radio	15.6	19.8	32.3	32.3	2.18	0.99	Rejected

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 5.2 illustrates that the social media platforms that participants predominantly used to access information regarding activism were TikTok, Instagram, and Twitter/X, all of which obtained 3.5 as an average score. On the contrary, the traditional media formats of television and radio scored below 2.5, thus considering them inadequate sources.

Table 5.3 *Examine perceptions of the effectiveness of the Nepal activism*

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD	Decision
I believe the activism in Nepal is effective in raising awareness about corruption and nepotism in Nigeria.	53.4	30.8	10.7	5.1	3.91	0.89	Accepted
The Nepal activism has drawn global attention to youth empowerment and accountability in Nigeria.	46.6	34.9	9.8	8.7	3.67	0.96	Accepted
The activism has inspired discussions among Nigerian youths in developing countries.	41.5	36.2	13.4	8.9	3.53	0.93	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 5.3 shows that responders consider activism in Nepal effective in creating awareness on the anti-corruption campaign as the average value is above 3.6. This aligns with Bhattarai (2025) which stated that activism in the digital networks can transform the engagement processes of the youth in governance and participations by escalating visibility in the inclusion of decision making. This also connects to Ihuoma (2025) whose focus is on viral online campaigns and their cross-border accountability mechanisms.

Table 5.4 *Ascertain whether learning about the Nepal activism has influenced respondents' anti-corruption attitudes*

Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD	Decision
Learning about the Nepal activism has improved my attitude toward anti-corruption campaigns in Nigeria.	42.3	37.1	12.8	7.8	3.57	0.94	Accepted
I am now more likely to participate in youth-led anti-corruption campaigns in Nigeria.	38.5	35.8	15.6	10.1	3.41	0.98	Accepted
Youth activism can bring tangible changes in governance if properly organised.	49.3	33.7	10.2	6.8	3.82	0.90	Accepted
I feel motivated to discuss corruption and nepotism with	45.5	36.4	11.2	6.9	3.68	0.91	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 5.4 showed that respondents rated the statements on average above 3.4 implying that learning about the Nepal activism has influenced respondents' anti-corruption attitudes. This is in tandem with the argument presented by Odoh and Olagunju (2025) that exposure to global reformist content 's youth activism on the agenda of national accountability. The inclination of respondents to engage with local conversations on corruption is in line with the observations made by Soegiono et al. (2025), which stated that 'youth

digital dialogue in transitional democracies' promotes resilience to cynicism of governance.

6.   Discussion

Findings of this study showed that North-East Nigerian Gen Zs demonstrate awareness of Nepali activism and activism in the September 2025 "Gen Z Against Corruption and Nepotism" movements. This phenomenon illustrates the extent to which social media has closed the gaps between different countries and cultures and allows the youth to monitor and engage in distant activism. Concerning the global youth populations, Odoh and Olagunju (2025) remark social media technology articulates reform and accountability closing the socio-political gap. Alkali (2024) states the predominant 2023 Nepali activism as the Nigerian Gen Z's "primary activism awareness" was social media short clips and influencer content. There is much greater social media reality as the works of Inobemhe et al. (2024) and other research, elaborate on, the social media risk activism of developed democracies and the civic education social networks dangerously lack for democracy.

Moreover, findings showed that younger consumers of media continue to regard TikTok, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) as the principal sources for news and information on the coverage of the Nepalese movement while older media, such as radio and television, remain underappreciated. This indicates a significant preference for youth information consumption that Ja'afaru and Asemah (2024) describe as more visual, interactive, and portable. Njau, Ndiga, and Kitonga (2025) argue that the value of digital media in the context of youth advocacy for participatory governance is far more present and impactful than traditional media.

Consequently, the findings suggest that the methods used to engage the youth of Nigeria in anti-corruption advocacy should be digitally oriented. In addition, Bhattarai (2025) comments on the digitally active younger population who tend to unilaterally assign social visibility to their channels as their primary influence and power rationale. This is why, in the Nigerian context, advocates for civics education for governance alongside the government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should emulate the

Nepalese approach in using emotionally engaging, narrative nonfiction, and data-driven stories that align with themes of youth advocacy and governance.

Several respondents expressed admiration for the activism carried out by Nepalese focusing on issues faced by younger Nigerians. Many noted that the activism sparked global conversations regarding youth disempowerment, accountability, and corruption. This feels aligned with Ihuoma (2025) who explains that experiencing youth activism from a different country invokes some form of 'digital empathy' in which a person can connect dislocated activism experience to their own. For the current study, the existence of cross-border activism suggests more than informing the activists on global issues; it indicates deeper self-reflection and a heightened level of activism. The awareness-participation link in this study suggests that knowledge of anti-corruption activism in other countries can ignite belief in their own country's potential for change. This is similar to the digital activism observations made by Soegiono, Ningrum, Al Ghofiqi, Hariani, and Supeno (2025) which described 'behavioral contagion' where online participants from less developed countries mimic the political and democratic practices of more developed countries.

Furthermore, evidence shows how the Nepalese movement interacted with and shaped the views of young Nigerian Zs on taking part in activism. A good deal of the participants picked the activism as motivation in joining the youth-initiated activism and discussions on corruption and nepotism. This underscores the influence of civil movements abroad and the self-reflective impact on the civic movements and democracy of the global south. Bhattarai (2025) explains how transnational activism reverses the civil accountability ladder and illustrates how citizens, and not the state, initiate movements to demand accountability. This is, for Nigeria, what these findings illustrate. Active youth participation in the Nepalese protests is a clear indication that young people are politically and civically engaged, and are simply 'waiting' for direct, unmediated avenues to concretely assert their civic identity.

These findings align with Networked Publics Theory. This is because, digital platforms do not just help people talk, they actually create new spaces

where folks come together, make sense of what is happening, and rally around things they care about. Gen Z's heavy use of TikTok, Instagram, and X, and how they draw inspiration from the Nepalese movement shows how these online spaces break down borders and build what Boyd calls persistent, searchable, and globally connected publics. The kind of cross-border "behavioral contagion" this study picked up on fits into the theory. Suffice it to say that the findings agree with the theoretical foundation of this study because digital networks let stories and ideas spread fast, shaping how people think and act as citizens.

7. Conclusion

This study was carried out to examine 'North-East Nigerian Gen Z's Perceptions of Social-Media-Driven September 2025 Gen Z Against Corruption and Nepotism Activism in Nepal. Unlike in the East, activism in Nigeria is highly concentrated on social media, particularly TikTok, Instagram, and X, which serve as the main platforms for the dissemination of information and activism. The activism, particularly Gen Z Against Corruption and Nepotism, emphasises the reality that young people on these platforms are not merely passive users. Large volumes of socially educational materials related to advocacy, governance and reform are available for these young people to consume. Nigerian Gen Zs in the North-East considered the activism aimed at anti-accountability sufficiently appropriate and encouraged active participation in anti-corruption advocacy in Nigeria. This is indicative of the transformative capacity and the impact of social movements in developing democracies. Neoliberal social movements, therefore, serve as a conduit for global activist engagement and the activation of citizenship in the home nation.

That said, there are a few limitations of the study to keep in mind. The study leans on self-reported online surveys, so Gen Zs without much digital access are excluded. Plus, even though the sample was spread out proportionally, it is still limited in randomisation since it was all digital platform-based. One more thing, the research does not track long-term change. It is more of a snapshot, focused on how people felt at one moment.

Still, even with these limits, the data give real insight into how networked publics drive youth activism across borders thus making the findings reliable.

8. Recommendations

In light of the results, the following is recommended:

- Like youth-led movements in other countries, Nigerian anti-corruption agencies and NGOs have the capacity to develop appealing and engaging online materials. Using creative advocacy, collaborating with social media influencers, and leveraging social media challenges will help capture the attention of Generation Z and promote advocacy.
- In Nigeria and other developing countries, youth organisations should implement cross-border partnership initiatives with organisations in other countries for experience sharing, and collaboratively develop frameworks that adopt more inclusive, innovative, and sustainable approaches to tackling corruption and nepotism, particularly in cross-border urban centres.
- Incorporating civic technology training into school curricula, as well as into training programs for youth organisations and government agencies, would empower young people to channel social media use positively for civic accountability and community development.

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

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Abstract

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

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

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

1.   Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.   Objectives

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

3.   Research Questions

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

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

4.   Literature Review

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5.   Rationale of the Study

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

6.   Method

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

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

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

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

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

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

6.1   Themes

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

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

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

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

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

7. Findings

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8.   Discussion

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

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

8.1   Created Ease in Job-related Tasks of Routine

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

8.2   Enhanced the Pace of News Gathering

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

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

8.3 Compromised Authenticity of the News

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

8.4 Democratized the Information

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

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

8.5   Heightened the Accountability of Media Organizations

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

8.6   The Trend of Digital Story Telling

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

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

8.7   Enabled Journalists to Directly Share News with the Audience

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

8.8   Sharing of Exclusive News Stories on Twitter (X)

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

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

9.   Conclusion & Limitations

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

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

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

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

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

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

10.   Disclosure Statement

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

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

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Abstract

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

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

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

1.   Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2.   Objectives of the Study

The below is the study objective of the research:

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

3.   Research Hypotheses

Following are the research hypotheses of the study:

H1: Instagram is usually episodic framing about Climate change.

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

4.   Literature Review

4.1   Climate Change Communication and Media Framing

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

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

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

4.2   Episodic vs. Thematic Framing in Climate Change Coverage

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

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

4.3   Instagram in Climate Change Communication

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

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

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

4.4   Engagement and Sentiment on social media

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

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

4.5   Challenges in Media Representation of Climate Change

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

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

4.6   Visual Communication and Climate Literacy on Instagram

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

4.7   Hashtag Activism and Climate Change Discourse

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

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

4.8   Audience Engagement and Sentiment on Instagram

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

4.9   The Role of Influencers in Climate Change Communication

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

4.10   Media Shaping Policy Discourse

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

informed policy discourses and system changes within environmental governance.

5.   Research Methodology

5.1   Research Design

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

5.2   Sample Selection

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

5.3   Unit of Analysis

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

5.4   Coding Scheme

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

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

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

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

5.5 Data Analysis Procedure

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

5.6 Consistency and Analytical Rigor

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

6. Findings & Results

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

Table 6.1 *Posts on Instagram of ARY News*

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

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

Table 6.2 *Posts on Instagram of GEO News*

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

Total of 90 news found on climate change on Geo News Instagram, in which 35 post based on thematic frame and other the rest on episodic.
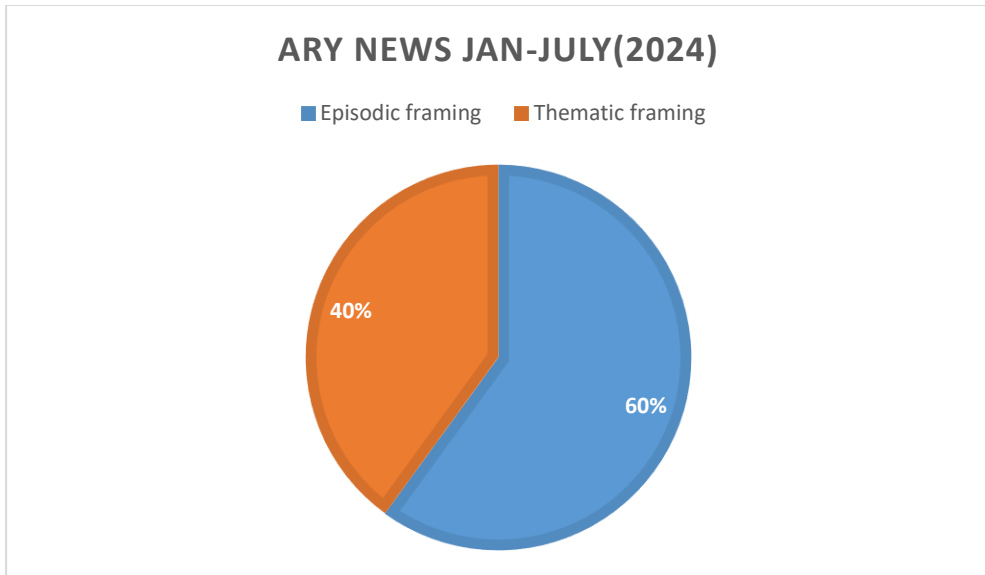
Figure 6.1 Framing in ARY News

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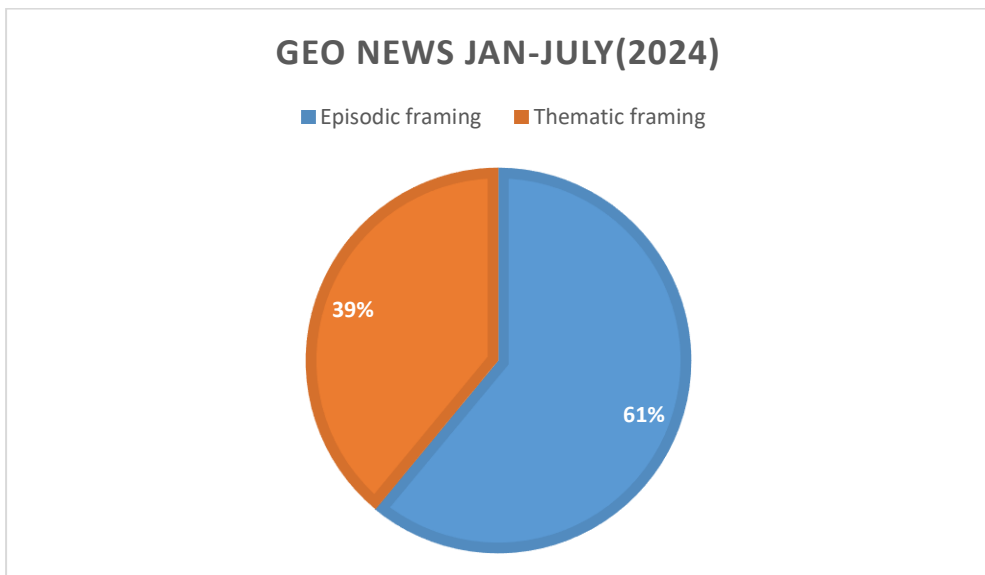

Figure 6.2 Framing in GEO News

6.1 Episodic Framing Qualitative Analysis of Data Coding

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6.2 Thematic Framing Qualitative Analysis of The Data Coding

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

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

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

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

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

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

7.   Discussion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

8.   Conclusion

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

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Exploring The Impact of Consumer Perception on Their Buying Predispositions: A Theoretical Validation of Cause & Effect Theories

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Abstract

This paper is grounded around the systematic literature review of cause-and-effect theories, persuasion and consumer decision making model and relevant existing research for understanding the role of perception in defining consumer behaviour, effect of internal and external variables on perceptions and the resultant buying behaviour. Selection of cause-and-effect theories was made due to their predictive nature, generalizability, testability and human centric attributes. Key findings reveal that perceived benefits are positively related with consumers' buying predispositions. Expectation of rewards depends upon the type of need gratification consumer is interested in. Moreover, highly motivated consumers focus on product specifications thus inclined towards the central route of persuasion. In contrast, less involved consumers will be hooked by message cues (like music, spokesperson etc.) hence the peripheral route is preferred. These insights are beneficial for advertisers and marketers as it allows them to understand the interplay of consumers' thought process, their underlying motives and its impact on their buying decisions.

Keywords: Consumer Decision Making, Buying Predispositions, Perceptions, Buying Behavior, and Motivations.

1. Introduction

Perception is a process which helps us in understanding the world around us by using our five sensory abilities (Devito, 2018). Human beings are inundated with lots of information coming from several sources; it is difficult, or we should say impossible, to absorb each bit of it. Perceptions are influenced by five key elements i.e., exposure to the stimuli, the information chunk that individuals select to process, the hook in the message that grabs their attention, relatability and desire to know more.' (Wells, Burnett, & Moriarty, 2015, p. 131).

Perception involves the process of receiving, selecting, and interpreting some of the messages to which we come across. But it also depends upon which information cues we are allowing to reach us and how we handle them. The process of perception is a bit complicated since whatever is happening around us may be different than what we perceive. There are three important stages which occur in the process of perception. The first stage begins as soon as we get the information cue from the environment. At this point our brain gets activated and we start processing the information.

Schiffman & Kanuk (2007) also laid an emphasis on the process of selective attention. Selective attention also reflects that the amount of attention is also distributed based on selective criteria. The selective criteria suggest attending only that piece of information cue which appears to meet the requirements of consumers; otherwise, no chance to attend the irrelevant stimulus. Attention takes place when an individual's mind gets activated as soon as they are encountered with any information cue (Assael, 2008).

Sciffman & Kanuk (2007) explained that individuals perceive messages the way they like it, and this happens according to their perceptual mindset i.e., the relevance they tend to create with the new piece of information based on their existing psychological framework i.e., their observations, learning and their predispositions. The information is perceived only if it seems parallel to the one's existing mind. On the contrary, selective retention refers to the information processing mechanism whereby customers retain certain chunks of information only while ignoring the rest, thus

developing a positive inclination towards the selected messages (Nath, Saumyabrata, Mishra, Prashant G., Safi, Bahrullah & R., Sangeeta, 2023).

Devito (2015) explained that our expectations, necessities, aspirations, preferences and the world around them shapes the way we perceive and interact with our surroundings. Moreover, our decision to consume and engage with certain types of media messages reflects our worldview.

Turow (2017) highlighted that we as humans develop our personalized version of the real world; which is an amalgamation of the media we consume, our prior experiences and personal insight. Our perception of reality is mostly media driven thus, at times the distinction between personal insight and the media version of reality is challenging.

Human processes stimuli by connecting the dots of new information with the previously archived information in their storage / brain warehouse. In simple words, individuals interpret and assign meanings to the information by referring to their knowledge pool that they have acquired over the years by interacting with their surroundings. This process is referred to as Schema (Adekoya, 2013).

Hegde (2022) emphasized that schemas serve as an integral component in shaping our thinking pattern, the way we store / archive information, making sense of the socio-cultural environments and also our judgement process.

2.   Scope & Significance

This paper establishes strong foundations for the field of consumer behavior, marketing, and advertising. Marketers can apply this theoretical framework to understand their prospects before launching their products in the market, i.e., pre-launch market research to position their products effectively and for post campaign evaluation to evaluate the efficacy of their campaigns.

Besides, advertisers can take the leverage in their potential campaigns if they get to know their audience better, which is possible if they study their target audience's needs, their expectations regarding the products and the degree of satisfaction they want to achieve through their potential purchase.

Hence, this theoretical framework is beneficial for both advertisers and marketers as someone rightly says that 'customers are king'.

3.   Research Objectives

Following are the research objectives:

- To examine the relationship between the consumers' buying predispositions and their actual purchase decisions
- To identify factors that affect the consumer's perception and resulting buying behavior.
- To identify the relationship between the consumers' message evaluation criteria and their preferred route to persuasion.

4.   Literature Review

This section highlights the descriptive analysis of cause-and-effect theories, persuasion model and consumer decision making model in the context of consumer buying behavior. Cause and effect theories revolve around the idea that certain factors or agents serve as catalysts for inculcating behavior patterns among individuals. It is commonly believed that for every 'reaction' there must be some 'action'.

For critical analysis, an attempt is made to find the relevance of each theory with the most used consumer decision making model. The consumer behavior model is considered as it provides insights regarding the steps involved in consumers' decision-making process. The stages in consumer behavior can be highlighted as: 1) need recognition, 2) information search, 3) evaluation & comparison, 4) outlet selection & purchase decision, 5) post purchase evaluation' (Wells, Burnett & Moriarty, 1998, p.178).

4.1   Means End Chain Analysis Theory

Means End Chains theory posits the possible explanation of the consumer behavior by establishing a relationship (or developing a chain structure) between the best-selling features of the product, the anticipated benefits of the product that consumer is looking forward to and the worth (or significance) of the product according to consumer perception. Every consumer seeks certain benefits from the products or services being offered. These benefits

reflect the distinct qualities of the product (i.e., the unique selling point) and the consumer tends to form a connection between these two elements, i.e. attributes and benefits (of the product). In addition to the above elements there is another significant factor that completes the whole chain structure and that is the consumer's expected 'level of satisfaction' from the consumption of that product. The 'level of satisfaction' would either be in the form of acquired 'pleasure', 'comfort' or the 'sense of achievement' (Webb, 2005).

In view of the preceding lines about the 'means end chain theory' it is explicable that the whole 'chain structure' revolves around the process of consumer perception. Further, it explains how consumers process information about the brand i.e., their characteristics, benefits, and the efficacy or worth of the product.

4.1.1   Relevance with Consumer Decision Making Model

This theory deals with the three out of five steps involved in decision making as discussed by Wells, Burnett & Moriarty (1998). These include need recognition, evaluation, and post purchase feelings. Need recognition rests on the idea that when the customer evaluates the value of the product, they can identify certain human needs that can be gratified by the consumption of a particular product or service.

Parente (2006) highlighted some of the compelling reasons that trigger potential prospects to make a certain buying decision. These includes gratification of certain underlying needs or wants by consuming product, the product appears as the ultimate solution of consumers problems, when they (consumer) feel inquisitive about the brand, consumer find relevance with the product and their ideal self that reflecting their perfect self-image and their likeability towards the product and the advertising. Moreover, individuals can get motivated towards a brand if the mores and values featured in advertising appeals to them.

Evaluation stage wherein the customer evaluates the product benefits, attributes and the level of satisfaction that can be linked with the product purchase. Bower, Bootzin, & Zajonc (1987) stressed that our expectations play a pivotal role in our message evaluation stage. These expectations serve as reference material and based on our prior experiences and observations.

So, whenever we encounter any message, we begin to associate our expectations to assign certain meanings to it.

Post purchase feeling that reflects the state of contentment or dissatisfaction after experiencing the product. Webb (2005) discussed that after making a buying decision of a product or service, there can be two possible experiences. Either that purchase has satisfied the consumer's need, or it may trigger a feeling of dissatisfaction which will ultimately create 'Cognitive Dissonance.' This level of frustration would further aggravate when the consumer considers himself being ripped off. Also, if the weaknesses of the product or service cannot be kept hidden then it will worsen the consumer's state of mind.

The strength of the means end chain theory lies in its product-centered approach as its sole emphasis is on the customer understanding of the product in terms of its attributes, benefits, and the expected level of satisfaction. This insight can be helpful for advertisers or marketers as it gives them a better understanding of their product-related decision-making processes. Moreover, this theory reflects how consumers perceive information about any product or service by identifying their human needs that can be linked with the product use, their expectations regarding the product. In this way, if this theory is used as theoretical foundation for a pre-launch market survey it will discover several interesting insights into the advertiser's potential prospect i.e., the needs that generally triggers an individual to buy a particular product, the value that potential prospect associates with the product and the level of expectation also defines their attitude towards the product. Besides, the level of consumer expectation can also define the degree of acceptance or rejection in their purchase decision. Succeeding paragraphs highlight the significance of means end chain analysis theory in the contemporary media landscape.

Nafisyah et al. (2023) study in the context of telecommunication services revealed that there is a significant impact of perceived price and perceived trust on the perceived value of the product. Specifically, perceived price is negatively associated with the consumer contentment. Perceived trust can improve perceived value of the service hence generate consumer

satisfaction making them inclined towards repeating the purchasing behavior afterwards.

Li et al. (2016) study asserted that MEC's (i.e., means end chain) theoretical framework provides a better understanding of consumer's purchase predispositions behind the purchase of local food. They asserted that cultural inclinations and resulting values of consumers (which in this context: Javanese and non-Javanese Indonesians) are significant factors in discovering the actual reason behind their purchase decision, as they may differ from each other.

In addition, Lin, Hong Wen (2023) stressed the significance of the means end chain framework in explaining the user behavior of the TikTok platform. Results revealed that diversity of content, platform usability, appealing visual content and active social engagement are highly significant platform attributes. Also, mental models of different genders are different from each other thus affecting platform's perceived attributes and resulting consumer values. Kumar, Harish, Philipp A. Rauschnabel, Philipp A., Agarwal, Madhushree Nanda, Singh, Rajesh Kumar & Srivastava, Ritu (2024) also confirmed that the likelihood of consumer's favorable decisions increases with the mediating effect of augmented reality characteristics and likeable benefits. Hence, the applicability of MEC's theoretical foundation in the domain of augmented reality marketing is validated.

Trzebiński,Wojciech et al. (2024) revealed that attributes can significantly impact consumer satisfaction thus confirming the application of means end chain for understanding consumer decision making. For high tech-products, it is suggested that measurable / concrete benefits should be highlighted alongside the comparison with the competitor brand thus allowing customers to evaluate two products simultaneously whereas abstract / intangible attributes (emotional cues, luxury, convenience, emotional connection etc.) may not create substantial impact on consumer decisions.

Rasheed et al. (2023) revealed that benefits (both in terms of economic gains and intangible rewards like satisfaction, ease etc.) generate favorable online purchase behavior whereas associated risk is negatively correlated with the buying behavior. Abdelsalam et al. (2021) asserted that three significant

factors i.e., benefit in terms of platform efficacy, motivation and the value perceived by the user can determine their behavioral inclinations towards the social media platforms.

4.2   Edward's expectancy value theory

This theory explained the motivations behind the consumer decision making process. Besides, this theory laid an emphasis on the consumer's evaluative criterion for making a final purchase decision. This criterion revolves around two significant factors, i.e., the expectations of the consumer about the value of the product they would like to buy and the probability of getting the anticipated rewards / benefits from the product. Individuals anticipate a certain level of satisfaction in terms of the product's performance, i.e., the benefits of the product and tend to evaluate the propensity of gratification they would associate with the purchase of that product. Altogether both these factors enable the consumers to decide which product they would like to buy. The greater the likelihood of maximum benefits the more inclination a consumer will show towards a particular product in comparison with the other alternatives (Callan et al, 1999).

This idea provides an insight into the individual's decision-making process and elaborates how consumers evaluate the benefits associated with the buying or selling of products or services. Being a consumer, we tend to look out for all possible strengths and weaknesses before making a buying decision. Apparently, this theory can be applied to provide valuable insights about the consumer buying behavior as it suggests that an individual associates a certain value with products or services, evaluates its possible benefits and then makes a final decision. But to increase the efficacy of this theory, individuals preferred benefits and the actual product benefits appear to be in-line with each other to increase the quality of this relationship.

4.2.1   *Relevance with Consumer Decision Making Model*

This theory focused on consumers' evaluative criteria (one of the steps in the decision-making process as discussed by Wells, Burnett & Moriarty, 1998) for making a purchase decision. This criterion comprises two elements, i.e., the expectations of consumers about the value of the product and the possibility of reward from product consumption. In simple words

the relationship between the product's expected benefits and the level of anticipated satisfaction that it creates i.e., the higher the benefits expected the more likelihood of higher expectations regarding the product post purchase satisfaction. For instance: if a consumer perceives the maximum benefits of a certain product due to the discount offer of buy 1 get 1 free; this added reward may increase the expectations regarding post purchase satisfaction.

Moussa et al. (2024) study affirmed that the predispositions regarding the consumption of mobile commerce are interrelated with the likelihood of task efficacy, decision complexity & the reliability of mobile commerce. Thus, these predispositions increase the likelihood of adoption of mobile commerce. Discussing the potential of reward expectations and the applicability of gamification elements in social commerce, Yan et al. (2020) emphasized that consumers' online shopping behavior can be significantly improved by employing these game elements like players freedom, control, incentive mechanism and the immersive experience.

But if the consumers are unfamiliar with the product, and they do not have direct experience or no prior information of any kind then there is a possibility that they may overestimate product benefits and its consequences. This in turn may increase the chances of a possible misunderstanding or distrust between the product marketer and the prospectus. Also, this theory emphasizes direct experience with the product, i.e., no external factors are considered. For the positive side, it can be asserted that the product centered approach highlights the relationship between product and their actual prospects.

On the contrary, there are some factors that may create distortion in the desired message understanding. For example, every individual may perceive things differently depending on their personal schemas and this is natural. So, to minimize the effect of their differences, researchers may investigate the common parameters that consumers usually employ for reaching a certain decision like human needs or the conditions in which a product is generally consumed. For instance, Seo et al. (2023) revealed that the consumers' anticipated need for gratification from buying rental clothes online vary from pandemic to post pandemic times. Also, the emotional

attachment factor may inhibit customers from purchasing rental clothes online irrespective of pandemic or post pandemic situation.

Impact of different rewards may also vary as discussed by Wang et al. (2020) that monetary rewards are more effective as compared to social rewards as it offers emotional compensation to the customer thus affecting the online ratings of dissatisfactory items but questionable on ethical grounds.

Zubair et al. (2024) also stressed on the role of audience / customer as they found that product elements and user participation in social media discourse affects consumers' buying predispositions alongside the consumers' anticipation regarding the products' productivity.

In the context of consumer behavior, means end chain theory and expectancy value theory seems relevant as it explains how consumers perceive the products and services offered to them and associate certain expectations to be fulfilled by the consumption of a particular product. For advertisers, this theory can work best if they focus on the products' characteristic features and tend to highlight those aspects that consumers would desire for. According to this theory, consumers always seek benefits they would like to get after making a particular purchase therefore if the connection between the product attributes and the benefits preferred by consumers are consistent then it will automatically add significance to that product. Meanwhile consumers develop trust in the performance of the product and anticipate the consequences of the product in terms of immense satisfaction and comfort.

Considering the above-mentioned discussion on the consumer's developed association between the 'preferred benefits' and the 'actual features' of the product, it can be asserted that these two elements may serve as rewards for the prospective buyers. These rewards may act as stimulating agents and provide reinforcement for the consumer's buying behavior.

4.3   The Attribution Theory

The Attribution theory focuses on the agents that serve as reasons for an individual's behavior. Theory puts forward an idea that the individual seeks ways to justify their behaviors and other people alike. A person, to vindicate

display of certain behavioral patterns tends to search for reasons or factors that can be held responsible (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007).

Attribution was contributed by Fiske and Tailor (1984), Jones & Davis (1965) and Kelley (1979). This concept rests on the idea that human beings seek justifications for others' behaviors and their own behavior too (As cited by Devito, 1997).

It appears that this theory can easily be related to the consumer post purchase behavior wherein individually either get reinforcement from the experience of buying products or services or get infuriated due to the disappointing consequences. Consequently, they either acknowledge the benefits of the product by continuing their purchase decisions or impugn the substandard performance of the product; hence, no likelihood of favorable attitude towards that product or service from then on. Moreover, it can be considered that attributions do play a vital role in identifying the core reason for one's behavior in certain situations. The nature of this theory allows researchers to consider this theory as a theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between consumers and several internal or external factors.

This theory allows advertisers and marketers to understand the causal relationship between their potential prospects and their buying behavior. By holding some internal or external factors responsible for their behavior, to justify their behaviors, consciously or unconsciously they define why they do what they do. This means that they give cues to understand the motives behind their decisions. Together with this, there is a possibility that the reasons that consumers attribute for their certain behavior may not necessarily depict the actual motives behind their decision. But it may give clues to make some sense of their behaviors by understanding different kinds of attribution people generally make.

4.3.1   *Relevance with Consumer Decision Making Model*

Attribution can be observed in the 'evaluation' (one of the essential steps involved in consumer decision making as discussed by Wells, Burnett & Moriarty, 1998) process, when people finally decide whether to buy or not to buy a particular product. Post purchase attributions can or may vary because

they reflect the post purchase feedback and that may or may not be in-line with the consumer's early attributions during the evaluation process. This change in attributions may cause a certain level of uneasiness or discomfort among the minds of consumers; and it may increase the likelihood of favorable or unfavorable future decisions, respectively.

There is another important criterion to understand the attributions i.e., the nature of consequences that a particular behavior brings forward and the effect that it may have on the consumers' contribution. (Rosenthal & Jacobson (1992) explained the 'Pygmalion Effect' in which the nature of anticipated behavior i.e., positive & negative both affects the individual's performance accordingly (As cited by Devito, 1997).

For instance: if an individual performs certain actions that bring them recognition, then there is a possibility of internal attributions i.e., those factors that can be associated with one's own self. Whereas, if the action does not bring any favorable consequences, then there is a possibility of external attributions as it is human nature to find escape from the situations that cause discomfort.

Unlike previous theories, attribution theory provides an understanding of the relationship between prospects, their decision, and the impact of internal / external factors in their decision-making process. Also, the nature of attribution related to the low-risk decisions may be different with high-risk decisions. Because if the decision involves low risk, there is a possibility that consumers may give a second try to the product to re-authenticate their previous attributions. But in case of high-risk involvement, consumers may either reject or accept the early attributions altogether depending on the consequences of their behavior.

For instance, if consumers justify their purchase decision because of those television advertisements they viewed recently, the underlying reason appears to be some of the message elements of that television commercial. Like they can make decisions about buying some product as compared to other alternatives because of the celebrity endorsements, in particular advertisements or the claims that have been made in the commercial. They give credit for their buying decision to those televised advertisements that

have compelled them to do certain action. Given that, similar 'blame games' also appear in the case when individuals get influenced by some of their favorite celebrity endorsing a product or the time, they ask for recommendations about product or service from family, peers, or acquaintances. In the same way, they can also claim to be ripped off on certain purchases if they find the product featured in television commercials different as compared to the one, they bought. To encapsulate, the above case can be considered valid for justifying the relevance of this theory to the context of consumer behavior research.

Ghosh et al. (2022) asserted that the buying predispositions of women are significantly correlated with their perceptions of the advertisement primarily applicable in the context of women related products. Rimoldi (2008) also unveiled that a favorable attitude towards advertised products increases the likelihood of encouraging buying behaviors. In addition to this, Kotwal, Gupta & Devi (2008) underscored that television advertising serves as a potent source of information for potential consumers and facilitates them in making a rational decision. Also, Gazley et al. (2012) asserted that dislike ability of advertising decreases the likelihood of favorable buying behavior

Relevant research establishes the relationship between the impacts of celebrity endorsing products in advertisement on consumer recall of brand. A research study carried out by Jawaid, Rajput & Naqvi (2013) elucidates the positive correlation between the celebrity endorsement and its impact on teenage impulsive buying.

Pughazhendi et al. (2011) conducted research in Coimbatore, India. Results revealed that celebrity endorsements play a pivotal role in disseminating information about durable goods and it also affects the brands' recall among the potential consumers. Moreover, consumers buying behaviors also get triggered by celebrities mainly when they laid their emphasis on affordability and product quality. In contrast, Mai,Nguyen Quynh, Nguyen,Long ThangVan, Thuan,Nguyen Hoang and Ngo,Liem Viet (2025) revealed that the role of social media influencers in endorsing beauty brands is validated subject to the brands' credibility and the user's experience alignment.

While discussing the influence of social media celebrities, Lee et al. (2025) revealed that social media display of materialistic possessions serves as the important factor in shaping the public image of the content creator. In contrast, there is a negative relationship with the perception of low-key consumers and the materialistic expression on social media. Du et al. (2023) asserted that the Para social relationship between social media influencers and their followers can be a gamechanger if the selection of influencers is carefully aligned with the product endorsed.

In the context of technology, an interesting investigation conducted by Zhang et al. (2025) revealed that the involvement in metaverse tourism is positively aligned with the degree of receptiveness and the level of absorption among gamers. Hence, attributions for technology centered products heavily rely on the consumers' willingness and inclinations towards technological advancements.

Subsequent paragraphs will elaborate the significance of factors that affect consumer decision making process which in turn allows advertisers to select the relevant persuasion route to convince their prospects effectively.

4.4   The Elaboration Likelihood Model

'The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) suggests that a person's level of involvement during message processing is a critical factor in determining which route to persuasion is likely to be effective' (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007, p. 243).

Hawkins et al (2010) argued that involvement appears to be the decisive factor for the consumer's information processing and attitude change. Consequently, it is ensured that the individuals with high degree of involvement towards the product will show more likelihood to pursue the central route thereby emphasizing on the related variants of the message to create favorable associations. On the contrary, in low involvement cases individuals do not pay heed to the relevance factor, take a peripheral route instead of focusing on product features they attend corresponding factors of the message i.e., background music, illustrations and the spokesperson of the targeted message.

The elaboration likelihood model is significant in understanding the role of internal / external factors to persuade consumers of different categories. Assael (1998) discussed studies supporting the notions of ELM i.e., Elaboration Likelihood Model presented by Petty & Cacioppo. It was asserted that to increase the efficacy of advertising content primarily for the consumers with a high relevance factor; message should lay emphasis on the attributes and the benefits of the products. On the contrary, for 'uninvolved consumers' it is imperative to focus more on other contributing factors that supplement the advertising message (for instance the surroundings or the context of communication) but require less involvement in message reception.

Pillai et al. (2022) asserted that the consumer perception of benefits associated with online food delivery service are favorably aligned with their buying behavior, unlike risk association. In addition, message efficacy is relevant for conscious consumers whereas emotional appeal works best for passive consumers. Feng,Nuanru (2024) studied the patterns of consumer behaviors in the context of WeChat Group Buying and revealed that there is a shift in consumer behavior from peripheral routes driven by the social recommendations towards the service-centered central route resulting in an increase in the propensity of favorable buying behavior. Consumers' perspective can be significantly influenced by the sociocultural context of social media platforms in contrast to the information component of the advertisements. Thus application of ELM is validated in the context of social media advertising (Pan, Piao & Zhang,Hao, 2023).

Study conducted by Jayawardena et al. (2023) asserted that Virtual reality advertising is effective when catering the self-actualization and moral fulfilment needs of the consumers like promoting recreational inspirations or philanthropic expressions. On the contrary, augmented reality deals with the cognitive needs of consumers as it enhances their message retention and also triggers favorable buying dispositions.

Shao et al. (2023) highlighted that consumer's emotional connection as well as their rational mindset can be simultaneously affected based on the source credibility. Unlike social recommendations that work only when no prior connection with the brand exists

In sum, the ELM model is compatible with this theoretical framework as it facilitates the understanding of message processing and consumer buying intentions. It is therefore addressing research question 3 as this model explains how consumers would process advertising messages that are consistent to them, and which route they would like to follow. Likewise, it also elucidates the effect of consumer involvement with the product to the change in individual attitude.

Consider the example of cooking oil advertisements and the effect on consumers vary depending upon their level of involvement with the product. If housewives are exposed to this message, then they would probably take the central route as they are more concerned about their family health hence more involved with the product. On the contrary, if male professional is watching this advertisement, then there are less chances of high involvement as they generally do not bother to consider the brand of cooking oil.

To recapitulate the concept of ELM it is observed that this model is applicable to apply the consumer behavior understanding so that the consumer can be motivated accordingly. Moreover, it presents a theoretical framework to understand the evaluative criterion most often employed by the individuals to get to the final decision.

5.   Methodology

This research revolves around the systematic review of the cause-and-effect theories, persuasion model and consumer buying behaviour model and the relevant studies to present a theoretical framework that elaborates the relationship between consumer buying predispositions and their actual buying behaviour. Cause and effect theories i.e., means end chain analysis theory, Edwards' expectancy theory, attribution theory have been selected mainly because they are predictive in nature, encompasses human centric attributes, generalizable & testable as well. Variables highlighted in these theories include an individual's expectations regarding the outcome of the product, their needs, product attributes and rewards associated with the purchase of a certain product.

Moreover, the consumer buying behaviour model was studied to understand the impact of the above-mentioned variables (factors) on the

consumer decision making process. The elaboration likelihood model was selected to identify the most suitable persuasion route for the prospects based upon the understanding of factors that usually triggers their decision-making process.

Considering the selected theories and models, research questions have been designed to study the correlation between consumers' purchase intentions and their actual buying behaviour:

o   What is the relationship between consumer buying predispositions and their actual buying behaviour?
o   What are the factors that affect consumer perception & their actual purchase behaviour?
o   How do consumers' message evaluation criteria predict their preferred route to persuasion?

6.   Findings & Results

To explain the basic tenets of each theory and how they are interlinked with the consumer decision making process, refer to table 1 & figure 1. Considering the basic assumption of means end chain theory, it can be stated that the relationship between product benefits, consumer expectation of the product and the value that an individual assigns to that product; reflects the process of selective perception. Selective perception revolves around the idea that an individual attends and perceives every piece of information if that is consistent with their existing belief system.

In this case, if there is a gap between product benefits and consumer expectations then there is a growing possibility of inverse feedback from the prospect, i.e., they may disregard or reject the information altogether. Relevance is the key factor as per the assumption of this theory and it increases the efficacy of this entire chain of consumer behaviour.

Together with this, Edward expectancy theory focuses on self-perception and allows great liberty to researchers to understand the process of perception and its relative equation with the product/ services and their resulting buying behaviour. Besides, the value that an individual assigns to a particular product may create complexities in understanding consumer

behaviour. It is assumed that every individual differs from each other because of their personal schema that reflects their values, experiences, observations and learning from childhood. The efficacy of this theory can be maximized if the individual's 'collective values' to be identified will ultimately facilitate researchers to categorize the consumers based on some commonly found values. The same treatment can be given to identify consumers who have most found 'human needs' to group them together on similarity basis.

The 'product centred approach' of this theory and Edward expectancy theory allows researchers to utilize this theory as a foundation to understand the consumers likes and dislikes about the product, their specific underlying needs that can be later associated with the product benefits. But in case of 'product repositioning' there is a need to redefine the target market. In this case there is a possibility of complexity between the product's actual benefits and the consumers' expectations of the product attributes because they do not have any prior information on the subject. Like means end chain, there is an element of uncertainty that lies in the case of unfamiliar products. This theory can be best utilized to understand the customer relationship with the products that they are already familiar with.

In consideration of the above-mentioned cause and effect theories; it is observed that certain factors play a substantial role in affecting an individual's buying predispositions and ultimate purchasing behaviour. Theoretically, it seems obvious that the individual behaviours are often driven by the rewards associated with the purchase of that product or service, the consumer's favourable experience with certain products and the dissonance that occurs due to the specific mediated messages. All these factors are consequential as they provide consumers with an evaluative criterion to take future buying decisions accordingly. Moreover, individuals develop certain expectations about the performance of their 'would-be' purchase item. Thus, the level of expectation associated with their buying decision also enables consumers to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the product or service to make a rational decision.

Similarly, the theoretical framework of attribution theory also underscores that individual seek out reasoning to justify their behavioural

patterns. Likewise, people tend to evaluate themselves by observing others' reactions towards them. In terms of advertising, it appears relevant to explain the consumer behaviour for buying products or services that often get triggered by the need of social approval.

In practice, means end chain analysis and Edward expectancy theory are applicable during the pre-launch phase / initial market research of advertising campaigns, when the purpose is to understand the existing consumer perceptions and their buying inclinations towards the product. For existing products or services, this theory will allow marketers and advertisers to understand the relationship between the products' actual benefits and how they are being perceived by their prospects. For instance, if customers' expectations and product benefits are congruent there are increased chances of favourable consumer behaviour and that will ultimately be deemed as a successful advertising campaign as well. In contrast, if a certain product/service advertising campaign fails or seems unsuccessful it can be gauged by examining the customers' expectations and the product's benefits claimed via advertising messages. The difference/s between the customers' expectations and the actual product benefits reveal that there seems to be a communication gap between the marketer's perspective and the customers' expectations regarding the product / service.

Likewise, Edward expectancy theory also allows the advertisers and marketers to understand what customers are looking for in their respective products or services and then select their persuasion tactics accordingly. Ostensibly, this usually happens in advertising campaigns; during the market research phase marketers get the idea what their customers are anticipating which they later transform through their brands' USP (i.e., unique selling propositions). Thus, the above analysis addresses the concerns of research question 2 regarding the factors that can affect consumers' purchase intentions and actual buying behaviour.

The Elaboration Likelihood model is also practically suitable for advertising strategists as it allows them to understand the persuasion route they should be following for influencing their target audience. For instance, the central route when people are highly motivated then logic can be used to

persuade them. Whereas emotions can work best if people are least involved in the product. Based on their understanding, they can design their advertising messages in a more precise and efficient manner. This addresses the research question 3 as the elaboration likelihood model presents the role of audience factor in deciding the relevant route of persuasion.

Referring to image 1 which addresses research Q3 as it represents the central route of persuasion where the audience is highly motivated and relies on logical reasoning, thus focusing more on the product specifications therefore the message should be designed in a way that it highlights the product centred attributes like possible benefits and associated rewards etc.

Whereas image 2 addresses research Q3 as it represents the peripheral route of persuasion where the audience is least motivated and thus focuses more on the external factors therefore the message should be designed in a way that highlights the background music, celebrity spokesperson, visuals, colours etc.

Based on the discussion in previous paragraphs, it can be asserted that there is a significant relationship between an individual's buying intentions and their actual buying behaviour. Therefore, studies emphasizing consumer's buying predispositions can be beneficial to understand the consumer's real buying behaviour.

Table 6.1 *Overview of the Theories*

Theory	Basic Tenets	Relevant Decision-Making Steps	Scope & Significance
Means End Chain	Refers to a chain structure which elaborates the consumer perception and the factors affecting the process of perception, i.e., product features, consumers' anticipated benefits and the value of product for customers	This theory highlights factors that are relevant for three important steps of consumer decision making model i.e., ***need recognition, evaluation, and post purchase evaluation***	Presents the insights regarding the product-oriented factors that affect consumers decision making, beneficial for pre-launch market research and designing an effective advertising strategy
Edwards' Expectancy Value theory	Revolve around the consumer motivations i.e., expectations of the consumer about the value of the product they would like to buy and the probability for getting the anticipated rewards / benefits from the product.	Referring to the ***evaluation*** step of the decision-making model, as consumers value the association of certain rewards as a positive reinforcement which results in raising their expectations	To increase the likelihood of favorable behavior, individuals preferred benefits and the actual product benefits appears to be in-line with each other
Attribution theory	Talks about the agents that serve as justifications or reasoning for an	Refers to the ***post purchase evaluation*** as consumers either	Applicable for post campaign evaluation by advertisers and

individual's behavior i.e., positive, or negative reinforcement.	find positive reinforcement in terms of rewards associated with their purchase or feel dejected due to negative reinforcement	marketers, as it will help them understand the consumer feedback and the efficacy of their campaigns.

Table 6.1 addresses the research question 2 as it explains the basic tenets of each theory and how they are inter-linked with the consumer decision making process.
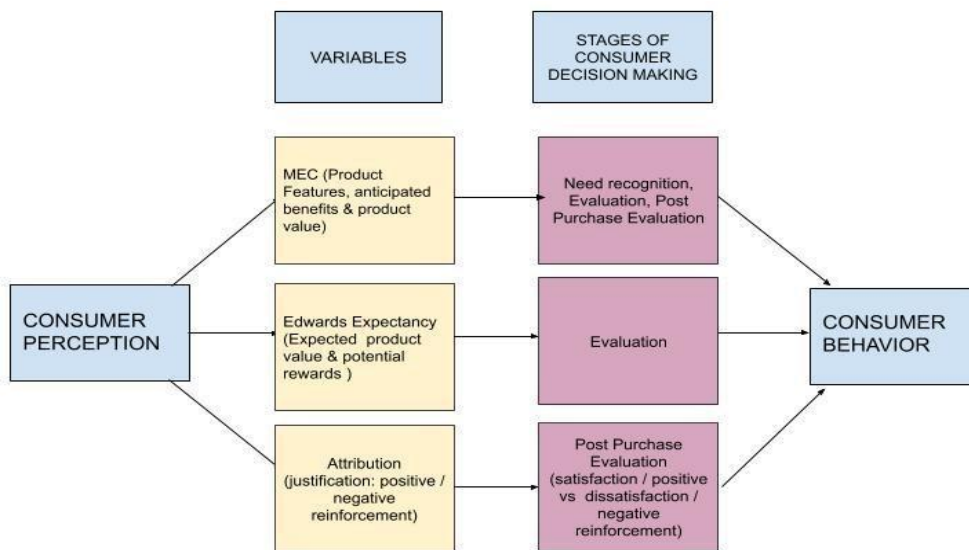

Figure 6.1 Relationship explained between Variables

Figure 6.1 clearly depicts how the variables identified through the selected theories affect different stages of the consumer decision making process.
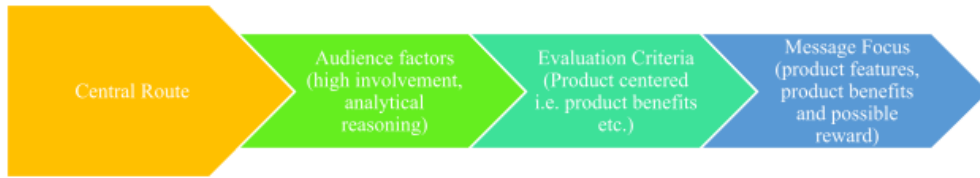
Figure 6.2 Central Route Explained

Image 6.2 above addresses research Q3 as it represents the central route of persuasion where the audience is highly motivated and relies on logical reasoning, thus focusing more on the product specifications therefore the message should be designed in a way that it highlights the product centred attributes like possible benefits and associated rewards etc.
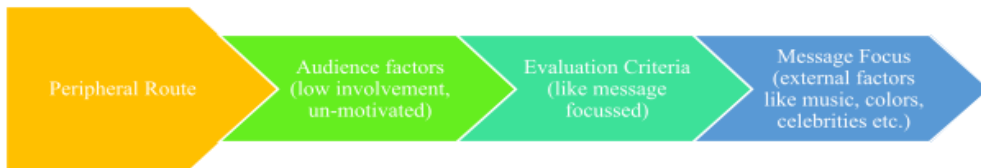

Figure 6.3 Peripheral Route Explained

Image 6.3 addresses research Q3 as it represents the peripheral route of persuasion where the audience is least motivated and thus focuses more on the external factors therefore the message should be designed in a way that it highlights the background music, celebrity spokesperson, visuals, colours etc.

7.   Conclusion

To sum up, this theoretical framework is considerably significant as it lays the foundation of pre-launch market research and post campaign evaluation. For the pre-launch market research this study provides theoretical insight regarding the processes that may affect consumer's initial thought process as well as their message evaluation criteria. To understand consumer inclinations, market research tools (e.g., survey questionnaire, in-store or online observations of customer's inclinations) can be designed by

incorporating means end chains and expectancy value notions, i.e., product features, benefits, customer expectations regarding the product rewards and the potential possibility of customer satisfaction.

Specifically, if means end chain is utilized then some important aspects should also be considered for instance; tangible and intangible benefits can affect consumer behaviour differently (Trzebiński, 2024), gender perceptions of associated benefits may vary significantly (Lin et.al, 2023) and cultural inclinations have the potential to affect individuals perceived values of the product (Li et.al,2016).

In the context of Edward's expectation value theory, key insights highlighting the diversified nature of new media landscape includes: game based rewards mechanism can works best for enhancing consumers online shopping experience (Yan, 2020), expected need gratification may vary depending upon the conditions in which decision has been made along with the consumer's frame of mind(Seo,2023), monetary rewards can redress customer's in case of substandard product (Wang, 2020), product specific elements and customers' social media communications does affect their online buying predispositions (Zubair,2024).

Display of materialistic possessions by social media influencers may affect low-key and status conscious customers differently (Lee,2025), selection of celebrity association with the product should be carefully planned (Du et.al, 2023), favourable behavioural inclinations towards technology products heavily rely on the degree of willingness and likelihood of technology adoption by the consumers (Zhang et.al, 2025)

It is important to note that the amount of prior information that a person may have about stimuli can affect their feedback towards the product. Also, the impact of communication strategy can also vary depending upon the degree of familiarity the consumer depicts towards the product. In this way, existing customers who are already familiar with the product may respond differently as compared to the new ones. Pillai (2022) also confirmed that the message's efficacy can have a substantial impact on conscious consumers unlike passive ones who get swayed by the emotional appeals. Transition from peripheral towards central route is witnessed in studying behavioural

inclinations of WeChat group where people make group buying decisions based on recommendations followed by the value of the service (Feng, 2024), social media community discourse needs to be considered when dealing with the consumer behaviour on social commerce (Pan et.al, 2023).

Similarly, individual expectations and feedback towards rewards associations may be different altogether as it may reflect their individual evaluative criteria as well as their personal preferences. Consciously or unconsciously, individuals tend to make their decisions based on certain underlying factors that they may not be aware of at the time of decision making but serve as the driving force behind their decision-making process. For instance, Seo (2023) mentioned how emotional attachment with the clothing purchase may inhibit customers from buying rental clothes online.

To conclude, this study encapsulates the idea that people may have different reasons for making and justifying their decisions, therefore marketers and advertisers can apply relevant theoretical parameters validated by the available empirical research to understand the significant dimensions of consumer behaviour and predict the impact of the intended communication strategy on their potential prospects.

8.   Recommendations for Future Research Studies

o   Since this paper revolves around the systematic literature review therefore only secondary research has been used to address the research questions. In future studies, primary research can also be used to expand the scope of this study.
o   This theoretical framework particularly highlights the impact of consumer needs, product benefits, product features and the consumer expectations regarding the products and services. Hence other possible factors like gender perception, audio-visual components of message, technological readiness should also be considered in future studies.

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Critical Review of Ethan Zuckerman's Perspective on social media and Civic Movements: A Case Study of Pakistan

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Abstract

This paper is based on a critical review of Ethan Zuckerman's two-dimensional model of civic engagement, described as "Thin vs Thick Participation" and "Voice vs. Instrumental Action," by using the concept of social movements in the global south, primarily Pakistan. While slacktivism may popularize digital activism, this study contends that even low-effort online actions can play a significant role in transformation through the setting of public discourse and building support, which creates pressure on institutions. This paper uses three case studies, the Lawyers' Movement (2007–2009), the Justice for Zainab campaign (2018), and the Students' Solidarity March (2018–present), to show how national political structures and digital platforms mediate various combinations of thick/thin and voice/instrumental strategies. In order to more accurately assess the potential and constraints of social movements in postcolonial contexts, the study recommends expanding Zuckerman's model by including a third axis, historical power dynamics, and global hegemonies. This enhanced framework provides a more nuanced understanding of civic engagement in developing nations where online protest operates within structural constraints.

*Keywords***:** Social Media Activism, Civic Movements, Case Study, Ethan Zuckerman, Digital Protest, and Civic Engagement.

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1.   Introduction

Social media plays a crucial role in our everyday lives, impacting everything from our communication and recreation patterns to cultural trends, global political debates, economic concerns, and social movements. The media is acknowledged by politicians, scholars, artists, and professionals in a variety of fields as a powerful and useful instrument for explaining social movements and political shifts in society (Zuckerman, 2016). Political sociologists have recognized the importance of past developments in communication technology. Although there has been a rich debate on digital activism within the developed countries, the evolving role of social media in third-world countries has not been adequately captured in the literature review. The paper will attempt to fill that gap by evaluating how social media affects modern movements and proposing a revision of theoretical models, which is the application of the dual-axis model of civic participation and outcomes by Zuckerman, which compares the Thin and Thick Engagements to the Voice and Instrumental Effects, to add more understanding to the successes and failures of movements in the global south (Hammad, 2022).

As Anderson (2006) emphasizes, the press played a key role in spreading nationalist causes, and newspapers played a central role in the 19th century in spreading social movements just as radio and television did in the 20th century and do in the present (Tilly, 2004). Not only did these technologies allow controversial politics, but they also affected the nature of social movements. In the modern online space, social media networking has become a transformative tool of activism. A 2021 study by Cervi and Marin-Llado indicates that the application of social media with regard to politics has been on the rise in the last ten years. Social media such as TikTok, which feature entertaining videos, are starting to become platforms to discuss politics and activism. Political narratives rely on viral content and digital stories to appeal to emotions, simplify complicated problems, and make one feel part of a community. Viral content may assist social movements and give them a temporary boost, but it is also associated with the risk of misinformation distribution (Jenkins et al., 2020).

Society is entering a new era characterized by citizens who are more knowledgeable and actively involved in political life. This shift is marked by a growing demand for transparency, participation, and genuine democratic engagement. In this context, civil society, especially protest movements, is expected to adopt innovative digital tools to support and accelerate this democratic transition. If the history is analysed in depth, it can be seen how the media has long played an important role in mobilizing civil society. The society is moving into a new era where people are more informed and are participating actively in political life (Zuckerman & Gessen, 2019).

This change is characterized by increased calls for transparency, participation, and real democratic practice. Since in this regard, the civil society, particularly the protest movements, is likely to embrace creative digital technologies to facilitate and speed up this democratic shift, it would be explored that the media have long been influential in terms of mobilizing the civil society (Gazia et al., 2024). The Arab Spring was a movement of revolutions in the Middle East, in such countries as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and also in about 17 countries that defied authoritarian regimes in a move to bring power back to the people. This was the Arab Spring, which was a revolution of uprisings in the Middle East, including Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, among many others, which amounted to approximately 17 states that revolted against the authoritarian regimes in an attempt to bring the people back to power. The Arab Spring did not start on social media; however, social media played a role in counterrevolution (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013).

The other historical case, which is the struggle for independence of Indo-Pakistan, used the print media to reach the masses, albeit gradually, through the leaders. Comparing this, the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine proved to be a faster mobilization process, which revealed how the changing communication tools could speed up the democratic momentum (Karatnycky & Ackerman, 2005). The modern technological world has turned into a strong and fast-growing catalyst, and social media enables people all over the world to express their views. In the absence of social media, contemporary movements would not have met their intended results as amicably and fast. This paper analyses the application of the Two-Dimensional Model of civic

engagement of Ethan Zuckerman, Thin vs. Thick and Voice vs. instrumental, to social movements in Pakistan.

2.   Research Question

RQ1: How do changes of digital activism in a postcolonial, developing place better fit Zuckerman's idea, and what needs to be changed in the model to make it more global?

3.   Method

This paper uses a qualitative, interpretive approach by critically reviewing Zuckerman's framework and conducting comparative case studies of three significant Pakistani movements: the Lawyers' Movement (2007–2009), the #JusticeForZainab campaign (2018), and the Students' Solidarity March (2018–present). These cases are examined through Zuckerman's "Thin/Thick" and "Voice/Instrumental" axes to evaluate the model's explanatory power and its limitations in the Global South.

3.1   Data Sources

The sources of secondary data in this research project involve articles published in major newspapers like DAWN, Gulf News, and BBC as sources of comprehensive coverage of the three case studies. These articles are important sources of information on the campaign of Justice for Zainab and the Solidarity March of the Students that were documented in real-time regarding the events, societal responses, and media framing of these phenomena.

·   Justice For Zainab (2018): The articles by DAWN and Gulf News were considered to trace the public outrage, media coverage, and government reaction to the tragic event of Zainab Ansari's rape and murder. The social media-led movement called the Justice for Zainab campaign resulted in widespread protests and demands to take action. DAWN News (2018) and Gulf News (2018) coverage were useful sources of information regarding the way people organized online using hashtags, and also the offline protests that happened simultaneously. These sources contributed to emphasizing the

transition between online communication (the popularity of the hashtag) and street demonstrations and activism.

·   Solidarity March by students (2018–present): The articles of the Students' Solidarity March in DAWN were utilized to analyse the development and mobilization of student movements in Pakistan. Such movements required the restoration of student unions and improved educational reforms. This data was supplemented by research articles in scholarly resources, which gave background information about the political situation under which the student activism took shape in Pakistan. The nationwide participation and the expectations of educational reforms were documented in coverage in DAWN (2019).

·   Lawyers Movement (2007-2009): In the case of the Lawyers Movement, academic works, including Ahmed and Stephan (2010) and Phelps (2009) articles, offered a deeper discussion of the goals, leadership, and tactics of resistance used by the movement. Research papers talked about lawyers applying offline (protests, sit-ins) and online (blogs, YouTube) modes to pressure the judiciary to be independent and reinstate Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry. These academic sources and newspaper articles, put together, made a wholesome picture of the Lawyers' Movement and how the traditional media and the new digital tools contributed to the success of the Lawyers' Movement.

4.   Data Analysis

The newspaper articles in the DAWN, the Gulf News and the BBC newspaper were examined using the thematic analysis to identify the key patterns and themes in its coverage of these movements. It focused on how the movements were framed by media and the levels of participation by the populace and the efficacy of online movements compared to offline demonstrations. In the Lawyers Movement case, academic research was used to contextualize how the movement was being framed in the media during the censorship in the bigger political context of Pakistan. This study contributed to the mapping of the movement onto the Thin/Thick and Voice/Instrumental framework proposed by Zuckerman, which enabled a more in-depth insight into how both

online and offline strategies were applied by political actors to reach their objectives.

The analysis integrated the secondary information of the newspaper articles with the theoretical framework which gave a strong idea of the meeting points of media, digital activism and social movements. The case studies of Justice for Zainab and Students Solidarity March were considered in terms of how digital activism could support offline protests and the Lawyers Movement was considered as an example of thick-instrumental activism, with the combination of grassroots organization and strategic use of the media.

4.1   Thick & Thin, Voice and Instrumental Scale

Ethan Zuckerman explores online civic engagement using a two-dimensional scale in his article "New Media and New Civic." The first dimension distinguishes between "thin" and "thick" participation. According to Zuckerman, thin participation involves low levels of time and effort, including actions like updating a Facebook profile picture or signing an online petition. The minimal engagement he observes that can be involved in thin engagement is merely to sign a petition or support a campaign fund, which is what organizers demand of the masses.

Conversely, thick participation requires more time, critical thinking and administrative abilities to comprehend what is needed and what must be done. Zuckerman goes further to explain that to have a thick engagement, the campaigners expect the people to involve themselves by generating innovative ideas, strategic thinking, media declarations, research, contemplation or helping to solve the problems. In this regard, campaigners have a precise objective but would want the people to give their input to influence the course of their activities. The second axis is that of Voice and Instrumental action, which is designed to impact particular policies and foster more global cultural shifts witnessed in the legalization of same-sex marriage in the United States (Zuckerman, 2014).
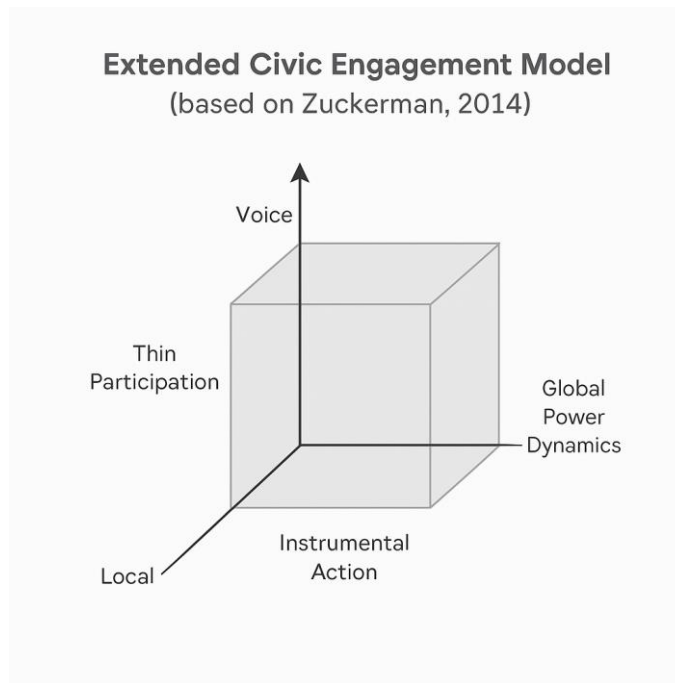
Figure 3.1 Thick and Thin Style

4.2   Raising Awareness via Slacktivism and Minimal Voice-Based Engagement

Contemporary media and social media have reorganized the traditional strategy of violent civic action into a system of non-violent opposition, thus promoting social transformation through non-violent methods. Digital activism is the best place where different causes can be successfully promoted. Social media has helped many movements to reach a wider audience especially the ones who do not want to attend to street activism. Digital activism involves the use of internet communication devices, including emails, blogs, and social networking platforms, to ensure greater awareness and promote socio-economic and political change within and outside the country. Yet there is a type of online activism called Slacktivism that has been criticized as weakening real world activism. It can easily form a misconception that one is achieving something when in reality, there is no tangible activity happening, which leads to a negligible political and social effect (Evgeny & Zuckerman, 2014). It is opposed because in spite of the slow

results, digital activism is an important activity that helps to inform the population by using blogs, e-mails, social media communication, and help to communicate the importance of different issues and raise the consciousness of the masses.

In one instance, the ALS Association introduced the IceBucketChallenge online in order to create awareness about the Lou Gehrig disease which is a terminal illness. In 2014, it was also participated by numerous individuals dumping ice water on themselves and uploading the videos into the social media followed by nominating their friends to either repeat it or donate to help fund ALS research. ALS has already collected over $15.6 million fund. The contestants of the challenge were normal individuals, politicians, celebrities and even top CEOs, including the founder and CEO of Facebook, Mark Zuckerberg who was nominated in this contest and accepted. CEO and chairman of Microsoft, for this challenge and he accepted.

In the same year (2024), when violence in Gaza intensified, and humanitarian issues were on the agenda, the global focus shifted towards the area, as the campaign SaveGaza and Free Palestine began to gain momentum in the Internet. The digital platforms have been instrumental in media propaganda of the Palestinian cause. Activists resort to social media and blogging to receive awareness and share first-hand experiences, as well as elicit support of Palestinian rights. Real time documentation and exposure of the abuses has been made possible through the digital media and has resulted in the creation of a new level of accountability of the perpetrators, and helped in increasing awareness in the world. This online activism growth was crucial in awareness and mobilization of people around the world. This is an outburst of social movements in TikTok as young Palestinians shared short videos of their daily life in the occupied territory, acts of violence by settlers or soldiers, and curses and protests. The videos were very instrumental in getting the attention of a younger international audience through some innovative and effective means of attracting attention to the Palestinian struggle. (Abbas et al. 2022).

Though its critics discount it as an empty 'slacktivism,' The movement triggered large scale protests in major cities like London, New York, Istanbul,

and Karachi, where millions of people took to the streets. Influencers, scholars, and medical professionals, among other figures of influence, used their online platforms to give increased attention to voices in Gaza and demand the media and political forces to act on the same. Even though the geopolitical complexities of the situation are still very high, the need of ceasefire, economic boycotts, and diplomacy demanded by the world has been only increased. This shows how online campaigns can evolve into major types of civic activity. They demonstrate that activism through the internet can usually be significant in terms of creating awareness, shaping out discourse, and creating a social drive. Although the change can be slow, the power of the collective digital voice can be used as a platform of real change.

A good example is the Egyptian Revolution, which was instigated by the social media, and this led to a considerable turnout of civic interest. This movement enabled people to know how the police acted and treated the citizens in Cairo, Egypt, through the different online platforms. Although social media played a major role in planning the protests in both Tunisia and Egypt, the resolutions were very different. In Egypt, the protests were much bloodier and intricate. The Egyptian protests as described by Tufekci (2014) in her article in Policy and Internet was faced with significant difficulties and ended up killing approximately 800 individuals in the process of the protests. As a result, the Internet played a vital role in motivating people into protesting, transforming into a large group of 500,000 members, as an organization, which exerted political pressure in achieving their objectives, known as Thick. This concerted effort eventually forced the long serving dictator Hosni Mubarak to step down and leave power in the hands of the military that promised to hold elections in line with what the Egyptian people wanted. It is interesting to note that this whole movement was done in the absence of any known traditional political leadership in the country.

4.3   Mass Media Participation and Social Movements in Pakistan: Zuckerman's Thin–Thick and Voice–Instrumental Framework

4.3.1   Media and Political Context in Pakistan

The incorporation of new technologies has also contributed a lot in the strengthening of the influence of traditional news and print media into a shift of the model of social communication waiting to one which is characterized as an instant access and consequently has affected the dynamics of political communication. In Pakistan, which is a developing nation, the emergence of the new media and communication technologies is still at the infant stage and this is happening against the background of a fight between democratic principles and the legacies of an authoritarian rule.

Regarding media and politics, the formal legislations of Pakistan purport to protect the freedom of speech; nevertheless, they also allow far-reaching prohibition. Article 19 of the Pakistani constitution provides freedom of speech and press, but with the exception of any reasonable restrictions connected with religion, national security, or the state of law (Usman & Mujaddid, 2023). These limitations are usually imposed by the government in practice. As an illustration, in 2007, the state of emergency was declared by the General Musharraf who suspended the entire television broadcasts in the country. Activists responded by choosing the Internet as the medium of dissent. In recent years, with an explosion in the size of online population in Pakistan, the government has acted on occasions of blocking social media platforms (including twitter and YouTube) when the protest is at a peak. In turn, Pakistani social movements often have to find their way in a media environment that is prone to censorship or even co-optation of traditional sources, which makes digital platforms indispensable when it comes to both visibility and organization (Usman, & Mujaddid, 2023).

Although Zuckerman model offers a useful framework in comprehending the nature of digital civic participation, this paper states that it needs to be adjusted to take note of the distinct socio-political realities of developing countries. The paper adds to this discussion by suggesting the addition of the third-dimension historical power relations and postcolonial

situation and thus rendering the model more globally applicable and analytical.

4.3.2   Case Study: The Lawyers' Movement (2007–2009)

The Lawyers Movement started in March 2007 after President Musharraf dismissed Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry, sparking a countrywide campaign on the issues of judicial independence. Phelps (2009), reports that about 80,000 lawyers took the streets all over Pakistan with the express goal of restoring Chaudhry and restoring the rule of law. The demonstrations and motorcades were marked by immense participation as the people continued with intensive and active activities within two years. The government reacted by harsh repression, such as beatings and arrests, and a media blackout, especially by blocking independent television news reporting. Nevertheless, the protesters used online resources: attorneys and their followers posted videos on YouTube and shared the news via email and mobile phones (Usman, & Mujaddid, 2023).

The Lawyers' Movement, as described by Zuckerman, is characterized by a mixture between a high degree of engagement and a defined instrumental purpose. The leaders wanted real institutional change (the reinstatement of the court) as opposed to symbolic protest. At the same time, the movement created a strong popular support of democracy and rights. As an example, even casual movements like wearing black coats became a very important symbolic centre of interest. These grassroots organizing (thick) and strategic media usage to create awareness (voice) combination was ultimately successful: when the people started pressuring Musharraf to reinstate the judges, the judges were restored to office in July 2007 (an instrumental outcome) Phelps (2009). Finally, Lawyers Movement was a classic upside-down example of Zuckerman thick-instrumental quadrant, which was enhanced with various thin activities (e.g., blogging, SMS alerts) that reinforced its message (Phelps, 2009; Swarthmore College. (n.d.).

4.3.3   Case Study: #JusticeForZainab (2018)

In January 2018, the tragic rape and murder of seven-year-old Zainab Ansari in Kasur ignited widespread public outrage. According to Global Voices, by

January 11, approximately half a million social media users had engaged with the hashtag #JusticeForZainab (Jamal & Saleem, 2018). This digital initiative coincided with protests across the country, involving students, lawyers, and parents (Jamal, S., & Saleem, A., 2018). For instance, on the day of Zainab's funeral, rallies advocating for child protection and the apprehension of the perpetrator took place at Karachi's press club.

According to Dawn News, social media outrage over the police's alleged inaction has significantly increased across Pakistan (Ansari, Guramani, & Riaz, 2018). The BBC reports that since January 9, the hashtag #JusticeForZainab has been used more than 600,000 times on Twitter. Furthermore, within that same period, almost 30,000 public Instagram posts had related hashtags (Pierpoint, 2018).

According to Zuckerman's concept, low-effort, voice-oriented engagement was the main characteristic of the #JusticeForZainab movement. Retweets, changing one's profile photo, and candlelight vigils—all of which are frequently associated with "slacktivism"—were common ways for participants to show their support (Jamal, S., & Saleem, A., 2018). The primary goals of these acts were to increase public opinion and hold authority responsible. Hundreds of people took part in street marches demanding police reform, but there were also elements of more significant activity. The movement's goals were to challenge the social taboo around talking about sexual violence and to put pressure on the government to improve child protection legislation and punish the criminal. In this case, the voice-oriented component of Zuckerman's engagement spectrum predominates due to the substantial dependence on social media.

4.3.4 Case Study: Students' Solidarity March (2018–present)

Beginning in late 2018, Pakistani students started annual Solidarity Marches in support of substantial educational reforms and the restoration of student unions. This movement had spread throughout the country by 2019. Dawn claims that on a single day in November 2019, students, activists, and allies marched under the banner of Student Solidarity in almost fifty locations,

delivering a list of demands that included improvements to educational facilities and the reinstatement of student unions.

The Students' Solidarity March employed a hybrid approach; updates on Facebook and Twitter successfully disseminated information to large audiences, while its planning and organizing involved limited online interaction. The gathering on the ground has drawn thousands of kids. Restoring unions and reducing educational disparities were the movement's main objectives. Zuckerman's concept places the SSM in the middle, combining substantial preparation and mobilization with limited coordination, and striving for both the manifestation of a student identity (voice) and institutional reform (instrumental). Crucially, social media helped these marches spread widely throughout many cities, even if the main demands were for specific legislative reforms. (Gabol et al., 2019).

5. Comparative Analysis

The three case examples highlight different aspects of Zuckerman's framework for participation. The main focus of the Lawyers' Movement was thick-instrumental activism, or active and goal-driven campaigning. The main goal of widespread, continuous street demonstrations was the reinstatement of the judges who had been removed. The campaign employed a variety of media strategies, including YouTube videos and petitions, especially when there was little television coverage (Usman & Mujaddid, 2023). However, the campaign's successes were primarily due to the strength of constant public protests.

As previously noted, the Pakistani lawyers' movement is a prime example of how grassroots, organized campaigns brought people together in the fight for constitutional rights (Mahmood & Yasmin, 2019). Conversely, contemporary movements often use social media to spread their messages faster, operate in a more decentralized manner, and draw global attention. Examining these two tactics demonstrates the remarkable impact that digital tools have had on modern activism. In contrast, the #JusticeForZainab movement took a quieter method (thin-voice strategy), combining quick, easy digital activities with small-scale protests to spark a national conversation

about children's rights. This demonstrates that even if significant changes to the legislation may not happen right away, a large number of people's combined efforts can generate public pressure and raise awareness of crucial concerns. The student unions coordinated large-scale demonstrations in several locations, marches, and internet campaigns. In addition to emphasizing the significance of youth empowerment, participants demanded substantive reform, particularly the reinstatement of student unions. Social media was crucial to the preparation and promotion of these movements in Pakistan.

During periods of censorship, such as in 2007, activists used all available media channels, making digital tactics a minimum necessary to express their concerns (Usman, & Mujaddid, 2023). Conversely, when social media was available, it amplified the collective voice, as demonstrated by #JusticeForZainab (Jamal, S. and Saleem, A. 2018). However, none of these movements depended exclusively on online engagement; robust, face-to-face mobilization remained essential for exerting pressure. In summary, the application of Zuckerman's model indicates that social movements in Pakistan often integrate various forms of engagement. The Lawyers' Movement utilized media to establish a robust grassroots campaign, while #JusticeForZainab leveraged media to convey a more subtle expression of solidarity, and the Students' March integrated both approaches. Each instance featured aspects of public expression and practical goals, albeit in varying degrees. Collectively, they demonstrate that even within a limited media-political environment, digital activism (subtle and expressive) and traditional protests (robust and goal-oriented) frequently work together to promote social causes. (Keegan et al., 2018).

6.   Conclusion

Through the lens of three significant Pakistani social movements, this paper examines Ethan Zuckerman's civic participation model. It was discovered that although the model does a good job of capturing different aspects of participation both online and offline, it is unable to adequately explain movements influenced by colonial legacies, authoritarian media restrictions, and uneven global power relations. To better represent the realities of activism

in the Global South, the article suggested extending the model in three dimensions. Future studies could compare movements in South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East in order to empirically evaluate this extended paradigm in additional postcolonial situations. The ways that digital tools continue to change the lines between "thin" and "thick" interaction in politically limited situations may also be the subject of future research.

7.   Suggestions and Proposals

Is there a necessity for an additional comprehensive model that takes into account the political and social behaviours of individuals in developing regions to assess and forecast the effectiveness of a movement? Alternatively, could Zuckerman's two-dimensional model be expanded into a three-dimensional framework, one that incorporates Thin versus Thick Engagement along one axis, Voice versus Instrumental outcomes on a second, and the evolving power dynamics between dominant regimes and opposing global forces over time on a third, to better analyse the varying outcomes of global independence movements? For instance, this could include contemporary global political challenges such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict influenced by American capitalism, the Indian occupation of Kashmir in the context of British imperialism and American capitalist interests, the Irish struggle, or the resistance of Native Americans against European colonialism, as well as the efforts of industrial Europe to undermine the Muslim dominance of the Ottoman Empire from the mid-19th century.

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