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From Media Silence to Economic Loss: Climate Change Communication and Policy Responses in Pakistan (2020–2025)

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Abstract

Climate change has appeared as a critical global challenge, while the communication and policy prioritization remain uneven in Pakistan. This empirical research study analyzes the relation between media coverage, policy responses and economic consequences of climate change over the period 2020–2025. Drawing on the political economy of communication, it argues that inadequate and ambiguous media attention has contributed to feeble public discourse. Moreover, deficient governmental policies, despite frequent warning and recommendations from international bodies such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Employing qualitative method for thematic analysis of climate coverage in leading Pakistani English-language newspapers, including Dawn and The News International, policy documents, and professional perspectives to explore how climate change has been framed and addressed within Pakistan's governance structures.

The study reveals a persistent pattern of media neglect, fragmented policy execution, and a lack of configuration with global climate obligation. This communication gap has not only constrained effective climate governance but has also deepens economic vulnerability, and developmental setback.

The research contributes to the literature by connecting climate communication with economic outcomes through a political economy lens. Highlighting how power structures, institutional limitations, and media practices shape climate inaction. It concludes on escalation of climate communication, enhancing media responsibility, and aligning policy frameworks are essential for extenuating economic risks and fostering sustainable development in Pakistan.

Key words: Climate Change Communication, Political Economy of Communication, Media Framing, Climate Governance, Sustainable Development

Introduction

Environmental consequence is a prospering global challenge being faced by the entire humanity, with implications for natural ecosystems, food production, , fresh water supply, health, etc. These deadly impacts are already manifesting themselves around the world in the form of immoderate weather events like storms, cyclones, floods, droughts that are rising in frequency and intensity.

As revealed in the current scientific assessment, the earth system has provably denatured on both global and regional scales since the pre-industrial era. Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) describes that the temperature may increase between 1.4 to 5.8oC before the present century ends. (IPCC 2007). This unprecedented increase is expected to have severe impacts on the global geophysics system, ecosystems, sea level, crop production and all its relevant processes. The impact would be particularly severe in tropical areas, which mainly consists of developing countries, including Pakistan. Eventually, Pakistan is considerably on the high risks state in the internationally which are extremely assailable to this interrupted climate disruption (Choudhry, 2016). The ice-mass may shrink by 2035, having dreadful consequence on fresh water flow in the land. Even though the state is primarily agrarian based economy contributes the 21% GDP. It is placed on 135th position from the perspective of (CO₂) releases (Naseer, 2013) regrettably placed on 7th to the disturbed weather (Global Climate Risk Index 2017).

Some research works previously carried out indicates bias in print media coverage of the issue in Pakistan, while its representation falls in line with the wider social and cultural views. The mass media coverage is presently under influence of political and economic motives, which subsequently prescript how the news covers these circumstance, what we should pay attention to.(Ajeel et al.,2024)

It was revealed that media giants with its editorial policy both are prejudice to determining factors, how such news are the part of print media discourse for Pakistan. So far the experiments clarify that the political economy and climate change media can render valuable insights into climate change driving factors (Imran Nazeer et al., 2024). Another problems which news-men face in reporting situations of complex scientific issues, needed to be broken down to interpret and maintain balance between accuracy and readability gets cornered in random topics for audience. (Javed et al., 2024)

Media Framing of Climate-related Issues

Numerous news stories about climate change produced by the journalists usually contains the least news values and construction, which causes sensationalism rather the information about the issues.(Gutsche & Pinto2024) Results of the studies underscore the relevance of analysis of press sources on climate change including nominal information to portray scientific issues like climate change.(Syed et al., 2023). Strong news framing determine how the masses visualize the reflection of climate change and its effects, as well as possible solutions (Wadud 2024). While the media-men have assessed how print medium indicates its pronouncement on public reaction and participation. It was also revealed that the news information drives the audience mindset and influences on decision regarding it (Sushil 2024). As far as Pakistani media is concern many experiments disclosed, not only media raise the public consciousness and concern but also it also shape-up attitudes of the masses that how they should react to the undue effects (Kamboh et al., 2024).The specific time of harvesting has also liquefy in Southern Punjab and

Baluchistan with onwads undulation during seeding, indicates that results from conventional ways no more accessible for the livelihood of the families. The change must be accumulated ratio and magnitude of thrilling events i.e. dryness, flood, and cyclone, disastrous for the rural production. The entire farming basically depends on the water which regrettably on its decline (Baig & Amjad, 2014).

Policies and amplification

National Climate Policies Pakistan (NCCP) has developed as a pack of domestic policies to address its climate vulnerabilities, as per NCCP of 2021 serving as the cornerstone. The National Climate Policies Pakistan NCCP strategies for mitigation and adaptation, emphasizing renewable energy, afforestation, and disaster risk reduction (Government of Pakistan, 2021).

Eminent initiatives like "Billion Tree Tsunami, through which more than 1 billion trees planted to combat deforestation and enhance carbon sequestration, broader extended for ecological restoration (Qamar, 2022). These initiatives have been grab international recognition, raised Pakistan's position as a proactive actor in climate adaptation. The Ministry of Climate Change (MoCC) leads policy execution through taking into loop all provincial governments and international stack-holder. The legislatures have established Climate Change Authority (CCA) under Act-2017, oversees the integration of climate policies into sectoral plans, such as agriculture and water management (Government of Pakistan, 2017). This research exploration is important for its contribution of detailed review of literature on environmental governance, media studies, and climate change communication in Pakistan. Disturbed Eco-system-up came as dominant challenges of human-being with insufficient academic attention. The research determine to explore about media advocacy in disseminating issue-relevant information and its influence in public and policy. It also indicates the weak segments of climate communication suggesting suggest appropriate method to deal as per requirements.

Conceptual perspective amended through utilization of relevant theories with the context of the subject. It explains media priorities and practices effecting environmental issues and representation in masses. In the end, the study explicate a foundation for future researchers on climate communication by offering insights that may be extended to conventional and social media platforms, and comparative studies across different national contexts.

Problem Statement

Pakistan being one of the countries which is most vulnerable to climate change, communication has remained inconsistent and inadequately prioritized in the conventional media. Restricted media coverage has contributed to low public awareness, weak public engagement, and insufficient policy responses to climate-related challenges. Particularly, international organizations like IPCC, have repeatedly emphasize the importance of climate action. Pakistan's climate governance continues to suffer from policy implementation gaps and deficient institutional coordination. Existing research studies have primarily examined either media representation or climate policy independently, with confined attention to how media communication influences policy responses and economic outcomes. Therefore, a crucial research gap in understanding how media framing of climate change has shaped climate governance and contributed to Pakistan's increasing economic vulnerability. The exploration is an attempt to address this space through investigating the connection between climate change

communication, policy responses, and economic consequences in Pakistan during the period 2020–2025.

Study Objectives

1. **To analyze the scope and reasoning of climate change coverage in *Dawn* and *The News International* from 2020 to 2025.**
2. **To explore the relation between climate change communication, people awareness, and policy responses from a political economy perspective.**
3. To ascertain the substance of media marginalization of Climate change, environmental and economic vulnerability of Pakistan.
4. To determine the frequent themes and communicative used in the coverage of the issue.

Research Questions

1. How climate-relevant issue framed in Pakistani English newspapers during 2020-25.
2. What relationship persists between climate communication and policy?
3. How media build narratives co-relate with national and international policies.
4. How inadequate climate communication contributes in national economic exposure.

Material and Method

A qualitative research design using thematic content analysis utilized to see the co-relation in climate change communication, policy responses, and economic consequences in Pakistan between 2020 and 2025.

It allows exploring institutional perspectives rather than measuring numerical relation, gives a deep clarification and understanding how the climate change has been communicated, interpreted, and translated into policy actions. Furthermore it justifies how these communication patterns have influenced Pakistan's economic vulnerability.

Research Approach

An interpretive approach used, which foresee that news with policy documents are socially constructed and reflect political, institutional, and economic interests. This approach let the researcher to explore, how climate change is framed in the media and how this respond with national climate policies. It also leads to look into issue that practices really influence public discourse and policy development. Rather than testing causal relationships statistically, the study aims to interpret meanings, identify recurring themes, and explain patterns within climate communication.

Data Sources

Through using multiple sources of qualitative data to assure comprehensive analysis and triangulation, include:

- Climate-related news published in Daily **Dawn** and *The News International* (Jan 2020-Dec 2025).
- The reports issued by the MoCC&ECC, National climate policy documents, including the NCC Policy, National Adaptation Plan, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).
- International reports and recommendations IPCC, UNEP, UNDP, and the World Bank that discuss Pakistan's climate challenges and policy commitments.

Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling technique **used** to select news articles relevant to the climate Policy, disaster management, adaptation, mitigation, and climate governance during the specify study period that is January 2020 to December 2025.

Analytical Procedures

Data analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. These are connected and familiarization with the data, coding, searching and reviewing for theme's names and producing the final interpretation. Themes identify media framing, policy priorities, institutional responses, governance challenges, and economic impacts.

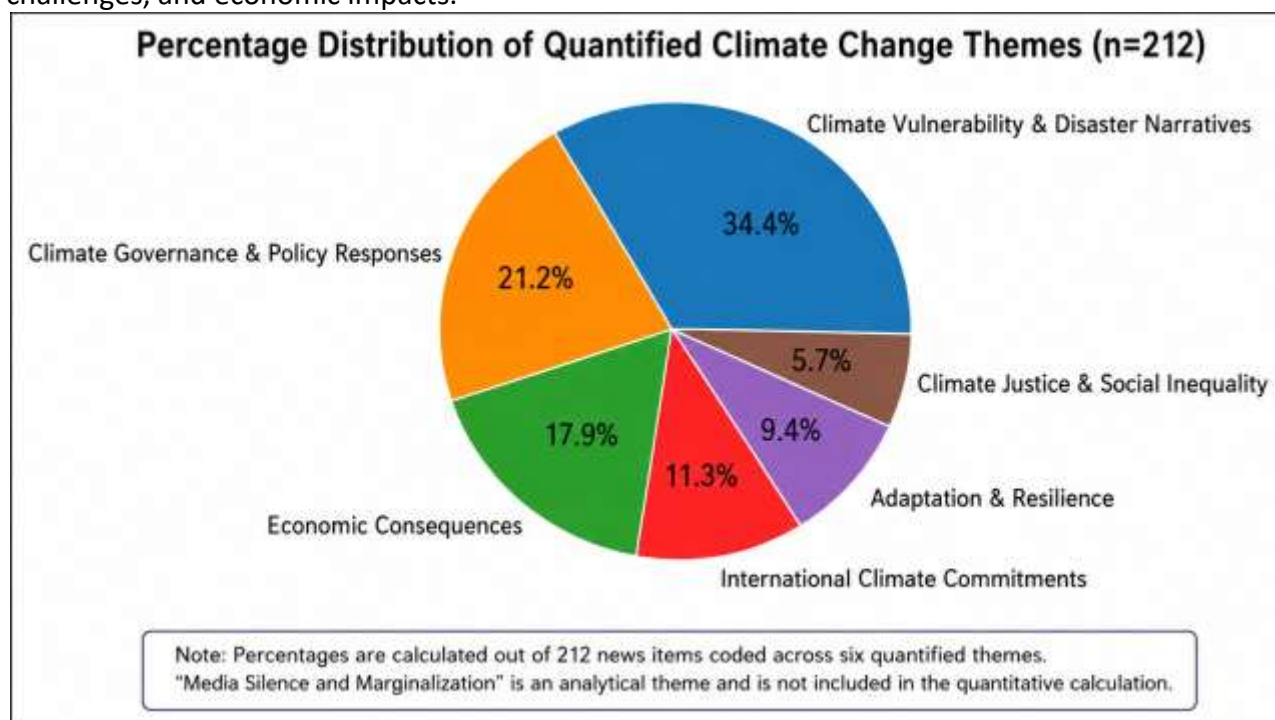


Figure:1 Climate vulnerability and disaster narratives dominated coverage, while climate justice received the least attention

Trustworthiness

Data Triangulation has been opted aiming to enhance the quality and reliability of the results through scrutinizing media reports, government policy documents, and international climate reports. Entire coding process follows a structured coding framework, and themes are continuously reviewed to affirm uniformity and transparency of the study. For managing an audit trail of coding decisions further strengthens the study's dependability.

Delimitation's

This research study has limitations included the news-paper representation of atmospheric-disorder within the country, without taking into an account, the other forms of conventional media like television and online platforms. The research restriction is that only samples of news reports published in the two

newspapers mentioned in abstract within the prescribed time frame (2000-2025). Besides, the qualitative content analysis formulation offers a lot of data which may not completely true or depict of a comprehensive picture of stakeholders' relevant to the issue. It confines the work only to interrogate the language and rhetoric devices deployed just for print medium. While in broader perspective it focuses on socioeconomic element of print-media information.

Results

The thematic synthesis of 220 climate-related news published in *The News International* (n = 131) and *Dawn* (n = 89) between 2020-2025 unconcealed six predominant themes that defined the strength of climate change communication in the country. Climate Vulnerability and Disaster Narratives from 73 news appear as the most frequently reported themes. As same the Climate Governance and Policy Responses (45), Economic Consequences of Climate Change (38), International Climate Commitments and Diplomacy (24), Adaptation, Resilience, and Sustainable Development (20), and Climate Justice and Social Inequality (12).

Theme	Dawn (n=89)	The News (n=131)	Total (N=220)
Climate Vulnerability and Disaster Narratives	28	45	73
Climate Governance and Policy Responses	24	21	45
Economic Consequences	12	26	38
International Climate Commitments	10	14	24
Adaptation and Resilience	8	12	20
Climate Justice and Social Inequality	4	8	12
Quantified Thematic Total	86	126	212
Media Silence and Marginalization*	Analytical Theme	Analytical Theme	Analytical Theme
Total Articles Analyzed	89	131	220

Table: 1 Note: *Media Silence and Marginalization was treated as an analytical theme rather than a separately quantified category. It represents a recurring pattern of limited and event-driven climate coverage identified across the thematic analysis.

The research findings show that newspaper coverage was primarily event-driven. The extensive attention was devoted to floods, heat waves, droughts, and other extreme weather events. While the coverage comparatively less focused was placed on long-term climate governance, adaptation strategies, and socioeconomic resilience. Furthermore it demonstrates that climate reporting preponderantly highlighted after immediate disasters rather than sustained policy implementation or economic planning. Although, both newspapers regularly reported Pakistan's participation on international climate forums and referenced national climate initiatives, but limited attention was given to evaluating policy strength, institutional responsibility, and implementation outcomes.

Theme	Description	Demonstrative Focus
Media Silence and Marginalization	Limited frequency and prominence of climate-related reporting despite increasing climate risks.	Lack of sustained media coverage, event-driven reporting, Neglected agenda priority
Climate Vulnerability and Disaster Narratives	Coverage accenting floods, heat-waves, droughts, and environmental crises affecting Pakistan	2022 floods, heat-waves, water deficiency, displacement
Economic Consequences of Climate Change	News coverage on financial losses and impacts on national development.	Agricultural losses, infrastructure damage, GDP impact, livelihood disruption
Climate Governance and Policy Responses	Discussion of government policies, climate plans, and institutional actions.	National Climate Change Policy, adaptation measures, implementation challenges
International Climate Commitments and Diplomacy	Coverage of Pakistan's participation in global climate forums and obligations.	COP conferences, Paris Agreement, climate finance
Climate Justice and Social Inequality	Focus on vulnerable communities disproportionately affected by climate change.	Rural populations, women, marginalized groups, food insecurity
Adaptation, Resilience, and Sustainable Development	Narratives emphasizing solutions and long-term resilience strategies.	Renewable energy, adaptation projects, sustainable development goals

Table:2 Media Silence is usually interpreted from the overall pattern of coverage rather than counted as a news theme.

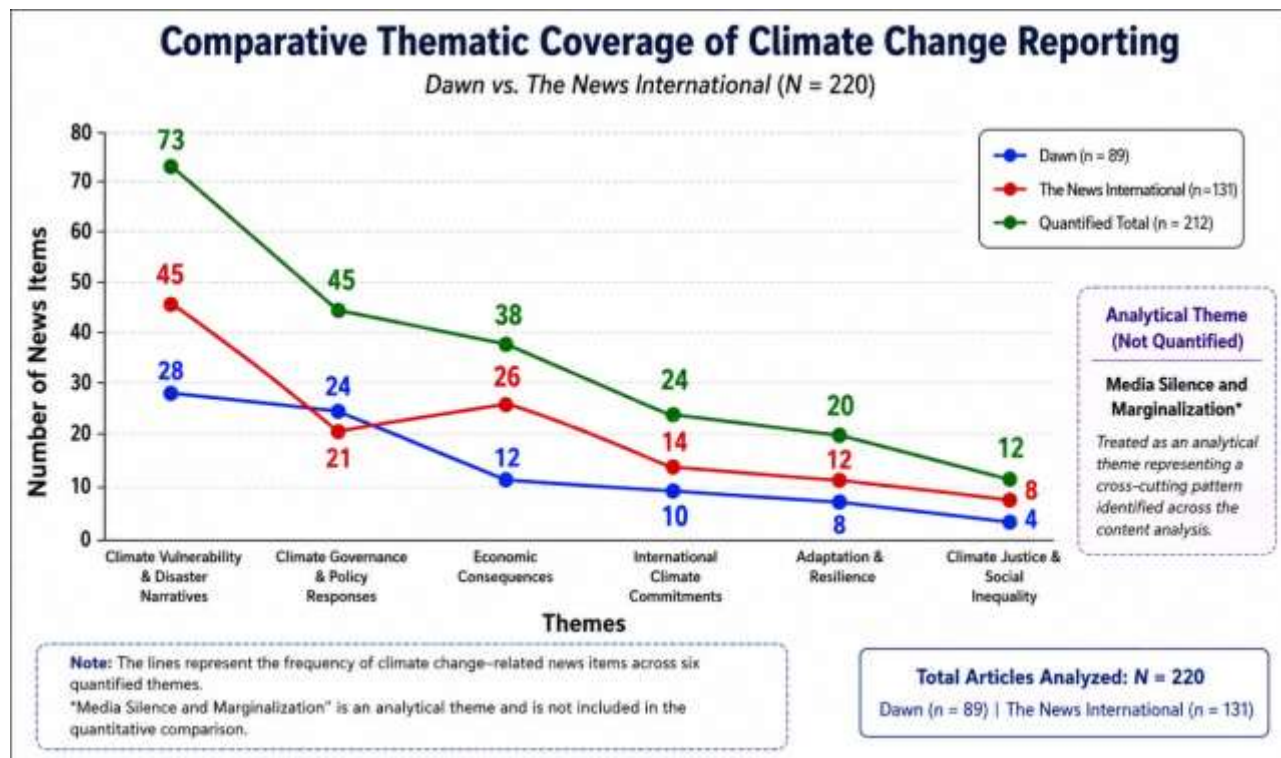


Figure: 2 Comparative Thematic Coverage of Climate Change Reporting

An overall interpretation also emerged, mentioning a pattern of media silence and social process, whereby environmental issue received full attention but decay considerably once the immediate crisis settles. This particular pattern suggests that climate communication in Pakistan always remains reactive rather than constant, thereby limiting sustained public engagement with long-term climate challenges.

Discussion

The results suggest that climate change communication in newspapers is preponderantly framed through disaster-oriented narratives. It is centrally proposition of Framing Theory, media influence public apprehension by accenting designated aspects of reality while minimize others.

The dominance of catastrophe coverage reflects a tendency to prioritize immediate and visually compelling events. Accordingly, public discourse is more likely to realize climate change as a series of isolated crises rather than as a multidimensional challenge. These entire hazard requires sustained institutional and policy responses on permanent basis. Similar practice have been reported in previous researches been explored by the climate communication researchers, where unpredictable disaster reporting often overshadows long-term adaptation and mitigation efforts.

As far as **Political Economy of Communication**, the findings show that the media houses and their editorial policies may influence the selection and importance of content. Although, policies and international cooperation, along-with the Paris Agreement and COP conferences, received a periodic coverage, but comparatively marginal attention was devoted to monitoring policy implementation, evaluating governance and performance. Such instability contributes to a communication gap between

policy formulation and public awareness. The analysis also argue on media silence beyond time period of emergencies further propose on the need for more sustained, evidence-based reporting, integrates environmental, economic, and governance perspectives into routine news coverage.

Conclusion

The exploration concludes that climate change coverage in Pakistan's leading English-language newspapers remains largely impermanent and disaster-oriented. Media accumulates its attention to climate-related events, particularly during periods of environmental crisis, reporting continues to focus predominantly on immediate disasters. Instead of than long-term climate governance, adaptation, and sustainable development challenges, its only focus after occurrence of the catastrophe.

Furthermore it demonstrates that climate change is increasingly framed as an issue with significant economic consequences, including threats to agriculture, infrastructure, livelihoods, and national development. However, the nominal concentration given to the social inequality, climate justice, and long-term resilience strategies intimate an imbalance of climate communication priorities.

The analysis is also brings out inequality between climate discourse and policy execution. Although initiatives and global commitments received media attention, critical evaluation, mechanisms of its execution remains limited. Therefore, the media's role in nurturing informed public debate and policy accountability appears strained.

In general, the document argues of media strength with marginalized contribution, weak public engagement and low policy importance regarding climate change. Strengthening climate journalism through encouraging solution-oriented reporting, and intensify coverage of governance is indispensable for supporting effective climate action and reducing Pakistan's growing economic and environmental risks.

Future Directions

In light of the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Modify Climate Journalism:** Media hubs should double the frequency and presence of climate change reporting by treating as a constant developmental issue rather than an occasional disaster-related event. News organization should develop dedicated climate and environmental reporting desks.
2. **Solution-Oriented Reporting:** Media representatives should work beyond disaster-focused coverage and incorporate reporting on adaptation strategies, resilience-building initiatives, renewable energy and sustainable development efforts to encourage informed public engagement.
3. **Capacity Building enhancement for News-men:** Media professionals should be given specialized training in climate science, climate policy, and environmental communication by the concern authorities to improve the accuracy and quality of climate reporting.
4. **Develop Media–Policy Linkages:** Government institutions including environmental agencies and policymakers should establish strong link with media to access reliable climate information and improve public understanding of policies.

5. **Effective Coverage of Economic Impacts:** Work with determination and deeper attention should be devoted towards the economic dimensions, including agricultural losses, infrastructure damage, public health costs, and livelihood.
6. **Dedicated Climate Justice Narratives:** Media should expand coverage of vulnerable populations, including rural communities, women, low-income households, and climate-displaced groups.
7. **Enhanced Reporting Accountability:** Critical examining of the News organizations should implemented of climate policies, adaptation plans, and international commitments to the larger transparency and policy accountability.
8. **Collaboration with Multi-Stakeholder:** Researchers from educational Institutes and Universities, collaboration with civil society should also generate for evidence-based climate communication strategies.
9. **Institutionalize Climate Communication Policies:** Relevant Policymakers should established climate communication into national climate governance frameworks. They should also develop public information strategies.
10. **Research Directions:** Language restricted research explorations and findings should be expanded through including social media networks in order to promote a more comprehensive understanding of climate change communication in Pakistan.

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