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A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Portrayal of *Climate Change* in Pakistani English Newspapers' Headlines

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ABSTRACT

Climate change has emerged as a major global issue in this century, impacting the environment, society, the economy, and politics. Although scientists agree on its causes, most people's perceptions and policies are influenced by media portrayals of the phenomenon. This study investigates how climate change is depicted in leading Pakistani English newspapers. Five samples from Dawn are analyzed. Using Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (1992), the study reviews various headlines from these articles. It examines how word choices, metaphors, and references to earlier texts communicate specific messages, assign responsibilities, and shape public perceptions of environmental issues. The research explores how lexical choices, metaphorical framing, and intertextual references create particular meanings, distribute responsibilities, and influence perceptions of ecological crises. Findings indicate that discussions about climate change are often shaped by government beliefs, Pakistan's economic development plans, and international opinions. Often, climate change is framed as a result of disasters like floods and heatwaves rather than as a policy or sustainability issue.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Portrayal, Climate Change, Pakistani English Newspapers' Headlines.

Introduction

1. Introduction

Climate change has become a major public concern in recent years, significantly affecting the environment, people, and the economy. Newspapers, as key media outlets, shape attitudes and actions on climate change through confident language framing. These choices can either minimize the issue or highlight its urgency and the need for action. This topic is even more prominent in Pakistani media, which is particularly important because vulnerable populations are already experiencing the impacts of climate change. Climate change is the most serious challenge of the twenty-first century, affecting the physical environment, human society, and the global economy. For example, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), human-induced global warming is increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events. The effects of climate change lead to hardship in countries like Pakistan, which faces devastating floods, glacier melting, and prolonged heat waves during summer. However, there is still a lack of sufficient public

awareness and understanding of climate change. Since it influences how people and leaders perceive environmental issues, the media plays a vital role in shaping the social understanding of this topic (Crow & Boykoff, 2007). Newspapers help set the agenda and can change or even create perceptions about climate change. How the media presents this issue determines whether people see it as an urgent problem or something distant that does not affect human life (Boykoff, 2009). Understanding how the media reports on climate change is essential, especially since Pakistan is directly impacted. To analyze how these narratives reflect power dynamics and ideologies, this study examines the language styles and rhetorical strategies used in Pakistani English media about climate change.

The changes in the world already caused by climate change are being discussed in more detail, especially regarding how to categorize them. Newspapers influence public perceptions of social issues, and in terms of authority, they are considered the most credible sources of information. This research focuses on analyzing how organizations respond to consumer concerns about climate change through newspaper language. It also aims to determine whether such campaigns are authentic, sustainable, or simply advantageous. This analysis helps evaluate the overall coverage of climate change in major Pakistani newspapers written in English. In this study, the Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (1992) by Norman Fairclough is used to examine how language exposes overt and covert dominance over public perceptions of climate change. The newspaper Dawn is the source that can show the extent to which socio-political and economic factors influence the climate change debate. The study analyzes how climate change concerns are presented in newspaper advertisements and whether these ads reflect genuine sustainability efforts or if they are just superficial acts of greenwashing. Ultimately, this paper aims to critically assess the media's role in shaping public opinions and perceptions about climate change in Pakistan through journalistic articles and advertisements.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a three-dimensional framework developed by Norman Fairclough (1992) that explains how meaning is created within a text and its sociocultural setting (Fairclough, 1992). This framework forms the foundation of this study. CDA investigates the constitutive features and discursive processes of the chosen textual message, which shape narratives around issues like climate change in specific contexts. Using this approach, the research analyzes the connection between language, media, and power, especially how discourse on climate change is constructed and the ideology it advances in Pakistani newspapers. The study critically assesses article headlines as textual elements (words, metaphors, framing), discursive practices (the procedures through which these articles are produced and interpreted), and sociocultural contexts (the political, economic, and environmental factors influencing the discourse) related to climate change reporting, employing Fairclough's three-dimensional model.

1.2 Problem Statement

Many studies have examined how Pakistani newspapers address the topic of climate change. However, there is a growing global discussion about how it is portrayed in the media, especially in Western contexts. Much of the previous research on climate change communication in Pakistan has focused on its implications for science, the environment, and the economy. Nonetheless, less attention has been paid to the specific language and discursive strategies that shape public opinion and policy discussions. Furthermore, much more research is needed to understand how language functions to express power relations and discourses within Pakistani media's coverage of climate change. To fill this gap, this study aims to conduct a critical discourse analysis of how climate

change is constructed in articles from Pakistani newspapers. It examines the particular words and ways in which climate change concerns are depicted, and what reinforces or challenges existing statements of power or authority in the country.

1.3 Research Objectives

- To examine linguistic patterns and discursive strategies used in Pakistani Newspaper articles to represent climate change issues.
- To investigate how lexical choices in climate change-related news articles reflect power relations and ideologies in Pakistani Newspapers.

1.4 Research Questions

- What linguistic patterns and discursive strategies are used in Pakistani Newspaper articles to represent climate change issues?
- How do lexical choices in climate change-related news articles reflect power relations and ideologies in Pakistani Newspapers?

1.5 Significance of Study

This study is important because it examines how the issue of climate change is presented in Pakistani English-speaking newspapers, an area that has not been widely explored so far. Most research has focused on how Western newspapers discuss climate change, but very little has been done regarding how the media in countries like Pakistan—where people face severe climate challenges—highlight this issue. Pakistan is among the countries most affected by climate change, yet there is limited research on how language is used in Pakistani media to address the climate crisis. This research seeks to fill that gap by applying Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze the language used in climate news articles. By examining major newspapers such as Dawn, The Express Tribune, and The Nation, this study shows how these outlets discuss climate change, whom they blame, and what solutions they promote. It can help determine whether these newspapers foster a responsible, constructive debate on environmental issues or simply support statements from influential figures. The study also demonstrates how word choice and sentence structure can shape people's thoughts and decisions on climate issues. Ultimately, it aims to offer useful insights for journalists, educators, and policymakers interested in changing how climate change is discussed in Pakistan. This research is especially valuable for Pakistan, a country with weak infrastructure, political instability, and high vulnerability to climate-related disasters like floods and heatwaves. Understanding the language used by the media to cover climate issues can help the country raise awareness, develop effective policies, and improve communication strategies. Additionally, it can support international discussions by highlighting perspectives from the Global South that are often absent in global studies.

2. Research Methodology

The research is qualitative and interpretative in nature. The methodology relies on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Norman Fairclough (1992). This approach allows for a detailed examination of the textual and ideological structures in news discourse to analyze how climate change is framed, constructed, and presented to the audience.

The fundamental framework for this study is Norman Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Critical Discourse Analysis (1992), applied in a qualitative study. This research focuses on how climate change is represented in the media in English written and produced in Pakistan. Climate change stories from each of the selected Pakistani English newspaper Dawn, used to collect data for this study over the period of 2024 to 2025.

3. Literature Review

Naureen and Janjua 2024, focusing on Goffman's Frame Analysis 1974 and Stibbe's Framing method, analyzed Dawn-related news editorials to understand how language influences the public's perception of the environment. Based on their study, media generate phrases that may help increase public awareness and motivation to act toward ecological sustainability by framing climate change as a problem that requires immediate regulatory response (Naureen & Janjua, 2024).

In the current context, Pakistani print media, Habib and Zahra (2024) employed eco-linguistic and semiotic analysis to examine discursive constructions of floods and climate change. Using the theoretical frameworks of Barthes, Kress, and van Leeuwen, they discovered how language and visual strategies help shape public perception of devastation and survival themes. Therefore, the need for better media coverage is advised to focus on increasing media awareness and improving reporter education about climate change (Habib & Zahra, 2024).

Asif, Jamil, and Ahmad (2024) analyzed Pakistani media discourses about climate change, focusing on how the country is unprepared for it. Through a review of articles published from 2009 to 2023, they identified editorial priorities, low ratings, lack of infrastructure, and illiteracy as the main reasons for the limited media coverage on climate. Therefore, the study concluded that Pakistani media should dedicate more time to reporting on climate issues and develop specific campaigns to educate society and influence their direct behaviors regarding climate conservation (Asif, Jamil, & Ahmad, 2024).

Kausar and Hussain (2024) aim to express how and why discourse matters in shaping public opinion; they analyzed Pakistani media's discourse about climate change using Fairclough's CDA model. Similarly, this research employs Fairclough's approach to examine how the language used in Pakistani media influences public perceptions of climate change and policy (Kausar & Hussain, 2024).

Sharma, Lamsal, and Upadhyaya (2024) conducted a CDA analysis of The Kathmandu Post to examine how Nepali media constructs narratives about climate change and climate justice. Using Fairclough and Van Dijk, they found that the press often promotes narratives focused on the state, potentially marginalizing weaker communities. This shows how the media can either empower or silence social groups (Sharma, Lamsal, & Upadhyaya, 2024).

Bibi (2024) examined how Pakistani media shapes the discussion around climate change, focusing on how media portrayals influence public perception. The survey found that although many people are aware of climate-related issues, knowledge and sustainable actions vary. To improve how information about climate change is shared, it emphasized the importance of tailored communication strategies and better cooperation among the media, the government, and environmental organizations (Bibi, 2024).

3. Analysis

3.1. Pakistan Faces Severe Climate Crisis despite Minimal Global Emissions

"Climate change is a pressing reality for Pakistan, directly impacting millions of lives. Ranked as the fifth most vulnerable country to climate change, despite contributing just 0.88 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, Pakistan faces a dire crisis with severe implications.

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1890909>

Dawn Lahore, February 18, 2025.

i. Textual Analysis

The headline begins with the phrase CLIMATE change is a pressing reality in Pakistan, where the word pressing is used to convey urgency and importance. The use of the word reality emphasizes that climate change is not just a distant or theoretical issue but a present and urgent problem affecting Pakistan now. This phrasing is meant to grab the reader's attention by stressing that climate change is happening here and now. The words "with a direct effect on the lives of millions of people" take the focus beyond abstract environmental processes and bring it to human consequences, highlighting the scale of impact that causes widespread suffering and upheaval, tugging at the reader's emotions. Additionally, the text introduces a quantitative and comparative element: ranked fifth as the most vulnerable country. This fact sounds official and authoritative, likely citing global indices or scientific research. It also places Pakistan's vulnerability in an international context, showing that it is among the most at-risk nations. The phrase, despite only emitting 0.88 percent of the world's total greenhouse gas emissions, is striking. The word despite signals a contrast and injustice: logically, one might assume that lower emissions mean less impact, which is not the case here. This highlights an unfairness in the global system, where the least responsible suffer the most. Finally, the phrases dire crisis and stern implications serve as evaluative, closing remarks. Words like dire and severe heighten the emotional tone, underscoring the gravity of the situation. The overall structure moves from stating facts to delivering a strong, conclusive opinion, reinforcing the urgency and the seriousness of the issue.

ii. Discursive Practice

Such a headline is part of a broader effort by scientific communities, international organizations, media outlets, and policymakers to communicate the risks of climate change to the public. The inclusion of Pakistan's vulnerability ranking and specific emission data indicates that the headline is based on reputable sources like the Global Climate Risk Index or IPCC reports, which are widely recognized as credible. This text aims to inform readers about Pakistan's climate situation and evoke feelings of sadness and urgency. The contrast between low emissions and high vulnerability aligns with other climate justice narratives that highlight inequality and injustice in both the causes and effects of climate change. It problematizes the crisis but does not address responses or solutions. This is a common media trend where alarming information is emphasized to attract attention, often without promoting further policy, mitigation, or adaptation discussions. Pakistan is portrayed as a victim of global emissions, shaping perceptions of responsibility and fostering empathy, which may lead to support for international climate aid or policies. Nonetheless, this framing might also limit public discourse by excluding Pakistan's role and agency in climate action.

iii. Social Practice

At the social practice level, the headline reflects and reinforces dominant global and national narratives about climate vulnerability and justice. Emphasizing Pakistan's low contribution to emissions but high vulnerability mirrors the Global South's stance in international climate politics, which demands recognition of inequity and fairness. This framing can have significant socio-political implications: it may enhance Pakistan's position in climate negotiations by highlighting its vulnerability and the need for support. It may help unify people as a community due to common environmental dangers and inspire them to be aware and take action. However, emphasizing the crisis and how vulnerable the area is risks making the local community seem more likely to suffer harm rather than focusing on the solutions or progress that have been made. Discussing injustice may unintentionally support the idea that people depend on aid from other countries. As a result,

it upholds the hierarchy of experts and favors research findings and official statistics, which could overshadow local ideas and environmental activism. Overall, the headline raises awareness and highlights the severe and unjust crisis Pakistan faces regarding climate change, pointing to the social issues of who bears responsibility, holds power, and gains recognition in global environmental efforts.

3.2. Pakistan's Record Hailstorms and Heat

"THE freak hailstorm that swept across northern Pakistan on Wednesday, claiming lives and causing destruction, indicates how climate chaos is fast becoming our new normal. Social media was awash with videos showing 'golf ball-sized' icy projectiles damaging vehicles and solar panels in Islamabad, flash floods disrupting traffic on the Peshawar-Torkham Highway, and standing crops in Punjab and KP suffering damage."

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1904971>

Dawn Lahore, April 18, 2025.

i. Textual Analysis:

This headline uses powerful, emotionally charged language that immediately grabs the reader's attention and presents the event as both extraordinary and alarming. The adjective "freak" describes the hailstorm as an unusual, unexpected, and extreme weather event, highlighting its rarity and unpredictability in today's climate context. This word choice significantly influences public perception by portraying the event as something beyond normal experience, evoking anxiety and concern. Taking lives and causing destruction, the phrase directly appeals to emotion by emphasizing human loss and material damage, thus heightening the perceived severity of the incident. The term "climate chaos" is especially revealing, as it extends beyond a simple weather event to frame the phenomenon as part of a broader, systemic crisis related to climate change. The phrase "fast becoming our new normal" suggests inevitability and resignation, implying that such destructive weather patterns will increasingly become a routine part of life. This normalization, paradoxically, alarms readers while implying adaptation or acceptance of worsening conditions. Vivid imagery like "golf ball-sized icy projectiles," "flash floods," and damage to "vehicles and solar panels" offers concrete details about climate disruption, helping readers visualize and emotionally connect with the crisis's severity. Mentioning diverse locations such as Islamabad, Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) emphasizes widespread impact, suggesting a national-scale problem. This precise, sensory-rich language amplifies the emotional impact while framing climate change as an immediate and tangible threat.

ii. Discursive Practice

The headline's discursive structure reflects a typical journalistic approach where dramatic events are presented through a mix of authoritative reporting and popular media content. The mention of "social media awash with videos" indicates that the media narrative is heavily shaped by citizen-generated content, which provides instant, visual proof of climate impacts. This dependence on social media sources shows current media practices that favor quick, visual, and shareable content, often at the cost of deeper, more analytical, or scientific viewpoints. By using social media as a main source, the text gains immediacy and authenticity but may lose depth and critical context. The text does not include expert voices, such as climatologists, government officials, or representatives of affected communities, limiting its scope and reducing the chance for informed debate or critique. The audience mainly appears as spectators, receiving dramatic scenes of destruction rather than actively participating or demanding accountability or solutions. This style

of reporting aligns with the wider media tendency to concentrate on episodic coverage of climate disasters and individual events, instead of providing thematic or structural analysis of climate change causes and responses. As a result, the repetitive nature of such headlines risks normalizing extreme events, where frequent exposure can desensitize the public and diminish critical questioning about root causes, policy failures, or adaptation efforts.

iii. Social Practice

At the level of social practice, this headline both reflects and maintains dominant ideological frameworks regarding climate change in Pakistan and globally. Framing the hailstorm as a “freak” natural disaster positions climate change as an external, uncontrollable force, effectively depoliticizing the issue by disconnecting it from human activities, governance, or socio-economic factors. By primarily emphasizing the visible impacts of deaths, destruction, and traffic disruptions, the text overlooks the deeper socio-political and economic conditions that increase vulnerability, such as urban planning failures, inadequate infrastructure, poverty, and government neglect. Islamabad, Punjab, and KP vary significantly in population, resource access, and disaster response capacity, yet these disparities are not explored. This omission promotes a hegemonic discourse that treats climate disasters as natural occurrences, rather than outcomes of unequal power relations, environmental mismanagement, or policy failures. Presenting climate chaos as an inevitable new normal fosters a fatalistic attitude among the population, which can undermine efforts for political intervention, institutional accountability, or grassroots organizing. Additionally, social hierarchies are reinforced by the passive framing of affected groups as victims rather than agents of change, silencing voices that might otherwise demand justice or adaptation. Finally, the headline sustains a social trend to view climate change as a humanitarian emergency needing immediate aid instead of addressing it as a systemic issue requiring structural reforms, political action, and cultural change. Framing climate turmoil as an unavoidable new normal fosters fatalism, reducing perceived urgency for political or institutional response. Furthermore, the passive portrayal of affected populations as victims, not agents of change, naturalizes social hierarchies and stifles community voices advocating for justice or adaptation. Ultimately, the headline perpetuates a tendency to see climate change as a humanitarian crisis needing emergency intervention rather than a systemic challenge demanding structural solutions, political engagement, and social transformation.

4.3. Climate Crisis and Extreme Weather, Intensifying Heat waves and Water Scarcity in Pakistan

"ANOTHER round of climate-induced misery is upon us. The Met Office predicted last Friday that this week would be a sweltering one, with a heat wave sweeping over the country till the coming weekend. It said that a high-pressure system was likely to grip the upper atmosphere from Sunday, triggering heat wave conditions in most parts of the country, which would get more severe in the southern half from April 14. It expected daytime temperatures to remain 6°C to 8°C above normal in Sindh, southern Punjab, and Baluchistan from Monday to Friday. Meanwhile, the upper half of the country would stew in temperatures four to six degrees higher than usual. Hot nights, dust storms, and windstorms are also featured in the forecast. It made for a rather sobering prognosis, with an acute shortage of water in the Tarbela and Mangla dams adding to the worries."

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1904098>

Dawn Lahore, April 14, 2025

i. Textual Analysis

The headline and report open with a powerful, emotive phrase, “ANOTHER round of climate-induced misery,” that immediately sets a tone of ongoing crisis and inevitability. The word “another” suggests that such extreme weather events have become repetitive and normalized in public discourse, reflecting a persistent pattern rather than an isolated incident. The phrase “climate-induced misery” explicitly attributes the suffering and hardships to climate change, personifying it as an active force responsible for the escalating calamities, which frames climate change not as a passive background condition but as a direct and destructive agent. The text strategically incorporates technical meteorological terms, such as “high-pressure system” and “heat wave sweeping,” as well as exact temperature deviations like “6°C to 8°C above normal,” lending scientific legitimacy and credibility to the warnings. This use of precise measurements makes the abstract threat of climate change tangible and measurable, fostering a sense of factual authority. The inclusion of modal verbs such as “was likely to grip” and “would get more severe” introduces a predictive and cautious tone, emphasizing uncertainty but also warning about potential worsening conditions. It also creates a unified lexical field of environmental pressure through expressions like “hot nights,” “dust storms,” and “windstorms,” which dramatize the prevailing hardships and heighten the sense of discomfort and danger. The final mention of “an acute shortage of water” in critical reservoirs links climate events to infrastructural and resource crises, deepening the urgency of the situation beyond weather to water security, a vital socio-economic issue. Overall, the textual choices dramatize the severity of climate impacts while anchoring them in scientific discourse, constructing a narrative of a worsening crisis.

ii. Discursive Practice

This headline and article illustrate how mainstream environmental journalism practices discursive construction of climate change, predominantly through the authoritative voice of scientific institutions like the Encountered Workplace, which serve as the main sources of knowledge and legitimacy. The text aligns itself with official forecasts and expert opinions, boosting the credibility of warnings but also positioning the media as a channel for transmitting specialized knowledge rather than encouraging critical debate. The public is mainly cast as passive recipients of scientific data and imminent climate threats, rather than active participants with a say in shaping policies or responses. Notably, the discourse omits other crucial actors, such as local communities, policymakers, and civil society voices, which restricts the range of perspectives and responses available. This omission narrows the discursive space, framing climate change as primarily a scientific and natural issue instead of a socio-political one. The media's repeated framing of extreme weather as routine or “another round” risks normalizing these events, which can desensitize the public to climate disasters, lower critical engagement, and foster complacency. In this way, the reporting perpetuates a pattern where the media mainly forecasts and alarms the public but avoids questioning systemic causes or holding institutions accountable.

iii. Social Practice

At the broader social level, the headline and report reinforce a dominant ideological framework that mainly views climate change as a natural environmental crisis rather than placing it within socio-political and economic contexts. While the article vividly describes the physical and ecological impacts of heat waves, dust storms, and water shortages, it avoids addressing deeper issues such as government policy failures, social inequalities, or the lack of infrastructure investment that worsens vulnerability. When Sindh, southern Punjab, and Baluchistan are

mentioned as regions with less development and fewer resources, it highlights the core problem. The article does not discuss the specific threats these regions face or how they cope with disasters. This omission may lead readers to overlook that social inequality and poor governance are critical aspects of climate issues. This framing causes people to see climate change as an unavoidable disaster rather than a challenge that citizens or political leaders can address. Such thinking can sustain current conditions by emphasizing visible problems like heat or water shortages instead of tackling underlying causes and solutions, which hampers efforts to persuade organizations to implement vital policies related to climate justice.

4.4. Climate Justice and Global Leadership in an Era of Crisis

"In a world shaped by accelerating climate change, disruptive technologies, geopolitical conflicts and massive human displacements, the need for bold action and value-driven leadership is critical to bend the arc of history towards justice."

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1881382>

Dawn Lahore, December 18, 2024.

i. Textual Analysis

The headline begins with the words: In a world driven by climate change, which is rapidly worsening, disruptive technologies, conflicts between geopolitics, and large-scale human displacements create a broad and interconnected crisis from the start. Using the verb "shaped" is crucial because it personifies these phenomena as powerful forces actively molding and transforming the global landscape, implying that these challenges are linked rather than isolated. Describing the word 'accelerating' emphasizes that climate change is accelerating at a concerning rate, creating a sense of urgency and seriousness. The term 'disruptive technologies' introduces the idea that technological innovations, while often seen as progress, can also cause turmoil that may trigger economic or social instability, highlighting the tension between innovation and its consequences. Adding geopolitical conflicts and mass human displacements broadens the crisis to include political and humanitarian issues, turning it into a global problem with interconnected facets. This complex list underscores the gravity of the worldwide situation. However, it does so using abstract, theoretical language that doesn't directly highlight how these crises affect individuals or society. This can make these realities seem distant, making the issues appear vast and somewhat abstract. The second part of the headline, "The moment demands bold action and value-driven leadership to bend the arc of history towards justice," shifts in tone. Alternatives like "The need for bold action and value-driven leadership is critical to bend the arc of history towards justice," are also effective. At this point, the language becomes more normative and idealistic. 'Bold action' implies urgency and decisiveness, indicating that it's time to move beyond inertia. The idea of value-driven leadership suggests leaders should be guided by ethical principles rather than pragmatism and politics. The metaphor of bending the arc of history toward justice refers to a moral and historical idea that progress can be achieved, but only through deliberate, purposeful effort. This language aims to inspire and suggests justice is an attainable goal. However, it also implies that without collective effort, the pursuit of justice might stall or worsen.

ii. Discursive Practice

The headline fits into a dominant discourse on climate change and international regulation prevalent in mainstream media, policy debates, and diplomatic language. Discussing various environmental, technological, political, and humanitarian crises, it reflects a modern narrative that views all these issues as interconnected global challenges requiring collective action. Repetition of

phrases like the need for bold action and value-driven leadership aligns with political discourses that emphasize the importance of strong leaders and ethical governments as solutions to complex problems. This framing suggests a top-down approach where leaders, often government officials or international organizations, are seen as the main agents of change. However, the subject remains vague and open to interpretation, as the headline does not specify who these leaders are or where this leadership exists. This ambiguity reveals a common discursive tactic of universalizing leadership without questioning existing power structures or examining political motives. The discussion also excludes significant input from marginalized communities, affected populations, or social movements, limiting the dialogue to an elite-centered perspective. Furthermore, the headline implicitly assumes the audience is knowledgeable and sympathetic to this call to action, without encouraging critical reflection or engagement with opposing views, such as systemic critiques or grassroots activism. As a result, it perpetuates a discourse that accepts current global arrangements but suggests they need improvement rather than fundamental change.

iii. Social Practice

At the social practice level, the headline reproduces and affirms the ideological assumptions of dominance regarding how global crises, particularly climate change, should be addressed. It positions these issues within a framework that celebrates leadership and moral responsibility as key to achieving justice. This perspective aligns closely with neoliberal and liberal democratic ideas, which prioritize governance, ethical leadership, and institutional reform over radical structural change or redistribution of power. By framing climate justice as a matter of guiding the arc of history toward justice, the headline suggests that progress can be made within the current socio-political system, thus depoliticizing deeper structural problems that contribute to climate vulnerability, such as capitalism, colonial legacies, and socio-economic inequalities. Additionally, the overall message of the headline, centered on value-driven leadership, appeals to universally accepted ethical principles but fails to address the inherently conflicting nature of justice or who defines those values. It underestimates the role of social justice movements, grassroots activists, and marginalized groups who often challenge excessive power and demand accountability beyond elite leadership. The story thus risks endorsing a paternalistic approach, where solutions are imposed rather than achieved through democratic participation and empowerment of those most affected by climate disasters. When applied to the situation in Pakistan (and the Global South more generally), this discourse can obscure local conflicts and the political economy of climate impacts, maintaining the status quo where systemic injustices are tolerated.

4.5. Pakistan's Climate Vulnerability and Disaster Risk: A Global Perspective

“ACCORDING to the Global Climate Risk Index, Pakistan ranks as the fifth most climate-vulnerable country in the world. It also faces significant disaster risk, ranking 23rd out of 194 countries as per the 2024 Inform Risk Index.”

Source: <https://www.dawn.com/news/1890109>

Dawn Lahore, February 6, 2025

i. Textual Analysis

The headline is deliberately crafted to evoke a sense of objective authority and scientific rigor. The very first phrase, “ACCORDING to,” immediately indicates that the information is quoted or derived from an external, presumably neutral, and expert source. This verbal device is used to lend credibility by removing subjective opinion or speculation and grounding the statement in scientific fact. Reference to the “Global Climate Risk Index” and the “Inform Risk Index” places the

discussion within the framework of global environmental monitoring and risk assessment, often associated with international bodies and transnational governance. The inclusion of numerical data, especially noting Pakistan's rankings of 5th and 23rd out of 194 countries, serves a clear rhetorical purpose in illustrating vulnerability and danger. While numbers suggest scientific objectivity, they also simplify complex social and ecological realities into rankings, which can overlook the lived experiences of communities affected by climate disasters. Emphasizing rankings creates a relative scale that can foster a sense of urgency but also reduces complex issues to simplistic terms. Pakistan's fragile position is underscored by the parallel structure of the two sentences, adding emphasis to the headline. Sadly, there are no qualitative descriptors or explanations of the methodology, limitations, or implications of the indices, leaving readers with a standalone fact that is uncontextualized and lacking critical framing. Additionally, the headline employs nominalization, as seen in phrases like "climate vulnerability" and "disaster risk," which transform dynamic, multifaceted processes into abstract concepts. This grammatical choice tends to present these issues as fixed and quantifiable, risking a depoliticized and overly technical view of climate impacts. The absence of emotional or evaluative language, without reference to human suffering, financial costs, or institutional failures, presents the issue as a purely technical challenge that should be addressed with data-driven policies rather than as a deeply human and political crisis.

ii. Discursive Practice

From the perspective of discursive practice, this headline is part of a broader intertextual network that draws on internationally recognized climate risk assessments to shape a specific portrayal of Pakistan's climate situation. The use of global indices reflects a discourse dominated by scientific institutions and international organizations that produce and distribute authoritative knowledge about environmental risks. This reliance on institutional voices helps validate the news and situate it within the accepted epistemic framework of ecological governance, where "expert knowledge" is prioritized over local or alternative insights. Referencing two different indices—the Global Climate Risk Index and the Inform Risk Index—serves as a triangulation tactic, boosting credibility through cross-checking. However, it also reveals how media and policy discourses can become dependent on external frameworks often created in Western or international contexts, which may overlook local specifics or sociopolitical realities. This highlights the uneven nature of knowledge production and dissemination in global environmental discussions, where countries like Pakistan often serve as subjects rather than active agents in the story. Additionally, the headline's emphasis on Pakistan's ranking reflects a competitive, comparative discourse common in global media and policymaking. It places climate vulnerability into a hierarchy, subtly prompting audiences to see Pakistan through its relative position, which can evoke pride, shame, or urgency but risks ignoring the diverse experiences of climate impacts across different regions and communities. The headline targets a global or national audience but does not encourage public participation or critical reflection on the root causes of vulnerability. Furthermore, the competitive and comparative tone of the headline mirrors a common attitude in world media and policymaking. It also situates climate vulnerability within a hierarchy, prompting audiences to consider Pakistan in terms of its rank, which can foster feelings of pride, shame, or urgency but may oversimplify the range of climate impacts across different areas and communities. The headline addresses a broad audience but does not invite participation or critical engagement with the factors driving vulnerability.

Instead, it depicts Pakistan as a passive receiver of global assessment, potentially reinforcing existing power imbalances between knowledge producers and users.

iii. Social Practice

Reproducing and reinforcing the structures of the dominant ideology at the social practice level, the headline climate change and disaster risk are presented in technocratic and depoliticized ways. Framing climate vulnerability and disaster risk through rankings that can be quantified promotes a discourse that supports a neoliberal model of governance, where expert-led, market-friendly technological fixes and international interventions are favored over empowered local activism or political change. Such framing aligns with a global agenda that tends to silence the voices of affected groups and downplays issues of social justice, inequality, and historical accountability. The mention of Pakistan by name among the most climate-vulnerable nations globally highlights the unfair burden on developing countries in bearing the consequences, acknowledging the climate inequalities worldwide. However, the depoliticized, data-driven language cannot effectively link Pakistan's vulnerability to broader socioeconomic and political factors, such as poverty, governance gaps, infrastructure deficits, and inequality in resource access. It also obscures the roles of international actors and past emissions in creating these vulnerabilities. This maintains public awareness at a superficial level instead of fostering a deep debate on accountability or systemic change. The implicit acknowledgment of global structures—more likely to influence funding, disaster response, and adaptation policies—is also evident in the headline that emphasizes rankings and indices. These power relations can influence the development and implementation of climate policies in Pakistan, favoring global expertise and donor-driven agendas. Consequently, the story reinforces a social hierarchy where climate vulnerability is seen as an external condition that can be addressed through technical solutions rather than as an internally generated socio-political process that requires systemic change. As a result, this portrayal can foster feelings of helplessness or fatalism among the public, discouraging societal agency and political action needed to demand climate justice. Such a representation, therefore, may lead to hopelessness or fatalism among the population, impeding collective agency and political engagement for climate justice.

Findings

i. Linguistic Patterns and Discursive Strategies in Pakistani Newspapers

The coverage of climate change in Pakistani newspapers written in English describes it as a threat to the nation, a global injustice, and a humanitarian crisis. To emphasize urgency, they use alarmist and emotive language with words like climate catastrophe, horrific floods, and a threat to life. Sentences such as 'villages were submerged' use passive voice, which removes blame and portrays Pakistan as a victim. References to international events (e.g., COP29, IPCC) and concepts like climate justice and loss and damage link Pakistan's situation to global issues and call for assistance. Metaphors like climate monster are used to dramatize the problem, although the opinions of the elite tend to overshadow those of local people. Overall, Pakistan is presented as weak and reliant, with an emphasis on global responsibility over local accountability.

ii. Lexical Choices Reflecting Power and Ideology

Power relations and ideologies are reflected in the lexical choices in climate news. Terms like 'existential threat' and 'climate emergency' are used, creating a picture of weakness, as Pakistan is positioned as a victim of emissions from the Global North. Euphemistic language acts as a shield against institutions because it conceals responsibility. Western scientific authority is reinforced

through repeated references to scientific data from international organizations such as UN reports or IPCC findings, often making local voices secondary. Neoliberalism appears in terms like 'resilience,' 'green transition,' and 'climate-smart solutions,' which imply a neoliberal agenda focused on development rather than environmental justice. As a result, in the case of Pakistan, the language in the newspaper fosters a discourse of victimhood, dominance, and dependence within the international arena, rooted in elite and institutional power.

Recommendations

Based on the results and limitations of this study, it is recommended that future research focus on specific directions. Additionally, there is a need to expand studies by including papers primarily aimed at readers from rural areas and those without a policy focus. Such platforms play a crucial role in delivering news and information to rural and semi-urban populations in Pakistan, who are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Analyzing environmental language in these media sources would provide a better understanding of how language reflects cultural beliefs and interpretations of environmental dangers, resilience, and protection against injustices. Another recommendation is to investigate how climate change is portrayed in different countries and regions to identify differences between nations in the Global South and the Global North. When comparing Pakistani media and Western outlets, it becomes clear that they have distinct approaches to responsibility, justice, and urgency regarding environmental issues. Furthermore, reviewing multiple South Asian countries could reveal common language features as well as unique expressions shaped by the region's environment and history. Since this study examined articles from 2023 to 2025, further research is necessary to explore long-term trends and developments. Monitoring how language and perspectives on the environment change before and after major climate events may help us understand how media adjusts its coverage of environmental issues in response to shifts in public opinion or significant events. As digital communication continues to grow in importance for sharing and debating climate news, additional analysis should focus on social media, online portals, and user-generated content. Platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube play a significant role in shaping climate narratives among young people, activists, and civil society groups.

Research Gap

Although climate change is now recognized as a major global issue, the way newspapers worldwide discuss this topic varies significantly. Many researchers in Western countries have studied media coverage of climate change using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to identify ideological views, potential biases, and political influences in climate reports. However, most research in this area focuses on media from the Global North, leading to a clear imbalance in understanding how climate change is portrayed in the Global South. Given Pakistan's high ranking in the Global Climate Risk Index, the way English-language media covers climate change has a substantial impact on the public and policymakers involved in climate-related decisions. Nevertheless, there is limited research on this subject. Although there are studies on how Pakistani media reports on climate change, most rely on basic methods like content analysis or simple classification. These approaches often avoid examining the deeper ideological, linguistic, and power-related aspects that CDA aims to uncover. Furthermore, research on Pakistan frequently overlooks the links between language, power, and ideology in environmental communication. There is little research on how leading newspapers Dawn describe climate change using words, metaphors, and rhetorical tools.

Conclusion

This study examined the discourses of climate change in the Pakistani English-language press. Its goal was to reveal the types of words, language styles, and ideas used by newspapers when discussing climate issues. The study employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), a method for interpreting how language expresses power, beliefs, and messages in society. The findings showed that newspapers tend to frame climate change as a major threat to the nation. They use powerful and emotional terms such as "climate emergency," "record-breaking heat," and "deadly floods" to make the issue seem urgent and serious. These words also highlight that Pakistan is a minor contributor to pollution compared to wealthier countries. Many sentences are passive, such as "the flooding of villages" or "the damage to infrastructure," which conceals who is responsible for the harm. It is unclear whether the government, foreign nations, or other groups should be blamed. International organizations like the UN, IPCC, and COP meetings are often mentioned to lend credibility to their reports. Terms such as "climate justice" and "loss and damage" are used to suggest that Pakistan needs assistance from wealthier nations. The study also found that newspapers mainly echo the voices of powerful figures such as government officials, scientists, and global experts, leaving little room for the perspectives of ordinary people—farmers, women, and impoverished communities—who suffer most from climate change. This creates an unfair and misleading image. Additionally, some articles include terms like "green economy," "resilience," and "climate-smart solutions," giving the impression that things are improving, even though underlying issues like pollution, poverty, and poor planning remain significant. Overall, the weak language pattern in Pakistani newspapers portrays Pakistan as a fragile state in need of international help. At the same time, it tends to favor the perspectives of the powerful, often failing to report the full truth. As the study shows, climate change involves not only science but also society, politics, and power. The media greatly influences public opinion and therefore should be more equitable and responsible. The conclusion suggests that Pakistani newspapers should dedicate more space to ordinary citizens and local communities. They should clearly identify who is responsible for climate issues and what changes are necessary. This research can support journalists, educators, and policymakers interested in improving climate communication in Pakistan. The media can help the country respond more effectively to climate change by using honest, clear, and fair language.

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