

ANALYZING STATE INFLUENCE AND MEDIA FRAMING IN PAKISTAN: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF OPERATION BUNYAN UL MARSOOS (2025)

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Abstract

This study aims to provide insight into the complex interplay of Pakistan's English-language press with media framing practices. Through a contextual analysis of Operation Bunyan-ul-Marsoos (2025) between Pakistan and India, this study seeks to examine observable patterns of state-driven strategic communication through Entman's framing theory, which provides the theoretical foundation and framework for the strategic use of media to produce and proliferate messages to influence the target audience. The research analyzes editorials and opinion articles published in four leading English - language newspapers – Daily Dawn, The News International, The Express Tribune, and The Nation. Using qualitative content analysis, the study scrutinizes how the Operation Bunyan-ul-Marsoos (2025) between Pakistan and India has been strategically reported and later perceived across key framing dimensions: problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation, and policy recommendations. A well - organized pattern of narrative convergence was recorded, largely relying on official sources rather than being practiced with legitimate objectivity and consistency, aligned with the argument that Pakistan showcased itself maturely as a self-restrained country. The results indicate that editorial independence of Pakistan's print media varies in terms of several factors including security paradigm, social dynamics, and political contexts, which suggests that media framing is not only developed through the institutional roles but also through the interaction of other contextual factors.

INTRODUCTION

Public perception of political and security issues in the media has been a topic of interest for communication studies for years. In simpler terms, the media does not simply report reality but also

shape it by choosing what to construct, highlight, interpret, and organize in a manner that helps make complex events intelligible (Entman, 1993). The interpretive role of media is particularly

critical in situations of uncertainty, chaos and conflict, where competing narratives assert their claims of legitimacy, responsibility and action (Scherling, 2021). Media-state relations in Pakistan have a history of liberalization and restriction. Owing to growth in print media, it created new spaces for debate and critique, yet the expansion did not completely replace the structural influences in fields deemed sensitive to national security. Media autonomy in such settings is often negotiated within subtle limits set by political, institutional, and ideological concerns.

During periods of geopolitical opposition and rivalry, the concept of creating narratives and framing interpretations offers a theoretical framework for analysis, especially during the Pakistan-India conflict in May 2025. The bilateral relations deteriorated after the attack on Pahalgam in April 2025. Resultantly, the Indian Army launched Operation Sindoor, while Pakistan initiated Operation Bunyan-ul-Marsoos on 10 May 2025. The said launch was declared as a response to Indian adventurism in South Asia and was seen as part of a grand narrative of national defense and national sovereignty.

In the same context, Operation Bunyan-ul-Marsoos is significant in terms of strategic narrative-construction as the official press releases and media representations require precise interpretation in order to justify actions. It is therefore a remarkable case study of how narratives are made, spread, and negotiated in the context of current interstate conflict. Therefore, this operation highlights these dynamics in the stated context. This operation was part of a larger crisis of tension in the region, and was also covered by intense media attention. Official statements called for restraint and defensive necessity, but media representations were key in amplifying, interpreting, and, sometimes, sensibly reframing these statements. Hence, this study aims to examine the coverage of Operation Bunyan-ul-Marsoos by the four English-language newspapers of Pakistan to determine the degree of congruity

or incongruity between the print media and the state-sponsored strategic communications. As a matter of fact, the research focuses on a single event, with the intention of going beyond the generalities of superficial framing to give a more detailed picture of the entire framing process. The main point presented is, that media framing during the operation is conditional convergence, with newspapers showing alignment with state framing at the core framing functions level, displaying only slight differences in tone and emphasis. This convergence is not to be traced to direct state control, but rather to a mix of structural dependencies, professional norms, and common discursive understandings of national interest. In this study, state narrative is conceptualized through the creation of integrated frames and overarching themes, which are generated by the state with the aim of developing a national identity and public policy agenda to justify. The write-ups are marked by repetition and predictability of language, framing, and agenda-setting features that are consistent and aligned with the state's interests.

Cottle (2006) argues that narratives are symbolic structures used to make meaning for states; Miskimmon et al. (2013) propose that narratives serve to legitimate state power, help in making meaning for public audiences, and support political aims. In the same vein, strategic communication is defined as the deliberate and conscious application of communication by the state to pursue political, security, and governance goals, and to influence discourse and public opinion. As Hallahan et al. (2007) put it, strategic communication is "the purposeful use of communication to accomplish its mission by an organization," and for the state, that mission is to effectively keep their legitimacy and sway public opinion. This basic understanding of how the media construct perception of reality stems from Walter Lippmann's (1922) book *Public Opinion* and his idea of the pseudo-environment that accounts for how individuals perceive the world through mediated representations. He says the mass media "filters" and "frames" information, and

this can affect the public's perspective and lead to "pictures in our heads" that may not be true. The overall paradigm of the concept of framing has been explored in the classic work by Robert Entman, "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm (1993).

According to Chomsky and Herman (1988), the state-media relation is one of interdependence in democratic countries, such that the media tend to support the interests of influential people in society, including the state. Official sources and political elites are also important sources for news organizations, with the frequent result that news mirrors the limits of dominant political discourse (Bennett, 1990). Nonetheless, tensions in this relationship exist, as media sometimes call into question government policies and actions. Shoemaker and Reese (1996), in a pioneering seminal work, maintain that media content is deep-rooted in nature. It is influenced by several factors, such as journalists, media routines, organizational structures, external pressures, and ideology. Their research sought to document changes in the framing of political and social problems in response to shifts in political power, public concerns, and media ownership. Since then, the method has been applied to various contexts worldwide, including research on strategic communication in print journalism. A second study by Gitlin (1980) focused on how newspapers depicted social movements and political activism, and the extent to which this depiction changed in the 1960s and 1970s. Gitlin chronicled the shift in tone in media coverage of early civil rights protests in the United States of America, from early coverage that was largely sympathetic to more critical coverage as the protests became radicalized. The study showed the influence of media framing on societal values and the influence of media ownership and audience demands on public perception, which helps lay the foundation for understanding strategic communication in print media.

Literature Review

The importance of mass communication and media studies lies in the construction of meaning and the spreading of political messages in order to manipulate and shape public opinion, which in turn guides the government decision-making process. Research has shown that media framing, linguistic manipulation, and thematic prioritization are employed to manipulate state discourses and frame a specific set of political and ideological beliefs (Salam-Salmaoui & Salam, 2023).

Building on this, the current study examines how English-language newspapers in Pakistan framed the contemporary issue of Operation *Bunyan ul Marsoos* (May 2025) between Pakistan and India. A substantial body of empirical research identifies conflicting patterns in the country's political system, state objectives, and media freedom as major ingredients of the country's communication environment, thereby warranting an intellectual inquiry to make sense of the phenomenon.

In the context of Pakistan, media framing during crises and conflicts has been studied, and people have perceived events as stories of government failures. In many instances, the media comply with the official versions, but people are less likely to believe them and instead demand reforms and solutions. Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde's (1998) model of the securitization process provides a substantial framework for understanding how states justify harsh measures by reframing challenges as security threats. The media, as the conduit of transmission, endorses and reinforces that state narrative (Cottle, 2006; Miskimmon et al., 2013).

Having established this, in Pakistani media, debate concerning the internal security situation, geopolitics, and bilateral relations, state-focused narratives may conceal nonconforming viewpoints, including democratic accountability, socioeconomic growth, and human security. Research has shown that media framing, linguistic manipulation, and thematic prioritization are employed to manipulate state discourses and frame a specific set of political and ideological beliefs (Salam-Salmaoui & Salam, 2023).

Therefore, the studies on agenda-setting, framing, and strategic communication unfold the multifaceted relationship between media and the political actors in Pakistan. There is a dearth in researches that closely looks at how the media frames specific security operations in Pakistan. Additionally, there is no major study that has examined the nature of the media coverage of Operation *Bunyan-ul-Marsoos* (2025) in the context of state-driven strategic communication. The operation was a milestone in the country's recent security and geopolitical scenario and was considered crucial to understanding the workings and transformation of state-driven communication in the media. The existing literature on the Pakistani media's representation of conflict and policy did not have a mechanism to investigate the specifics of the construction of conflict and policy and the use of framing tools in different newspapers. This present study has attempted to address these gaps by examining Operation *Bunyan-ul-Marsoos* in order to discover how four English-language dailies in Pakistan construct meaning to align with the state-sponsored communication. Moreover, the study attempts to explore this gap by studying the communication process in which state narratives are used strategically in the pursuit of national interests. Second, researchers continue to study particular political events (elections, terrorist attacks, military changes) instead of looking at the evolution of framing over time in various newspapers. Thirdly, many researchers see agenda-setting, framing, and strategic communication as three distinct fields of research. But there are few studies that have focused on how these perspectives can be combined to account for the legitimization of state narratives in media discourse. In a global context of immense political, security, and diplomatic challenges in Pakistan, strategic communication is an important pillar of governance. It assists the government in creating a lens to view public opinion, in strengthening national cohesion, while giving the government a reason to formulate its policies during crises, and helps define global perspectives.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Robert Entman's Framing theory (1993), which that provides a holistic framework and analyzes the ways in which individuals "organize, select, and arrange information" to "make meaning" in media texts. It uses Entman's four-dimensional framework of framing in the study:

- Problem Definition
- Causal Interpretation
- Moral

Evaluation

- Treatment Recommendation

This system enables a systematic analysis of meaningful organization in texts and the development of media narratives. These functions are particularly important when analyzing political and security discourse, which might have different but conflicting meanings. News reporting frames reality strategically, emphasizing some aspects over others and thus impacting audience interpretation and understanding of a given public issue, as suggested by Tankard (2001). Power dynamics and framing are intricately linked in Pakistan, combined with media framing that is influenced by political agenda, institutional norms, and ideology. Gamson and Modigliani (1989) define media frames as interpretive packages that enable the understanding of public issues by providing coherent narratives out of facts, while Pan and Kosicki (1993) suggest that news framing is manifested in the structural aspects of the news text, including syntax, themes, scripts, and rhetorical devices. An important point is that this bias is not always overt propaganda; it can be achieved through the use of formal language, appeals to authority, and subtle narrative techniques. Additionally, strategic communication is the art of creating and sharing stories with the goal of shaping people's thinking, clarifying policy decisions, and convincing audiences of the state message. (Hallahan et al., 2007). It is a communicative process that is intentional, research-based, and works to manage relationships, mold perceptions, and reach

strategic goals for the organization, states Holtzhausen and Zerfass (2015).

Strategic communication is now a more complex and ongoing task, rather than wartime propaganda. Whether at war or peace, modern states use strategic communication to address issues of reputation, legitimacy, and policy conflicts. Argenti, Howell, and Beck (2005) note that strategic communication is used to coordinate messages across communication channels to establish credibility, gain the trust of stakeholders, and support the mission of the institution. It also relies on an intricate network, especially news media, opinion leaders, and think tanks.

According to strategic communication proponent Paul (2011), strategic communication is a planned, coordinated, and conscious use of words, actions, and images intended to shape target groups in the service of policy and organizational objectives. Historically, strategic communication has been linked to wartime propaganda, but it is now an ongoing process during peacetime in response to situations that affect a state's reputation or legitimacy (Nye, 2008; Zaharna, 2010). The stories of valor and gallantry deeds are narrated to commemorate the sacrifices of soldiers by media, think tanks, and opinionated individuals to highlight success. There is a possibility that may occur as a result of direct pressure or other factors, such as a desire for money, information, or professional protocols that emphasize patriotism and the national interest. It also reflects that journalists would be interested in reporting or narrating state stories, not because they are suppressed by the authorities, but because of traditions and internalized principles of adhering to their duties as well as power protocols. Cornish, Lindley-French, and Yorke (2011) state that strategic communication is a key aspect of modern governance, as it can be used to communicate national interests, policy objectives, and security priorities to both domestic and international audiences.

Discourse on national security and strategic communication is of paramount importance. Most of the time, the government claims to have

good governance, independence, and stability and the media companies, particularly large newspapers, play a significant role by making these official stories appear real and trustworthy. In other words, journalists can share the same opinions, institutions can provide incentives, or individuals can be compelled to act rather than be explicitly penalized.

When articulating the state's narrative, it is important to promote a sense of political legitimacy and to diffuse domestic tension by emphasizing threats from outside the state and the need for national unity. In a nutshell, this study uses strategic communication theory to explore the process by which media frames support, uphold, or even contest state narratives in the English-language print media of Pakistan.

Theoretically, the work of Robert M. Entman offers a more academic approach to understanding how media select and highlight aspects of reality, as opposed to the related literature, which focuses on identifying media frames rather than on the broader political and strategic dynamics that create them. Within the context of Pakistan, though few studies have examined the framing process of English newspapers' narratives on important political and security events, an evident gap in understanding the relationship between the state and media framing still persists.

Methodology

A qualitative content analysis approach is adopted to examine the framing of *Operation Bunyan-ul-Marsoos* in selected newspapers. This method facilitates an interpretive analysis of textual data, allowing for the identification of patterns, themes, and underlying assumptions. Give a source who talks about the relevance of qualitative content analysis to this study

The study focuses on editorials and opinion articles published in four major English-language dailies: Dawn, The News International, The Express Tribune, and The Nation. The relevance of qualitative content analysis was justified in this study because it not only examines the presence of specific themes but also deals with the meanings,

interpretations, and narrative patterns through which Operation *Bunyan-ul-Marsoos* was represented in Pakistani English-language newspapers. The acquired data were analysed through the lens of framing theory by Entman (1993) through a four-dimensional conceptualization of framing: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. The findings were interpreted through a qualitative and theoretically informed reading of the identified themes and frames. Following the identification and organization of recurring patterns within the editorials and opinion articles, the researcher examined how these patterns constructed meanings around Operation *Bunyan-ul-Marsoos*, particularly in relation to the definition of the conflict, attribution of responsibility, moral evaluation of the actors involved, and proposed courses of action.

Findings and Interpretations

Daily Dawn maintained a broadly analytical editorial stance. The newspaper did not align with overtly nationalist or pro-state (official stance) narratives; instead, portrayed Pakistan's actions as defensive and maintained a critical orientation while recognizing national security concerns. This framing pattern indicated that Daily Dawn presented issues in a balanced and analytical way, recognizing multiple sides of the events with a democratic accountability and long-term governance perspective rather than only an official or politically oriented one. This aligns with Daily Dawn's legacy as one of the country's most policy-centric and English-language newspapers known for its focus on constitutionalism and the national institutional balance. Daily Dawn did not challenge the state position on the question of Pakistan's sovereignty and its right to self-defense, but neither was it triumphalist or celebratory.

The News International focused on the human-centric aspects of the conflict, the plight of civilians, international law, and the moral aspects of escalation. It emphasized the human toll of the war, the dangers to common citizens, the cost of

regional instability, and the risks of a protracted war between nuclear powers. Meanwhile, The News International did not change Pakistan's policy on security or defense narrative; rather, it described it as a combination of humanitarian concerns, strategic wisdom, and institutional management. It was often hastily interpreted as Indian aggression and regional tensions, and as a failure in the political process, and its moral evaluation emphasized moderation, international awareness, and humanitarian responsibility, what Entman (2004) calls a "managed framing" that does not polarize or evoke emotions, but rather fosters moderation and trust in institutions.

The Express Tribune was established as authoritative, having legal, strategic, and diplomatic commentaries on Pakistan's actions. The newspaper has highlighted the 'legitimacy of response' and 'concerns on escalation' to Pakistan in protecting its national sovereignty. This coverage created the impression that Pakistan was a rational and defense-minded nation instead of a cause of instability and chaos in the region. One key element of The Express Tribune's conflict framing was its extensive focus on media narratives, reputation management, and information operations. The newspaper regularly publicized Indian propaganda and Western views about the issue, which it covered as being 'unfair', thereby elevating the stakes to an arena of strategic communication. This is an indication of the growing awareness of how information politics in the global arena has become a significant element of the international politics of the states, which are not only competing through militaries, but also through global media discourse.

It is not shown as a military conflict but as an ideologically, geographically, and politically driven battle. This framing allows the creation of a permanent security policy, in which alertness, readiness for defense, and unity are basic duties of the nation.

The newspaper's framing objective is to withstand condemnation from outside Pakistan and to

highlight the legal basis, regional constraints, and Pakistan's contribution to the region's security, which corresponds to the concept of strategic narratives proposed by Miskimmon, O'Loughlin, and Roselle (2013), who argue that it is becoming more important for states to rely on strategic communication to influence the international perception of disputes in their editorials.

The Nation's hallmark editorial style is to frame security issues as existential rather than political or diplomatic. This is clearly evident in the way it handled the Pakistan-India conflict and Operation *Bunyan – ul – Marsoos*. The Nation sees the conflict in very different terms than more measured newspapers, which emphasize diplomacy or regional stability; it is a conflict that is very nationalist and security-oriented, in which India is viewed not only as a neighbor but as a long-term threat to Pakistan's territorial integrity, socio-cultural unity, and national identity. The newspaper consistently places the conflict in its wider historical context, specifically in terms of Kashmir, regional domination, and water security concerns. In such a portrayal, The Nation casts India as a timeless foe whose policies are framed as being essentially in opposition to Pakistan's existence and interests. It isn't depicted as a stand-off military campaign, but as an ideologically, geographically, and politically motivated battle. This framing helps to establish a permanent security narrative in which being alert, prepared for defense, and united is a fundamental national duty. The newspaper's language is usually urgent and serious, which strengthens the impression that there is a constant threat from outside Pakistan and that Pakistan needs strong state authority and collective organization to respond to these threats.

.Summary

Overall, there is clear evidence of editorial identity and framing strategies in the qualitative content analysis of the four newspapers, while at the same time there were differences in the way the newspapers corresponded to the government's message formulation as a function of the specific issue. Daily Dawn remained the most transparent, equality-oriented, critically analytical newspaper that consistently focused on the legitimacy, inclusiveness, and stability of electoral institutions. It promoted national security needs but also worked to prevent over-militarization, lack of government accountability, and strategic dependence, and thus had the greatest editorial freedom among the newspapers. The News covered the issue and framed the conflict as strategic but also a moral and humanitarian dilemma which required some responsibility by all nations in the international community. The newspaper frequently referred to the concepts of international responsibility, diplomatic accountability, and the deafening silence of the world institutions on the situation in the region. The Express Tribune undertook an objective approach to communicating state narratives. It did not come up with critique, but focused on political functioning, systemic placement, and information handling. It highlighted the weaknesses of the system without questioning it; rather, it referred to them as existing problems that need to be dealt with strategically. The Nation remained on the far extreme, having the most nationalist and state-oriented positions. It emphasized political and security matters, dissecting them with reference to legitimacy, authority, and national solidarity of the state. The newspaper emphasized stability, military preparedness, and common faith more than democratic competition and inclusive dialogue, particularly in the context of external threats and military defense.

	Daily Dawn	The News International	The Express Tribune	The Nation
Problem Definition	Conflict framed as regional escalation and risk, not celebration of military success.	Focus on civilian risk and strategic management.	Conflict framed as Indian aggression countered by Pakistani defensive response	Conflict framed as existential national struggle.
Causal Interpretation	Indian escalation Regional tensions Political nationalism	Conflict arises from geopolitical rivalry and escalation dynamics.	India blamed for escalation and propaganda warfare.	Blames: Indian nationalism Strategic aggression and propaganda
Moral Evaluation	Avoid escalation Nuclear risk awareness Diplomacy over war	Calls for restraint while recognizing military necessity.	Tone is assertive: Pakistan's response justified legally and strategically.	Emphasizes: Deterrence works National unity required
Treatment Recommendation	Dialogue Strategic patience International engagement	Balance military preparedness with diplomacy	Maintain readiness Use diplomatic channels Avoid full escalation	Maintain deterrence Protect sovereignty Counter propaganda
Narrative Outcome	Supports Pakistan's defensive stance but discourages militaristic enthusiasm.	Managerial-security framing: avoid chaos, maintain order.	Strongly supportive of national military narrative.	Hardline nationalist framing.

Operation Bunyan -ul- Marsoos – Framing Components

Operation Bunyan-ul-Marsoos - Overall Pattern

Daily Dawn	The News International	The Express Tribune	The Nation
Conflict Coverage	Conflict Coverage	Conflict Coverage	Conflict Coverage
All newspapers align with national defensive narrative. Pakistan is considered a restrained defender, while India is an aggressor.			
State communication influence is strongest here.			

Defensive National Framing

Responsible nuclear state	Defensive actor
Military trained/disciplined but contained	Victim of escalation
Media aligned with state discourse of deterrence and sovereignty.	

Discussion

Findings of this research provide a contribution to the debate on media-state relations, including the conditional nature of media autonomy. Media should not be seen as independent or controlled, but rather autonomous and context-dependent. However, in Operation Bunyan-ul-Marsoos, the sensitivity of the issue seems to have changed the acceptable discourse, with increased congruence with state narratives. Structural conditions like the dependency on official sources and national interest normative considerations help this alignment. Meanwhile, the tonal and emphatic variation suggests that media is not a mere medium but is involved in creating stories, despite working within limits.

Methodological Considerations

The analysis is restricted to English-language newspapers, and the results might not be generalizable. The dynamics in the Urdu press and electronic media are different. In addition, framing analysis does require interpretive judgment, but systematic coding minimizes subjectivity.

Media, Power, and the State

The study results suggest that there is a need to further examine the complex relationship between media and power in contemporary society,

particularly in the postcolonial and security settings. The classical liberal theory is that the press is a “fourth estate” which acts as a check on power. This sunny outlook, however, assumes that institutions remain stable, press freedom is robust, and that there is no existential threat to state sovereignty. The structural conditions vary in many of the developing democracies, including Pakistan. States have the potential to suffer from internal instability, regional hostility, and attacks on their security. In this type of setting, the function of the journalist in the media is shifting from watchdog to nation builder, crisis communicator, and stabilizer of narratives. This is not necessarily a period of democratic backsliding. Instead, it is a representation of the media that performs multiple functions, including as a watchdog, mediator, stabilizer, and sometimes an amplifier of the concerns of the state.

The Pakistani experience has shown how the media can regard submission to pressure as an integral part of their civic responsibility on issues of national security. Thus, the relationship between media and the state should be considered non-exclusive, but rather relational and situational. The actors in the media are part of a political culture characterized by patriotic, sovereign, and stable values and norms. Political constraints are not the only factors that influence framing.

Media Sociology Perspective

According to the sociological approach to media, journalists' professional behavior is shaped by their newsroom culture, habits, and expectations, which are formed by other journalists. Journalists are not alone; they are situated in institutional settings that are subject to the rewards or penalties of certain stories. When reporting in a sensitive manner, official sources, defense analysts, and diplomatic briefings are the sources of information. This, of course, results in a more limited spectrum of viewpoints. Over time, this sourcing process results in "interpretive communities", where certain frames are "normal". Many Pakistani journalists maintain close ties with policymakers, military analysts, and diplomatic circles in Pakistan. These networks influence the interpretation and articulation of issues. This does not necessarily mean manipulation; it is just an indication of the role professional ecosystems play in the formation of discourse. Large media organizations need to consider relationships (corporate and political), expectations, and commercial sustainability (of the audience). The national-security consensus is at stake if there is a significant deviation, in terms of reputation or financial. Convergence can then happen without the notion of ideology.

Contribution to Theory

This study contributes to the existing theories of media framing, strategic communication, and the relation between states and media by showing how strategic communication is used by states to create media frames in English-language newspapers in Pakistan. Framing theory and strategic communication have been widely used in Western democracies and in the study of communication in times of conflict, but there is little research that investigates how the theory in these cases works in developing democracies, in which media institutions also struggle with the professional norms of their profession as well as political and national security agendas. This study fills this gap and further theorizes it by examining editorial framing in four leading English-language

newspapers across three events of national significance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has demonstrated that media framing of Operation *Bunyan-ul-Marsoos* is characterized by a pattern of conditional convergence, reflecting both alignment with state-driven strategic communication and the presence of limited editorial variation. By focusing on a single event, the research provides a detailed and nuanced understanding of framing processes in the Pakistani context.

The findings suggest that media autonomy is best understood as a negotiated condition, shaped by structural, institutional, and discursive factors. In the national security context, these factors blend to create narratives of legitimacy, restraint, and responsibility. Essentially, the dissertation is a rethinking of the idea of "media power" in a non-Western context. The media is not the state's product; it is not completely independent and has no relation to politics. A historical, economic, and cultural institution is geopolitically integrated. However, this is not a deal-breaker when it comes to criticism and caution, as Pakistani English-language media has proved. Journalism has the power to critique governance and can be a force for unity on sovereignty. This is not a shortcoming of democracy, but a pragmatic adjustment. The main point is that media autonomy is a dynamic, contextual, institutional, and national-interest-based concept. The fluidity is recognized and constitutes a higher level of scholarship and a more equitable assessment of media systems. A challenge for future scholars is to design theories that can explain this complexity. The challenge for practitioners is to keep a critical mind and at the same time be sensitive to the legitimate concerns of the nation. For the policy makers, the lesson to be learned is that trust and transparency can be more lasting building blocks of media relations than control. Summing up, this study has found that the media-state relationship is not monopoly-driven but rather negotiated in Pakistan. This discovery helps to paint a broader picture of

transitional democracy journalism, and suggests that there is a need for situational theory in media studies.

Policy Recommendations

- Strengthening Editorial Independence
- Journalists should be shielded from formal and informal pressure through the law and institutions.
- Transparency in Strategic Communication
- Open information policies minimize guesswork and boost credibility.
- Media Literacy Initiatives
- Awareness of framing should be a part of the curriculum at universities and in civil society.
- Structured Media - State Dialogue
- Briefings and off-record sessions can enhance understanding without sacrificing autonomy.
- Support for Investigative Journalism
- Strategies to provide funding and training can facilitate greater reporting on complex issues.

Academic Recommendations

- Comparative South Asian studies
- Vernacular-language media analysis
- Audience reception research
- Longitudinal framing studies
- Mixed-methods approaches

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