



Political Polarization and the Media: An Editorial Review of the PML-N and PTI Rivalry in English Newspapers

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Abstract

In the wake of the events of May 9, 2023, and the ensuing political crisis, this study looks at how editorial rhetoric in Pakistan's top English-language media reflects and reinforces political polarisation. The study examines how Dawn, The News International, and The Express Tribune, three prominent media organisations, portrayed the conflict between the Pakistan Muslim League–Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) during one of the most tumultuous periods in recent times. Content analysis of 60 editorials from May through July 2023 was carried out with the qualitative content analysis approach within the framework of agenda-setting theory, framing theory, emotional polarisation theory, and normative media ethics theory. The findings of research are that polarisation in editorials in Pakistan has energetically acquired a structured communication process conceptualized through media ethics, journalistic responsibility, and emotional tone instead of reflecting political hatred in a mirror-like fashion. Whereas The Express Tribune assumed a reconciliatory and reformist stand, encouraging talk and reflection on the matter, Dawn primarily focused on constitutionalism and self-restraint, exhibiting a spirit of deliberative democracy; The News International highlighted disciplinary regularity and institutional fidelity and therefore promoted control as well as stability. The above-mentioned publications collectively reflected several vocabularies of democracy's morality within the same political era. The research arrives at the conclusion polarisation in the country's elite press is not an indicator of unprofessionalism but a moral and affective negotiation. The editorials being at the same time critical, introspective and emotionally charged, they serve as moral texts showing the still-present role of journalism in hybrid democracies as a watchdog and a stabilising force. Apart from shedding light on such matters, this study also highlights the interaction of media ethics, emotional expression and institutional pressures in the shaping of public discourse, as well as the importance of moral responsibility, emotional intelligence and balanced framing in the fight for democracy through the use of discourse during emergencies.

Keywords: Polarization in Politics, Agenda-Setting, Framing, Emotional Polarization, Media Ethics, Editorial Analysis, Crisis Communication, Hybrid Democracy, Pakistan

Introduction

Background of the Study

Pakistan saw one of its most volatile political days in decades on May 9, 2023, when paramilitary troops detained Imran Khan, the former prime minister and chairman of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), outside the Islamabad High Court. Violent riots and impromptu protests broke out in major cities, including Karachi, Peshawar, Rawalpindi, and Lahore, within hours. Attacks on government buildings and army installations exposed severe rifts in Pakistan's societal cohesion and civil-military connection (Dawn, 2023, May 10; The News International, 2023, May 11). Political polarisation that had grown since Khan was removed from office in April 2022 by a vote of no confidence was exacerbated by the tragedy. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)-led coalition government presented his detention as a legitimate measure of accountability, but PTI supporters saw it as political persecution (The Express Tribune, 2023, May 12). The English-language media came to play an essential role in the providing the interpretation of the crisis amidst all that chaos. Not only did they substantiate their reports with facts but also created meanings through their editorials by expressing moral judgments and clarifying what "9 May" would mean in the context of Pakistan's politics.

9 May 2023	10 May 2023	11 May 2023	12 May 2023	June–July 2023
Imran Khan arrested in Islamabad → Nationwide protests erupt	Dawn publishes “A Dangerous Precedent” → Moderate, constitutional tone	The News International publishes “Law Must Prevail” → Accountability frame	The Express Tribune publishes “Lessons from 9 May” → Balanced reflection	Series of editorials on PTI leadership, military trials → Diverging frames across papers

Figure 1.1: Timeline of Key Political and Media Events Following 9 May 2023

Zia (2021) mentions that the earlier referred to newspapers, i.e., Dawn, The News International, and The Express Tribune, have been consistently viewed as the inciter of Pakistan's upper class public sphere. Their editorials have a say in academic discussion, diplomatic opinion and policy discourse. After the events of May 9, these editorials were at once both a mirror of the national consciousness and an instrument for either exacerbating or mitigating the polarization.

Key Concepts

Political division. While Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012) highlight polarization's affective dimension the emotional hostility between partisans Fiorina and Abrams (2008) describe it as the growing ideological gap among political actors. PTI and PML-N camps' conflicting victimization and legitimacy narratives are two examples of Pakistan's institutional and affective polarization.

Editorial Discussion. Instead of expressing a single viewpoint, editorials reflect a newspaper's institutional voice (Rehman, 2020). These are deliberate meaning-making actions that use normative language to frame public concerns. Editorials function as moral interpreters of events during political crises (Hackett & Zhao, 1998). Setting the agenda and framing. The media tells individuals what to think about rather than what to think, according to McCombs and Shaw (1972). Entman (1993) goes one step farther by demonstrating how frames identify issues, identify their root causes, and suggest fixes. The normative attitude of each daily is thus indicated by the editorials' choice of "law and order" versus "constitutional rights" framing. Emotional Polarisation.

Emotional animosity towards opposing parties is becoming a more powerful divider than policy disagreement, according to Iyengar et al. (2019). Editorials published in Pakistan after May 9th included morally repugnant language, such as "traitors," "arsonists," or "sympathisers of chaos," demonstrating how emotive labels turn political events into moral battlefields.

Table 1.1: **Key Concepts and Their Relevance to Editorial Analysis**

Concept	Definition	Relevance to Study
Agenda-Setting	Media determine issue salience.	Identifies which editorial themes dominate post-9 May coverage.
Framing	Selection of aspects of reality to shape interpretation.	Reveals the normative stance of each newspaper toward the crisis.
Affective Polarization	Emotional and moral distance between groups.	Analyzes tone and moral language in post-9 May editorials.

Statement of the Problem

Not only were Pakistan's political institutions put to the test by the events of May 9, 2023, but the media's impartiality and accountability were also put to the test. Despite being seen as elite platforms that influence the opinions of urban readers and officials, English-language newspapers' editorials showed varying reactions to the same situation.

The News International (2023, May 11) stated that "those who attacked state installations must face the full weight of justice," while Dawn (2023, May 10) cautioned that "the rule of law must be upheld without succumbing to collective vengeance." The Express Tribune, on the other hand, called for "institutional introspection and restraint on all sides" on May 12, 2023. Constitutionalism, security, and reconciliation are the opposing moral philosophies that these editorials highlight. Such editorial framing and tone contributed to political polarisation after May 9, 2023, which is the issue this study attempts to address. Did English editorials serve to divide the elite or stabilise public reason?

Objectives of the Study

- 1 To examine the representation of PTI, PML-N, and state institutions in English-language editorials following May 9, 2023.
- 2 Law and order, accountability, constitutionalism, civil-military interactions, and electoral fairness are the prevailing frames that need to be identified.
- 3 To investigate how moral language and editorial tone convey emotive polarization.
- 4 To contrast editorial strategies used by The Express Tribune, The News International, and Dawn.
- 5 To assess if editorials served as polarizing or instigating democratic stability.

Research Questions

- 1 In what ways did the crisis and its aftermath dominate editorial coverage?
- 2 How did the language and tone of editorials convey affective polarisation?
- 3 How did the three main English-language newspapers differ in terms of tone and framing?
- 4 How were Imran Khan, the PTI, the PML-N government, and state institutions portrayed in English-language editorials following May 9, 2023?
- 5 What can be learnt from these editorial trends regarding the function of Pakistan's elite media in the country's democratic discourse?

Rationale of the Study

This study's importance stems from its dual contribution to theoretical development and context-specific comprehension of the role of editorial institutions during times of political unrest. An empirical view into what Entman (1993) refers to as the "framing power of elite discourse" is offered by the episode from May 9, 2023. (Habermas, 1989; Yousaf, 2020) Editorials serve as discursive venues where opposing claims of legitimacy, justice, and sovereignty are publicly tested in transitional democracies such as Pakistan, where media autonomy is continuously negotiated against structural pressures. By integrating agenda-setting and framing models into Pakistan's hybrid political system, this study theoretically expands their use beyond their Western roots. Agenda-setting is the first degree of influence, according to McCombs (2005), and involves deciding what audiences should value. The evaluation of those concerns, on the other hand, is explained by second-level or attribute agenda-setting. The study examines the agenda-setting practices of prominent Pakistani publications at both levels during the post-9 May crisis by contrasting Dawn, The News International, and The Express Tribune. Including the theory of affective polarisation is also important. Affective hostility among conflicting groups has, as suggested by Iyengar et al. (2019), overpowered the ideological discourse as the main source of dispute. The starkly different reactions of the Pakistani public towards Imran Khan's arrest that included both condemning and idolizing him, are indicative signs of emotional divisions that are very much alive in the communication of the ruling class. In the analysis of the impact of media discourse on the persistence of "us vs. them" moral dichotomies, it is very important to take such emotional signals into account (Levendusky, 2013). In practice, the study adds to discussions on the ethics of journalists in democracies that are still in their infancy. Cho and McLeod (2007) contend that editorial tone has the power to intensify or defuse disagreement. Thus, charting the framing of May 9 in English media enriches both communication theory and normative standards for responsible editorial behaviour during emergencies.

Scope and Delimitation of the Study

This study only looks at editorials written in English that appeared in three national dailies—Dawn, The News International, and The Express Tribune—between May 10, 2023, and December 31, 2024. Only institutional editorials without signatures that specifically mention:

- The events of 9 May 2023 and subsequent protests,
- Imran Khan's legal and political status,
- Government and military responses, or
- Broader narratives of accountability and constitutionalism.

To preserve linguistic and institutional uniformity, outlets that are only available online and in Urdu are not included. The study emphasises interpretive depth over frequency counts and gives preference to qualitative content analysis over quantitative measurements. Therefore, while the results clarify elite speech, they do not purport to be representative of the general public.

Theoretical Framework

Framing Theory

Agenda-setting, framing, and affective polarisation are three interlocking viewpoints that are integrated into the theoretical scaffolding within the framework of hybrid media systems (Chadwick, 2017).

Establishing the Agenda Theoretical

According to McCombs and Shaw (1972), the subjects that the media chooses to cover create a hierarchy of public concern. Editorials published after May 9th in Pakistan frequently emphasised accountability, law and order, and civil-military ties, elevating these as the primary interpretive categories. Newspapers indicated which aspects of the issue were worthy of elite attention by applying consistent emphasis. "Political passions must be subordinated to institutional discipline," for instance, according to an editorial in *The News International* (2023, June 21), which reiterated stability as the primary objective.

Frames, which build on Entman (1993), act analytically in four ways: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral assessment, and remedy proposal. The editorial positions of each newspaper can be plotted along the following axes:

Dawn tended to define the problem as constitutional erosion, diagnose state overreach, and prescribe adherence to the rule of law (*Dawn*, 2023, May 10).

- *The News International* defined the problem as an assault on state authority, attributed blame to PTI leadership, and proposed punitive restoration of order (*The News International*, 2023, May 11).
- *The Express Tribune* combined both, urging reconciliation and institutional introspection (*The Express Tribune*, 2023, May 12).

Framing analysis thus reveals how the same events were narratively reconstructed using different moral logics, such as reformist, security-centric, or liberal-constitutional.

Affective Polarization

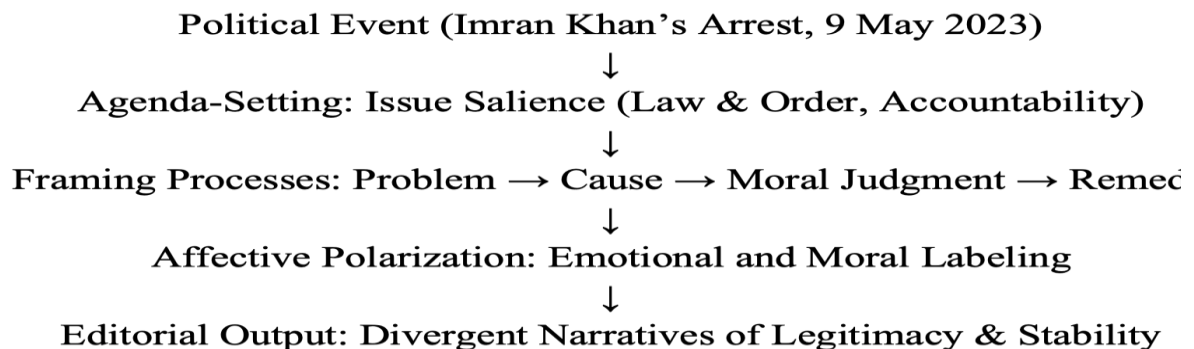


Figure 1.2: Summarizes how these theories converge into an integrative explanatory model.

According to Iyengar et al. (2019), partisan affect turns political disagreement into moral disgust. Affective markers, such as moral absolutism, delegitimising labels, and emotionally charged metaphors, are how this shows up in editorials. "Enemies of the state," "mob anarchy," and "victims of vendetta" are examples of phrases that expose different emotive grammars that

categorise players into moral groups (Druckman & Levendusky, 2019). Even in elite discourse, polarisation is maintained when such terminology is used often because it institutionalises mistrust.

Conceptual and Analytical Framework

Table 1.2: Analytical Dimensions of Editorial Polarization

Dimension	Indicators	Theoretical Link	Expected Manifestation
Tone	Positive, negative, or neutral evaluation of PTI, PML-N, and state institutions.	Affective Polarization	Emotional valence (condemnation or sympathy).
Frame	Law & Order, Accountability, Constitutionalism, Civil–Military, Electoral Fairness.	Framing Theory	Selection and emphasis of interpretive lens.
Affective Markers	Moral metaphors, zero-sum language, threat imagery.	Affective Polarization	Heightened moral boundaries and emotional intensity.

The theoretical connections are operationalised into three quantifiable dimensions by the analytical model: tone, frame, and affective markers. Each of these characteristics serves as a gauge of editorial polarisation. Through the use of these axes to code editorials, the study places the speech of each newspaper on a spectrum ranging from divisive to thoughtful. Wanta and Ghanem (2007) point out that when attribute salience becomes moralised, second-level agenda-setting combines with framing, which is also consistent with this design.

Organization of the Thesis

Following this introduction,

- **Chapter 2** reviews global and Pakistani literature on media polarization, populism, and crisis communication.
- **Chapter 3** details the qualitative methodology, sampling, and coding protocols.
- **Chapter 4** presents comparative results of tone, frame, and affective markers.
- **Chapter 5** interprets findings through theoretical lenses and evaluates implications for democratic accountability.
- **Chapter 6** concludes with recommendations for editorial responsibility and future research.

A theoretically supported and empirically supported understanding of how Pakistan's English-language press mediated the "9 May moment" is advanced by these chapters taken together. In times of democratic fragility, editorials actively shape elite consciousness by constructing political reality rather than passively reflecting it, as the research emphasises.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media Polarization, Framing, and Elite Discourse in Hybrid Democracies

Introduction

Throughout the years, there has been a complete alteration in the people's perception of political conflicts. One of such changes is the public space being partitioned among various ideological

viewpoints. Today, the term Polarisation has become a kind of media trademark and it clears the way for even the tiniest differences in opinions concerning policies (Iyengar, Sood, & Lelkes, 2012; Levendusky, 2013) to fall under its category. These frameworks include affective polarisation, agenda-setting, framing, normative media theory, and hybrid media systems. This chapter synthesises both traditional and modern theoretical viewpoints, showing how the framing and agenda-setting roles of the media interact with the moral and emotional dynamics of polarisation. It also places these theories in the context of hybrid political systems, where the limits of public discourse are constantly being redrawn by populist movements, media outlets, and governmental authority.

Theoretical Evolution of Political Polarization

Three main paradigms ideological, emotive, and discursive have shaped the theoretical concept of political polarisation.

Ideological Polarization

Polarisation was defined in early political science literature as the growing ideological gap between social groupings or parties (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008). Partisanship and policy divergence were associated with this process in pluralist democracies (Hetherington & Rudolph, 2015). But the presumption of logical, issue-based disagreement was not enough to explain modern dynamics in politically inflamed, emotionally charged societies.

Affective Polarization

Using a social identity lens, Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes (2012) reinterpreted polarisation as "the degree to which partisans regard opposing groups with animosity and their own group with favouritism." With the transition from cognitive to affective models, emotionality became a fundamental variable. Polarisation was reframed as a psychological process that is maintained via digital echo chambers, elite cues, and media narratives (Druckman & Levendusky, 2019).

Discursive Polarization

Recent research views polarisation as a discursive process that is enmeshed in symbolic power and language (Wodak, 2015). Media speech uses moral judgement, framing, and metaphors to create antagonistic relationships (Entman, 1993). Habermas (1989) defined the public sphere as a communicative space where power is contested through debate, and this discursive turn is consistent with that idea. Nonetheless, this domain is divided and moulded in hybrid democracies by ownership patterns, institutional restraints, and ideological affinities (Waisbord, 2013). The theoretical framework for examining how editorials in Pakistan reframed the 9 May 2023 issue into conflicting moral narratives of legitimacy and law is comprised of these paradigms.

Normative Media Theory and the Hybrid Public Sphere

The tradition of normative media theory places journalism in the context of democracy's moral framework (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956; Christians et al., 2009). Each of the four media models it identifies authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and democratic-participant proposes a unique interaction between the state and the media. Pakistan's press history is a combination of these models: libertarian during periods of liberalisation, authoritarian under military regimes, and socially responsible during times of national emergency. In his public sphere theory (1989), Habermas saw journalism as the place where critical and rational debates took place. However, this illusion in hybrid forms of government is the case as Voltmer (2013) puts it "transitional public spheres," which are the places where power is not equal and different discursive rationalities are competing with each other. Yousaf (2020) relays the situation of the English-language newspapers in Pakistan where they are free in paper only but are limited in the

structure by market forces, military supervision, and political patronage. The same argument is made by Zia (2021) who points out that Pakistani elite media create a "constitutional imagination," that is a narrative that in a symbolic way defends democratic values and civic superiority, though there are no real limitations. Thus, editorials are the places where conflicting normative commitments and pragmatic limitations meet each other.

Agenda-Setting: From Salience to Attribute Construction

The agenda-setting theory of McCombs and Shaw (1972) is still a cornerstone of knowledge on media power. Their empirical research during the 1968 U.S. presidential election showed that issue salience is determined by media coverage, which effectively informs audiences of "what to think about." According to McCombs (2005), this first-level agenda-setting has subsequently developed into second-level or attribute agenda-setting, in which the media not only draws attention to topics but also shapes its evaluative dimensions, or how people view them. In Pakistan after May 9, English newspapers set out to promote "law and order," "accountability," and "civil-military balance." The interpretation of national stability by intellectuals and decision-makers was shaped by these topics, which served as elite issue agendas. The News International (2023, May 11) highlighted accountability as the main issue, whilst Dawn (2023, May 10) focused on constitutional legality. Theoretically, agenda-setting works by means of cognitive priming, when particular concerns are repeatedly presented to increase their perceived significance (Wanta & Ghanem, 2007). Audiences are more vulnerable to partisan cues in polarised cultures due to the interaction between this mechanism and emotive predispositions.

Framing Theory: The Construction of Meaning and Moral Evaluation

Framing teaches people how to think about it, but agenda-setting tells them what to think about (Entman, 1993). As interpretive schemata, frames help to structure experience and direct moral judgement. Entman claims that framing entails four essential steps:

Defining the problem,

1. Diagnosing causes,
2. Making moral judgments, and
3. Recommending remedies.

By connecting media narratives to collective cognition, framing theory creates a link between social psychology and journalism. Newspapers' definitions of "violence," "accountability," and "patriotism" influence how readers ethically place themselves in relation to political actors, making framing a moral act in editorial discourse. According to Druckman and McDermott's (2008) framing-affect nexus, emotional language intensifies frame effects, especially when there is uncertainty. Different moral vocabulary were utilised by editorials after May 9: Dawn presented restraint as moral strength, The News connected order with virtue, and The Express Tribune called for "institutional introspection," combining moderation and realism.

Table 2.2: below synthesizes the key theoretical intersections

Newspaper	Dominant Frame	Causal Logic	Moral Evaluation	Prescribed Remedy
Dawn	Constitutionalism	State overreach and executive excess	Civil supremacy and legal restraint as moral imperatives	Promotion of dialogue and institutional balance. The News International
	Accountability and Security	Political irresponsibility and breakdown of law and order	Moral virtue tied to institutional discipline and enforcement	Implementation of strict punitive measures for offenders. The Express Tribune
	Institutional Reform	Systemic failure and elite confrontation	Moderation and collective responsibility as moral virtues	Reconciliation through institutional introspection and reform

Affective Polarization and Emotional Publics

The way that emotional discourse shapes political engagement is highlighted by the emergence of affective publics (Papacharissi, 2015). Citizens' political identities are held together by their emotions (Marcus, Neuman, & MacKuen, 2000). In editorial writing, affect is ingrained through evaluative language that moralises political events, tone, and metaphor. Affective polarisation theory refers to the gradual process of ideological divisions being replaced by emotional hostility and is explained by Iyengar et al. (2019). The media, which through their logic focus on the most dramatic aspects, conflicts and personalisation (Altheide, 2016), contribute to this emotionalization of politics to a great extent. This very reasoning which characterizes the Pakistani English press is subtle yet effective and is confirmed by the fact that the editorials often appeal to emotive partisanship through the moral dichotomies that they draw such as "discipline vs. chaos," "reform vs. revenge," and "law vs. lawlessness," rather than using openly populist rhetoric. Levendusky (2013) maintains that political media employ motivated reasoning to solidify these emotional identities among the viewers and thus make them perceive the information in a manner that is conducive to their allegiances. Editorials are affective scripts through which political elites disclose their feelings and, at the same time, offer rationale for their support or opposition to institutions.

Crisis Communication and Elite Media in Hybrid Regimes

The theory of crisis communication has been a major tool in analyzing editorial discourse during periods of national unrest, thus being able to spot the negotiation of the conflicting requirements of institutional defence, moral accountability, and emotional appeal. Coombs (2012) points out that crises are nothing more than social constructs that are continually fought over through the use of rhetoric and symbolism, not just as an objective disturbance through the definition of meaning, causality, and blame. The Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) posits that the tactics of framing by communicators mainly, the way in which narratives convey empathy, give blame, and take corrective action are very powerful in establishing the credibility of organizations and institutions during times of crisis. Therefore, the deliberate use of frames directly affects the public's view of guilt and the process of trust restoration after a crisis has occurred (Coombs & Holladay, 2002). In the case of hybrid political regimes such as Pakistan, crisis situations become even more important from the symbolic perspective since power is shared among military, elected institutions, and a constantly shifting media landscape. Ahmad (2022) and Siraj (2019) mentioned the elite media as performing two roles in this unique situation: first they are challengers questioning the official accounts' legitimacy and at the same time they are linking the society by making sure that institutions have continuity. The very fragility of institutional legitimacy causes the editorial narratives to oscillate between the calls for inquiry and the calls for patience. According to Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2014), these narratives are an ethical dialectic where the media has to find a way to neither totally silence nor fully disclose the moral issue and, at the same time, keep or at least not disrupt the order in the institution. The editorials released in Pakistan after the May 9, 2023 events indeed depict such communication tension very well. Applying the concepts of constitutionalism and civil restraint, those of Dawn in editorial speaking seemed to challenge the democratic standards safeguarding the political actors amidst public unrest, a notion that Habermas (1989) would call deliberative rationality. Coombs' rebuilding approach in SCCT, which gives greater weight to institutional rehabilitation over moral empathy, is coherent with The News International's stressing on discipline and accountability where the state is portrayed as responsible for maintaining order through law enforcement and institutional unity. To regain legitimacy, The Express Tribune supported the slow process of institutional reform with an integrationist standpoint that compelled the entire system to rethink its practices. Waisbord (2013)

considers this dual process of moral criticism and emotional dramatization as “media populism” and the diversity of these editorial stands illustrates the way media in hybrid democracies deal with this issue. In this scenario, journalism moves back and forth between being a moral protector and being a source of public emotions. It was on May 9 that the newspapers came out with their editorials trying to tell the story of the political events in terms of virtue, vice, and redemption, which was their way of searching for consistency of morals amid the political turmoil. First of all, these backgrounds point out the case that editorial polarisation is merely the ideological rearticulation of journalism in new hybrid structural settings, not an end of journalistic professionalism. Voltmer (2013) claims that in transitional or semi-democratic regimes, journalists experience “constrained pluralism,” where the editorial identity is impacted by a combination of government backing, market rivalry, and professional norms. Therefore, in this restricted freedom, polarisation turns out to be a kind of institutional logic that allows the press to approve its role while still maintaining its own discourse. The crisis communication strategy indicates that from a theoretical point of view the polarisation issue is not merely ideological or emotive but also performative and strategic. Reiterating official authority or appealing to moral feeling in response to crises are two examples of editorials’ deliberate rhetorical positioning within the larger ecosystem of credibility and power. Because of this, editorials published after May 9, 2023, are communication case studies that show how crisis circumstances activate the media’s twin position as moral commentator and institutional custodian, a role that maintains the normative appearance of responsibility and balance while fostering polarisation.

Toward an Integrative Framework of Editorial Polarization

Synthesizing the preceding theories reveals a multi-level conceptual structure:

1. **Agenda-Setting (Cognitive Level):** Determines which issues dominate elite discourse.
2. **Framing (Discursive Level):** Defines interpretive boundaries and moral reasoning.
3. **Affective Polarization (Emotional Level):** Imbues discourse with emotional and moral intensity.
4. **Normative Function (Ethical Level):** Reflects competing visions of democracy and authority.

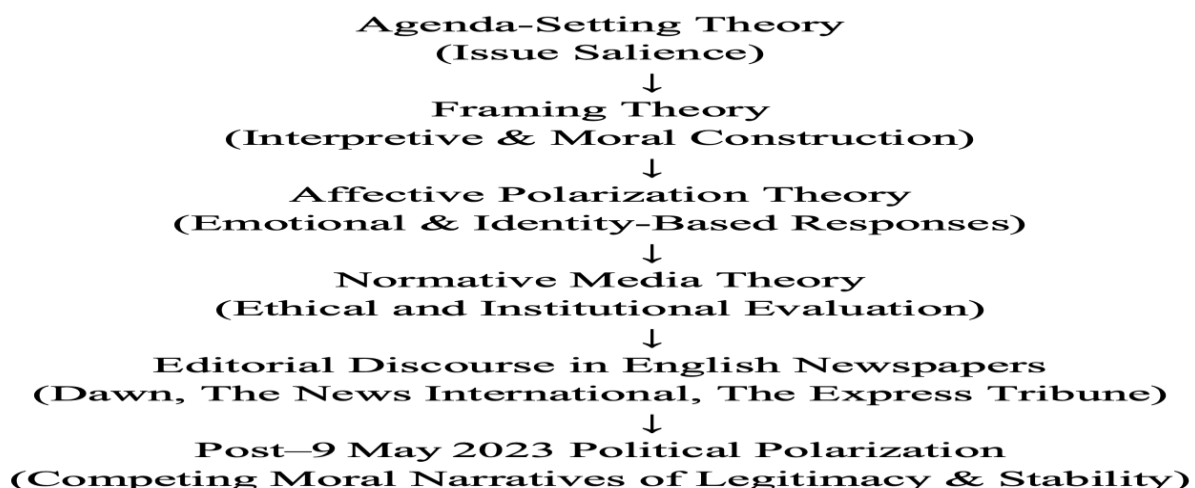


Figure 2.2 illustrates the proposed theoretical integration.

In a hybrid media environment, where conventional and digital media coexist under political restrictions, these processes take place (Chadwick, 2017). Because they structure elites’

knowledge and feelings about political actors, editorials serve both epistemological and affective purposes.

Summary of Theoretical Insights

According to this theoretical synthesis, political polarisation in elite media is an institutionalised communicative process that results from ethical framing, affective narration, and purposeful agenda construction. It is not just a derivative reflection of societal or partisan division. In Pakistan's English-language press, editorials published after May 9, 2023, best represent this shift in journalism from objective reporting to discursive agency, as the lines separating information, moral judgement, and persuasion become hazy in the communicative framework of the hybrid public sphere. At its foundation, editorial polarisation is a multi-layered communication continuum that functions along four interconnected dimensions:

Cognitive (Agenda-Setting): by choosing and highlighting topics that are thought to be essential to public conversation, media organisations first establish the hierarchy of relevance (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Establishing interpretive priorities, newspapers like Dawn and The News International influenced elite cognition by repeatedly emphasising "law and order," "civilian supremacy," and "accountability."

(Framing): following the establishment of salience, interpretive schemata that ascribe causality, moral relevance, and favoured solutions contextualise these dilemmas (Entman, 1993). The editorial frame, being an epistemic filter, sets the moral language for the understanding of crises and organizes the confusion into a coherent whole.

(Polarization): the moral tone of editorial writing is influenced by emotional and identity-based responses that are deeper than speech and thought (Iyengar et al., 2019). In the press, emotions such as fear, anger, or moral arrogance are transformed into stories, thus, creating symbolic divisions between the good self ("law defenders") and the bad self ("chaos actors"). This is a case of affective polarisation.

(Media Ethics): In the end, the hybrid democracies show the normative layer (Christians et al., 2009) as the one that expresses the journalistic ethics. This point of view slants the argument over the journalists' independence and the necessity of the setup by revealing the way the editorial bodies are protecting their stands through professionalism, social responsibility, or democratic stability. The combined characteristics indicate that polarization is not merely a fault of journalism but rather a communicative logic of power struggles, institutional cultures, and ideological forecasts. The normative criticism places those activities in the ethical terminology of journalism, while agenda-setting decides what is highlighted, framing explains how it is understood, and affective polarization gives that understanding moral and emotional power.

Pakistan's multi-layered structure of the English-language press plays the role of global media revolution through its elite speech that reflects the larger democratic conflicts like residing together of rationale and feeling, moral principles and ideological beliefs, and conversation and disagreement. This range of positions in the ongoing discussions on the mediatisation of politics places Pakistan as an important case for research, not as a breakaway from the Western theoretical models but as a demonstration of how hybrid regimes create morally and emotionally contentious public spheres. This view transforms the editorial polarisation into an analytical category and an ethical activity, a development that permits, through the medium of journalism, the confrontational concepts of democracy, legitimacy, and authority to be aired, accepted, and even imitated.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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Introduction

The current chapter presents the methodological framework for the research on editorial polarization in the English-language newspapers of Pakistan conducted in the wake of Imran Khan's arrest on May 9, 2023. The study was grounded on the theoretical concepts discussed in Chapters 1 and 2—particularly agenda-setting, framing, affective polarization, and normative media theories—thus the chapter covers the epistemological assumptions, research design, data collection, and analytical procedures used for the interpretation of the editorials appearing in Dawn, The News International, and The Express Tribune from May 9 to July 31, 2023. The qualitative interpretivist position of the chapter thus replaces the numerical measurement with meaning, context, and discourse as the key concerns. The exploration of the matter is through and of the elite editorial institutions' construction of political reality, moral meaning, and emotional tone during the crisis periods, respectively.

Research Philosophy and Paradigm

The technique to reveal the presence of editorial polarization in Pakistan's English newspapers post Imran Khan's arrest on May 9, 2023, has been elaborated upon by the author in this part. Theoretical foundations laid out in Chapters 1 and 2 (namely, agenda-setting, framing, affective polarization, and normative media theories) have formed the basis for the research design, data collection, analysis and epistemological assumptions that are revealed through the interpretation of editorials from three chosen newspapers: Dawn, The News International, and The Express Tribune covering the period from May 9 to July 31, 2023. The qualitative interpretivist methodology applied in this chapter prioritizes meaning, context and language over the numerical measurement of the concerned phenomena. The study aims to uncover the powerful editorial groups' ways and reasons of building the socio-political reality, moral significance, and emotional tone in a crisis through framing. Creswell and Poth (2018) declare that the research adopts an interpretivist–constructivist paradigm where linguistic, symbolic and communicative practices are the means through which social realities, especially political meanings, are created and manifested. Wodak (2015) is in agreement with this philosophical perspective when he puts forward the thought that media discourse is not merely a copy of events but rather a battleground for meaning that is determined by the institutional, cultural, and ideological environment that surrounds it. The researcher within this paradigm does not assume the role of a detached observer, rather he/she is an interpreter of the linguistically and textually constructed realities. Qualitative content and framing analysis have been used for the study which is in harmony with the hermeneutic tradition and instead of statistical generalisation, it accentuates through comprehension, interpretation, and theoretical contextualization.

Research Design

For the purpose of this research, a qualitative comparative case approach was adopted to examine editorial texts as manifestations of individuals' discourse in hybrid media system of Pakistan (Chadwick, 2017). The reasons for opting for the three leading English newspapers Dawn, The News International, and The Express Tribune—as the focal point of the study are as follows:

1. Their **editorial independence** and **distinct ideological orientations**, which allow for comparative analysis.
2. Their **role as agenda-setters** in Pakistan's media ecology, influencing both domestic and international perception of political events (Yousaf, 2020).

Both cross-case comparison (across newspapers) and within-case analysis (patterns within the framing and affective tone of each source) are made possible by this method. The purpose of the design is to reveal how each editorial institution dealt with institutional legitimacy and moral responsibility in the wake of the May 9 crisis.

Population and Sampling

The research population comprises all political editorials that were published in Dawn, The News International, and The Express Tribune between May 9 and July 31, 2023. The following criteria were used to pick editorials using purposive sampling:

Explicit or implicit reference to Imran Khan’s arrest, PTI protests, or subsequent political developments.

1. Thematic focus on state legitimacy, accountability, civil–military relations, or rule of law.
2. Availability in the public online archives or e-paper editions of the three newspapers.

Table 3.1: Sample Distribution of Editorials by Newspaper (May–July 2023)				
Newspaper	Total Editorials Published		Editorials on Political Polarization	
Selected (%)				Percentage
Dawn	60	22	36.6%	
The News International		55	20	36.3%
The Express Tribune		58	18	31.0%
Total	173	60	34.7%	

Units of Analysis

The unsigned opinion columns that serve as the newspaper's institutional voice are the editorial text, which serves as the study's unit of analysis. Headlines, leads, and moral conclusions were all included in each editorial, which was handled as a discursive unit. The study's main focus was :

- **Lexical choices** (e.g., “rioters,” “protesters,” “traitors”),
- **Thematic frames** (constitutionalism, accountability, reform),
- **Moral and emotional tone**, and
- **Prescriptive statements** indicating institutional position.

Both explicit arguments and the hidden meanings present in tone, metaphor, and evaluative language can be captured using this method.

Data Collection Procedures

Editorials were retrieved from official **online archives and e-papers**:

- *Dawn*
- *The News International*
- *The Express Tribune*

Every editorial that was chosen was downloaded in text or PDF format, checked for context and publication date, then documented using an indexing spreadsheet. Comparative representativeness, source legitimacy, and temporal continuity were thereby guaranteed by the dataset for all three outlets.

Data Analysis Method

The data were analyzed using **Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA)**, complemented by **Framing Analysis** and **Affective Discourse Analysis**.

Both deductive coding based on theoretical categories and inductive theme generation are possible with QCA, claim Hsieh and Shannon (2005). Chapter 2 provided four analytical dimensions that were incorporated into the theoretical framework (see Figure 3.1):

Agenda-setting → identifying recurring issues and themes.

1. **Framing** → analyzing problem definitions, causes, and remedies.
2. **Affective polarization** → coding emotional and moral tone.
3. **Normative ethics** → interpreting journalistic purpose and democratic implications.

Table 3.2: <i>Coding Framework of Thematic and Affective Dimensions</i>			
Analytical Dimension	Operational Indicators	Example Codes	Expected Output
Agenda-Setting	Repetition of issue keywords; prominence of specific topics in headlines and leads.	“Law & order,” “Accountability,” “Civil–military balance,” “Rights.”	Identification of salient issue hierarchy and thematic focus.
Framing	Problem definition, causal diagnosis, moral evaluation, and recommended remedy.	“Civilian restraint,” “Political irresponsibility,” “Institutional failure,” “Rule of law.”	Dominant interpretive and moral frame in each editorial.
Affective Tone	Detection of emotional polarity, metaphoric intensity, and moral language.	“Violence,” “Chaos,” “Patriotism,” “Vendetta,” “Betrayal.”	Mapping of emotional and moral valence within editorials.
Normative Function	Evaluation of democratic or authoritarian orientation and ethical justification.	“Unity, Institution’s integrity, freedom, national interest.”	Reporting norms and ethical positioning.

Coding Process and Analytical Flow

The coding process took place step-by-step through three repetitions:

1. Open coding – First detecting the reoccurring themes and emotional indicators.
2. Axial coding – Grouping of codes according to theoretical categories (agenda, frame, affect, norm).
3. Selective coding
4. the elevation of the existing frameworks of beliefs and value systems.
5. The inter-coder reliability was proven by peer evaluation of 15% of the sample using NVivo-assisted coding comparison. The differences were discussed until a conceptual agreement was arrived at.

Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

To ensure **trustworthiness**, the study adopted multiple strategies:

- **Credibility:** Achieved through prolonged engagement with textual data and peer debriefing with communication scholars.
- **Transferability:** Enhanced by providing contextual details of the newspapers, time frame, and national political background.
- **Dependability:** Maintained via an audit trail documenting coding decisions and theoretical memos.
- **Confirmability:** Ensured through reflective journaling and cross-verification with secondary literature (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In qualitative research, subjective interpretation cannot be avoided, but the combination of theory, textual evidence, and media environment made the analysis of the study very powerful.

Ethical Considerations

All data were sourced from publicly available resources which guaranteed transparency and compliance with intellectual property rights. Editorials' citations accurately contained publication dates and URLs. The study focused on the communicative logic of polarisation rather than political interpretation, maintaining ethical neutrality. Since no private or sensitive information was involved, institutional review board approval was not necessary.

Limitations of the Study

It is necessary to recognise several limitations even though the qualitative design permits interpretive richness:

The study only looks at English-language publications, which may not fully reflect the variety of media debate in Pakistan because they serve a privileged readership.

In addition to being time-bound (May–July 2023), the analysis misses long-term media patterns.

The scope of the study did not include quantitative assessments of audience response. Editorial discourse was examined solely in textual form; social media and visual elements were not included. These restrictions, however, align with the goal of the study, which is to provide a thorough interpretive examination of editorial discourse among elites.

Summary

In conclusion, this chapter has described the methodological framework for examining political polarisation in Pakistan's elite English-language press in the wake of the crisis of May 9, 2023. Based on theoretical traditions of agenda-setting, framing, emotional polarisation, and normative media ethics, the study uses a qualitative interpretivist methodology.

The methods applied for data collection, coding, and analysis made an attempt to reflect the emotional and mental aspects of the editorial discourse. The combination of different theories with meticulous textual analysis, this research approach offers a rational way to perceive the editorial authorities as communicative agents that reflect and affect the political divide in the hybrid democratic system of Pakistan. The empirical findings are expected to be revealed through this methodological setup and will be detailed in the next chapter.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Introduction

This chapter presents the detailed analysis and interpretation of the sixty selected editorials published in Dawn, The News International, and The Express Tribune during the period from May 9 to July 31, 2023. The objective is to analyze the way in which these major English-language newspapers gave the political crisis after Imran Khan's arrest and the extent to which their narratives mirrored the normative positioning and affective polarization in the hybrid media landscape of Pakistan.

The review amalgamates the four theoretical dimensions of the framework in Chapter 2:

1. Agenda-Setting (issue importance and cognitive attention),
2. Framing (interpretative and moral structuring),
3. Affective Polarization (emotional tone and moral valence), and
4. Normative Media Ethics (editorial justification and professional position).

The study of the combination of these dimensions provides an insight into the way the moral complexity of Pakistan's democratic discourse is reflected and transformed by elite media through the creation of various but institutionally limited narratives.

Agenda-Setting and Issue Salience

Dominant Issues in Editorial Discourse

According to the agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), the importance of particular problems is shaped and public attention is directed by the media's constant emphasis on them. The three newspapers consistently highlighted four key issues:

1. **Law and Order / Security,**
2. **Constitutionalism and Civil Supremacy,**
3. **Accountability and Governance, and**
4. **Institutional Reform.**

These topics have served as cognitive anchors of the editorial discourse and have drawn the boundaries for the discussion of morality and legitimacy.

Newspaper-Level Variation

- The crisis was predominantly represented by Dawn as a political matter and the ethical demand for limitation, legal control, and the use of institutional constraints was brought to the fore.
- The News International chose to focus on law and order and perceived the entire situation as a threat to the stability of the nation which required vigorous government intervention.
- The Express Tribune remained neutral and evaluated the need for transparency alongside the demand for reform in the system.

Table 4.1:Frequency of Major Editorial Frames by Newspaper (May–July 2023)

Frames/Issues (%)	Dawn	The News International	The Express Tribune	Total	Frequency
Law & Order / Security	8	12	6	26 (43%)	
Constitutionalism / Civil Supremacy	9	3	4	16 (27%)	
Accountability / Governance	3	4	5	12 (20%)	
Institutional Reform	2	1	3	6 (10%)	
Total	22	20	18	60 (100%)	

Framing Patterns and Moral Narratives

Overview of Framing Functions

According to Entman (1993), the process of framing involves recognizing problems, discovering their underlying reasons, making ethical evaluations, and proposing remedies. The editorials of the three newspapers participating in this research showed three intermingling logics of framing:

1. **Law and Order Frame** - focusing on the absolute strictness of the law, punishment as the only tool, and the government's total power.
2. **Constitutional Frame** - portraying the law, limits, and people as the main power over the government.
3. **Reform Frame** - stressing the need for the whole society to look inwards, become more human-like, and have open conversations.

Framing in Each Newspaper

- Dawn: The editorials proposed a framework for constitutional deliberation by presenting state restraint as the only possible measure for order restoration. The editorial "A Dangerous Precedent" (10 May 2023), amongst other things, asserted that the exercise of coercive power should always be subsequent to the attainment of moral legitimacy.
- News International: The publication was talking about a disciplinary framework through its rhetoric, making the enforcement actions appear to be justified and also warning against the possible chaos that might result from the abrupt cutting off of order. The manner of communication that depicted the strict supervision as an inevitable moral obligation was consistent with the rebuilding strategy of crisis communication theory as proposed by Coombs (2012).
- Express Tribune: It was an occasion where Ulmer, Sellnow, and Seeger (2014) depicted the "ethical dialectic" in crisis communication, for its parsing of the issue called for self-examination while simultaneously condemning the government for its excesses, thus indicating a reformist stance.

Moral Narratives and Framing Consequences

Each frame transferred one political incident into a moral drama.:

- Dawn's hero was **constitutional restraint**.
- The News's hero was **institutional authority**.
- The Express Tribune's hero was **pragmatic reform**.

The distinction shown through the framing is that it not only transforms political news into a moral tale but also, in a way, shapes the emotions of the segment of the populace that is most affected by and its elite opinions indirectly.

Affective Polarization and Emotional Tone

Emotional Vocabulary and Tone

Building on the affective polarization hypothesis (Iyengar et al., 2019), the authors of the study have identified the linguistic markers of moral judgment and emotionality. The researchers created three groups regarding the emotional tone :

- **Measured Concern** (moderate affect),
- **Moral Condemnation** (high negative affect), and
- **Reflective Empathy** (balanced affect).

Comparative Affective Profiles

Table 4.2: Dominant Affective and Moral Tone by Newspaper

Newspaper	Affective Tone	Emotional Polarity	Key Lexical Markers	Moral Orientation
Dawn	Generalized, Restrained	Mildly Negative	"The dialogue of civility and restraint"	
The News International	Critical, punitive	Strongly negative	"Chaos," "Institutional discipline and authority"	
Express Tribune	Reflective, reformist	Balanced / moderate	"Recklessness," "lawlessness," "punishment"	
	Pragmatic moderation and reform		"Introspection," "healing," "stability," "reform"	

Affective Findings

By means of a comparative affective analysis, it was concluded that moral persuasion took place through the use of emotional tone—rather than mere sentiment—as the main vehicle. News International moved along the punitive and high-affect path, making anger and panic the means to justify their coercive stability. In her low-affect moral mockery, Dawn was resorting to legal rationality and democratic conscience. The Express Tribune, displaying a concern for emotional healing and group reconciliation, was thus practicing compassionate moderation. The affect imbalance exhibited above demonstrates that elite discourse is differentiated by emotions to such a degree and this has indeed been the case in the past as well when it was suggested by Marcus, Neuman, and MacKuen (2000) that emotions do have an impact on moral reasoning and political cognition.

Normative Evaluation and Ethical Positioning

The Dual Role of Editorial Ethics

Christian et al. (2009) state that the findings reveal that the top-tier Pakistani publications took turns in adopting the two ethical positions:

- **Deliberative Accountability** that is characterized by journalism as a moral monitor.
- **Institutional Guardianship** that sees journalism as a support of order and cooperation.

Dawn was the leading publication in the former category, advocating for accountability and legality, while The News was more in the direction of the latter by emphasizing social control and discipline. Applying Voltmer's (2013) concept of "constrained pluralism" whereby systemic pressures and professional liberty were at the same time in the same place, the Express Tribune fused the two approaches.

Ethical Implications

Such a division showcases the adaptability of media ethics in the context of hybrid democracies. The editorials speak about the complexities of adhering to various viewpoints, searching for a middle ground between the moral standards and the practical realities of the institution, and at the same time being critical and careful. The professional ethics, hence, are more aligned with political transactions in a specific situation rather than with neutral positions, thus making the dilemma so.

Comparative Discourse Trends



According to the chart, the differences in editorial speech styles regarding Ideology and Emotiveness were not only determined by the ideological position but also by the emotional framework or the moral tone and intensity used to convey authority. The illustration suggests a continuum of styles from emotive dramatization to logical reflection and thus depicting polarization.

Integrated Theoretical Interpretation

When taken together, the results confirm that editorial polarisation in Pakistan is a multifaceted communication phenomenon organised through:

1. **Cognitive prioritization** (agenda-setting),
2. **Discursive framing** (interpretive control),
3. **Emotional modulation** (affective polarization), and
4. **Ethical rationalization** (normative justification).

Editorials are changed into moral texts by this four-tier continuum, which both reflects and shapes elite political awareness. Here, polarisation is a useful discourse logic rather than an anomaly; it is a way for journalism to maintain its moral authority and relevance in a divided society.

Additionally, the results expand on global theories. Although polarisation and partisan fragmentation are linked in Western research (Iyengar et al., 2019), Pakistan's instance illustrates institutionalised polarisation, which is founded in the media system's structural hybridity and the moral conflict between authoritarian stability and democratic critique.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Pakistan's elite media, redefining professionalism and polarisation after May 9, 2023

5.1 An Overview

The main conclusions of the study are summarised in this chapter and placed within the previously mentioned theoretical framework. Linking the editorial discourse patterns found in Dawn, The News International, and The Express Tribune to the more general issues of media ethics, affective polarisation, and political communication in Pakistan is the goal.

Whereas earlier chapters concentrated on empirical observation, this one explains the significance of those patterns, highlighting the ethical quandaries of journalism, the conflicts of professionalism, and the nuanced emotional lives of a country experiencing political unrest.

The chapter consists of four major sections:

The results will be discussed from a theoretical perspective, their implications for journalism and democracy will be examined, limitations and future research paths will be considered, and the study's communicative and ethical relevance will be summarised in the conclusion.

The study makes the case in this discussion that editorial polarisation in Pakistan's English-language press is a process by which journalists interpret crises, assign responsibility, and uphold their professional integrity in a politically charged setting. It is not just partisan animosity.

Revisiting the Theoretical Framework

Agenda-Setting and the Power of Salience

With its emphasis on particular topics, agenda-setting, the first theoretical pillar, provided a compelling explanation of how newspapers shape public opinion. The events of May 9 were presented in all three venues as significant national turning points rather than isolated episodes.

Dawn emphasised the moral need to uphold the law and due process, constantly cautioned against overreach, and gave the issue of constitutional restraint top priority. Focussing on law and order, News International emphasised the necessity of discipline and the perils of anarchy. In contrast, The Express Tribune called for political contemplation and institutional reform, balancing all viewpoints.

According to McCombs (2005), this common emphasis on governance, legality, and change exemplifies the cognitive dimension of agenda-setting, or the press's ability to influence readers' thoughts. The attribute agenda-setting impact was confirmed by your data, which showed that each newspaper also influenced readers' thoughts on these topics. Setting the agenda was therefore a question of moral guidance as much as coverage.

Framing: Constructing Moral Realities

The second pillar, framing theory, describes how moral judgement and selective emphasis are used to create meaning. The problem definition, cause interpretation, moral assessment, and cure components of Entman's (1993) model were clearly visible in each of the three newspapers.

In addition to reporting events, each editorial included a moral analysis of Pakistan's democratic crises.

- *Dawn* used a **constitutional frame**, portraying restraint as both ethical and patriotic.
- *The News International* relied on a **disciplinary frame**, equating order with virtue and rebellion with moral failure.
- The Express Tribune opted for a reformist perspective, which was a mixture of empathy and critical realism.
- Different moral frameworks provided different meanings to "good governance" and "responsible citizenship", thus enlightening the readers on the fact that the rivalry among newspapers was not merely political but also moral.
- In other words, the media became a platform for the moral values of democracy to be re-discussed and re-built.

Affective Polarization: The Emotional Life of Editorials

The third theoretical thread, affective polarisation, shed light on how emotion works as a communication medium. Affective polarisation is defined by Iyengar et al. (2019) as the separation of emotions between the political parties; however, in your case, it is the application of a moral language, a language through which journalists express and communicate their feelings of empathy, outrage, or restraint.

News International drew a picture of disorder and supported the power of the state through the use of highly charged expressions such as "chaos," "lawlessness," and "recklessness." On the other hand, Dawn chose the calm and reasoned approach in its choice of words and urged the public not to succumb to their fears. "dangerous precedent," "erosion," and "prudence" were some of the phrases used by the paper. The Express Tribune aimed to achieve a tone that was emotionally balanced by using terms such as "healing" and "introspection," which signified their desire to unify the protagonist's cultural sphere again.

The emotional difference shows that polarization was not simply a conflictual relationship. In essence, it suggests a whole new way of thinking about perception of the Manila elite press, managing, setting into being of, insulating and blocking or putting in the way/ means anything that is emotionally reactive. Therefore, professional ethics and institutional identity were indicated by affective tone.

Normative Media Ethics: Between Watchdog and Stabilizer

Finally, the results confirm the conflict indicated by Voltmer (2013) and Christians et al. (2009): journalists in hybrid regimes have to balance their responsibilities as stabilisers and watchdogs. In times of crisis, they have to choose between upholding order and defying authority.

By upholding accountability and legality, Dawn exemplified the watchdog concept. According to the News, governmental enforcement was justified in the name of unity, favouring stabilisation. The Express Tribune, acting as a mediator, mixed criticism with requests for change. This paradox indicates that the ethical norms of journalists in Pakistan are characteristics that are specific to the context, negotiable, and often even disputed rather than lofty ideals. In such a democracy where different systems coexist, the professional conduct is represented in the negotiation: through the moral balancing rather than neutrality the credibility is kept.

Discussion of Major Findings

Polarization as a Communicative Process

This research claims that polarisation is an organised communication tactic instead of a signal of objectivity lapse. Newspapers through editorial polarisation manipulated audience trust, crisis analysis, and professional values maintenance. The two actions, i.e., explaining events and imparting civic virtue, happened simultaneously and, therefore, the editorial became a moral text. In this light, polarisation was, in fact, a way of narrative distinction and not enmity, which is how the newspapers told their readers about their moral obligations. Thus, polarisation did not divide but rather united through the rhetoric of identity.

Professionalism and Moral Identity

One of the most surprising findings of the analysis is the degree to which occupations in Pakistan were moralised. The editorials did not disguise their opinions and instead expressed moral judgement, empathy, and reasoning. The Western concept of "objectivity" as disengagement is challenged here. Pakistani editorialists not only maintained the high standards of their profession but also made truth and accountability their watchwords. They were morally persuasive through their choice of words and the tone they adopted, wanting to be emotionally intelligent rather than being cold-hearted. Such professional behavior points to a dialogical, reflective, and conscious journalism culture that considers moral participation as an essential component of public discourse.

Emotional Regulation and Civic Stability

As per the research outcomes, the extreme emotions, whether excessive or inadequate, were the factors that polarized discourse rather than emotion itself which was still stable by nature. While the West's controlled Killing tone saved the Neglect on one hand the News's emotionality was the other hand that threatened to escalate the fright. The Express Tribune's managed reach was a middle way between rhetorical equality and emotional sensitivity. This 'controlled emotion' was there to confirm the existence of a shaky media field that was unstabilized otherwise. It has shown that moderation of feelings which allows compassion without surrendering to dramatization can be a way of supporting democratic dialogue.

5.3.4 Ethical Typologies in Editorial Reasoning

Newspaper	Ethical Orientation	Dominant Moral Logic	Professional Role
<i>Dawn</i>	Deliberative Legalism	Legitimacy through restraint and constitutionalism	Watchdog of democracy
<i>The News International</i>	Authoritarian Moralism	Legitimacy through discipline and control	Guardian of order
<i>The Express Tribune</i>	Reformist Pragmatism	Legitimacy through empathy and dialogue	Mediator of reform

The viewpoints indicate that the main reason behind the opposing editorial views in Pakistan is the ethical plurality instead of binary opposition. In hybrid regimes, the professional media's role is more about acting upon one's conscience than choosing sides, since each medium finds its own place between loyalty to the institution and moral obligation.

Implications of the Study

Theoretical Implications

The study presents several benefits to the current literature in the following ways:

- It broadens the concept of media polarization by incorporating the emotional and moral dimensions alongside the ideological one.
- It points out the moderating power of emotions that can help stabilize hybrid democracies.
- It utilizes the crisis communication theory (Coombs, 2012) in a political context and shows how editorials can be employed as means for gaining trust and promoting community sense-making. These concepts represent the debate in the ideological setting as a matter of ethics in a democratic narrative where emotions, morality, and logic intermix.

Practical and Societal Implications

A study about the media setting in Pakistan has given a strong reason for a two-way communication between the public and the government through the recommendations made to the media organizations mentioned below:

1. Ethical Reflexivity: It would be better if journalists first tried to know the connections among emotions, political legitimacy, and public perception.
2. Deliberative Journalism: Instead of fussing about moral views, different editorial teams within the newsrooms should indulge in debates based on rational arguments.
3. Media Education: Journalism schools must provide the teaching of moral reasoning, empathy, and emotive communication along with technical writing skills.
4. Institutional Independence: Media should be a truthful voice for the public by gaining ethical independence and hence reducing the control of either corporate or state over the moral narratives. The execution of these moves would enable the press to perform its democratizing role as a moral mediator between the government and the people instead of being a biased player.

Limitations

Even though this study provides very deep interpretative insights, at the same time there are some limitations:

- It is true that media in local languages may have different affections and populism, however, the study was done only on English-language newspapers which are a sign of elite discourse and so not inclusive of the whole situation.
- The study period from May to July 2023 was intensive but did not reflect the entire long-term tendencies.
- The focus on texts neglected the social media stories and pictures, which are very quickly shaping public opinion.

The study still presents a strong argument for the understanding of editorial discourse as moral communication in the case of national crises, though these limitations are acknowledged.

Recommendations for Future Research

1. Through the perspective of comparative language studies, the tones and ideologies of Urdu and regional languages are compared.
2. The audience is analyzed: the emotional reactions of readers and the understanding of editorial polarization are investigated.
3. The Digital Ecosystem is researched: the traditional editorial narratives are studied to see how they interact with online and social media comments.
4. Longitudinal Studies are conducted: the future elections or crises will show the increase in moral and emotional polarization.
5. Cross-National Analysis is done: the Pakistan's media discourse's theoretical generality is checked by comparing it with those of other hybrid democracies like Indonesia or Turkey.

Conclusion

1. The results of the investigation imply that the editorial polarisation in the English-language journalism of Pakistan is nothing but a moral compromise and not merely a symptom of division. Journalists must topple-set, frame, and give emotional tone along with ethical reasoning in a big way to not lose their professional integrity while dealing with unpredictable politics.
2. The power of journalism to act as a moral guide was made clear by the upheaval that followed May 9. The Express Tribune, Dawn, and The News International did not only give reports; but rather, they also evaluated, analysed, and made the suffering of the nation more human. Although they communicated with different moral tongues—restraint, discipline, and reform—they all the time kept the pace of democratic discourse.
3. Different moral perspectives are not a media flaw in tough times, but rather a media advantage. Polarization, which is the basis of moral and emotional discussions, can be seen as a society's democratic battle and is the pulse of a community that is still negotiating between its hopes and realities.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The research study set very clear and urgent objectives among others:

1. To investigate the framing by the English-language media of the entire 9 May crisis from its beginning until the end.

2. To recognize the emotional and ethical aspects implicit in the editorials.
3. To scrutinize the manner of controlling and supporting polarization in hybrids regimes due to the institutional and moral forces.
4. To determine the consequences of editorial polarization for democratic communication in Pakistan.

The researcher applied a mix of qualitative content analysis, thematic coding, and theoretical interpretation to not just address the goals but also to comprehensively cover these objectives in the previous chapters. The analysis brought out that polarization, though evident in tone and emphasis, was supported by moral coherence and institutional logic—not by unrestrained partisanship.

Thus, the results shift the focus of the research from “media bias” to media ethics, from “political hostility” to moral reasoning, and from “crisis coverage” to communicative negotiation.

The editorials worked as a medium for conversation on the confluence between journalism, government, and ethics.

Contextualizing Professionalism in Hybrid Media Systems Professionalism in hybrid democracies should not be limited to the Western definition of objective reporting. The study based on Voltmer’s (2013) theory of constrained pluralism, reveals that Pakistani journalists enact professionalism depending on the circumstances while still exercising their independence amid the survival tactics of the politically charged media environment.

The revolutions enable us to view professionalism in Pakistan as a moral discourse rather than a continuous struggle. The very ethical principles are getting preserved amidst the institutional pressure, censorship, and ideological division which are the author's concerns. Furthermore, it comes to the point where the journalists just change their roles: no longer as passive onlookers but as moral agents who use empathy and self-discipline to carry out the conflicts.

The fresh perspective is not only looking to offer but also to draw from the global dialogue on journalistic values, which is through the non-Western political realities altering the views of professionalism. The editorialists of Pakistan do not just mirror the Western objectivity but rather signify the ethical improvisation—creating a code of journalism that is specific to the country, emotionally connected, and socially relevant.

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