



Power, Proximity, and Perspective: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of Pakistani and International Media Framing

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ABSTRACT

With the increasing polarization of the media worldwide, the same geopolitical event could be discursively represented in completely different ways depending on the reporting context and who reports it. This difference raises the question of the role of national and international media in shaping public opinion through linguistic construction. In this paper, the ideological positioning of Pakistani print media within the international news reports on the same events has been analyzed. Thus, it is planned to fill the gap in CDA studies, which have considered domestic and international media as occupying two distinct ideological poles. For this purpose, the comparative critical discourse analysis of six headlines was conducted in three tracks: the Beijing Summit, the ban on social media in Pakistan, and the funeral of Iran's Supreme Leader. Fairclough's Three-dimensional model, as well as Van Dijk's socio-cognitive ideological square, are employed together to examine transitivity, modality, nominalization, and positive Self/negative Other construction. The study shows that there exists an ideological difference among Pakistan-based media organizations due to socio-cognitive mental models related to the particular issues in question.

1. Introduction

Newspaper headlines and editorial writing are not merely windows that reflect reality; they are complex linguistic and semiotic constructs designed to shape social reality, build consensus, and maintain or destabilize institutional power relations. In today's public sphere, such short linguistic forms as news headlines become important sites of negotiation. Because headlines have strict spatial constraints, each lexical item, syntactic structure, and associated visual sign carries greater ideological significance (Saleem and Yasmin, 2024; Ul Sabah et al., 2026). Structural choices in such texts are inherently ideological and aim to mediate the complex relationship between language, power, and cognition.

It is interesting to note that when both domestic and international media outlets cover the same worldwide event, their stories rarely intersect. For instance, while the story told by a domestic media outlet is shaped by a particular geographical context and must account for local institutional constraints, the story told by a global international news channel or publication is constructed to reach transnational audiences and represent alternative or dominant geopolitical paradigms. The study explored

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this aspect through a comparative CDA of headlines and editorials within three separate analytical frames: 1. Geopolitical Statecraft 2. Socio-Digital Policy 3. Religious-Political Commemoration.

The theoretical foundation of the study rests on the overlap among three main paradigms in critical linguistics and media sociology. First, it adopts the Three-Dimensional Framework proposed by Norman Fairclough (1995), in which language is understood as an evolving social practice linked to institutional power. Fairclough's model includes a description of textual features at the micro-level, an interpretation of text production and consumption at the meso-level, and an explanation of the socio-political context of the discourse at the macro-level. Second, to consider the connection between text and readers' perceptions, the study uses a socio-cognitive approach developed by Teun van Dijk (2001, 2006), who examines how newsrooms use ideological squares from pre-existing mental models in their readership to reinforce or challenge social domination. Finally, to account for current media realities, the study adopts a structural semiotic approach based on Saussure that considers non-verbal communication, such as gestures, feature photography, and design.

This empiricism gap lies at the core of the motivation for this research. Although considerable research has used CDA to analyze media framing through a narrow national lens, particularly in economic coverage in specific nations, there is a serious lack of comparative research that accounts for the multimodality of journalism today. Localized research in Pakistan often analyzes headline construction in local newspapers in response to isolated national incidents, such as the nation's budget allocation. In doing so, the research often lacks both multimodality and a comparative perspective on how these headlines would be framed in an international newspaper in light of the same incident.

- To answer the two key research questions, the analysis examines how these newspapers construct transitivity, agency, and linguistic modality.
- How do the differing institutional production strategies of domestic editorials and global columns appeal to, and manipulate, the pre-existing socio-cognitive mental models of their respective readerships?
- How does Fairclough's 3D model show that specific lexical choices, modality, and transitivity structures alter the distribution of ideological power, state hegemony, and agency across different newspapers?

This study thus goes beyond simple thematic analysis of international news reporting and uncovers the complex methodological, ideological, and metaphorical process through which brief public texts and images become tools of either hegemonic preservation or counter-hegemonic resistance. It shows that Pakistan-based media organizations engage in either hegemonic or counter-hegemonic discourses, depending on whether the issue concerns the state's vulnerability, its religious/geopolitical solidarity, or its diplomatic reliance.

2. Literature Review

To understand how headlines can be used as a means of ideological alignment, one needs to consider discourse not as a neutral device of communication but as a dynamic social practice. The theoretical underpinning of the approach is largely based on the ideas of Norman Fairclough, who, throughout his work, elaborated the interdependence among language practices, institutional power structures, and social change. First introduced in Fairclough's earlier work, the description of power in discourse and the power behind discourse postulates that language use is always ideological and works to reproduce or reinforce power inequalities. Further developed by the author, the idea that textual structures do not simply mirror existing social reality but constitute part of it was demonstrated (Fairclough, 1995).

With increasing institutionalization in media landscapes, the critical examination of language required a systematic framework for analyzing such latent socio-political dynamics. To operationalize this need, Fairclough (1995) developed the Three-Dimensional Framework, categorizing analysis into three segments: text (description), discursive practice (interpretation), and social practice (explanation). This three-dimensional approach connects the microscopic elements of linguistic features, such as the transitivity and lexis of headlines, with macroscopic societal change, making it essential for scholars analyzing how institutional ideologies are encoded in public texts (Fairclough, 1995; 2013). Extending the discussion of how media representations create political realities, Fiske (1994) argues that the production of media texts becomes one of the major sites of cultural and ideological struggle. Fiske (1994) illustrates how the public's perception of 'news' becomes an intentionally constructed discursive event that explains social reality in accordance with certain political intentions or institutional equilibrium.

The socio-cognitive dimension of the media text under discussion is unpacked using Van Dijk's (2001) framework of Critical Discourse Analysis, in which discourse becomes one of the principal instruments of social reproduction and dominance. According to Van Dijk (2001), institutional elites exploit textual forms of communication to create consensus and maintain

ideological hegemony. Therefore, discourses such as news headlines not only convey messages but also construct mental models in their recipients.

Headlines are generally understood as ideological spaces of power struggle. For example, the critical discourse analysis of Pakistani newspaper headlines during the 2021-2022 federal budget period was done by Arshad and Khan (2021). It is in line with the CDA's claims that media text construction can never be neutral. Yet, while modern literature usually assesses local news headlines through the lens of a national or economic perspective, as seen in the case of Arshad and Khan's (2021) research, a key missing link is the failure to understand the way domestic media platforms change their interdiscursivity and transitivity decisions in contrast to non-local global media in reaction to the same international news events.

Using Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model, Iqbal and Saleem (2026) analyzed 15 advertising slogans from Pakistani and international companies to investigate how consumerist ideology is constructed and legitimized in commercial communication through cultural and societal references in brand messages. Their research showed that slogans consistently conveyed values of happiness, obligation to relatives and friends, and belonging to a group in relation to ordinary products. Yet, the research was focused only on one kind of commercial discourse, namely advertising slogans, rather than journalistic headlines and contrasts between domestic and international news production. Whereas Conboy (2007) presents an institutional perspective on linguistic practices in news media, Chilwa (2007) discusses pragmatic manipulation in news headlines; however, both reviews have concentrated on these linguistic and pragmatic manipulations in isolated national contexts. A crucial gap exists in the study of the dynamics of such linguistic practices in the context of competition between a national and an international newspaper covering the same international issue. The current research fills this gap through the comparative multimodal analysis of the Trump-Xi Beijing summit and the social media ban controversy.

The claim that media organizations not only reflect real-life events but also create them is firmly grounded in media sociology and critical linguistics. In its radical rejection of conventional ideas about journalistic objectivity, Tuchman (1978) showed that news-making is a process involving the social construction of reality. Such a construction is always ideological and is implemented through institutional processes that determine how events are presented to the audience. Applying this socio-political framework to linguistic approaches, van Dijk (1988) considered media texts as discourse genres, demonstrating that macro-ideologies are institutionally embedded in the micro-structure of news segments, especially in their headlines and leads.

The use of conceptual metaphors in newspaper texts enables editors to portray complex social problems through the lens of well-known, sometimes ideologically biased, frames of reference. To discover the underlying communicative goals, it is necessary to use pragmatic criteria, as provided, for instance, by Huang (2007). The current study goes beyond the mere comparative aspect and explores the differences from the perspective of the methodological and metaphorical transitions that occur when Pakistani and international newsrooms cover simultaneous events.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research uses a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative methodological framework within the paradigm of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In contrast to quantitative measures of content, this study focuses on describing the phenomenon of interdiscursivity in media headlines, alongside visual semiotics. Through a structural comparison of local (Pakistan) news sites with international news channels, it is evident that geographic proximity and cultural orientations influence news editors' language and visual decisions regarding the same socio-political events.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

To account for the multimodal nature of contemporary media, this study synthesizes a tripartite theoretical framework:

Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model (1995) serves as the macro-structural anchor, segmenting the analysis into Description (formal properties of text and visual data), Interpretation (discursive processes of text production and consumption), and Explanation (the macro socio-political structures framing the discourse).

Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach (2006) operates as the analytical bridge within Fairclough's secondary layer (Discursive Practice). It evaluates how newsrooms leverage or manipulate the pre-existing mental models and Ideological Squares of their target readerships.

Saussurean Structural Semiotics provides the criteria for visual and kinesic analysis, treating nonverbal gestures and feature imagery as sign systems composed of material signifiers mapped onto conceptual, ideological signifieds.

3.3 Data Corpus and Sample Selection

A specialized data corpus was compiled using purposive sampling to isolate highly concentrated instances of institutional framing, multimodal construction, and interdiscursivity in media headlines. The corpus is divided into three distinct analytical tracks to assess both macro-geopolitical and domestic policy spaces:

1. **Track 1 (Geopolitical Statecraft):** Examines the textual headlines/leads and corresponding visual broadcast kinesics of the Trump-Xi Beijing Summit as covered by Al Jazeera (Global) and The News International (Pakistani).
2. **Track 2 (Socio-Digital Policy):** Analyzes the written headlines/editorials and accompanying feature illustrations concerning the under-16 social media ban debate from The Times (Global) and The News International (Pakistani).
3. **Track 3 (Religious-Political Commemoration):** Examines news reports and headlines covering the funeral commemoration of Iran's assassinated Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, comparing international coverage by Al Jazeera (Global) with domestic editorial coverage by Dawn (Pakistan).

To identify a dataset with concentrated instances of institutional framing, multimodal construction, and interdiscursivity, a purposely constructed dataset has been selected from media headlines. This dataset includes three different sets for analysis in the fields of geopolitics, domestic policy, and religious-political discourses: Set 1 (Geopolitical Statecraft): Analysis of textual headlines/leads and visual broadcast kinesics in connection to the Trump-Xi Beijing Summit from Al Jazeera (Global) and The News International (Pakistani). Set 2 (Socio-Digital Policy): Analysis of textual headlines/editorials and their feature illustrations in connection with the ban on social media use by the under-16 age group from The Times (Global) and The News International (Pakistani). Set 3 (Religious-Political Commemoration): Analysis of textual headlines/reports and press photographs in relation to the funeral commemoration of Iran's assassinated Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in Al Jazeera (Global) and Dawn (Pakistani). The following criteria have been followed in selection of data in this study: (i) Institutional Voice: Where only collective editorials, official leads and columns could be chosen and not op-eds; (ii) Multimodality: All the textual items must be connected with a photograph, feature illustration or gesture of diplomacy; and (iii) Temporal Congruence, where the paired texts have to cover the same event synchronically.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

Following established qualitative protocols for critical discourse analysis, the gathered data is processed sequentially through Fairclough's three dimensions:

- **Step 1:** Textual and Visual Description (Layer 1): The textual headlines and leads are examined in a micro-level analysis of paradigms (motivations for lexicons), transitivity (distribution of active agency through grammar), and modality (indexes of urgency and certainty through language). Simultaneously, the visual syntax is deciphered by the linking of the formal signifiers (framing, camera angles, physical actions, structural symmetry) to the conceptual signifieds.
- **Step 2:** Discursive Interpretation (Layer 2): Next, at the meso-level, the research employs Van Dijk's socio-cognitive dimensions to examine text-production processes. This is an assessment of how newsrooms produce media texts to fit into or against the institutional constraints, state diplomatic sensitivities, and public worries that define their respective audiences.
- **Step 3:** Social Explanation (Layer 3): Finally, at the macro-level, the results of the research are framed within broader networks of power to understand whether these texts serve as tools for maintaining hegemony (the status quo state power or power balance) or as spaces for counter-hegemonic discourses.

3.5 Research Reliability and Validity

Reliability has been achieved through the application of a standardized analytical process, using Fairclough's Three-Dimensional model, socio-cognitive elements proposed by Van Dijk, and Saussurean semiotics, to all four datasets across the two analytical tracks. The consistency in the analysis process is ensured by applying the same three-part process to each headline, each editor's statement, and visual signs: textual description, discursive interpretation, and social explanation of the text. Validity is achieved through the purposive collection of primary data from official archives and published sources of Al Jazeera, The News International, and The Times. In other words, the data have been collected directly from the newspapers in question, with no secondary sources used, thereby guaranteeing the validity of the data being analyzed.

4. Data Analysis And Interpretation

4.1 Multimodal Comparative Analysis: The Trump-Xi Beijing Summit

This chapter presents an analysis of discourse that compares media frames of the landmark meeting between US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing. To understand the complex ideological elements of the meeting, this study takes a multimodal approach, incorporating both textual and kinesic data. Using a combination of the Three-Dimensional Framework by Norman Fairclough (1995), structural semiotics by Ferdinand de Saussure, and the Socio-Cognitive Model by Teun van Dijk (2006), this study reveals how media texts work with physical performance to construct, negotiate, or reproduce global power structures.

4.1.1 Presentation of Selected Data

- **Data Set 1 (Al Jazeera - Textual):** "Trump needs Xi much more than Xi needs Trump: As the Iran war reshapes global power dynamics, Beijing enters the Trump-Xi summit with growing leverage over Washington."
- **Data Set 2 (The News International - Textual):** "Superpower dynamics" [Heading] / "The visit of US President Donald Trump to Beijing has once again drawn global attention to the evolving relationship between the US and China." [Lead Line]
- **Data Set 3 (Kinesic / Visual Data):** The opening handshake of the summit, wherein President Trump adopts a level, sustained ten-second grip with his hand positioned lower or equal to President Xi's, consciously refraining from his signature dominant, over-hand "yank-and-shake" tactical gesture.

4.1.2 Three-Dimensional Discourse Analysis

From the perspective of the micro-level description, one can notice the marked difference between the linguistic and kinesic signs used by the two publications in terms of transitivity, agency, and syntax. Thus, in Data Set 1 (Al Jazeera), the text uses an asymmetric lexical paradigm. Within the paradigmatic axis, the use of the verb "needs" serves as a signifier of dependency, making the United States structurally vulnerable. In turn, the phrase "Beijing enters... with growing leverage" serves as a transitivity construction that absolutely bestows political and strategic agency on China. The syntagmatic structure shows the cause-and-effect relationship through which the "Iran war" is presented as the active grammatical subject reshaping the world order in physical reality, thus diminishing the role of American unilateralism.

On the contrary, Data Set 2 (The News International) uses neutralized, institutionalized vocabulary. CDA is often used to analyze the macro-structures hidden within short-form media texts. This approach has proven its efficiency, as evidenced by Arshad and Khan's (2021) successful use of qualitative CDA to analyze lexical and structural decisions in Pakistani newspaper headlines regarding national fiscal policies.

The significance of their work lies in proving the usefulness of headlines in analyzing the dynamics of social power. The current work also follows the same linguistic approach to analyzing headlines but differs from the previous one in its theoretical framework, incorporating both Fairclough's 3D Model and Saussurean semiotics to account for the visual syntax and interdiscursivity of multimodal journalism. The headline uses the nominalized phrase "Superpower dynamics," which reduces the political conflict to an abstract, static equilibrium. Moreover, the use of the modifier "evolving" rather than Al Jazeera's violent "reshaping" tends to smooth out the element of unexpected political changes, portraying the process as a natural course of history. The agent is completely stripped away from the lead line by the passive metaphor "has once again drawn global attention."

Comparing these texts to the visual syntax present in Data Set 3, one can see that Trump's physical performance perfectly matches these linguistic changes. From the Saussurian standpoint, body language can be considered a system of non-verbal signs in which physical movements function as signifiers of certain mental concepts (signified). In history, Trump was always seen as using a dominant overhand grip to signify unilateral power. Yet in his meeting with Xi Jinping, the man changes the paradigm of his behavior. By keeping himself at the same level and creating physical symmetry in his grip, the non-verbal syntax no longer has an agent and a patient.

The discourse practice is a study of the process by which texts and images are generated, distributed, and consumed within institutions, and is a socio-cognitive link proposed by Van Dijk. The editorial discourse approach at Al Jazeera aims to appeal to a global audience interested in alternative viewpoints from the Western world. In Al Jazeera's case, there is an existing mental schema among readers who believe that Western supremacy is fading. By covering the summit from the perspective of America's vulnerability, Al Jazeera applies Van Dijk's Ideological Square to emphasize China's strategic position (in this scenario,

the favored country globally) and the United States' dependency. This leads the media organization to interpret Trump's passive body language as concrete proof that an empire is loosening its control due to material conditions.

At the level of social practice macros, such discourses act as ideological spaces that negotiate, maintain, or resist global power through direct application of Fairclough's "power behind discourse" theory and Van Dijk's notion of ideological stability. The text of Al Jazeera, along with its further confirmation of Trump's low kinesic performance, acts as a counter-hegemonic discourse. It defies the centuries-old myth of American omnipotence and discursively constructs the shift from a unipolar to a multipolar world order. In this socio-political environment, the text defines the summit as an explicit linguistic and physical manifestation of the shift of global power towards Eastern alliances.

4.2.1 Multimodal Comparative Analysis: The Social Media Ban Debate

In this paper, a comparative discourse analysis of how a newspaper editorial from Pakistan (The News International) and an article from an international newspaper (The Times) frame the issue of a social media ban for those under the age of 16 is presented. To decipher the underlying meanings of the two texts, this paper uses a multimodal approach to analyze both the written word and the visual elements of the articles. Through the integration of the Three-Dimensional Framework by Norman Fairclough, the structural semiotics of Ferdinand de Saussure, and text alignment.

4.2.2 Presentation of Selected Data

Data Set 1 (Pakistani Editorial - Textual): "Ban – not the answer: Banning these platforms outright is a blunt instrument that may do more harm than good... It risks alienating and isolating young people even further."

Data Set 2 (The Times - Textual): "Last chance to back social media ban for the under-16s: Algorithms push never-ending content that no child went looking for, and we must act quickly to stop that."

Data Set 3 (Visual Data): The feature image of the Pakistani editorial shows a calm, undated scene of children simply looking at their phones. It feels normal and every day, with no visual sense of immediate danger or panic.

4.2.3 Three-Dimensional Discourse Analysis

At this basic level of description, there is a dramatic divergence in the vocabulary and imagery used by the two news sources regarding the concepts of transitivity (acting party) and agency (agent party).

In Data Set 1, the Pakistani text uses a lexeme cluster in which social media is conceptualized as physical space. Social media gains its positive socio-cultural connotations by being termed "a digital meeting space" and equated to "the mall of the 1990s". Meanwhile, government actions are described using negative lexemes: ban is called "a blunt instrument" and "a populist measure". In other words, the government is portrayed as clumsy and short-sighted.

In sharp contrast to the above, Data Set 2 (The Times) employs a highly aggressive technical lexicon. In this case, the dominant signifier is "Algorithms". Powerful active verbs are used to describe algorithms "pushing" content at children. Thus, the transitivity is inverted: technology is depicted as an active predator, whereas children lose all of their agency and become totally passive victims receiving content that they never sought.

Another point of contrast between the two texts is the level of certainty, which is a matter of modality. While the Pakistani newspaper makes cautious remarks, using phrases such as "may do more harm" and "could become isolated," thereby inviting the reader to reflect deeply on the issue, the Times uses an urgent expression, "we must act quickly." Such a high-imperative expression creates a sense of panic, leaving no room for debate.

As far as the visual syntax in Data Set 3 is concerned, the picture from the Pakistani newspaper showing children calmly handling their phones corresponds with the text. According to Saussurian semiotics, the picture serves as a signifier of the peaceful signified (a normal modern childhood), rather than of tech monsters or screaming kids. It reflects a normal "meeting space."

This level concerns the production of the text and its compatibility with the socio-cognitive mental model of its audience. Following Fairclough's structural approach, Van Dijk (2001) adds a socio-cognitive element to Critical Discourse Analysis by examining a complex triad of discourse, power, and cognition. According to the author, it is the responsibility of a critical analyst to reveal the discursive tactics employed by hegemonic groups to enact and justify social inequality. The theoretical stance above gives grounds for studying the mechanisms of headline agency distribution in the context of current research.

However, the Times article is a personal, highly visible opinion piece meant to call for instant political intervention in capital letters. It operates within the Western mindset in which giant tech corporations are perceived as greedy monopolies that should

be regulated. The use of the word "we," in its collective form, unites the newspaper, parents, and the state. The story is not about freedom but an obligatory rescue of the kids.

On a larger scale of social practice, however, both texts serve more as battlegrounds for supporting or opposing state power, and Fairclough would agree with this approach, since he defines power in discourse in this very way.

The text from Pakistan is an example of counter-hegemony discourse (a discourse that opposes the state). The text runs counter to the notion that the government has the right to freely erase any digital space. In a broader social context, in which Pakistanis use digital media to be a part of the contemporary world, it is said that a ban is dangerous for youth development, and a better solution would be to change the culture rather than pass any kind of authoritarian law. In the contrary, the text from The Times serves as a tool for preserving hegemony (support for state power). By describing the technological world as extremely dangerous and chaotic, the text provides justification for further expansion of state surveillance and bans.

4.3.2. Presentation of Selected Data

Data Set 1 (Al Jazeera – Textual): "Iran promotes message of continuity and revenge at Khamenei commemoration: Thousands attend funeral commemorations for Iran's assassinated Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, with authorities promoting a message of continuity for the Islamic Republic and vengeance for his killing."

Data Set 2 (Dawn – Textual): "Iran's resilience" [Heading] / "The funeral ceremonies for Iran's assassinated supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and his family members, which began in Tehran on Friday, are evidence that the joint US-Israeli endeavor to break the Islamic Republic has failed." [Lead Line]

Data Set 3 (Visual / Photographic Data): The juxtaposition of Ayatollah Khamenei's coffin with the visibly smaller coffin of his fourteen-month-old granddaughter, Zahra Mohammadi Golpaygani, displayed side by side at the Grand Mosalla in Tehran, alongside press photographs of foreign dignitaries – including Saudi Arabia's deputy foreign minister – bowing or standing in respect before the coffins, consciously framing a moment of pan-Islamic solidarity across historically rival states.

4.3.3 Three-Dimensional Discourse Analysis

Al Jazeera uses reporting verbs and observational lexis like "promoting," "commemoration," "targeted," and "confiscated." In this case, the headline nominalizes the state's action, turning it into an "abstract 'message'" that allows the writer to remain neutral and avoid giving the reader the impression that he endorses the political meaning of the event described. The modality used is mainly factual and categorical – "were seen," "was targeted" – again, following the typical news-language convention. Nonetheless, certain lexical items such as "vengeance," "clenched fist," and "heavy security presence" imply militancy and control going beyond merely descriptive functions.

The editorial in Dawn starts with strong evaluative modality, stating that these ceremonies are "evidence" of the failure of the joint US-Israeli endeavor to topple the Islamic Republic of Iran. There are verbs here, such as "failed," "rallied," "unified," and "exposed," that carry a judgmental meaning rather than being purely descriptive. The headline "Iran's resilience" presupposes that this fact has been established, whereas it should be presented as one possible interpretation of the events. This is the presupposition strategy mentioned in Fairclough's theory of ideological discourse analysis. The scale of the event is itself ideologically significant: Iranian officials estimated attendance of between 15 and 20 million mourners, with delegations from more than 100 countries, positioning the funeral as one of the largest public gatherings in modern history and surpassing even the 1989 funeral of Ayatollah Khomeini. This magnitude functions rhetorically in both texts: for Al Jazeera, as evidence of the regime's capacity to mobilize mass sentiment despite war losses; for Dawn, as visual confirmation of the 'resilience' narrative asserted in its headline.

The text by Al Jazeera conforms to the conventions of the news report genre: a dateline ("Tehran, Iran"), quotations from Iranian officials, and sensory details (temperature, security checks, crowd management). The quoted statements by IRGC leaders appear as reported speech, allowing the paper to record the regime's statements without seeming to endorse them as its own voice.

The text in Dawn conforms to the conventions of the editorial genre, which necessarily involves taking an evaluative stance. It cites the 2016 funeral of Khomeini for credibility. It identifies itself as belonging to a particular interpretive community, i.e., the Pakistani foreign policy discussion that favors Muslim countries against the West.

Here, we see the difference between international and Pakistani media in social practice, rather than just in style. The relative neutrality of Al Jazeera stems from its status as an international media organization and its need to maintain a degree of institutional credibility before a wide variety of audiences, including Western audiences. As such, it can describe the regime's

"continuity and revenge" propaganda as an event worthy of media reporting, without seeming to promote it. This ability to maintain a degree of descriptive distance is vital for the institution.

Dawn's pro-Iran bias, however, can be explained in terms of the sociopolitical situation in Pakistan: the presence of common religion and common interests, the diplomatic relations between the countries, and the generally anti-US/anti-Israeli editorial policy of Dawn as a newspaper, stemming from the criticism of US/Israeli interventionism in the Muslim world. Thus, the editorial does not describe the event but tries to form a public opinion within Pakistan in favor of Iran and against the policies of the US-Israeli coalition.

5. Discussion

The comparison of the six headlines within the three tracks of the Beijing Summit, the social media ban, and the Khamenei commemoration illustrates that Pakistani print media does not have an ideologically fixed stance as compared to international media when covering the same news stories. Rather, it changes its position in accordance with the specific nature of the geopolitics in which Pakistan is involved, thus showing that the ideologically different stance of Pakistani media is an issue-contingent phenomenon (Fairclough, 1995).

Regarding the news story on the Beijing Summit, Al Jazeera portrays China as the actor of the changing world order ("Beijing enters... with growing leverage"), whereas the United States is presented as dependent and passive ("Trump needs Xi") (Al Jazeera, 2026). However, The News International uses nominalization to remove this inequality by presenting the news as "China-US superpower dynamics" (The News International, 2026); according to Fairclough (1995), it is a typical technique for removing agency. This difference can be best understood in light of socio-cognitive mental models, as described by Van Dijk (2006): while Al Jazeera appeals to a mental model focused on Western hegemonic decline and thus offers a framework appealing to a historically distrustful audience towards the West and its geopolitical interests, The News International appeals to a mental model focused on diplomatic stability, as Pakistan relies on sustaining functional relations with both Washington and Beijing. In this sense, the Pakistani news organization acts as an instrument of hegemonic maintenance rather than challenging hegemonic power relations.

Whereas news stories on the Beijing Summit exemplify the reverse tendency, those related to the Social Media Ban show how it can be employed. For instance, The Times employs the predator-victim paradigm and constructs algorithms as predators and children as victims in high-imperative modality ("We must act quickly"), thus preventing further discussion of the policy itself and legitimizing state action aimed at increased surveillance and banning of social media as the only solution to this problem (The Times, 2026). On the other hand, The News International resists this construction in a low-imperative modality ("may do more harm," "could become isolated") and uses a positive lexicon to construe social media as a community rather than a threat (The News International, 2024). This difference can be explained by Van Dijk's (2006) socio-cognitive model: while The Times appeals to Western ideological mental models in which people tend to distrust large technological corporations and construe state action as protective, The News International appeals to domestic Pakistani mental models based on their previous experience of digital shutdowns imposed by the state, thus perceiving blanket bans as populism.

When considered collectively, these three tracks show that the ideological positioning of Pakistani media is less defined by a stable dichotomy between "domestic" and "international" and much more by particular socio-cognitive mental models associated with a given issue among Pakistani audiences (van Dijk, 2006). As soon as the issue involves Pakistan's vulnerability to state coercion, such as the case with the social media ban, the domestic media takes up a stance of resistance towards power. If the issue implies solidarity on religious and geopolitical grounds against a common threat, as in the case of the Khamenei commemoration, domestic media tends to align more readily with state-adjacent narratives than international media does. Lastly, when the issue concerns Pakistan's dependence on its diplomacy, such as the Beijing Summit, the domestic media tends to downplay any tensions involved. This analysis supports Fairclough's (1995) argument that discourse not only reflects social structures but also helps shape them: in all cases, Pakistani media not only reports geopolitics but also performs ideological work to shape its domestic readership's fears, resistances, and solidarity.

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore whether the print media in Pakistan has an ideology that is more stable than the international coverage of the same events. The comparative analysis through three different tracks Beijing Summit, social media ban, and Khamenei's death supports the fact that the Pakistani media does not have such fixed ideology and changes its position accordingly depending upon the importance of the particular event in relation to domestic audiences: The News International neutralized the tension in the Beijing Summit story to maintain diplomatic balance, yet the same outlet challenged the social media ban narrative due to domestic concerns regarding state overreach; while the Dawn took the side of the resilience narrative about Iran due to religious-geopolitical affiliation.

Thus, this research brings a specific nuance to the field of CDA, as the ideological position of the domestic media is a variable and depends on which socio-cognitive model is activated by the particular topic. This results in a reconfiguration of Van Dijk's Ideological Square, where "Us" and "Them" groups shift from issue to issue rather than remaining constant, and an expansion of the Fairclough approach, showing that the same linguistic strategies can serve opposite purposes depending on the context. The limited sample used in this study, that is, six headline pairs belonging to three different channels, restricts the possibilities for generalization in this case. Further studies should expand the scope to a larger corpus and other media (broadcasting and social media) to see whether the issue-dependent alignment holds.

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