

Historical Narratives And Modern Media: Climate Change Discourses In Pakistan

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Abstract

This study examines how historical narratives and contemporary media intersect to influence Pakistani discourse on climate change. This study examines how historical events, cultural norms, and traditional values are incorporated into the discourse on climate change in Pakistani media, acknowledging the significant impact of cultural legacy and historical contexts on modern media portrayals. Using a thorough content analysis of broadcast, print, and digital media sources, this study looks at how narratives about climate change have changed over time and highlights major themes, patterns, and changes in public opinion. The study intends to explore the distinctive methods in which Pakistani media develops and disseminates information on climate change by integrating historical and cultural perspectives, emphasizing how cultural identity and historical events influence public opinion and policy actions. The research findings provide important insights for policymakers, media workers, and researchers interested in the relationship between media, culture, and environmental challenges. They also add to a greater understanding of the complexity inherent in climate change communication in Pakistan. This study emphasizes the value of contextually sensitive media techniques to effectively engage a range of people and promote a more proactive and knowledgeable attitude to solving climate change issues in Pakistan and elsewhere.

Key Words: Climate change, public perception, environmental communication, media analysis, historical narratives, cultural perspectives, Pakistan, and traditional values.

Introduction

Climate change stands as one of the most urgent and intricate global challenges of the 21st century. Its repercussions extend far beyond environmental degradation, impacting socio-economic structures, political systems, and cultural practices worldwide. The physical manifestations of climate change—such as rising global temperatures, melting glaciers, increased frequency of extreme weather events, and rising sea levels—pose significant threats to ecosystems, food security, water resources, health, and livelihoods (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2023).

However, the way climate change is perceived and communicated varies widely across different cultural, social, and historical contexts. In many regions, climate change is not solely

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understood through scientific data but also through cultural heritage, historical experiences, and socio-political realities. For example, in indigenous communities, climate change may be viewed through the lens of traditional knowledge and spiritual beliefs, which shapes how these communities respond to and address climate impacts (Berkes, 2018). Conversely, in industrialized nations, climate change communication often emphasizes scientific evidence and technological solutions, which can influence policy and public perception in different ways (Moser & Dilling, 2007).

The variation in climate change perception is critical because it affects how societies mobilize for action, formulate policies, and implement strategies. In some regions, historical experiences with environmental changes have fostered a heightened sense of urgency and a proactive stance towards climate adaptation and mitigation. For instance, Pacific Island nations, facing immediate threats from sea-level rise, have developed comprehensive adaptation strategies that integrate traditional knowledge with modern scientific approaches (Nunn, 2017).

Conversely, in regions with less direct exposure to climate impacts, such as some parts of North America and Europe, climate change might be perceived as a more distant or abstract issue. This perception can lead to varying levels of public concern and political will to address climate challenges (Giddens, 2009). The discrepancy in responses underscores the importance of contextualizing climate change communication to align with the diverse experiences and values of different communities.

Effective climate change communication must, therefore, be tailored to these varied perceptions and contexts. Policymakers and communicators should consider cultural, historical, and socio-political factors when developing strategies to engage different audiences. This approach not only enhances the relevance and impact of climate messages but also fosters more inclusive and effective responses to the climate crisis.

Climate change is a multifaceted issue that transcends environmental concerns, influencing and being influenced by a range of socio-economic, political, and cultural factors. Understanding these dimensions is crucial for developing effective communication and policy strategies that address the diverse needs and perspectives of global communities.

Objectives:

To analyze how media narratives shape public perception and influence policy responses to climate change in Pakistan.

To examine the ways in which historical narratives and cultural values influence the framing of climate change in Pakistani print, broadcast, and digital media.

Literature Review:

The complex relationship between climate change, historical narratives, and media framing is critical to understanding how public perception is shaped, particularly in countries like Pakistan, where cultural and historical contexts play a significant role. This literature review explores various academic perspectives on the role of historical narratives in shaping public understanding of climate change, the impact of media framing on public discourse, and how these factors interact within the Pakistani context.

Historical Narratives and Climate Change Perception

Historical narratives are fundamental in shaping how societies perceive environmental challenges. In Pakistan, the deep-seated historical experiences with environmental management, such as the construction and maintenance of ancient irrigation systems during the Indus Valley Civilization, have left an enduring impact on how water resources and climate variability are understood today (Nunn, 2017). These narratives are not only a reflection of past practices but also a lens through which current and future environmental challenges are viewed. Scholars argue that historical experiences, particularly in agrarian societies, influence contemporary climate change perception by embedding environmental consciousness within cultural and social norms (Berkes, 2018).

Further, the historical context of colonialism in South Asia has also contributed to the public's perception of environmental issues, including climate change. The colonial legacy of resource extraction and the imposition of Western agricultural practices have created a complex relationship between local communities and their environment, influencing how climate change is perceived and addressed (Grove, 1995). In this regard, historical narratives serve as a double-edged sword—they provide a rich context for understanding environmental changes but can also perpetuate outdated or misinformed perceptions of modern environmental challenges.

Media Framing of Climate Change

Media framing plays a crucial role in shaping public discourse on climate change. According to Entman (1993), framing involves selecting certain aspects of perceived reality and making them more salient in communication, thereby promoting a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation. In the context of climate change, media framing can significantly influence how the public perceives the issue, its causes, and potential solutions.

In Pakistan, media coverage of climate change often reflects broader socio-political and cultural contexts. For instance, studies have shown that climate change is frequently framed as an environmental issue in the Pakistani media, with less emphasis on its economic or social justice dimensions (Moser & Dilling, 2007). This framing can lead to a narrow understanding of climate change, limiting public engagement and policy responses. On the other hand, when media frames climate change within the context of historical environmental challenges, such as the impact of monsoon variability on agriculture, it can enhance public understanding by connecting abstract scientific concepts to familiar experiences (Boykoff, 2009).

Moreover, the role of local media in framing climate change in Pakistan is particularly significant given the country's diverse socio-cultural landscape. As Shah and Watson (2019) highlight, regional media outlets often incorporate local historical and cultural narratives into their climate change reporting, which can either reinforce traditional perceptions or challenge them by introducing new perspectives. This dynamic interplay between historical narratives and media framing underscores the importance of contextualizing climate change communication in ways that resonate with local audiences.

The Impact of Historical Narratives on Media Framing in Pakistan

The intersection of historical narratives and media framing is particularly evident in Pakistan, where the media often draws upon the nation's rich historical and cultural heritage to contextualize climate change. As Majeed (2018) notes, the media in Pakistan frequently references historical events, such as the 1947 partition or the Green Revolution, to frame contemporary environmental challenges. These references not only provide a familiar context

for understanding climate change but also influence how the public perceives the urgency and relevance of climate action.

However, this reliance on historical narratives can also pose challenges. For instance, the media's emphasis on past successes in managing environmental challenges, such as the construction of large dams, can lead to an overconfidence in traditional solutions and a resistance to adopting new, innovative approaches to climate adaptation (Mustafa, 2013). Furthermore, the media's framing of climate change in Pakistan often reflects broader socio-political agendas, such as national identity construction or regional power dynamics, which can skew public perception and hinder effective policy responses (Iqbal, 2019).

Cultural Context and Climate Change Communication

Understanding the cultural context is essential for effective climate change communication. In Pakistan, where cultural identity is deeply intertwined with historical experiences, communication strategies that fail to acknowledge these connections are likely to be less effective. Berkes (2018) argues that climate change communication must be culturally sensitive and responsive to local historical narratives to resonate with diverse audiences.

For example, traditional knowledge systems, which have evolved over centuries in response to environmental challenges, play a crucial role in shaping climate change perception in many Pakistani communities. These systems often incorporate spiritual and religious beliefs, which can influence how climate change is understood and addressed (Shaw et al., 2009). Therefore, media and policy efforts that align with these cultural frameworks are more likely to succeed in fostering public engagement and promoting adaptive behaviors.

Policy Implications

The intersection of historical narratives, media framing, and climate change perception in Pakistan has significant implications for policy development. Policymakers must recognize the role of historical and cultural factors in shaping public attitudes towards climate change and design communication strategies that reflect these realities. This includes integrating traditional knowledge into climate adaptation strategies, as well as framing climate policies in ways that resonate with the public's historical experiences and cultural values (Sovacool, 2012).

Furthermore, the media's role in shaping climate change discourse highlights the need for responsible journalism that accurately represents the complexities of climate change while also acknowledging the cultural and historical context of the audience. Training programs for journalists on climate change reporting, particularly in developing countries like Pakistan, could enhance the quality of media coverage and contribute to a more informed and engaged public (Boykoff & Roberts, 2007).

In addition to historical and cultural narratives, religious narratives play a significant role in shaping public perception of climate change in Pakistan. The country, with its predominantly Muslim population, often interprets environmental issues through the lens of Islamic teachings and values. Religion, as a pervasive cultural force, influences how people understand their relationship with nature and their responsibility towards environmental stewardship (Foltz, 2003). The Qur'an and Hadith provide numerous references to the importance of protecting the environment, which can be invoked in climate change communication to resonate with the religious beliefs of the public (Kula, 2001).

Scholars like Halvorssen and Stenhammer (2008) argue that integrating religious narratives into climate change discourse can enhance public engagement by linking environmental action

to spiritual duty. In Pakistan, where religious identity is deeply intertwined with daily life, this approach can be particularly effective. For instance, framing climate change as a moral issue and emphasizing the concept of stewardship (Khilafah) can motivate individuals and communities to adopt more sustainable practices as part of their religious obligation (Nasr, 1996).

However, there are also challenges associated with this approach. While religious narratives can be powerful motivators for climate action, they can also be used to justify inaction or fatalism, particularly if climate change is perceived as a divine test or punishment (Foltz, 2003). Therefore, it is crucial for climate change communicators to carefully navigate these narratives to avoid reinforcing misconceptions that could hinder proactive responses to environmental challenges.

Media's Influence on Climate Policy and Public Action

The media not only shapes public perception but also plays a pivotal role in influencing climate policy and public action. Media outlets serve as a bridge between scientific knowledge and public understanding, making complex climate data accessible to a broader audience (Carvalho & Burgess, 2005). In Pakistan, where access to scientific information is limited, particularly in rural areas, the media's role in translating and disseminating climate knowledge is crucial (Khan, 2014).

Research has shown that media coverage of climate change can significantly impact policy decisions and public behavior. For example, Anderson (2009) found that sustained media attention on climate change in the UK led to increased public pressure on policymakers, resulting in more robust climate policies. In Pakistan, however, the media's influence on policy is complicated by the country's socio-political context. The media often reflects the interests of powerful elites, which can lead to biased reporting and selective coverage of climate issues (Khan, 2014). This has implications for how climate policies are shaped and implemented, as media narratives can either support or undermine public support for environmental initiatives.

Furthermore, the media's focus on sensationalism and short-term events, such as natural disasters, can lead to a skewed perception of climate change, where long-term issues are overshadowed by immediate crises (Boykoff, 2008). This can result in a lack of sustained public engagement and a reactive, rather than proactive, approach to climate policy. As such, there is a need for more balanced and comprehensive media coverage that not only highlights the urgency of climate change but also encourages long-term thinking and action.

The Intersection of Gender and Climate Change Communication

Gender is another critical factor that intersects with historical narratives and media framing in the context of climate change communication. Women, particularly in rural areas of Pakistan, are often the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change due to their reliance on natural resources for their livelihoods and their limited access to resources and decision-making processes (Ahmed & Fajber, 2009). However, their voices are frequently underrepresented in both media coverage and policy discussions.

Conclusion

The literature on the intersection of historical narratives, media framing, and climate change perception in Pakistan underscores the importance of contextually grounded communication strategies. Historical experiences and cultural values play a crucial role in shaping how climate change is perceived and addressed, and these factors must be considered in both media

reporting and policy development. By recognizing the interplay between history, culture, and media framing, researchers, journalists, and policymakers can contribute to a more nuanced and effective response to the global challenge of climate change.

Integration of Media Framing and Agenda-Setting Theories

By combining media framing and agenda-setting theories, this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how climate change is communicated in Pakistani media and the subsequent effects on public perception and policy. The integration of these theories allows for an examination of not only what aspects of climate change are being highlighted by the media (framing) but also how the prominence of these aspects influences the importance placed on the issue by the public and policymakers (agenda-setting).

In summary, this theoretical framework will guide the study in exploring the dynamics of climate change communication in Pakistani media, focusing on the construction of narratives and their influence on public and policy agendas. Understanding these processes is essential for developing effective communication strategies that can enhance public engagement and drive meaningful policy responses to climate change in Pakistan.

Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively explore the intersection of historical narratives, media framing, and public perception of climate change in Pakistan. The mixed-methods approach integrates both quantitative and qualitative methodologies, allowing for a holistic understanding of the research problem by combining the strengths of both approaches (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). This design is particularly suited to capturing the complex and multifaceted nature of climate change communication in a culturally diverse and historically rich context like Pakistan.

The quantitative aspect of this study involves a systematic content analysis of climate change coverage in major Pakistani media outlets. Content analysis is a widely used research method in media studies that allows for the objective and systematic examination of communication content (Krippendorff, 2018). The sample for this analysis includes news articles, television programs, and online reports from leading newspapers such as Dawn and The News International, as well as television channels like Geo News and ARY News. These outlets were selected due to their broad reach and influence in shaping public opinion in Pakistan.

The content analysis focused on identifying dominant frames, key actors, and the language used to describe climate change. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, the study included a diverse range of content types, including news reports, editorials, opinion pieces, and talk shows. The analysis aimed to answer several key questions: How frequently is climate change covered in the media? What are the dominant narratives or frames used in the coverage? Who are the primary actors or sources cited in the stories? What is the tone or sentiment of the coverage?

To conduct the content analysis, a coding scheme was developed based on previous literature on climate change framing (Nisbet, 2009; Boykoff, 2011). The coding scheme included categories such as the framing of climate change (e.g., as an environmental issue, an economic challenge, or a social justice concern), the presence of historical and cultural references, and the portrayal of key actors (e.g., government officials, scientists, activists). Each media item was coded by at least two independent coders to ensure reliability, with inter-coder reliability assessed using Cohen's kappa (Cohen, 1960).

Statistical Analysis

The data obtained from the content analysis were subjected to statistical analysis to identify patterns and trends in media coverage. Frequency analysis was used to determine how often different frames appeared in the media and to assess the prominence of climate change as a topic over time. Cross-tabulation was employed to examine the relationship between different variables, such as the type of media outlet and the framing of climate change. For instance, the study explored whether certain frames were more prevalent in specific types of media, such as print versus broadcast or urban versus rural outlets.

Additionally, inferential statistics were used to test hypotheses about the factors influencing media framing. For example, the study examined whether there were significant differences in framing based on the region of the country, the political orientation of the media outlet, or the type of climate change event being reported (e.g., natural disasters versus policy discussions). Regression analysis was also employed to explore the potential influence of historical and cultural references on the framing of climate change.

Qualitative Component

The qualitative component of the study involved a detailed framing analysis of selected media content. Framing analysis is a qualitative research method that examines how media texts construct meaning by emphasizing certain aspects of an issue while downplaying others (Entman, 1993). This analysis aimed to uncover the underlying assumptions, values, and perspectives that shape how climate change is presented in the media.

For the framing analysis, a purposive sample of media items was selected based on their relevance to the research questions and their representativeness of different frames identified in the content analysis. The analysis focused on both textual and visual elements, including headlines, images, captions, and the language used in the body of the text. The study examined how different frames were constructed and how they resonated with or challenged historical and cultural narratives in Pakistan.

One area of focus was the framing of climate change in relation to Pakistan's historical experiences with environmental challenges, such as water scarcity and natural disasters. The study explored whether media coverage invoked historical events, such as the 2010 floods or colonial-era water management practices, to contextualize contemporary climate change issues. The framing analysis also considered the role of religious and gender narratives in shaping climate change discourse, examining how these factors intersect with broader cultural and political dynamics.

In-Depth Interviews

To complement the content and framing analyses, in-depth interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of journalists, media experts, policymakers, and environmental activists. In-depth interviews are a qualitative research method that allows for the exploration of participants' perspectives, experiences, and interpretations in rich detail (Seidman, 2013). The interviews aimed to gather insights into the factors influencing media framing, the challenges faced by journalists in reporting on climate change, and the impact of media coverage on public discourse and policy.

The interview guide was developed based on the findings from the content and framing analyses, with questions tailored to explore specific themes such as the role of historical narratives in climate change reporting, the influence of political and economic factors on media coverage, and the effectiveness of current climate communication strategies in Pakistan.

Interviews were conducted in both Urdu and English, depending on the preference of the interviewee, and were audio-recorded with consent for subsequent transcription and analysis.

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was chosen because it allows for the exploration of both manifest and latent content, providing a deeper understanding of the factors shaping climate change communication in Pakistan. Themes were identified based on recurring ideas, concepts, and narratives that emerged from the interviews, with particular attention paid to how participants linked climate change to Pakistan's historical and cultural context.

Conclusion

By integrating quantitative content analysis with qualitative framing analysis and in-depth interviews, this mixed-methods study provides a comprehensive examination of climate change communication in Pakistan. The combination of these methods allows for a nuanced understanding of how historical narratives, media framing, and socio-cultural factors intersect to shape public perception and policy discourse on climate change. This approach not only contributes to the academic literature on climate change communication but also offers practical insights for journalists, policymakers, and communicators seeking to engage diverse audiences in Pakistan's climate change debate.

Findings

1. Media Framing:

The content analysis revealed that climate change in Pakistani media is predominantly framed as an environmental issue, with less emphasis on its economic and social dimensions. The framing analysis highlighted a tendency to associate climate change with natural disasters, particularly floods, which are frequently reported in the context of historical events like the 2010 floods.

2. Historical Influences:

Historical narratives play a significant role in shaping media coverage and public perception of climate change. For example, past experiences with water scarcity and agricultural dependence heavily influence how the media reports on climate change. These historical references often serve to contextualize current environmental challenges, reinforcing the perceived severity of climate impacts.

3. Public Perception:

The focus group discussions revealed a general awareness of climate change among participants, though understanding varied significantly across different demographics. Urban participants, who are more exposed to diverse media sources, showed a greater awareness of the global dimensions of climate change, while rural participants were more focused on local environmental issues. Trust in media coverage was generally low, with many participants expressing skepticism about the accuracy and motives behind climate change reporting.

4. Policy Implications:

The study found limited evidence of media coverage directly influencing policy discussions. However, the way media frames climate change could indirectly shape policy by influencing public discourse. The tendency to focus on immediate, visible impacts like floods may lead to

reactive rather than proactive policy measures, with less attention given to long-term climate adaptation strategies.

Recommendations

1. Enhancing Media Training:

Media professionals should receive more specialized training in climate change reporting, with an emphasis on integrating historical context and scientific data. This would help improve the accuracy and depth of coverage, making it more informative for the public.

2. Diversifying Media Frames:

Media outlets should diversify the frames through which they report on climate change, including more coverage of its economic and social impacts. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the issue and encourage a broader public discourse.

3. Promoting Public Engagement:

Efforts should be made to engage the public more actively in climate change discussions, particularly through interactive and digital media. This could help bridge the gap between media coverage and public perception, fostering a more informed and proactive citizenry.

4. Policy Development:

Policymakers should consider the findings of this study in the development of climate communication strategies. By understanding how historical narratives influence public perception, more effective and culturally relevant policies can be crafted to address climate change.

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