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Construing the Political Identity of Imran Khan in Pakistani Print Media Discourse: A Systemic Functional Perspective

Abstract

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Keywords: Imran Khan, Political Identity, Media Discourse, Pakistani Print Media, Transitivity, Ideological Framing

Authors:

Muqadas Fakhar: M.Phil Scholar, Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan.

Tazanfal Tehseem (Corresponding Author)
Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan.
(Email: tazanfal.tehseem@uos.edu.pk)
ORCID: <http://orcid.org/000-0003-1366-0174>

Asad Nazar PhD Scholar, Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan.
ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0009-0000-1019-9787>

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Authors:

Muqadas Fakhar: M.Phil Scholar, Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan.

Tazanfal Tehseem : (Corresponding Author)

Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan.
 (Email: tazanfal.tehseem@uos.edu.pk) ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1366-0174>

Asad Nazar : PhD Scholar, Department of English Language and Linguistics, University of Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan.

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0009-0000-1019-9787>

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Abstract

This study presents a discursive analysis to determine how the Pakistani English print media constructed the political identity of Imran Khan between 2022 and 2024 using the Systemic Functional Linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Framing Theory. An integrated examination of Dawn News, 2022 and The News International indicates that the identity of Khan is constructed by both material and verbalization that place a greater emphasis on the agency and populist identity on the one hand, and relational and evaluative clauses on the other that suggest inconsistencies in governance. Although both sources lead to the same conclusions of portraying him as polarizing, they differ ideologically: Dawn shows him as a danger to the democratic norm, whereas The News provides a less idealistic critique on governance. This paper illustrates the role of these language processes in creating polarized mass opinions and supports the role of the press in creating disputed political identities.

Keywords:

[Imran Khan](#), [Political Identity](#), [Media Discourse](#), [Pakistani Print Media](#), [Transitivity](#), [Ideological Framing](#)

Introduction

Imran Khan is one of the most iconic and controversial political activists in Pakistan in recent history. Khan is a former cricket captain and politician who became a popular reformist who promised to make a New Pakistan after being elected to power in 2018 as a populist. In April 2022, the government of Khan was overthrown in a dramatic way, through a parliamentary no-confidence vote, the first attempted oust of a

Pakistani premier by constitutional means. Not only did this watershed event bring the tenure of Khan to an end 18 months earlier than scheduled but also saw Pakistan enter a new stage of political upheaval, including the loss of power by the former prime minister, the opposition campaign led by him, the legal struggles and the gradual clash with the state. This situation brought the political identity of Imran Khan into the center of the intense public discussion and the media interest at this period of time, as in



the dynamic media environment of Pakistan, the print press is key to the formation of the political discourse and the perception of the masses, and so, two major English newspapers - Dawn and The News International - take center stage in this research. Having a history of independent editorial position, Dawn is read by policy makers and the general public in Pakistan who can read English. The News has a large following and has a tendency to be more populist in its coverage or take the point of view that is viewed as more populist or tied to the opinions of its media group. The opinion pages of Dawn and The News in the aftermath of the ouster of Khan were consumed in creating competing images of Imran Khan, ranging between savior and demagogue, democrat and autocrat, victim and villain. The print media discussions in the month of April 2022-March 2024 can therefore be viewed as an excellent corpus to study the intersection of language and ideology in presenting the identity of a leader at a time when there is unrest.

Early signs point toward the fact that these newspapers balanced Imran Khan and his activity in a significantly different manner. An illustration is the position of domestic commentators who portray Khan as a populist hero and the head of a freedom struggle against an alleged foreign involvement, which makes his account of resistance and martyrdom more dramatic. Others portrayed him as a disruptive agitator whose words and strategies were dangerous to democracy. The given background preconditions the occurrence of the present research, as it explores the linguistic and rhetorical processes according to which Dawn and The News created the image of Imran Khan in the key period of April 2022 to March 2024.

Although there has been a lot of conjecture on Imran Khan in the Pakistani press, it has left a gap in explanation of the language behind the identity that he mediates. Much of the popular discourse has been vehemently political or ideological as to whether or not Khan is right or wrong without reflecting how language is utilized to create such judgments. The issue raised by this thesis is, in fact, one of discourse: in what ways are newspapers limited, by their use of vocabulary, grammar and the structuring of the narrative, to construct the identity of a political figure amongst their readership? This study has been based on a multidisciplinary theoretical framework, which incorporates

functional linguistic understanding, evaluative language theory, media framing, and critical discourse analysis. The combination of these views gives a strong prism on which to examine the textual construction of the political identity of Imran Khan and why these constructions are arranged in the ways they are. Halliday (1985/1994) says that any utterance serves several metafunctions at once: it ideationally describes some kind of reality, interpersonally performs social relations and textually constructs a coherent message (Halliday and Matthiessen, 1994). The ideational metafunction is especially used in this study with the analysis of transitivity and agency in new papers clauses. Through the analysis of the persons doing what to whom.

Halliday (2014) outlines the following types of processes material processes (actions and events), mental processes (thoughts, feelings, perceptions), relational processes (states of being and identity), verbal processes, behavioral processes and existence processes. The transitivity analysis will be conducted in order to demonstrate the identity of the main character to concentrate whether he has been presented as the agent of the action or something has been done to him. The analysis of the types of processes to which newspapers apply when portraying Imran Khan helps the study to identify the ways in which the political identity of Imran Khan is discursively produced, although the identification of the connections between SFL and Appraisal and the identification of the Framing theory as applied to Imran Khan is also located within the framework of media communication studies. The classic definition of framing as developed by Robert Entman offers a key principle: it is to choose some details of perceived reality and highlight them in a text, in such a manner, that it gains a certain definition of problems, a certain interpretation of causality, a certain moral judgment, and/or a certain prescription (Entman, 1993). In less complex language the framing theory suggests that media houses emphasize some facts or perspective of a story and focus down on others or avoid such information altogether and thus influence how people perceive it. This thesis discusses the representation of Imran Khan as framing per se. The discourse of each newspaper can be interpreted as the way the ouster of Khan and the subsequent events are put into perspective with a

larger story. This framing is done in terms of transitivity portrayal.

The research can be used in studying the role of language as a power instrument in political discourse, as the study can give insights to linguistics, media studies, and the political science. It identifies the role of press in the creation of challenged political identities and the overall implications of this on the democratic debate and media accountability in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Political identity in the media discourse is created through millions of linguistic decisions, including the word-names and adjectives which are used to identify the person, verbs which are used to describe his/her actions, and the general structure of the text. The major vehicle through which identities have textual performances is language. A major lesson of the literature is that minor lexical or grammatical variations can accrue to create unique identity of a political leader. As an example, the presence or absence of the frequent use of honorifics (Mr. Khan, Prime Minister Khan) or pejorative qualities (populist Khan, playboy-turned-politician) in a leader will make a difference to the perceptions of the audience. These are evaluative words that are usually linked to implicit evaluation. According to researchers such as Richardson (2007), naming strategies and descriptive attributions are used by newspapers to enable them place political actors in a positive or negative position. Names and titles are not neutral: calling a person a President or a Prime Minister projects his or her institutional credibility, but calling a person by the last name only (e.g., Sharif or Zardari with no title) makes him or her look more like a partisan than a statesman. This is precisely what Tehseem (2022) pointed out: when it comes to a political scandal, the government leaders were commonly addressed by office (e.g. the President or the Presidency when referring to Asif Ali Zardari), but the opposition leaders such as Nawaz Sharif or Imran Khan were called by name. This kind of reference difference forms a subtle construction of the identity of the government figures as institutional power figures and the opposition figures as individual politicians. This is equivalent to an ideological staging - perhaps giving the government the sense of formality and deemphasizing the official statue of anti-

governmental figures. The resultant effect is that it leads to the framing of an identity in which the President is the incumbent (an office representing the state) and the challenger is merely a human being, e.g. Nawaz or Imran, further highlighting the status of an outsider.

Along with naming, transitivity patterns are also an important part of identity construction. Transitivity options have subtle rhetorical inferences in the political news, where a leader can be credited with good deeds, or the bad effects can be exonerated. A groundbreaking experiment conducted by Umar Bello (2014) on news coverage on the Gaza War indicated that English and Arabic news outlets encoded bias using transitivity and other grammatical resources. As an example, when a paper wished to tone down the image of an ally, the use of agency deletion (with passive constructions or nominalizations) was typical: civilians were killed (it is unknown who did it, so blame is distributed) vs. Israel killed civilians (the blame is explicitly placed).

Equally, the linguistic study by Tehseem (2013) of the Pakistani journalistic discourse had found that transitivity could be used to foreground or background the role of an actor in an event, e.g., by foregrounding actions of the opponents and backgrounding actions of the proponents. Bigger ideological positioning strategies are also used in media discourse to put political actors in a particular light, which may be either good or bad camp in an implicit discourse. The notion of the ideological square introduced by Teun van Dijk, 1988 eloquently describes one of the strategies, which is focusing on highlighting the good things about us (the in-group or people who the outlet defends) and the bad things about them (the out-group or people who the outlet opposes), and downplaying our bad and their good.

Such bias in political media coverage can appear in the form of linguistic framing -the angle, the point of view in which stories are recounted. In contrast to overt editorializing, bias by framing is much less obvious: it includes the patterns of the description of events and people, the choice of the facts that should be accentuated, as well as the situation. Such decisions may have a tremendous impact on the perception of the population. Literature on political communication has remarked that with the inculcation of news frames, they end up acting as mental shortcuts among people (Entman, 1993;

Gamson, 1992) Entman (2007) has considered the framing bias in news as telling the public how to think about something, or who to think about, by making certain considerations more uppermost in their minds.

Theoretical approaches like the Systemic Functional Linguistics developed by Halliday perceives language as a social-semiotic system in which grammatical options bring about a meaning in the context. In its ideational metafunction, transitivity is the mapping of the expression of events and participants, giving us an agency distribution. In Critical Discourse Analysis, Fowler (1979) extends this and relates discourse with power and ideology. Fairclough (1995) emphasizes that media discourse is a social practice reflecting and constituting sociopolitical structures that calls on analysts to relate textual features to sociopolitical structure. CDA of media thus looks on lexical loading, transitivity and voice (naming or obscuring agents), presuppositions, implicatures, and framing. These discursive strategies metonymy, evaluative adjectives, active/passive constructions are placed in particular historical-political contexts, and the editorial positions influence the linguistic decisions, which is developed in the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) by Wodak.

Nonetheless, the review finds gaps in the literature that exist. Although a lot of literature examines certain political occurrences or temporary media representations, longitudinal research is required to examine how the mediated identity of Khan has developed over the years. Also, although the review has concentrated on the print media, more investigation should be carried out on the role of television, digital media and social media in identity construction, especially with the increasing popularity of the populist discourse and other media accounts. Audience reception is one more future area of interest since the research using surveys and interviews may offer empirical data on how such portrayals are internalized by media consumers.

On the whole, this literature review emphasizes that the active communication between language, ideology, and media discourse is the most effective way to construct political identities. It shows the significance of the critical analysis of the ways news media form narratives of leadership, legitimacy and opposition. With the ongoing changes in the media spaces and especially with the growth of digital

spaces, the proposed research is necessary to comprehend how the political identities are being constantly redefined and challenged in the light of the mass media.

Research Questions

Based on the above theoretical knowledge, the following research questions can guide the research, and they are as follows:

1. What transitivity patterns are journalists using to frame the identity of Imran Khan in print media discourses?
2. What are the benefits of the projected image in terms of how it assists journalists in ideologically constructing the political image of Imran Khan?
3. What is the way in which journalists translate socio-political realities of political leaders in their writings?

Research Objectives

The research aimed at studying the creation of Imran Khan as a political identity based on the English print media discourse by relying on the Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and Framing Theory. In particular, it will attempt to study linguistic pattern that forms the political persona of Khan, compares and contrasts the representations in Dawn and The News and, as a result, explores the implications on the perception of people and political speech acts.

Research Methodology

The study has a qualitative research design, namely, a discourse analytic approach, to research the way language is applied in newspaper writing to create the political identity of Imran Khan. The use of qualitative approach can be explained by the fact that the research questions are focused on the interpretation of meaning, context, and ideology in language that can best be investigated using an in-depth textual analysis and not quantitative measurements. It is aimed at providing a deeper, more complex insight into the role of grammatical decisions (patterns of transitivity, specifically) in media representations. It makes use of the SFL of Halliday to analyze it and CDA to interpret it critically.

Data Selection and Sampling Strategy

The corpus used in this study is based on the leading Pakistani newspapers Dawn and The News and discusses the period between April 2022 and March 2024, including the events of Imran Khan being ousted, legal proceedings, and the aftermath of the election. A purposive approach to sampling, the number of articles (exceeding 90) that were selected and included central reference to Khan were a combination of both editorial and news articles with special consideration to the headlines and lead of the article as a degree of framing power. This strategy was aimed at covering the major events during which his public identity was negotiated most effectively, which allowed to concentrate on the linguistic tools forming his political identity. By focusing on these informative cases in outlets and time, it was possible to make significant comparisons and observations about any discursive change.

Corpus Preparation and Data Collection

The data collection included accessing news headlines/leads and editorials at Dawn and The News which were gathered in the corpus and annotated in UAM CorpusTool systematically through the transitivity framework of Halliday. To analyze the data the analysis was done in two integrated steps: the first step was to map transitivity patterns to answer RQ1; the second step involved a critical interpretation that used CDA and framing theory to relate the patterns to ideology and power to answer RQ2 and RQ3. The qualitative, interpretive analysis used count descriptive process and representative excerpts in order to show what constructions of identity were made using linguistic choices. Through triangulation of SFL, CDA, and framing theory, the study systematically links linguistic form to social meaning, which is methodologically a blueprint to the study of how the creation of political identity is constructed in news discourse.

Theoretical Framework: Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), invented by M.A.K. Halliday considers the nature of language as a social semiotic system of building meaning in a situation. The key of this is ideational metafunction that is concerned with the way language describes experiences and events in the world. This role is achieved by using the transitivity system which is a grammatical model

that breaks down the clauses to show a mini reality by encoding a Process (the action, state, or event), its Participants (who or what is involved) and related Circumstances (details of time, place, or manner). Transitivity analysis as deciphered by researchers such as Thompson provides the answer to the question: Who does what to whom, under what circumstances? In such a way, the analysis of these patterns gives good insight on how the texts, including the news discourse, construct and represent reality in a systematic way.

Transitivity system by Halliday identifies six types of processes and each process has unique roles of participants. Material processes refer to events or actions (e.g. Khans campaign), and they have an actor and a goal. Sensing (e.g., The public believed his claim) is covered by mental processes, which have a sense and a phenomenon. Relational processes attribute or define identities (e.g., the opposition leader is Khan), the former is an attribute or identified and the latter an identifier. Communication occurs through verbal processes (e.g. the journalist said Khan was victorious) with a sayer, usually a verbiage, and the receiver. Behavioral processes explain psychological or physiological behavior (e.g., Khan laughed), and they are focused on a behavior. Lastly, there are existential processes which confirm existence (e.g., There was a commotion) and point to an existent. Both structures provide a certain grammatical prism in which to view reality.

Transitivity analysis is a systematic procedure that involves the discovery of the processes, participants or actors and optional circumstance in clauses as a means to determine how a text captures events and relationships. In every grammatical option agency and responsibility are distributed and it is a question of who does what and to whom. When using this framework in media discourse to clauses that contain a figure such as Imran Khan, one would have seen how he is represented, whether he is an active agent or a passive actor, what actions are attributed to him, and what situational context he is set in. This approach gives an accurate prism of analyzing the building of political identity with the help of language.

As an example, when the material process clauses usually include Imran Khan as the actor (e.g., "Khan led a protest), then he is grammatically described as an active and firm leader. On the other

hand, when he is constantly put in the center (e.g., “Khan was ousted), the language constructs him as passive or something done to him. In like manner, attributing roles of the sayer in verbal processes or the carrier in relational processes in such a way influence perceptions of his agency and qualities attributed to it. The power of these minor but compounding grammatical decisions of transitivity analysis are that they affect the reader in the impression of his authority, victimhood, or efficacy.

The decisions of transitivity are explained, which are supported by the critical linguistics, to be based on underlying ideologies, not on neutral description. News is actively transmitted through the systematic manipulation of grammar (i.e. agentless passives or nominalizations) to blur responsibility or to put into the spotlight specific actors, as shown by Fowler et al. (1979/1991) to shape impression without any overt commentary. In the example of Imran Khan, using the transitivity analysis, one can divide his linguistic construction, which is composed of processes and roles of his participants and place them in categories described to him. It investigates how often such outlets as Dawn and The News portray him as either an active actor in material processes (a reformer who takes radical actions) or as a passive object (a besieged character acted upon). Such grammatical decisions, based on the consideration of grammar as a tool of constructing reality as argued by Halliday, add up to the creation of a particular image of his leadership, agency, and character in terms of the discourse in the public.

Findings

Form a thorough analysis of Dawn and The News International, 2022-2024, it becomes obvious that the discursive construction of Imran Khan as a political personality has been created by providing direct quotes and quantitative evidence. One of the main themes that present him as a cult leader and populist demagogue is that both articles use terms such as cult leader and hero-worshipped to describe the fanatical, frequently unreasonable adherence of

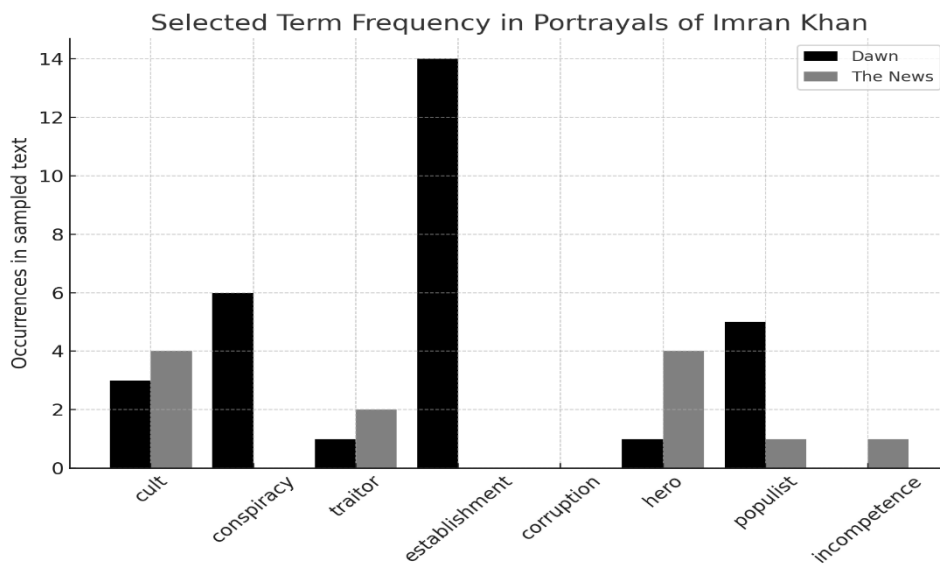
his followers. At the same time, the coverage methodically destroys his narrative of saviour by opposing his high-minded vows, like eliminating corruption, with the documented facts of unfulfilled promises and political inability. This criticism is pushed using irony and straight protests, to make Khan seem like an extremist, whose own rhetoric of transformation failed miserably. Although some subtlety is observed, the general commentary sets him as a divisive populist whose legacy is characterized less by actual achievement than by myth.

The comparison indicates that the role of Imran Khan in Dawn and The News International is always focused on his application of purposely divisive and moralistic populist discourse. This discourse is not only constructed as a political difference, but as a structural way of dividing the body politic into irreconcilable camps and as is presented in *The News as a crusade between right and wrong...a war between patriots... and traitors*. Both sources scrupulously record the propensity of Khan to present sophisticated political disputes as simple binary choices where he was the pro-Khan and his adversaries were the pro-traitors with the fence sitters being just animals.

The definite, dehumanizing treatment of the vocabulary of Khan and his supporters is also a critical focus of the coverage. Such rhetoric that involves calling opponents stooges and Mir Jafars is being emulated as symptomatic of a bigger discursive pattern. The thematic focus on polarization is visually reinforced by the fact that as Figure 4.1 shows, comparing the frequency of the words selected in the sampled coverage, the words that refer to conspiracy, establishment, and divisive terms such as the word traitor take the center stage. The newspapers take such rhetorical patterns as the very foundations of a weakening democracy, as Dawn warns of the propagation of hate, foul language use and slander and The News trumpets the tendency of the use of obnoxious commentaries in his camp as a sign of the fascist in Imran.

Figure 1

Occurrence of terms chosen in the description of Imran Khan (sampled articles). The coverage of Dawn (black bars) emphasizes the words such as “establishment” and “populist,” whereas The News (grey bars) frequently refers to the word “corrupt” and “hero,” but both highlight “cult” and divisive rhetoric (e.g., traitor) are also emphasized by both of them (e.g., cult).



Moreover, the newspapers will position themselves as overtly opposite to such a populist narrative. They put the confrontational style of the Khan in the context of Dawn, that he used to stir up xenophobic nationalism; to get religious feeling going; to make Pakistani against Pakistani, and so forth, in a negative perspective of political mobilization. In such a way and to the extent to which the linguistic patterns in Figure 4.1 confirm it, Dawn and The News are playing a major ideological role: they are actively delegitimising the populist rhetoric of Khan, by reminding them that (as Dawn is suggesting) reason and rationality should be prioritised over and above social practices (such as rhetoric) and by stating that (as warned by The News) politics can be nothing but binary thinking, which makes his rhetoric a direct danger to the health of democracy.

Transitivity Analysis of Imran Khan’s Representation in Dawn and The News

This analysis used the framework created by Halliday to analyze the types of processes that were involved with Imran Khan in Dawn and The News. It centred attention on the manner in which his image was determined by the repetition of certain processes, including material action, verbal communication using words, and relational attribution of character. This approach demonstrated how his discursive identity of political identity is constructed with the help of language.

The tabulation of the types of processes (Material, Verbal, Relational, Mental, Behavioral, Existential processes) in the clauses that refer to Imran Khan was made using the annotated corpus of both Dawn and The News. The frequency of each type of process in the two sub-corpora is summarized in Table 4.1 below in raw numbers of all the clauses involving Imran Khan. This provides a numerical profile of what types of processes are most salient in the creation of the image of Khan in both newspapers.

Table 1

Distribution of Process Types in Imran Khan Coverage (Dawn vs The News)

Process Type	Dawn (freq.)	The News (freq.)
Material (action events)	117	22
Mental (internal thoughts)	18	9
Relational (being/attribution)	27	12
Verbal (speech acts)	35	9
Behavioral (physiological acts)	0	0
Existential (existence/occurrence)	1	1

As Table 4.1. and Figure 4.1 show, material processes (clauses of doing/action) are the most frequent in both newspapers' discourse about Imran Khan. However, there are notable differences: *Dawn* employs slightly more material process clauses about Khan (about 40% of all clauses) than *The News* (around 36%). In contrast, *The News* uses relatively more verbal process clauses (nearly 29% vs *Dawn*'s 20%), indicating *The News* more often presents Khan in the context of saying or being quoted. *Dawn* also shows a higher proportion of relational process clauses (nearly 27% vs *The News*' 21%), suggesting *Dawn* more frequently attaches descriptive labels or identities to Khan. The proportions of mental, behavioral, and existential processes are comparatively lower in both corpora, though *The News* has a modestly higher share of mental processes than *Dawn*. These quantitative patterns already hint at different stylistic and ideological emphases: for example, *Dawn*'s higher use of material and relational clauses may paint Khan as an active doer of deeds and as a figure defined by certain attributes, while *The News*' greater use of verbal clauses might reflect more coverage of what Khan says (or what is said about him) in their narratives.

Material processes – physical or concrete actions – are the most common way Imran Khan is represented, especially in *Dawn*. The *Dawn* articles repeatedly cast Khan as the Actor (or sometimes Goal) of tangible actions in the political arena. For example, *Dawn* describes how “Imran Khan worked relentlessly for decades at self-promotion”

“Captain Khan has invented the cock-and-bull story of an American conspiracy to oust him”.

The reliance of material processes in clauses where Imran Khan appears to be the initiator or receiver of the activity depict him as a main living and moving power of the political story, which is usually presented as the cause of the subsequent turmoil or transformation. This figure of speech is in line with the editorial tone, which often tends to be critical of Dawn, and which is also rather systematic in presenting the political crisis in terms of his agency and the effects it produces on him. Material actions appear, for instance, when summarizing his tenure: “Over the past three-odd years, Khan made some things worse, [a] few better. He launched a remarkably ill-advised amnesty programme... He delayed an inevitable IMF programme...”. However,

the slightly lower frequency and prominence of material process usage in *The News* suggests that while Khan's actions are acknowledged, the paper places relatively more weight on interpreting his motives and character

Both newspapers frequently employ verbal processes (processes of saying) to represent Imran Khan's statements and rhetoric, though *Dawn* does so in absolute terms more often (35 instances vs 9 in *The News*). Quoted remarks and reported speech are a key part of constructing Khan's persona, since much of his political style involves bold claims and slogans. In *Dawn*, Khan is often the Sayer in verbal clauses, with his pronouncements featured or critiqued. For example, *Dawn* highlights his vows and slogans: “Never again, he said, would Pakistan see the dirty politics of horse trading, and “Khan would ‘commit suicide but never return to the IMF” – a dramatic promise he made. These verbal processes are made to highlight the rhetorical fact of what Khan is: Dawn is there to reveal him as a person who talks in high terms (often unrealistically) – promising things, accusing conspiracies, and naming enemies. By frequently quoting his words (“in his words, [they are] mere animals”, for instance), *Dawn* allows Khan's own rhetoric to illustrate his confrontational and populist style, while often framing it with skepticism. *The News* uses verbal processes in a similar way, though slightly less often, to report what Khan says and how he says it. One *News* article notes that “Khan has called out the Western world for dictating to Pakistan”, portraying himself as the only one with the courage to say “Absolutely Not” to foreign pressure. Such instances show *The News* depicting Khan's speech acts (calling out, telling, demanding) to underline his narrative as a rabble-rouser and propagator of a specific “anti-establishment” narrative. The use of verbal processes in both outlets highlights Khan's role as a *communicator* – either as a demagogue stirring supporters (as *The News* suggests with terms like “master narrator”) or as a populist making lofty promises (*Dawn*'s angle). In sum, verbal process clauses contribute to a portrayal of Imran Khan as a leader defined by his words.

Relational processes (processes of being and attribution) are more prominent in *The News* coverage than in *Dawn*'s. These clauses assign qualities or identities to Imran Khan, effectively telling readers *what he is* rather than *what he does*.

The News frequently uses relational descriptors to characterize Khan's persona and legacy. For example, it states that

"When the dust settles... Khan is likely to be seen as one who has, sadly, left a legacy of sheer incompetency, blatant lies, [and] blame game".

In this case a relational clause ("Khan is likely to be perceived as...") characterizes him in terms of the *outcome/quality of his life - the legacy he leaves*. In another article, *The News* literally describes him as a cult figure, a hero-worshipped figure to his supporters and as not a politician in the more normal sense, making a comparison with Trump (relatively identifying Khan with a cult-leader status). This is a tendency of *The News* to assess and label him, in terms of personality and symbolic identity. It frequently projects onto him attributes such as authoritarian, narcissistic or divisive, e.g. *it has been said that his politics has always been toxic and that it has a legacy of social division*. These attributions of relations can be used to build a story about what Khan is in the political arena (*a polarizing politician, a populist hero/villain, etc.*). *Dawn*, however, makes less use of relational processes, though when used they are keen. In the aftermath of his ouster, *Dawn* op-eds describe Khan through attributes: "*Imran Khan... is dangerous for Pakistan*" due to his "lust for power," or "*even with his shortcomings, [he] is clean as a whistle*" in terms of financial corruption – a sarcastic juxtaposition implying he's seen as honest compared to other politicians. *Dawn* overall prefers to *show* Khan's nature via actions and quotes rather than *tell* via labels. The fewer relational clauses in *Dawn* means it less often simply declares "Khan is X"; however, when it does (e.g. calling him "*a cult leader... a symbol of resistance*" in later pieces), it is usually to underpin a critical point. In summary, *The News* employs relational processes more directly to define and characterize Imran Khan's identity, whereas *Dawn* uses them more sparingly or ironically. The fact that *The News* is using overt attribution and *Dawn* is using connoting features in its descriptions implies that the former and the latter are using opposite methods of description.

There is also mental processes (*processes of consciousness -thinking, hopeful feeling, perceiving*) where *The News* is proportionally ahead of *Dawn*. *The News* tends to give explanations to the inner world or motivations of Imran Khan, what he

wanted to think, what he wanted to or did not want to realize (or tried to realize). This offers some interpretation to its coverage, implying the way that the mind of Khan operates or where he went astray. An example is that *The News* reports that Khan could not control himself to dissolve the assemblies when his loss was most likely to occur, i. e. he was not able to avoid acting on his impulse (mental decision-making process to material action). and it is mentioned that Khan was not able to listen to good advisers (he was not able to process advice). This kind of use presents *The News* with a portrait of the way of thinking of Khan: *impulsive, hasty, or blind to personal ends (narcissism, zeal as a populist)* such that he misperceives reality. In comparison, *Dawn* makes much fewer mental process clauses on behalf of Khan. *Dawn* rarely penetrates into what Khan believes or feels - except when informing about what he has said he believes (e.g. "*Khan now believes in an American conspiracy against him*): which is often reported through a verbal process: (*he said there is a conspiracy*). One of them could be the fact that *Dawn* only adheres to what can be seen and heard but does not dare to make assumptions about what can be thought (according to a more reportorial or analytical style of writing). Articles in *One Dawn* did express the question, *Is Imran Khan following the example of Hitler... or are there defects in his personality...?* but then made the case that it must be explained by political choice and not individual psyche. This implies that *Dawn* was not willing to narrow analysis to the dispositions within the company. Overall, *The News* uses the mechanisms of mental rests to critically evaluate the decision-making and motivation of Khan (which continuously points to miscalculations or self-delusions) to create a leader with a poor inner logic or a leader that is motivated by hubris. *Dawn* relies much less on mental processes in describing the point of view of Khan and more on outward behavior, and when mental verbs are used, they typically are described in quotations (*Khan thought X or dreamed of Y*) or are directed at explaining why he acted in a certain way out of an external perspective. It is also another indication of the more interpretive, evaluative position of *The News* compared to a more descriptive/narrative position of *Dawn*.

Framing Imran Khan: Entman's Four Functions in Dawn and The News

In addition to the extent of analyzing the clauses, it is important to look at the way that each of the newspapers presents the entire story of Imran Khan. It is examined, using the model of framing presented by Entmann (1993), how the story of Imran Khan is constructed by Dawn and The News using four major functions of framing in the context of transitivity: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. Both the newspapers reported the same political news, but the manner in which they put the news into perspective that is, what they identified as the main problem, who or what they blamed, the judgment they taught and the solutions they offered or the outcome they gave is an indication of the ideological leanings of the two newspapers.

The concept of problem definition proposed by Entman involves the way that the media names what the root problem or conflict is within a particular situation. Within the coverage of Imran Khan, Dawn consistently presents the issue as a challenge to the democratic stability and institutional integrity. Within the context of Dawn, the fundamental issue that is typically featured is that the actions and the politics of Imran Khan is a threat to the Pakistani democracy or social peace. As an example, in the case of the overthrow of Khan in April 2022, Dawn described the case not only as a normal change of authority but as a mandatory action in order to prevent a greater crisis. The editorial of Hoodbhoy takes the problem to be the lust of power of Khan and cult politics that makes him dangerous to Pakistan - implicitly, the problem is that the instability, confrontation, and division caused by the individual demagoguery of Khan needs to be controlled or eliminated so that normalcy can be restored. The News tends to define the problem differently and puts more emphasis on the failures of governance and political confrontation and division as a whole, which should be controlled or eliminated so that the normalcy will be restored. The problem in the framing in The News is often the economic and political turmoil Pakistan is going through and Imran Khan is one of the main actors in all that turmoil. As one example, in April 2022, The News editorial coverage presented the immediate issue as a political crisis (actually one headline is

called The political crisis, dated April 13, 2022, according to dataset) in which a sitting PM was subjected to a no-confidence vote. It was the constitutional stalemate and the resultant instability that was in focus, not each and every personality of Khan. The problem of economic malaise was also preempted. Dawn framed the removal of Khan as a necessary evil to prevent a greater crisis, and the problem in question was to protect democracy against his leadership. On the other hand, The News presented it as a solution to a political crisis and instantly switched to the next problems, namely, economic collapse and structural instability, thus presenting the problem as the restoration of order and confronting inherited challenges.

After establishing a problem, causal interpretation is used to establish what or whom is being blamed, or the cause attached to the problem. Dawn tends to pin the blame on the causal level and on Imran Khan himself and his close circle. In case the issue is the instability of democracy, Dawn would have seen the issue in the actions of Khan himself: his confrontational politics, unconstitutional games, or his unwillingness to play by the rules of democracy. To give an example, the no-confidence saga was followed by Dawn editorials describing the effort to evade the vote (a botched dissolution of assembly) by Khan as the cause of a constitutional crisis. They emphasize that a foreign conspiracy story was a source of instability that Khan created as a reason to use to save his throne and in effect, he is blaming himself that he created the dispute and intentionally ignited. In the News, causality is allocated more broadly. Although it does definitely accuse Imran Khan of a multitude of things (such as policy mismanagement and political decisions), it also points to structural and external factors. As an illustration, Kamila Hyat argues that the support of the ever-powerful establishment was one of the major factors that contributed to the rise (and fall) of Khan after which it withdrew. That way, causally, it is the military withdrawal of support that caused him to fall as opposed to his faults but a more complicated system of causality is presented in The News with references to Khan (as an action of the institution, other entities, etc.). This contrast is based on the ideological stances: Dawn makes Khan guilty and holding the primary responsibility of the mess; The News makes him a significant character but as a part of a system.

Moral evaluation is categorically or unspoken evaluation of the parties and their acts- in essence telling the audience who is right or wrong, good or bad. In this case, the ethical assessment of Imran Khan by Dawn is mainly negative and critical. Dawn makes sure to portray Khan in a negative moral light through either the use of explicit labels or the choice of facts. As it was mentioned in the relational analysis, Dawn employs such terms as dangerous, and there are also comparisons with demagogues or cult leaders, which have a strong moral connotation (deceit, lust of power, lack of democratic mind). Hoodbhoy article even places Khan on a list with Trump, Hitler, Stalin, Mao on the topic of lust of power, which carries the implication of absolute power in the hands of a person who might wield it very abusively, and in this case, the News article is less scathing and more disappointed, almost to the point of rationalizing it with a hint of exoneration. It recognizes that pledge that earned the people trust, but regrets his perceived moral and professional incompetence, in which scandals never shatter the faith of people, a remark that implicitly criticizes the irrationality of his supporters, not to mention his wasted talent. The News manages to strike the right balance between criticizing and referencing the flaws of its competitors and of the establishment, which makes it not appear like Khan is an incarnation of evil, but like another casualty of a broken political system. In such a way, the moral judgment by Dawn means Imran Khan as essentially dangerous, criticizing his motives, when The News takes him as either incompetent or naive, and his motivation is the overwhelming importance of action rather than evil. This is a character-based reproach by Dawn as compared to a more capability-based reproach by The News.

Lastly, treatment recommendation entails what are the proposed solutions or actions to be undertaken to resolve the determined problems. The Imran Khan issue as suggested by the Dawn treatment is basically political and institutional rejection- to marginalize Khan and strengthen democratic norms, i.e. to encourage all political parties to follow rules and Constitution, adopt democracy and pluralism, restrain aggression and spread of hate. It suggests that one should get rid of the disruptive leader and restore the order to the system via constitutionalism and civility. Generally, Dawn proposes a reestablishment of normality by means of legal responsibility, intensification of the

parliament, and preservation of an order of rules. This is in line with its moral position of eliminating what it pitches as a divisive force so that as projected in its editorials, the nation can move out of the divisions he brought about. The News treatment recommendations are more subtle and diversified than those of Dawn, regardless of reliance on reconciliation, systemic reform, and pragmatic government as opposed to having political disownment. Whereas the prescription of Dawn to sidelines Khan in order to reestablish constitutional order, The News calls upon not to use a politics of retribution but to stabilize the economy so that the country will be put on track- and therefore, weakening the appeal of Khan via governance and not isolation. It provides direct advice to Khan to change his strategy and establish alliances and makes reform a two-way process. Unlike Dawn focusing on legal containment, The News focuses on dialogue, electoral reforms and compromise to mend polarization and cautions that outright bans on popular parties can be counterproductive. In this way, where Dawn tries to pull away, The News tries to pull away the crisis by trying to correct the system in general and engaging in political participation.

Convergences and Divergences

Both Dawn and The News portray Imran Khan as a divisive political leader however there exists a lot of discursive differences created by the editorial ideologies of that editorials. Dawn popularizes a delegitimizing frame, referred to as an existential threat to the democratic stability assisted by the alarmist metaphors and negative attributions of relations. Instead, The News adopts a more contextualising frame and situates Khan within the realm of broader dysfunction in the system and strikes a balance between criticism and acknowledgement of his political popularity. The signs of this ideological difference can be observed in the roles of framing: the characterization of the problems, the explanation of the causal relations, the assessment of the moral nature and the recommendations of the treatment. Therefore, the discourse of Dawn attempts to put the political identity of Khan in the background, but The News attempt to place it in a subtle story of institutional and governance malfunction.

Public Implication and Implication in the Media Discourse

These conflicting media images of Imran Khan contribute to political polarization and the creation of the discourse among the Pakistani population to a great extent. The delegitimizing framing of Dawn conditions its audience to regard Khan as a destabilizing factor to democratic institutions, in contrast to the more contextual one of The News, which creates a clear but critical image in centrist readers. These conflicting accounts not only further informational echo chambers, but actively shape the conditions of political discussion: raising constitutionalism versus governance levels of discussion and allowing political actors to put the process of mediation in media coverage to strategic use. Accordingly, these discontinuous representations undermine shared confidence in conventional media and internalize the mediated identity of Khan as a defining point of reference in the wider civic discourses regarding leadership, populism and democratic security.

Limitations

The research has a number of limitations. To begin with, the intended introduction of the Urdu-language daily Jang was not done so because of the complexities of translations and annotations, and thus valuable information about the possible cross-linguistic differences in the representation was not provided. Second, it is purposely sampled, but the

amount of the corpus is small in comparison with the overall production of the chosen newspapers, which can limit the extrapolation of the patterns observed. Lastly, the analysis is narrowed down to the print media, omitting the powerful sphere of television and online news where the story of Imran Khan is just as much, perhaps more, opposed and fought over. Such limitations indicate future research opportunities towards more thorough research.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that language is not a neutral medium but one that constitutes politics. Pakistani English print media discursively presents Imran Khan as a charismatic and destabilizing populist through transitivity patterns, appealing to the resources of appraisal, and presenting him as an individual within the frames of political discourse using framing strategies. Comparison of Dawn and The News shows that they both acknowledge his polarizing role in their coverage and differ in their frame of ideologies, which are manifestations of wider tensions over democracy, governance, and populism in Pakistan. In conclusion, the paper highlights the strength of media discourse to form political identity. The way in which newspapers build leaders is of key importance in the context of polarization and institutional vulnerability not only to popular opinion but the course of democratic politics in Pakistan.

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