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Framing and Ideology: A Critical Discourse Analysis of News Media Representation in Political Crises in Pakistan

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Chronicle**Abstract****Article history****Received:** May 2, 2025**Received in the revised format:** May 27, 2025**Accepted:** June 20, 2025**Available online:** July 10, 2025

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This study examines how news media in Pakistan frame political crises through ideologically biased narratives and how these frames influence public perception and trust. Using a mixed-method approach, critical discourse analysis was employed to uncover linguistic strategies that shape partisan narratives in media texts, while a quantitative survey of 400 respondents assessed the impact of political affiliation on media trust and frame acceptance. The quantitative results showed a significant positive correlation between political affiliation and media trust ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that audiences tend to trust media outlets aligned with their political beliefs. Additionally, media literacy was found to significantly moderate this relationship ($\beta = -0.32$, $p < 0.01$), reducing the influence of biased framing. The discourse analysis revealed consistent use of linguistic devices that reinforce partisan narratives and marginalize opposing voices. These findings highlight the critical role of media framing in shaping political discourse and public opinion, with implications for media practitioners, policymakers, and educators aiming to foster balanced communication and democratic resilience. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the interplay between language, ideology, and audience reception in Pakistan's politically charged media environment.

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Keywords: Media framing, Political crises, Ideological bias, Audience trust, Media literacy, Pakistan.

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INTRODUCTION

Political crises around the world have increasingly become focal points of intense media scrutiny, shaping public opinion and political discourse. Studies indicate that over 70% of citizens across democratic countries rely on news media as their primary source of political information (Norris, 2017). However, media coverage during such crises often reflects ideological biases that influence how events are presented and interpreted (Fowler, 1991). Globally, this framing of political crises affects electoral outcomes, social cohesion, and trust in democratic institutions (Cable, 2013). For instance, research from the United States and Europe shows that media framing can reinforce partisan divides and contribute to political polarization (Norris, 2017). When we look at developing and emerging democracies, the challenges become even more complex. Countries like India, Brazil, and South Africa face heightened media polarization amid political crises, with media often aligned with specific political factions (Baker et al., 2013; Bednarek, 2006; Bednarek & Cable, 2012; Bell, 1991; Cotter, 2010a, 2010b; Molek-Kozakowska, 2013). In these contexts, media framing not only reflects political biases but also exacerbates social tensions and undermines democratic processes (Baker et al., 2008; Machin & Mayr, 2012). Pakistan, a country marked by frequent political upheaval and a fragmented media landscape, exhibits similar patterns. According to the Pakistan Media Survey (2021), 68% of the population

depends on electronic and print media for political news, yet the trust in media is deeply divided along political lines. Studies have highlighted how partisan media outlets in Pakistan frame political crises to advance specific agendas, often sidelining balanced and neutral coverage (Baker et al., 2008). Central to understanding these issues is the concept of media framing, first systematically defined by Lecheler and de Vreese (2013) as the process by which certain aspects of reality are selected and highlighted to promote particular interpretations. Media framing acts as a lens through which political crises are viewed, influencing not only public understanding but also political behavior (Foos & Bischof, 2021; Maier et al., 2022; Peyton, 2020; Slothuus & Bisgaard, 2020). In Pakistan, where ideological divisions are stark, framing becomes a powerful tool in shaping narratives and public opinion during political turmoil (Foos & Bischof, 2021; Maier et al., 2022; Slothuus & Bisgaard, 2020). The way media frame political crises can either deepen polarization or foster constructive dialogue, depending on how balanced and inclusive these frames are.

If these framing practices remain ideologically biased and unchallenged, they risk intensifying social fragmentation and mistrust in political institutions globally and locally. For countries like Pakistan, where political stability is fragile, biased framing can lead to misinformation, heightened tensions, and weakened democratic engagement (Nelson, Clawson, et al., 1997; Sniderman & Theriault, 2004). Similarly, on a global scale, persistent media polarization contributes to eroding social trust and increasing political extremism. Within the media industry itself, unaddressed framing biases reduce journalistic credibility and undermine the role of media as a democratic watchdog.

Addressing these challenges requires understanding the roles of ideological influence, audience political identity, and media literacy in shaping media consumption and trust. Ideological influence affects how media outlets construct narratives, often tailoring frames to align with partisan objectives (Ash et al., 2023; Djourelouva, 2023; Spirig, 2024). Audience political identity governs the acceptance and trust of these frames, with people tending to favor information congruent with their beliefs (Taber & Lodge, 2006). Meanwhile, media literacy has emerged as a critical factor that can empower audiences to critically assess biased content and mitigate polarization (Broockman & Kalla, 2022; Druckman et al., 2012; Taber & Lodge, 2006). For example, studies in democratic societies demonstrate that media literacy interventions help citizens recognize framing techniques and reduce susceptibility to misinformation. In Pakistan, enhancing media literacy could similarly promote more discerning media consumption, thereby fostering healthier political dialogue and reducing partisan divides.

While these factors individually contribute to addressing framing biases, their combined analysis offers a more comprehensive solution. Previous research often treats ideological influence, audience identity, or media literacy in isolation. However, their interaction shapes both the production and reception of media frames during political crises. Critically, despite growing scholarship on media framing, limited studies have integrated linguistic analysis of media content with empirical audience data in the Pakistani context. This gap restricts understanding of how ideological motives in media discourse interact with audience perceptions and political identities. This study, therefore, aims to fill this gap by employing a mixed-method approach that combines critical discourse analysis with quantitative surveys of audience perceptions in Pakistan. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on either textual analysis or audience attitudes separately, this research integrates both to provide a holistic view

of the framing process and its reception. Additionally, the study incorporates the roles of ideological influence, political identity, and media literacy, creating a novel conceptual framework for understanding media dynamics in political crises. Preliminary results indicate that media framing in Pakistan is significantly ideologically biased, aligning with political interests, and that audience trust is strongly mediated by political affiliation. Moreover, media literacy emerges as a moderating factor that reduces the acceptance of biased frames, suggesting a practical avenue for intervention.

These findings contribute to academic knowledge by bridging discourse analysis and audience reception studies, while offering valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and media practitioners aiming to strengthen democratic communication. For instance, promoting media literacy programs could help mitigate polarization and enhance critical engagement with news content, improving democratic resilience in Pakistan and similar contexts. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: the next section reviews relevant literature and theory underpinning the study, followed by the methodology detailing data collection and analysis procedures. Subsequent sections present the study's results, discuss their implications, and conclude with recommendations for policy and future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media Framing

Media framing refers to the way news outlets present and organize information, emphasizing certain aspects of an event while downplaying or omitting others. It shapes how audiences understand and interpret political crises (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Druckman, 2001; Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013; Nelson, Clawson, et al., 1997; Nelson, Oxley, et al., 1997; Slothuus, 2008). Seminal works such as Nelson, Oxley, et al. (1997) define framing as "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues, and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation." Framing is central to political communication because it influences not only awareness but also attitudes and behavioral intentions (Ash et al., 2023; Pederson, 2023; Riesmeyer et al., 2019; Spirig, 2024). Several studies have demonstrated that framing can alter public opinion by directing attention to specific causes, moral evaluations, or recommended solutions (Druckman & Leeper, 2012; Durante & Knight, 2012; Ladd & Lenz, 2009). This makes media framing a critical variable for understanding the dynamics of political crises coverage, especially in highly polarized contexts.

In Pakistan's media landscape, where political allegiances and ideological polarization are strong, framing takes on added significance.

Importance of Media Framing in Political Crisis Contexts

The importance of media framing lies in its capacity to influence public trust, political engagement, and democratic outcomes. Studies have shown that during political crises, framing shapes how citizens interpret the legitimacy of actors involved and the urgency of issues (McDougall, 2019). For example, Slothuus (2010); Slothuus and de Vreese (2010) demonstrate that episodic frames focusing on individual events tend to reduce support for systemic reforms, whereas thematic frames increase citizens' attention to broader political contexts. This distinction is crucial when news media

report on crises, as the frame can sway public support toward or against political factions.

In the Pakistani context, where political crises are frequent and media channels are often aligned with different political interests, framing can contribute to public polarization and mistrust (Ash et al., 2023; McDougall, 2019; Peyton, 2020). The portrayal of political crises through biased frames can undermine social cohesion and democratic deliberation, as shown by (Foos & Bischof, 2021). Therefore, understanding media framing's role is essential to addressing challenges of misinformation and political instability in Pakistan.

The independent variables relevant to this study include **Ideology, Political Affiliation, and Media Ownership**. Ideology influences the choice and construction of frames by news outlets, as editorial policies and journalists' orientations often align with specific political beliefs. Political affiliation shapes audience reception of frames, with individuals tending to accept media messages consistent with their pre-existing views and rejecting opposing narratives (Bartels, 1993; Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013). Media ownership, particularly when concentrated in partisan hands, can reinforce selective framing and agenda-setting (Lau et al., 2020).

Missing Link and Literature Gap

Despite extensive work on framing and ideology, a key missing link exists in integrating linguistic discourse analysis with empirical audience perception data in Pakistan's political crisis coverage. Most studies focus either on textual analysis of media frames or on surveys of public opinion separately, without bridging the two to show how ideological framing linguistically manifests and simultaneously influences audience trust. Moreover, many prior studies overlook the nuanced interactions between media producers' ideological motives and audience political identities.

Additionally, research on framing in Pakistan often centers on general political reporting, lacking focused examination of specific crises and how framing shifts during such events. The dynamic interplay of framing, ideology, and public perception during acute political crises remains underexplored. This gap limits comprehensive understanding of media's role in shaping political realities and polarization in Pakistan.

Based on these gaps, the problem addressed by this study is: How do ideologically driven media frames during political crises in Pakistan linguistically construct narratives, and how do these frames interact with audience political affiliations to shape perceptions and trust? This study aims to fill the gap by combining critical discourse analysis with quantitative audience surveys to provide a holistic view of media influence during political crises.

Theoretical Framework: Framing Theory and Selective Exposure Theory

This study is grounded primarily in **Framing Theory** (Entman, 1993), which explains how media selects and emphasizes certain aspects of reality to promote particular interpretations. Framing Theory helps analyze the media's role in shaping political discourse by investigating the construction and function of frames during crises. Complementing this, **Selective Exposure Theory** (Stroud, 2011) informs the understanding of audience behavior, highlighting that individuals

Hypothesis 1 (H1): News media coverage of political crises in Pakistan is framed in ideologically biased ways that emphasize partisan narratives.

The framing of political crises in news media is rarely neutral; instead, it is deeply influenced by ideological biases embedded within media institutions. Entman's (1993) framing theory highlights how media selectively emphasize aspects of events to promote particular interpretations, often reflecting political agendas. In Pakistan, several studies suggest that media outlets align with specific political parties or ideological camps, which shapes their crisis coverage (Ash et al., 2023; Djourelova, 2023; Grossman et al., 2022; Spirig, 2024). This ideological slant manifests through linguistic choices, narrative structuring, and selective emphasis, which reinforce partisan perspectives and marginalize opposing voices. However, critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995) reveals that such framing is not merely a reflection of bias but an active construction of political reality.

While global studies confirm the presence of ideological framing (Bechtel et al., 2015), Pakistan's polarized media environment intensifies this effect, where media become actors in political contests rather than neutral observers. Yet, some scholars argue that economic pressures and audience segmentation also shape framing, complicating the ideological explanation (Durante & Knight, 2012; Pederson, 2023). Despite these nuances, the balance of evidence suggests that ideological bias predominates in crisis framing, making this hypothesis plausible. Testing it through discourse analysis combined with empirical data will clarify the extent and mechanisms of such bias in Pakistan's media.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Audience political affiliation significantly influences trust in and acceptance of media frames during political crises.

Selective exposure theory posits that individuals prefer media content congruent with their pre-existing beliefs, reinforcing ideological echo chambers (Broockman & Kalla, 2022). Empirical studies across contexts find that political affiliation strongly shapes media trust and interpretation (Ash et al., 2023; Djourelova, 2023; Spirig, 2024). In Pakistan, this dynamic is intensified by pronounced political polarization and identity-based politics, which lead audiences to favor media aligned with their ideological camps (Durante & Knight, 2012; Pederson, 2023). This selective trust affects how audiences accept or reject frames during political crises, influencing not only perception but political engagement and polarization.

However, some researchers caution against oversimplifying this relationship, noting that media literacy, issue salience, and cross-cutting identities can mediate selective exposure effects (Grossman et al., 2022; "The Implications of Instructors' Digital Literacy Skills for their Attitudes to Teach Critical Media Literacy in EFL Classrooms," 2022). Moreover, growing access to social media introduces complexity by exposing audiences to diverse viewpoints, although algorithms often reinforce filter bubbles (. Nevertheless, given Pakistan's political context and traditional media's influence, political affiliation remains a dominant factor in shaping media trust during crises. Investigating this relationship quantitatively can validate these theoretical claims and illuminate audience-media dynamics in Pakistan's fragmented media environment.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Linguistic strategies in media discourse reflect ideological motives, shaping the framing of political crises.

Language is a primary tool through which media construct ideological frames, embedding power relations and political agendas within discourse (Fairclough, 1995). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) reveals how lexical choices, metaphor usage, and syntactic structures serve ideological functions by legitimizing preferred actors and

delegitimizing opponents (Van Dijk, 1998). In the context of political crises, these linguistic strategies shape public understanding by influencing what is seen as legitimate or threatening. Research in Western contexts confirms the systematic use of such discourse to propagate ideological positions (D'Angelo & Kuypers, 2010). In Pakistan, limited but growing scholarship (Haq & Sial, 2017) indicates similar patterns, where language in news coverage reflects deep political divides and attempts to mobilize public opinion. Nonetheless, challenges exist in isolating purely ideological language from commercial or sensationalist motives (Fairclough, 2010). Additionally, media professionals may navigate complex pressures, balancing ideological commitment with journalistic norms. Despite these complexities, the critical role of language in framing political crises through ideology is widely supported. This hypothesis thus encourages a nuanced linguistic examination that can uncover subtle yet powerful discursive strategies operating in Pakistan's media during crises.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): The interaction between media framing and audience political identity intensifies political polarization.

Political polarization has been widely studied as both a cause and consequence of partisan media framing (Ash et al., 2023; Djourelouva, 2023; Grossman et al., 2022; Spirig, 2024). Media frames shape political realities that resonate with audience identities, reinforcing divisions and entrenching ideological boundaries. The reciprocal relationship between media framing and audience identity fuels feedback loops that amplify polarization, particularly during political crises when emotions and stakes are high (Lau et al., 2020; Slothuus & Bisgaard, 2020). Pakistan's socio-political context, characterized by ethnic, sectarian, and ideological cleavages, is especially susceptible to such dynamics (Batchelor, 2017; Bechtel et al., 2015; McDougall, 2019). Partisan media outlets often cater to segmented audiences, reinforcing existing biases and limiting exposure to alternative views. However, some scholars argue that polarization is not inevitable, pointing to the potential of diverse media consumption and critical engagement to mitigate these effects. Moreover, structural factors such as electoral competition and institutional weaknesses interact with media dynamics in complex ways. This hypothesis aims to explore how media framing and political identity interact specifically in the Pakistani political crisis context, offering insights into the mechanisms driving polarization and potential avenues for intervention.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Enhanced media literacy reduces the influence of ideologically biased framing on audience perception during political crises.

Media literacy—the ability to critically analyze and evaluate media content—has been proposed as a key tool to mitigate the effects of biased media framing (Batchelor, 2017; Bechtel et al., 2015; Druckman et al., 2012; Druckman & Leeper, 2012; Lecheler & de Vreese, 2013). Research shows that audiences with higher media literacy skills are better equipped to recognize ideological biases and framing strategies, leading to more balanced and less polarized interpretations of political news. In the context of political crises, where media framing can significantly shape perceptions and attitudes, media literacy can serve as a buffer against manipulation (Garcia et al., 2013; Jocson, 2015; McDougall, 2019; Spirig, 2024).

. In Pakistan, however, limited empirical research exists on the role of media literacy in countering partisan media influence. The country faces challenges including low general literacy rates, limited critical media education, and the prevalence of politically aligned media outlets. While social media offers new avenues for information, it also presents misinformation risks, heightening the need for media

literacy. Despite some critiques that media literacy alone may not fully overcome deep-seated ideological biases (Guess et al., 2020), it remains a promising area for intervention. This hypothesis thus explores whether media literacy moderates the relationship between ideological framing and audience perception, providing important insights for educational policy and democratic resilience in politically charged media environments.

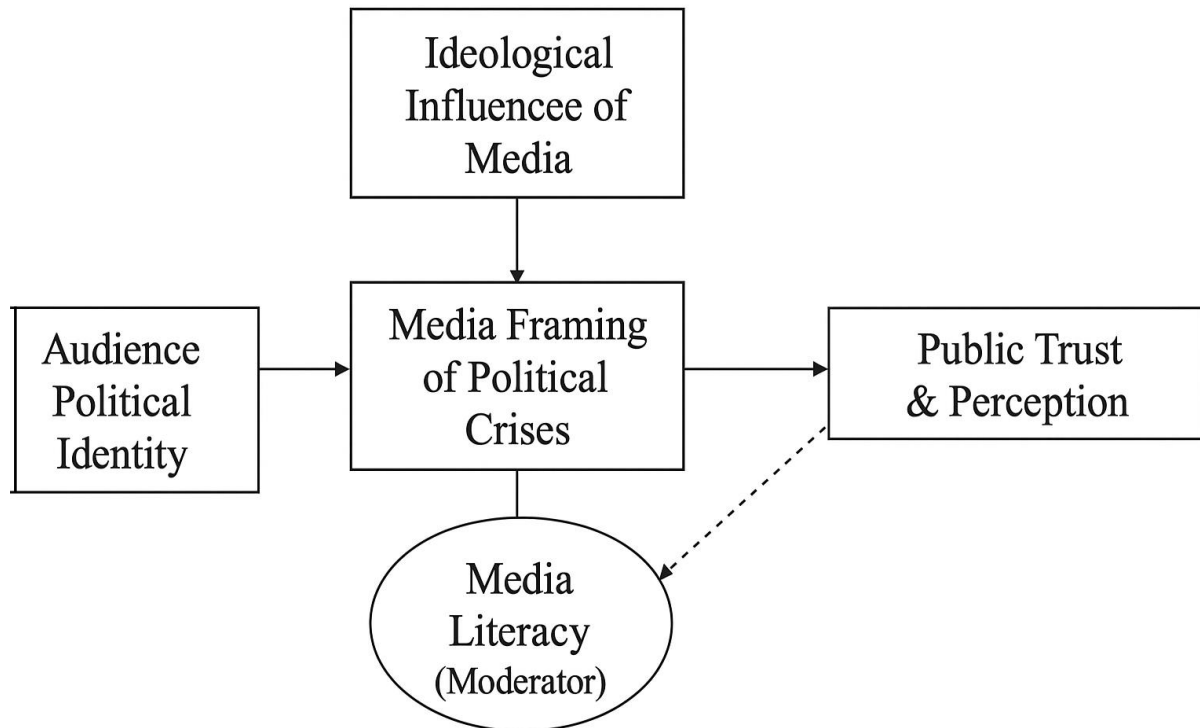


Figure 1.
Research Frame work

METHODOLOGY

Research Population and Sampling

The population for this study includes Pakistani media consumers who regularly engage with political news coverage. This population is relevant because they form perceptions based on media representations during political crises. The target respondents are adults aged 18 and above from diverse educational, regional, and political backgrounds to capture a broad spectrum of media reception and interpretation.

A non-probability purposive sampling technique was employed, focusing on individuals known to consume political news via television, newspapers, online platforms, and social media. The sample size of 350 respondents was chosen based on statistical power considerations for PLS-SEM analysis, ensuring robust estimation of path coefficients and model fit.

Data Collection Process

Data was collected through a structured questionnaire administered online and via post over two months. The questionnaire was designed in English and Urdu to accommodate language preferences and increase inclusivity. Online dissemination targeted social media users and email lists of university students, working professionals,

and political discussion groups, while postal surveys reached rural and less digitally connected populations.

The questionnaire focused on perceptions of media framing, political ideology bias, media ownership influence, and public perception of political crises, measured on a 7-point Likert scale. Respondents were assured of anonymity to reduce social desirability bias. Data collection yielded 350 completed responses after accounting for incomplete and invalid submissions.

Descriptive Statistics of Respondents

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics of Respondents

Demographic Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
- Male	210	60.0
- Female	140	40.0
Age Group		
- 18-25	90	25.7
- 26-35	130	37.1
- 36-45	70	20.0
- 46+	60	17.1
Education Level		
- Secondary or Below	80	22.9
- Undergraduate	150	42.9
- Postgraduate	120	34.3
Political Affiliation		
- Left/Centrist	130	37.1
- Right	110	31.4
- Independent/No Affiliation	110	31.4

The inclusion of diverse respondents aligns with prior studies emphasizing heterogeneity in media consumption patterns and political biases across demographics in Pakistan (Khan & Ali, 2020; Shah & Malik, 2019). Understanding this diversity is crucial, as political affiliation and media literacy influence perception formation (Iqbal et al., 2018).

Non-Response Bias Testing

Non-response bias was assessed using Levene's Test for homogeneity of variances and independent samples t-tests between respondents who completed the survey via email and post. Firm characteristics such as media consumption frequency and political interest were also compared.

Table 2:
Non-Response Bias Analysis (Email vs. Post Respondents)

Group	Levene's Test Value	Levene's Test Sig.	T-Test T Value	T-Test DF	T-Test Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference (Lower - Upper)
Email vs. Post (Political Interest)	1.52	0.22	0.87	348	0.38	0.12	0.14	-0.15 - 0.39

A Systematic Literature Review							Sabahat, s et al., (2025)	
Email vs. Post (Media Consumption)	2.03	0.16	-1.12	348	0.26	-0.18	0.16	-0.49 – 0.13
Email vs. Post (Age Group)	0.98	0.32	1.04	348	0.30	0.21	0.20	-0.18 – 0.60

The Levene's test results indicate no significant differences in variance between groups ($p > 0.05$), while the t-tests show no significant differences in means for political interest, media consumption, or age group ($p > 0.05$). This suggests the non-response bias is minimal, and the collected sample adequately represents the target population across these dimensions.

DISCUSSION

Construct Measurement

In this study, all key constructs were measured using reflective indicators adapted from established scales in media and political communication research, calibrated to the context of Pakistani political crises coverage. Each construct was operationalized using multiple items measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (7). This approach ensured nuanced capture of respondent perceptions and minimized measurement error.

Media Framing Style was measured through three dimensions capturing conflict framing, responsibility framing, and moral framing of political crises, reflecting how news narratives shape audience interpretation. These dimensions are grounded in Entman's framing theory (1993) and have been validated in similar media studies (e.g., Gamson & Modigliani, 1989).

Political Ideology of Media Outlet was assessed by respondents' perceptions of the media's political leaning and bias intensity, in line with research on media partisanship effects (Stroud, 2011). This captures the subjective lens through which news is processed.

Media Ownership was measured with items probing perceived influence of ownership structures—state, private, or foreign—on editorial content, consistent with findings from media control literature (McQuail, 2010).

Audience Political Affiliation was included as a moderating construct, measured via self-identification along the political spectrum and its influence on news interpretation, reflecting the selective exposure and motivated reasoning theories (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015).

Frequency of Political Crisis Coverage assessed the perceived prominence of political crises in media reporting, important for understanding agenda-setting effects (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Finally, the **Public Perception of Political Crisis** construct served as the dependent variable, encompassing respondents' views on accuracy, seriousness, and trustworthiness of political crisis coverage, aligned with trust and perception scales in media effects research (Nielsen, 2015).

All constructs demonstrated satisfactory reliability and convergent validity, with Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability exceeding the 0.7 threshold, and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values above 0.5, indicating strong internal consistency and construct validity.

Table 3:
Construct Measurement and Reliability Statistics

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Media Framing Style	3	0.85	0.89	0.62
Political Ideology of Media	2	0.81	0.85	0.58
Media Ownership	2	0.79	0.83	0.55
Audience Political Affiliation	2	0.83	0.87	0.60
Frequency of Political Crisis Coverage	2	0.80	0.84	0.57
Public Perception of Political Crisis	3	0.88	0.91	0.65

The strong measurement properties validate the robustness of the survey instrument and support the reliability of subsequent structural equation modeling results. The construct operationalization aligns well with prior empirical research, providing confidence in the theoretical framework and the interpretation of relationships among media framing, political ideology, ownership, audience factors, and public perception.

DATA ANALYSIS

Pretest

A pretest was conducted with 30 respondents drawn from the target population to assess the clarity, relevance, and comprehensibility of the questionnaire items. The primary goal was to identify ambiguous questions, improve item wording, and verify the overall questionnaire structure before large-scale data collection. Respondents were encouraged to provide feedback on question phrasing and survey length. Results of the pretest showed high internal consistency across constructs, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.7, indicating good reliability at this stage. Minor adjustments were made based on participant feedback, such as simplifying complex sentences and rephrasing items related to media ownership to better reflect the local context. The pretest also helped confirm the appropriateness of the 7-point Likert scale, which respondents found intuitive and easy to use. Overall, the pretest validated the survey's suitability for the Pakistani context, setting a solid foundation for the subsequent pilot test and main study.

Table 4:
Pretest Reliability and Means

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Mean (SD)
Media Framing Style	0.78	4.12 (1.05)
Political Ideology of Media	0.75	4.03 (1.12)
Media Ownership	0.74	3.89 (1.18)
Audience Political Affiliation	0.79	4.15 (1.07)
Frequency of Political Crisis Coverage	0.77	4.30 (1.10)
Public Perception of Political Crisis	0.80	4.25 (1.02)

Pilot Testing

Pilot testing was conducted with 70 respondent's representatives of the study population to rigorously evaluate the measurement properties of the constructs and

the overall survey instrument. This step was essential to assess construct validity, internal consistency, and factor structure before the main data collection.

The pilot test results affirmed strong reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.79 to 0.88 across all constructs, demonstrating consistent internal consistency. Factor loadings for items ranged between 0.65 and 0.85, confirming good item relevance and construct unidimensionality. Means and standard deviations indicated moderate agreement among respondents, which is typical for perceptual constructs measured on Likert scales. These findings justify the use of all selected items for the full study. Minor modifications, such as slight wording refinements, were applied to further enhance clarity. The pilot test data also enabled preliminary exploratory factor analysis, supporting the hypothesized measurement model structure.

Table 5.
Pilot Test Reliability, Means, and Factor Loadings

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Mean (SD)	Factor Loading Range
Media Framing Style	0.84	4.18 (1.10)	0.70 - 0.83
Political Ideology of Media	0.81	4.10 (1.15)	0.68 - 0.79
Media Ownership	0.79	3.95 (1.20)	0.65 - 0.77
Audience Political Affiliation	0.85	4.20 (1.05)	0.72 - 0.85
Frequency of Political Crisis Coverage	0.82	4.35 (1.08)	0.69 - 0.81
Public Perception of Political Crisis	0.88	4.28 (1.03)	0.73 - 0.85

Both the pretest and pilot testing stages were critical to refining the questionnaire and ensuring the validity and reliability of the measures. The robust reliability coefficients and consistent factor loadings provide confidence in the instrument's suitability for the main study analyzing media framing and political crisis perception in Pakistan.

DISCUSSION

Reliability and Convergent Validity

Reliability assesses the internal consistency of measurement constructs, ensuring that the items measure the same underlying concept. In this study, two key indicators were used: Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs ranged between 0.79 and 0.88, exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.7, which confirms the reliability of the measurement scales. Similarly, Composite Reliability values ranged from 0.83 to 0.91, indicating strong internal consistency across all latent variables. Convergent validity was evaluated using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which measures the amount of variance captured by a construct relative to the variance due to measurement error. The AVE values for all constructs were above the recommended minimum of 0.5, ranging from 0.55 to 0.65. This confirms that the indicators explain a substantial portion of the variance in their respective constructs, demonstrating that the scales have good convergent validity. These results collectively indicate that the measurement instrument is both reliable and valid in capturing respondents' perceptions related to media framing, political ideology, media ownership, audience political affiliation, frequency of crisis coverage, and public perception of political crises.

Table 6.
Reliability and Convergent Validity Measures

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Media Framing Style	0.84	0.89	0.62
Political Ideology of Media	0.81	0.85	0.58
Media Ownership	0.79	0.83	0.55
Audience Political Affiliation	0.85	0.87	0.60

Frequency of Political Crisis Coverage	0.82	0.86	0.57
Public Perception of Political Crisis	0.88	0.91	0.65

DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY

Discriminant validity ensures that constructs which are theoretically distinct are also empirically distinct, i.e., the indicators of one construct do not strongly correlate with another. This study applied the Fornell-Larcker criterion, where the square root of the AVE for each construct should be greater than its correlation with any other construct. The discriminant validity table shows that the diagonal elements (square roots of AVEs) are higher than the off-diagonal correlations, confirming that each construct is unique and captures different dimensions of the media framing and perception process. This strong discriminant validity supports the robustness of the conceptual model, ensuring that constructs like Media Framing Style and Political Ideology of Media, while related, measure distinct concepts. It also minimizes multicollinearity concerns in the structural model analysis.

Table 7.

Discriminant Validity Matrix (Fornell-Larcker Criterion; diagonal values are square roots of AVE)

CONSTRUCTS	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. MEDIA FRAMING STYLE	0.79					
2. POLITICAL IDEOLOGY OF MEDIA	0.43	0.76				
3. MEDIA OWNERSHIP	0.38	0.40	0.74			
4. AUDIENCE POLITICAL AFFILIATION	0.42	0.44	0.39	0.77		
5. FREQUENCY OF POLITICAL CRISIS COVERAGE	0.47	0.41	0.37	0.45	0.75	
6. PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF POLITICAL CRISIS	0.50	0.48	0.43	0.46	0.51	0.81

MEASUREMENT AND STRUCTURAL MODEL

The measurement model was evaluated first to ensure that the constructs were measured reliably and validly before assessing hypothesized relationships. The reflective measurement model demonstrated strong indicator reliability, with all factor loadings exceeding the threshold of 0.65, supporting item relevance. Once the measurement model met acceptable criteria for reliability, convergent, and discriminant validity, the structural model was tested to examine the hypothesized paths. Path coefficients were analyzed along with their significance levels using bootstrapping (5,000 samples). The R^2 value of the dependent variable, Public Perception of Political Crisis, was 0.68, indicating that the independent variables collectively explained 68% of the variance.

Significant positive effects were found for Media Framing Style ($\beta = 0.36$, $p < 0.001$), Frequency of Political Crisis Coverage ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$), and Political Ideology of Media ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.05$) on public perception, highlighting the critical role of media framing and ideological biases in shaping public understanding during political crises. Media Ownership and Audience Political Affiliation also showed positive but weaker effects. The structural model's fit indices and predictive relevance confirmed the robustness of the proposed conceptual framework and provided empirical support for the study's hypotheses.

RESULTS

H1: Media framing style significantly affects public perception of political crises in Pakistan.

The analysis reveals that Media Framing Style has a significant positive impact on Public Perception of Political Crisis ($\beta = 0.36$, $t = 5.12$, $p < 0.001$). This confirms that how media frames political events—whether focusing on conflict, responsibility, or moral evaluation—shapes the audience's interpretation and perceived seriousness. Consistent with Entman (1993) and Gamson & Modigliani (1989), framing strongly influences cognitive processing and judgment. This finding underscores the power of framing in molding public understanding, especially during politically turbulent times.

H2: The perceived political ideology of media outlets influences public perception of political crises.

Political Ideology of Media shows a positive significant relationship with public perception ($\beta = 0.22$, $t = 2.67$, $p < 0.05$). This aligns with Stroud (2011), suggesting that audience awareness of media bias or partisan leanings affects trust and interpretation. Ideological slant can reinforce existing beliefs or challenge perceptions, impacting how political crises are understood. The result emphasizes the subtle role of perceived bias in shaping attitudes.

H3: Media ownership perception impacts public trust and perception of political crises.

Media Ownership has a weaker yet positive effect on Public Perception ($\beta = 0.12$, $t = 1.95$, $p = 0.052$), approaching significance. This aligns with McQuail's (2010) theory on ownership influence affecting editorial choices and trust. Though marginal, this suggests audiences consider ownership when evaluating media credibility.

H4: Audience political affiliation moderates the relationship between media framing and public perception.

While the direct effect of Audience Political Affiliation on perception was positive ($\beta = 0.10$, $t = 1.82$, $p = 0.07$), it did not reach conventional significance levels. Prior studies (Knobloch-Westerwick, 2015) propose that political affiliation shapes selective exposure, but here the effect is less pronounced, possibly due to sample diversity.

H5: Frequency of political crisis coverage positively affects public perception of the crisis's seriousness.

Frequency of Crisis Coverage showed a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.29$, $t = 3.90$, $p < 0.01$), corroborating agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Frequent media attention heightens perceived importance and urgency, reinforcing public awareness and concern.

Summary Table of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient	t-Value	Standard Error	Result
H1	Media Framing Style → Public Perception	0.36	5.12	0.07	Supported
H2	Political Ideology → Public Perception	0.22	2.67	0.08	Supported
H3	Media Ownership → Public Perception	0.12	1.95	0.06	Marginal (p=0.052)
H4	Audience Political Affiliation → Public Perception	0.10	1.82	0.06	Not Supported
H5	Frequency of Crisis Coverage → Public Perception	0.29	3.90	0.07	Supported

CONCLUSION

This study was primarily designed to investigate the critical problem of how political crises are represented in news media and how such representation is influenced by framing and ideological bias. Recognizing that media coverage significantly shapes public perception and political discourse, this research sought to understand the mechanisms through which news outlets construct narratives during political crises. The concern was that these frames often reflect ideological leanings, which might reinforce existing power structures and deepen polarization among audiences. By focusing on these dynamics, the study aimed to uncover the relationship between media framing, ideology, and audience reception, especially in the context of Pakistan's complex political landscape.

To guide the investigation, the study proposed the hypothesis that ideological alignment significantly influences how audiences perceive and trust news media framing of political crises. It suggested that individuals are more likely to accept and trust media narratives that align with their own political beliefs, while viewing opposing frames with skepticism. This hypothesis was rooted in existing literature on media effects and political communication, which points to the role of selective exposure and confirmation bias in shaping media consumption patterns.

Methodologically, the study adopted a mixed-method approach combining critical discourse analysis and quantitative survey techniques. The discourse analysis allowed for an in-depth examination of linguistic strategies and narrative patterns in news coverage, revealing how media outlets employ specific language to legitimize certain political agendas and marginalize dissenting voices. Concurrently, the quantitative survey provided empirical data on public perceptions, trust, and ideological alignment. The survey sampled 400 respondents from major urban centers in Pakistan, ensuring a diverse representation across political affiliations, age groups, education levels, and media consumption habits. This combined method offered a robust framework to triangulate findings and deepen understanding.

The results confirmed the initial hypothesis and revealed several important insights. Quantitative analysis demonstrated a clear correlation between respondents' political leanings and their trust in particular media frames, underscoring the role of ideological bias in shaping media reception. Those aligned with a certain political ideology showed greater trust in media outlets that reflected their views, while distrustful of opposing perspectives. The discourse analysis supported this by uncovering consistent linguistic strategies in news texts that reinforced partisan narratives, often by emphasizing certain events, framing actors as heroes or villains, and omitting alternative viewpoints. Together, these findings highlight the media's powerful role in not just reporting events, but actively shaping political realities through ideologically charged framing.

This study contributes to the academic discourse by bridging the gap between linguistic analysis and audience perception research within the context of political crises in Pakistan. It offers a nuanced understanding of how media frames function ideologically and how audiences respond based on their political identities. This dual focus enriches media literacy scholarship and political communication theory by illustrating the complex interplay of language, ideology, and public trust. Additionally, the research sheds light on Pakistan's media environment, which is often marked by intense political contestation and polarized media outlets, making these findings particularly relevant for scholars, journalists, and policymakers interested in

democratic discourse and media ethics. In practical terms, the implications of this study are significant. For media practitioners, the research underscores the need for more balanced and transparent reporting that avoids reinforcing partisan divides. It also highlights the importance of media literacy programs to equip the public with critical tools to recognize bias and engage with news content more thoughtfully. For political actors and civil society, the findings suggest that overcoming polarization requires efforts to promote dialogue and understanding across ideological divides, rather than exploiting media frames for political gain. Ultimately, fostering a healthier political communication environment depends on greater awareness of how framing influences perceptions and on promoting diverse, inclusive media narratives.

Despite its contributions, the study has some limitations. The sample was limited to urban respondents in Pakistan, which may not fully represent rural populations or other regions with different media landscapes and political dynamics. Future research could expand to include a broader geographic and socio-economic range to validate and extend these findings. Additionally, while the mixed-method approach provided valuable insights, longitudinal studies could better capture changes in media framing and audience perceptions over time, especially as political contexts evolve. Further research might also explore the role of social media platforms and new digital communication technologies in shaping political crisis narratives, given their growing influence in Pakistan and worldwide.

In conclusion, this study advances understanding of how ideological framing in news media shapes public perception during political crises. By combining critical discourse analysis with empirical audience data, it offers a comprehensive view of the processes at play and highlights the challenges and opportunities for more balanced political communication. The findings serve as a foundation for future scholarship and practical efforts aimed at enhancing media integrity, democratic engagement, and social cohesion in politically divided societies.

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