

CLASHING NARRATIVES IN OPERATION ZARB-E-AZB: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MILITARY OPERATION COVERAGE BY PAKISTANI AND INDIAN MEDIA

Ammara Usmani

PhD Scholar, Centre for Media and Communication Studies, University of Gujrat.

Email: ammarausmani9@gmail.com

Dr. Zahid Yousaf

Professor/Dean Faculty of Arts/Chairperson, Centre for Media and Communication
Studies, University of Gujrat.

Email: zahid.yousaf@uog.edu.pk

Abstract

This study investigates the differences in framing of media coverage across the borders during military operations carried out by Pakistani forces. Given the historical enmity and strategic interests of both Indian and Pakistani nations, the portrayal of such operations significantly varies. Through a content analysis of editorials Dawn, The News, Indian Express and The Telegraph, this study highlights the divergent narratives, biases, and the impact of state policies on the reporting of media. The findings of this study suggest that press in both countries not only replicate but also reinforce nationalistic sentiments and state agendas, calling for more balanced and ethical journalism.

Keywords: Comparative Analysis; Nationalism; Military Operations; State Influence; Zarb- e- Azb.

INTRODUCTION

Since the independence of both the countries in 1947, there is remarkable strain relationship of Pakistan and India by conflict and rivalry. This enmity is often reflected in the press coverage of events, particularly military operations from both the sides. The media of both countries play an important role in shaping the public opinion and national discourse. Although there are ups and down remain in both the countries relationship but after the event of 9/11, the world witnessed Pakistan although initially confused about decision but later become a strong ally of US strategies in combating Global War on Terror. The then President of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharaf articulated his opinions that: "Pakistan took a deliberate choice regarding the matter and it is rooted in the principles of mortality and the country national priorities to support the Global War on Terror" (Riaz, 2009)

Ultimately, Pakistan Government gained US 11 billion dollar for this coordinational support in playing the part in counter terrorism operations mainly in North Waziristan and other adjacent tribal belts of Pak-Afghan Border called Durand Line. As a result of this forefront ally, Pakistan turn out to be the main target of militants and they started to attack Pakistan brutally towards the Army, defence installations and Pakistani Nation.

Radical violence and uncertainty become a defining characteristics of Pakistan following the eruption of Afghan war. As Pakistan's was playing its position as leading nation in the Global War on Terrorism (GWO). Pakistan received multiple terrorist threats and subsequent incidents of terrorism has increased manifold being an ally of Global War on Terrorism. These threats were even challenging to the survival of Pakistan, it is repeatedly claimed by the Pakistan that he has paying a massive price as a result to be a partner in this war.

When the Pakistan faced multiple attacks, it was decided that an army operation is necessary against Al-Qaeda and other elements. During the period of 2002 to 2015, tribal belt was determined as a safe place for the militants where they can hide and operate. The organisation which were escaped from the Afghanistan started to recovered themselves in the tribal region especially in North Waziristan. So, to bring the peace in the country, military operations was started. As the area was deep-rooted and managed with the militants the prior operation was not entirely effective. An operation which was called Rah-e-Nijat, the last major attacking launched in Federal Administrative area initiated by Pakistan Army against the militants battered the TTP-occupied areas in South Waziristan during 2009. However, in 2011 the former Army Chief, General Ashfaq Pervaiz Kiyani was stressed by the worldwide community and partners to immediately carried out an military operation in North Waziristan too against the terrorist hiding in this area. The than President Zardari, during his tenure also forced by the political factions across the country to carry out an operation, meanwhile the General Kiyani was also fully complied and USA also emphasized to carry out an operation in the tribal belt of NWA (Yousan, 2015).

As the militants was using the NWA as a main hub to fight against Pakistan that disordered the nation-wide daily affairs; hampering her economic activities and causing a huge financial and humanitarian loss. Hence an operation in which 30,000 Pakistani soldiers was participating comprehensively launched as the recent incident of deadly attack on Jinnah International Airport Karachi was enough that elimination of all militants and their foreign allies. The primarily goal of this operation Zarb-e-Azb are to fully eliminate the terrorist from this area and to recapture the control of tribal belt, adjacent area and FATA. Pakistan claimed that we are not going to successfully complete this operation but the main objective is to bring back the weak law and order

CLASHING NARRATIVES IN OPERATION ZARB-E-AZB: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MILITARY OPERATION COVERAGE BY PAKISTANI AND INDIAN MEDIA

situation towards the normality. This paper seeks to analyze how Pakistani and Indian media cover military operations in Pakistan, uncovering the differences in narratives, biases, and influences. Understanding these differences is essential for comprehending the broader implications for peace and conflict in the region.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In various parts of the world, dependence between media and military operations in conflict zones has been covered very vigorously particularly in the regions of polemical and historic and political significance. By analyzing the data, it can be concluded that in South Asia, especially between Pakistan and India, media act as an influential source in forming the public opinion and constructing a nation's archive. This literature review analyzes the scholarly literature of media, specifically media coverage of military operation, working with agenda setting, framing, biasness, and the regulators: state and their impact, including the background for understanding contradictory discourses of Pakistani and Indian media.

MEDIA FRAMING AND AGENDA-SETTING

Media framing theory according to Goffman (1974) suggest that how news reach the people has a profound effect on the audience perception. From this theory it is clear that how mainstream media of Pakistan and India frame up the military operations. Further, Entman (1993) and Reese (2001) elaborate framing more regarding the work of media in framing a story so that the public decidedly understands and responds, removing the certain features of a story.

According to a more specific theory known as agenda-setting theory, originally expounded by McCombs and Shaw (1972), media does not just inform people what to think, but also informs them what to think about. This theory is also useful when we are going to compare when both Pakistani and Indian media prioritise the military operations. According to Wanta and Ghanem (2007) mass communication agenda-setting studies demonstrate how information flow can be used to influence opinions and policies especially in situations of conflict.

BIAS DURING MEDIA COVERAGE

In analyzing the coverage of military operation, biasness has been severally established. According to Mullen (2010), Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model was described and it was also explained how media tends to privilege the needs of powerful wanta-garde, usually in complicity with the state. Concerning Pakistan and India, Shaikh (2018) prove that the mass media are highly related to the nationalistic interests. Impact It is seen that through cross- referencing Pakistani media repeatedly constructs military operations necessary measures against terrorism and Indian media commonly portrays such operation as violation of rights and a continuous

threat to stability of the region.

STATE INFLUENCE ON MEDIA

Interference by the state with the independent operation of media houses is a serious factor that contributes to the coverage of military operations. According to Kumar's (2020) understanding of how the government policies and censorship mechanisms shape media stories, both countries' media are rather preponderant in the states' regulation and control. People often complain about Pakistan and how much of the media is owned by the military, journalists in Pakistan frequently here pressure to toe the line to do what is acceptable to the military and the government's narratives (Zaidi, 2019). Despite the government's assertion on the same as having made India more liberal as regard to freedom of the press, their influence is still colossal especially on contentious issues that border on security and diplomacy (Malik, 2021).

IMPACT OF MEDIA COVERAGE ON PUBLIC OPINION

The effect of media coverage towards changing the perception of the society mainly targeting the areas of conflict has been discussed widely. Using data from the sample, Lee and Maslog (2005) were able to show that exposure to media escalates nationalism and enmity. This is most relevant in the case of India and Pakistan, media helps in shaping the negative perception that each country has about the other. According to Cohen (2004) and Peri (2007) studies, sensational and biased media coverage tend to reduce the build up for dialogues and peace; the authors therefore called for objective and ethical media coverage.

CROSS-BORDER JOURNALISM AND ETHICAL REPORTING

Some measures advocated for to enhance Namibia's cross border communication include cross border journalism with a view of reducing animosities among the nations and eliminating prejudices in journalism. Hussain state that, sharing such collaborative project of the journalism can provide the more sufficient and the developing point of view and the encouragement of the peace building. Responsible coverage and eradicating unethical journalism play an important role in decreasing biases of the state and giving a humane outlook to the reports. Hanitzsch (2007) stated that there was a need of training programs for journalists who are practicing their works in the conflict areas as a way of enhancing their professional role of being able to report the conflict news ethically and in a bias free manner.

The available literature establishes the essential place media occupies in building stories in Pakistan and India. Framing and agenda-setting theory provides a vigorous foundation for the understanding of how media affects the public, but the bias and state influence studies explain how far the media are oriented according to national interest. This literature review was useful for the development of the current study's research, as it helped in carrying out comparative analysis of Pakistani and Indian media sources and highlight the effects of military operations on stability in the

CLASHING NARRATIVES IN OPERATION ZARB-E-AZB: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MILITARY OPERATION COVERAGE BY PAKISTANI AND INDIAN MEDIA

region.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- *To evaluate the editorials covered by Pakistani and Indian press and a comparative analysis of specific frames given to Military Operation Zarb-e-Azb.*

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: *To what extent editorial published by both the countries during Operation Zarb-e-Azb vary with respect to prominence?*

RQ2: *Whether and to what extent editorial frames during Operation Zarb-e-Azb expressively vary in Pakistani & Indian press with respect to the specific tones?*

METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative content analysis to compare and contrast the media coverage of military operations in Pakistan by Pakistani and Indian mass media. Content analysis is a suitable method for methodically examining the content to comprehend how media frames and portrays particular events (Krippendorff, 2004).

SAMPLE SELECTION

NEWS OUTLETS:

This research study focuses on leading and widely circulated news outlets from India and Pakistan to ensure a representative sample of the media landscape. The selected Pakistani news papers include Dawn and The News. The Indian news papers include Indian Express and The Telegraph.

TIME FRAME

The time frame for this research study was a period of peak of this operation which was mid of June 2014 to mid of June 2015. Primary reason for the selection of this period as the thoroughgoing efforts was launched to get the maximum achievement by the Pakistani Military. Moreover, rationale for selecting this time frame is that it ensures a substantial amount of data the analysis confine various events and responses over time.

UNIT OF ANALYSIS

The unit of analysis of this study are editorial published regarding this operation by both the countries. Besides the major information, the specific coded topic related to this operation like, role of Pakistan in War and Terror, image of Pakistan, solution of this menace, internal displaced persons are also the part of the study.

FRAMES

The following frames were under investigation of the study:

1. ***Threat frame of terrorist.*** *This includes editorials discussion about the threats given by the terrorist.*

2. **Internal politics frame.** This frame was basically focused on the political influence Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts.

TONE

To measure the judgemental tone the study has below noted categories

- Encouraging / Favorable
- Adverse / Unfavorable
- Neutral

DATA COLLECTION

Editorials are collected using digital archives of the selected news papers. A total of 274 editorials are selected for analysis, ensuring a balanced representation.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The study sticks to ethical guidelines of research. All the data is publicly accessible, and proper citations have been provided for all sources. The analysis of this research conducted objectively, and any potential biases are acknowledged and addressed in the discussion.

RESULTS

The published editorials was accessed through online available official website of these newspapers.

S. No.	Newspaper	Editorial Published
1	Dawn Newspaper (Pakistan)	96
2	THE NEWS (Pakistan)	73
3	INDIAN EXPRESS (Indian)	44
4	The Telegraph (Indian)	61

TABLE. 1 Editorial Printed regarding Zarb e Azb in Newspapers

The above table reveals that 274 editorials was published during the stipulated time frame. Pakistani newspaper **The Dawn** covered 35% editorials regarding the operation Zarb e Azb whereas **The News** another Pakistani newspapers gives the 26 % coverage. One the other hand, **The Telegraphan** Indian newspaper exhibited a tendency of 22 % of the entire data and **Indian Express** was published 16 % to this operation in the coverage.

Newspaper	Favourable	Neutral	Unfavourable
Dawn	40	32	24
The News	27	24	22
The Telegraph (India)	12	20	29
Indian Express	7	11	26

TABLE .2 Tone of Editorials in Newspapers

CLASHING NARRATIVES IN OPERATION ZARB-E-AZB: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MILITARY OPERATION COVERAGE BY PAKISTANI AND INDIAN MEDIA

Dawn newspaper covered 40 editorials in appreciating tone of operation zarb e azb and Pakistan whereas 24 articles published against / unfavourable this Operation Zarb-e-Azb. 32 editorials of this newspapers were neutral tone in which representing both sides of the argument. As compared to this newspaper another Pakistani paper **The News** covered 27 editorials in favourable tone of the operation zarb e azb whereas this newspaper published 22 articles unfavourable. A volume of 24 editorials of this paper were coded as neutral tone as the content was presenting both sides of the argument.

The data of Indian papers was accessed and analysed **The Telegraph** covered 12 editorials in favour of the operation Zarb E Azb and role of Pakistan while 29 editorials were against the operation and the narrative of these was Pakistan failure in achieving any success and poor strategies to cope the threat of terrorism. 20 editorials published in this paper were neutral in tone. The **Indian Express** covered 7 articles favourable to the operation Zarb E Azb and Pakistani role whereas 26 editorials were against emphasizing that Pakistani failure strategies to cope up the danger of terrorism. This newspaper covered 11 articles as in neutral tone by presenting both sides of the story.

PROMINENCE OF FRAMING OF THE OPERATION ZARB E AZB BY PAKISTANI & INDIAN EDITORIAL TREATMENT

As a volume of 274 articles were taken up for the analysis: country wise assessment reveals that Pakistani press *Dawn* & *The News* covered 169 (61.6%) whereas Indian press (*Indian Express* & *The Telegraph*) covered 105 (40.4%).

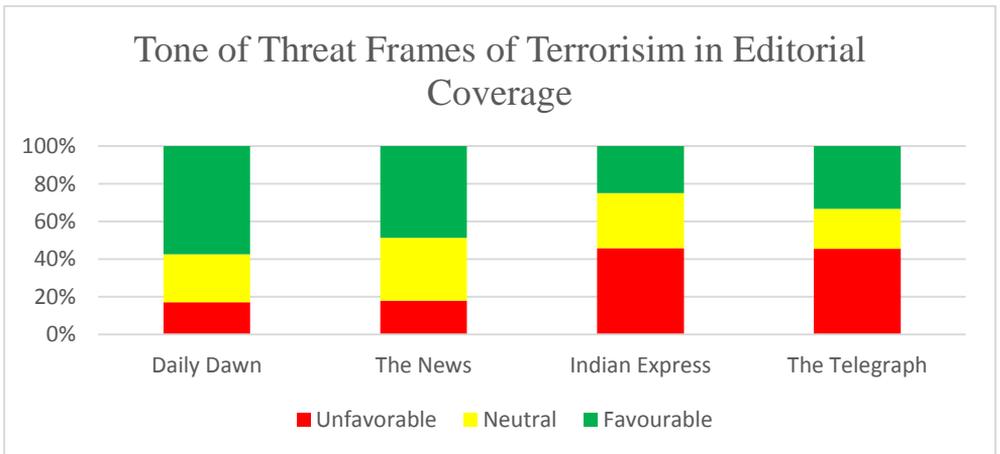


Figure 1 Tone of Threat Frame of Terrorism in Editorial Coverage

The above figure presenting the data of 4 newspapers, Daily Dawn published 47 editorial in which the main debate was terrorist activities and their influence, out of 47 favourable frame editorials were 27 while 08 editorials was unfavourable. This paper covered 12 editorials as neutrals. Another newspaper, the News presented 39 editorials of this operation, 19 articles were favourable to operation Zarb e Azb and Pakistani role whereas 13 articles were based on neutral content, 7 articles covered were in tone of unfavourable. The analysis of Indian newspapers reveals that Indian Express covered 24 editorials in connection with this operation within which 6 editorials were favourable, 7 editorials were Neutral although 11 articles covered Pakistan as a country harbouring extremism and terrorism. The Telegraph covered terrorist activities in 33 articles, 11 editorials were portraying in favour of Operation Zarb e Azb, 7 articles was in neutral tone while 15 were presenting not in favour of the operation zarb e azb.

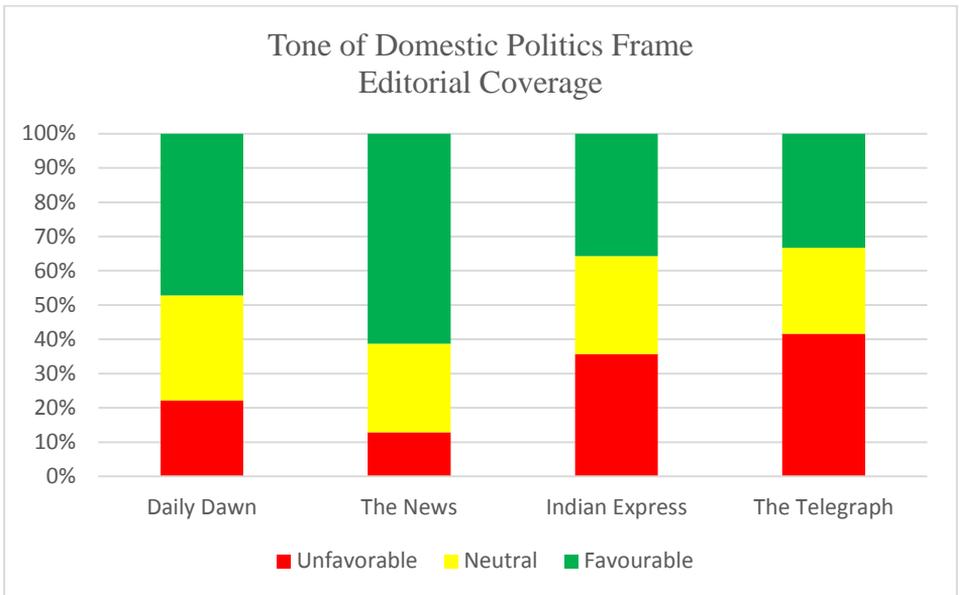


Figure.2 Tone of Domestic Politics Frame in Editorial Coverage

Daily Dawn discoursed the frame of Domestic Politics in connection with the terrorism related activities and military operation in 36 articles, 17 were framed infavourable, 11 were in tone of Neutral whereas 8 articles were unfavourable. The News covered 31 editorials, in which 19 were in the tone of favourable to this operation while 8 articles were debated on neutral base and 4 editorials were framed as unfavourable. Indian Express covered 17 articles to this operation, 5 were in positive tone, 4 were Neutral whereas 8 articles portrayed the Pakistan as a country harbouringviolence. The Telegraph narrated terrorist activities in 23 articles, 8 were presenting in favourable tonetowards the Operation Zarb e Azb, 6 articles were neutral whereas 10 were debatedunfavourable to the operation zarb e azb.

CLASHING NARRATIVES IN OPERATION ZARB-E-AZB: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MILITARY OPERATION COVERAGE BY PAKISTANI AND INDIAN MEDIA

DISCUSSION

The analysis of editorial coverage of military operations in Pakistan by both Pakistani and Indian print media exposed significant differences in the narratives, tones, and framing of these events. These differences reveal the different national interests, their historical contexts, and state influences in both countries. The study reveals that Pakistani press recognised the idea of nationalism and entirely support the role of security forces in this operation and further commended democratic policies of the country in coping the terrorism menace. Daily Dawn appeared more objective in reporting than The News.

INDIAN MEDIA

Conversely, Indian media was highly condemning this military operation and labeled Pakistan as the supporter of terrorism in this part of the globe. While the relation of Pakistani press was more favourable in terms of discussion in terms of efforts being showcased by the Pakistani military forces to eradicate Taliban, the editorials covered by Indian press were mostly unfavourable.

BIASES AND STATE INFLUENCE

The findings of the print media analysis present facts that both Indian and Pakistani Print media has its content embedded with state policies and nationalistic agenda. There's substantial preference in Pakistani media to side with military and the story of government. The Indian print media generally reflects the government's hostile approach towards Pakistan, thereby boosting nationalist feelings and dominant bias.

IMPACT ON PUBLIC OPINION

According to the different media narratives, people's perception in both countries is influenced suggestively. In Pakistani coverage, it supports the military and its actions and helps foster the feeling of an enemy that needs to be erased to ensure national security. This negative portrayal of military operation by Pakistan in India further develops the level of community contempt and more hostile towards Pakistan and thus makes it endorse a pessimistic attitude in regional security affairs.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals the insightful differences in media coverage of military operations in Pakistan. These transformations are shaped by national interests, state influence, and historical hostilities. The media in both countries not only replicates but also strengthens nationalistic sentiments and state agendas, contributing to the continuation of conflict and mistrust among both the countries.

The findings highlight the need for more objectives, balanced and ethical journalism, particularly in conflict areas where the narratives can meaningfully

influence public opinion and policy. Both Pakistani and Indian press have a responsibility to deliver accurate, unbiased, and comprehensive reporting to increase better understanding and peaceful dialogue between both the countries.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Media of India and Pakistan should attempt to provide and maintain impartiality in coverages of military actions. It can be present different perspectives, deeply verified facts, and such actions should be taken to minimize sensationalism.*

Both the countries should begin cross border journalism which can also reduce biasness and give a better and more correct coverage. Projects like these and bilateral cooperation programs for journalists can foster better understandings of the two countries' stories.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

References

- 1- Cohen, J. (1960). A coefficient of agreement for nominal scales. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 20(1), 37-46.
- 2- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58.
- 3- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Harper & Row.
- 4- Hanitzsch, T. (2007). Situating peace journalism in journalism studies: A critical appraisal. *Conflict & Communication Online*, 6(2), 1-9.
- 5- Hussain, S. (2016). Cross-border journalism in South Asia: Opportunities and challenges. *Journal of South Asian Studies*, 34(3), 367-383.
- 6- Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology*. Sage Publications.
- 7- Kumar, A. (2020). State Influence on Media Coverage of Military Operations in South Asia. *South Asian Journal of Communication*, 15(3), 244-261.
- 8- Lee, S. T., & Maslog, C. C. (2005). War or peace journalism? Asian newspaper coverage of conflicts. *Journal of Communication*, 55(2), 311-329.
- 9- Malik, I. (2021). Comparative Analysis of Media Coverage in India and Pakistan. *Asian Media Studies*, 12(4), 389-403.
- 10- McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), 176-187.
- 11- Mullen, A., & Klæhn, J. (2010). The Herman–Chomsky propaganda model: A critical approach to analysing mass media behaviour. *Sociology compass*, 4(4), 215-229.
- 12- Adil, Muhammad, and Dr Sardar Muhammad Saad Jaffar. "Role Of Religious Parties In Legislation In Parliament Of Pakistan (2013-18): A Critical Analysis." *Webology* 18, no. 5 (2021): 1890-1900.
- 13- Reese, S. D. (2001). Prologue—Framing public life: A bridging model for

**CLASHING NARRATIVES IN OPERATION ZARB-E-AZB: A
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF MILITARY OPERATION COVERAGE BY
PAKISTANI AND INDIAN MEDIA**

- media research. In S. D. Reese, O. H. Gandy, & A. E. Grant (Eds.), *Framing Public Life: Perspectives on Media and Our Understanding of the Social World* (pp. 7-31). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- 14- Riaz ul Hassan, "Corporatization of Indian Media", Viewpoint online magazine Report prepared by consultancy KPMG, commissioned by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), 2010
- 15- Shaikh, F. (2018). Media narratives and public perceptions: A case study of Indo-Pak relations. *Journal of Media Studies*, 33(1), 56-73.
- 16- Khan, Muhammad Bahar, Dr Imran Naseem Saad Jaffar, Muhammad Waseem Mukhtar, and Waqar Ahmed. "Nature Of 21st Century's Global Conflicts Under The Global Powers' Geoeconomic Strategies And Islamic Ideology For Peace." *Journal of Positive School Psychology* (2023): 1291-1298.
- 17- Wanta, W., & Ghanem, S. (2007). Effects of agenda setting. In R. W. Preiss, B. M. Gayle, N. Burrell, M. Allen, & J. Bryant (Eds.), *Mass Media Effects Research: Advances Through Meta-Analysis* (pp. 37-51). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- 18- Yousaf, S. (2015). Political marketing in Pakistan: Exaggerated promises, delusive claims, marketable development projects and change advocacy. *Journal of Public Affairs*. Advance online publication. doi:10.1002/pa.1562
- 19- Zaidi, S. (2019). The role of media in shaping national security narratives in Pakistan. *Journal of Contemporary Media*, 21(2), 112-129.