

Exploring Post-9/11 Media Narratives: A Review of Pakistan's Portrayal in the Context of Terrorism

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Abstract

Since the 9/11 tragedy, Pakistan's global image has posed a persistent fragility, particularly in American and European societies, despite substantial contributions to the 'war on terror.' This paper, employing the PRISMA framework and reviewing 39 selected studies, explores how Pakistan has been portrayed in terrorism discourse by local and international media from 2001 to 2018. The Pakistani media tends to portray a favorable image of Pakistan's anti-terrorism efforts. At the same time, the American and Indian elite press leans towards a more critical view, negatively impacting the country's global reputation. In addition to framing analysis, the study examines recent research methodologies, revealing a prevalent use of quantitative content analysis and surveys coupled with framing and agenda-setting theories. This paper not only reviews the media framing of Pakistan but also suggests avenues for future research.

Keywords. 9/11 incident, Terrorism, Pakistani media, War on Terror, Western media.

Introduction

The terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in September 2001 sparked widespread global discourse on the issue of terrorism (Smith & Zeigler, 2011). A nuanced portrayal of Pakistani society emerged, characterized by concerns regarding its association with terrorism due to its provision of diplomatic and moral support to the Taliban before the 9/11 incident (Hilali, 2012). Following the 9/11 attack, Al-Qaeda was exposed as the master

planner of this incident. Subsequently, the U.S. Bush Administration declared a war on terrorism to apprehend Osama Bin Laden in Afghanistan (Schmitt & Shanker, 2005). The US triggered Pakistan to join this war, which the people, organizations, and religious groups of Pakistan criticized. The alliance with the US has faced several worse consequences by the region's Government, people, and organizations.

The rise in terrorism has caused problems for Pakistan in social, economic, and humanitarian aspects. This is particularly true since the Pakistan army started taking action to break down militant groups. Pakistan has faced an economic loss of 126.79 billion USD because of its continuous war on terror from 2001 to 2018 (Zakaria, Jun & Ahmed, 2019). The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) has also decided to keep Pakistan on the grey list when the country has not effectively addressed concerns related to terrorism financing (Mohan, 2021).

According to the facts, 52,000 people lost their lives in terrorist activities in Pakistan between 2002-2013, including troops, civilians, and personnel of security enforcement agencies (Abbasi, 2013), which has increased to almost 64,000 by 2019 (South Asian terrorism portal, 2019). Despite Pakistan gaining control over terrorist activities over time (Afzal, 2021), its international image has suffered due to the perception that it now harbors lasting elements of terrorism within the fabric of the country. Pakistan has natural places, and media reporting forms its reputation among international countries. The consistent portrayal of a disrupted law and order situation by Pakistani media has negatively affected tourism, resulting in a decrease in visits by foreign tourists and a decline in foreign tourist visits. Historical evidence indicates that the compromised security for foreigners has hindered significant regional economic investments (Malik, He & Rafay, 2019). The time after 9/11 was crucial for Pakistan. The foreign policies of several countries, like America and Europe, changed to focus mainly on dealing with terrorism. This made the region of Pakistan known for terrorism and damaged its reputation (Hussain, 2019). Inside the country, terrorist attacks have fueled global criticism of Pakistan, and several hours of media coverage about suicide bombings on Army headquarters and attacks on foreign cricket teams highlighted it failed as a State in front of the world (Javaid & Haq, 2016).

Many research studies have shown how people see Pakistan in terms of terrorism. This paper examines what scholars have found about the said issue in their studies. It's important because there are no review studies on terrorism and Pakistan in the existing literature. A critical review study about the image of Islam in Western print media was conducted by Ali and Lodhi (2009), which also reviewed research linked with Islam and terrorism. However, it considered

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Muslims in a global paradigm, and this research was limited to analyzing studies conducted in the pre-9/11 era. Hence, this study aims to provide a comprehensive review of research conducted after the 9/11 incident, mainly focusing on how Pakistan is portrayed in the context of terrorism in both national and international media.

Objectives of the study:

- 1. From the broader perspective, the study is based on presenting reviews about the image of Pakistan in the context of terrorism after the 9/11 incident. Thus, the primary objectives of this study are:*
- 2. To review the results of both quantitative and qualitative studies which have examined the portrayal of Pakistan in the realm of terrorism in all the governmental regimes of Pakistan after the 9/11 incident*
- 3. To critically analyze methodological aspects of previous research studies, including their designs and analytical techniques to consider terrorism in the context of the portrayal of Pakistan*

Materials and method:

This study has presented a review of the studies that have been conducted after the 9/11 incident on terrorism and the framing of Pakistan in national and international media during 2001-2018. Many academic studies were conducted in this era, but it is impossible to include all studies because of certain limitations (e.g., access, timeframe). Therefore, this review has adopted scientific standard for the selection of studies, which was based on the principle of the PRISMA statement, and it has been used in many review studies earlier related to the media (Domaradzki, 2021; Pilar, Rafael, Félix & Gabriel, 2019). PRISMA comprises the filtration of studies through four stages: identification, screening, eligibility evaluation, and final selection, as reflected in the figure below.

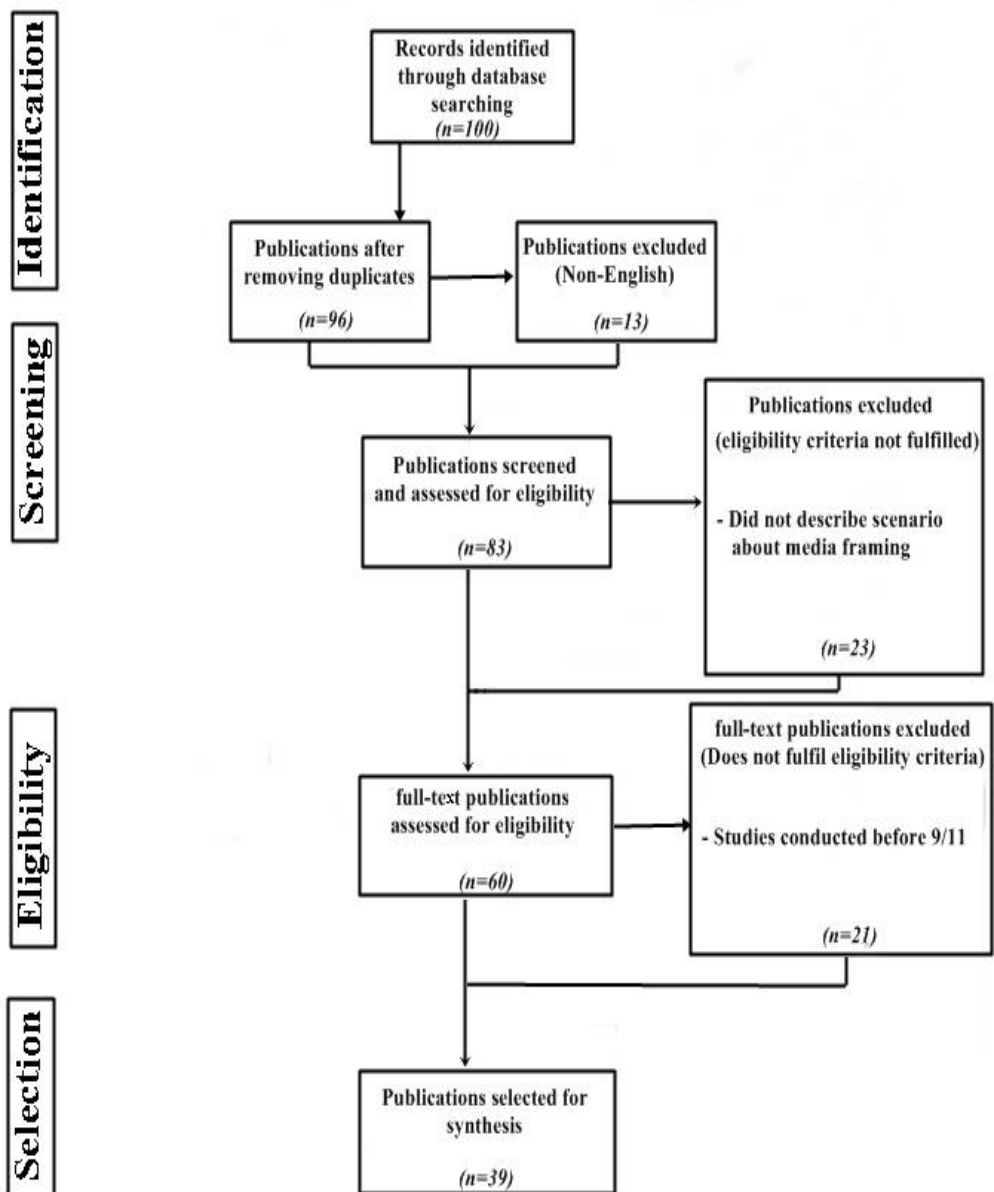


Figure-1: PRISMA Flow chart for systematic selection of studies

At the initial stage of the filtration process, research studies were identified through multiple open-access databases that could have been explored. These databases include Google Scholar, ProQuest, Pakistan Research Repository, OATD, Web of Science, Scopus, and OVID. For searching relevant studies, multiple keywords have been used in all databases according to relevance, e.g., framing of Pakistan and terrorism, framing of Pakistan war on terror, Pakistan image in media, framing of Pakistan after 9/11, Lal masjid and media framing,

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Zarb-e-Azab and media, Pakistani terrorism and western media. These keywords facilitated extracting all the studies (research papers, articles, dissertations) conducted in the specified area with their similarities either with abstract, keywords, or title of the publication, and almost 100 publications were collected during the identification stage. Through manual evaluation, four duplications and 13 non-English publications were removed from collected studies, leaving 83 publications in screening. In the 3rd stage, 23 studies were excluded as they did not fulfill the eligibility criteria according to the subject's relevance (did not describe a scenario about media framing). Next, the remaining 60 publications were assessed for their eligibility, and then 21 studies 'before 9/11' were excluded from the group; 39 full-text articles and dissertations were left for the selection, which has been reviewed for synthesis according to objectives in the present study.

Results:

This section comprises a synthesis of research studies presented according to the sampling of newspapers/movies/electronic news in different regimes so that media framing of terrorism can be analyzed in light of policies implemented by respective military and democratic governments in Pakistan. In other words, every era presents the studies' results by analyzing sampled items specifically in the particular governmental regime. These results have been synthesized in the following:

The regime of Pervez Musharraf after 9/11 (2001-2008):

The era of Pervez Musharraf has been significant for shaping the image of Pakistan in international media. Musharraf decided to conduct military operations to combat terrorism in the area of FATA, and the army claimed the killing of more than 1300 terrorists during 2002-2004. However, Western media continued blaming Pakistan for double standards, and the efforts of Pakistan for the war on terror were not appreciated (Khan, 2005). Many research studies investigated the portrayal of Pakistan in international media, as Shabbir, Hassan, Madni, and Ahmed (2018) divulged that Indian print media has not supported Pakistan's effort to curb terrorism and followed its governmental policy for portraying Pakistan over its media. These results have been supported by the study of Iftikhar and Shafiq (2019), who argued that Western print media (New York Times) remained unfavorable for narrating Pakistan in the realm of terrorism during the American democratic regime (Barack Obama). Similar research conducted by Naseer and Khan (2020) found the editorial treatment of the New York Times and Washington Post antagonistic towards Pakistan regarding terrorism, which reflects the prejudiced handling of American print

media after the 9/11 incident. Washington Post has given more negative coverage to Pakistan in the context of terrorism than the New York Times, and Pakistani people have been portrayed as religious extremists and Islamic radicals in these elite newspapers of America (Ali & Shahid, 2012; Farooq, 2016).

Many academic scholars paid their attention to exploring the image of Pakistan in the realm of terrorism in local media as Safdar, Budiman, and Hamid (2018) examined that Pakistani print media framed the war on terror critically; their study was based on thematic analysis (qualitative) which argued that press coverage has found in an anti-war manner due to external factors, i.e., religion, killings of Muslims. Several other studies presented a range of Pakistani media against governmental policy combating terrorism and argued about Western countries' hidden interest in Pakistan (Sing, 2003; Terradellas, 2008). Rahman and Ashraf (2014) discovered that the role of Pakistani media is more skewed towards war journalism, especially in English dailies on the issue of the Lal Masjid operation, while results of research by Hassan, Ali, Iqbal, and Raza (2013) depicted that The News and Dawn portrayed this operation in favor of Pakistani Government which has been argued as displaying the image of Pakistan as a supporter of "war on terror" among the world. These newspapers presented the government agenda regarding the Lal masjid operation and framed the issue with a responsible journalistic perspective.

However, the US invasion to kill Osama Bin Laden in Pakistan has been criticized by Pakistani print media (The News & Dawn). Although the aspect of killing the Al-Qaeda leader has been portrayed positively, the Pakistani Government has been blamed for having the weakest internal security, which allowed the US to rupture national sovereignty by assassinating Osama Bin Laden (Onyebadi, 2016). Similar results have been analyzed in the qualitative study of Hassan (2011), who argued that The Nation, Dawn, and The News portrayed the war on terror in Pakistan (FATA) solely as a "fight of Pakistan" but not as a joint venture with the US. Furthermore, another quantitative research also revealed that these elite newspapers framed the US as a "foe of Pakistan" because of its role in breaching Pakistan's sovereignty over security issues and drone attacks in the northern territory of Pakistan (Anwar, 2020).

The regime of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) (2008-2013):

This regime has recorded many terrorist attacks in Pakistan, which resulted in immense humanity loss as reflected in 3310 only in 2009. By 2010, almost 35,000 innocent citizens were killed in suicide bombings and grenade attacks in all provinces of Pakistan after the 9/11 incident (Sameer, 2018). Pakistan's framing regarding the war on terror has been investigated by multiple scholars as Shehla (2017) conducted research to examine the portrayal of Pakistan in the elite

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press of America during the PPP regime (2008-2012) and found that both newspapers (New York Times & Washington Post) framed Pakistan negatively in the context of its war on terror. Similar results have been reported by Ali and Shahid (2012), who argued that the elite American press portrayed Pakistan with a negative tone regarding terrorism while the Pakistani press favored the governmental stance for curbing militancy in the region. These authors attributed the results to weakening ties between the US and Pakistan. There have been many studies that comparatively analyzed news framing of American and Pakistani print media at this time and the results revealed that coverage of the US newspapers (New York Times & Washington Post) was based on deteriorating Pakistani image as a failure of its efforts for combating terrorism whereas Pakistani print media (Dawn) encouraged government efforts but criticized its alliance with the US which continued drone strikes into Western-Pakistani territories, both US-Pakistani elite press charged foreign policy of their respective governments (Khan & Irtaza, 2009; Sultan, 2013; Zahid, 2012).

However, Indian print media followed its foreign policy to criticize Pakistan for spreading terrorism, as the study of Raina (2011) found that Indian print media held Pakistan responsible for the Mumbai terror attacks of November 2008. Lashkar-e-taiba has been blamed for this incident that represented Pakistan as a "terrorist on religious grounds." Minhas (2019) also supported the notion of media compliance with the foreign policy of respective civil administration and comparatively analyzed the framing of the war on terror in Pakistan by the US, Indian, and Pakistani print media; he divulged that the American and Indian press portrayed negative picture of Pakistan for terrorism and 'The Hindu' named the nation of Pakistan as fundamentalist rather than liberals which further represented Pakistan in negative tone as compared to DAWN (Pakistani newspaper), that covered war on terror in a positive light. Similarly, Saadia (2018) conducted a discourse analysis of Western electronic media (CNN, BBC, Maxnews) and analyzed their news coverage; she divulged that these channels had criticized Pakistan during 2009-2010 when Pakistan became a victim of many terrorist attacks, but the military efforts of Pakistan have never appreciated, rather than western press labeled Pakistan's army belonging with the extremist group and overall Pakistan has portrayed as "responsible for terrorism."

The image of Pakistan has also been studied in national print media during this regime as Raza, Jan, Sultan, and Aziz (2012) analyzed coverage of two English newspapers (The Nation & Business Recorder) and found that both national newspapers framed the Taliban as enemy of Pakistan and held them

responsible for wide spreading terrorism in the region, overall, it has concluded that these newspapers supported Pakistan's war on terror and portrayed image of Pakistan positively by supporting governmental and military stance about terrorism. Similar results were divulged in the study of Malik and Iqbal (2011), who conducted quantitative content analysis and framed the Taliban as animals, extremists, and butchers in English newspapers of Pakistan (DAWN & The News), which represented the country's positive stance for condemning Talibanization and increased terrorism in the region.

The regime of PML-N (2013-2018):

This time is considered crucial for Pakistan because of its military operations in Northern areas for combating terrorism from this region, and the media continued several hours reporting on curbing militants, which established an image of Pakistan in the global landscape in different forms. Multiple academic studies have been conducted to investigate the created image of Pakistan in both national and international media regarding terrorism as Khan (2018) examined the portrayal of Operation Zarb-e-Azab in two Urdu and English Pakistani dailies (Dawn & The News, Nawa-i-Waqt & Daily Express) and findings revealed that both newspapers framed this military operation in a supportive manner. Along with this, the agenda-setting role of print media was investigated. The author argued that public opinion was consistent with the media, and people considered this war on terror patriotic, reflecting the positive image of Pakistan around the globe. The results of this study support the research of Akhtar and Khan (2016), who argued for the favorable image of Pakistan regarding Zarb-e-Azab in local media. Other qualitative and quantitative research studies with Dawn, The News, and The Nation revealed that the Pakistan army has been represented in a positive frame for integrating peace in the region, and efforts of Pakistan for the war on terror have been endorsed by these newspapers (Gul, Farooq & Afridi, 2020; Musarrat & Shabir, 2016). It should be noted that this military initiative has been projected as the biggest counteraction against terrorism; therefore, it has caught the attention of many academic scholars.

Following this operation, Yousaf (2015) comparatively analyzed coverage of US and Chinese news agencies by using quantitative methods and found that the US portrayed Pakistan in their frames as responsible for spreading terrorism in the region. In contrast, China represented Pakistan as a victim and sufferer of terrorism while efforts for combating terrorism have been endorsed by Xinhua news agency of China. Wazir and Ali (2015) conducted a longitudinal study and analyzed Western print media coverage (New York Times & Washington Post) in the context of representing the Pakistan army; their research concluded that pre-operation treatment of both newspapers was found negative whereas post-

operation treatment was favorable that portrayed the overall image of Pakistan favorably. Similar results have been identified in the study of Maqsood, Sharif, and Adnan (2020), who divulged that pre-operation framing was negative and that the army's role was unsatisfying in combating terrorism. Shah and Yousafzai (2020) analyzed coverage of elite press in the UK, USA, China, and India in their longitudinal study; the authors revealed that Western print media portrayed Pakistan negatively before the operation while acknowledging Pakistan's efforts during operation times.

On the other hand, Chinese Media positively highlighted the army's initiative before and during the process, but the Times of India criticized Pakistan as "a haven for terrorists." Another comparative study about India and Pakistan was conducted by Ali, Haq, and Aslam (2019), who examined press coverage of Western (UK, USA) and Chinese media; authors argued that Western print media framed Pakistan more in the context of terrorism and its effort for curbing militancy also have endorsed by China. Thus, the authors claimed that the foreign policy of countries affects media coverage, which is also evident in many researches that reflected news of elite Indian media are based on the war frames about Pakistan, which projects Pakistan as a warrior (Hussain, 2015; Yousaf, Ilahi & Adnan, 2018)

Similar discourse has been represented even in Bollywood movies (The Attack of 26/11, Baby, Welcome 2 Karachi) aired between 2013-2015, which have portrayed the Pakistani nation as 'terror-loving people' and expressed direct involvement of Pakistani people in religious groups 'Lashkar-e-Taiba' for spreading terrorism (Atif, 2020). "Phantom" was released in 2015, and discourse analysis for investigating the image of Pakistan has resulted in the portrayal of Pakistan as a terrorist nation, including its armed forces and inter-service intelligence (ISI), which control militants for exploding on Indian territories, the study was based on dialogues and visual elements' analysis used in the movie (Atif & Shafiq, 2019). In the realm of terrorism, both methodologies (content analysis and survey) have been employed by academic researchers in different domains. The framing of terrorism has been investigated using the method of content analysis, whereas survey research was conducted to find the agenda-setting effects of mass media. During the Zarb-e-Azab operation, people perceived that television coverage provided them confidence and the curbing of militant wings gave them a sense of security. The public processed information on the war on terror as a peaceful step toward national integrity and felt free of fear because of preventing the spread of terrorism from Pakistan (Basit, Hussain, & Javed,

2019). Another survey research was conducted by Qureshi, Gulraiz, and Shahzad (2016) to investigate the media's role in handling the Peshawar attack (APS). The results divulged that the media portrayal of this attack did not create fear among the public. Instead, the role of media has been found responsible for promoting solidarity and peace in the Pakistani nation.

Conclusion:

The study is based on analyzing 39 research studies (selected through PRISMA) that have been conducted after the 9/11 incident in the context of terrorism and the portrayal of Pakistan in both national and international media. As research findings have been bifurcated with the military (Pervaiz Musharraf) and civilian (PPP & PML-N) governmental regimes of Pakistan (2001-2018), results have been interpreted in light of the foreign policy of respective administrations in both national and international contexts.

During the era of military dictator Pervaiz Musharraf (2001-2008), most of the coverage regarding the war on terror in Pakistan was given negatively by both national and international media. Western newspapers (New York Times & Washington Post) have been selected to analyze terrorism framing of Pakistan by many scholars. In contrast, the studies picked DAWN, The News, and The Nation as Pakistani elite press. American print media criticized (e.g., as a double gamer, religious extremist, Islamic radicals) Pakistan's efforts in combating terrorism despite Pakistan's alliance with the US. It has been divulged that American media complied with the foreign policy of their respective administration, which is more dependent on its interest in any country. In the Musharraf regime, Pakistani print media appreciated military operation activities. However, alliance with the US was stigmatized in local news coverage due to American drone strikes in the Northern territories of Pakistan, which resulted in the killing of thousands of innocent civilians.

During the Pakistan Peoples Party regime (2008-2013), Pakistan became a victim of increased terrorism in the region. By and large, all provinces of Pakistan have exploded with suicide bombings and grenade attacks, which resulted in the killings of a large number of residents. Indian print media demolished Pakistan's reputation with negative coverage, especially after the Mumbai attacks of 2011, and Lashkar-e-Taiba was held responsible for this incident. 'The Hindu' (an Indian newspaper) labeled the Pakistani nation as fundamentalist and religious extremist to express their traditional animosity. Western print media continued its policy to deteriorate the image of Pakistan, and efforts for curbing militancy were not covered in a supportive manner. News coverage of BBC, CNN, and Maxnews has been divulged against the Pakistan army, which even attributed the army to militant groups serving in Pakistan and further portrayed as "responsible

for spreading terrorism” in the region. This was a time when diplomatic ties between the US and Pakistan were getting weak since Pakistan revoked NATO supplies of America after the Slala check post-incident. Therefore, American media tarnished Pakistan’s image, and Pakistani media also criticized US-Pakistan ties during this time. It should be noted that elite newspapers of Pakistan (Dawn, The News, and The Nation) supported government efforts for the war on terror, and Talibanization has been criticized in the greater media coverage as these newspapers called them animals, butchers, extremists, and religiously orthodox.

During the PML-N regime (2013-2018), the Pakistan army conducted its biggest operation against militancy in northern territories, known as “Operation Zarb-e-Azab,” which gained the attention of many scholars. Coverage of Western print media before this operation was harmful to a greater extent, and the Pakistan army was declared as having failed to combat terrorism. In contrast, post-operation coverage of American newspapers (New York Times & Washington Post) has divulged in favor of Pakistan. Chinese media also endorsed the Pakistani Government for its war on terror as both countries tied in a friendly relationship for too long. But Indian news media coverage was as usual against Pakistan, which portrayed this region as a “haven for terrorists,” and the overall picture of Pakistan has been presented as a “warrior.” Many Bollywood movies were aired during this regime, and their depiction sarcastically deteriorated Pakistani people who have been attributed with ‘Lashkar-e-Taiba’ for spreading terrorism on religious grounds.

Furthermore, Pakistan’s army and ISI have been presented with a negative image as they control militants for exploding over Indian territories. In a nutshell, both American and Indian media portrayed a fragile picture of Pakistan in the context of terrorism after the 9/11 incident. However, Chinese media have always supported Pakistan, which concludes media compliance with the foreign policy of their respective governments.

Concerning methodological and analytical paradigms, it can be noticed that a large number of scholars have adopted quantitative content analysis and discourse-analysis approaches. At the same time, qualitative studies are very few in number. Similarly, the phenomenon of terrorism has also been linked with military operations about terrorism activities in respective governmental regimes. Still, there are uninvestigated areas that may be addressed in future research.

Identified gaps in literature:

This area comprises describing phenomenological and methodological aspects that can set directions for further research in the context of terrorism and the

portrayal of Pakistan after the 9/11 incident. These aspects have been discussed below:

Recent research has examined coverage of the NEW York Times and Washington Post in terms of investigating Western discourse; further research should be conducted by taking more newspapers of Western and European societies.

The portrayal of Pakistan regarding terrorism should be explored in the media of Middle Eastern countries because Pakistan's image has become fragile globally, so its representation in the media of the Middle East may reflect significant results.

Most research studies considered elite print media for analysis; therefore, electronic media channels should also be analyzed.

Coverage of Urdu print media of Pakistan should also be examined to find out the portrayal of Pakistan after the 9/11 incident by different governmental regimes, as the majority of studies comprised of English newspapers of Pakistan.

On theoretical grounds, framing and agenda-setting were applied in all studies. Future research should be conducted with cultivation analysis to examine how the portrayal of Pakistan as a terrorist cultivates the minds of viewers.

Content analysis of Bollywood and Hollywood movies may be conducted to evaluate the representation of Pakistan in the context of terrorism because minimal studies were found in this domain.

Mainstream media always have some limitations in the news coverage. Therefore, social media news channels or online web channels of Western, European, and Middle Eastern countries should be examined to determine the portrayal of Pakistan.



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