



## RESEARCH PAPER

### Exploring the Press Coverage of Political Leaders in Pakistan: An Indexing Perspective

<sup>1</sup>Wasim Tariq, <sup>2</sup>Syed Abid Ali Bukhari and <sup>3</sup>Muhammad Junaid Ghauri\*

1. MS Scholar, Department of Media and Communication Studies, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan
2. PhD Scholar, Department of Media Studies, the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Lecturer, Department of Media and Communication Studies, International Islamic University Islamabad, Pakistan

\*Corresponding Author

Muhammad.junaid@iiu.edu.pk

## ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this research is to examine the coverage of political leaders in the leading newspapers of Pakistan within the premises of indexing theory. Employing a qualitative content analysis methodology, this study investigates the portrayal of political leaders within the selected newspapers and explores the predominant themes in their coverage. In order to achieve this objective, a comprehensive content analysis of top two English newspapers including; Dawn and The Express Tribune has been conducted. This study provides insights into the manner in which the newspapers present political leaders and examines the extent to which their coverage adheres to the principles of indexing theory. The findings of this study show that the coverage and indexing of new related to the political figures in Pakistani newspapers demonstrate a wide array of perspectives, as observed through the lens of indexing theory. However, overall portrayal of Imran Khan in both the newspapers contain indexing as an active political figure. There is mix of indexing of Maryam Nawaz in both the newspapers. One the other hand, Maulana Fazal Ur Rehman found critical indexing in both the newspapers. Ameer JI Siraj ul Haq has been indexed in more neutral way by the selected newspapers.

## KEYWORDS

Content Analysis, Indexing Theory, Political Indexing, Political Leaders, Predominant Themes

## Introduction

Evidently, in the modern, digitalized world, scholars paid great attention to the link between the media and the government, primarily theorizing about this relationship within the framework of policy issues. Additionally, Rhodes (2022) believes that the role of the media is susceptible to the pre-existing (political) climate, while Milutinović (2021) believes that the media plays its independent function, pushing the critical narrative and its agenda when dramatic and unsettling events occur. On the other hand, Herman and Chomsky (1988) asserted that the media is submissive to the government due to factors including shared interests, the media's reliance on advertising money, and the media's reliance on official sources for information.

Malcolm X once said; "the media is the most powerful entity on earth. Media have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that power is because they control the minds of the masses". Although mass media have evolved, there continues to be a strong connection between mass media and the political system.

Moreover, the media plays a dominant role in indexing news, while individuals consume this news through newspapers without seeking it out themselves. Political leaders have also had significant roles in society. However, when any newspaper indexes the speeches or talks of political leaders according to their policies, it has positive or adverse effects. So, the main thrust of this research is to explore how did the dailies; *Dawn*, *The Express Tribune*, *The Nation*, and *The News International* index the news related to Imran Khan- Chairman Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), Bilawal Bhutto Zardari-Co-Chairman Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Maryam Nawaz- Vice President Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N), Maulana Fazal ur Rehman- President Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) and Maulana Siraj Ul Haq- Ameer Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) during May 01, 2022 to October 31, 2022.

The findings of this study will contribute to the academic literature on the hypothesis of the indexing theory within the context of coverage of political leaders in Pakistan's Press. The theoretical implications of this study will also enhance the existing knowledge of how the press in Pakistan indexes news about political leaders. Furthermore, the literature reviewed for this study will also contribute to the latest research findings on the similar topics of indexing. This research attempt is a practical examination that considers the efficacy of the indexing theory in analyzing the coverage of political leaders in Pakistan's press. Hallin (1986) asserts that news sources and opinions are "indexed" or "filtered" by journalists in various national press systems based on perceived power relationships among factions inside political institutions. Through this study, the researchers will have a more concrete understanding of the indexing of news by the press in the Pakistani context.

### Literature Review

A literature review is a summary of research on a specific topic. It aims to critically evaluate the existing research on the topic, identify gaps in the literature, and synthesize the essential findings and emerging themes. The coverage of political leaders exploring indexing theory could provide an overview of the research conducted on how the media covers political leaders and how this coverage is influenced by indexing theory. According to indexing theory, the media is inclined to mirror and bolster the prevailing values, beliefs, and perspectives of a given society instead of questioning or evaluating them. This literature review comprehensively analyses the fundamental concepts and notions of indexing theory and their applicability to the media's portrayal of political figures in Pakistan. This review analyses the implications of the findings for researchers and policymakers interested in comprehending the media's function in democratic societies and the influence of media coverage on public opinion.

Lance Bennett argues in his book "News: The Politics of Illusion" that the preferences of the privileged class significantly impact how political leaders are portrayed in the media. Bennett found that media coverage of political leaders focuses more on their personalities than their policies or length of service in office (Washburn & Washburn, 2011). The study also found that the media frequently uses a positive framing strategy to portray political figures, making them appear determined and competent even when their activities are controversial, or their effectiveness is questionable.

Bennett found that media outlets are likelier to focus on a politician's personality traits than on their ideas or performance in office. In political parlance, "horse race" coverage refers to the media's focus on a candidate's or incumbent's personality, style, and campaign methods rather than their programs or office records. Aalberg, Strömbäck, and De Vreese (2012) observed that during election seasons, media outlets tend to prioritize the personalities and campaign techniques of political candidates over the policies they put

out. The media's focus on the candidates' histories and personalities during the 2016 U.S. Presidential election overshadowed coverage of the contenders' actual programs and qualifications. Examples of this kind of coverage may be found in the media's representation of politicians' everyday events, including speeches, press conferences, and photo ops.

The media frequently gives more weight to a political leader's "optics," or outward appearance, than the actual content of what they say. Bennett found that the media is biased toward positive portrayals of political leaders, emphasizing their strength and decisiveness despite their potentially divisive policies and questionable performance (Momen, 2018). What we call "hero framing" occurs when a political leader's acts or ideas are presented favorably in the media, even though they may be divisive. Even if his decision to launch military action in Iraq was controversial, the media portrayed George W. Bush as a strong and decisive leader during the Iraq conflict. It has also been observed that the media presents a more positive image of a popular leader with the elite than an unpopular leader with that group.

The study titled "All News is Bad News: Newspaper Coverage of Political Parties in Spain" examines and juxtaposes the methodologies employed by two prominent Spanish newspapers, namely *El País* and *El Mundo*, in their coverage of various political parties. The authors have observed that past studies have indicated that discrepancies in media coverage based on ownership patterns and partisan affiliations are more frequently observed in cross-national studies than those conducted within a single country. Despite the existence of observed disparities, Baumgartner and Chaques Bonafont (2015) found that similarities in media coverage had a higher impact than differences. Bennett's indexing hypothesis, the authors argue, is to blame for these shifts. According to this hypothesis, news outlets choose which stories to cover based on how exciting or essential their readers find them rather than any ideological bias. The authors argue that their theory provides a framework for doing just that. The authors' findings corroborate the notion, showing that the Spanish executive, particularly the Prime Minister, received extensive coverage in Spain's two most widely circulated newspapers. This suggests that media coverage is determined less by ideological bias and more by the perceived significance or novelty of the subject matter. The survey also found that when CiU, ERC, and PNV were instrumental in forming the government, they received extensive media coverage. Bennett's indexing hypothesis, which proposes that media coverage of such events is driven by their perceived significance or novelty rather than any ideological predispositions, receives further support from the previous observation.

The authors of "Pakistani Muslim Society On the Front-Pages of Mainstream U.S. Newspapers", contend that the American mainstream media has vilified Pakistan to legitimize the aggressive pursuits of the U.S. government in the South Asian region. The authors substantiate their claim by citing data from American newspapers from January 2009 to January 2010, which reported on al Qaeda's potential takeover of the Pakistani state. This reportage was potentially utilized as a rationale for the sustained presence of the United States in the region. According to Gillani, Frey, and Ishfaq (2021), Imran Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, has contended that military action is not a viable means of achieving peace in Afghanistan. Khan has further suggested that the portrayal of Pakistan by the U.S. media may exhibit a bias in favor of perpetuating aggressive approaches. The authors posit that the depiction of Pakistani society by the mainstream U.S. media is subject to the influence of the "Golden triangle," a term used to describe the financial elites in the U.S. who wield significant power in shaping both domestic and foreign policy. The authors contend that the media coverage of Pakistani society by the United States serves to advance

the interests of the "Golden triangle" instead of providing an accurate portrayal of the perspectives and encounters of the Pakistani populace.

Gentzkow and Mullinix (2010) conducted a comprehensive analysis of various research studies that have explored the correlation between newspaper entry and exit and electoral results in their work titled "The Effect of Newspaper Entry and Exit on Electoral Politics." The authors posit that comprehending the influence of newspaper entrance and departure on electoral politics holds significance for policymakers and researchers who are invested in the operation of democratic societies.

The analysis reveals that the entrance and departure of newspapers can yield significant impacts on electoral politics, encompassing the direct impact of newspapers on voter conduct and the indirect impact of newspapers on media coverage of elections. The impact of newspapers on the dissemination of information is more pronounced in smaller and less competitive markets, where the media environment is more consolidated. This is supported by the findings of Gentzkow and Shapiro (2010). The present review news thoroughly summarizes the extant literature on the influence of newspaper entry and exit on electoral politics. It underscores how alterations in the newspaper industry can impact voter conduct, campaign expenditure, and media representation of elections. The review above contributes to the existing body of literature regarding the impact of media on democratic societies, as well as the media's function in shaping public opinion and electoral results. This resource is of significant value to scholars and decision-makers who seek to comprehend the impact of transformations in the newspaper sector on electoral processes.

Furthermore, the scholarly work titled "Online News Credibility: An Examination of the Perceptions of Newspaper Journalists" was published in the peer-reviewed journal *New Media & Society* in 2014. The study investigates the viewpoints of newspaper journalists concerning the credibility of online news sources. Grigore and Roman have conducted a review that synthesizes and summarizes various research studies that have explored the credibility of online news, specifically from the standpoint of newspaper journalists, as noted by Cassidy (2007). The authors posit the significance of comprehending the viewpoints of newspaper journalists, as these individuals are frequently responsible for assessing the reliability of digital news outlets to ascertain their suitability for incorporation into their news reportage. The authors observe that the emergence of the internet has resulted in a surge of digital news outlets, posing a challenge for journalists to discern the veracity of these sources.

According to the authors' findings, newspaper journalists perceive online news sources as possessing lower credibility than conventional print or broadcast sources. Individuals exhibit heightened concern regarding the precision and dependability of digital news and frequently employ a diverse range of criteria when assessing the authenticity of such outlets. Several factors may be considered, such as the credibility of the source, the website's structure and format, and the existence of validation and fact-checking mechanisms. In general, the review news presents a valuable synopsis of the extant literature concerning the veracity of online news as perceived by print journalists (Cassidy, 2007). The text elucidates the variables that impact digital sources' reliability and the methodologies journalists employ to assess their veracity. The review above contributes to the extant body of literature concerning the veracity of internet-based news and the media's function in shaping the viewpoints of the populace and providing information to democratic societies.

In general, scholarly literature about newspaper coverage of political scandals posits that the media significantly influences the public's perceptions of politicians and

government. Furthermore, it is suggested that the extent and duration of media coverage can substantially impact public attitudes. The findings of this study hold significance for policymakers and scholars who seek to comprehend the function of media in democratic societies and the methods by which media representation can influence public perspectives.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Bennett's (1990) indexing model, which is an extension of Hallin's (1986) media spheres and Herman and Noam Chomsky's (1988) manufacturing consent model, is a more influential model that attempts to explain how the U.S. media index the opinions of elites in a (political and policy) debates. This model seeks to explain how the media in the United States index the opinions of elites. Indexing explains one's confidence level in the discourse of the media and the elite. Bennett's (1990) seminal work on the indexing model identifies three indicators that push the media to trust elites in a political debate. Despite the criticisms from the elites' points of view, the indexing theory can address the current connection between the media and the government. This is particularly true regarding how the media treats elites' (political) debate. Bennett (1990) asserts that "news professionals in the mass media, from the boardroom to the beat, tend to "index" the diversity of voices and ideas in both news and editorials according to the range of viewpoints reflected in mainstream government discourse on a given subject. Therefore, the theory can forecast the type of media coverage based on the degree to which elites are in accord or consensus and the degree to which they disagree.

The theory of indexing, initially posited by Lance Bennett, postulates that the media holds significant influence in molding public perception by carefully choosing, emphasizing, and construing occurrences for their viewership. Bennett argues that the preferences and objectives of political and economic elites substantially impact the media's curation of news events and their presentation. According to Bennett's argument (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2019), the media's selection of news events is heavily influenced by the tastes of political and economic elites. Bennett claims that the media routinely gives more publicity to events and subjects that are important to the elites and less attention to, or completely ignores, those that are of no importance to the elites. In their 1972 study "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw found that the media prioritizes themes important to political and economic elites, such as the economy and international affairs. Conversely, public-interest concerns like healthcare and education are frequently overlooked (Towner & Muoz, 2020). Bennett's thesis postulates a crucial component that the interests of political and economic elites considerably shape the framing of events by the media.

According to Bennett, the news tends to be skewed toward the interests of the people who hold power in society. Doris Graber's 1974 study, "Mass Media and American Politics," found that, despite the controversial nature of political leaders' policies or the uncertainty surrounding their performance, the media often presents them favourably, portraying them as resolute and commanding. The media's focus on the candidates' personalities and histories during the 2016 U.S. presidential election was at the expense of coverage of their existing programs and qualifications. The media also uses framing strategies that serve the interests of the powerful. When the establishment backs one candidate, the media often present them in a positive light while portraying the other in a negative light. Bennett argues further that the agenda of the privileged class significantly impacts how political personalities are portrayed in the media. Hayes and Guardino (2010) found that the media frequently focuses on politicians' personalities rather than their policies or office performance. Furthermore, the media often presents political figures

favorably, portraying them as determined and competent despite the controversy around their programs or the doubts about their effectiveness.

## Material and Methods

### Data Collection and Sampling

Keeping in view the main research objective of exploring and investigating the indexing of news regarding selected political leaders by dailies; *Dawn* and *The Express Tribune* in their press coverage during May 01, 2022 to October 31, 2022, we have used the census sampling to carry out this study. Using this method, it is possible to analyze each selected sample. Moreover, a census method is the process of a statistical list that all population members can analyze. The population relates to the set of all observations under concern. After census sampling the researchers have collected 80 news stories from *Dawn* newspaper and 68 news stories from *The Express Tribune*. Bearing in mind the magnitude of the data as a next step, employing the Nth method we have selected every 16<sup>th</sup> news story from *Dawn* newspaper. Similarly, every 13<sup>th</sup> story has been selected from 68 news stories published in *The Express Tribune* during the time period under study. By doing so, we have selected 10 news stories as sample size of the study i.e. 5 news stories from each newspaper.

### Data Analysis

Content analysis has been applied to analyze the data. The researchers have carefully examined each piece of news about the selected political leaders on the front and back pages of the selected newspapers to identify the indexing related to the portrayal of political leaders. Various aspects were considered, such as the tone of coverage, prominence given to different leaders on the nature of their portrayal (positive, negative, and neutral). Data has been categorizing into positive, negative and neutral content categories. Content analysis has been employed to categories the data on the basis of words, phrases and sentence available in the news stories.

## Results and Discussion

### Analysis on *Dawn*

"Warning of March on Capital, Imran seeks election date." (*Dawn*, 2022 May 14)

Utilizing indexing theory to analyze the hypothetical news titled "Warning of March on Capital, Imran seeks election date" from *Dawn*, it can be inferred that they may convey a pessimistic viewpoint. The title draws attention to the announcement of a planned march towards the Capital, suggesting the possibility of civil disorder or agitation. The utilization of negative indexing implies a state of discontentment or disappointment. Moreover, Imran's appeal for a specific date for the election could suggest a yearning for transformation or a deficiency of trust in the present political circumstances.

From an indexing theory standpoint, the news exhibits a bias towards a negative perspective. The prominence given to the cautionary notice regarding a march and Imran's call for a specific date for the election denotes a possible discontentment with the existing state of affairs. The utilization of negative framing implies a critical evaluation or a plea for modification. Nonetheless, a thorough examination of the entirety of the subject matter, encompassing its substance, linguistic expression, manner of delivery, and contextual elements, is imperative to arrive at a more precise assessment of the news' overarching viewpoint in light of the indexing theory.

“Reaction to be severe if Imran arrested warns PTI.” (*Dawn*, 2022 June 6)

Utilizing indexing theory to analyze the hypothetical news titled "Reaction to be severe if Imran arrested warns PTI" from *Dawn*, it is evident that the news conveys a potentially unfavorable viewpoint. The PTI party's statement, which includes the phrase "Reaction to be severe if Imran arrested," implies a warning of potentially significant and adverse repercussions in the event of Imran Khan's arrest. The aforementioned framing of the possible detention of Imran Khan portrays a pessimistic perspective, emphasizing the expected adverse response.

From an indexing theory standpoint, it can be argued that the news tends to exhibit a bias towards negative content. The PTI's emphasis on the warning of a severe reaction connotes a potential threat or unrest in the event of Imran Khan's arrest. The utilization of negative framing implies the possibility of a precarious circumstance or resistance to the apprehension, situating it within an unfavorable context. Conducting a thorough analysis of the entirety of a news piece, encompassing its language, tone, and contextual factors, is crucial in accurately ascertaining its overall perspective within the framework of indexing theory.

“Imran warns CEC gone.” (*Dawn*, 2022 July 18)

By applying indexing theory to the hypothetical news titled "Imran warns CEC gone" from *Dawn*, it is possible to discern that the news conveys a potentially unfavorable viewpoint. The employment of the term "warns" connotes a confrontational or disapproving demeanor, implying that Imran Khan is conveying discontentment or providing a word of caution to the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC).

From an indexing theory standpoint, it can be argued that the news tends to exhibit a bias towards negative perspectives. Imran Khan's cautionary statement aimed at the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) connotes an unfavorable evaluation of the CEC's conduct or determinations, indicating a dearth of trust or discontentment. The utilization of negative indexing within this particular context serves to underscore plausible apprehensions or dissensions regarding the performance or comportment of the CEC. Conducting a thorough analysis of the entirety of a news piece, encompassing language, tone, and contextual factors, is crucial in accurately ascertaining its overall perspective within the framework of indexing theory.

“Imran granted protective bail in terror case.” (*Dawn*, 2022 August 23)

By applying indexing theory to the news "Imran granted protective bail in terror case" published in *Dawn*, it can be inferred that the news indicates a possibly impartial viewpoint. The terminology "protective bail" implies that Imran Khan has been granted bail as a safeguard against possible danger or detention in connection with a case involving terrorism. The framing in question does not possess an inherent positive or negative connotation, as its interpretation is contingent upon the contextual and substantive elements of the particular case.

From an indexing theory standpoint, it can be argued that the news exhibits a tendency towards a neutral perspective. The statement emphasizes that Imran Khan has been granted bail in a terrorism case, implying a legal process associated with the issue. The utilization of neutral framing implies a presentation of the event in an objective manner, devoid of any explicit expression of positive or negative evaluation. Conducting a thorough analysis of the entirety of a news piece, which encompasses language, tone,

and contextual factors, is crucial in accurately ascertaining the news's overall perspective within the framework of indexing theory.

“Imran visits courts to apologize in judge's absence.” (*Dawn*, 2022 October 1)

By applying indexing theory to the news titled "Imran visits courts to apologize in judge's absence" from *Dawn*, we can derive the conveyed perspective. The title of the news conveys a favorable viewpoint by emphasizing Imran's attendance at the courts with the aim of expressing regret, indicating a notion of responsibility and contrition.

From a positive indexing standpoint, it has been reported that Imran Khan made a visit to the courts to offer an apology in the absence of the judge. The act of offering an apology indicates a readiness to assume accountability for any transgression or misbehavior. The aforementioned statement presents a favorable depiction of Imran Khan, highlighting his appreciation for the legal system and deference towards the judiciary.

### **Analysis on *The Express Tribune***

“Imran PTI bigwigs booked for blasphemy.” (*The Express Tribune*, 2022 May 1)

Utilizing indexing theory to scrutinize *The Express Tribune's* news titled "Imran PTI bigwigs booked for blasphemy," it can be inferred that the news implies that notable figures affiliated with the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) political party, such as Imran Khan, have been charged with committing blasphemy. The document is expected to furnish particulars concerning the allegations, the legal measures implemented, the responses from the accused and the general populace, and any possible ramifications for both the individuals involved and the political party.

From an indexing theory standpoint, it can be posited that news media often conveys a negative perspective. The title of the news implies a grave accusation of blasphemy directed towards prominent members of the PTI, which holds substantial legal and societal ramifications within the context of Pakistan. The diction employed in the news implies a plausible adverse circumstance for the implicated persons and their political faction. A comprehensive examination of the entirety of *The News International*, encompassing both its substance and manner, is imperative in order to ascertain the complete scope of the unfavorable viewpoint expressed.

“Bilawal derides Imran over US conspiracy claim.” (*The Express Tribune*, 2022 May 15)

Utilizing indexing theory to scrutinize *The Express Tribune's* news entitled "Bilawal derides Imran over US conspiracy claim," it can be inferred that Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, a notable political personality, is censuring Imran Khan for his assertion regarding a US conspiracy. The document is expected to furnish particulars regarding the circumstances surrounding Imran Khan's assertion, Bilawal's reaction or refutation, and the possible ramifications for the political interplay between the two.

From an indexing theory standpoint, it can be posited that news media often conveys a negative perspective. The title conveys a tone of derision or mockery as Bilawal criticizes Imran Khan for his assertion regarding a conspiracy involving the United States. The diction employed in the news implies a discerning assessment of Imran Khan's declaration, as Bilawal articulates dissent or incredulity. Nonetheless, a thorough examination of the complete news coverage, encompassing both its substance and manner, is imperative to ascertain the complete scope of the unfavorable viewpoint communicated.



"Bilawal urges global effort to counter disinformation." (*The Express Tribune*, 2022 June 23)

Utilizing indexing theory to scrutinize *The Express Tribune's* news titled "Bilawal urges global effort to counter disinformation," it can be inferred that Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, a distinguished political personality, is advocating for a worldwide endeavor to counteract disinformation. The document is expected to furnish particulars concerning Bilawal's proposition, the rationales he underscores for the necessity to tackle disinformation, and the probable consequences for media literacy and information authenticity.

From an indexing theory standpoint, it can be argued that news media tends to convey a positive perspective. The aforementioned title suggests that Bilawal is advocating for a worldwide endeavor to combat disinformation, thereby indicating a favorable assessment of his plea for collaborative measures to address the dissemination of inaccurate or deceptive data. The utilization of language in *The News International*, specifically the expression "urge global effort," implies a proactive and constructive stance. Nonetheless, a thorough examination of the complete news report, encompassing both its substance and manner, is imperative to validate the overarching viewpoint communicated.

"Imran forces general elections in 6-8 weeks." (*The Express Tribune*, 2022 July 31)

Utilizing indexing theory to scrutinize the news entitled "Imran forces general elections in 6-8 weeks" published in *The Express Tribune*, it can be inferred that the aforementioned political personality, Imran Khan, is advocating for the conduct of general elections within a definite span of 6-8 weeks. The forthcoming report is expected to furnish information regarding the rationale behind Imran Khan's determination, the ramifications for the political milieu, and the possible obstacles and advantages linked with premature elections.

From an indexing theory standpoint, it can be argued that news media presents information in a neutral manner. The aforementioned news presents Imran Khan's advocacy for the scheduling of general elections within a specific timeframe, devoid of any overtly favorable or unfavorable connotations. The lexical choices employed in *The News International*, including the term "forces" and the explicit mention of a timeline, suggest a sense of exigency and resolve. Nonetheless, a thorough examination of the complete news report, encompassing both its substance and manner, is imperative in ascertaining the overarching viewpoint communicated.

"Imran deeply regrets lady judge remark." (*The Express Tribune*, 2022 September 8)

Utilizing indexing theory to scrutinize the news titled "Imran deeply regrets lady judge remark" from *The Express Tribune*, it can be inferred that Imran Khan, a prominent political figure, has expressed profound remorse for a comment he made regarding a female judge. The aforementioned source is expected to furnish comprehensive information regarding the contextual background of the statement, the ensuing reaction it garnered, and the subsequent response and contrition expressed by Imran Khan.

From an indexing theory standpoint, it is possible for news to convey a negative perspective. The title implies that Imran Khan's comment regarding a female judge was regrettable, indicating a possible error in decision-making or an unsuitable utterance. The forthcoming report is anticipated to furnish additional details concerning the character of the comment, its resultant repercussions or adverse reactions, and the measures taken by

Imran Khan to redress the matter. Conducting a thorough examination of the complete news report, encompassing its substance, presentation, and attitude, is imperative in ascertaining the overarching viewpoint communicated. However, the preliminary perception is that the statement is imbued with pessimism.

## Conclusion

The scholarly community has shown enduring interest in examining the dynamics between the media and the government. Various theories have been developed to investigate the extent of media's influence on public opinion, its ability to shape political discourse, and the degree of independence maintained by the media. According to Rhodes (2022), the media's role is influenced by the prevailing political environment, whereas Milutinović (2021) contends that the media is autonomous in advancing critical narratives amidst turbulent circumstances. In contrast, Herman and Chomsky (1988) posit that the media assumes a subordinate role to the government due to mutual interests, reliance on advertising revenue, and dependence on official sources. This discourse also explores the indexing theory, which suggests that the media tends to reflect the diversity of voices and ideas by aligning with the range of viewpoints present in mainstream government discourse (Bennett, 1990). This study was aimed to analyze the news coverage of Imran Khan, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Maryam Nawaz, Maulana Fazl ur Rehman, and Maulana Siraj Ul Haq, in two prominent Pakistani newspapers, namely *Dawn* and *The Express Tribune* over six months. The research holds importance due to its contribution to the existing body of literature on media coverage of political leaders.

The coverage and indexing of new related to the political figures in Pakistani newspapers demonstrate a wide array of perspectives, as observed through the lens of indexing theory. The *Dawn* newspaper offers a comprehensive analysis and acknowledgement of Imran Khan's political activism and involvement, incorporating critical evaluation and appreciation. *The Express Tribune* comprehensively analyzes Imran Khan, encompassing both positive and negative viewpoints. It sheds light on his political pursuits and the controversies surrounding him. Concerning Maryam Nawaz, *Dawn* offers a combination of critical and impartial perspectives, whereas *The Express Tribune* presents various viewpoints, encompassing both positive and negative assessments. *Dawn* presents a positive perspective on Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, highlighting his constructive endeavors. *The Express Tribune* provides a balanced analysis by presenting a comprehensive evaluation of his political engagements, encompassing both positive and critical perspectives. The *Dawn* adopts a critical perspective when discussing Maulana Fazal Ur Rehman, emphasizing his opposition to Imran Khan and the PTI government. *The Express Tribune* upholds an objective perspective by neutrally presenting statements and actions. Maulana Siraj-ul-Haq, the leader of Jamaat-e-Islami, appears to receive relatively limited media coverage, indicating a potential disparity in the attention given to him compared to other prominent political figures.

## References

- Aalberg, T., Strömbäck, J., & De Vreese, C. H. (2012). The framing of politics as strategy and game: A review of concepts, operationalizations and key findings. *Journalism*, 13(2), 162-178.
- Adnan, I. (2022, July 31). Imran forces general elections in 6-8 weeks. *The Express Tribune*.
- Asad, M. (2022, August 23). Imran granted protective bail in terror case. *Dawn*
- Asad, M. (2022, October 1). Imran visits courts to apologize in judge's absence. *Dawn*.
- Baumgartner, F. R., & Chaques Bonafont, L. (2015). All news is bad news: Newspaper coverage of political parties in Spain. *Political communication*, 32(2), 268-291.
- Bennett, W. L. (1990). Toward a theory of press-state. *Journal of communication*, 40(2), 103-127. Bennett, W. L., & Lawrence, R. G. (1995). News icons and the mainstreaming of social change. *Journal of Communication*, 45(3), 20-39.
- Bennett, W. L., & Manheim, J. B. (2006). The one-step flow of communication. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 608(1), 213-232.
- "Bilawal derides Imran over US conspiracy claim". (2022, May 15). *The Express Tribune*.
- "Bilawal urges global effort to counter disinformation". (2022, June 23). *The Express Tribune*.
- Cassidy, W. P. (2007). Online news credibility: An examination of the perceptions of newspaper journalists. *Journal of computer-mediated communication*, 12(2), 478-498.
- Gentzkow, M., & Shapiro, J. M. (2010). What drives media slant? Evidence from U.S. daily newspapers. *Econometrica*, 78(1), 35-71.
- Gillani, A. H., Frey, H., & Ishfaq, N. (2021). Indexing and American Presidency: Pakistani Muslim Society on the Front Pages of Mainstream US Newspapers. *Pakistan Journal of Social Research*, 3(4), 599-608.
- Graber, D. A. (2012). *Processing politics: Learning from television in the Internet age*. University of Chicago Press.
- Hallin, D. (1986) *The Uncensored War*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hasnat, M. & Bashir, S. (2022, September 7). Imran deeply regrets lady judge remark. *The Express Tribune*
- Hayes, D., & Guardino, M. (2010). Whose views made the news? Media coverage and the march to war in Iraq. *Political Communication*, 27(1), 59-87.
- Herman, E. S., & Chomsky, N. (1988). *Manufacturing consent: A propaganda model*. Manufacturing Consent
- Hoti, M. J., & Raza, S. I. (2022, May 14). Warning of March on Capital, Imran seeks election date. *Dawn*
- "Imran PTI bigwigs booked for blasphemy". (2022, May 1). *The Express Tribune*

“Imran warns CEC gone”. (2022, July 18). *Dawn*

Junaidi, I. (2022, June 6). Reaction to be severe if Imran arrested warns PTI. *Dawn*

Milutinović, I., (2021). Media framing of COVID-19 pandemic in the transitional regime of Serbia: Exploring discourses and strategies. *Media, Culture & Society*, 43(7), 1311-1327.

Momen, M. (2018). *Political Satire, Postmodern Reality, and the Trump Presidency: Who Are We Laughing At?* Rowman & Littlefield.

Rhodes, S. C. (2022). Filter bubbles, echo chambers, and fake news: how social media conditions individuals to be less critical of political misinformation. *Political Communication*, 39(1), 1-22.

Tewksbury, D., & Scheufele, D. A. (2019). News framing theory and research. In *Media effects* (pp. 51-68). Routledge.

Towner, T., & Muñoz, C. L. (2020). Instagramming issues: Agenda setting during the 2016 presidential campaign. *Social Media+ Society*, 6(3), 2056305120940803.

Washburn, P. C., & Washburn, M. H. (2011). Media coverage of women in politics: The curious case of Sarah Palin. *Media, Culture & Society*, 33(7), 1027-1041.