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RESEARCH PAPER

The Role of International Media in Shaping Public Opinion on International Conflicts: A Study of Pakistani Youth on Israel-Palestine War

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the international media in the formation of perceptions held by the Pakistani youths on the issue of the Israel-Palestine dispute, with emphasis on the effect of international news stories on perceptions, emotionality, and the priority of the issues. The study, relying on the Framing Theory, Agenda-Setting and Second-Level Agenda-Setting, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Social Identity Theory, considers how young audiences negotiate, interpret, and challenge the portrayal of the conflict in the media. The qualitative research design has been used in the study, purposive sampling has been used, and semi-structured interviews were used to interview 14 students of the university aged between 18 and 29 years who are active consumers of international news via television, digital media, and social networks. Thematic analysis of the data provided has identified four predominant patterns, which are the powerful impact of humanitarian and conflict frames; the agenda-setting impact of a repeated visual and textual cue; the critical recognition of bias, language, and omission in Western and non-Western media; and the mediating role of religious, national, and humanitarian identities in creating emotional and political meaning. The results indicate that international media can influence the issue salience and moral positioning substantially, but the Pakistani youth are not passive observers because they critique, redefine, and at times deny the prevalent discourse. The research adds to the literature as it discusses the interaction of global media discourse and youth meaning-making in conflict situations. It suggests the enhancement of critical media literacy and promotion of diversified media coverage to provide alternative and balanced views on international conflicts.

| **KEYWORDS** | International Media, Public Opinion, International Conflicts, Israel-Palestine W[ar], Pakistani Youth |

Introduction

The international conflicts are becoming more uncomfortable to unfold in the information space in which global media, digital platforms, and transnational communication networks are becoming influential constructors of the opinion. The Israel-Palestine crisis has been long-established in historical confrontation and stalemate in the diplomatic arena, but has acquired a new meaning in this changed media cape, with discourses spreading at a faster rate and emotional temperature than ever. According to scholars, the international media, no matter whether it is Western or Arab or otherwise, does not simply report on conflict but it frames, filters, and in some cases distorts realities

and influence the way audiences make sense of legitimacy, victimhood, violence and justice (Ahmed et al., 2019; Gilboa, 2021). More recent studies of the 2023-2024 Gaza War show that reporting on it has become increasingly partisan, more tactical, and more bound up in political influence, which usually results in profound ethical ambiguities, and presents asymmetries in its presentation (Abdelaziz, 2025; Alajmi, 2025; Al-Najjar & Zaid, 2025; El Damanhoury et al., 2025).

This dynamic information hierarchy particularly carries implications on young cohorts, who get their political information, emotional identity, and orientation on digital platforms increasingly over the legacy news. Having an extensive network and being very active online, Pakistani youth face a vast variety of global discourse on the conflict between Israel and Palestine, such as Western broadcast discourses, Arab discourses of mass media, and a chaotic torrent of social media news. It has been found that online spaces enhance emotional messages, symbolic violence and competing truth-telling, and they also support counter-narratives, digital activism and transnational solidarity (Bany Mohammed et al., 2025; Nasereddin, 2023; Yarchi & Boxman-Shabtai, 2023). Meanwhile, the effect of selective visibility, misinformation, partisan amplification, and algorithmic curation and platform logics are highly likely to emerge and impact the attitude formation of young users towards war, justice, and responsibility (Petrova & Tapsoba, 2025; Riaz, 2021).

Media framing is kept at the centre stage of such processes. Researchers emphasize the way that the choice of words, imagery, and cues are used to shape cognitive scaffolding that dictates the decisions of the audience (Al-Khawaldeh & Alserhan, 2025; Cherkaoui, 2024; Iqbal & Farukh, 2025). Gaza conflict research indicates the usual discursive asymmetries in newsrooms of the West, in which the suffering of Palestinians is often depoliticized or decontextualized, whereas powerful narratives of the Israeli state are privileged in structure (Bhowmik & Fisher, 2023; Malik, 2025; Matar, 2025). The comparative analysis of CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera, and online platforms also proves that each media aligns violence, legitimacy, and the representation of the casualties in their ideological frames (Alajmi, 2025; El Damanhoury et al., 2025; Shahzad et al., 2023). The trends replicate larger literature regarding the power of media worldwide, in which the ownership of media, geopolitical accommodation, and the media culture determine not only what is displayed but what is suppressed (Baum & Zhukov, 2019; Garz & Ots, 2025).

This globalized media ecosystem is, however, not merely informational as it is participatory to Pakistani youth. Narratives of loss and resistance circulate through visual stories of Palestinian suffering to build affective publics and transnational identification amongst young audiences navigating, remixing, and challenging narratives on TikTok, X, Facebook, and Instagram (Alsharairi et al., 2025; Vihalemm & Juzefovics, 2023; Suryani, 2024). The Gaza war can be used to explain how digital interaction forms political imagination and the act of consumerism; social media campaigns/boycott movements surrounding the war (Cevher, 2025; Bany Mohammed et al., 2025; Okechukwu, 2023). However, the same spaces may contribute to polarization, the heightening of moral indignation, and the promotion of the spread of manipulated content, and understanding the believability of the international media narrative becomes more difficult in young generations (Imtiaz et al., 2022).

It is thus empirically urgent, as well as theoretically important, to understand how Pakistani young people make sense of international media reporting of the Israeli-Palestine conflict. Literature has already charted the media preferences and patterns of discourse, but much less is understood about the way in which Global South youth viewers internalize, negotiate, or resist these discourses (Tzika, 2024; Shomroni, 2025; Warshel, 2021; Zahoor & Sadiq, 2021). Furthermore, the Gaza war has escalated the discourses

around ethical journalism, digital propaganda, and the breakdown of the epistemic trust, which makes audience-centered inquiry critical in comprehending how the perspective of conflict is constructed across the conventional geopolitical footing (Sayad & CA, 2024; Marukhovskyi et al., 2024).

In this work, Pakistani youth are put in the limelight of this changing communication reality by exploring the manner in which the international media, through the television, online news, and social media, influence the attitudes, emotional reactions, and political perceptions of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The paper, based on the application of the modern framing theory, critical discourse analysis, and the emergent studies on digital publics, brings contributions to the wider discourse concerning media power, conflict-based stories, and youth political socialization in the culture of a highly mediatized society.

Although the Israel-Palestine conflict has been widely reported by the world media, there is very little insight into the impacts of the international media discourse on the minds of Pakistani youths, who are highly active in the digital space but are located outside of the immediate geopolitical range of the conflict. The literature has reported high levels of biases, framing differences, ideological affiliations, and discursive imbalances in the international and Western coverage of the Gaza war (Abdelaziz, 2025; Al-Najjar & Zaid, 2025; Bhowmik & Fisher, 2023). It is also noted in research that the social media setting enhances emotional rhetoric, misinformation, and counter-narratives, which condition the opinion of the population in multifaceted and rather contradictory ways (Bany Mohammed et al., 2025; Nasereddin, 2023; Petrova & Tapsoba, 2025).

But not much is understood of how the Pakistani youth are making sense of it, digesting it, bargaining with it or challenging it, as they are subjected to a new form of hybrid mediated texts of the West, the Arabic, and the various social media on the internet. Lack of audience-based scholarship leaves a gaping hole in knowledge regarding how foreign media influence not just the attitude to politics but the development of emotional reactions, identity, and the perception of the justice over the foreign conflicts by the youth in the Global South.

This research paper fills this gap by exploring the effects of international media framing and the digital content ecosystem on the opinion, attitudes, and understanding of the Pakistani young people on the war between Israel and Palestine. The issue is in inability to find empirical data on how these media impacts are achieved in the environment of digital saturation, high emotional involvement, and access to the same, even contradictory, global narratives.

Theoretical Framework

These frameworks combined enable one to understand the way Pakistani young people make sense of competing world accounts of the war between Israel and Palestine.

Framing Theory

The focus of this study is the Framing Theory that states that media do not passively deliver facts but rather construct meaning by highlighting specific angles, metaphors, and moral indicators and minimizing others. News frames lead the audience to specific definitions of conflict, who is to blame, who is all suffering, and what is right to be done.

The seminal works of scholars like Ahmed et al., (2019) indicate that framing has an effect on moral judgments, empathy, and political preferences.

To Pakistani young people, the exposure of western, Arab and social media frames constructs an acculturated cognitive topography within which narratives struggle to attain interpretive hegemony over one another.

Agenda-Setting Second-Level Agenda-Setting.

According to agenda-setting, the media shape the thoughts of individuals by establishing prominence of issues. Second-level agenda setting expands this concept by influencing how the audience appraises such issues by giving them emphasis as attributes, such as presenting Gaza in terms of number of casualties, terrorism frames, diplomacy, or humanitarian crises.

The relevance of particular stories in terms of international conflicts (e.g., self-defense, occupation, ceasefire diplomacy) directly influences the policy preference and emotional orientation of young audiences.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

CDA is the study of the ways in which the media language is predetermined by power, ideology, and political interests. Words such as militant, terrorist, resistance, genocide, airstrike, and massacre are never neutral in a conflict situation. Linguistic works based on CDA (e.g., Al-Khawaldeh and Alserhan, 2025; Cherkaoui, 2024) show how the use of language conveys the asymmetries of power and how the use of language makes certain geopolitical agendas the order of the day. CDA thus assists this study unravel the way the youth decodes and internalizes such enshrined ideologies.

Social Identity Theory

The theory can be used to understand why Pakistani young people can be emotionally drawn to Palestinian stories due to religious, cultural, or moral identities even when they watch global media. The social identity determines the way in which the media messages are filtered, accepted, resisted or challenged. Narratives that are associated with group identity are more convincing and affective when they are appealing.

Material and Methods

This paper has used a qualitative research approach, to examine how the international media has affected the minds of Pakistani youths towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A purposive sampling method was employed in the study whereby semi-structured interviews were carried out on university students aged between 18-29 olds who are active consumers of international news via television, online, and social media. Interview guide was composed based on the major themes that can be found in the literature, such as media framing, emotional reactions, credibility judgments, and digital political involvement. Data collection was done until thematic saturation was achieved and then analyzed using thematic analysis using the six steps of Braun and Clarke. The approach helped to identify systematic sensations and interpretations of patterned significance of how youth negotiate, contest, or internalize international media narratives. The study was conducted according to ethical principles in terms of voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity and the safe treatment of transcripts.

Results and Discussion

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Participants (n = 14)

Respondent	Age	Gender	Degree Program	Media Use (Primary Source)	City
R1	19	Female	BS IR	Instagram, Al Jazeera	Lahore
R2	22	Male	BS Journalism	BBC, X (Twitter)	Islamabad
R3	20	Female	BS Political Science	TikTok, CNN	Karachi
R4	21	Male	BS IR	YouTube, TRT World	Multan
R5	24	Female	MPhil Sociology	Instagram Reels	Lahore
R6	23	Male	BS Media Studies	BBC, AJ+	Peshawar
R7	28	Female	MPhil IR	Al Jazeera, Twitter	Islamabad
R8	25	Male	MBA	TikTok, Independent bloggers	Faisalabad
R9	22	Female	BS IR	TRT World, Middle East Eye	Quetta
R10	21	Male	BS Computer Science	Social media influencers	Karachi
R11	26	Female	MPhil Gender Studies	Al Jazeera, Twitter	Lahore
R12	29	Male	MPhil Political Science	BBC, YouTube documentaries	Rawalpindi
R13	20	Male	BS IR	TikTok, Reddit	Sialkot
R14	23	Female	BS Psychology	Instagram, BBC	Hyderabad

Fourteen respondents participated in the study. All were Pakistani university students aged 18–29, representing diverse academic backgrounds, media consumption habits, and socioeconomic contexts.

The theme 1: Media Framing Influences Emotional and Moral Judgment

The participants always reported that international media painted Israel and Palestine in mutually exclusive moral terms. The perception of the western media framing, which is usually cautious, sanitized and balanced, was taken to implicitly authorize Israeli actions whereas the Arab and alternative media platforms prefigured Palestinian suffering.

R7 reflected on this tension: *"When I tune to the BBC, all is done in sterile language. But Al Jazeera puts the human touch on the story. It is as though the two worlds were telling one and the same hurt."*

In interviews students recounted how, emotionally, they were driven by the imagery and narrative focus which various outlets selected. Raw emotional and graphic postings on the social media platforms increased compassion, outrage and unity.

R3 remarked: *"A single Instagram photo is more powerful than a five-minute CNN article. The graphics determine the mood even before the words are received."* The victims, aggressors, and legitimacy frames established interpretive anchors that influenced the way that the youth interpreted the conflict.

Theme 2: Selective Highlighting as an Agenda-Setting and Second-Level Agenda-Setting

The participants also noted that international media did not merely report but rather coached audiences on some issues, which took precedence over others.

R12 stated: *"BBC devotes three minutes to talk about rockets and half a minute to talk about people displaced. It tells you what not to think and not telling you to think it."*

The focus on specific characteristics was also visible as a second-level agenda-setting, with moral interpretation being influenced by such terminology (e.g., a strike vs. an attack, conflict vs. genocide).

R5 noted: *"Words are made the battlefield. Speaking of both sides, it is already a distortion of the victimization."* Even among heavy social media users, students were more than aware of linguistic framing and politics inherent to it.

Theme 3: Youth Interpret Bias and Ideological Leanings

Surprising depth in identifying ideological currents flowing underneath the news language was exhibited by the respondents. They knew that discourse could not be neutral in any situation, especially on an international political struggle.

R9 offered a vivid reflection: *"Using the western channels which do not say the word occupation, they are not neutral. They're siding with silence."*

Some of the respondents said they felt distrusted by Western outlets because of omission, euphemism, or shyness in terms of structural causes.

R14 commented: *"Even the pauses speak. The present is twisted when they overlook the history."*

The young people characterized international media texts as stratified artifacts where the word-choice, sequencing, voice and selection of visual were embedded with political cues.

Theme 4: Perceived In-Group Solidarity and Social Identity

The participants kept on identifying themselves as a part of the wider Muslim and Global South sense and this informed their readings of the narrative.

R1 shared: *"When I look at Palestinian children I think they are our own. I do not have to read in the media to know who the victim is."*

This common identity made most respondents uncooperative to western frames of media, which they perceived to be systematically prejudiced against Muslim people.

R8 expanded on this: *"The question of which narrative is truthful is determined by my identity. The western versions become alien to my life and reality."*

Social identity influenced the trust, as well: the outlets that were perceived to serve the interests of the Muslim and non-Western viewpoints, such as Al Jazeera, TRT World, Middle east eye, were perceived to be more credible and in line with the values of the respondents.

Theme 5: Role of Social Media

Social media served as a raw pipe of unedited images, eyewitness testimony and activist message. The participants also believed it to be emotionally charged, narratively varying and closer to their political sensibilities.

R10 described: *"Social media: it is not news, but a tempest. It beats pictures about you till your stomach knows what your brain fails to know."*

Nevertheless, respondents were aware of the dangers of misinformation. TikTok and influencer commentary were highly vulnerable to falsifying facts, yet the emotional authenticity prevailed over the issue of credibility.

R13 admitted: *"Even a bit wobbly info is almost close to the ground than a Western studio."*

The social media also brought about a participative populace: the youngsters re-shared, commentated, debated, and showed solidarity- do identity and citizenship online.

Theme 6: Discordance between Faith and Doubt

In interviews, young people were walking along the lines of dependence and mistrust. Their belief was in the international media as a fast and access to footage but non-trust in institutional motives.

R2 expressed: *"I believe that Western channels will show me something but not will tell me the truth about it."*

Resistance to the influence of media and its use at the same time was a characteristic of the data set.

Discussion

The results reveal that Pakistani young people negotiate the narratives of international media in an intricate relationship between exposure to the frames, agenda setting clues, discursive meaning making, and identity terms meaning making. This is consistent with the long history of previous research demonstrating that conflict coverage tends not to permeate the minds of viewers as neutral information, but instead, it circulates as storytelling and value-colored content (Ahmed et al., 2019; Cherkaoui, 2024).

The interpretations of the participants were very high in the mechanics of Framing Theory. In line with the findings of Bhowmik and Fisher (2023) and Alajmi (2025) on the news comparisons of CNN-Al Jazeera and its Arab equivalents, youth perceived frames of euphemism or sanity in the western sources, whereas Arab networks prefigured civilian victimization and structural unfairness. Such impressions are a reflection of previous findings that the framing decisions - the use of words, images, and choosing of the victims influence the moral judgments and emotional orientations (Asmus, 2024).

The statistics confirm that Pakistani young people were aware and opposed agenda-setting approaches such as unequal focus on violence as compared to humanitarian impacts. Similar to the previous results presented by Baum and Zhukov (2019) and Al-Najjar & Zaid (2025), the respondents criticized Western sources that foreground the Israeli security issues, downplaying the history of the situation. The selective focus on particular features - language cues, issue prioritization and visual sequencing - relates to the second-level agenda-setting processes which are well-documented in conflict-media literature (Hameleers et al., 2018). The fact that students recognize these patterns implies that their level of media literacy is quite high, which was formed to some extent by unrelenting exposure to alternative versions of stories that are spreading through social media ecosystems (Nasereddin, 2023).

The results showed that there was deep congruence with the prism of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The respondents often rated ideological positioning inherent in the discourse of international news, which is reminiscent of El Damanhoury et al. (2025) and Al-Khawaldeh and Alserhan (2025). Youth were very sensitive of the fact that discourse patterns, such as word usage, word omissions and symbolic boundaries are political actions.

This discursive awareness is echoed by the conclusion of Matar (2025) that Western legacy media are the cause of epistemic harm through the eradication of historical asymmetries. The lexical neutrality critiques by the participants, i.e., the presence of conflict, clashes, both sides, etc., correlate with the CDA-based results of Shahzad et al. (2023), which also demonstrates the awareness of young audiences to the linguistic efforts to decontextualize Palestinian suffering or redistribute blame.

Social Identity Theory offered a strong explanatory level. Similarly, to Warshel (2021) and Vihalemm and Juzefovics (2023), participants interpreted the media messages through the lens of collective identity, i. e., religious, regional and humanitarian. Such identity-based filtering influenced the trends of trust: the sources in the Muslim majority or in the Global South became looked upon as sensitive and historic, whereas western sources became viewed as cold and politicized.

These results support the fact that media targeted at the Arab and Muslim audience is viewed in terms of collective cultural membership (Alhossary et al., 2023). The tendency of Pakistani youth to solidarity resembles the studies by Petrova and Tapsoba (2025) regarding how identity mediates the opinion of the people in conflicted setting. In line with Bany Mohammed et al. (2025), the young generation depended much on social media to receive real-time photographs, eyewitnesses, and activist stories. It was an emotional amplifier and interpretive space, which platforms such as Instagram and TikTok aligned with what Yarchi and Boxman-Shabtai (2023) note as the image war becoming one where it was transmitted to short-form video platforms.

The immediate and the perceived validity of user-generated content overshadowed the issue of trust, although the participants recognized the threat of misinformation, as did Riaz (2021) and Imtiaz et al. (2022). This echoes the argument of Okechukwu (2023) that viewers tend to favor emotionally appealing content despite the fact that it is not always accurate. Social media was also used as a platform of digital activism, identity performance as well as collective solidarity, which is in line with the findings of Alsharairi et al. (2025).

Finally, the results demonstrate a hybrid interpretive framework whereby young people do not believe in international media discourses wholesome or wholesale. Rather, they filter, reject or reprocess material. Such negotiated position resonates with the argument of Sayad and CA (2024), which states that global audiences in conflict situations are not inactive consumers, but meaning-makers. The discussion is also consistent with Garz and Ots (2025) and Gilboa (2021) which posit that media impact in modern conflicts is based on overt persuasion.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to analyze the effects of international media in shaping the attitudes of Pakistani youth about the Israel- Palestine war based on Framing Theory, Agenda-Setting, Critical Discourse Analysis and Social Identity Theory. The results indicate that international media does not only inform, it also builds interpretive frameworks with which the youth have to frame conflicts around the world. The participants constantly reported that media frames, especially those with high humanitarian suffering, occupation, resistance, and geopolitical power imbalances influenced the emotional and moral contours of their knowledge. The effects of agenda-setting were also noticeable because the respondents mentioned their focus on the problems, which the international media covered repeatedly, including the issues of civilian casualties, the international reaction in the form of diplomatic discourses, and the discussion of human rights.

It was also found that discourse is central in influence of political emotions and narratives. Exposed to the difference between Western and non-Western media discourses, the participants adopted a hybrid discourse of interpretation, where they frequently undermined biases, silences, and language decisions. An analysis based on CDA indicated that the youths critically evaluate dominant discourses and show a high level of media literacy in discerning selective imagery, euphemistic framing as well as ideological clues. Social Identity Theory also helped understand the role of religious, national, and humanitarian identities in mediating the perceptions of the respondents-strengthening empathy towards Palestinians and cynicism about the descriptions that attempted to legitimize occupation and/or diminish the conflict to issues of security.

The respondents showed varying amounts of tension between exposure to global news and domestic political, economic, and emotional realms of life, although all of them exhibited a certain level of media exposure. A feeling of frustration, helplessness and increased awareness of injustice was described by many meaning international media is more than a transmitter of information as it has an affective role. Notably, the youth did not passively receive the media stories, instead, they negotiated, resisted or reinterpreted them in a manner that embodied their social identities and lived experiences.

On the whole, this paper adds value to comprehending the role of international media in influencing opinion among people in conflict situations through the lenses of shedding light on the meaning-making processes of the Pakistani young generation. The results of the study promote the significance of diversifying world news, enhancing critical media literacy, and encouraging balanced and transparent news coverage of old conflicts. Future studies can be enhanced by increasing the sample size, the comparisons between rural and urban young people, or the impact of platforms (e.g., TikTok vs. Al Jazeera vs. BBC). With media battles taking an ever-increasing parallel to territorial battles in a world, it is vital to comprehend how the youth interpret international discourse to create aware, sympathetic and discerning citizens of the world.

Recommendations

The research suggests that the Pakistani youth should be empowered in critical media literacy to improve their skills in identifying such framing features, agenda-setting indicators, and discursive bias in international media coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Colleges and institutions that target young people ought to foster diversified media intake by encouraging young individuals to be exposed to more global news outlets than those that are predominantly used by the Western world, thus lessening reliance on selective stories. As a means to deal with the issues of misinformation, in particular, on social media, it is necessary to increase the number of fact-checking projects and online awareness. Moreover, journalism education courses and media controllers ought to encourage ethical, balanced and context sensitive reporting on international conflicts by ensuring that the various sides are heard and the humanitarian voices are not quashed. The results also reveal the necessity of youth discussion areas and mental health support systems to allow the students to cope with the emotional pressure linked with the intake of conflict news. The intensification of partnerships between academia and media institutions is a potential solution to optimize the intersection between theory and practice, and more studies on social media algorithms and platform dynamics would further shed light on how digital ecosystems influence the perceptions of young people. All these actions can bring more educated, critical, and emotionally tougher youth audiences in Pakistan.

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