Environmental Journalism: A Comparative Analysis of Flood Editorials In Pakistan's Dailies Dawn, Jang, And Kawish

Usama Hassan Soomro[1], Dr Sumera Memon[2]

[1]M.S scholar Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi, [2]Assistant professor, Department of Media and Communication studies, Sindh Madressatul Islam, University Karachi

Corresponding author email: Usamahassansoomro@gmail.com

Abstract

Floods are one of the most common, destructive and frequent natural disasters in the world, but in Pakistan, floods of 2022 which occurred as a monsoon or flash flood were highly destructive in nature, which affected over more than 33 million people, in which 90 districts were hit highly by flood and around 8 million people were displaced and faced massive damage in the country (ICS, 2022; BRC, 2022). Any media either broadcast, print, or digital media play a pivotal role during any crisis and disaster management (UNESCO, 2025). In this regard three different regional and linguistic newspapers i.e the Dawn (English), Jang (Urdu), and Kawish (Sindhi) were selected as population, and unit of analysis were the editors' editorials related to flood that were published during the period of flood 2022 from 1st January and 31st December. Unit of analysis was based on criterion sampling technique to find the newspapers and its institutional voice. This study uses the comparative content analysis approach that compares the editorials under the umbrella of agenda setting and framing theory. Through study it was found that the Dawn newspaper published 51 editorials, Jang 36 and Kawish published 69 editorials. In total 156 editorials related to floods were examined. The findings revealed that Kawish was focused on agricultural and infrastructure damage, humanitarian crisis, vulnerability, and economic hardship. Dawn's editorials focused on the damage to infrastructure and political responsibility, whereas Jang averaged damage to infrastructure and response from the government. In all three newspapers it was seen that which newspaper prioritized the flood.

KEYWORDS *Environmental Journalism, Flood Editorials 2022, Pakistani Print Media policy, Agenda Setting Theory, Framing Theory, Comparative Analysis,*

Introduction

In 2022, Pakistan was hit by one of its worst floods, which came as a result of the unusually heavy monsoon season and glacial melt, and submerged almost one-third of the country, displacing millions people of thousands of deaths and damaging the economy at the expense of tens of billions of dollars. That the destruction took place in Sindh and Balochistan but most of the national media focus was on the political and administrative hubs of Punjab and the federal capital makes the scale of the loss evident (ICS, 2022; BRC, 2022). It is noteworthy that in the field of environment / disaster journalism there are questions as to how newspapers in various linguistic zones make the same catastrophic event in their articles. Editorials are a unique type of question in this. Editorials are the voice of the newspaper and are not necessarily constrained by the logic of the reportage, which, though nominally subject to the conventions of objectivity and balance, is nonetheless more constrained in reality than those of the editorial. They are found in publications that tell their readers what should be done, who should be held responsible and which issues need to be addressed immediately (Umber et al., 2023). Floods thus define clear differences in the direction of each newspaper to a degree that is arguably more pronounced than with normal news coverage in terms of editorial coverage of the 2022 floods.

In its broad sense, environmental journalism is the journalism that addresses "the transmission of environmental risks, conditions and policy discussions to the general public in user-friendly terms" (Saner and Wyss, 2019). Even though the direct trigger for floods in Pakistan is monsoon rains, but floods are today widely considered to have been exacerbated by a number of climate changes, irrespective of their scientific nature, flood coverage falls into this domain. The job of the media in this regard is not only to report the damage; but to build the perception of the public regarding the cause of the disaster, the responsibilities of the guilty and the proper response. (Entman, 1993). One of the report published by the UNESCO (2025) argues that many media institutions do have the response mechanisms for calamities, but still lack proper preparedness strategies it does. Meanwhile majority of newspapers in Pakistan are very linguistically polarized. In Urdu language, most of the dailies such as Jang have the national circulation within the Pakistan, English language dailies like Dawn caters to an elite section of audience with policy facing agenda, and regional language dailies, such as Kawish are published in Sindhi language and attend to a more geographically based audience, but at the same time directly affected by the flood events in the

province of Sindh in 2022. Moreover, it has been enhanced in one of the reports by reuters institute for the study of the journalism (2022) that 2022 was the worst year of floods in Pakistan history. The exploration of these three papers in conjunction enables a comparison not only in terms of editorial volume but also on how proximity to disaster, audience make-up, and language affects editorial framing.

Building on previous single-language or two-newspaper comparative studies of Pakistani flood coverage (Umber et al., 2023), it extends the comparison to three newspapers spanning English, Urdu, and Sindhi print media, and narrows its focus specifically to editorials published across the full 2022 calendar year rather than to news reports.

Research Questions

RQ1: Which of the three selected newspapers (Dawn, Jang, and Kawish) gave more editorial coverage to the 2022 floods in Pakistan?

RQ2: What thematic frames were prioritized by each newspaper in its flood-related editorials?

Research Objectives

● To examine the extent of editorial coverage given to the 2022 floods in Dawn, Jang, and Kawish.
● To explore the thematic categories through which each newspaper's editorial interpreted the floods.

● To determine the similarities and differences in editorial framing across the English, Urdu, and Sindhi press in Pakistan.

Limitations Of the Study

This study is limited in several respects. First, it restricts its unit of analysis to editor’s editorials alone; news reports, articles, and letters to the editor which may carry different framing patterns were not included in this analysis. Second, because editorials by convention appear only on a newspaper's dedicated editorial page, placement and prominence could not be compared in the same way that news-report placement can be, and this study accordingly does not treat placement as a variable of interest. Third, month-by-month distribution of editorials and the tone or evaluative stance of individual editorials (e.g., critical versus supportive of government response) fall outside the scope of the analysis reported here, pending further coding. Finally, the study is confined to

three newspapers and a single calendar year, which limits generalization to Pakistan's wider and highly fragmented press landscape.

Literature Review

Media coverage of the 2022 Pakistan floods has attracted growing scholarly attention in the years since the disaster. Umber et al. (2023) conducted a framing theory based comparative study of editorials in Dawn and Jang across the same January–December 2022 period examined here, finding that Jang devoted more space to environmental and climate themes than Dawn, and that both papers converged heavily on monsoon related and agricultural themes, with striking similarity in their overall narrative strategies. The present study extends this two-newspaper comparison by adding Kawish, allowing an examination of how a regional Sindhi language newspaper serving the most flood affected regions frames the same disaster.

One of the study (Khawaja et al., 2025) undertook a large-scale cross-sectional content analysis that compares the framing of the 2022 floods across global news outlets of north-west (The Guardian, and The New York Times) and news outlets of south-east (The Times of India and Dawn). And findings of this study showed that the both Global North and Global South coverage disproportionately emphasized victimization and international aid oriented solution frames over community led resilience frames, and that responsibility for the floods was attributed more often to governance failure than to natural causes even within Pakistan's own national press. This pattern of attributing blame to human and institutional failure rather than to climatic causation recurs across the literature and is directly relevant to the governance focused themes coded for Dawn and Jang in the present study.

Umber et al. (2023) applied critical discourse analysis, informed jointly by agenda setting and framing theory, to flood coverage in Dawn, The Express Tribune, and The News, and identified climate change, infrastructure inadequacy, human cost, social inequality, and government responsibility as the dominant narrative threads running through Pakistani print coverage of the disaster. Their emphasis on infrastructure and governance narratives parallels the two leading thematic categories identified for Dawn in the present study: infrastructure damage and reconstruction, and political accountability and governance.

It is less common to see regional and language specific press given adequate attention. Javed (2021) compared coverage of natural disasters in Pakistani English and Urdu newspapers and revealed that there is systematic difference between the tone, sources, and framing of these two linguistic regions where the Urdu papers were more emotive and human interest frames dominated and the English papers were more dominant in terms of policy or governance. At the same time, the same source's analysis in the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2022), shows how local outlets in the Sindhi language like Kawish newspaper were more visible and active in the affected areas than the English and Urdu media outlets, thus providing more immediate coverage of the disaster, despite being less visible on the political stage. The imbalance between the extent to which someone can reach people and have influence on how they receive the news carries a constant worry in the narratives of disaster local media in the newspapers (ICS, 2023).

One of the study (Akram et al., 2023) conducted on climate change and the frame based analysis on the flood of 2022, examines the dominant frames of the Pakistani press during and after the flood. In that study the coverage on proportion of the climate change were minimal and the subject of the flood had a significant increase in media coverage in the selected newspapers, which priors the urgency of the issue by the print media outlets.

Iyengar (1994) distinguished between episodic framing, which presents an event as an isolated occurrence, and thematic framing, which situates it within broader societal patterns; episodic framing tends to individualize responsibility while thematic framing tends to implicate institutions and structural conditions. Another study conducted on the same cautioned disaster coverage by Raza et al., (2025) emphasizes that the coverage by Pakistani print and Tv channels through its coverage on the flood shows that the victimhood and suffering in flood is due to Global warming, natural unavoidable occurrences, God's Wrath and India has stopped the water. Neither or very limited focus was put on the Structural causes for suffering the vulnerability. Another of the study conducted on the press coverage of 45 countries, on the theme of climate change, global warming and environmental phenomenon in 37,670 articles across four different languages emphasized through the findings and data that climate change should be considered as important and factual for the world (Vu, 2019).

Meanwhile, a cross-sectional study, conducted on the theme of disasters coverage in Pakistani media argues that, there was no coverage to the pre-disaster period. While, pre coverage to the

major flood that hit the Sindh most in 2010 got only 5 news reports, although media has a duty to cover the predictable calamities (Zaheer, 2016).

Earlier work on Pakistani disaster coverage, such as Muzamill's (2012) comparison of Dawn and The News coverage of the 2005 earthquake and the 2010 floods, found that Pakistani English language dailies have historically tended to prioritize relief and rescue operations in their immediate coverage, with sustained attention to reconstruction and accountability fading over subsequent months — a pattern that resonates with the relatively modest five editorials Dawn devoted to relief and rehabilitation compared to its stronger emphasis on longer-term infrastructure and governance themes in 2022. Taken together, the literature suggests three recurring patterns relevant to the present study: first, Pakistani print media, across languages, tend to attribute flood-related harm more to governance and infrastructural failure than to climate change as such; second, regional and vernacular press are comparatively understudied despite serving the communities most directly affected by disaster; and third, editorial and opinion content, as distinct from news reporting, has received markedly less comparative attention than straight news coverage, despite arguably offering a clearer signal of a newspaper's institutional stance.

Theoretical Framework

McCombs and Shaw (1972) proposed agenda setting theory to explain how the media, through the relative amount of attention it devotes to an issue, shapes what audiences come to regard as important. Applied to disaster coverage, the theory suggests that the sheer volume of editorial attention a newspaper devotes to the floods signals to its readers how seriously the issue ought to be taken relative to competing national concerns such as politics or the economy. Under this lens the comparative numbers found in this study are 51 editorials in Dawn, 36 editorials in Jang, and 69 editorials in Kawish indicate agenda-setting preferences that must be different with Dawn having more and Jang and Kawish having fewer.

Framing theory

As Framing theory is related to the characterization of an issue when it is placed on the political agenda, agenda setting is related to the level of attention paid to an issue. Entman (1993) proposed that framing is the process of reinforcing “that” portion of the perceived reality with the intention and the force of a communique to establish a problem definition, causal interpretation, moral

assessment, or a recommendation for a treatment that encourages that interpretation. When analyzed for editorials in newspapers, this means that the process of determining whether a newspaper tends to consider the floods as a governance failure, a humanitarian emergency, an economic catastrophe, or as a product of climate change is also an interpretation with implications for policy (Khawaja et al., 2025).

Each newspaper was assigned five codes for the study that reflect the thematic categories identified in the Entman's list and the frequency of each code represents the specific news frame of the disaster that is most likely to be activated by the newspaper. The two theories were combined so that both questions related to the two flood components discussed in the newspapers could be addressed: the amount of editorial space dedicated to the floods (agenda setting) and the specific story each newspaper selected concerning the floods (framing).

Methodology

A quantitative content analysis study design was used to analyse Pakistan floods editorial coverage in 2022. The main source of the primary data was the editorial pages of 3 Pakistani daily newspapers namely Dawn (English language daily), Jang (Urdu language daily), Kawish (Sindhi language daily). The three are chosen to be the representative of the English language press, the highest circulation Urdu language press and the top regional press in Sindh, which was most impacted by the floods in 2022 (Pahore et al., 2021).

The unit of analysis was the newspaper editorial — that is, the newspaper's own institutional opinion piece appearing on its dedicated editorial page, as distinct from bylined opinion articles, letters to the editor, or news reports. The study included the entire year of 2022 from January 1 to December 31, 2022, to incorporate both the peak of the monsoon and the flood months, but also to include “anticipatory” coverage in earlier months of 2022 as well as continued coverage on rehabilitation issues in the months after the floods.

All editorials that made substantive reference to the floods, their causes, their humanitarian or economic consequences, or the state's and society's response to them were retained for analysis. Each retained editorial was then coded into one of five thematic categories developed inductively from the dataset for each newspaper separately, reflecting that newspaper's own distinctive editorial priorities rather than a single fixed coding scheme imposed uniformly across all three

papers. This approach was adopted because preliminary review indicated that the three newspapers organized their editorial commentary around meaningfully different thematic emphases, and a shared coding scheme risked flattening those differences.

Frequency counts and percentages were calculated for each thematic category within each newspaper, and aggregate totals were compared across newspapers to address RQ1. Thematic distributions within each newspaper were then compared to address RQ2. Because editorials by genre convention are confined to the editorial page, placement analysis — which was appropriate for the news-report-based comparative studies this analysis builds on — was not applicable here and is instead noted as a shared structural feature of all three newspapers' editorial coverage.

Data Analysis and Results

Data analysis is based on the total frequency of flood-related editorials published by each newspaper and the thematic distribution of those editorials across the categories identified for each paper.

Total Frequency of Flood Editorials published in Newspapers

Table 1.

Total Frequency of Flood-Related Editorials by Newspaper (January–December 2022)

Newspaper	Total Flood Editorials	Percentage of Combined Total
Dawn (English)	51	32.69%
Jang (Urdu)	36	23.08%
Kawish (Sindhi)	69	44.23%
Total	156	100%

Across the full 2022 calendar year, the three newspapers together published 156 flood-related editorials. Kawish published the highest number at 69 editorials (44.23% of the combined total), followed by Dawn at 51 editorials (32.69%), and Jang at 36 editorials (23.08%). This distribution suggests that Kawish, as the regional Sindhi-language daily serving the most severely flood affected province, accorded the disaster substantially greater and more sustained editorial attention than either the national English-language or the higher-circulation Urdu-language press.

Table 2.

Thematic Distribution of Flood Editorials in Dawn (2022)

Theme	***Frequency***	***Percentage***
Infrastructure Damage and Reconstruction	*15*	*29.41%*
Political Accountability and Governance	*13*	*25.49%*
Economic Hardship and Livelihood Loss	*11*	*21.57%*
Climate Change Nexus	*07*	*13.73%*
Relief and Rehabilitation	*05*	*9.80%*
Total	*51*	*100%*

Thematic Distribution: Dawn

Dawn's 51 flood editorials were distributed across five thematic categories. Infrastructure damage and reconstruction was the single largest theme, accounting for 15 editorials (29.41%), followed closely by political accountability and governance at 13 editorials (25.49%). Economic hardship and livelihood loss accounted for 11 editorials (21.57%), the climate change nexus for 7 editorials (13.73%), and relief and rehabilitation for the remaining 5 editorials (9.80%). This distribution indicates that Dawn editorials' framed the floods predominantly as a matter of state capacity infrastructure and governance, rather than as an immediate humanitarian emergency or an explicitly climate-driven event

Table 3.

Thematic Distribution of Flood Editorials in Jang (2022)

Theme	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Economic Impact and Livelihood Disruption	10	27.78%
Governance and Institutional Response	10	27.78%
Climate Change and Environmental Degradation	07	19.44%
Humanitarian Crisis and Community Suffering	06	16.67%
Media Advocacy and Civil Society Mobilization	03	8.33%
Total	36	100%

Thematic Distribution: Jang

Jang's 36 flood editorials showed a more even distribution across its five thematic categories than Dawn's. Economic impact and livelihood disruption and governance and institutional response were tied as the leading themes, each accounting for 10 editorials (27.78%). Climate change and environmental degradation accounted for 7 editorials (19.44%), humanitarian crisis and community suffering for 6 editorials (16.67%), and media advocacy and civil society mobilization — a theme not coded for either Dawn or Kawish — for the remaining 3 editorials (8.33%). Jang has major chunk on governance, economic, and humanitarian themes. This together with its distinctive attention to civil-society mobilization, suggests an editorial posture oriented which is coordinating public and institutional response rather than singularly assigning blame.

Table 4.

Thematic Distribution of Flood Editorials in Kawish (2022)

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Agricultural Collapse and Economic Hardship	23	33.33%
Humanitarian Crisis and Vulnerability	20	28.99%
Governance Failure and Negligence	13	18.84%
Climate Change and Environmental Mismanagement	08	11.59%
Sindhi Cultural Identity and Regional Disparities	05	7.25%
Total	69	100%

Thematic Distribution: Kawish

Kawish's 69 flood editorials, the largest volume among the three papers, were dominated by agricultural collapse and economic hardship, which alone accounted for 23 editorials (33.33%) — reflecting Sindh's heavy dependence on agriculture and the scale of crop and livestock losses in the province. Humanitarian crisis and vulnerability followed at 20 editorials (28.99%), governance failure and negligence at 13 editorials (18.84%), climate change and environmental mismanagement at 8 editorials (11.59%), and Sindhi cultural identity and regional disparities — a theme unique to Kawish among the three papers — at the remaining 5 editorials (7.25%). This distribution positions Kawish's editorials as most attentive among the three papers to the disaster's economic and humanitarian toll on the local population, and as the only outlet to explicitly frame

the floods in terms of the province's cultural identity and its disparity in treatment relative to the rest of the country.

Editorials

All 156 editorials analyzed across the three newspapers appeared exclusively on each paper's dedicated editorial page, as is conventional for the genre. Unlike news reports, whose placement on the front page versus inside pages can itself signal a newspaper's prioritization of an issue, editorials do not vary in placement within a single edition; their significance instead lies in their frequency, their thematic content, and their timing relative to the disaster, all of which are addressed above.

Summary of Findings

When it comes to answering RQ1, Kawish was far more inclined to give the 2022 floods editorial attention, both in number of editorials and proportion of the combined 156 editorials, than either Dawn or Jang. Regarding RQ2, the thematic focus of each newspaper was different, with Dawn focusing on infrastructure and governance, Jang having a somewhat even spread of attention between the economic, governance and humanitarian dimensions, and Kawish foregrounding agricultural and economic damage and human vulnerability, with a particular eye on the importance of the province in the disaster narrative in terms of its culture and region. The explicit climate change framing appeared consistently throughout all three papers, though always in the background of topics relating to governance, economic and humanitarian issues.

Discussion

This is consistent with the proximity principle familiar in disaster reporting, which is that outlets closer to the disaster are more likely to carry more coverage than those geographically or politically further away from the disaster (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2022). Sindh, where Kawish is based, suffered disproportionately severe flood damage relative to its national political weight, and the volume of Kawish's editorial output can be read as a corrective response to what local media practitioners have described as national media's comparative neglect of the province's suffering (Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 2023).

The thematic findings likewise align with, and extend, prior comparative work. Dawn's emphasis on infrastructure and governance echoes both Latif et al.'s (2023) critical discourse analysis of Dawn, The Express Tribune, and The News, and Khawaja et al.'s (2025) finding that Pakistani national press tends to attribute flood-related harm to human and institutional failure more than to climate causation per se. Jang's more evenly distributed thematic profile, and its unique attention to civil-society mobilization, is broadly consistent with Umber et al.'s (2023) finding that Jang devoted comparatively greater editorial space to environmental themes than Dawn across the same 2022 period, while also reflecting Javed's (2021) observation that Urdu-language coverage of disasters tends toward broader public-facing, mobilization-oriented framing relative to English language coverage.

Kawish's dominant emphasis on agricultural collapse and economic hardship reflects Sindh's economic dependence on agriculture and livestock, sectors that suffered some of the heaviest losses nationally during the 2022 floods. Its unique attention to Sindhi cultural identity and regional disparity, not found in either Dawn or Jang, suggests that the regional vernacular press performs a representational function beyond disaster reporting: it also advocates for the province's standing and treatment within the national response, a dimension of flood coverage largely absent from the existing English- and Urdu-language literature reviewed above (Javed, 2021).

In all three newspapers, comparatively less number of editorials explicitly highlight the climate change nexus (13.73% in Dawn, 19.44% in Jang and 11.59% in Kawish), similar to what Boykoff (2007) And Akram et al.'s (2023) observed, that is, Pakistani press coverage of flood disaster and where climate change is being understood as a driver more often foregrounds immediate governance, economic and humanitarian concerns than the climatic causation. This trend indicates an opportunity, following Boykoff's (2009) previous claims in the environmental journalism literature, to make more explicit comparisons between the short- and long-term impacts of flooding, and the longer-term climate change context, for editorials in all three linguistic markets, rather than treating each flood season as an episodic event (Iyengar, 1994).

Recommendations

- The need of the hour is to explicitly link immediate flood reporting to the context of climate change in editorials of English, Urdu, and Sindhi newspapers throughout the country instead of considering every flood season as a standalone occurrence.

- English and Urdu language dailies should give more and prolonged time and space to the disproportionately affected areas like Sindh, and not just based on the distance from the political centres.
- Future editorial coverage should give greater voice to community-led resilience and local adaptation efforts, alongside the governance-failure and humanitarian-crisis frames that currently dominate.
- Comparative studies of Pakistani disaster journalism should extend beyond English, and Urdu language outlets to include regional and vernacular press, which this study suggests plays a distinctive and currently understudied representational role.

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