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Societal Norms and Media Discourse: A Linguistics comparison of Pakistani and International print Media reporting on Noor Mukadam Case

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ABSTRACT

This research critically examines how Pakistani and international English-language news reports construct media discourse on Noor Mukadam case between July 2021 and July 2022. Using Carvalho's Critical Discourse Analysis framework and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), the study compares the headlines and news reports from four Pakistani and four international outlets. Transitivity choices were analyzed in the headlines using the ideational metafunction of SFL, while eight news reports were investigated through textual analysis based on Carvalho's framework, focusing on nominalizations, representation of social actors, and language choices, alongside contextual analysis using a comparative synchronic approach. The findings indicate that the Pakistani print media used detached and emotionally impersonal language in reporting this case by avoiding repeated mention of the victim's names due to cultural values of considering women's reputation and family honor sacred. In contrast, international media reported the case using explicit language and mentioning all the actors involved in this case, considering this case a symbol of gender-based violence and a broader societal failure in Pakistan. Based on the findings of this study, future research may examine how international media portrays cases of gender-based violence in other countries, whether such emotionally powerful and popular coverage is common in other countries as well, and whether Pakistan is portrayed differently in international media.

Keywords: *Critical Discourse Analysis, Comparative Media, Media Framing, Transitivity, Nominalization, Social Actors, Noor Mukadam Case.*

Introduction

The role of the media, especially print journalism, is significant in the construction of public knowledge because it not only informs the public about events and issues but also contributes to the construction of social meaning through language (Fairclough, 1995). Criminal cases involving prominent individuals often expose the underlying power structures and ideologies that are embedded in the language used in the media (van Dijk, 2006; Machin & Mayr, 2012). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), as proposed by Carvalho (2008), is an efficient approach that can be employed to analyze the linguistic strategies used in the construction of public knowledge through language, including the representation of social actors and the transitivity strategies employed in the narratives.

One such case is the murder of Noor Mukadam, a young Pakistani woman from an influential family, in 2021, which was given considerable coverage in both Pakistani and international English-speaking media outlets. Noor Mukadam was murdered in Islamabad, at a private residence on 20th July 2021. The accused, Zahir Jaffer, was later arrested at the crime scene, and the case became a high-profile criminal trial, generating debate on issues such as violence against women in Pakistan and the criminal justice system in the country. This study aims to compare the linguistic representation of the Noor Mukadam murder case in both Pakistani and international English-speaking media outlets, specifically in the initial period of the coverage. This study is based on Carvalho's model of Critical Discourse Analysis (2008) and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). Specifically, the study examines transitivity structures, nominalization, evaluative language, and the use of quotations in the headlines and in the news articles by various media outlets. This study is based on the analysis of news coverage in eight newspapers: four Pakistani (Dawn, The Express Tribune, The News International, and The Nation) and four international (BBC, CNN, Gulf News, and The Washington Post).

Language and identity are closely connected, and media discourse is of vital importance in shaping public perception of gendered violence. Feminist Media Theory and Feminist CDA, as developed by Lazar (2005), also discuss how media discourse contributes to patriarchal ideology. Intersectionality, as defined by Crenshaw (1991), also provides insight into how different identities, such as gender, class, and ethnicity, influence access to public sympathy. Research from South Asia shows that women from elite backgrounds often receive more visible and sympathetic coverage than marginalized women, reinforcing existing social inequalities (Butler & Saleem, 2020; Mukherjee, 2020). Despite growing research on media discourse and gender-based violence, limited attention has been given to high-profile femicide cases in Pakistan using Critical Discourse Analysis and Systemic Functional Linguistics. Moreover, few studies have compared Pakistani and international English-language newspapers to examine how the same event is framed differently across cultural and ideological contexts. This study addresses this gap by offering a comparative linguistic analysis of national and international media coverage of the Noor Mukadam case.

The importance of this study lies in the fact that it reveals how language in print media affects the way the public thinks about violence, justice, and gender issues. The study is important because it reveals how the values and ideologies of the cultures, and how the two English language news sources handle the case, both being international and Pakistani (National), show the differences and similarities in the ways that the two cultures handle the issues presented in the case. The study is important because it reveals the reasons behind the way the Pakistani media handles the case with caution due to the values of honor and privacy, while the international media portrays the case as part of the failure in society.

Research Questions

1. How do the headlines in Pakistani and international news reports differ in showing who did what in the Noor Mukadam case?
2. How do newspapers use nouns (nominalizations) to talk about events and actions in their reports?
3. How are social actors (victim, accused, institutions) represented in Pakistani and international news reports, and whose voices are quoted to shape these representations?

4. What kind of words and tones do Pakistani and international newspapers use to describe the Noor Mukadam case and the people involved?

Theoretical Framework

This study was informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which considers language as a practice of social construction of power relations, ideology, and social inequalities (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 2006). This approach to discourse analysis is particularly appropriate in the study of media discourse because, unlike other forms of discourse, news reportage not only reports what has happened but also contributes to the construction of public understanding of an event. In gender-based violence, this approach helps to expose discursively constructed attributions of responsibility, agency, and blame.

To analyze the news discourse systematically, the study employs the CDA model proposed by Carvalho (2008), which is appropriate for the analysis of journalistic discourse. This CDA model has two dimensions: textual and contextual dimensions.

In the textual analysis, according to Carvalho's model, the study specifically focuses on the components most relevant to the objectives of the study, within the textual dimension of the model, and the selected relevant components are as follows:

- Objects and Social Actors
- Language analysis
- Discursive strategies (Nominalizations, Representations of Social actors)

In the analysis of objects and social actors, the study examines the way in which the social actors, or individuals, in this case, such as the victim, the perpetrator, or institutions and society, are constructed in the news discourse. According to van Leeuwen's model, in this study, it is analyzed whether social actors are activated or suppressed in the media discourse, especially in the construction of gender-based violence.

The researchers further analyze discursive strategies, which include linguistic strategies used for event description or interpretation (Carvalho, 2008; Machin & Mayr, 2012). In this regard, the research focuses on the following:

- Nominalization: The study focuses on nominalization, where actions are used as nouns (e.g., "the murder" instead of "X murdered Y"). In this regard, clarity on who is doing what to whom is often lost (Fairclough, 1995).
- Representation of Social Actors: The study focuses on how social actors are represented in the media texts, including how their names are used or avoided in media reports.

Under the contextual analysis, Carvalho suggests that the researcher can conduct either the synchronic comparative analysis or the diachronic historical analysis. In the study, the researchers conduct the synchronic comparative analysis, which is the comparison of the ways different information sources report the same incident within the same period of time (Carvalho, 2008). The researchers compare the newspapers in Pakistan and international English newspapers and spot the differences in terms of ideology and culture. The diachronic historical analysis is not included in the study because it is not applicable.

In addition to Carvalho's model, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is used as a separate analytical lens for analyzing headlines in this study. The analysis of headlines is conducted separately because it is a significant element in creating a first impression or interpretation (Bednarek & Caple, 2012).

The ideational metafunction in Halliday's (2014) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) framework is used for analysis in this study, specifically transitivity analysis. Transitivity analysis is a tool for analyzing how actions, participants, and processes are organized in clauses in a piece of language, which can be used to identify:

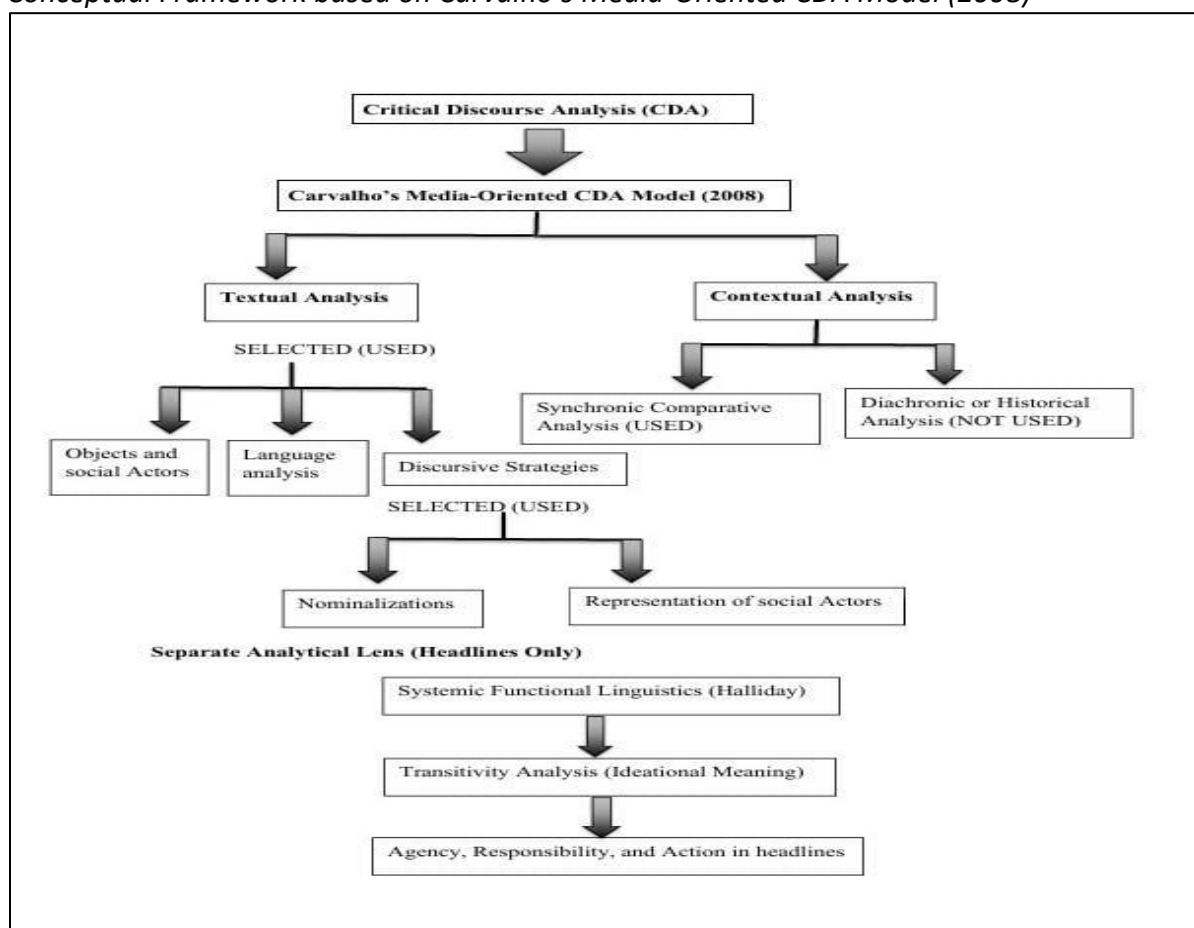
- Who is depicted as the actor
- Who is depicted as affected
- Whether the agency is made explicit or implicit

The transitivity analysis is conducted on headlines only in this study because it is used to examine how agency, responsibility, and action are linguistically constructed at the most visible level of reporting in a piece of language.

The framework is also guided by the perspective of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, which stresses the way in which the discourse of the media is imbued with patriarchal values and how it suppresses the voice of women (Lazar, 2005). This perspective is especially relevant when discussing the topic of femicide and violence against women because it stresses the way in which cultural values such as honour, reputation, and privacy shape the discourse in the context of South Asia (Gill, 2020; Fatima & Pasha, 2024). The analytical framework guiding this study is presented in Figure 1, adapted for the present study.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework based on Carvalho's Media-Oriented CDA Model (2008)



Note. Adapted from Anabela Carvalho (2008) and modified by researchers for the present study.

Research Methodology

The present study employed a qualitative research methodology based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore the linguistic construction of the Noor Mukadam murder case in some English-language newspapers. Carvalho's (2008) CDA model for media-oriented CDA is followed in this study to facilitate the examination of the interrelationship between language, power, and ideology in news discourse. The newspapers of national and international repute, such as Dawn, The News International, The Express Tribune, The Nation, BBC, CNN, The Washington Post, and Gulf News, were examined for comparison of representation, quotation, and narrative framing of the case in different newspapers. Table 1 presents the names of selected Pakistani and international news reports and their corresponding publication years.

Table 1

Names and Dates of Pakistani and International News Reports on the Noor Mukadam case.

Pakistani News Reports	Dates (Pakistani)	International News Reports	Dates (International)
Dawn	July 21, 2021	BBC News	July 27, 2021
The Express Tribune	July 21, 2021	The Washington Post	July 28, 2021
The Nation	July 21, 2021	CNN	February 25, 2022
The News International	July 21, 2021	Gulf News	July 21, 2021

A purposive method of sampling was used to select the first straight hard news report from each newspaper following the incident. This approach helped achieve consistency in the genre of media reports, ensuring a systematic analysis of how the incident was initially framed. In total, eight news reports were considered, dating back to July 2021 until July 2022. The news reports were extracted from the official digital databases of each individual publication using manual searches based on certain keywords linked to the event. It is important to note that dates of publications vary between Pakistani and international news reports, as international outlets often published their reports later than national newspapers.

Data analysis was conducted through a deductive-inductive approach, in which pre-existing categories were used in combination with categories identified through data analysis. Data familiarization entailed a series of readings of each individual article in order to identify tone, overall structure, and overall approach. Discourse elements such as agency allocation, representation of social actors, quotation forms, nominalization, and evaluative language forms were identified for comparison in national and international reports. Furthermore, a separate analysis of headlines was conducted through Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) in order to identify transitivity forms and agency allocation.

In order to ensure a more rigorous evaluation, a series of validation strategies was employed through multiple readings, cross-comparison of reports, and reference to established frameworks in CDA and SFL. Ethical considerations were met by only utilizing publicly available and credible sources of information and by being mindful of the nature of this case.

Comparative Synchronic Analysis

The study will employ a selective application of the media-oriented Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework suggested by Carvalho (2008), which combines textual and contextual elements. In terms of the textual level, the study will examine four key aspects of discourse in the selected newspaper articles: the pattern of transitivity used in the headlines, nominalization, the use of lexis, and the representation of social actors through the inclusion of quotations. In addition, the study will utilize Halliday's theory of transitivity to examine the distribution of agency and action in the newspaper headlines. In terms of the contextual level, the study will employ a comparative synchronic approach to examine the similarities and differences in the representation of the event by the Pakistani and international newspapers.

A. Transitivity Analysis of Pakistani and International News Headlines

This study undertakes a transitivity analysis of news headlines based on the Systemic Functional Linguistics theory of Halliday, focusing on the sub-system of transitivity under the ideational metafunction. Transitivity, as a sub-function of language, reveals the representational potential of language, revealing who does what to whom, through various types of processes, such as material, mental, and relational processes. By limiting the scope of this study to news headlines, this study can reveal the representational potential of language at its most condensed level, revealing the dominant representational pattern of the news of Noor Mukadam's murder: the victim-centered framing, the accused-centered framing, the crime-centered framing, and the moral commentary through the voice of elites.

Group A: Victim-centered Representation

Headlines in the Pakistani media, such as DAWN, The News International, and The Nation, as well as Gulf News (an international media outlet that reflects the discursive trends in the national media), highlight the victim and completely ignore the perpetrator. Examples are as follows:

"Ex-diplomat's daughter killed" (DAWN, July 21, 2021)

"Ex-ambassador's daughter killed in Islamabad" (The News International, July 21, 2021)

"Ex-diplomat's daughter brutally murdered in Islamabad" (The Nation, July 24, 2021)

"Former Pakistani diplomat's daughter 'brutally' murdered in Islamabad" (Gulf News, July 22, 2021)

All the headlines use material Processes such as "killed" and "murdered" in the passive voice and omit the Actor (Zahir Jaffer), focusing on Noor Mukadam as the Goal. Circumstantial elements such as "brutally" and "in Islamabad" either heighten the crime or the location but do not engage with social commentary and emotive language. The result is a formal and restrained tone in the headlines, which is more in keeping with institutional caution.

Group B: Accused-Centered / Judicial Representation

The only headline that represents the accused and judicial representation is found in CNN:

- "Pakistan-American man sentenced to death for beheading a diplomat's daughter" (CNN, August 9, 2021)

Here, the use of the active material Process of sentencing with the Actor identified as "Pakistan-American man" creates a focus on representation and judicial outcome. The nominalized clause of "for beheading a diplomat's daughter" represents the violent act in relation to sentencing. There is a marked difference in representation between this and the national headlines in that it introduces agency and judicial representation, creating a sense of progression from reporting the act to reporting its judicial outcome.

Group C: Crime-Centered / Symbolic Representation

A different trend is seen in the headlines from BBC and The Washington Post, which emphasize the symbolic aspects of the crime:

- “Noor Mukadam: The high society beheading that stunned a nation” (BBC, February 24, 2022)
- “Outcry in Pakistan over beheading of former ambassador’s daughter” (The Washington Post, July 28, 2021)

In these cases, the nominalized material Processes “beheading” is used in combination with Mental “stunned” and Behavioural “outcry.” The Actor remains unknown, but the attention is directed at the senser in general, “a nation,” in Pakistan. In this way, more emphasis is placed on the emotional and structural aspects of the crime than on its description in detail. The event is seen not only as a murder but as a symbol of the failure of the elite in society. Such a representation is in accordance with global journalistic practices aiming at problematization of gender-based violence systemically rather than focusing on a singular case.

Group D: Moral Commentary through Official Quotation

One of the newspaper headlines in Pakistan diverges from event-based reporting and offers a value-laden quotation, though it is worth noting that this is done through elite verbalization and not editorial voice:

“No place for violence against women in our society, lives, religion or culture” (The Express Tribune, July 23, 2021)

The Relational/Existential Process is employed in this newspaper headline, where “violence against women” is related to “no place” in society; however, it is worth noting that this quotation is from the former Foreign Minister of Pakistan. The Carrier “violence against women” and the Attribute “no place” are embedded in a moral frame, and it is interesting to note that there is a lack of Actor and victim in this newspaper headline, as the editorial voice tends to quote officials and institutions and not civic duty, which is evidence of a state-centric approach in Pakistan’s national discourse.

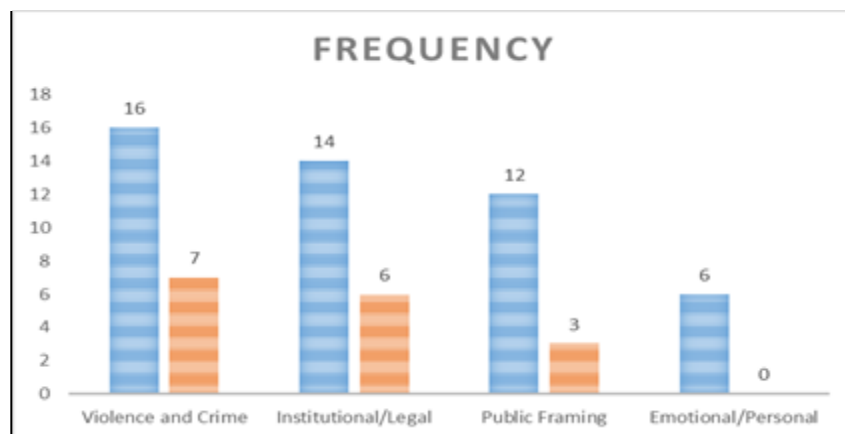
An analysis of the Pakistani and international news reports headlines regarding the Noor case reveals that different media are concerned with different aspects of the case. For instance, Pakistani media are concerned with the victim and the crime, whereas the international media are concerned with the accused or the crime’s impact on society from a moral point of view. The analysis of these headlines reveals that different media are concerned with different aspects of the case, either the victim, the accused, or the crime’s impact on society from a moral point of view.

B. Use of Nominalization as a Discursive Strategy in Pakistani and International News Reports

The following section describes the use of nominalization in Pakistani and international news reports. For clarity, the discussion is divided into four main categories: violence framing, institutional and legal framing, public reaction, and emotional framing. Figure 2 shows the occurrence of nominalizations in the four themes for comparison. International media has more frequent usage of nominalizations than Pakistani media, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Frequency chart of Nominalizations



Note. (Blue = International News reports, Orange= National News Reports)

The chart indicates that there is a higher usage of nominalization in international news reports compared to those in Pakistan across all categories. This is because international news reports use abstract and institutionalized words concerning violence, legal issues, and public framing, which focus on systemic issues and exclude individual agency, unlike the usage in Pakistani news, which has minimal nominalization and is indicative of its conservative approach to reporting news. Table 2 compares the nominalization categories and frequency of their occurrence in Pakistani and international news reports.

Table 2

Comparative Use of Nominalizations in Pakistani and International News Reports

Category	Sample Nominalizations	Pakistani (Freq.)	International (Freq.)	Presence
Violence and Crime	murder, killing, beheading, incident, trauma, death.	7	16	All outlets
Institutional / Legal	FIR, investigation, justice, system, laws.	6	14	Widely present
Public Framing	nation, protest, hashtag, backlash, prevention.	3	12	Limited in Pakistan
Media / Event Framing	report, footage, coverage, details.	0–1	6	Mostly international
Emotional / Personal	grief, horror, concern, solidarity.	0–1	6	Minimal in Pakistan

Note. The findings reveal differences in the use of nominalization as a discursive strategy, where international media displays a wider variety and increased frequency compared to Pakistani media, which demonstrates narrow and procedural use.

1. Framing Violence through Nominalization

Nominalization of violence in international news reporting includes murder, killing, beheading, trauma, and death, which collectively account for 16 instances in international news reporting. For instance, in a report by Gulf News, it was stated, "The grisly murder of the woman sparked debate across Pakistan." The actor is not explicitly mentioned in this report. Likewise, in a report by the BBC, it was stated, "The brutal killing that shook the capital." There was again no mention of the killer in this report either. On the other hand, in a report by Dawn, it was stated, "The incident occurred in a house in Islamabad." The term incident neutralizes the brutality of the murder and takes away all the emotive intensity from it. Likewise, in a report by The News International, it was stated, "A murder case has been registered against the accused." The term murder case neutralizes the brutality of murder and reduces the emotive intensity.

2. Institutional and Legal Framing

International media coverage frequently criticizes institutional performance through nominalizations such as justice, system, bill, and investigation (14 instances). In The Washington Post's coverage, it was stated, "This case is a test for a system that too easily bends to power." This sentence expresses the theme of institutionalized injustice. CNN reported, "Pakistan's weak legal system has repeatedly failed victims of gender-based violence." Again, the theme of institutional inefficiency was highlighted through the use of nominalization-based criticism. In the coverage by the Pakistani media, the theme of routine bureaucratic processes was highlighted. The News International reported, "Further investigation is underway." The use of investigation as a nominalization does not carry any evaluative connotations. The Nation reported, "An FIR was registered at the Kohsar Police Station." In this sentence, the use of nominalization does not carry any evaluative connotations and expresses the theme of procedural routine.

3. Public Reaction as Nominalized Events

The international media sites also highlighted public reaction by referring to it as a protest, outcry, hashtag, and backlash, which are abstract entities (12 times). For example, CNN reported, "The outpouring of grief provoked backlash and reignited the women's rights movement," which made public reaction and the women's rights movement visible discursive events. Moreover, the BBC reported, "#JusticeForNoor trended for days," showing how the public had reacted digitally. Pakistani media sites did not report public reaction at all, except for The Nation, which reported, "The nation is demanding justice." Moreover, The Express Tribune reported, "calls for prevention."

4. Emotional and Personal Framing

The international reports create space for emotional nominalizations like grief, horror, concern, and solidarity (6 times). CNN wrote, "A tsunami of violence against women has swept the country." It is a metaphorical expression of the scale of the problem and its urgency. The BBC wrote "an outpouring of grief from across the globe." In contrast, Pakistani newspapers make extensive use of technical words and phrases. Dawn wrote, "The body was sent for postmortem." The News International wrote, "The medico-legal report is awaited." These phrases eliminate emotional framing and substitute personal tragedy with a scientific approach.

C. Representation of Social Actors through Quotations

In the media text, they are the people who "do" or "say" something, or who "are" done to, and the way they are represented reveals the ideology. This section focuses on the discourse representation of social actors through the use of quotations within media texts. Actors have been classified into different groups with a comparison of the construction of voice, agency, and authority between Pakistan and international news reporting.

Victim

Although the central figure of the event is Noor Mukadam, she is not represented as a social actor in the discourse because she is dead. Her presence is mediated through others, mostly through institutional documents like FIRs or through her relatives. This absence of her voice is indicative of the discursive marginalization of the victim and the louder voices of the other actors.

Personal Actors

At the national level, personal actors such as Shaukat Mukadam, the father of Noor, and her friends are mentioned through indirect speech, especially in Dawn and The News newspapers. For example, The Nation newspaper writes about the FIR report, which states, "He informed police about the disappearance of Noor." The speech of Shaukat is presented in an objective and emotionless tone. However, at the global level, newspapers such as CNN and BBC report the speeches of the actors directly. In the report by CNN, Shaukat says, "This case is for all the daughters of Pakistan," and Noor's sister, Sara Mukadam, says, "Her sacrifice will change the world."

Accused/Perpetrator

The main accused, Zahir Jaffer, is mentioned in different ways by different publications. While News International and The Express Tribune directly mention his name, "Zahir Jaffer was fully conscious," other publications, such as Dawn and The Nation, mention him indirectly: "The alleged killer is the son of a leading businessman." This is because, in Pakistan, class considerations are also taken into account in media discourse.

In international publications, such as The Washington Post and BBC, his identification is mentioned in the context of his privileged position and connections: "A system that bends to power and influence..." by Fatima Bhutto, in the context of commentary in The Washington Post.

Legal and Judicial Actors

In both Pakistani and international media coverage, the voices and perspectives of legal actors are prominent. Dawn quotes all the statements from the police authorities and changes the focus through the use of indirect speech, as in the following quotation: "Police said she was slaughtered." In the coverage by The Nation, the police statements are dramatic and quoted verbatim from the senior police authorities, as in the following quotation: "Noor entered the house... where she was killed." In international media coverage by CNN and BBC, the police statements are quoted in a paraphrased manner and focus on the legal timeline.

State/Government Actors

Sometimes, the Pakistani media cite people like Imran Khan and Shah Mahmood Qureshi, implying a sense of government condemnation. In an article published in The Express Tribune, Qureshi says, "This has no place in our society." This appears to be a case of performative stance. Dawn, on the other hand, does not cite government officials, showing a sense of neutrality. In fact, CNN accuses the government of not acting enough, as they "took him 12 days to comment."

This shows a sense of impatience, which is not evident in Pakistani media reports. BBC quotes critics who are urging the government to act more quickly.

Civil Society and Activist Voices

There is almost no mention of the voices of activists in the national media. However, the reference to hashtags like #JusticeForNoor is mentioned in The Express Tribune. Yet, the international media like The Washington Post, CNN, and BBC refer to the voices of feminists and civil society organizations. Meesha Shafi is quoted as saying, "Another woman brutally killed. Another hashtag." Aurat March Lahore writes, "The legal system is complicit in maintaining a culture of silence." In the BBC article, the comments of Khadija Siddiqi, Barrister/Survivor of Violence Against Women, refer to her own experiences while discussing the issue structurally. In the international media, the role of civil society is highlighted as central to the narrative, while in the national media, the role of civil society is marginalized or tokenistic.

D. Language Analysis

The analysis for this section is organized in linguistic categories to study the ways in which specific linguistic elements serve to create meanings and exercise ideologies. This allows for the comparative investigation of linguistic constructions in Pakistani media versus those in international print media discourse.

1. Bureaucratic and Legal Lexicalization

One of the prominent aspects in the news reports in Pakistan is the use of bureaucratic and legal lexicalization, such as FIR registered, remand, section 302 of the Pakistan Penal Code, physical remand, and on merit. The use of such lexicalization in the news reports focuses on the legality and the procedures involved in the murder case. Unlike international news reports, the use of legal lexicalization in the Pakistani news reports does not evaluate the legality and the procedures involved in the murder case. Instead, the international media has reported the poor record in protecting women and the statistics, such as the country's 1% to 2.5% conviction rate.

2. Passive Voice and Suppression of Agency

Another important category is the use of passive voice, and in this regard, Pakistani media reports often include phrases such as the victim was identified, the body was shifted to the hospital, and statements have been recorded, etc. This minimizes the agent causing violence and focuses instead on outcomes instead of actions. Contrarily, international media reports are more likely to convey a sense of agency, as in the cases of phrases such as the system is complicit in silence, or push back by religious leaders, etc.

3. Medical, Technical, and Clinical Language

Pakistani news discourse is full of medical and technical terminology, such as autopsy, postmortem report, medico-legal report, and forensic experts. This kind of language emphasizes clinical detachment and defines the crime in relation to this process. This emphasis on process, not experience, avoids emotional involvement and human pain.

In international reports, technical information may be mentioned, but it is always part of a larger social commentary, discussing how the process is linked to injustice.

4. Euphemism, Sanitization, and Emotional Neutrality

The violence in Pakistani media reports is often watered down through the use of language such as incident, episode, case, tragic murder, etc. Furthermore, the lack of emotional descriptors, such as a few instances of brutal, horrific, or shocking, helps maintain a neutral tone. Even phrases such as investigation is underway add to this emotional distance.

In contrast, international media reports differ greatly in their use of emotive language such as brutally killed or suffer from the shocking levels of violence.

5. Emotive and Metaphorical Framing

The international media makes extensive use of emotive and metaphorical language in framing the murder within the context of a social calamity. Phrases such as a wave of cases, like a tsunami, and a test for the system are examples of the exaggeration and gravity attached to the issue of gender-based crime. The repetition of certain words and the use of anaphora in the phrase Another day. Another woman... Another hashtag reinforces the normalization and prevalence of such crimes. This type of figurative and emotive language is absent in the Pakistani media.

6. Moral Positioning through Attribution and Voice

Moral position is indirectly conducted in Pakistani discourse by using formal attribution, such as a Foreign Office spokesperson condemned, and the PM has taken notice. This shifts the responsibility of moral judgment from the media to elite authorities. The victim is also depersonalized by referring to her as the victim or daughter of a former ambassador, which is again an elite representation of the victim rather than a personal representation. International media also use linguistic categories of moral positioning by referring to groups of people, for example, women's rights activists took to the streets, and by using intertextual references, such as #JusticeForNoor, which drew tens of thousands of tweets.

All these linguistic categories of moral positioning reveal different ideological constructions of the same event in different discourses. Pakistani discourse relies on procedural legitimacy, neutrality, and institutional authority by using passive voice, legal jargon, euphemisms, and elite attribution, whereas international discourse relies on emotive, metaphorical, evaluative, and advocacy-oriented language to frame the murder as part of a larger issue of gender violence in society. All these linguistic categories reveal that language is a very powerful tool in shaping public perception of violence against women.

Findings and Discussion

This section will contain the main results of the investigation concerning the media discourses of the case in question. The difference in coverage in Pakistani and international news outlets will be analyzed. Specifically, the analysis will focus on the representation of social actors, social action, events, language used in the media, tones of the messages, and ideological implications. The results of the research will be compared with findings of existing local and international literature, allowing for placing the findings in the context of trends in gender-based violence coverage in the media.

1. Agency Construction in Headlines

There is a substantial difference between Pakistani and international print media concerning the portrayal of agency in headlines. While the former tends to rely on bureaucratic and procedural terms, such as "daughter of an ex-diplomat killed" or "FIR registered in Noor Mukadam murder case," which emphasize institutional outcomes rather than perpetrators' actions, the latter explicitly name the perpetrator and point to the necessity of holding him accountable, like in the example of the headline "Perpetrator of Noor Mukadam murder arrested."

This phenomenon resembles the results obtained by Zaman et al. (2023) regarding the representation of rape cases in Pakistan's media outlets, where, according to the authors, the utilization of the passive voice and legal terminology obscures the identification of the

perpetrator. Meanwhile, Mukherjee describes a similar approach in the context of Indian media outlets that tend to use such headlines as "woman raped" while excluding actors from them, yet emphasizing the need for justice and punishment.

2. Usage of Nominalization

The use of nominalizations, including "violence against women is continuing" and "investigation is ongoing," by Pakistani media depersonalizes acts and avoids attributing blame to the guilty parties. According to Sadia, Ahmed, and Riaz's (2022) findings from prior research, this method diminishes the guilt of the guilty party while highlighting the act as a phenomenon rather than an agent. In international media discourse, nominalizations are employed to tie an occurrence to larger social and advocacy movements. Terms like "overhaul of the criminal justice system" and #JusticeForNoor are examples that both describe the incident and engage the public in evaluating its underlying structures. This approach is supported by Akinmusuyi's (2023) and Windarini and Hamdani's (2021) results, which demonstrate that material procedures with known agents elicit public accountability and morality.

3. Presentation of Social Actors

While covering the femicide cases in Pakistan, the victim was often depersonalized via an elite frame. The headlines did not use the victim's name but called her "daughter of a former ambassador," emphasizing the importance of honor and prestige in local culture. This is consistent with the research by Nahdliyah & Robot (2024), who identified similar patterns of presentation among the victims in femicide cases in Indonesia, where symbolism outweighs individuality and creates gender inequalities.

The male perpetrator tends to be excluded or presented in an indirect way, while the institutions (police, court) get the main emphasis. This tendency was also detected by Hasan & Almnaseer (2022) when researching media coverage of domestic violence cases in Iraq, where patriarchal patterns influenced the narrative and minimized the responsibility of men for their actions. The international media, on the contrary, actively quoted various social actors, which provided a more holistic view of the crime as part of societal structures.

4. Linguistic Elements, Tone, and Emotive Framing

The Pakistani media mainly uses neutral, procedural, and bureaucratic language. For example, "FIR Registered in Noor Mukadam Murder Case" is an illustrative headline that reports facts without any emotive undertones. This reflects a focus on institutions rather than a condemnation of the criminal individuals or the social system as a whole. The international media, in turn, resorts to the employment of emotive and symbolic terms for framing the case as a manifestation of gender-based violence. Terms such as "grisly murder", "tsunami of violence", and "collective trauma" help to see this act of brutality as a systemic issue, not just an unfortunate case. Such a tendency is well-aligned with what is found in other international studies, including Akinmusuyi (2023) and Windarini & Hamdani (2021).

Media Discourse and Ideology

The contrast between the media in Pakistan and internationally shows ideological distinctions. The Pakistani media values procedure, dehumanizes victims, and de-emphasizes the perpetrators' roles. In contrast, the international media characterizes crimes as systemic, focuses on accountability, and supports advocacy by using language and intertextuality. This finding is consistent with the claim of Fairclough (1995), which states that media discourse reflects societal power structures.

Conclusion

From the comparative linguistic study of the national and international news reports on the murder of Noor Mukadam, it is evident that there is a marked contrast in the narrative strategies, representation of participants, and the ideological perspective. In the case of the national dailies such as Dawn, News International, and The Nation from Pakistan, the language used is bureaucratic or legalistic and depersonalized. In the newspaper reports, the headlines often make use of agentless passive constructions, such as “Ex-diplomat's daughter killed,” that obscure the victim as well as the killer and maintain an emotionally detached tone consistent with the institutional style of reporting, especially when the actors belong to the elite group. In contrast, the international newspapers such as BBC, CNN, and The Washington Post have a symbolic and systemic style.

International news sources are more likely to refer to both Noor Mukadam and Zahir Jaffer, focus on the elite privilege, and incorporate the public's response through the usage of terms such as “protests,” “hashtags,” and “activists.” The usage of emotive and descriptive words such as “grisly murder,” “tsunami of violence,” and “collective trauma” is also common in international news sources to contextualize the incident within the larger spectrum of gender violence and its consequences. The international news sources have also provided a platform to the victim's family and civil society to raise their voice and humanise the character of Noor Mukadam. The difference between the two types of news sources is that the former has strengthened the procedural and institutional legitimacy, whereas the latter has challenged the power structure and presented the incident as a national emergency that demands societal change. The Noor Mukadam case demonstrates how the language used by the media not only informs the audience about the incident but also constructs the reality and influences the audience's perspective and the discourse on the issues of justice, gender, and power in the country.

Future Research Recommendations

It is suggested that the same framework could be used to analyze the process through which these discourses were institutionalized through law and the police (discourse institutionalization) and the way some perspectives have become marginalized over time, resulting in a lack of critical dialogue (discourse closure). Further research needs to be done using a diachronic analysis to look at how this discourse has developed from the stage of media reporting to the lasting effect it has had on public discourse. Interdisciplinary research would also be beneficial, bringing together ideas from discourse analysis with sociology, politics, media studies, and gender studies. Finally, it needs to be determined what impact these discourses had outside of the text. It is also recommended that future research could be on how international media portrays cases of gender-based violence in other countries, whether such emotionally powerful and popular coverage is common in other countries as well, and whether Pakistan is portrayed differently in international media or not.

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