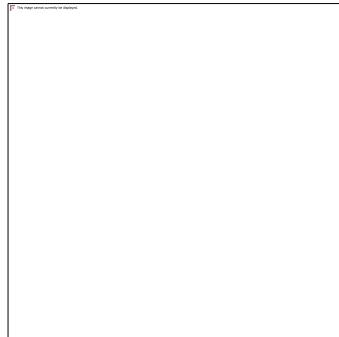


MS Research Thesis

FRAMING OF HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS IN PAKISTANI PRESS: THE CASE OF MAHRANG BALOCH

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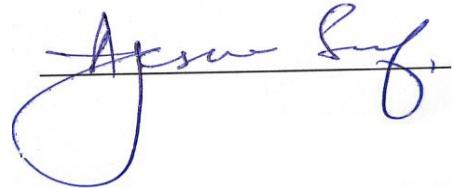
THESIS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

It is certified that we have read this thesis submitted by Areesha Sagheer. It is our judgment that this is a sufficient standard to warrant acceptance by International Islamic University, Islamabad for MS in Media and Communication Studies.

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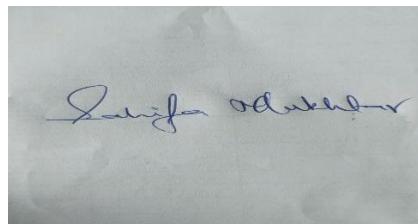
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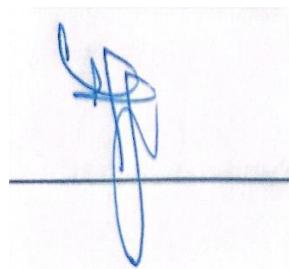
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Declaration

The thesis has been submitted as partial fulfillment of MS in Media and Communication Studies to the Department of Media and Communication studies. I solemnly declare that this is my original work and no material has been plagiarized and my material quoted from a secondary source has been provided with proper citations and references.

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Acknowledgement

All praise and gratitude are due to Allah Almighty for bestowing upon me the strength to successfully complete my work. I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to all my teachers who have played a very important role in shaping my educational path.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the framing of human rights activists in the national dailies of Pakistan with reference to the Sit-in of Dr. Mahrang Baloch in Islamabad. The study utilizes a quantitative content analysis methodology to evaluate news articles in two popular newspapers of the English and Urdu variants, chosen in respect to their readership. Random sampling was carried out systematically, with every other issue chosen and an interval sampling technique. The results provide a relational pattern of the application of episodic and thematic framing and displays the impact of framing on the popular admission of activism and human rights problems in Pakistan.

Keywords: *Media framing, human rights activism, Balochistan, protest coverage, thematic framing, episodic framing, Pakistani newspapers*

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The Universal declaration of Rights on Human rights contains 30 points and encompasses besides others the following; no one shall be held in slavery or servitude, the slave trade shall be banned in all its forms. Nobody should be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (UN, 1948). The concept of human rights has been adopted as a universal truth and it cuts across all people. States and corporations, however, can allow human rights violations to be committed because human rights violation is rewarding and is looked at as justified to fulfill a given political aim (Engle, 2004; Muchlinski, 2001). The rights of man have been implicated in the violation of human rights by multinationals and other security firms as well as sanctions have been applied to restrain the states into improving their human rights (Goldstone, 2011; Weiss and Shamir, 2011).

Whereas, the activism is all about bringing the injustice and demanding a better and brighter future through campaigns and protest manifestations (Eleanor Brooks, 2024).

Enforced disappearances are not a fresh and recent form of violation of human rights. It occurs everywhere in the world (Arfat and Banday, 2013; Vitkauskait, 2010) and has been common through the entire human history. The kidnappings are mostly done by the state under the pretext of national security and national interest. The United Nations General Assembly and the United Nations Framework of Human Rights Charter came up with the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons against Enforced Disappearances on 23 December 2010 to stop the practice of enforced disappearances. The role of the Convention is to highlight the plague of enforced disappearance, to assist victims, to assist States where disappeared persons are found, to penalize and prevent this crime, and to hold the perpetrators of the crime, which is against humanity, responsible.

Forced disappearance of persons is among the most alarming security concerns of various ethnic groups of Pakistan in the present day political contexts. Human rights and democratic rights are generally violated in Pakistan and also there are illegal arrests and detentions, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances. In Pakistan, thousands of people

have been taken to detentions without identifying locations and been subjected to torture and ill-treatment. The relatives of these victims are bothered and intimidated when they look for their loved ones (HRCP, 2006; HRW, 2011). The disappearance of people in Pakistan became systematic with the war on terror that was supported by the United States of America and its supporters (Amnesty International, 2006; Shafiq, 2013).

However, the same approach was later adopted by Pakistani state machinery i.e. secret agencies and law enforcing agencies to subdue other political fractions who are viewed as dissidents, who struggle to gain their civil and political rights, an independent state as with the case of the Baloch separatists, or those who are suspected to be involved in terrorism acts following the attack of 9/11 (Mughal, 2013). The opposition to enforced disappearance has been documented in numerous locations on many several occasions.

Although the history of enforced disappearances could be traced in Pakistan as far back as the 1970s (Mughal, 2013), the first example was a disappearance of Asad Mengal, the brother of Atta Ullah Mengal in Balochistan during a blue operation in 1976. Later in the year 1995, a large number of members of MQM (Mutahida Qaumi Movement) went missing involuntarily (Hassan, 2011). Beginning in 2001, the cases of enforced disappearances, illegal custody and extrajudicial killings of activists, nationalist leaders, journalists, and civilians affiliated to the Baloch, Pashtun, Sindhi, and Muhajir ethnic groups have occurred several times (HRW, 2011; Mughal, 2013; Shafiq, 2013).

Enforced disappearance, ill treatment and extra-judicial execution, especially based on their dissident political ideas and activities, have especially been employed against the Baloch of Balochistan (HRCP, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2019; Mughal, 2013). Yet, as stated by VBMP (Voice for Baloch Missing Persons), at this point in time, mass of involuntary disappearances is without any previous history of political activism or insurgency.

Baloch women themselves have made it their mission ever since, beginning in 2009, but even earlier than that, to come out in the front, to protest loudly and vociferously, to hold sit-in protests, against the forced disappearances of their loved ones (Shafiq, 2013). The experience of unspeakable stories of injustice and extrajudicial killings, state perpetrated

violence, and forced disappearances that saturate the minds and memories of women who were the relatives of the disappeared in Balochistan. That leaves a lingering feeling of isolation to the left behind family of missing persons (HRCP 2006; HRW 2011).

Enforced disappearance in Pakistan re-entered the national spotlight during the Mahrang Baloch sit-in in Islamabad that lasted between December 2023 and January 2024. Mahrang Baloch, who is a known human rights activist, organized a bold demonstration seeking justice to the victims of enforced disappearances in Balochistan. The sit-in was widely reported and attracted the attention of other activists, like-minded citizens, and human rights agencies around the world. The tireless effort of Mahrang Baloch in the sit-in scared as a call to action to victims of forced disappearances and focused on the life of thousands of people who live in permanent agony as families wait to learn what has become of their relatives. The rebellious and persistence nature of Baloch echoed the continual efforts of the activists to pursue accountability and safeguarding of human rights in Pakistan.

Even under the threat of intimidation and harassment by the authorities, Mahrang Baloch and her supporters did not stand down when demanding transparency and themselves calling upon the government to take tangible steps to counter the topical menace of forced disappearances. The sit-in became an emblem of unity and strength, and an idea of hope in change and justice in Balochistan and the rest of the world. By using their collective voice and unrelenting determination, Mahrang Baloch and sit-in participants made the urgency to end human rights abuse and to bring perpetrators to justice even louder. Their activism echoed throughout the nation, sparking a national debate and rousing support on the very idea of human rights, on which all people, no matter their ethnic or political background were able to rely.

Thus present study is related to the exploration of framing of human rights activists in Pakistan national dailies focussing the Mahrang Baloch sit-in in Islamabad to seek justice of enforced disappearances in Balochistan.

The activism by human rights groups in Pakistan, especially over concerns like enforced disappearance, ethnic conflicts, and political opposition, has been critical in not only raising awareness about the social injustice but also advocating social change. When the state

systematically excludes certain groups and tramples their call to justice and rights, the intervention of activists, like the case of Mahrang Baloch in Pakistan, became significantly critical and important. Activists have to strive and operate under circumstances where the media is either controlled or censored and where military-backed governance speaks the final word in political issues.

It is observed that Balochistan is the centre of political and human rights activism in Pakistan. The marginalized ethnic Baloch communities are seeking more autonomy, economic wealth, and an end to enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. Because of this, since 2000, a conflict in Balochistan has escalated.

The voice of the movement of the disappeared is Mahrang Baloch who has organized numerous protests, media campaigns and sit-ins to highlight the human rights violations in the region. Her sit-in demonstration in Islamabad in 2023 united many human rights activists and relatives of the disappeared, raising a burning topic that drew little attention to national debates.

The history of human rights activism has strongly influenced political and social transformation with the focus on systematic inequalities and the promotion of justice globally. Activism commonly arises out of the necessity to challenge state approved repression, structural inequalities, and infringement of civil liberties. Human rights activists have over the years used different means to raise their voices, through protests, digital campaigns, court cases, and most importantly sit-in protests. Sit in has been a difficult move to counter or address the human rights violations and motivation of the masses. In Pakistan, a place where such problems as freedom of speech, political opposition, and civil liberties abuses are widespread, activism has become a necessary tool to guide the national discourse and impact policy reforms (Pechota, 2017).

1.1.1 Human Rights Issues in Pakistan

Abuses of human rights in Pakistan are seemingly heterogeneous and multifaceted, ranging between political repression, gender discrimination, ethnicities, and religious discrimination. Of these, one of the most consistent and disturbing human rights violations is the enforced disappearance of individuals especially in Balochistan. Such disappearances have been triggered

mainly by the Baloch separatist movement, whose demands for more autonomy and political freedom has resulted in the targeting of more ethnic Baloch citizens and activists by state security officials (HRW, 2011).

Other local human rights organizations such as Voice for Baloch Missing Persons (VBMP) have worked to bring attention to this issue in recent years organizing protests and campaigns both inside and outside Pakistan.

1.1.2 Mahrang Baloch and the Struggle for Justice

Mahrang Baloch, a young human rights activist in Balochistan, who has dedicated her time to defending the right of disappeared people of Baluchistan, is one of the most prominent person in this struggle. One reason why Mahrang joined the human rights movement is personal as she lost her father under enforced disappearance and she later lost her brother. Such personal tragedies projected her into the open life, where she is now a major figure in the Balochistan movement (Humera, 2023). Her most popular act of defiance was the sit-in protest that she led in December 2023, at the National Press Club in Islamabad. The protest was to make a national and international call to highlight the enforced disappearances in Balochistan to hold the state accountable and the victim's justice.

1.1.3 The Role of Media in Human Rights Activism

Media has had an instrumental history in social movements, aiding them in shaping the media narrative, rallying an audience, and instigating the social change. Media coverage is central to human rights activism in the Pakistani context; it acts as a platform where activists give voice to their efforts ensuring that violation of human rights rise to the centre of national and international concern. This role of the media is crucial especially in Pakistan where freedom of the press is frequently limited and any journalist who covers politically sensitive issues is threatened (Hassan, 2011).

Media framing plays an important role in the success of a social movement in a scenario of enforced disappearances and activism of Mahrang Baloch. The framing of the issues by the media as a human rights abuse or a national security concern can exert profound influence on the attitude of the people and how governments respond to the issues. The portrayal of Baloch activists and

the demonstrations reported in the media usually reflects deeper political, social, and ethnic tensions in the country.

1.1.4 The Role of Media in Human Rights Advocacy in Pakistan

Pakistani media has a dual role to play regarding the coverage of human rights in Pakistan. On the one hand, it may be a useful tool to raise the voices of activists, raise awareness, and provoke action. Conversely, the media in Pakistan has been widely criticized as being sensationalist or blocking reports of political violence and human rights abuses in exchange for favours of the powerful political or military factors (Riaz, 2018).

Regarding the subject of enforced disappearances in Balochistan, commercial media houses, including Dawn and The News, have occasionally been involved in the systemic cover-up or trivializing of the magnitude of the human rights abuse. The Pakistani government, which exerts a broad control over the media, influenced a great scope of the discourse of these conditions. Nonetheless, there are other independent journalists and media houses who have ignored state influence to bring out some light on the matter.

The fact creates a rare sense of critical media examination in which activists, particularly those such as Mahrang Baloch, utilize the media in order to re-contextualize accounts around the disappearances. The framing of the media consequently does not merely determine the contents of the discourse but is also a vital part of movements that pursue legitimizing human rights.

1.1.5 Framing Theory and Its Relevance to Human Rights Movements

The Framing Theory is an indicator of relationship between media outlets and tendency to create reality through focus on one portion of an issue, at the expense of the other. The present theory is especially applicable to the plight of an activist of human rights in the media. Framing can influence the way people perceive an activist through the lens of media reports: either establishing a ground of support or positioning activists as extremists and causes of trouble.

The production of Mahrang Baloch sit-in by the media plays a central role to her protest. Was she the victim of the state oppression, who must be given justice because thousands of Baloch citizens had already disappeared, or was she the figure of destabilization, dividing the nation and bringing peace?

Present study explored and discussed the frames created by the Pakistani press in light of their connotations on popular backing and reform of policy. The media framing also give an important insight helping the activists to know the implications towards the way their movements are being viewed and interpreted by the people.

1.1.6 The Political Context of Enforced Disappearances in Balochistan

Pakistan has been struggling with internal governance since the inception of Balochistan. The Baloch Nationalist movement has urged for increased regional autonomy and cultural right security. State repression, however, has risen over the years, which includes military operations, extrajudicial execution, and disappearances. Although the Pakistani government justifies the military operation by claiming that it is essential to counter insurgency, impose national security, human rights groups and local activists declare it to be a continuous human rights catastrophe (Human Rights Watch, 2011).

Such activists as Mahrang Baloch were often threatened by violence, intimidation, and marginalization in an effort to seek justice on the behalf of the victims of forced disappearances. Their activism tends to directly conflict with the Pakistani military and the national security state of the government, making their work a political theatre.

This study aims at discussing the effects of media coverage of the Mahrang Baloch on the overall perception of the population and the policy discourse regarding forceful disappearances. Through the media coverage of Baloch activism we can find out that how activism in the region can either be projected as a justified resistance or it could be a destabilization by foreign powers.

1.1.7 Media Landscape in Pakistan: Press Freedom and Censorship

The Pakistan media environment is a complicated one, although the country has many privately owned media houses and newspapers. The government usually interferes with the coverage of various issues including the human rights, due to government attack. The unique aspect of the media domain is the participation of the military in the censorship of media, particularly in controversial issues such as Balochistan and mandatory disappearance (Ahmed, 2019).

Talking about press freedom, Pakistan is placed quite low among countries. There are many journalists in Pakistan being threatened, harassed, arrested, detained or killed.

This has made life of human rights activists and other independent journalists difficult as they strive to promote their messages about forced disappearances and military repression and ethnic discrimination. But there have been developments by some print outlets in Pakistan like Dawn and the Express Tribune to adopt a critical reporting especially on aspects like the autonomy of Balochistan and human rights abuses.

So the present study explored the influence of the elements of government censorship and state control over the press on the media representation of human rights activists and to what extent Mahrang Baloch framed in the Pakistani media.

1.2 Problem Statement

Although media framing has a great effect the construction of discourses in the society. Especially when human rights activists significantly framed by media in order to create a specific narrative among different societal groups.

Therefore, present study aims to explore the framing strategies of the coverage of Mahrang Baloch sit-in, used by the two most popular Pakistani dailies i.e, Dawn and The Express Tribune. Further contributing the understanding the power of media on activism and citizen participation in Pakistan.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Present study significantly adds to scholarly knowledge of media framing in sensitive political environments like Pakistan. Second, it throws light on the role of press coverage that may promote or weaken human rights activism. Third, it makes us understand the bigger picture of the media presence in conflict regions, where the demonstration of minority groups and critical opinions is frequently manipulated. Using the example of the Mahrang Baloch case, this paper outlines both the ethical and political consequences of the press framing in the Pakistani socio-political context.

1.4 Objective of the Study

The main aim of this study is to examine the framing patterns by the Pakistani national dailies as they report on human rights activists with emphasis on Mahrang Baloch sit-in.

1.5 Research Questions

Following are the research questions of present study.

RQ.1 What thematic elements are present in the media coverage of Mahrng Baloch's sit-in in Islamabad against forced disappearances?

RQ.2 What kind of frames are used by English dailies of Pakistan to represent human rights activists during sit-in?

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Review of Related Literature

Since 1990s, human rights have been tied into the international political lexicon and into media narratives. This transition has come along with a dramatic rise in social consciousness, legislation, and global overviews regarding concerns regarding criminal justice, equality, and civil rights. As observed by scholars such as Cmiel (2004), the use of terminologies of human rights in policy documents, global governance systems, and even journalism has gone exponential. Human rights have taken on near-ritualistic significance in the developed world, representing fundamental democratic principles and a yardstick against which the actions of states might be tested, internationally. Evidence of war crimes tribunals, demonstration, and transnational advocacy networks have further entrenched the presence and ethical power of human rights within the modern political culture.

Human rights became a discourse that has begun to serve as a generative ideology in liberal democracies, both domestically and in foreign policy. Chandler (2002) suggested that the evolution of human rights into a new kind of civic religion has dominated national identity and global policies. Public opinion research in the United States provides evidence that affirms this statement, as there has been a high level of support towards foreign policy measures related to the general human rights agenda. The cosmopolitan nature of tools such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the popularity of legal instruments such as international tribunals have rendered the human rights system as the hallmark of international legitimacy. These systems and symbols help to form the collective moral code accepted by democratic societies and a platform to give voice to the unheard.

The concept of media framing has played a significant role in media studies and communication theory, especially in interpreting how media coverage frames shape the way any event is perceived as being politically or socially important. Initially Goffman (1974), in his classic publication of *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, the framing theory implies that people establish and explain reality via frames cognitive frameworks that guide the processing of information. The media employs these frames to depict certain elements of events or issues thereby shaping how the populace perceives the events.

The first major aspect of framing theory is that it does not just tell about events but also influences them. Robert Entman (1993) said that framing is the process of choosing and highlighting some facts about an issue and de-emphasizing or omitting others to drive the audience perception of that issue. Media frames can have very strong influence on general opinion especially on politically sensitive topics like human rights violations. Protests, or any activist campaign, framing may increase or reduce the legitimate aspects of the cause in which eventually what lands the ground depends on how it is framed.

When it comes to human rights movements, how activists are framed by media can strongly influence whether these activists will be supported by the general population. Activists will have a better chance at sympathy by being framed as victims of state oppression. However, on the other hand, framed as radicals or terrorists, their movements are perceived as disruptive, and illegitimate. The difference is essential to comprehending the weird ways in which media framing can help to shape both popular thought and government policy, especially under the conditions of political struggle such as in Balochistan.

Researchers have recently discovered that media framing within conflict areas can also be a means of control because the media has the potential to alter narratives of activist groups and movements. As an illustration, Iyengar (1991) wrote that frames used in the media frequently affect the manner in which people view matters episodically (isolated events) versus thematically (underlying causes) and has serious implications to the way individuals see the situation. Although episodic frames tend to commodify social problems into isolated tales or isolated events, thematic frames tend to be structurally explanatory concerning the social problem. With the understanding of how the Pakistani press constructs the activism of this young woman and the issue of human rights in Balochistan, it is possible to analyse the media advocacy connected to the situation of Mahrang Baloch critically.

The history of human rights activism in Pakistan is comprised of political repression, and social movements that work towards the annihilation of these injustices. The political life of Pakistan filled with military coups, military dictatorship, and ethnic strife has been marred with search of freedom, independence and social harmony. In this way the quest of political reform and pursuit of ethnic equality, has often been coupled with activism in Pakistan.

Pakistan Human rights activism has addressed the rights of women as well as the right of expression among others because Balochistan is a tough area because of the history of ethnic dispute and political oppression. The portrayal of movement by the Baloch who demand extended powers and protection of their ethnic rights has been a conflict with the central government. Due to this conflict, Baloch Communities have become marginalized and displaced as well as Baloch activists have been systematically abused by government agencies (Shah, 2019).

The human rights Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have cited Balochistan as one of the most unprotected areas to human rights violations including disappearances and extrajudicial killings. The fight of justice and accountability has been the key to activities of organizations such as Voice of Baloch Missing peoples (VBMP), which has played a critical role in supporting the cause of the families of those missing.

Mahrang Baloch, a strong supporter of this movement, has lead campaigns demanding justice of the disappeared. Her demonstrations, in particular the sit-in protest in Islamabad in 2023 can be seen as a symbol of resistance to state oppression and an example of how political activism could work as a political instrument and a stance-raising activity with international appeal.

Such activism in Pakistan has regularly been characterized by the Pakistani state as undermining national unity and security helping to delegitimize activist demands. This has given rise to self-censorship by the media with human rights issues usually relegated or underemphasized. The studies on media in Pakistan bring out the struggle that the activists have to ensure their voices are heard in a media that is politically dominated.

2.1.1 Mahrang Baloch Sit-In in Islamabad

On December 19, 2023, Mahrang Baloch tweeted, attracting world concern to a great movement in the fight against the Baloch genocide. This Long March tapped into thousands of people who covered more than a thousand kilometres between Turbat and Taunsa showing their great resistance to the horrors the people of Baloch were facing. With her slogan and the hashtag #MarchAgainstBalochGenocide, she urgently urges the world not to stay silent anymore but to

use their solidarity and seek justice (Humera, 2023). Dr. Mahrang Baloch, who organized the protests, was critical in this movement. Not scared of fighting against wrongs, she defended the rights of the disappeared. Her strength and dedication encouraged people to become involved in the movement.

The Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) just ended their sit-in that lasted more than 30 days at the National Press Club (NPC) in Islamabad. It was an amazing demonstration by Baloch activists to speak up against enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings in Balochistan. The sit-in started on December 20, 2023, and the protesters braved bad weather as they stood firmly in their protest (Guramani, 2024). After the sit-in, Dr. Mahrang Baloch announced that they were going back to Balochistan. But they still fight injustice. On January 27, a rally is scheduled to be held in Balochistan to further escalate their demands and to highlight the currently existing human rights violation in the area. Although it is surrounded by difficulties and hardships, the continuous commitment of Mahrang Baloch is a source of hope all the people in search of justice and equality.

2.1.2 Mahrang Baloch Human Rights Activist

Within the intricate maze of Mahrang Baloch's life, a compelling story of Survival, resistance and a continued pursuit of justice is depicted. Of late, her path has attracted a lot of attention due to her personal tragedies and constant commitment to the Baloch cause. This has culminated in impressive mass mobilization of rights and justice.

Mahrang Baloch started her journey 10 years earlier, when she was still living in her home town Mangochar, Kalat with a certain dream to become a doctor. She had her own tragedies though. Her father, Abdul Ghaffar Lango, was a nationalist political dissent who disappeared against his will in the years 2006 and 2009. All these misfortunes eventually resulted in his extra judicial murder in 2011. In the age of 16, Mahrang had to contend with the cruelty of finding the mutilated body of her father in Gadani. She also continued to press on despite these problems due to the political awareness which had spurred the convictions of her father (Humera, 2023).

Mahrang became even more dedicated to the Baloch cause after her brother, Nasir

Baloch, was subjected to enforced disappearance for a period of over three months in 2017. In order to prevent the tragic loss of another cherished family member to state violence, she decided to take action on digital platforms. She created a Twitter account and composed her first tweet, advocating for the release of her brother. Since then, Mahrang has emerged as a steadfast advocate against enforced disappearances, and the broader problem of Baloch genocide. In her activism, she goes beyond personal issues and focuses on societal problems like the harassment that women students at the University of Balochistan experience.

2.1.3 Gap in Literature

Despite the growing body of research on media framing and human rights, there remains a noticeable gap when it comes to the representation of human rights defenders in Pakistan's mainstream press. While several studies have addressed general trends in media bias, censorship, and state influence, few have specifically examined how individual activists particularly from marginalized communities are framed in news coverage. Even fewer focus on the portrayal of women activists like Mahrang Baloch, whose gender, ethnicity, and political stance intersect in complex ways. Moreover, most existing studies rely on broader thematic analyses and do not engage with specific events or sit-ins as case studies, which could offer deeper insights into the framing process during moments of heightened political tension.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

2.2.1 Framing theory

It focuses on the concept of media framing as developed in communication studies and its relevance to understanding how the press shapes public perceptions of social and political movements. Given that this study investigates the portrayal of a high-profile human rights sit-in led by Mahrang Baloch, framing theory provides a suitable lens for analyzing the selection, emphasis, and interpretation strategies used by national newspapers. This discusses core framing concepts and models developed by scholars such as Erving Goffman, Robert Entman, and Shanto Iyengar, further connecting that how these ideas are applied in the context of Pakistani media.

2.2.2 Goffman's Concept of Frames

The theoretical underpinnings of the framing theory can be traced to the work of Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (1974), where the author held that people use frames in making sense of their life experiences. Frames according to Goffman are mental constructions through which individuals understand activities, social encounters and social actions. These frames affect the construction and interpretation of news in a media context. Whilst journalists, editors and media houses select what features of a story to accentuate, the sources to rely on and the words to use among others, each of this is a pre-determined framing which conditions audience cognizance. The insights, of Goffman, formed the foundation of comprehending how meaning is constructed and expressed by communication.

2.2.3 Entman's Framing Model

Robert Entman (1993) extended Goffman by developing a clear analytic framework for the concept of framing. Entman defines framing as the selection and prominence of some elements of a perceived reality in order to facilitate a specific interpretation. He suggested that frames have four important functions: they are used to define problems, diagnose problems, offer moral judgments, and propose remedies. The model can be especially helpful in media analysis as it helps researchers to identify systematically how stories are framed to guide audience perception. As an example, when a protest is presented in the context of a security threat, as opposed to a demand of justice, it triggers alternative emotional and political resonances with readers.

2.2.4 Iyengar's Episodic and Thematic Framing

One more important aspect of framing was proposed by Shanto Iyengar (1991) who introduced a difference between episodic and thematic frames. Episodic framing is all about news that is portrayed in an isolated form, lacking any context. It has the tendency of framing problems as personal ones, which deters structural or policy options. In contrast, thematic framing offers background, trends and systemic perspective and invites viewers to see events in terms of larger social or political context. This difference will be important in the context of this study: when the sit-in organized by Mahrang Baloch is discussed as an episodic event, it can be perceived as a single incident. Thematically speaking, however, the battle over this most

recent outcry could be seen as one of the long-time fight of justice in Baluchistan.

Framing is not a vacuum phenomenon, it is imbedded in systems of power. Political, economic, and ideological orders tend to put limitations on media institutions. The Propaganda Model as outlined by Herman and Chomsky (1988) which is not strictly a framing theory enhances this discussion by pointing out how the media perform agenda-setting and selective reporting to better serve the interests of the elite. In states such as Pakistan, where the press is under great military and intelligence influence, framing is being used to strengthen dominant state narratives and suppress dissent. These larger power relations tend to determine the mediated representation of activists, particularly those acting against the state power.

2.2.4 Relevance of Framing Theory to Present Study

The particular relevancy of the framing theory to this research is that it permits a critical analysis of the manner in which the Pakistani press was presenting Mahrang Baloch sit-in. Through characterizing certain frames e.g. national security, human rights, or law and order the study can determine whether the media coverage legitimized or delegitimized the protest. It also sheds light on the underlying values, assumptions, and ideologies reflected in the news. Since this research uses both thematic and episodic categories as analytical tools, framing theory provides a coherent and flexible framework to assess how newspapers like Dawn and The Express Tribune influenced public discourse during a politically sensitive event.

The researcher applied framing theory to explore thematic frames described by Iyengar in the framing of human rights activist in Pakistan National Dailies i.e. The Dawn and The Express Tribune.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A research technique is an explanation of how a certain type of study is done. It outlines the processes or procedures used to gather and analyze data for a certain research subject. Furthermore, if we are talking about the notion of research, then research is an organized approach in which a researcher digs up secrets in a technique that involves more or less systematically which knowledge he didn't know previously. In this section researcher explored the methods used to conduct the research study on human rights activist, the deep insight of Mahrang Baloch sit in. So it has provided a detailed view of the sample, the instrumentation, and the procedure utilities in this study. This study attempted to determine that how the human rights activist is being framed in Pakistan dailies

3.1 Research Design

The researcher followed quantitative content analysis to understand the framing of political activist by analyzing two highly circulated newspapers DAWN and the express tribune their week day circulation is 95,446 copies.

3.2 Population

In this study population is Pakistani's highly circulated newspapers i.e, Dawn and The Express tribune.

3.3 Sampling

In this research, the quantitative content analysis approach has utilized to collect data from two highly circulated newspapers i.e, Daily Dawn and the Express Tribune. The researcher has collected news related to Mahrang Baloch sit-in in Islamabad. The time period to collect data of Mahrang Baloch sit-in is December 20, 2023 to 23rd January 2024, this time period has been selected due to a reason when Mahrang Baloch announced the sit-in in Islamabad till the termination of sit-in. So, the news of one month is collected and analyzed.

3.4 Operational Definitions

Framing

In this study, framing refers to the process by which news media select, highlight, and present certain aspects of an issue while downplaying or excluding others, thereby shaping public perception. It involves choices related to language, focus, sources, and context. For this research, framing is examined through two main categories: episodic frames, which emphasize individual incidents, and thematic frames, which present issues within a broader social, political, or historical perspective.

Human Rights Activist

A human rights activist is defined here as a person who works actively to protect and advocate for basic human rights, often in challenging or high-risk situations. Within this research, the term specifically refers to Dr. Mahrang Baloch, who led a peaceful sit-in protest in Islamabad from December 20, 2023, to January 23, 2024, against enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings in Balochistan.

Thematic Frames

Thematic frames place an event or issue within a wider context, linking it to structural causes, historical background, and broader patterns. In this study, thematic framing is identified when news coverage connects the Mahrang Baloch sit-in to ongoing human rights concerns, long-standing grievances in Balochistan, and state policies affecting the region.

Episodic Frames

Episodic frames depict events as isolated occurrences without connecting them to larger patterns or underlying causes. For this research, episodic framing is recognized when reporting on the Mahrang Baloch sit-in focuses on specific daily events, confrontations, or individual statements without providing wider contextual links.

3.5 Instrument

Researcher used the instrument of quantitative content analysis and highlighted different frames i.e. episodic and thematic frames used for Mahrang Baloch's sit-in from 20th December 2023 to 23rd January 2024.

3.6 Data Collection

Data has been collected through purposive sampling. Articles from two highly circulated newspapers i.e, Daily Dawn and the Express Tribune have been chosen because of their audience reach, and to provide a diverse standpoint on the framing of human rights activist discussing the Mahrang Baloch sit-in in Islamabad.

3.7 Data Analysis

Researcher has developed the coding sheet with different themes, and frames used in these newspapers

3.8 Ethical Consideration

Researcher has chosen the relevant news articles from selected newspapers. There are no fake news or self-made news to examine results.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Data for the present study has been collected through Purposive sampling by extracting news stories out of the given sample. The findings reveals interesting results for both English dailies, as explained below.

4.1 Coverage in both newspapers

Coverage regarding Mahrang Baloch's sit in from two English dailies are given below. The news stories appeared on the subject mentioned above are categorised and analysed as per following.

4.1.1. News Stories from Daily Dawn

Date	Headline	News
22-12-23	Baloch protesters rounded up in brutal overnight action	<p>After the capital's police used force to disperse and detain Baloch demonstrators, who had converged on the capital to protest against enforced disappearances and extra-judicial killings in their province, the federal government claimed that more than 90 per cent of the demonstrators — including all women and children — had been released by the police. The claim stood in stark contrast to scenes that unfolded later on Thursday night outside the Women Police Station, when cops could be seen shoving women into buses to send them back to Quetta.</p> <p>After exhaustive talks with protesters that continued late into the night, authorities decided to postpone their 'repatriation' until Friday, when the protesters are also likely to be presented in court.</p>
23-12-23	Police get dressing-down over action against Baloch protesters	<p>Islamabad High Court (IHC) Chief Justice Aamer Farooq on Friday advised the capital police chief to concentrate on controlling street crimes rather than flexing their muscles against protesters.</p> <p>Justice Farooq was hearing a petition filed against the arrest of Baloch people, who came to Islamabad to protest against enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings in Balochistan.</p> <p>During the proceedings, the chief justice asked the IGP about the whereabouts of some 50 women who, according to the counsel for the protesters, were missing.</p>

24-12-23 Baloch activists seek protesters' release within 3 days

The police chief replied that the women went to the Women Police Station on their own, and their entry was marked by the authorised officer.

As a protest outside the National Press Club in Islamabad against the enforced disappearances and extra-judicial killings continued, the Baloch Yakjehti Committee — organiser of the long march — gave the authorities a three-day ultimatum to quash cases registered against students and activists and release all protesters.

A statement issued by the BYC on their social media platform said over 100 Baloch students were “missing” after the crackdown on the march by the police on Wednesday night. “Nearly 350 of our students and families were arrested...the females and 33 students were granted bail the next day, while more than 250 of our students are still in jail...more than 100 still have not been presented before court,” it claimed.

The protesters demanded the withdrawal of all cases registered in different cities — including Islamabad — against the participants of the long march and urged the Islamabad police to release their companions.

The protesters warned the authorities of ‘harsh steps’ if their demands were not met and said the state and the capital administration would be responsible in that case.

On Saturday, a judicial magistrate granted bail to 162 participants. A protester, however, told *Dawn* that only half of the protesters had been granted bail. The BYC claimed that though the bail was granted, their release was cancelled.

Gulzadi Baloch, 17, said: “We are still unaware of the whereabouts of 160 to 170 protesters... Some people have been saying that they are in Attock jail and others have been saying that the police have handed over them to the powers-that-be.” The participant alleged that the police were not allowing visitors and even “stopped the food delivery” for the protesters.

The police, however, said officials had been deployed around the press club for the security of the protesters, whose number was about 200. A senior police official, requesting anonymity, said the protesters were allowed to sit outside the NPC because of the ‘efforts and intervention’ of caretaker PM Anwaarul Haq Kakar.

According to a police spokesperson, the protesters would not be allowed to move towards the ‘Red Zone’. “We hope protesters will fully cooperate with police for peace and security,” the spokesperson said.

Earlier, Chief Commissioner Mohammad Anwarul Haq, IGP Akbar Nasir Khan and others visited the NPC for a meeting with the protesters and relatives of missing persons.

25-12-23	Baloch protesters being freed after bail: police	<p>Islamabad police said on Sunday the bail of all detained Baloch protesters — taken into custody during a demonstration demanding an end to enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings — had been approved and they were being released.</p> <p>However, the protesters have accused the police of “giving false statements” and reiterated that more than 100 Baloch students were still “missing” and they had not been produced before any court.</p> <p>The Islamabad police statement came a day after the Baloch Yakjehti Committee, organiser of the Baloch long march in Islamabad, gave the authorities a three-day ultimatum to quash cases registered against students and activists and release all protesters, Dawn.com reported.</p>
26-12-23	Protesters contest govt claim of 290 Baloch activists' release	<p>The caretaker federal government on Monday claimed to have released about 290 Baloch demonstrators held in the wake of a crackdown on a long march organised by the Baloch Yakjehti Committee.</p> <p>The claim was contested by the organisers of the protest, who said the authorities released about 130 protesters on Sunday night, but not a single person was released on Monday as claimed by the government.</p> <p>In a statement on ‘X’ (formerly Twitter), the interior ministry said the decision to release the protesters was taken in light of the negotiations held between the Baloch demonstrators and a cabinet committee, and a court verdict.</p>
2-01-24	PM Kakar ‘loses his cool’ over Baloch protests in capital	<p>Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar on Monday took exception to the support lent to Baloch protesters, who have been staging a sit-in in Islamabad for more than a week for the recovery of their loved ones and extra-judicial killings in the province.</p> <p>The caretaker premier, who spent more than 15 minutes of a 20-minute press conference on the issues of Balochistan at Lahore’s Central Business District, appeared visibly irked.</p> <p>Speaking about those who are supporting the Baloch protest, Mr Kakar said they could join the Baloch militants.</p> <p>“Advocates of terrorists in Balochistan should go and join them if they are convinced on the veracity of their issue and fight the state along with them, so that we know where they stand and how to deal with them,” he said, alluding to rights activists and journalists standing with the Baloch marchers.</p> <p><i>Challenges those championing rights of Baloch to ‘go and join the militants’; claims those protesting are relatives of ‘people fighting against the state’</i></p>

Responding to the media on the issue of police violence against Baloch protesters in Islamabad, the caretaker premier said that some of the people — media persons included — were trying to “mislead everyone, turning themselves into fake heroes of human rights and damaging the state”.

The caretaker PM insisted that those protesting in Islamabad are the “relatives of those fighting against the state” in Balochistan. He, however, added that the state had a beef with militant outfits, not the Baloch people.

“We still respect their right to protest because their dear and near ones disappeared. But they should also know that they [militants] were fighting against the state, with the help of RAW funding and aided by India. It is an armed rebellion, with foreign help,” he said.

Mr Kakar said those trying to create human rights issues out of the use of water cannons against protestors should also explain who is killing common people in Balochistan.

“Who is engaged in armed mutiny against the state of Pakistan? I am sure if these so-called advocates go to Balochistan, they would be killed as well. But please, go and join the BLF or BLA so that the state knows where you stand. The state is clear on how to deal with this menace. Please clarify your position,” he demanded.

“Should we ignore the fact that over 90,000 innocent people have been killed and not even nine criminals have been convicted so far? Our criminal justice is weak, and cannot punish terrorists. Should we let them go on a rampage? Have these false advocates [of human rights] tried to unmask those who are behind this carnage? Who is doing it? Isn’t investigative journalism part of their duty? If they are turning the handling of protestors into a human rights issue, taunting me about my Balochistan origin, and raising an uproar about how can it happen right under my nose, they must also bring out the other side of the picture,” he added.

“There are organised attacks taking place on security forces on a daily basis. Why not demand the arrest of killers of security forces and innocent people? Drawing a one-sided picture and then trying to take social, professional and political mileage out of it will not be allowed because it damages the state,” the caretaker PM added.

“I insist and support their right to protest for their dear ones. My problem is with those trying to project the wrong interpretation of the issue and exploiting it for their ends,” he added.

According to Mr Kakar, protest within the ambit of law was everyone’s right, the state has to respond if a limit is crossed. “After all, what happened on May 9? The PTI people were also protesting. Why are they taken to task? They crossed the legal limit. Everyone can protest but only with legal limits,” he added.

Known for his soft-spoken demeanour, Mr Kakar did not hold back on the first day of the new year and, at certain points, his tone was

bordering on hostile. During the talk, he also told a journalist to stay quiet as they tried to interject with a question while he was speaking.

4-01-24	Govt told not to uproot Baloch protest camp	<p>The Supreme Court on Wednesday asked the government not to resort to harsh measures against the Baloch protesters whereas the Islamabad High Court (IHC) barred the police from using force to disperse the demonstrators encamped for almost two weeks outside the National Press Club.</p> <p>The observation by the Supreme Court came during the hearing of a petition filed by lawyer Aitzaz Ahsan against enforced disappearance and the directives of the high court came in response to a petition moved by Sammi Deen Baloch — an organiser of the Baloch long march against enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings in Balochistan.</p> <p>At the fag end of Wednesday's hearing on enforced disappearances, Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP) Qazi Faez Isa observed every citizen had the right to protest. "Let them exercise this right to their heart's content; unless they destroy public properties or resort to violence, there must not be any reason to curtail the right to protest let alone by force," CJP Isa observed without naming the protesters from Balochistan.</p>
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23-01-24	'Disappointed' by state, Baloch protesters wrap up sit-in	<p>Hundreds of Baloch protesters, who had been camping outside the National Press Club since December 20 for the recovery of missing persons and an end to extra-judicial killings in the province, on Tuesday wrapped up their sit-in after the 'round the clock' harassment at the hands of the Islamabad police.</p> <p>Dr Mahrang Baloch, one of the organisers, announced the decision to end 'Phase IV' of the movement during a press conference outside the press club.</p> <p>Now, the protest organised by the Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) has moved on to the next phase, which will start in Quetta on Jan 27 with a public gathering.</p> <p>Ms Baloch said "Phase V" of the movement will focus on the eradication of issue through "creating awareness and exposing state-sponsored oppression... We will bring these inhumane state policies and actions to the public courts".</p> <p><i>BYC says next phase of movement from Jan 27 with rally in Quetta</i></p> <p>During the presser, she delved into the harassment meted out to the protesters in Islamabad. She said despite their peaceful sit-in, they were subjected to harassment, threats and profiling. "Then imagine what could be happening to women and children living thousands of kilometres from Islamabad," she said.</p>
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Expressing her dismay with the authorities, she said the state had given them a clear message by declaring them ‘terrorists’ and that the government only cared about the resources of Balochistan and not its people.

“The state departments have stooped low to the point where false security threats were created to divert attention from us, harass us, and end our protest. They lodged FIRs in every region to stop us and arrest our people, but it has only made us stronger,” said the BYC leader.

She also recalled the violence unleashed upon the protesters as they entered Islamabad.

“We were welcomed into the city with batons, water cannons and arrests, and for more than a month, we have not spent a single night where we were not given threats and harassed by the Islamabad police and other ‘secret’ agencies,” she claimed.

According to Dr Mahrang Baloch, the guests who came to attend the ‘Oppressed Peoples Conference’ were also subjected to violence by the police and were barred from entering the camp.

She said the sit-in was a golden opportunity for the state to “reconcile with us, halt violence, and initiate dialogue”. She alleged: “However, they showed the entire world that the treatment of Baloch people will remain violent; the state has shown how non-serious it is about our issue.”

Meanwhile, former senator Farhatullah Babar, in a statement, supported the decision of the Baloch protesters to wind up their sit-in.

“The decision by the organisers to wind up the 60-day-long protest camp in Islamabad of Baloch women and children against enforced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and death squads in the province is wise and welcomed for having achieved the purpose for which it was set up. When hundreds of peaceful and unarmed Baloch women set out on the long march from Turbat on November 23 last year, they did not expect to secure the imminent release of all those who had disappeared nor hoped to bring to justice the criminals behind the crime,” he said.

Meanwhile, another protest camp led by Nawabzada Jamal Raisani has been established for more than two weeks, demanding justice for the family members and relatives of the victims of terrorism in Balochistan.

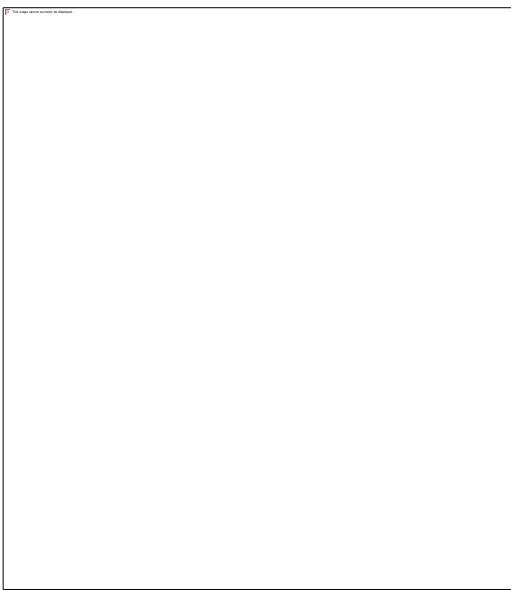
4.1.2. News Stories from Express Tribune

News stories collected from Express Tribune have been analysed as mentioned below.

22-12-23



23-12-23



Event: Baloch protesters, led by Dr. Mahrang Baloch, commence a sit-in outside Islamabad's National Press Club (NPC) to protest enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings.

December 21, 2023

Headline: Police attempt to disperse protesters using water cannons and batons. Over 200 activists are arrested.

December 22, 2023

Headline: Protesters establish a camp at the NPC, continuing their demonstration despite harsh weather conditions.

December 25, 2023

Headline: Pakistani police release 290 Baloch activists who were arrested during the protest.

January 3, 2024

Headline: The Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) calls for a nationwide shutter-down strike to protest the state's response to their demands.

January 23, 2024

Headline: Dr. Mahrang Baloch announces the conclusion of the sit-in, stating that the movement will continue through other means, including a planned rally in Quetta on January 27.

January 24, 2024

Headline: The sit-in officially ends after over 30 days, with organizers citing continuous harassment by authorities.

4.2 Tone and Language Analysis of the news reports by Dawn News

Tone: *Sympathetic and supportive.*

Language: Emphasizes human rights concerns, highlighting the peaceful nature of the protest and the protesters' resilience. Example: "Hundreds of Baloch protesters... wrapped up their sit-in after the 'round the clock' harassment at the hands of the Islamabad police."

4.3 Tone and Language Analysis of the news reports by The Express Tribune

Tone: *Neutral to slightly supportive language:* Focuses on reporting events factually, with occasional emphasis on the protesters' grievances.

Example: "Baloch Yakjehti Committee (BYC) leader Dr Mahrang Baloch on Tuesday called off a month-long sit-in... against 'enforced disappearances' and 'extrajudicial killings'."

4.4 Analysis of News Stories:

4.4.1 News Story 1

Headline: Baloch protesters rounded up amid sit-in in Islamabad" (Dawn, 22-Dec-2023)

Police detained dozens of Baloch protesters, including women, during a sit-in demanding justice for enforced disappearances.

Table 1

News Story	Codes	Themes	Sub themes
Police detained dozens... justice for enforced disappearances.	Detained" (state repression), "justice" (human rights demand) Including women" (gendered victimhood)	Threat-perception Gender representation	State repression Victimization
	"Enforced disappearances" (systemic issue)		Legal-institutional Human Rights

4.4.2 News Story 2

Headline: *"Police get dressing-down over action against Baloch protesters"* (Dawn, 23-Dec-2023)

"Islamabad High Court Chief Justice Aamer Farooq on Friday advised the capital police chief to concentrate on controlling street crimes rather than flexing their muscles against protesters... asked about the whereabouts of 50 women... police claimed they went to the station voluntarily."

Table 2

News Story #2	Codes	Themes	Sub-themes
"Flexing muscles... against protesters"	"Authoritarian force" (state aggression)	State Response	Excessive use of power
"Whereabouts of 50 women"	"Disappearances" (lack of accountability)	Legal-Institutional	Judicial inquiry

<i>News Story #2</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>
"Police claimed they went voluntarily"	"Denial" (defensive narrative)	Representation	Image control by authority

Analysis of News Story 2:

- The news stories draws a contrast between the judiciary and the police. While the judiciary is shown defending the public, the police are portrayed as authoritarian and evasive. This dynamic positions the courts and protesters on one side and the state's enforcement apparatus on the other — reinforcing Van Dijk's ideological square where "they" (the police/state) are oppressive and "we" (the protesters/legal system) represent moral resistance.
- The framing goes beyond individual incidents of detention. It places the event in a structural context by showing how law enforcement operates with impunity, only checked by judicial oversight. The questioning of missing women elevates the incident to a broader issue of systemic abuse and lack of accountability — clearly applying Iyengar's **thematic framing** model and represents the themes like, state response in the form of excessive use of power, judicial inquiry for missing persons and control of image by the authority.

4.4.3 News Story 3:

Headline: "*Baloch activists seek protesters' release within 3 days*" (Dawn, 24-Dec-2023)

"Over 100 Baloch students were 'missing'... nearly 350 were arrested... the state would be responsible if demands are not met."

Table 3

<i>News Story #3</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>
"Over 100 Baloch students were 'missing'"	"Disappearances" (invisibility)		Human Rights Victimization

<i>News Story #3</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>
"Nearly 350 were arrested"	"Crackdown" (mass suppression)	State Response	Police oppression
"State would be responsible if demands are not met"	"Accountability threat" (power dynamic)	Threat- Perception	Blame attribution

Analysis:

- This article reinforces a sharp divide between the state and the protesters. The phrase “state would be responsible” suggests the activists are holding the authorities morally and politically accountable. Protesters are positioned as organized, aggrieved, and justified while the state is shown as dismissive, complicit, and repressive. Van Dijk’s ideological square is clearly active, with the “us” as victims of enforced disappearances and “them” as powerful suppressors denying justice.
- The article doesn’t treat the arrests as a spontaneous incident but rather as part of a repeated pattern of state action against Baloch individuals. The inclusion of terms like “missing” and the specific mention of Baloch students places the incident in a recurring structural context of ethnic profiling and forced disappearances. It is a textbook application of Iyengar’s **thematic framing**, emphasizing long-standing, deep-rooted systemic injustices rather than surface-level disruptions

4.4.4 News Story 4

Headline: *"Baloch protesters being freed after bail: police"* (Dawn, 25-Dec-2023)

“The Islamabad police claimed on Sunday that all detained Baloch protesters had been granted bail and were being released... however, protesters contested this claim, saying over 100 people were still missing.”

Table 4

<i>News Story #4</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>
"All detained protesters had been granted bail"	"Institutional denial" (official narrative)	Legal-Institutional	Government version

<i>News Story #4</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>
"Over 100 people were still missing"	"Contradiction" (lack of clarity)	Human Rights	Enforced disappearances
"Protesters contested this claim"	"Challenge" (activist resistance)	Representation	Credibility struggle

Analysis:

- The article presents two conflicting realities: the state's version that everyone has been released, and the protesters' version that many are still unaccounted for. "they" (the state) are manipulating facts to downplay repression, and "we" (the protesters) are exposing the truth. Protesters are portrayed as credible and consistent, while the state appears evasive and untrustworthy.
- Rather than focusing on the event of bail itself, the article embeds it in a broader theme of **institutional mistrust** and **systemic opacity**. It's not about whether one person got bail — it's about how the state handles political dissent as a pattern. This article clearly utilizes Iyengar's **thematic framing**, tying the incident into recurring state attempts to control narratives and avoid accountability regarding missing persons.

4.4.5 News Story 5

Headline: "*Protesters contest govt claim of 290 Baloch activists' release*" (Dawn, 26-Dec-2023)

"The interior ministry said 290 protesters had been released... however, the Baloch Yakjehti Committee claimed that no new releases had taken place on Monday and that only 130 individuals had been freed earlier."

Table 5

News story #5	Codes	Themes	Sub-themes
"Interior ministry said 290 protesters had been released"	"State narrative" (data manipulation)	Legal-Institutional	Official discourse
"No new releases had taken place"	"Contradiction" (disputed claims)	Representation	Credibility gap
"Only 130 individuals had been freed earlier"	"Disinformation" (underreporting reality)	Human Rights	Misinformation and denial

Analysis:

- The article reinforces the adversarial relationship between the state and protesters. The government's inflated numbers serve to present a façade of action and responsiveness, while the protesters dismantle this illusion with firsthand knowledge and statistics. Van Dijk's ideological model is clearly visible — "they" (the state) as the deceptive power structure using media and numbers to shape perceptions, and "we" (the activists) as truth-bearers exposing systemic dishonesty.
- The report focuses not just on whether people were released but on **how the state controls narratives** to maintain its legitimacy. This turns the article into a commentary on broader issues — like **state manipulation, lack of transparency, and erasure of marginalized voices**. Thus, it fits Iyengar's **thematic framing** by placing the event within a pattern of institutional obfuscation and public misinformation around enforced disappearances.

4.4.6 News Story 6

Headline: "PM Kakar 'loses his cool' over Baloch protests in capital" (Dawn, 2-Jan-2024)

"Caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul Haq Kakar accused the protest of being sponsored by anti-

state elements... he said the protest was part of a foreign-funded conspiracy aimed at destabilizing Pakistan."

Table 6

News story #6	Codes	Themes	Sub-themes
"Sponsored by anti-state elements"	"Delegitimization" (traitor framing)	Threat-Perception	Terrorism/insurgency frame
"Foreign-funded conspiracy"	"External blame" (national security excuse)	State Response	Securitization rhetoric
"Destabilizing Pakistan"	"Othering" (activists as threats)	Representation	Political labeling

Analysis:

- In this case, the state flips the narrative aggressively by accusing the protesters of acting on behalf of foreign agendas. The Prime Minister's rhetoric creates a stark "us vs. them" divide — not just between state and protesters, but between "patriots" and "traitors." However, the article's tone and quotation style subtly highlight the excessiveness of Kakar's response, which may provoke reader skepticism about the state's claims.
- Though the article reports a particular speech, it contributes to a broader theme of how states frequently securitize dissent. The "foreign-funded" label is not just an isolated phrase; it's part of a systemic attempt to delegitimize domestic movements by framing them as externally controlled threats to national unity. Iyengar's **thematic framing** applies here, as this article uncovers patterns in how the state reframes peaceful protests into matters of national security to justify repression.

4.4.7 News Story 7

Headline: "*Govt told not to uproot Baloch protest camp*" (Dawn, 4-Jan-2024)

“Both the Supreme Court and Islamabad High Court directed the government not to remove the protest camp... the courts observed that citizens have the right to protest peacefully.”

Table 7

News story#7	Codes	Themes	Sub-themes
"Directed the government not to remove the protest camp"	"Judicial protection" (check on authority)	Legal-Institutional	Rule of law
"Citizens have the right to protest peacefully"	"Democratic rights" (civil liberty framing)	Representation	Legitimacy of dissent
"Both courts intervened"	"Institutional friction" (internal tension)	State Response	Division within state apparatus

Analysis:

- This article complicates the usual binary by introducing **intra-state tension**. While the executive and law enforcement have attempted to suppress the protest, the judiciary positions itself as a defender of fundamental rights. It reinforces the idea that not all institutions serve the same agenda, creating space for internal resistance to authoritarianism.
- The article embeds the courts' decision within a larger narrative of civil liberties in Pakistan. It doesn't present this as a one-time judgment but as a continuation of the judiciary acting as a safeguard against state overreach. This reflects Iyengar's **thematic framing**, linking this intervention to long-standing struggles over the right to protest, freedom of expression, and state accountability. The message is clear: repression is systemic, but so is resistance — sometimes even from within the state itself.

4.4.8 News Story 8

Headline: “‘Disappointed’ by state, Baloch protesters wrap up sit-in” (Dawn, 23-Jan-2024)

“Dr. Mahrang Baloch said they ended the protest after facing continuous harassment, profiling,

and surveillance by state authorities. She said the state had missed an opportunity to reconcile with the people of Balochistan.”

Table 8

News Story #8	Codes	Themes	Sub-themes
"Continuous harassment, profiling, and surveillance" (targeted policing)	"Systemic repression"	State Response	Psychological warfare
"Missed an opportunity to reconcile"	"State apathy" (ignored plea for justice)	Representation	Broken state-citizen trust
"Ended the protest"	"Resignation under pressure" (strategic retreat)	Human Rights	Fatigue and endurance

Analysis:

- The protesters are depicted as morally consistent and committed, despite operating under extreme pressure. Mahrang Baloch's statement that the state “missed an opportunity to reconcile” deepens the divide between citizens seeking justice and a state unwilling to listen. Here, the state is portrayed not just as oppressive but negligent and disconnected from its people, while the protesters are the rational, peace-seeking side burdened by injustice. Their withdrawal is not a defeat — it is portrayed as a dignified response to an intransigent system.
- This article encapsulates the culmination of systemic repression and emotional toll. By mentioning profiling, harassment, and psychological pressure, the piece shifts the narrative from simple protest coverage to a broader commentary on how the state neutralizes dissent, as the sit-in’s conclusion is contextualized within a larger story of marginalization, fatigue, and the failure of the state to address deep-rooted grievances. The article concludes the cycle of protest as part of a longer struggle for justice, not as an isolated or failed action.

4.4.9 News Story 9

Headline: *“Baloch protesters launch Islamabad sit-in against enforced disappearances”* (The Express Tribune, 22-Dec-2023)

“Dr Mahrang Baloch led a sit-in at the National Press Club (NPC) to protest enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. Over 200 activists, including women, were arrested following clashes with police.”

Table 9

News Story #9	Codes	Themes	Sub-themes
"Over 200 activists... were arrested"	"Mass detentions" (state crackdown)	State Response	Police force and intimidation
"Dr Mahrang Baloch led"	"Leadership" (female agency)	Representation	Women-led activism
"Enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings"	"Systemic abuse" (deep-rooted issue)	Human Rights	Structural violence

Analysis:

- This article captures the immediate confrontation between the protesters and the state. The arrests of over 200 individuals reflect a forceful state response, reinforcing division where the state appears authoritarian and the protesters — particularly under a female leader — emerge as victims demanding justice. The mention of Dr. Mahrang Baloch's leadership contrasts state suppression with grassroots resilience, framing her as a symbol of moral opposition.
- The report highlights recurring and entrenched human rights abuses — namely, enforced disappearances and extrajudicial killings. Rather than portraying the sit-in as a temporary incident, the article implicitly positions it within a longer history of Baloch marginalization. This aligns closely with Iyengar's thematic framing, as the article focuses on underlying causes rather than episodic violence. The reference to both institutional abuses and civic protest creates a broad context of systemic failure.

4.4.10 News Story 10

Headline: *"Protesters decry silence over missing persons"* (The Express Tribune, 24-Dec-2023)

“Participants at the Islamabad sit-in expressed anger at the government’s silence regarding the whereabouts of their missing relatives. Many held placards showing photos of the disappeared and chanted for justice.”

Table 10

News story #10	Codes	Themes	Sub-themes
"Government's silence"	"Neglect" (state indifference)	State Response	Political inaction
"Photos of the disappeared"	"Symbolism" (personal loss)	Human Rights	Visual protest, memory
"Chanted for justice"	"Resistance" (voice of the oppressed)	Representation	Grassroots mobilization

Analysis:

- The story highlights the emotional and symbolic elements of the protest, emphasizing the protesters’ desperation and the government’s indifference. By focusing on “silence” from the authorities, it frames the state as apathetic and unresponsive to moral appeals. In contrast, the protesters — armed with placards and slogans — are shown as emotionally invested, creating an ideological division: “they” (the state) are cold and absent; “we” (the victims) are present, suffering, and demanding humanity.
- This article is deeply thematic in nature. It draws on powerful imagery — photographs of missing persons and emotional slogans — to connect individual pain to systemic injustice. The silence of the government is not treated as a bureaucratic lapse but as evidence of structural negligence. The emphasis on collective memory and visual protest aligns perfectly with Iyengar’s thematic framing, portraying the protest as a manifestation of long-standing trauma and social neglect.

4.4.11 News Story 11

Headline: "Police justify detentions, deny abuse of protesters" (The Express Tribune, 25-Dec-2023)

"Islamabad Police stated that all arrests were made lawfully and denied any mistreatment of protesters. Officials claimed that many protesters were taken into custody for violating Section 144."

Table 11

<i>News story#11</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Themes</i>	<i>Sub-themes</i>
"Arrests were made lawfully"	"Legal justification" (state framing)	Legal-Institutional	Rule-based defense
"Denied any mistreatment"	"Narrative control" (denial of abuse)	Representation	Image management
"Violating Section 144"	"Criminalization of protest" (law as tool)	State Response	Legal repression

Analysis:

- Unlike previous articles, this one emphasizes the state's narrative. The police statements aim to present law enforcement as lawful and justified. However, the framing reveals a subtle ideological division — the state is attempting to reframe itself from an oppressor into a protector of law and order. This defensive stance reflects to portray "them" (protesters) as violators and "us" (institutions) as lawful and reasonable. Yet, by reporting this justification, the article indirectly reveals the need for damage control, hinting that public opinion may not fully align with the state.
- The news story supports a thematic frame by contextualizing the detentions within broader legal repression. The use of Section 144 — often invoked to suppress assembly — highlights how legal instruments are used to delegitimize protest. This connects the specific arrests to a pattern of authoritarian governance and silencing dissent, illustrating Iyengar's thematic framing even within a piece dominated by state perspective.

4.4.12 News Story 12

Headline: "*Families of missing persons vow to continue protest until justice is served*" (The Express Tribune, 28-Dec-2023)

"Despite severe weather and police pressure, families of missing persons, including women and children, have vowed to continue their protest until their loved ones are recovered. Many said the sit-in is not political but a plea for basic human dignity."

Table 12

News Story #12	Codes	Themes	Sub-themes
"Despite severe weather and police pressure"	"Endurance" (resistance under hardship)	Human Rights	Resilience of the oppressed
"Families of missing persons... vowed to continue"	"Commitment" (moral stance)	Representation	Civil courage
"Not political but a plea for dignity"	"De-politicization" (human framing)	Threat- Perception	Humanization of protest

Analysis:

- The contrast here is stark: the families, described as peaceful, dignified, and morally steadfast, are placed opposite a state apparatus exerting pressure through force and neglect. The mention of women and children enduring weather and intimidation reinforces their victimhood and moral superiority.
- The article goes beyond mere protest coverage by highlighting emotional endurance, generational suffering, and the desire for basic human dignity. It presents the sit-in not as political theater but as a deep moral crisis, giving it strong thematic framing. By focusing on the pain and dignity of families rather than slogans or demands, it evokes Iyengar's thematic framing, which exposes long-term injustice and the psychological toll of disappearance and silence.

4.4.13 News Story 13

Headline: "*Baloch protest ends with call for continued struggle*" (The Express Tribune, 23-Jan-2024).

"After nearly a month of sit-in, Dr Mahrang Baloch announced the end of the Islamabad protest.

She said the movement would now continue in Balochistan. Protesters accused the government of harassment and deliberate silence.”

Table 13

News Story #13	Codes	Themes	Sub-themes
"Announced the end of the protest"	"Strategic withdrawal" (controlled closure)	Human Rights	Tactical protest shift
"Movement would now continue in Balochistan"	"Continuation" (persistence of resistance)	Representation	Decentralized struggle
"Government of harassment and deliberate silence"	"Repression" (targeted suppression)	State Response	Suppressing dissent

Analysis:

- This article portrays the protesters as composed, forward-thinking, and resilient, even in their decision to end the Islamabad sit-in. Dr. Mahrang Baloch's calm but assertive tone contrasts with the state's silence and harassment, “They” — the state — are oppressive and disengaged; “we” — the protesters — are moral agents who will not be silenced but will adapt and continue the fight elsewhere.
- The article does not present the protest's end as defeat but as an evolution. By showing the protest's continuation in Balochistan, it situates the movement in a long-term, regional context, consistent with Iyengar's thematic framing. The accusation of harassment and “deliberate silence” connects this event with a larger history of state neglect and abuse. It becomes clear that the protest was not simply about an event in Islamabad but about the unresolved national issue of Baloch rights, disappearances, and identity.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

This research explored how Pakistani mainstream English-language newspapers **Dawn** and **The News** framed the human rights activism of **Dr. Mahrang Baloch** during her sit-in protest for Baloch missing persons. By using qualitative content analysis under the **Framing Theory** framework, this study examined the dominant frames, language choices, tone, frequency of coverage, and the broader narrative constructed around Mahrang Baloch. Frame analysis offers a lens to study how beliefs, values, and goals are formulated, negotiated, consolidated, or dismissed through processes of signification (Goffman, 1974, p. 21). This framework has been applied to various social movements, including human rights activism (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 612).

The results indicate that although both the newspapers recognized the human rights crisis, which received fairly consistent neutral-to-positive coverage although Dawn seemed to be more neutral- to positive when compared to the Times. The News, however, had a more scattered and dull touch; the political aspects of the protest tend to be down-laid or the activist might be sidelined by the media. Human rights activists' frames are shaped by national contexts, cultural narratives, and discursive opportunities (Bob, 2005, p. 130).

An interesting result shows absence of visual demonstration and detailed editorial assistance, bearing in mind the seriousness of the matter. This implies institutional reluctance against challenging the institution of the state or challenging state discourse of national security and forced disappearance. - Human rights activism can be complex, with some groups facing challenges in distinguishing between peaceful activism and violent separatism (Khan, 2019, p. 80). In present study human rights frame was present it was also frequently weakened through the use of passive voice, event orientation and unwillingness to recognize the reality of enforced disappearance by designating it as the violation of international law. As the literature highlights that activists employ various framing strategies to mobilize support, influence policy, and raise awareness about human rights issues (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 615).

The frequent employment of such framing elements as headlines, people interviewed, and topic of emphasis means that Pakistani media have yet to demonstrate any independence in terms of socio-political activism, especially in marginal provinces such as Balochistan. Some of the media coverage tried to present Mahrang Baloch as a brave young leader but the coverage was not enough to create a consistent media discourse, which could have resulted in societal discussions, governance responsibility, or policymaking.

These findings agree with previous studies, which established that Pakistani media is full of self-censoring policies, biased reporting, and ideological adherence to state policy in reporting dissent, particularly by ethnic minorities.

5.2 Conclusion

Present study revealed that the Pakistani English dailies i.e, Daily Dawn, Express Tribune have been unable to effectively and consistently give voice to the Baloch human rights activist such as Mahrang Baloch. Though a number of stories contained a human rights framing of her struggle, most of the coverage was more superficial and not frequent enough or analytical.

The framing analysis demonstrates that the media remains reluctant to investigate charismatic institutions or defend grass root activists aimed at pursuing justice on behalf of enforced disappearances. This weakens the watchdog aspect of journalism and speaks of bigger structural biases in media reporting in terms of gender, ethnicity, and center-periphery.

The study adds value to research on media behavior in a confrontational environment and reveals the necessity of press freedom and ethical journalism and unbiased coverage of minority voices. It also highlights the role of developing counter-narratives by means of free press and civil society activism.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Research

- **Broader Newspaper Sample:** Future research should include Urdu and regional language newspapers to understand framing differences across linguistic and political lines.

- **Social Media Analysis:** Investigate how activists like Mahrang Baloch are represented on social platforms like Twitter/X and how it compares with mainstream media.
- **Audience Reception:** Future study should be done that how audiences interpret and respond to such media framing of human rights issues.
- **Journalist Interviews:** Incorporating journalists' perspectives could help understand newsroom constraints and editorial decision-making processes.

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