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South Asian Print Media and Climate Discourse: A Framing Analysis of COP28 and COP29

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ABSTRACT

Aim of Study: The current study examines how South Asian media (leading English newspapers) framed the climate change news stories, columns, and editorials during the international global climate change summits (CoP 28 and CoP 29).

Methodology: This study examines the use of episodic and thematic frames in environmental and climate change reporting by *Dawn* (Pakistan), *The Times of India* (India), and *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh) through content analysis. A total of 568 articles from these English newspapers published during the periods surrounding the COP 28 (Dubai, 2023) and COP 29 (Baku, 2024) events were analyzed. The study applies agenda-setting theory to explore media influence on public perception and policy discourse. A purposive sampling technique was used to collect the data.

Findings: The findings indicate that episodic frames dominated coverage (55.3%) compared to thematic frames (44.7%), with *The Times of India* (India) contributing the highest number of news items/ articles.

Conclusion: Coverage was more extensive for COP-28 compared to COP-29, with themes such as climate finance and GHG emissions dominating press coverage. These framing patterns reflect climate vulnerability, government model, political systems, priorities, and media strategies of selected countries. The study highlights regional inequality in climate journalism and climate coverage. It suggests the need for more balanced, context-driven thematic framing to address climate emergencies effectively. These insights are significant for researchers, media practitioners, and decision-makers planning to enhance public engagement, climate communication, and promote cooperation in the South Asian region.

Keywords: Climate Change, Climate Framing, Episodic and Thematic Framing, COP 28, COP 29, South Asia, Media Analysis, Climate Journalism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Climate change is a lasting problem for humanity that influences different ecosystems, food production, health, and our infrastructure. Asia, and especially South Asia, is among the regions facing the most

serious threats from climate change. CoP stands for Conferences of the Parties and are held by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to let nations exchange views on climate policies. It is at the global COPs, most recently at Cop 28 and COP 29, that key dialogues about climate happen (Wei et al., 2024; Younis and Ahmed, 2024; Emeka et al., 2024).

Media reports influence both public knowledge and what policymakers focus on regarding climate change. Media is vital in these international meetings because it directs public opinion and plays a big role in policy decisions, as noted by (Akram et al., 2023a; Javed et al., 2024; Javed and Parwana, 2021).

Media reporting decisively shapes how the public understands different and difficult topics like climate change. An episodic frame shows a particular event, while a thematic frame looks at the overall context and how things are structured. Earlier studies revealed that Western media mostly report on COP politics, whereas outlets from the Global South highlight how nations have to adapt and change. Not much research has focused on how South Asian media reports on climate change at different COPs (Raza & Shah, 2024; Afzal et al., 2022; Ibrahim et al., 2024).

1.1 Research Gap

Almost no studies have looked at how climate change is reported as either an event or a concept, nor have they focused on CoP events in regional media anywhere in South Asia. This study fills this gap using content analysis of coverage during COP 28 and COP 29.

1.2 Statement Problem

Despite the increasing urgency of climate change, limited research studies compare how South Asian media frames climate change during major international climate conferences, especially during CoPs. Most studies focus on Western or global North perspectives, overlooking how regional newspapers in the global South present climate issues, particularly in South Asia. This gap is critical, as countries like Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh are highly vulnerable to climate impacts.

This study addresses this gap by examining how leading English newspapers from Pakistan (*Dawn*), India (*The Times of India*), and Bangladesh (*The Daily Star*) framed climate change during COP 28 and COP 29. Specifically, it investigates the use of episodic versus thematic frames to understand whether the coverage focused more on immediate, event-based reporting or broader, structural, and long-term issues. Analyzing the framing practices of these regional media outlets during high-level climate events contributes to a better understanding of how climate discourse is shaped in countries most affected and defenseless by climate change.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To examine the extent of climate change coverage during COP 28 and COP 29 in selected South Asian newspapers.
2. To compare episodic and thematic framing in *Dawn*, *The Times of India*, and *The Daily Star*.
3. To identify which climate categories received the most media attention.
4. To compare framing patterns across COP 28 and COP 29.

1.4 Hypotheses

H1: There is a significant difference in the volume of climate change coverage during COP 28 and COP 29 in the selected newspapers

H2: There is a significant difference between episodic and thematic framing in climate change coverage among South Asian newspapers.

H3: GHG emissions and climate finance are more frequently framed thematically as climate categories.

H4: There is a significant difference in framing styles (episodic vs. thematic) between COP 28 and COP 29 in the selected newspapers.

1.5 Significance of Study

This study contributes to climate communication by comparing episodic and thematic framing in South Asian print media during COP 28 and COP 29. By examining coverage in *Dawn*, *The Times of India*, and *The Daily Star*, the research highlights how national media narratives differ in framing climate change, reflecting each country's geopolitical stance, climate vulnerability, and media priorities.

The findings address a significant gap in the literature, which has largely overlooked regional media framing in the Global South, especially during international climate talks. This study advances framing theory in a non-Western context and enhances media effects research by demonstrating how framing choices may influence public discourse and policy orientation on climate change in Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh.

Additionally, the study highlights the media's agenda-setting role in climate journalism and climate communication. It supports calls for more sustained, thematic reporting to enhance public understanding and regional climate cooperation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Even though South Asian nations are affected differently by climate change, the media presents assorted perspectives from different states. In India, climate news is covered differently than it is in Pakistan and Bangladesh, which are both very sensitive to the climate emergency. According to research, South Asian media is lacking in continual and thematic news reports (Huq, 2020; Rashid & Shah, 2025; Raza & Shah, 2024).

Intercontinental climate talks called COPs happen under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Coverage of COP events in the media reaches a peak during the meetings, but disappears quickly afterward (Bardell, 2023).

Global media helps define the topics discussed around global climate at international meetings such as the Conferences of the Parties (COPs). Many important newspapers such as The New York Times and The Guardian generally discuss climate change in terms of how countries, groups, and industries wield influence, finance efforts, and enter talks about solutions (Pralle, 2009). As a result, the way climate stories are reported in South Asia might be different from that of nations where the climate situation is not as dramatic.

As major events related to climate policy, COPs encourage attention from people, promises from states, and cross-border collaboration (Maslin et al., 2023). Even with issues related to enforcement, the Paris Agreement (at its COP21) and the Kyoto Protocol (at its COP3) have helped set future climate goals. Environmental journalism, especially on these events, shows that media attention rises quickly at the start and quickly falls afterward, illustrating the temporary nature of such coverage (Ahmed & Kashif, 2025; Akram et al., 2023b; Raza et al., 2025).

Globally, the Northern media sometimes crow about their progress in addressing climate change, despite ignoring the problems facing vulnerable countries. Pakistan and Bangladesh's media usually choose a victim role, focusing on climate injustice caused by top polluters such as India. Because of this gap, there is a more pronounced spread between Northern and Southern interests in discussions and coverage (Denisova, 2025; Muhammad et al., 2024).

Climate discussions are greatly influenced by the way the media frames issues. It has been established that in the Global North, media frequently discuss international concerns, but media in the Global South usually concentrate on how nations cope with global problems (Ahmed et al., 2024; Denisova, 2025; Iftikhar & Shafiq, 2019; Sharif et al., 2023).

Fossil fuel lobbyists and businesses also fund stories and arguments that discourage action on climate change (Influence Map, 2019). As a result, public discourse on climate often becomes fragmented and politicized (Laville, 2019). Scholars like Lester, (2014) argue that this has weakened the long-term impact of COP media coverage.

2.1 Major Key Points COP 28 (2023, Dubai, UAE)

Global Stocktake (GST): First-ever formal review of progress since the Paris Agreement (2015); revealed that the world is off track to meet the 1.5°C target.

Fossil Fuels: Historic mention to transition away from fossil fuels, though the wording was not strong enough for some nations.

Loss and Damage Fund: Official launch and initial funding ($700 million pledged) for vulnerable countries facing climate impacts.

Renewable Energy Goal: Agreement to triple renewable energy capacity and double energy efficiency by 2030.

Methane Emissions: Stronger commitments have been made by several countries to cut methane, a potent greenhouse gas.

Food and Health: First-time focus on climate impacts on food systems and human health.

Equity & Finance Gaps: Developing countries raised concerns about climate finance, fairness, and unmet past pledges (United Nations Climate Change, 2023).

2.2 Major Key Points COP 29 (2024, Baku, Azerbaijan)

Climate Finance at Center: The main agenda is setting a new global climate finance goal (post-2025), expected to exceed $100 billion annually.

Equity Demands: Developing nations will push for fair access to finance, tech, and adaptation resources.

Implementation Focus: Moving from talks to action and enforcement of past pledges (from COP26–COP28).

Fossil Fuel Phase-Out Debate Continues: Stronger wording may be demanded on ending fossil fuel use.

Carbon Markets & Transparency: Negotiations on Article 6 (global carbon markets) and transparency frameworks (United Nations Climate Change, 2024).

2.3 Theoretical Framework

The current study is based on framing theory. Framing in the media refers to how the media structures narratives to shape understanding. According to the theory, episodic frames focus on specific events, while thematic frames emphasize broader social contexts. In climate reporting, episodic frames often highlight disasters or conferences, while thematic frames provide long-term policy insights (Abid et al., 2017).

Framing theory, particularly the distinction between episodic (event-focused) and thematic (context-focused) frames, is crucial in understanding how information is presented. Few comparative studies have explored South Asian media framing during successive COP events.

3. METHODOLOGY

The current study uses a quantitative content analysis. Articles from *Dawn*, *The Times of India*, and *The Daily Star* were purposively sampled to include those discussing climate change and COP 28 or COP 29. The final sample included 568 articles. The data was coded based on article length, genre (news, editorial, column), climate categories (e.g., emissions, floods, funding), and framing style (episodic or thematic). Cross-tabulations and chi-square tests were used to analyze relationships among variables.

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative content analysis. Framing theory was used to analyze using Iyengar's (1991) classification of episodic and thematic frames. A purposive sample of 568 climate-related articles published during COP 28 and COP 29 was collected from *Dawn* (n=44), *The Times of India* (n=420), and *The Daily Star* (n=104).

3.2 Time Frame

This analysis focuses on media coverage of COP 28 (2023, Dubai) and COP 29 (2024, Baku)—two pivotal summits in the global climate dialogue. The selected timeframe for each summit includes pre-event discussions, real-time reporting, and post-event analysis, enabling a comprehensive examination of media framing. This approach offers deeper insight into how the press contextualized and interpreted both events.

A total of 568 news items, columns, and editorials were collected from each newspaper—*Dawn* (Pakistan), *The Times of India* (India), and *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh)—based on availability and relevance for each COP event. The sample size is sufficiently large to support quantitative analysis, allowing for exploration of diverse media perspectives and framing strategies.

The study is specifically limited to these two climate conferences and three regional countries of South Asia, aiming to understand how Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh responded to global climate discourse within their national media landscapes.

Table 1: *Timeline of COP-28 and COP-29*

Timeline of COP-28 and COP-29	
COP-28 (Dubai, UAE)	November 30, 2023, to December 12, 2023
COP-29 (Baku, Azerbaijan)	November 11, 2024, to November 22, 2024

3.3 Coding Scheme

Each article was coded for newspaper, date, word count, genre (news, editorial, column), climate category (e.g., emissions, funding), and frame type (episodic or thematic).

Details are as under

Newspapers: Dawn = 1, The Time of India =2, The Daily Star =3

Conferences: CoP28 =1, CoP29 =2

Length: Small = 1, Medium= 2, Large= 3

Genre: News = 1, Column= 2, Editorial = 3

Climate Categories: Global Warming = 1, Heat wave = 2, Glacier Melting = 3, Rains/Flood = 4, Smog = 5, Forest Fire =6, GHG/CO_2 Emissions = 7

Human Activities = 8, Drought= 9, Climate Funding = 10, Others = 11

Frames: Episodic = 1, Thematic = 2

3.4 Statistical Tools

Percentage, cross-tabulation, and chi-square tests were used to assess the relationship between variables such as frame type, newspaper, COP event, and article length. Cross-tabulation was used to explore relationships between newspapers, frame types, and other categorical variables. Chi-square tests assessed the statistical significance of differences in framing styles among the newspapers.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Table 2: *Length of Stories/ News Items*

	Length			**Total**
	Small	**Medium**	**Large**	
Dawn	12	23	9	44 (7.75%)
The Times of India	178	168	74	420 (73.94%)
Daily Star	30	46	28	104 (18.31%)
Total	**220**	**237**	**111**	**568 (100.0%)**

Table 2 shows that *The Times of India* published the highest number of stories overall (420), including 178 small, 168 medium, and 74 large articles. *Dawn* published a total of 44 stories, with 12 small, 23 medium, and 9 large. *The Daily Star* published 104 stories, consisting of 30 small, 46 medium, and 28 large articles.

Across all three newspapers, medium-length stories were the most common (237), followed by small stories (220), and large stories (111). This suggests that while coverage of climate change exists in all three newspapers, most articles tend to be of medium length, with The Times of India contributing the largest share of content.

Table 3: *Genre of News Items vs Newspaper*

	Genre			Total
	News Story	**Column**	**Editorial**	
Dawn	19	10	15	44
The Times of India	227	146	47	420
Daily Star	38	42	24	104
Total	**284**	**198**	**86**	**568**

Table 3 shows the distribution of different genres of climate change-related news items—News Stories, Columns, and Editorials—across three newspapers: *Dawn* (Pakistan), *The Times of India* (India), and *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh), with a total of 568 articles analyzed.

Among the newspapers, *The Times of India* published the highest number of items overall (420), including 227 news stories, 146 columns, and 47 editorials. *Dawn* published a total of 44 items, with a relatively balanced distribution: 19 news stories, 10 columns, and 15 editorials. *The Daily Star* published 104 items, including 38 news stories, 42 columns, and 24 editorials.

Across all newspapers, news stories were the most common genre (284), followed by columns (198), and then editorials (86). This indicates that the primary mode of reporting on climate change in these newspapers is through standard news stories, while opinion-based content such as columns and editorials also contributes significantly, especially in *The Daily Star*.

Table 4: *Distribution of Articles by Newspaper*

	CoP Session		Total
	CoP 28	**CoP 29**	
Dawn	16	28	44
The Times of India	252	168	420
Daily Star	88	16	104
Total	356	212	568
Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	**df**	**Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)**
Pearson Chi-Square	35.707	2	.000

Table 4 presents the distribution of climate change-related articles published during two Conference of the Parties (CoP) sessions—CoP 28 and CoP 29—across three newspapers: *Dawn* (Pakistan), *The Times of India* (India), and *The Daily Star* (Bangladesh). A total of 568 articles were analyzed.

The *Times of India* published the highest number of articles overall (420), with 252 articles during CoP 28 and 168 during CoP 29. *Dawn* published a total of 44 articles, with 16 during CoP 28 and 28 during CoP 29. *The Daily Star* published 104 articles, with the majority (88) appearing during CoP 28 and only 16 during CoP 29.

Overall, more articles were published during CoP 28 (356/ 62.67%) compared to CoP 29 (212/ 37.33%). This suggests that CoP 28 received more media attention in all three newspapers, especially in *The Times of India* and *The Daily Star*.

Moreover, the chi-square value is 35.707, and the p-value is 0.000, which shows a significant coverage difference during the CoP-28 and CoP-29. Hence, H1 is accepted that there is a significant difference in the volume of climate change coverage during COP 28 and COP 29 in the selected newspapers

Figure 1

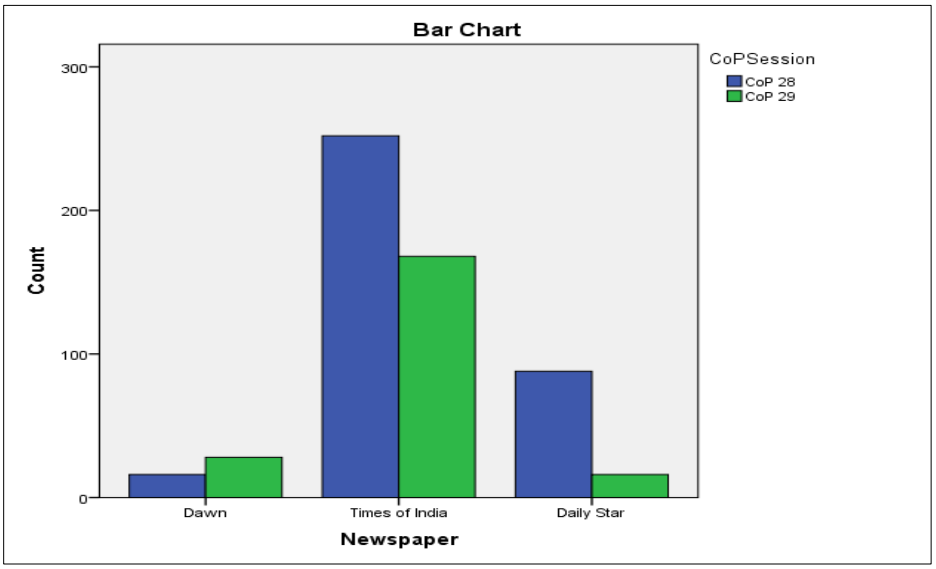

Table 5: *Framing Styles Used*

	Frames		Total
	Episodic	**Thematic**	
Dawn	22	22	44
The Times of India	236	184	420
Daily Star	56	48	104
Total	**314 (55.3%)**	**254 (44.7%)**	**568**

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	**Df**	**Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)**
Pearson Chi-Square	.724[a]	2	.696

Table 5 presents the framing styles, Episodic and Thematic. *The Times of India* used episodic framing the most (236 articles), followed by thematic framing in 184 articles. *Dawn* showed an equal use of both framing styles, with 22 episodic and 22 thematic articles. *The Daily Star* published 56 articles with episodic framing and 48 with thematic framing.

Overall, episodic framing was more common, used in 314 articles (55.3%), while thematic framing was used in 254 articles (44.7%). This indicates a general preference for episodic framing, which focuses on specific events or cases, over thematic framing, which presents broader context and long-term issues related to climate change.

Chi Square value is .724, and p value is 0.696, which is much higher than the commonly used significance level of 0.05. This means there is no statistically significant difference in the use of episodic vs. thematic framing among the three newspapers. Descriptive Data shows some variation, but the statistical test (Chi Square) shows that this variation is not strong enough to conclude there's a significant difference, so H2 is rejected; hence, there is no significant difference between episodic and thematic framing in climate change coverage among South Asian newspapers.

Table 6: *Climate Category vs. Frame Type*

	Frames		Total
	Episodic	**Thematic**	
Global Warming	27	21	48
Heatwaves	8	1	9
Glacier Melting	17	15	32
Rains/ Flood	25	28	53
Smog	17	17	34
Forest Fires	19	14	33
GHG /CO2 Emissions	56	71	127
Human Activities	22	16	38
Drought	12	6	18
Climate Funding/Finance	76	21	97
Others	35	44	79
Total	314	254	568

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	**df**	**Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)**
Pearson Chi-Square	38.266[a]	10	.000

Table 6 shows the relationship between different climate change categories and the type of framing used, *Episodic* or *Thematic,* across 568 analyzed articles.

The highest number of articles (127) was related to *GHG/CO_2 emissions*, with thematic framing (71 articles) used slightly more than episodic framing (56). *Climate Funding/Finance* was the second most covered category (97 articles), with a strong preference for episodic framing (76 articles) over thematic (21). The *"Others"* category also had a significant number of articles (79), but with more thematic (44) than episodic (35) framing.

For natural disasters like *Rains/Floods* and *Glacier Melting*, framing was more balanced: 25 episodic vs. 28 thematic for floods, and 17 episodic vs. 15 thematic for glacier melting. *Smog* and *Forest Fires* also showed nearly equal distribution between the two framing types. However, in cases like *heat waves* and *Drought*, episodic framing was dominant.

Overall, episodic framing (314 articles) was used more than thematic framing (254 articles). This suggests that most climate change issues in the media were presented as specific events or incidents rather than broader, ongoing challenges. However, thematic framing was preferred in some complex topics like *GHG/CO_2 emissions* and *Rains/Floods*, indicating efforts to provide deeper context in those areas.

Moreover, the chi-square value is 38.266, and the p-value is 0.000, which is less than 0.05; hence, H3 is accepted that GHG emissions and climate finance are more frequently framed thematically as climate categories.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings support that episodic framing dominated regional media coverage of COP 28 and COP 29. *The Times of India* contributed most to episodic frames, consistent with national priorities and media style. Although thematic coverage was lower, it offered in-depth insights into systemic issues. Climate categories such as emissions and finance were evenly split between the two frame types, showing no strong alignment with either.

In contrast, *Dawn* maintained an equal distribution of both frame types, possibly reflecting a balanced editorial approach to climate discourse in Pakistan. *The Daily Star* exhibited near balance but slightly advocated episodic framing. The findings reveal a regional trend of emphasizing news-style, episodic

reporting, particularly around COP events. However, thematic frames were more common in columns and editorials, suggesting a depth of discussion in opinion-based content.

Episodic framing, while effective for raising short-term awareness, may obscure the long-term and systemic nature of climate change. Thematic framing is essential for contextualizing issues like emissions policy, climate finance, and international cooperation. South Asian media should therefore enhance thematic coverage to support informed public discourse and policy engagement.

6. CONCLUSION

This study reveals a predominance of episodic framing in South Asian print media during COP 28 and COP 29, especially in Indian coverage. Balanced framing was more evident in Pakistani and Bangladeshi newspapers. While episodic frames attract immediate attention, thematic frames are crucial for understanding root causes and sustainable solutions to climate challenges. The research suggests that print media in South Asia should invest more in thematic journalism to foster deeper public understanding and stronger policy responses to climate change.

6.1 Recommendations

- Journalists should increase thematic framing to support deeper public understanding.
- Policymakers should engage with the media to encourage balanced reporting.
- Further studies should explore social media and vernacular press framing.

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