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MEDIATING DISASTER, POWER AND PUBLIC MEANING: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PAKISTANI ENGLISH NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF THE 2025 PUNJAB FLOODS

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Abstract
This article examines how selected Pakistani English-language newspapers discursively constructed the 2025 Punjab floods. Drawing on Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis, the study investigates how media texts represented the disaster at the textual, discursive-practice, and social-practice levels. The data consist of a purposive qualitative sample of flood-related reports and updates published in Dawn, The Express Tribune, and The News International during the peak period of the crisis from August to October 2025. The analysis shows that newspaper coverage did not merely communicate factual information about rainfall, river levels, evacuations, casualties, crop losses, or relief operations. Rather, it organized the floods through overlapping frames of humanitarian emergency, administrative response, economic loss, climate vulnerability, and geopolitical tension. At the textual level, the reports relied heavily on statistics, technical vocabulary, official terminology, emotive expressions, and passive grammatical patterns. At the discursive-practice level, the coverage privileged institutional voices such as government departments, disaster-management authorities, international organizations, and experts, while the direct voices of displaced families, farmers, women, children, and low-income communities remained comparatively limited. At the social-practice level, the discourse reproduced wider power relations by legitimizing state-led rescue, relief, compensation, and rehabilitation, even when some reports opened space for critique of weak preparedness and structural vulnerability. The article argues that disaster journalism in Pakistan should move beyond event-based and authority-centered reporting toward a more inclusive, critical, and socially accountable model of environmental communication.

INTRODUCTION

Floods are physical events, but they become socially meaningful through discourse. Water may overflow rivers, damage houses, submerge crops, and displace communities, yet the public meaning of such loss is shaped through headlines, leads, official statements, photographs, casualty counts, expert comments, and the everyday vocabulary of crisis. Newspapers do not simply mirror a disaster; they select what is

newsworthy, choose whose voices are credible, decide how responsibility is framed, and place the event within larger narratives of nature, nation, governance, climate, economy, and relief.

The 2025 Punjab floods provide an important case for examining this process. Punjab is Pakistan's most populous and agriculturally central province. Damage in this region affects not only riverine settlements but also food security, rural livelihoods, transport networks, educational institutions, textile supply chains, export planning, provincial governance, and public trust in disaster-management institutions. When newspapers report floods in Punjab, therefore, they report much more than water levels. They participate in a national conversation about state capacity, rural vulnerability, climatic uncertainty, class inequality, cross-border water politics, and the political economy of relief.

This article is constructed from an MS thesis on Pakistani newspapers' coverage of the 2025 Punjab floods and reformulates the thesis into a journal-article format. The original thesis argued that the coverage of the floods was ideologically significant because the press foregrounded some actors and explanations while backgrounding others. In particular, the thesis noted a strong dependence on official statistics, state agencies, disaster-management authorities, and international organizations. It also showed that the lived experiences of affected communities were often converted into categories such as casualties, evacuees, affectees, villages, houses, cattle, relief camps, and compensation cases.

The central claim of this article is that the selected English-language newspapers constructed the floods through a complex but unequal discourse. On one side, the newspapers performed an essential public function by communicating warnings, damage figures, evacuation information, health risks, school closures, crop losses, and relief updates. On the other side, the linguistic organization of this information often represented the disaster as a sudden event requiring emergency management rather than as a result of long-term vulnerability, weak planning, infrastructural neglect, and unequal access to safety. This tension between information and ideology makes the 2025 Punjab floods a significant site for Critical Discourse Analysis.

Disaster reporting is frequently treated as a neutral genre because it appears to communicate observable facts: deaths, rainfall, river levels, evacuation numbers, damaged houses, relief camps, and official responses. However, language choices in disaster news are never entirely neutral. The use of passive constructions such as 'villages were inundated' may obscure agency; the repeated description of displaced people as 'affectees' may turn citizens into administrative objects; and the priority given to official sources may allow institutional perspectives to dominate the public understanding of the event. These patterns are especially important in a country where recurring floods are linked not only to weather but also to governance, poverty, land use, river management, climate vulnerability, and social inequality.

The problem addressed in this article is that English-language newspaper coverage of the 2025 Punjab floods requires critical linguistic analysis. While many reports conveyed important emergency information, the deeper ideological work of the coverage remains less visible unless the texts are examined closely. A CDA perspective can show how the same article may create urgency through numbers, legitimacy through official sources, compassion through emotive words, and distance through technical vocabulary. It can also reveal how institutional actors become visible as rescuers and decision-makers, while affected people are often represented as passive recipients of action.

The article pursues three objectives. First, it identifies the major language patterns used by selected Pakistani English newspapers to represent the 2025 Punjab floods. Second, it examines the discursive strategies through which the newspapers produced particular narratives of disaster, rescue, loss, recovery, and responsibility. Third, it interprets how these media representations relate to broader social, political, and power structures in Pakistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Discourse Analysis emerged from the recognition that language is not simply a transparent channel of communication. It is a form of social practice through which identities, relationships, institutions, and ideologies are produced and reproduced. Scholars such as Fairclough, van Dijk, Wodak, and Fowler have demonstrated that media discourse is especially important because it circulates common-sense interpretations of events to large audiences. News texts appear factual, but their headlines, lexical choices, grammar, sequencing, quotations, and source selections guide readers toward particular interpretations.

Fairclough's contribution is particularly relevant for this study because his model links close textual analysis with institutional and social interpretation. In Fairclough's three-dimensional framework, a text is analyzed first as language, second as discursive practice, and third as social practice. Textual analysis focuses on vocabulary, grammar, modality, transitivity, cohesion, metaphor, and rhetorical organization. Discursive-practice analysis investigates how a text is produced, circulated, and consumed, including the role of sources, intertextuality, genres, and media routines. Social-practice analysis connects these patterns to wider structures of power, ideology, inequality, and social change.

Research on Pakistani political discourse demonstrates how linguistic choices make ideology and power appear natural. Naeem, Hussain, and Shah (2022) found that political speakers used actor description, authority, distancing, number games, polarization, hyperbole, evidentiality, and repetition to construct a positive in-group and a negative out-group. Although their data consisted of political speeches rather than newspaper reports, the study is relevant because disaster coverage also classifies actors, distributes authority, and selectively foregrounds evidence. Similarly, Tayyab et al. (2021) showed that ethos, pathos, logos, pronouns, self-presentation, and other rhetorical strategies enabled political discourse to frame national and international problems persuasively. Together, these studies support the present assumption that apparently factual public communication is rhetorically organized and ideologically consequential.

News discourse studies have repeatedly shown that headlines and leads perform strong framing functions. A flood can be presented as a natural disaster, a humanitarian tragedy, an economic shock, a climate-related emergency, a failure of governance, or a geopolitical issue. Each frame highlights different causes, actors, emotions, and solutions. A humanitarian frame encourages empathy and relief; an administrative frame emphasizes evacuation, compensation, and institutional control; an economic frame converts loss into market, crop, and budgetary categories; a climate frame connects local suffering to global environmental injustice; and a governance frame raises questions of accountability, planning, and preparedness.

Disaster journalism usually faces a difficult balance between event reporting and structural explanation. During a crisis, the immediate responsibility of news media is to inform the public about danger, rescue, relief, and safety. This function is essential. However, disaster news often privileges dramatic spectacle and official updates over long-term analysis of vulnerability. Floodwater, boats, camps, damaged roads, and casualty figures are visually and narratively powerful. By contrast, drainage policy, land-use planning, embankment maintenance, class inequality, and floodplain regulation are slower and less visible. As a result, disaster journalism can unintentionally normalize recurring suffering by treating each flood as a separate emergency rather than part of a historical pattern.

Climate-change communication creates another challenge. Pakistan is widely represented as highly vulnerable to climate risk, yet local flood disasters cannot be explained by climate alone. Rainfall, river flows, catchment management, dam and barrage operations, floodplain settlement, infrastructural weakness, poverty, and state capacity interact in complex ways. A critical approach must therefore ask whether newspapers connect climate vulnerability with local governance or whether climate becomes a broad explanation that reduces attention to

accountability. Similarly, when flood coverage refers to cross-border water discharge, it may shift the discourse toward geopolitical tension, which can make domestic planning failures less prominent.

An ecolinguistic perspective further clarifies how language shapes environmental understanding. Hussain, Riaz, and Waheed (2025a), in their study of Uzma Aslam Khan's Thinner than Skin, showed that metaphors, symbols, narratives, and evaluations can construct ecological worldviews and ethical relationships between culture and the natural environment. Their findings are relevant to flood reporting because newspaper descriptions of water, land, vulnerability, destruction, and recovery likewise carry implicit environmental values. The present study extends this concern from literary ecological discourse to journalistic discourse, asking whether flood coverage promotes structural ecological awareness or reduces the environment to an external threat managed by institutions.

Previous studies of Pakistani media and disaster discourse have noted that official sources often dominate news reporting. Disaster-management authorities, ministers, police, rescue services, meteorological departments, district officials, and international agencies provide journalists with timely and apparently credible information. Yet reliance on such sources can narrow public meaning. Official discourse tends to emphasize control, monitoring, evacuation, rescue, relief, compensation, and rehabilitation. These terms construct the state as a central actor and may reduce the visibility of prevention, rights, uneven vulnerability, and local experience. Media narratives frequently organize complex crises through specialized frameworks to influence public perception and institutional legitimacy. According to Riaz et al. (2026a), the structural integrity of a narrative frame and its transparency directly dictate how audiences process accountability and perceived risk. Consequently, when disaster journalism relies excessively on authority-centered frameworks, it alters the democratic potential of public communication during ecological crises. Beyond traditional press structures, the specific architecture and formal affordances of communication channels heavily dictate how public meaning and digital identities are constructed. This structural influence aligns with the findings of Riaz et al. (2025), who demonstrate that platform-specific constraints directly shape linguistic adaptation and audience targeting strategies within contemporary media spaces. In disaster journalism, a parallel mechanism operates where institutional editorial boundaries and formal textual patterns restrict marginalized community narratives in favor of authority-centered reporting. The framing of environmental crises is heavily shaped by the underlying conceptual metaphors used to define agency and blame. This aligns with the cognitive linguistic analysis by Riaz et al. (2026b), which reveals that shifting from human-centered (anthropocentric) to nature-centered (ecocentric) frameworks fundamentally alters how audiences attribute responsibility for environmental destruction. In disaster journalism, a similar tension exists where a reliance on institutional and technical vocabulary obscures ecocentric realities, reinforcing human-centered administrative success over deep ecological vulnerability.

Questions of representation are also central to the discursive treatment of marginalized groups. Zafran et al. (2021) demonstrated how textual representation can reproduce racial stereotypes, cultural binaries, and social othering. The context differs from disaster journalism, but the representational principle remains relevant: repeated labels and asymmetrical descriptions can position one group as authoritative and another as dependent, inferior, or voiceless. In flood news, generalized categories such as victims, affectees, villagers, and displaced families may similarly compress diverse social identities and weaken the visibility of community agency.

Contemporary public meaning is also produced beyond conventional print genres. Hussain, Ahmad, and Sufi (2026) found that internet memes combine visual and verbal resources to condense political criticism, assign blame, expose inconsistency, and transform geopolitical crisis into shareable public argument. This multimodal evidence reinforces the view that crisis discourse

is not a neutral record of events but a selective construction shaped by genre, platform, symbolism, and audience. While the present article focuses on newspaper language, it shares the broader concern with how mediated forms organize public interpretations of authority, conflict, risk, and responsibility.

Hussain, Riaz, and Waheed (2026) demonstrate that the semantic categorization and frequent deployment of adverbs serve to provide nuanced descriptions, establish precision, and build explicit clarity within specialized texts. In disaster journalism, a parallel textual strategy is observed where deliberate modifier choices and official terminology are leveraged to reinforce administrative effectiveness and validate institutional narratives during ecological crises. At the textual and semiotic level, public meaning is heavily constructed through structured communicative units tailored to specific cultural and national frameworks. As Ijaz et al. (2026) demonstrate, symbolic and visual components operate as functional morphological units that adapt dynamically to shape local interpretation and modify text. In disaster journalism, a parallel structural mechanism operates where highly specific textual markers and institutional symbols are mobilized to frame crisis realities and steer public comprehension. At the discursive level, the reliance on specific formal structures shapes how agency and authority are established within public text. This mirrors genre findings by Hussain et al. (2025b), who note a prevalent use of passive constructions and limited structural frameworks in regional Pakistani writing. In disaster journalism, a similar preference for passive textual arrangements serves to obscure civic agency while reinforcing state-centric institutional narratives. At the discursive level, the manifestation of authority versus relational communication is deeply embedded in gendered media performance. As Tahir et al. (2025a) demonstrate, televised media discourse actively reinforces societal expectations by contrasting authoritative, directive tones with personal, affective communication styles. In disaster journalism, a similar dichotomy operates where authority-centered, institutional voices are systematically prioritized, while the relational and emotional narratives of marginalized communities are suppressed. At the social-practice level, the deep narrative of ecological preservation can be advanced by integrating cultural and spiritual dimensions into environmental discourse. This aligns with the eco-critical findings of Sukhera et al. (2024), who demonstrate that an eco-spiritual perspective highlights the fundamental interconnectedness of nature, serving as a powerful catalyst for environmental conservation. In disaster journalism, a similar integration is required to challenge authority-centered frameworks, moving toward an inclusive communication model that recognizes deep ecological vulnerability alongside human experience. At the social-practice level, institutional discourses frequently construct specific public subjectivities to legitimize state authority and interventions over marginalized populations. This mirrors the ideological analysis by Younas and Riaz (2024), which reveals how dominant political speech establishes top-down frameworks that define and control vulnerable communities. In disaster journalism, a parallel mechanism occurs when media narratives categorize flood-affected populations through strict administrative frames, validating state control while sidelining local agency. At the discursive-practice level, media texts frequently marginalize non-institutional or diverse localized perspectives by prioritizing single, generalized narratives. This aligns with the poststructuralist discourse analysis by Sattar et al. (2021), which reveals how political speeches often privilege specific voices to legitimize or delegitimize particular cultural beliefs, thereby fixing gender symmetries and subject positions. In disaster journalism, a similar mechanism operates where the media privileges centralized, authority-driven reports, effectively silencing the distinct, experiential realities of vulnerable communities during environmental crises.

The English-language press in Pakistan occupies a distinctive position. Its readers include urban elites, policymakers, intellectuals, civil society actors, international observers, and educated middle-class audiences. Consequently, English

newspapers often use technical, administrative, and macroeconomic language. When rural disasters are mediated for this readership, local suffering may be translated into institutional categories. This makes English-language newspapers a valuable site for examining how rural vulnerability is represented for elite and policy-oriented audiences.

Theoretical Framework:

This study uses Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis. The model is suitable because it allows the research to move from language to institutions and from institutions to social structure. At the social-practice level, political and institutional rhetoric is strategically structured to legitimize dominance and maintain hegemonic power. Utilizing Norman Fairclough's framework, Tahir et al. (2025b) demonstrate how state-level discourse employs authoritative language strategies to reaffirm institutional power dynamics and shape public memory. In disaster journalism, a similar ideological mechanism operates during crisis reporting, where the media privileges state-led interventions to validate existing power relations and structural hegemony. In this article, the three dimensions are applied as follows.

First, textual analysis examines the linguistic surface of the newspaper reports. This includes lexical choices such as 'devastation,' 'evacuation,' 'relief,' 'affectees,' 'losses,' 'compensation,' 'flood wave,' and 'rehabilitation'; grammatical patterns such as active and passive voice; transitivity choices that determine who acts and who is acted upon; modality markers such as 'may,' 'could,' 'likely,' 'must,' and 'warned'; and metaphors that personify floodwater as violent, destructive, or threatening.

Second, discursive-practice analysis examines how the reports were produced and circulated. This dimension focuses on source hierarchy, intertextuality, genre, and media routines. For example, reports may draw on statements from the Provincial Disaster Management Authority, the National Disaster Management Authority, rescue services, ministers, international organizations, expert assessments, and wire services. These sources shape the range of interpretations available to readers.

Third, social-practice analysis relates the textual and discursive findings to Pakistan's broader political and social context. Floods are linked to state authority, rural marginalization, class inequality, agriculture, climate vulnerability, infrastructure, public health, education, and cross-border water politics. The social-practice level asks how newspaper discourse legitimizes, questions, or normalizes these structures.

METHODOLOGY

The study follows a qualitative research design. A qualitative approach is appropriate because the aim is not to count every lexical item in a large corpus but to interpret how meaning, ideology, and power relations are produced through selected media texts. The analysis is interpretive, but it is grounded in repeated close reading, systematic coding, and textual evidence.

The population of the study consists of Pakistani English-language newspaper reports on the 2025 Punjab floods. The sample was purposively selected from three major newspapers: Dawn, The Express Tribune, and The News International. These newspapers were chosen because of their national visibility, digital availability, influential readership, and regular coverage of political, environmental, and social issues. The articles were selected from the peak period of flood coverage, August to October 2025, when evacuation, casualties, crop losses, relief operations, and official assessments were most frequently reported.

The sample includes reports that contained substantial discussion of the floods, official response, social impact, environmental implications, economic loss, or relief and rehabilitation. Short items that consisted only of brief numerical updates were not treated as main analytical texts unless they contributed to broader patterns of discourse. The original thesis analyzed thirty newspaper articles; the present article condenses the findings from that analysis into a journal format.

The analysis proceeded in three steps. First, the reports were read for textual features: vocabulary, grammar, modality, transitivity, metaphor, numbers, naming practices, and emotional or technical wording. Second, the reports were examined for discursive practice: sources, quotation patterns, genre conventions, intertextual references, and the presence or absence of local voices. Third, the findings were interpreted in relation to broader social practices: state legitimacy, institutional power, rural vulnerability, climate risk, economic discourse, and accountability.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Quantification and the Construction of Scale

One of the most prominent features of the coverage was the repeated use of numbers. Newspapers reported deaths, injuries, damaged houses, evacuated people, affected villages, destroyed roads, damaged bridges, submerged acres of crops, rescued cattle, relief camps, and medical facilities. Quantification created a strong sense of scale and urgency. Large numbers made the floods appear measurable, objective, and administratively knowable.

However, numbers also produced emotional distance. When people are represented as casualties, evacuees, displaced populations, or affectees, their individual experiences can disappear behind aggregate categories. A sentence that reports millions affected or thousands evacuated communicates magnitude but does not necessarily communicate grief, fear, uncertainty, hunger, disease risk, debt, land loss, school interruption, or long-term trauma. In this sense, statistical discourse is both necessary and limited.

The ideological effect of quantification is that it organizes disaster as a manageable administrative object. The state and its agencies can count, classify, rescue, compensate, and rehabilitate. This pattern does not make the reporting false; rather, it shows how factual language contributes to a particular construction of social reality. The reader sees a large crisis, but the crisis is filtered through official categories of management.

Technical and Administrative Vocabulary

The reports frequently used technical and administrative vocabulary: evacuation, rescue operations, relief camps, medical camps, compensation, rehabilitation, district administration, high flood level, flood wave, alert, monitoring, safe locations, affected districts, and damage assessment. Such vocabulary is expected in disaster reporting because it communicates urgent information. Yet its repetition also frames the disaster as a matter of control, logistics, and institutional response.

Administrative language foregrounds the activity of state institutions. Rescue teams evacuate; authorities report; departments monitor; governments announce packages; officials declare areas safe or unsafe. Affected communities, by contrast, are often grammatically positioned as recipients of action. They are evacuated, rescued, shifted, relocated, or compensated. This transitivity pattern gives active agency to institutions and passive status to victims.

This does not mean that state action was unimportant. Rescue and relief are crucial during floods. The critical point is that when administrative vocabulary dominates the discourse, other questions may become less visible: Why were communities exposed? Why were settlements located in high-risk zones? Why did infrastructure fail? Why were warnings, drainage, embankments, or relocation plans inadequate? The vocabulary of response can overshadow the vocabulary of prevention.

Emotive Language and Humanitarian Framing

Alongside statistics and technical vocabulary, newspapers used emotive language to construct the floods as a human tragedy. Words and phrases such as devastation, havoc, suffering, tragedy, destruction, washed away, endless mud, lost everything, and displaced families created a humanitarian frame. This language invited sympathy and moral concern. In some human-interest stories, direct quotations from affected people personalized the disaster and interrupted the dominance of abstract statistics.

The humanitarian frame has positive value because it prevents the disaster from becoming

purely bureaucratic. It reminds readers that floods are lived experiences involving loss, fear, mourning, uncertainty, and survival. Nevertheless, humanitarian discourse can also present affected people primarily as helpless victims. If such stories are not connected with rights, agency, local knowledge, or structural causes, they may create compassion without accountability.

The analysis suggests that human-interest reporting appeared less frequently than official or statistical reporting. When local voices were included, they often functioned as illustrations of suffering rather than as sources of analysis. Farmers, women, children, displaced families, and vulnerable groups were described more often than they were allowed to define the causes, failures, and needs of the crisis in their own terms.

Source Hierarchy and Institutional Dominance

At the level of discursive practice, the strongest pattern was reliance on institutional sources. Reports drew heavily on disaster-management authorities, ministers, district administrations, rescue services, international organizations, and expert assessments. This dependence gave the coverage credibility, timeliness, and authority. In emergency reporting, such reliance is understandable because journalists require verified information quickly.

However, source hierarchy also shaped the ideological structure of the coverage. Institutions were positioned as knowledge producers, while affected communities were positioned as objects of knowledge. Official statistics and statements became the primary basis for public meaning. Local experience, community memory, and criticism from below had less discursive power. The result was a top-down model of disaster communication.

Intertextuality reinforced this pattern. News reports frequently recycled official briefings, situation reports, warnings, and assessments. The newspaper text therefore became part of a wider chain of discourse involving state agencies, international organizations, experts, and media institutions. This chain increased authority but also limited the range of alternative explanations. The discourse was not produced by the newspaper alone; it circulated through institutional networks.

Economic Loss and Agrarian Vulnerability

Because Punjab is central to Pakistan's agriculture, the floods were frequently represented through the language of economic loss. Crop damage, cattle loss, road disruption, export pressure, food prices, and rehabilitation costs appeared as recurring themes. This economic frame expanded the significance of the floods from local suffering to national markets and state planning.

The economic frame is important because flood damage in Punjab can affect livelihoods, debt cycles, food supply, rural labor, and national economic stability. Yet the frame also risks translating suffering into financial categories. Farmers may appear as economic units rather than as citizens with rights, histories, and local knowledge. When the loss of crops is discussed mainly in terms of market impact, export competitiveness, or government compensation, the social texture of rural life may be reduced.

The analysis indicates that newspapers often recognized crop losses and livestock damage but gave less sustained attention to the uneven ability of rural households to recover. Landowners, tenants, sharecroppers, agricultural laborers, women-headed households, and informal workers do not experience floods equally. A critical disaster discourse must therefore move from aggregate economic loss to differentiated social vulnerability.

Climate Vulnerability, Governance and Responsibility

Climate change appeared in the broader discourse as one explanation for the severity and recurrence of floods. This frame connected the Punjab floods with global environmental injustice and Pakistan's vulnerability to climate risk. It also provided a vocabulary for international aid, adaptation, and loss-and-damage debates. However, climate discourse can have mixed ideological effects.

When climate change is linked with weak infrastructure, poor planning, poverty, land-use practices, floodplain occupation, and institutional failure, it deepens public understanding. When climate change is used as a general explanation without local accountability, it can make disasters appear inevitable. The same is true of narratives about upstream water discharge or cross-border responsibility. Such narratives may be relevant, but if they dominate the frame, domestic questions of preparedness and governance may be displaced.

The selected newspapers showed both tendencies. Some reports framed the floods through rainfall, river flow, and emergency response. Others opened space for criticism by pointing to recurring disasters, inadequate planning, health risks, compensation gaps, and repeated exposure. The discourse was therefore not uniform. It contained both legitimizing and critical elements, although institutional and event-based framing remained more dominant.

Passive Voice, Agency and Victim Representation

Transitivity and voice were central to the construction of agency. In many reports, floodwater appeared as an active force: it swept away, inundated, hit, damaged, destroyed, or threatened. Institutions also appeared as active actors: they evacuated, rescued, reported, declared, warned, and announced. Affected people were often passive: they were displaced, rescued, evacuated, shifted, or compensated.

This grammatical pattern is significant because it influences how readers imagine responsibility. If floodwater is the primary destructive actor, the event appears natural. If institutions are the primary responding actors, the state appears active and protective. If affected communities are passive recipients, their agency, criticism, knowledge, and demands become less visible. CDA helps reveal how such ordinary grammatical choices reproduce wider social relations.

The repeated use of collective labels also shaped victim representation. Terms such as affectees, victims, residents, villagers, families, farmers, and displaced people grouped diverse experiences into broad categories. These labels are useful for quick reporting, but they may erase differences of gender, age, class, disability, land ownership, caste, occupation, and location. More inclusive reporting would identify how vulnerability is socially distributed.

Interdiscursivity: Disaster, State, Market, Climate and Nation

The coverage was highly interdiscursive. A single report could combine disaster-management discourse, humanitarian discourse, economic discourse, climate discourse, public-health discourse, education discourse, and geopolitical discourse. This interdiscursivity reflects the complex nature of floods. They are not only environmental events; they also affect schools, roads, crops, health systems, relief budgets, political legitimacy, and international relations.

However, not all discourses had equal power. Disaster-management and administrative discourses were more dominant because they were supported by official sources and immediate news value. Economic discourse was strong because Punjab's agriculture is nationally important. Humanitarian discourse appeared through images and selected quotations. Structural discourse - dealing with inequality, planning, prevention, and long-term adaptation - was less consistent and often appeared more clearly in opinion or analytical pieces than in hard news.

Summary of Major Findings

The analysis can be summarized through five major findings. First, the newspapers used quantification to create objectivity and urgency, but this also depersonalized suffering. Second, official and technical vocabulary constructed the floods as an administrative emergency, making state response highly visible. Third, institutional sources dominated the production of meaning, while community voices remained limited. Fourth, economic and climate frames expanded the meaning of the disaster but sometimes reduced attention to differentiated vulnerability and accountability. Fifth, the discourse reproduced state legitimacy while also allowing

partial criticism of preparedness, compensation, and structural weakness.

Analytical Matrix of Key Findings

Analytical Level	Main Pattern	Discursive Significance
Textual practice	Statistics, technical vocabulary, emotive wording, passive voice, and metaphors of destructive water.	Frames the floods as measurable, urgent, tragic, and administratively manageable.
Discursive practice	Dependence on official briefings, disaster authorities, experts, international agencies, and wire services.	Privileges institutional knowledge and reduces the space available for community-defined meanings.
Social practice	Legitimation of rescue, relief, compensation, rehabilitation, and state action, with partial critique of preparedness.	Reproduces existing power relations while allowing limited contestation around vulnerability and accountability.
Marginalized voices	Farmers, displaced families, women, children, and low-income groups are often described collectively.	Turns lived experience into categories and weakens the agency of vulnerable communities.
Recommended shift	Move from event-based crisis reporting to community-centered and accountability-oriented disaster journalism.	Supports more socially responsible coverage of recurring environmental crises.

DISCUSSION

The findings support the central premise of Critical Discourse Analysis: language is a form of social practice. The selected newspapers did not simply report the Punjab floods; they constructed the disaster through specific linguistic and institutional patterns. Numbers, official statements, technical terms, and emotive phrases worked together to produce a public narrative of scale, urgency, suffering, and response. This narrative was useful for emergency communication, but it also shaped the boundaries of what could be easily thought, felt, and questioned.

The dominance of official voices shows how power operates through credibility. Government departments and disaster-management authorities are not only actors in relief operations; they are also producers of authoritative knowledge. Journalists depend on them for data and updates, and readers often trust their statements because they appear formal and verified. Yet this credibility can make institutional interpretations appear as common sense. Affected people may be visible as bodies in need of rescue but less visible as speakers capable of diagnosing institutional failure.

The study also shows that disaster discourse in Pakistan is shaped by the political economy of media. English-language newspapers communicate to an audience that values policy, statistics, governance, economy, and international credibility. This may explain the frequent use of macroeconomic frames, official sources, and technical vocabulary. Such reporting can influence policymakers and international observers, but it can also distance urban elite readers from the social realities of rural flood-affected communities.

Another important implication concerns the normalization of recurring disaster. Pakistan experiences monsoon flooding repeatedly, and media vocabulary often repeats across events: emergency, alert, rescue, relief, compensation,

rehabilitation, destruction, and affectees. Repetition can create familiarity, and familiarity can produce compassion fatigue. When each flood is represented as another emergency, the structural history of vulnerability may fade. CDA slows down reading and makes this repetition visible.

The findings further suggest that disaster reporting should balance immediate information with structural explanation. During a flood, newspapers must report warnings, river levels, evacuation points, medical risks, and relief facilities. Yet once basic information is communicated, journalism also needs to ask why people remain exposed to predictable hazards. A socially responsible disaster discourse should connect relief with prevention, compensation with rights, climate change with local governance, and humanitarian suffering with social inequality.

The article also demonstrates that media discourse is not entirely one-sided. Some reports reproduced state legitimacy by highlighting rescue operations, compensation packages, relief camps, and official monitoring. Other reports raised concerns about health protocols, repeated exposure, economic uncertainty, weak preparedness, or dissatisfied communities. This mixture shows that newspaper discourse is a space of contestation. Nevertheless, the institutional frame remained more frequent and more authoritative than the community-centered frame.

9. Implications for Disaster Journalism

The analysis has several implications for disaster journalism in Pakistan and similar contexts. First, news organizations should strengthen the representation of affected communities. Reports should not rely only on official numbers and statements when the issue directly concerns vulnerable people. Farmers, women, children, tenants, laborers, shopkeepers, teachers, health workers, and displaced families should be included not merely as emotional examples but as knowledge-bearing participants.

Second, journalists should combine statistical reporting with human-centered storytelling. Numbers are essential for scale, but they should be accompanied by local narratives that show how loss is experienced differently across class, gender, location, and occupation. A report that mentions damaged crops should also explain debt, seed loss, food insecurity, labor disruption, school interruption, and health risks.

Third, media organizations should develop disaster-reporting guidelines that encourage accountability questions. Such guidelines may include prompts about preparedness, early warning, evacuation access, embankment maintenance, drainage, floodplain regulation, relief transparency, compensation distribution, disease prevention, and long-term rehabilitation. These questions can help shift reporting from event-based crisis description to accountability-based environmental journalism.

Fourth, journalists need access to transparent public data. Disaster-management institutions should provide updated information about relief distribution, compensation, health risks, damaged schools, infrastructure loss, and recovery progress in forms that can be independently checked. Transparency would allow newspapers to evaluate institutional claims instead of merely reproducing them.

Finally, training in Critical Discourse Analysis and environmental communication can help reporters recognize the ideological power of language. Terms such as affectees, victims, natural disaster, relief, rehabilitation, and compensation are not neutral labels; they organize public perception. Greater awareness of such language can improve the social responsibility of disaster reporting.

This article has reformulated thesis findings into a journal-ready analysis of Pakistani English newspaper coverage of the 2025 Punjab floods. Using Fairclough's three-dimensional model, it has shown that the selected newspapers constructed the floods through textual, discursive, and social practices. Textually, the reports used statistics, technical vocabulary, emotive language, passive voice, and metaphors to frame the floods as a large-scale humanitarian, administrative, economic, and environmental crisis. At the level of discursive practice,

institutional sources dominated the production of public knowledge. At the level of social practice, the discourse legitimized state-led rescue and relief while partially questioning preparedness, inequality, and structural vulnerability.

The main conclusion is that disaster news is never only descriptive. It shapes public understanding by deciding which actors are visible, whose voices are authoritative, which causes are emphasized, and what solutions appear reasonable. In the case of the 2025 Punjab floods, the English-language press played an important role in communicating emergency information, but it also reproduced unequal power relations by privileging official discourse over community experience. More inclusive, critical, and accountable disaster journalism is therefore necessary.

The study is limited to selected English-language newspapers and does not include Urdu newspapers, regional-language press, television news, social media, or audience reception. It also uses qualitative interpretation rather than quantitative corpus analysis. Future research may compare English, Urdu, and regional media coverage of the same floods; examine television and social-media discourse; study audience responses; or use corpus methods to trace lexical patterns across a larger dataset. Comparative studies across Pakistan and other climate-vulnerable countries would also help identify international patterns in disaster discourse.

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