

From Truth to Narrative: Postmodern Power and Media Control in Pakistan

Zeeshan Qasim¹ and Inam Ullah Khan²

<https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2026.15.2.14>

Abstract

This research paper examines the transformation of journalistic practice in Pakistan through a postmodern lens, focusing on the relationships among power, censorship, and media reality. While traditional journalism emphasises objectivity and factual representation, postmodern perspectives suggest that the media increasingly construct narratives shaped by institutional authority and ideological influence. Using a qualitative critical case study design, this research applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to selected news texts, political talk shows, and regulatory discourse. The study identifies patterns of discursive censorship, narrative framing, and symbolic representation that structure media content. Findings indicate that journalistic discourse operates within negotiated boundaries, in which truth claims are contingent on regulatory constraints and institutional priorities. Media narratives frequently exhibit selective representation, simulation, and ideological framing, contributing to fragmented public understandings of political and social reality. The study argues that media control in Pakistan reflects a broader postmodern condition in which distinctions between representation and reality become increasingly blurred. By integrating postmodern theory with empirical discourse analysis, this research contributes to critical media scholarship and offers insights into the dynamics of power, knowledge production, and mediated communication in contemporary Pakistan.

Introduction

The relationship between media, power, and truth has undergone a significant transformation in contemporary societies. While modern journalism is grounded in objectivity and factual representation, postmodern perspectives challenge this assumption by emphasising the constructed nature of reality. Media institutions are increasingly understood not as neutral reflectors of events but as active producers of narratives shaped by power relations and ideological interests (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Fuchs, 2021).

Postmodern theory suggests that truth is no longer fixed but contingent, fragmented, and negotiated within discursive structures (Lyotard, 1984). Media discourse constructs social meaning through selective representation, symbolic framing, and institutional filtering. In digitally mediated environments, the proliferation of information and the rise of hybrid media systems further destabilise traditional epistemic authority (Couldry & Mejias, 2019; McNair, 2018). Our study places Pakistani media within broader debates on postmodern power and knowledge production. The postmodern condition questions universal truths and highlights the role of discourse in shaping

¹Department of Communication and Media Studies, Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan, Pakistan.

Email: Sovereign26@hotmail.co.uk

²Department of Communication and Media Studies, Gomal University, Dera Ismail Khan, Pakistan.



social reality. Media institutions operate within systems of power that regulate what can be said and what must remain silent (Foucault, 1980).

Scholars argue that contemporary media practices involve simulation, symbolic representation, and ideological framing that shape public perception (Baudrillard, 1994). The increasing dominance of mediated communication also transforms political processes and public discourse (Kellner, 2020).

Pakistan provides a critical context for examining these dynamics. Although the constitution guarantees freedom of expression, media practices are shaped by regulatory frameworks, political pressures, and institutional constraints. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) plays a central role in licensing, monitoring, and enforcing content standards, thereby influencing the boundaries of permissible discourse (Siraj, 2009; Yousaf, 2022). Legal instruments such as the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act further extend regulatory control over digital communication (Khan & Satti, 2021). These conditions shape journalistic practices and influence the production of public discourse. Research further indicates that regulatory inconsistencies contribute to reduced trust in media institutions and constrain public interest journalism (Akhtar & Pratt, 2020). Scholars argue that these legal frameworks protect institutional authority but also restrict press freedom and public accountability (Shah, 2020).

The contemporary media environment also reflects broader transformations associated with digital communication technologies. Digital platforms expand opportunities for expression while simultaneously intensifying regulatory oversight. The spread of misinformation and emotional content further complicates the relationship between truth and representation. Research shows that misinformation in Pakistan often relies on emotional appeals, political polarisation, and symbolic authority to influence public opinion (Ali et al., 2023). These developments highlight the growing importance of narrative construction in shaping public perception.

Our study recognises that media discourse plays a central role in constructing political and social realities. Media narratives influence public understanding of authority, legitimacy, and national identity. Scholars argue that political communication increasingly reflects media logic rather than democratic deliberation (Stromback & Esser, 2014). Media institutions mediate political processes and shape public discourse through selective representation and framing. This transformation reflects a broader postmodern condition in which representation often replaces direct experience (Baudrillard, 1994). Studies show that conflict reporting in Pakistan frequently marginalises alternative perspectives and reinforces dominant narratives (Siraj, 2019). Such practices demonstrate the relationship between power structures and media representation.

Our study further acknowledges recent debates regarding digital regulation and media control in Pakistan. Contemporary policy developments seek to regulate online expression and combat misinformation. However, critics argue that such measures may suppress dissent and expand institutional control over public discourse (Freedom Network, 2023). These debates highlight tensions between security, regulation, and freedom of expression in the digital age.

The growing complexity of media regulation and narrative construction requires critical scholarly attention. Existing research often examines legal frameworks or Press freedom indicators, but rarely integrates postmodern theory with empirical analysis of media discourse. Our study addresses this gap by examining how power relations shape media narratives and construct social reality, and adopts a qualitative, critical case study approach to analyse the discursive mechanisms through which media institutions produce truth claims and legitimise authority (Qasim & Roshan, 2024).

The significance of this research lies in its theoretical and empirical contributions. Our study integrates postmodern theory, discourse analysis, and scholarship on media regulation to explain the transformation of journalistic practice. We argue that Pakistani media increasingly operate within negotiated boundaries where truth becomes contingent on institutional authority. Media discourse constructs reality through narrative framing, symbolic language, and selective representation.

The study, for this reason, seeks to answer three central questions. First, how do media institutions construct truth within regulated environments? Second, how do censorship practices shape media narratives and public discourse? Third, how does media representation produce simulated or mediated realities that influence public perception? These questions guide our investigation of the relationship between power, discourse, and media control. It provides a deeper understanding of how institutional power shapes knowledge production and public communication. The findings offer insights into the dynamics of media control, democratic communication, and the transformation of journalism in contemporary society.

Literature Review

Existing literature on media and power converges around three interrelated dimensions: the postmodern transformation of truth, the role of discourse in knowledge production, and the institutional regulation of media systems. Together, these perspectives explain how media operate not merely as channels of information but as sites where reality is constructed, contested, and controlled.

Postmodern theory challenges the notion of objective truth by emphasising fragmentation, multiplicity, and narrative construction (Lyotard, 1984). Within this framework, media representations do not simply reflect reality but actively produce it. Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality further suggests that symbolic representations increasingly replace empirical reality, creating mediated environments in which audiences engage with simulations rather than direct experience (Baudrillard, 1994). Contemporary digital communication intensifies these dynamics by amplifying competing narratives and weakening shared epistemic frameworks, allowing political actors to strategically manipulate information within hybrid media systems (Bennett & Livingston, 2018).

The relationship between power and knowledge is central to understanding these processes. Foucault (1980) conceptualises discourse as a mechanism through which institutions regulate meaning, define legitimacy, and shape public knowledge. Media systems operate within these discursive boundaries, producing normalised representations that reflect institutional priorities (Couldry, 2012). Increasingly, states employ digital governance mechanisms to regulate information flows, monitor online spaces, and manage dissent through technological control (Bradshaw & Howard, 2019). Such interventions extend beyond overt censorship, as restrictions on content and representation reshape public discourse by limiting alternative narratives and constraining civic engagement (Hussain, 2020).

In the Pakistani context, these dynamics are shaped by regulatory frameworks, political pressures, and ownership structures. Legal instruments and institutional oversight influence editorial decision-making, often resulting in self-censorship and constrained reporting (Shah, 2022; Rehmat & Khan, 2021). The expansion of digital regulation further extends state influence over information flows, creating a controlled communicative environment (Iqbal & Hussain, 2023). At the same time, concentrated media ownership reinforces political influence over editorial content, limiting diversity of perspectives and affecting public discourse (Khan & Joseph, 2020).

Within this environment, political communication increasingly operates through narrative construction. Media framing plays a central role in shaping public perception of political events (Entman, 1993), while strategic narratives are deployed to construct national identity and legitimise authority (Miskimmon et al., 2017). These narratives guide audience interpretation, influence political participation, and structure public understanding of complex issues (McNair, 2017). The rise of misinformation further complicates this process, as post-truth dynamics undermine objective knowledge systems and intensify contestation over meaning (Waisbord, 2018).

Digital media has become central to these transformations, giving rise to hybrid information systems that combine traditional journalism with networked communication (Chadwick, 2017). While digital platforms enable the circulation of alternative narratives, they also facilitate surveillance and control (Tufekci, 2017). Algorithmic systems shape information visibility and narrative dominance, influencing how knowledge is produced and consumed (Gillespie, 2018). These processes contribute to the fragmentation of publics, where echo chambers reinforce ideological divisions and produce competing realities (Sunstein, 2018).

Within such constrained and hybrid environments, self-censorship emerges as a key mechanism of media control. Journalists adapt their reporting practices to avoid institutional sanctions, balancing professional norms with structural pressures (Schiffrin, 2017; Hanitzsch et al., 2019). Safety concerns, political pressure, and organisational constraints further shape journalistic decision-making, resulting in negotiated forms of reporting that limit critical perspectives (Reporters Without Borders, 2023; Voltmer, 2019). Consequently, media content often reflects institutional priorities rather than independent inquiry.

These dynamics have significant implications for democracy and the public sphere. Habermas (1989) conceptualises the media as central to rational public discourse; however, constrained media environments undermine this function by limiting civic engagement and political participation (Voltmer, 2013). Narrative regulation and discursive control shape not only what information is available but also how it is interpreted, influencing civic voice and public understanding (Qasim, 2026). At the same time, digital communication transforms public sphere dynamics by enabling networked forms of expression that simultaneously expand participation and intensify control (Papacharissi, 2015).

Overall, the literature demonstrates that media systems operate at the intersection of power, discourse, and narrative construction. However, while these studies provide valuable insights, they often remain theoretically fragmented and insufficiently integrated within specific empirical contexts. This study addresses this gap by examining how postmodern concepts of discourse, power, and hyperreality operate within Pakistan's regulated media environment.

However, existing studies rarely examine how postmodern concepts such as hyperreality and narrative construction operate within Pakistan's regulated media environment. This study addresses this gap through a critical discourse approach.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

This study integrates postmodern theory, Foucauldian discourse analysis, and the concept of hyperreality to examine media control in Pakistan. Postmodern theory explains the fragmentation of truth and the rise of narrative construction (Lyotard, 1984). Foucauldian perspectives highlight how institutional power regulates discourse and produces regimes of truth (Foucault, 1980). Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality explains how media representations replace empirical reality with symbolic simulation (Baudrillard, 1994). Together, these perspectives conceptualise media as

a site where institutional power shapes discourse, discourse constructs narratives, and narratives produce mediated realities that influence public perception.

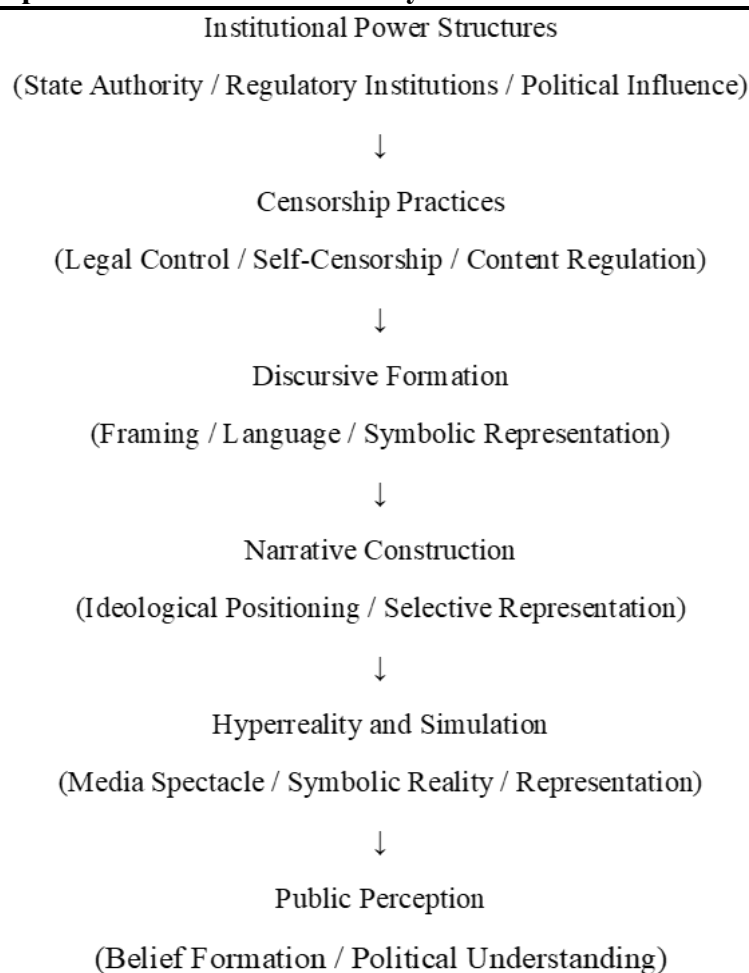
Research Objectives

1. To examine how institutional power shapes media discourse in Pakistan.
2. To analyse the role of censorship in constructing media narratives.
3. To investigate the presence of hyperreality and simulation in news representation.
4. To explore how media discourse legitimises institutional authority.
5. To explain the transformation of journalism from truth representation to narrative construction.

Research Questions

- RQ.1:* How does institutional power shape the construction of truth in Pakistani media?
RQ.2: How do censorship practices influence media narratives and discourse formation?
RQ.3: How does media representation produce hyperreal or simulated political realities?
RQ.4: How does media discourse legitimise institutional authority and regulate public perception?
RQ.5: How does the interaction between power, discourse, and simulation transform journalistic practice?

Figure 1: The conceptual framework of the study



The above conceptual model explains how institutional power produces media reality through discursive and symbolic processes. Power operates through regulatory structures. These structures shape censorship practices. Censorship influences media discourse. Media discourse produces narratives. Narratives construct hyperreal representations. These representations shape public perception.

Variable Explanation

Key variables of our conceptual model are explained as below:

Independent Variable

a) Institutional Power Structures

Institutional power structures refer to the formal and informal mechanisms through which state institutions, regulatory authorities, media organizations, and political actors influence media production and information flow. These structures include regulatory frameworks, ownership patterns, editorial hierarchies, political pressures, and organizational norms that shape journalistic practices.

This scientific paper conceptualizes institutional power as the primary force that determines what information becomes visible, how it is framed, and which perspectives are marginalized. Power operates through rules, policies, and professional expectations that regulate communication practices. The concept draws from Michel Foucault's notion of power-knowledge relations, where institutions produce and control knowledge through discourse regulation.

In the Pakistani context, institutional power structures influence media agendas, define acceptable narratives, and shape the boundaries of journalistic autonomy. This variable therefore functions as the driving force that initiates discursive processes leading to mediated realities.

Mediating Variables

Mediating variables explain the mechanisms through which institutional power influences media outcomes. They represent the processes that transform structural power into observable media discourse.

a) Censorship Practices

Censorship practices refer to explicit and implicit restrictions on information dissemination within media systems. These practices include editorial filtering, omission of sensitive content, self-censorship, regulatory constraints, and selective reporting.

This empirical study defines censorship as a regulatory mechanism that shapes media discourse by limiting the range of permissible expression. It does not operate only through direct prohibition but also through subtle forms of control such as topic selection, framing choices, and linguistic moderation.

Censorship practices mediate institutional power by controlling what information reaches the public and how it is presented. They influence public understanding by shaping visibility, silence, and representation in media narratives.

b) Discursive Formation

Discursive formation refers to the structured production of meaning through language, symbols, and communicative practices within media texts. It includes patterns of representation, framing strategies, ideological positioning, and recurring narrative structures.

This research paper conceptualizes discursive formation as the process through which institutional power becomes embedded in communication practices. Media discourse constructs social reality by defining meanings, categories, and interpretations of events.

This variable mediates power by shaping how issues are discussed, interpreted, and normalized in public communication. It determines the rules of representation and establishes dominant knowledge frameworks within society.

c) Narrative Construction

Narrative construction refers to the process through which media organizations organize events into coherent stories that shape audience interpretation. This includes selection of actors, sequencing of events, framing of causes and consequences, and emotional or symbolic emphasis.

Narrative construction is viewed as a mechanism that transforms raw information into meaningful stories aligned with institutional interests. Media narratives provide interpretive frameworks that guide public perception of political, social, and cultural realities.

Narrative construction mediates institutional power by shaping how audiences understand events, assign responsibility, and form opinions. It converts discursive practices into structured representations that influence collective understanding.

Outcome Variable

a) Hyperreal Media Reality and Public Perception

Hyperreal media reality refers to the condition in which mediated representations become more influential than direct experience in shaping public understanding. Media constructs symbolic realities that audiences perceive as authentic social truth.

We define outcome as the combined effect of mediated representation and audience interpretation. Public perception emerges from exposure to constructed narratives, symbolic imagery, and repeated discourse rather than empirical observation.

Hyperreal media reality represents the final stage of the conceptual process. Institutional power, operating through censorship, discursive formation, and narrative construction, produces mediated realities that shape civic awareness, political attitudes, and social knowledge.

In the Pakistani context, this outcome manifests in audience acceptance of dominant narratives, perception of political events through symbolic representation, and reliance on mediated knowledge for understanding governance and public affairs.

Conceptual Relationship Summary

The proposed framework assumes a causal sequence as it argues that institutional power initiates discursive control, mediating process's structure communication and argues that mediated narratives ultimately shape audience perception and social reality.

Methodology

Research Design

This research paper used a qualitative critical case study design to examine the relationship between power, censorship, and media reality in Pakistan and selected qualitative inquiry because the study investigated discursive practices, symbolic representation, and narrative construction rather than measurable variables. Qualitative research enabled interpretive analysis of meaning production within specific social and institutional contexts.

The study applied a critical case study approach to analyze media discourse within a regulated communicative environment. A critical case study examined power relations, institutional structures, and ideological processes that shape social phenomena and used this approach to investigate how media institutions construct truth claims and regulate public discourse through narrative practices.

The research design focused on contemporary Pakistani broadcast and digital news media as the primary case. The case provided us a context where regulatory authority, political influence, and institutional control intersect with journalistic practice. The design for this reason allowed an in-depth analysis of how power operates through media discourse.

Research Paradigm

The inquiry operated within an interpretivist and critical paradigm. Interpretivism assumes that social reality is constructed through human interaction and communicative practices. Critical research examined power structures and ideological processes that shape knowledge production. Our study interpreted media discourse as socially constructed rather than objectively given. Media narratives reflect institutional priorities and power relations. The critical perspective allowed examination of how censorship practices shape meaning and regulate communication.

Critical Discourse Analysis Methodological Approach

This investigation employed Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as the primary analytical method. CDA examined how language constructs social reality and reproduces power relations. The approach investigated linguistic structures, symbolic representations, and narrative patterns within communicative texts.

We chose CDA because the method reveals how institutional power operates through discourse. Media texts contain implicit assumptions, ideological framing, and strategic silences. CDA enabled systematic examination of these features.

The pattern of this study followed a three-level analytical process:

Textual Analysis

It examined vocabulary, framing strategies, metaphors, and symbolic language. The use of this analysis identified linguistic patterns that construct meaning.

Discursive Practice Analysis

We examined production and distribution processes of media content. Our analysis explored how institutional constraints shape narrative construction in Pakistan.

Social Practice Analysis

It interpreted media discourse within broader socio-political contexts. The analysis explained how discourse reproduces power relations and institutional authority.

This multi-level analysis ensured the comprehensive interpretation of media representation to the extent of this study.

Case Selection and Context

As this study explores mainstream television news and digital media content regulated by the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority and selected this institutional context because regulatory frameworks shape media production and public communication.

The case included major news bulletins, political talk shows, and online news content produced between 2022 and 2025. The selected period reflects contemporary developments in media regulation, digital governance, and political communication. The timeframe allowed us to do the analysis of recent discourse patterns.

Data Collection

The data collection process for this study was as below;

Data Sources

The study used multiple sources of media discourse such as (a) Prime-time television news bulletins (b) Political talk show transcripts (c) News headlines and reports (d) Regulatory statements and policy discourse (e) Digital news coverage

We collected publicly available media content from major broadcast and online platforms and selected content related to political events, governance issues, and institutional authority.

Sampling Strategy

The study applied purposive sampling to select relevant media texts. Purposive sampling identified information-rich cases that illustrate discursive patterns and selected media content that reflected political reporting, regulatory intervention, or contested public issues.

The sampling criteria included (a) relevance to political authority or governance (b) presence of regulatory or institutional themes (c) discursive representation of conflict or dissent (d) narrative framing of political actors.

The study analyzed approximately 60 media texts to ensure analytical depth and thematic saturation.

Data Analysis Procedure

The study applies thematic coding within a critical discourse framework. and conduct analysis through the following steps:

Step 1 (Data Familiarization): The researchers reviewed media texts to identify recurring patterns and discursive features.

Step 2 (Initial Coding): The study coded textual elements related to power, censorship, and narrative construction.

Step 3 (Theme Development): The analysis grouped codes into broader analytical themes such as discursive censorship, hyperreality, and institutional legitimacy

Step 4 (Interpretation): The study interpreted themes using postmodern theory, power knowledge relations, and simulation concepts.

This systematic process ensured analytical consistency and theoretical coherence for the investigation.

Trustworthiness and Validity

The study adopted several strategies to ensure research credibility. Such as;

1. *Credibility:* This research used multiple data sources and repeated analysis to ensure interpretive accuracy.
2. *Dependability:* The study documented coding procedures and analytical decisions to maintain methodological transparency.
3. *Confirmability:* The researchers maintained reflexive awareness of interpretive assumptions.

4. *Transferability*: The research provided detailed contextual description to allow application to similar media environments.

These measures enhance the reliability of qualitative findings in this study.

Ethical Considerations & Limitations

The study used publicly available media content and did not involve human participants. We ensured accurate representation of media texts and avoided misinterpretation. The research maintained academic integrity and transparency. The study focused on selected media texts rather than the entire media landscape. The qualitative design prioritized interpretive depth rather than statistical generalization. However, the approach provided rich insights into discursive processes and institutional power.

Operationalization of Variables

Table 1: The Analytical Themes Operationalization

Theme	Conceptual Definition	Analytical Indicators	Coding Questions	Theoretical Basis
Construction of Truth through Power	Media defines truth through institutional authority	Official sources, authority-based claims, state-centric framing	Who defines truth? Which voices dominate?	Foucault – power/knowledge
Discursive Censorship	Control of meaning through omission or silence	Absence of perspectives, passive voice, selective reporting	What is excluded? What remains unsaid?	Foucauldian discourse control
Narrative Construction	Media organizes events into ideological stories	Hero–villain framing, emotional sequencing, personalization	How is the story structured?	Postmodern narrative theory
Hyperreality / Simulation	Media representation replaces reality	Spectacle, dramatization, symbolic imagery	Does representation dominate over facts?	Baudrillard
Fragmentation of Reality	Media presents partial and competing truths	Contradictory reports, episodic coverage	Is reality presented as fragmented?	Postmodern condition
Institutional Legitimization	Media reinforces authority and stability	Security discourse, national interest rhetoric	How is authority justified?	Governmentality
Symbolic Language and Ideology	Language produces ideological meaning	Loaded terms, metaphors, cultural symbols	What symbolic meanings appear?	Discourse theory
Self-Censorship / Negotiated Journalism	Journalists adapt content to institutional constraints	Soft criticism, indirect language, risk avoidance	Is reporting negotiated or restrained?	Critical media theory

Results and Discussion

This research conducted Critical Discourse Analysis to observe patterns of media framing, ideological positioning, and linguistic strategies in news coverage. The findings reveal recurring themes of negotiated speech, symbolic resistance, and institutional constraint. The following Table presents the key discourse patterns that were identified in the study.

Table 2: The results of critical discourse analysis

Theme	Description	CDA Evidence / Examples	Interpretation Using Theory	Theoretical Link
Fragmentation of Truth	Media presents multiple, often conflicting, narratives rather than unified facts	- News headlines: “Authorities Claim Progress” vs “Opposition Denounces Inaction” - Modal verbs & speculative phrases: “it is reported that,” “sources claim” - Contrasting framing of protests across channels	Truth becomes socially constructed; reality is contested. Media institutions prioritize certain narratives, marginalizing others.	Postmodern theory (Lyotard, 1984); Foucault – discourse-power (1980)
Hyperreality	Media constructs symbolic realities that overshadow actual events	- Dramatic visuals and slow-motion footage - Repetitive emotional framing: “Nation in Turmoil” - Dramatized language: “storming of the parliament” for minor incidents	Audiences engage with mediated experiences rather than empirical events; media representation replaces reality.	Baudrillard – hyperreality (1994); Postmodern media theory
Discursive Censorship	Censorship operates subtly through omission, euphemism, and indirect language	- Omission of dissenting viewpoints - Neutral phrases: “the government continues its efforts” - Limited coverage of civic protests	Power regulates discourse; silence and omission enforce ideological control. Media defines boundaries of acceptable speech.	Foucault – discourse regulation (1980); Critical media theory
Negotiated Journalism	Journalists balance professional norms with institutional constraints	- Indirect phrasing: “Critics argue...” - Use of disclaimers: “allegedly,” “sources say” - Soft critiques of authorities in talk shows	Journalists internalize regulatory expectations; self-censorship produces hybrid discourse blending compliance with critique.	Foucault – disciplinary power (1980); Postmodern perspective
Audience Construction	Media shapes public perception and guides interpretation	- Emotionally charged language: “public fears escalate” - Framing protests as disorderly - Repetition of narratives across platforms	Audiences are positioned as passive interpreters; perception is regulated through symbolic representation and narrative framing.	Postmodern theory (Lyotard, 1984; Baudrillard, 1994); Foucault – governmentality

The table above shows how institutional power shapes media discourse in Pakistan through fragmentation, simulation, censorship, negotiated journalism, and audience construction.

Fragmentation of Truth (theme-1)

We find that Pakistani media constructs multiple, competing representations of political and social events rather than presenting unified, factual accounts. Media texts frequently employ selective framing, modal language, and contrasting interpretations of the same events. News coverage of political protests, governance issues, and institutional decisions often reflects divergent narratives across different channels. Reports emphasise particular perspectives while omitting contextual details, producing fragmented representations of reality.

Discourse analysis in this inquiry reveals recurring linguistic patterns, such as speculative phrases (“sources claim,” “it is reported that”) and contradictory event framing. Media organisations present conflicting interpretations without reconciling factual inconsistencies. These practices create an environment where truth appears provisional and contested.

This finding of our inquiry reflects postmodern scepticism toward universal truth. According to Jean-François Lyotard’s postmodern perspective, knowledge becomes fragmented and localised rather than unified. Besides, Michel Foucault’s concept of discourse-power relations explains how institutions determine which narratives gain legitimacy. Media organisations operate within institutional constraints that shape narrative priorities, producing selective truth claims.

The fragmentation of truth has significant implications for public understanding. Audiences encounter competing narratives that challenge the possibility of objective knowledge while reinforcing institutional authority, and argue that fragmented reporting transforms the epistemic environment by shifting journalism from factual representation toward strategic narrative construction.

Hyperreality (theme-2)

We identify hyperreality as a central feature of media representation in our present study. Media coverage frequently dramatises events through symbolic visuals, emotional language, and repetitive framing. Television broadcasts employ dramatic imagery and sensational language that amplify the perceived intensity of political developments. Digital platforms circulate short video clips and emotionally charged headlines that prioritise spectacle over contextual explanation.

The analysis of our present investigation shows that representation often exceeds empirical reality. Minor political confrontations are presented as national crises. Symbolic imagery constructs heightened emotional experiences. These practices produce simulated realities. Audiences interpret these as authentic.

This finding supports the theory of Jean Baudrillard, who argues that modern media creates simulations that replace direct experience. Hyperreal representation constructs social meaning by shaping perception, rather than reflecting reality. The media spectacle becomes a mechanism of symbolic power, influencing audience interpretations of political and social events.

In the Pakistani context, hyperreal representation reinforces institutional legitimacy by shaping collective perceptions. Audiences rely on mediated experiences to understand governance, political conflict, and national issues, and conclude that hyperreality functions as a subtle mechanism of ideological influence, in which representation becomes more influential than empirical observation.

Discursive Censorship (theme-3)

The findings of our study validate that censorship operates primarily through discursive control rather than overt suppression. We observe systematic omission of dissenting perspectives, selective reporting of sensitive issues, and use of neutral or euphemistic language. Media coverage frequently avoids direct criticism of institutional actors. Coverage instead frames controversial policies in restrained terms.

Content analysis in this study also reveals the absence of alternative viewpoints in coverage of regulatory decisions and governance issues. Journalistic language often employs indirect phrasing, passive constructions, and neutral terminology that minimise controversy. Silence and omission function as mechanisms of ideological control.

The presence of this pattern reflects Foucauldian insights into the regulation of discourse. Institutional power defines what can be said, who can speak, and which perspectives remain visible. Discursive censorship produces controlled communication environments where knowledge is filtered and normalised. Postmodern theory further suggests that absence and silence are meaningful components of discourse that shape perception.

The implications are substantial. Discursive censorship restricts the range of public debate and reinforces dominant narratives, and argues that media control in Pakistan operates through subtle regulatory practices that shape knowledge production without requiring explicit repression.

Negotiated Journalism (theme-4)

The analysis further reveals that journalists engage in negotiated reporting practices, balancing professional norms with institutional expectations, producing hybrid discourse that combines critique with compliance. News reports frequently use disclaimers, indirect attribution, and cautious language when addressing politically sensitive topics.

Journalists employ expressions such as “critics argue” or “according to sources” to distance themselves from direct claims. Talk show hosts strategically frame discussions to avoid confrontation with powerful actors while maintaining the appearance of balanced reporting. These practices indicate internalised regulatory expectations.

This phenomenon reflects Foucault’s concept of disciplinary power, where individuals internalise institutional norms and regulate their own behaviour. Journalists adapt reporting practices to navigate regulatory frameworks, organisational pressures, and professional constraints. Postmodern perspectives emphasise that truth becomes negotiated rather than fixed within such contexts.

Negotiated journalism has broader implications for media autonomy. It sustains institutional authority while preserving journalistic credibility and concludes that media control emerges through decentralised negotiation between institutional power and professional practice rather than through direct coercion.

Audience Construction (theme-5)

The findings also demonstrate that media discourse actively constructs audience perception. We observe consistent use of emotional language, symbolic representation, and narrative framing that guides interpretation. Media texts present structured interpretations of events. These encourage audiences to adopt particular perspectives.

Coverage of political conflict frequently emphasises disorder, crisis, or national interest, shaping emotional response and public understanding. Repetition of dominant narratives across multiple

platforms reinforces interpretive frameworks. Audience engagement reflects acceptance of these mediated representations.

Postmodern theory explains that perception is shaped through symbolic representation rather than empirical experience. Foucault's concept of governmentality further suggests that shaping public understanding constitutes a form of population regulation. Media discourse constructs not only information but also interpretive frameworks that influence civic consciousness.

The construction of audiences strengthens institutional power by regulating perception. Our findings argue that audiences become active participants in the reproduction of mediated reality. This completes the cycle of discursive control.

Integrated Interpretation (themes 1-5)

Across all the above themes, the findings demonstrate that institutional power operates through interconnected discursive processes. Fragmented truth, hyperreal simulation, discursive censorship, negotiated journalism, and audience construction function as mutually reinforcing mechanisms. Media institutions shape reality through selective representation, symbolic dramatisation, and narrative control in Pakistan. The integrated analysis hence supports the conceptual model we proposed in this research paper.

Conclusion

This critical qualitative research study establishes that Pakistani media operates within a postmodern communicative environment where truth is fragmented, representation is hyperreal, and institutional power shapes discourse. Study finds that media narratives rarely reflect objective reality. Instead, they are constructed through selective framing, discursive omission, and dramatised representation. Hyperreal simulations dominate audience perception, while negotiated journalism and self-censorship maintain institutional authority.

The findings confirm that media control in Pakistan is multidimensional, operating through subtle mechanisms of discourse, symbolic representation, and narrative construction rather than solely through overt legal or political repression. Regulatory institutions, editorial hierarchies, and journalistic self-regulation collectively shape the boundaries of acceptable discourse. Audiences engage with these mediated realities, often internalising constructed interpretations of political, social, and governance events.

This study positions Pakistani media within a Foucauldian framework of power/knowledge relations. Media institutions are not neutral observers; they actively produce and regulate knowledge, defining legitimacy, marginalising dissent, and framing public understanding. Postmodern theory explains the coexistence of multiple, conflicting narratives, while Baudrillard's concept of hyperreality highlights the replacement of direct experience with mediated spectacle. Together, these frameworks clarify how media narratives consolidate institutional power and influence civic consciousness in Pakistan.

We conclude that the transformation of journalism from factual representation toward narrative construction has profound implications for civic engagement, political literacy, and accountability. Fragmented and hyperreal reporting limits the public's ability to critically evaluate governance, contributing to a controlled, perception-driven political environment.

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