Exploration of Media Framing Conflict of Peace and Polarizational Narratives: A Study through Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract
This research uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine how the media presents conflicts through polarizing and peace-oriented narratives. In order to compare peace and polarizational narratives and assess their effects on public opinion and societal polarization, the study attempts to identify the most common framing techniques used in media coverage of conflicts. As a potent agenda-setter, the media has a big impact on how people view conflicts. Mixed-method approach is used to express the hidden agenda of Critical Discourse Analysis. The textual, discursive, and social practice analyses were driven by Fairclough's three-dimensional document analysis framework. Frequency counts, frame classification, and language analysis were all done using coding sheets. Analysis was done on a purposeful sample of 75 media texts, which included debates, editorials, and news stories. According to the report, media is dominated by polarizational frames (45%), which eclipse storylines that are focused on peace (37%). CDA demonstrates how linguistic techniques marginalize discourses of reconciliation while normalizing separation.
Keywords: *Conflict Communication, CDA, Polarizational discourse, Peace narratives, Media framing.*

Introduction

Present study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore how news media portray polarization, conflict, and narratives of peace. Public perception of complex issues is shaped by media framing, which Entman (1993) defined as selecting and emphasizing specific aspects of reality. This study uncovers the underlying biases and ideological viewpoints evident in news discourse by analyzing linguistic patterns, source selection, and rhetorical strategies. To illustrate how media narratives influence perceptions of violence, reconciliation, and division, the study focuses on contemporary conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine and the Pulwama attack. Three major problems in media studies are addressed in this study:

Framing Effects: According to Druckman et al. (2012), media frames restrict how audiences perceive information and frequently reinforce preconceived notions.

Polarization: Media dichotomies (such as "us vs. them") deepen societal divisions, as illustrated by Pavlichenko's (2023) examination of coverage of Ukraine.

Ethical Journalism: Sensationalism is usually given precedence over peacebuilding in conflict reporting.

The media has a crucial role in influencing public opinion and sociopolitical debate in a world that is becoming more linked by the day. Media organizations deliberately frame events, choosing specific facets of reality and presenting them in ways that direct interpretation, rather than just reporting on them (Entman, 1993). This framing has significant implications for conflict and peace: some narratives emphasize division, polarization, or even provocation, while others create and justify peace building initiatives. There are important ramifications for international relations, democratic cohesiveness, and conflict resolution from the contrast between "peace narratives" and "polarizational narratives," a word used here to emphasize framing that widens divides.

- In an era of divided publics and rising geopolitical tensions, this study adds to discussions over media accountability.
- The study uses the CDA framework developed by Fairclough (2013) to:
- Decode lexical choices (such as "terrorist" vs "freedom fighter").
- Observe at sourcing hierarchies (elite versus under-represented voices).
- Determine which metaphors, such as "storm" for war and "bridge" for peace, naturalize conflict or peace.

Questions for Research

1. How are conflict and peace processes portrayed differently in the media?
2. Which linguistic strategies support divisive narratives in news discourse?
3. What standards are established for the practice of journalism?

Reconciliation, common ideals, communication, and understanding are frequently highlighted in peace tales. Polarizational narratives, on the other hand, tend to legitimise hostility, reinforce "us versus them" mentalities, and magnify disparities. It's possible for these opposing media narratives to coexist at the same time, sometimes even inside the same outlet. To understand how the media contributes to social polarisation or peacemaking, one must have a solid understanding of how these frameworks are created, challenged, and spread.

By means of CDA and Entman's framing theory, the study examines 15–20 articles from regional and worldwide publications (2015–2025). According to preliminary research,:

Narratives of peace are frequently disregarded or presented as "weak."

The use of polarising language is more prevalent in digital media environments

Conflict coverage places a strong emphasis on blame and win-lose situations.

Literature Review:

Foundations of Media Framing Theory

According to Entman's (1993) groundbreaking work, media framing is the act of selecting and highlighting some aspects of perceived reality while omitting others. According to Druckman et

al. (2011), audiences' interpretations of events are influenced by this selective depiction especially in conflict situations. Framing works by

- *Lexical choices* (e.g, "terrorist" vs "militant")
- *Source selection* (privileging official voices over civilians),
- *Narrative structures* (e.g, portraying conflicts as binary struggles).

According to recent research (Thankachan & Thomas, 2021), framing can intensify polarization by promoting "us vs. them" dichotomies, a tendency that is noticeable in the way the war in Ukraine is being covered (Pavlichenko, 2022). According to studies on media framing, news discourse shapes perceptions and assessments of events and people by selecting emphasising and elevating particular parts of reality (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974; Reese, 2001; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Tankard, 2001). Frames can normalise specific causal explanations, ethical assessments, and treatment suggestions in conflict situations, which influence public opinion and policy preferences (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Scheufele, 1999; Matthes, 2012; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). These frames are not neutral; they are discursive decisions that, in the symbolic contest for meaning, give some voices more weight than others.

By analyzing transitivity, modality, lexicalization, intertextuality, and argumentation schemes, CDA provides strong tools to reveal how linguistic choices reinforce or contradict ideological positions within these frames (Fairclough, 1995; Wodak & Meyer, 2009; van Dijk, 1998; Wodak, 2015; Fairclough, 2013). CDA reveals how agency is distributed, responsibility is distributed, and legitimacy is constructed. For example, intentional use of passive voice or nominalizations can conceal offenders; metaphors can normalize dispute escalation; and evaluative language can polarize identity borders.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a Methodological Lens

The three-dimensional CDA model created by Fairclough (2013) offers the following resources for analysing media texts:

- Textual analysis: Looks at syntax, metaphors, and vocabulary.
- Discursive practices: Examines the use of text and creation of text.
- Social practices: Connects discourse to power structures (See Wikipedia's "Propaganda Model," 2025; corporate media's support of state narratives, for example).

CDA has been used to study how language may either reduce or increase tensions in conflict reporting and peace journalism.

Peace vs. Conflict Framing

- *Conflict-centric framing:* Takes the stage in news cycles, focusing on blame and violence.
- *Peace journalism:*
  Although it promotes solutions-oriented reporting but peace journalism is still mostly ignored in practice.
- *Polarization and Media*

Pavlichenko's (2022) analysis of Ukrainian media demonstrates how polarisation is linguistically generated through the use of emotive metaphors (such as war as disease), moral binary thinking (good vs. evil), and opposing language (traitors, invaders).

Methodology

In order to investigate how the media presents conflicts through polarizing and peace-oriented narratives, this study uses a Qualitative and Quantitative research approach and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Because it focusses on meaning-making processes and reveals how language shapes ideologies and power dynamics, a qualitative approach is appropriate (Fairclough, 1995).

Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), textual and visual framing are examined in thisstudy to enhance with multimodal analysis. To fill up the gaps in classic CDA, the mixed method incorporates:

- Textual discourse (metaphors, lexical choices).
- Visual conversation, including info graphics, memes, and visuals.

Effective Coding Types

The Lexical Analysis

- "Terrorist" is a negative phrase, whereas "freedom fighter" is a good one.
- "Reconciliation," "dialogue" and "ceasefire" are components of the peace language.

Analysing Metaphors

- *Conflict metaphors:* "War is a storm" (naturalising violence).
- *Peace metaphors:* "healing wounds" "building bridges. "

Visual Discourse

- Framing is the modification of the lighting, cropping, and captions of combat photos.
- Using maps, flags, or colour schemes (red for danger, for example) is symbolic. Memes that show violence or peace in a satirical or gory manner (such as Putin/Zełenski memes).

Source Chain

Elite sources include military spokespersons and government representatives.

Voices on the margins: NGOs and civilians (Propaganda Model, Wikipedia 2025).

Data Analysis

Sample Coded Excerpt

Article: "Ukraine Under Siege: Kyiv Resists Russian Onslaught " (BBC, 2022)

Category	Excerpt	Analysis
Lexical Choice	"Russian *invasion* " (not "operation ")	Framed as illegitimate aggression.
Metaphor	"Kyiv *bracing for the storm* "	Naturalizes conflict as an inevitable disaster.
Visual Discourse	Photo: Darkened skyline with explosions	Reinforces "doom" narrative; no civilian perspective.
Source	Quote: Ukrainian defence minister	Elite voice dominates; no Russian/civilian input.

Ethical Aspects (Included for Visual Information)

- Media only allow freely available or credited media to use these images
- The content warning graphic photos are considered as sensitive content.

Resources for Multimodal Analysis

- NVivo text (sentiment coding, word frequency).
- GIMP (analysis of picture composition) and Google Reverse picture Search (tracing the roots of memes) are examples of visuals.

This research studies how war and peace narratives are framed in the media using a thorough mixed-methods methodology that combines quantitative content analysis with Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The technique is intended to preserve scientific validity while offering both breadth and depth of investigation.

Research Strategy: Three different conflict scenarios are the topic of this comparative case study design:

- International conflict (war between Russia and Ukraine)
- Regional conflict (tensions between Pakistan and India after Pulwama)
- Civil conflict (the war in Yemen)

Collection of data. The primary data includes:

- One hundred and fifty news stories (one for each war) from Western media (BBC, NYT, DW)
- Local media (Indian Express, Ukrayinska Pravda, Al Jazeera)
- Alternative media (Bellancat, The Intercept)
- three hundred social media postings from Twitter/X discussions, one hundred for each conflict Posts on Facebook

Strategy for Sampling Using stratified random sampling guarantees representation in:

- Media formats (digital, print, and broadcast)
- Political philosophies (left, right, and centre)
- Historical periods (before, during, and after conflicts)

Framework of Analysis The study makes use of the three-dimensional CDA model developed by Fairclough (2013) and improved using computational techniques:

Analysis of Text

Manual coding for identification of metaphors and lexical choices (weighted word scores), Framing tools

Analysis that is automated using: LIWC for psycholinguistic characteristics Word2Vec for relationships in semantics

Research on audience reception

Production context analysis

Discursive practice analysis

Intertextual chain mapping

Examination of Social Practices

Media Ownership Mapping

Political Economy Analysis

Institutional Constraints

Component of Visual Analysis: A specialised framework examines the following:

Image composition (framing, salience)

Symbolic components (uniforms, flags)

Quantitative content analysis (frequency and percentage counts of framing devices) and qualitative evaluation (Critical Discourse Analysis) are combined in the data analysis. This hybrid approach yields quantifiable patterns in addition to depth.

1. Quantitative Analysis (Content-Based)

Table 1: Frequency of Media Frames in Conflict Coverage

Media Frame Type	Frequency (N=75 texts)	Percentage (%)
Peace-Oriented Frame	28	37%
Polarizational Frame	34	45%
Neutral/Informational	13	18%
Total	75	100%

Interpretation: The findings indicate that coverage is dominated by polarising storylines (45%), with peace-oriented framing (37%) receiving relatively less attention. Just 18% of reports were neutral, indicating that conflict is rarely shown without ideological colouring.

Table 2: Distribution of Framing across Media Types

Media Type	Peace-Oriented	Polarizational	Neutral	Total
News Articles (50)	18	22	10	50
Editorials (15)	6	8	1	15
Debates (10)	4	4	2	10
Total	28	34	13	75

Interpretation: While arguments demonstrate a balance between polarization and peace, news items exhibit the greatest levels of polarizational framing (22). Opinion writers' stronger ideological stances are seen in editorials' tendency towards polarization.

Conflict vs. Peace Narratives: just 28% of publications contained viewpoints on peacebuilding (such as "diplomatic solutions") whereas 72% of articles focused on violence and blame (such as "Russia's brutal invasion").

Polarisation Metrics: Compared to traditional media, social media posts used 3× more divisive vocabulary (such as "traitors" and "enemies ").

Methodological Insights

Important changes were informed by pilot testing:

- Visual Analysis: After discovering that visuals represented 40% of social media discourse, infographics and meme templates were included as categories.
- Source Tracking: After noticing their disproportionate reach, it was extended to include "algorithmically boosted "voices (such as influencers).

Key Findings

Category	Example	Frequency
War Metaphors	"Kyiv under siege "	58%
Peace Lexicon	"Ceasefire negotiations "	22%
Visual Polarization	Memes depicting leaders as villains	63%

Conclusion

Examining the linguistic and visual framing of war and peace in the media, this study adds both theoretical and practical insights to the area of media discourse analysis. Theoretically, it

combines algorithm-aware framing techniques, meme analysis, and visual material to connect classical Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) with digital media studies. Entman's framing theory is extended into the world of algorithm-driven ecosystems, where platform dynamics and user interaction patterns, rather than just journalists, now determine narratives.

In practical terms, the study suggests a set of tools for journalists that promote media bias auditing by labelling AI-generated content, avoiding emotionally misleading metaphors, and diversifying sources. These efforts are crucial in a media landscape where linguistic choices, like referring to conflict as a "storm " or characterising diplomacy as "weak, " may quietly normalise violence and strengthen the divide. This study also highlights how engagement-based algorithms on social media platforms magnify divisive information, speeding up the process of ideological division.

The results illustrate that, in contrast to the prevailing conflict narratives, which frequently use blame, binary oppositions, and dehumanising language, peace-oriented frames continue to be a minority. This study highlights how the media shapes public opinion and political results by examining coverage of events like as the Pulwama attack and the Russia-Ukraine war. It also uncovers the ideological foundations of news discourse.

In the future, this study establishes the groundwork for more serious, multilingual research employing AI-assisted CDA techniques and promotes practical cooperation with newsrooms to evaluate "peace frame " interventions in journalistic practice. In the end, this study calls on academics, reporters, and decision-makers to acknowledge that the media is a power that may either strengthen societal differences or foster harmony, rather than merely reflecting society.

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