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Article Title

Narrative Building by Baloch Separatist on X: A Thematic Analysis

Abstract

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Authors:

Mahwish Inam: (Corresponding Author)
Mphil Scholar, Department of Arts and Media, Foundation University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.
(Email: mahwishinam08@gmail.com)

Muhammad Ashfaq: Senior Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies, Bahria University, Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan.

Sajjad Ali: Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, University of Malakand, KP, Pakistan.

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Title

Narrative Building by Baloch Separatists on X: A Thematic Analysis

Authors:

Mahwish Inam:

(*Corresponding Author*)

Mphil Scholar, Department of Arts and Media, Foundation University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan.
mahwishinam08@gmail.com

Muhammad Ashfaq:

Senior Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies, Bahria University, Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan.

Sajjad Ali: Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, University of Malakand, KP, Pakistan.

Keywords:

Narrative Building, X, Bloch Separatists, Thematic Analysis, Framing Theory

Abstract

This research investigates the techniques applied to X by Baloch social media activists associated with separatist ideology. In this era of technology, 5th generation warfare is believed to create more ripples. This study analyses how particular issues are highlighted using tools of 5th-generation warfare for building desired narratives. Qualitative content analysis is adopted for this research. Content posted by X accounts of 10 activists affiliated with Baloch separatist ideology is selected for analysis. Contemporary data from 3 months is collected through an online tool (www.allmytweets.net). Codes/Themes are extracted from the data to understand the queries developed. This research discusses the issues that Baloch separatists select to present in media, the sentiments they attach to emotionalize them with intentions to gain audiences' attention and the media frames used by the activists to build a desired narrative. The research argues that the issues; are moulded around the violation of human rights and exploited to build anti Pakistan narrative. World powers and international organizations are urged to take action and help them for freedom from the forceful occupation.

Contents:

Introduction

Narrative building is one of the most natural ways for people to exchange information because it evokes more meaning and emotion than bare facts. "Telling stories is as basic to human beings as eating (Grimaldi & Fokkinga, 2013). Language is a system of representation, and as a system, it is governed by certain rules or conventions to produce the desired meaning. Reality is not external to language but is in part *shaped* by the language that we use (Darroch, 2006).

Robert Shiller (2019) defined narratives as elaborating stories with sentiments attached with which the audience can associate and resonate. These stories influence the minds and impact thought patterns (Shiller, 2019).

Alex and Adrianne defined social media in their research as a platform that allows people to create and

share information. Given the diversity of topics on X, analyses could be helpful for a variety of reasons. In the past, analysis of tweets has been used to map information dissemination, measure human emotions, predict personalities, summarize public opinion, monitor real-time earthquake detection, and, more recently, learn more about human nutrition and food science (Feldmeyer & Johnson, 2022).

Investigative studies regarding the impact of social media on news agendas suggest that the growing number of online news sources have an influence on intermedia agenda-setting (Dawson, 2020). A qualitative study can only help understand why leaders or candidates should show their massive presence on X if they desire to influence the media and set a narrative.

Philosophers have been forced to reconsider some of the basic concepts used to understand the world and ourselves in light of digital technology. In particular, there has been a lot of discussion on the idea of "identity" and how it has changed in the digital age.

The impact of digital technology on social and personal identities has been the subject of numerous research; yet, the notion of "collective identity" has been conspicuously absent from these investigations. In order to talk about the reconfiguration of collective identity in social media contexts, the paper discussed the context of social movements. The research accomplished this by presenting a narrative perspective on communal identity. X's features encourage novel approaches to creating collective identities and suggest a changing dynamic between the individual and collective (Longo, 2023)

Beatriz and Rebeca in their research discussed that X has developed into a valuable resource for its members to exchange ideas and knowledge. In addition, this channel offers more sensitive and private information than other middlemen and a voice to celebrities whose tweets turn into news. Furthermore, it is essential for trending, content virality, and the growth of online discourse (García & Suárez-Álvarez, 2022).

It's inevitable to ignore the significance of social media as a tool of communication in present times. The fact is that any campaign political, social or by any pressure group such as nationalists, makes use of social media as a tool to run their campaign and build narratives (Abdul & Iqbal, 2011).

It is important to understand how the narratives go viral and how they cause behavioural change. The algorithms of the social media platform and the networking between the users play a vital part (Dawson, 2020). The fact is that at a micro level, the narratives are not defined or explained by anyone to a society or a group. Cultural narratives are associated with societies, individualities and institutions. The collective behaviours of individuals and their social and historical happenings are framed according to their cultural narratives (Abbott, 2008)

#MeToo first appeared as a report on an event and then it emerged as a narrative which spread globally through the new media. Now whenever there is an incident that matches #MeToo, mentioned with the popular hashtag. This has emerged as a collective behaviour on social media (Dawson, 2020).

Neil Sadler (2018) argues that posting on X about political issues is attributed to storytelling. On X the individuals tell stories to the audience which is not clearly defined. It is a collective action by a large number of accounts which might not be essentially collaborative. The accounts considered influencers with large numbers of followers may support building a narrative related to any event but groups which may be called narrative constellations may use repeated hashtags or keywords in their posts or favour and retweet each other's tweets to build a cloud of a similar point of view associated to any incident.

5th Generation Warfare

The landscape of challenges and conflicts is changing dynamics with time as the world has seen the destruction of conventional war. The security of a State is just not limited to having a strong military and a strong foreign policy but now the States have to ensure security on moral, economic, social, environmental and cultural fronts. It is essential to understand the challenges and then possible solutions to those threats to security (Haider et al., 2020).

Hybrid warfare is the combination of conventional and unconventional tactics to fight for domination and 5th generation is the unconventional war tactics where media plays a dominant and vital part. Propagating narratives through electronic, print and social media which oppose and fight battles of philosophies is also termed "fifth-generation warfare" (Kakar, 2019). State and non-state actors, both practice this style of modern war to dominate and plan strategies that can effectively project their storyline generating a lasting impact on the audience's mind (Qureshi, 2019).

Baloch insurgents, in pursuit of their self-rule, make use of all the tools and tactics from guerrilla war to 5th generation war. They have created many pro-independence websites under the banner of free Balochistan which were blocked and taken down by PTA (Pakistan Telecommunication Authority). The websites were prohibited in Pakistan and the domestic audience was unable to access their content. These Baloch dissidents then shifted their energies towards

social networking sites to propagate their political ideology, which included X, YouTube and Facebook. Their Facebook pages attracted the attention of many due to which they succeeded in their digital campaigns (Abdul & Iqbal, 2011). Through these Facebook pages, they also managed to get sympathy from foreign countries to a small extent. It is believed by Abdul Rauf (2011) that this online activity helped them to start mobilizing their ideology and it is termed as a new wave of online social mobilization.

Pakistan is a unique country which is experiencing multi-directional and multi-dimensional challenges. The situation gets complicated when State and non-state actors get involved (Haider et al., 2020)

Role of X

X has gained popularity over the past few years among other social networking sites (SNS). It is considered an essential platform for reporting any news or happening. Since the Arab uprising (2010 / 2011) and Iranian protest (20019), putting information, reporting events and expressing views related to a happening within seconds has become a tradition (Sadler, 2018)

Digital media is a kind of media that has no limits and it cannot even be limited. Digital media is not only used for the collection of information but it supports civic participation, simplifies the complexities of creating communities and facilitates people to express their thoughts (Forum, World Economic Forum, 2020). Empowering people and communities and providing opportunities for strong social interaction is another benefit of this popular media.

Balochistan

Balochistan has experienced insurgency five times since its independence from Pakistan. Abdul Rauf (2011) used the term "Online Social Mobilization" for the utilization of social media by Baloch

Social media has become an important tool in the communication framework of modern political history. It is being used for campaign purposes by political parties, pressure groups, sub-nationalists etc. The same situation is being witnessed in the case of Balochistan which has undergone insurgency five times since the independence of Pakistan. Resultantly, a new wave of mobilisation has been started which can be termed as 'online social mobilisation'. Although, at the moment, a scanty number of individuals are part of online social mobilisation the optimum utilization of social media tools has the potential to create an upset in the political discourse of Pakistan. Against this backdrop, this paper tries to unearth the pertinent motivations behind the Baloch mobilisation and the impact of social media to accelerate the mobilisation process. Also, the study provides some policy measures in order to provide Baloch youth with a level playing field.

Literature Review

Research on narrative building in propaganda networks was conducted by a team of researchers in 2022. They defined that global concern is growing over the abuse of social media platforms to sway public opinion through misinformation efforts. Strategic internet manipulation has significantly increased, especially in nations like India where officials interact with the public through unfiltered, carefully controlled X feeds. This dissertation examines the propagandistic messages disseminated on Indian X during two divisive political events. More than 26k politicians and 6,000 influencers have sent us over 80 million tweets in Hindi and English. The researchers identified key propaganda narratives for all events by applying a mixed-methods methodology (Dash, Arya, Kaur, & Pal, 2022). Furthermore, researchers isolated prominent actors who contribute significantly to the spread of the discovered narratives using a network causal inference-based method. Finally, they described the role that these opinion leaders have in starting and growing propaganda efforts on X and how they disseminate information.

A research conducted by Dawson (2020), studied the mobilization of cultural movements using social media. He emphasized on the role of hashtags in the narrative building. The hashtag #MeToo on X was selected as a case study to observe the effects of society. Dawson described that movements can be generated in society when individuals share their own stories on social media, especially X. The research gives a comprehensive detail of how X works with regard to narrative building (Dawson, 2020).

Narrative has a range of meanings and it is not a singular term. Yang (2016) took #BlackLivesMatters as a case study to investigate the activism generated by hashtags. He explained that narrative is designed, and communicated via media skillfully and can be molded and changed accordingly. He described that initially the term Black Lives Matter was mentioned in July 2013 on Facebook by Alicia Garza after observing a new report on TV. Then in 2016 personal X accounts used the hashtag #BlackLivesMatters. Documenting his observations Yang said that the posts with the mentioned hashtag had bundles of likes and re-tweets which means that it was popular. The reactions to tweets were by people with diversified backgrounds. All the accounts who participated in the hashtag had no other relation but political, social or moral connection and empathy with the ethnic group. Doing the textual analysis, it was found that other hashtags were also used along with #BlackLivesMatters which were #Trump,

#OscaSoWhite #Blackish, #BlackX, #WhichHillary, #FeeltheBern, #abff, #ChicagoPD, #AlwaysHaveAlwaysWill and #No- Tasuperpredator. the #BlackLivesMatters became a universal phenomenon and any incident that happened in Black community is mentioned along with this hashtag. The hashtag has now become a campaign for raising voices for the rights of Blacks (Yang, 2016).

Other than the text in the #BlackLivesMatters of 140 characters, there were images, videos, slogans, music, jokes and cartoons attached and mentioned. links of articles, news reports and quoting of tweets from X accounts of news channels were commonly found. It was interesting to find out that an activity which started by just sharing personal stories by accounts turned into a campaign of protest narrative (Yang, 2016).

A qualitative analysis was done by Torok on accounts managed by groups with extremist ideology on social media. The themes used frequently by these groups to develop their narratives by using online resources were documented. the common themes were the message of unity in Islam, re-establishing Islam's glory, and putting the blame on the West. it was suggested by Torok that the unity of the Muslim world and communities around the globe is the key to de-radicalising and normalising extremist behaviours and thoughts (Torok, 2013).

Hybrid Warfare

Studying research on hybrid warfare and 5th-generation warfare reveals several facts. Dr Haseeb Waraich, Muhammad Waqas Haider and Tahir Mahmood Azad (2020) explained that the nuclearisation of the region has changed the dynamics of war. They enlisted a few indicators of hybrid warfare which they observed while studying the impacts (Haider et al., 2020). They are as under:-

a. Discontinuation of international cricket in Pakistan after the Sri Lankan cricket team was attacked in Lahore.
b. The nation's morale was deeply affected by the militant attacks on military installations.
c. Uri, Mumbai and Pathankot attacks which stained Indo-Pak relations seriously.
d. RAW's involvement was exposed in Karachi and Balochistan which damaged the security situation and caused economic and political destabilization.
e. Attack on Army Public School in 2014.
f. Several cyber-attacks have gained momentum in the recent past especially hacking websites of the government of Pakistan.

Research suggested that efforts were made to discredit and defame security forces and security agencies. A well-organized scheme was planned to malign the Pakistan army and the security agencies (Khattak, 2019). Researchers observed the scenarios and inferred that the Pakistan army and ISI were accused of having connections with the Haqqani network which was intended to disregard the sacrifices and efforts put in for the security of the country. Pakistan was blamed for the Mumbai attacks, Pathankot and Pulwama incidents by India to sabotage Pakistan's position at the international level. Similarly, a few anti-State elements and journalists accused the ISI of torture and giving death threats (Hussain, 2010)

Use of X

A study conducted in 2019 on Austrian election campaigns on X during 2017 discussed the significance of this social media platform in agenda-setting or narrative building. The research quoted that in the second phase of the election campaign, social media was also extensively used by the political parties who were not willing to use it in the first half. They found it more effective for the dissemination of their messages to the masses. To understand how the X communication builds up a narrative or agenda in masses in case of election campaign. The theoretical approach followed was the theory of Agenda Setting. The investigations revealed that X has the power to set the public or political agenda which, ultimately, becomes the media agenda (Seethaler & Melischek, 2019). X has the capability to strengthen the agenda-building competency of political parties.

Balochistan

Political messages are now massively communicated to target audiences through SNS and political dialogues are also generated in masses using the same mediums. Going through the literature it was found that in 1996 email was extensively used for political communication and with the advancement of technology it facilitated reaching the masses without much effort (Bimber, 1998). A study conducted in the US in 2007 revealed that 40% of SNS users in the US gather political information (Zhang, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2009). Another study which investigated the empirical data to find the relationship between SNS and politics showed that SNS are effective platforms for political campaigning (Gueorguieva, 2007).

Abdul Rauf (2011) defined two types of political groups which use social media for political narrative building. One is a disciplined group and an undisciplined group. Disciplined groups execute collective activities which may be assigned or defined to them while undisciplined groups individually do the actions (Abdul Rauf, 2011). For a successful political campaign coordinated and shared awareness is the key

(Shirky, 2011). A capability of members to understand any occurrence or current situation is shared awareness. The new media not only increases access to information and the required public sphere but also spreads information quickly.

Theoretical Framework

Framing is the process of communication in which certain facts are selected, others are manipulated and then presented in such a manner for the audience that drives them to think and see an event in a certain manner. Framing theory was first explained by Erving Goffman in 1974. Social scientists consider framing as a second level of agenda setting where the audience is not only made to think about a specific event but their focus is narrowed down upon how to think about that particular event/issue. Goffman stated that media managers or individuals have the knack of using the frames in their content for which they might or might not be conscious (Framing Theory, 2020)

Through applying the framing theory one can understand how any news or content is presented in the media to promote specific interpretations of events. Entman in 1993 defined that in media research there are four key purposes of frame analysis which are identifying the problems, spotting a sequence, making a value judgment and suggesting remedies (Marais, 2012).

Framing theory has emanated in the field of sociology. Since 1960, framing theory has evolved greatly (A Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015). A persuasive message in the form of text that is structured to project a specific narrative among the audience. These are purposeful messages which have an agenda to persuade minds. In communication and media studies framing is presenting content established on some narrative in a systematic manner to outline desired reality for the target audience. Tuchman (1978) referring to media frames compared them with windows which limit the perception and create different realities of the same story. The focus of reality is squeezed into a particular aspect which is made prominent to let the audience believe that it's the whole story (Mourão, 2015).

Methodology

Content analysis is a flexible research method, applied extensively in research studies. Three different approaches of content analysis are applied to interpret the findings gathered from the collected data, there are: summative, directed and conventional. The key modifications between these approaches are reliability, origins of codes, and coding patterns. In summative content analysis, the data is counted and compared to evaluate the context. In the direct approach codes are

derived from the previous appropriate research findings or a theory and the data is interpreted. Whereas in the conventional approach, the classification of codes is developed from the text of collected data (Hsieh H-F, 2005). The main purpose of content analysis is to develop a model and conceptually explain a phenomenon. Content analysis is used in both qualitative and quantitative research studies as a technique for analysis of the collected data (White, 2006). Quantitative content analysis focuses on frequency measuring where coding sheet of concepts, words and themes are developed whereas in qualitative content analysis, the text of data collected is interpreted and inferred (Luo, 2020).

Qualitative research of content is associated with apprehending people's sentiments and opinions (Poppulo, 2019). The process of abstraction in qualitative content analysis develops the concept. Depending on the perception and vision of the researcher the concepts are easy or difficult to explain. Both inductive and deductive approaches can be applied to qualitative content analysis (Elo, 2014).

Qualitative analysis is interpretive and analytic in nature which allows us to understand any phenomena holistically. The type of data obtained and the research queries define the methodology of the research (Marais, 2012).

Dynamics of X

X is a social media platform where politicians, opinion makers, journalists, researchers etc. can communicate in 140-word limit posts known as tweets and can build narratives, project their opinions or propagate their beliefs. X permits individuals/organizations to reach the masses, express, follow and develop networking, feedback, direct communication, update on contemporary issues and much more (ESRC, 2020).

Qualitative Frame Analysis

Erving Goffman's book (1974) titled "Frame Analysis: An Essay on the organization of experience" is being largely considered by researchers of media sciences. Media researchers are focusing a lot on framing theory and its popularity is increasing. The term "schemata of interpretation" is used by Goffman for frames that help people to detect, comprehend, recognize and label events and happenings. Framing analysis turned into a significant methodology for research after Robert Entman published his paper in 1993. The concept of framing analysis was introduced by Goffman and was applied by Entman in the media. Many researchers since then have applied this theory to investigate how media managers or journalists mould information. For four

decades researchers of media have tried to explain how media construct the news, broadcast it, propagate certain aspects give desired angles to the event and create reality for the audience (Marais, 2012).

Quantitative Frame Analysis

Wood (2004) argued that communication cannot be only measured quantitatively because it does not provide considerable or valuable insight into the content. He explained that if we desire to understand the text in a meaningful manner it is important to analyze it qualitatively as it allows substantial understanding of the construction of an item, feedback of the audience, the level of persuasion and how it made sense to the audience. It involves decoding the message and gaining in-depth knowledge of the dimensions of a message being communicated. Qualitative research primarily focuses on interpreting the meaning of any text (Marais, 2012).

Van Gorp (2007) advocated applying mixed methods from framing analysis. For larger data, he preferred to apply quantitative methods whereas for small data sets, he suggested applying qualitative techniques to interpret the effects of subtle framing (Gorp, 2007).

Data Collection

In this research, data was meaningfully interpreted and decoded by applying a qualitative approach to conventional content analysis. Frame analysis allowed us to analyze the text and gain in-depth knowledge about the communicated messages. It was an inductive approach to gain insight into media frames, emotions and issues which are concentrated upon by the Baloch activists. Datasets (tweets) of 10 social media activists affiliated with the Baloch separatist movement were collected by using an online tool (www.allmytweets.net). Contemporary data from 3 months was collected for investigation. Retweets, personal tweets and tweets on special days which were discarded from the data. Similarly, the tweets which were in Balochi language were excluded from the data because of the language barrier. Google translator was used but the tweets did not get translated into a scene depicting their true meaning. Two Baloch contacts were approached to verify the Google translated dataset but it was not considered reliable by the sources.

Sampling

All the X accounts associated with Baloch separatist ideology were part of the population. Applying the random sampling technique, X accounts of Baloch activists with more than five thousand followers were selected. It was also kept in mind that the selected accounts should be active and have reactions (retweets/likes/comments) on their tweets. Accounts that had real identities and were connected to some profession, especially with media were preferred. A few accounts which were selected had some position with the parties who work on separatists' ideology.

Data Analysis and Thematic Analysis

The dataset consisting of tweets from Baloch separatists' social media activists was analyzed to log and record the issues which were discussed during three months. This collection allowed us to understand the matters they tweeted about, what sentiments they attached and how they framed to present the information while posting on X. The tweets posted were coded after reading carefully and then the themes were generated after merging the open cods.

A linguistic analysis was conducted to identify the emotions like joy, threat, authority, sadness, confidence, analytical, fear, and tentative tones that appeared in the text of the acquired data. Through thematic content analysis, we can analyze the emotions, expressions, feelings and attitudes related to any topic, issue or product (Balshetwar et al., 2019).

This research also inquired about the emotions which the activists exhibit in their tweets. The emotions expressed by the Baloch separatists in their tweets will be listed to define a set of expressions they use for narrative building convey their concerns and gain public attention.

The thematic frame analysis of the data was conducted after investigating around 1512 tweets. Each tweet was read carefully and categorized into issues presented in it, emotions projected through the language used and media frames applied. Two steps were followed to generate the themes under each research question. The tweets posted were coded after reading carefully and then the themes were generated after merging the open cods. To bring in validity and avoid bias assistance of two researchers were sought who had experience in similar types of thematic coding.

Findings and Discussion

It is important to understand the issues which are talked about by the separatists to support their ideology. Data investigation revealed that there are around twelve topics and matters which are majorly discussed by the Baloch separatists on X. These include enforced disappearance and injustice, freedom from oppression, security and state, ethnical discrimination, Pak/Iran/China, Pak politics/government, socio-economic and civic issues, seeking international support, cultural identity and media ambiguity. All these issues are framed in a manner which helps them to build the narrative suiting their doctrine.

The major theme that is projected at an extensive level is the violation of human rights in Balochistan. They translated most of their issues under this banner and desired international communities to take notice and assist them in getting freedom not only from Pakistan but from Iran as well. Examining the data helped to understand that Baloch separatist tries to make the audience believe that they are oppressed incalculably which has destroyed their identity and that they are forced to be recognized as Pakistani. They projected that this identity was not acceptable to them. They desire a separate homeland. Let's discuss the issues highlighted by Baloch separatists on X in detail.

Figure 1
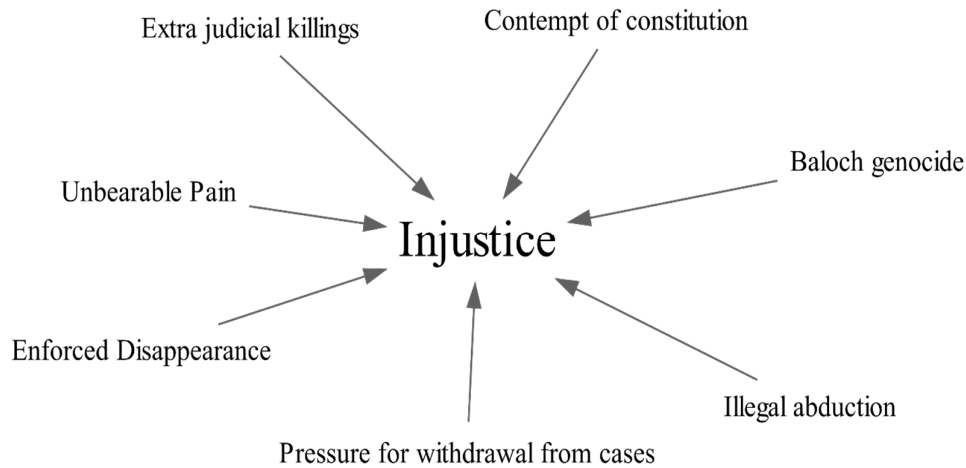
The most discussed issue observed was the unjust and enforced disappearances of Baloch. They blamed the Pakistan army is involved in disappearing and illegally abducting the Baloch who either were tortured or killed in fake encounters. Baloch activists used the term "genocide" to project that the Pakistan army was involved in the Baloch massacre. Enforced disappearance is linked with injustice and it is propagated that since they have been part of Pakistan, they are facing brutalities by the state. The protests which are conducted in Pakistan and abroad are projected through hashtags and pictures which depict pain and grief are posted. Mothers, daughters and sisters who join the protests are highlighted and talked about. It is projected that the Baloch women are suffering as their sons, husbands and brothers are missing. They expressed no clue on why Balochs are abducted and where they are kept. But again in many tweets, it was mentioned that armed forces abducted Baloch who were freedom fighters and standing for their rights. Talking about the injustice and blaming the Pakistani government, Baloch social media activists accuse the government of Pakistan of harassing them in case of enforced disappearance and using pressure tactics on the affected Baloch families to withdraw from the cases.

Figure 2

Freedom and oppression are the next most talked about issue on X by Baloch social media activists. They consider Pakistan, Iran and China as the occupiers who have forcibly invaded their land and exploited their natural resources. They project their freedom struggle as unarmed and peaceful and for getting rights in the political spectrum. They argue that they are fighting for their survival and against the oppression. Baloch considered 27 March 1948 as a Black Day when Pakistan forcibly occupied Balochistan after Muhammad Ali Jinnah begged Khan of Kalat. They strongly reject their accession with Pakistan and call it a forceful occupation.

The same is the case with Iran, Baloch consider Iran as a brutal state which is oppressing Baloch and restricting their freedom of economic growth. Baloch activists believed that China and Pakistan have occupied Gwadar and the economic development in the city is not beneficial for the locals as they are constrained to enter the area and find placements. Analyzing the data revealed that according to the Baloch activists they consider Punjab the occupier and complain their domination in every area, especially the army and politics.
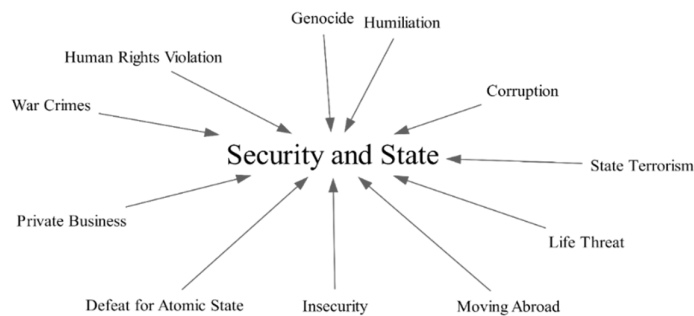
Figure 3

Religious Extremesim — Fake Economic Deals — Genocide — Supporting Taliban — Pak/Iran/China — Threats — Nuclear Threat by Iran — Occupational forces — lust of power

Pakistan and Iran were termed as occupiers who were involved in the Baloch genocide and religious extremism. According to the Baloch social media activists, Pakistan and Iran nurture extremism while misusing religion and achieving their ulterior motives. They terrorize the world with this tactic and oppress. Baloch separatists claimed that Pakistan is involved in supporting the Afghan Taliban and supporting them in conducting activities of terrorism. They showed sympathy for Afghanistan and believed that Afghanistan was experiencing problems because of interference by Pakistan and Iran. China was considered by them as invaders who intended to take control of

Balochistan's natural resources in the name of fake development. China was discussed as having a lust for power and all this economic game is to satisfy that lust and dominate the region. The economic deals with China were considered fake and an eyewash for the locals in which the natives were not getting the due share. Iran was mentioned as a terrorist State which is a threat, especially for Middle Eastern countries. Iran's nuclear program was considered destructive for the Middle East especially and in general a threat to the entire world. Baloch separatists propagated that Iranian nuclear is not for the safety of their country but to warn Middle Eastern countries and keep them under pressure

.

Figure 4

Genocide Humiliation — Human Rights Violation — Corruption — War Crimes — Security and State — State Terrorism — Private Business — Life Threat — Defeat for Atomic State — Insecurity — Moving Abroad

For Baloch, Balochistan is insecure because of the presence of the Pakistan army which is an occupational force. They believe that educated Baloch youth are specially targeted and abducted which is why Baloch are leaving their land and taking exile. They argue that even abroad their lives are under threat as Karima Baloch was murdered in Canada. Using X Baloch separatists build the narrative that the State is involved in terrorism and corruption. They blame the security forces are doing their private businesses in Balochistan covertly, looting Baloch belongings and humiliating them. Fake encounters, illegal abductions, enforced disappearances and torture are the threats through which every Baloch has to go. Mentioning examples of several incidents they justify that the security forces are involved in massacre and war crimes, making their land insecure. Talking about the insecurity, Baloch social media activists projected that security forces tested deadly weapons in Balochistan which damaged the Baloch population. Discussing their success in the struggle for freedom, Baloch activists project that the Baloch freedom fighters attacked the occupational security forces and they have defeated the atomic State.

Figure 5

The government of Pakistan was assumed to display discriminatory behaviours with Baloch. According to the government of Pakistan is responsible for the ill-treatment of the Baloch nation and they are not serious about resolving their issues which is adding to their misery and they are suffering. Baloch activists said that the government of Pakistan is accountable for missing persons. They launch campaigns on social media, especially on X to demand the release of missing persons. A few hashtags which were observed commonly as long-term campaigns were #ReleaseBalochMissingPersons, #EndEnforcedDisappearances and #BalochMissingPersons. Baloch complains that political leaders of Pakistan admit involvement of agencies in crimes in Balochistan but once they are in government they have the same ignorant behaviour as Baloch. They accuse the government of having no morals as they make promises during protests for the release of missing persons but when the protest is dismissed they forget their promises. They consider this a disgrace to the families of missing Baloch.

Figure 6
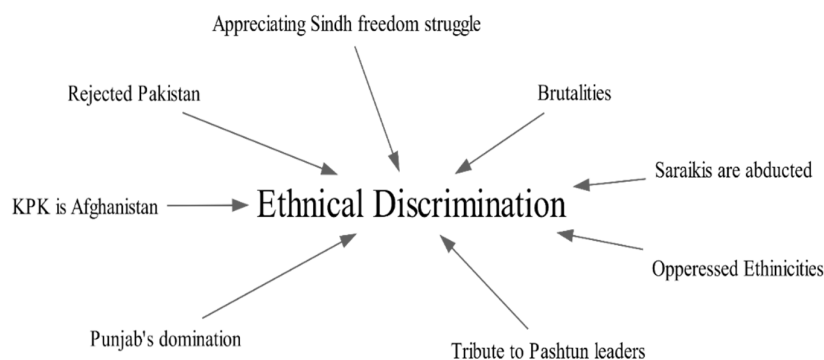
Ethnical discrimination is another issue which they talked about relating it with Pashtuns, Saraikis and Sindhis too. They argue that Balochistan is neither part of Pakistan nor they are part of Iran. Similarly, Pashtuns belong to Afghanistan and Sindhis have a separate identity and they deserve freedom from Pakistan too. They believe that Pashtuns, Sindhi, Saraki and Baloch are oppressed by Punjabis and they restrict their development. The Sindh freedom movement is especially supported by Baloch separatists. They show solidarity with Pashtuns and their leaders by supporting their social media campaigns on different events, for example abduction of Pashtun leader Gulalai Ismail's father, Jani Kheil long march. Pashtun leader Manzoor Pasheen visited an Islamabad protest by Baloch against enforced disappearances which was appreciated by Baloch activists. They claim that Baloch students do not have better opportunities for education and for that, they have to go to Punjab, where they face threats and insecurities and the same is the case with Pashtuns. Enforced conversion of Hindu girls to Muslim in Sindh was also discussed and wishes for Hindus on their occasions were also posted.

Figure 7

Social and civic issues were although not the main focus of their discussions they did mention contaminated drinking water, educational deprivation, non-availability of gas, lack of health facilities and blockade of communication. Economic issues were comparatively discussed more than social and civic matters. CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) was projected as a trap by China to control Balochistan's natural resources and the development under this project is fake with which locals are not benefited.

Figure 8
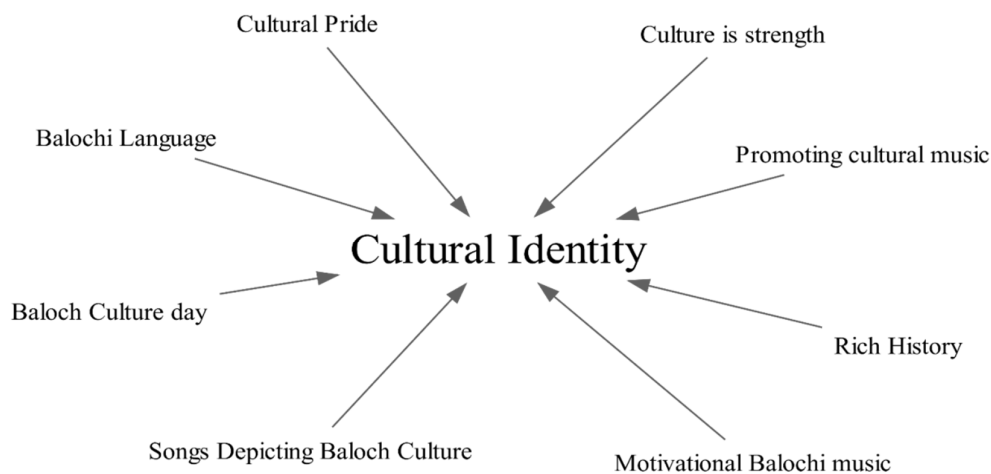
Baloch highlights their culture and ethnicity as separate from the rest of Pakistan to justify the need for an independent homeland. They celebrate Baloch Culture Day on 2nd March each year with zeal and enthusiasm. Balochi music is projected and circulated on social media by the activists which carried the motivational messages for the Baloch and depicts the beauty of the land. They argue that culture is their strength which differentiates them from others.

Figure 9
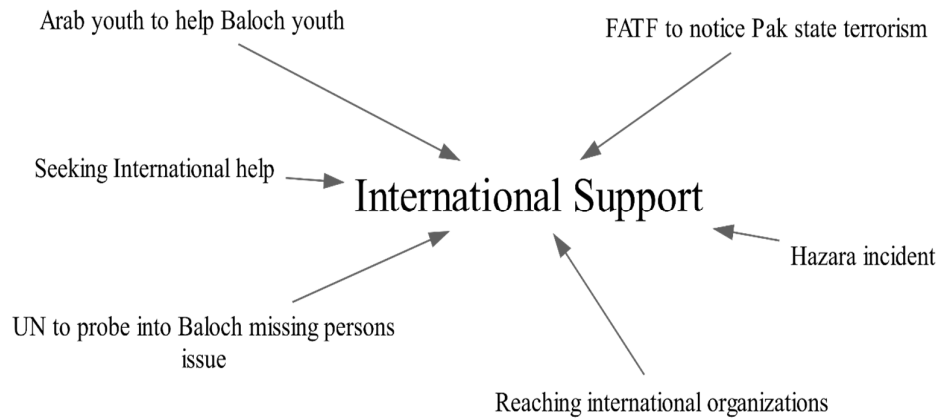
Baloch separatists desire the international communities and powerful countries to address their issues, take notice of the brutalities of Iran and Pakistan and help them to separate from both countries. The United Nations, Human Rights Watch and other international communities were tagged in the tweets similarly, X accounts of USA officials, UAE, Israel and other accounts of Middle Eastern countries were mentioned in the Tweets to call them for help and assistance.

Figure 10
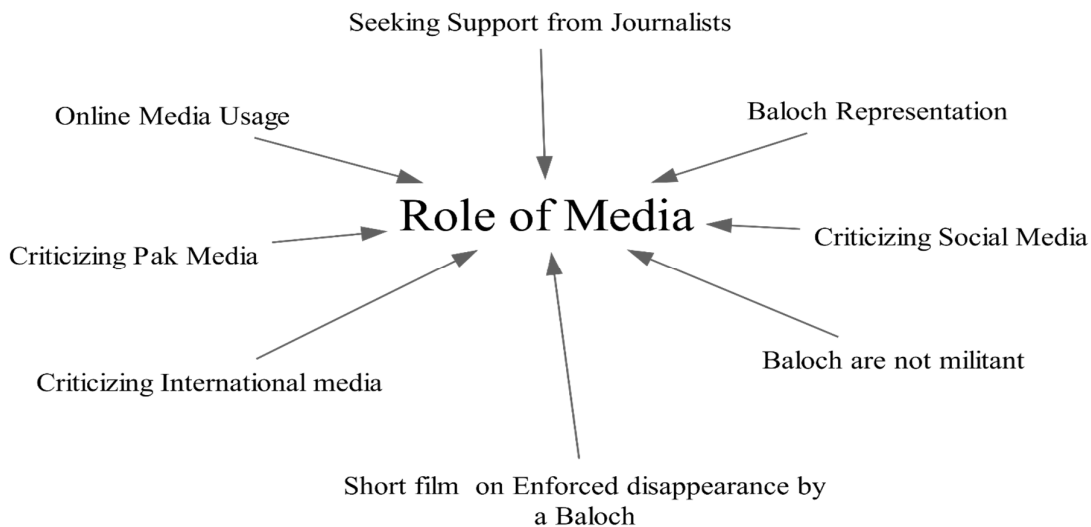
Criticism of both national and international media was observed whereas Baloch domestic media was appreciated for its reporting. They complain about the media's ignorance in reporting the sufferings and pains of Baloch. The activists with separatist mindsets who live abroad, produce their short films and report about the happenings in Balochistan to support their ideology. Most of them are attached to international media. Baloch were found protesting against the ambiguity of media and biased reporting which portray freedom fighters as

militants and create misconceptions about Baloch and Balochistan. Social media campaigns which are launched on X in the form of hashtags were also announced. They criticised that the Pakistan government and State are glorified through media whereas the agony of Baloch is a blackout. Social media platform Facebook was also criticised for a discriminatory policy with Baloch.

Conclusion

The epoch of technology has changed the dynamics of war. The term "war of narratives" has emerged with the advancement of technology which has strengthened the media to the extent that it has become a force to occupy people's minds. Any ideology that exists in any part of the world needs less effort than in the past to reach the masses. Electronic media took the lead from print media in the speed of spreading the information and now in recent times, social media has taken the lead and control. It doesn't matter whether there is any conventional war being fought on the ground or not, the way matters are framed in the media and the extent to which the minds are morphed is the real win.

This study explains the narrative-building techniques and approaches which were adopted on social media by Baloch separatists, especially in X posts which are limited to 140 words. To understand the mechanism around 1500 pulse tweets from 10 social media activists associated with the Baloch separatist mindset were picked and studied in detail. The tweets were coded and the themes were chalked out.

This investigation helped to analyse the issues which were discussed by Baloch separatists on X. This provided insight into the matters they selected to project their ideology and justify their demand for free Balochistan. They not only demand freedom from Pakistan but also desire the same from Iran and term both countries occupiers. They seemed not to be satisfied living as part of both the country. In addition to this, it was also understood that they were not even willing to accept China's presence on the land for development under CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) calling it an invader. The prime issue which was discussed in almost every other tweet was enforced disappearance which they blame on the security agencies of Pakistan. They claimed that Balochs are abducted by the Pakistan security agencies illegally and then are either tortured to death or killed in fake encounters. They argued that the abducted Baloch were declared as militants and were targeted by the forces on false accusations. This enforced disappearance was projected as an injustice and a violation of human rights. Baloch separatist propagated that they possess no sense of security and their biggest threat was claimed to be the State itself. They believed that they were targets of State brutalities which oppressed them to occupy the natural resources of Balochistan and that they peacefully fought for their rights. It is essential to understand that support and acceptance by other similar communities is oxygen to any ideology. Support for Baloch Sindh separatist movement and Pashtuns who are against the State and blame it for discrimination and deprivation, was visibly seen in the tweets. They argued that Sindh rejects Pakistan while KPK is part of Afghanistan which is also occupied by Pakistan. This support was undoubtedly shown to strengthen similar ideologies. Socio-economic and civic issues discussed were deprivation of education, health facilities (corona vaccines) and contaminated drinking water. They grumbled that Gwadar is glorified but in reality, the problems of Balochistan are swept under the carpet. Posting about culture and identity, the Baloch separatists projected it as unique whereas Balochi music was circulated which carried motivational messages of freedom and pride. This tactic seemed to be used to stimulate the Baloch community to struggle for freedom and inculcate a sense of uniqueness, persuading their minds to separate. Owning the land is so forcefully implanted that any other entity that is beyond their cultural sphere is rejected. International assistance for human rights organizations and powerful countries was sought by applying tagging techniques on X. Baloch separatists criticise mainstream media whether national or international, for not highlighting and presenting their issues therefore they use social media and launch campaigns using hashtag techniques on X.

Limitations

During the research, several limitations were experienced. The sample size and the data collected might not be sufficient, a larger sample size and data could have generated more accurate results. It was the first research experience, and the depth and scope of discussion may have been compromised at many stages as compared to other scholars. Time was also a limitation and the research had to be completed with restricted time. As this study is related to an issue that has the possibility to get resolved or get mild after some steps may be taken by the State therefore there is a possibility that during the time when the data was studied and the time it was published the situation on ground might change and the content posted may modify accordingly.

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