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Discourse of Economy and Inflation: An Investigation into Pakistani English Print Media Articles

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ABSTRACT

Print media discourses are considered as one of the best sites for ideological investment. They mirror existing sociopolitical trends of a particular context. The present study critically decodes economy and inflation related discourses of the articles of Dawn daily. The data for the study has been collected from the mentioned English daily newspaper. The time span for data collection ranges from 2020-2025. The present study employs Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model of discourse analysis. The levels of analysis of this particular model include text, interpretation and explanation. The present study has also used a questionnaire to know general perception about the social issue of economic crisis and inflation. This has been done to incorporate general perception of public in the findings of the study. The qualitative findings highlight that highly loaded lexical items in the form of the simile, metaphor, persuasive language, use of passive language and different types of political rhetoric have been employed to represent inflation and economic problems as a glaring issue. The quantitative findings highlight that 62 %respondents are of the view that such issues are self-created and class specific. This is how the findings of the present study have been supported qualitatively and quantitatively. Besides, it contends that print media discourses are one of the best sites for ideological investment and to propagate a desired version of reality to target audience.

Keywords: Inflation, Critical Discourse Analysis, Representation, Economic Hardships, Print media, Ideology, Linguistic, Metaphors, Public Perception, Pakistan

Introduction:

Inflation is among the most critical and recurrent economic challenges that has become a global issue and many countries including Pakistan are facing the severe consequences of it. Inflation means an increase in the general level of prices and price hiking which reduces people's purchasing power, making it a critical issue for governments, economists, and consumers. Moderate inflation and hyper-inflation result in social unrest and institutional vulnerabilities. The main causes of inflation

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include ineffective government policies, fiscal deficit, global factors and instable political conditions. This issue finds representation through different media discourses differently depending upon the socio-political conditions of a country suffering from it. Media discourses most often mirror social reality prevailing in a socio-political context and a particular genre of language is used to represent such issues. Particular types of linguistic moves are employed to highlight this issue keeping in view the target audience. These linguistic moves include metaphors, hyperbole, culture specific terms etc. The type of language used to highlight and represent inflation reflects the severity of the issue. Media framing of inflation is highly ideological land most often it embodies vested interests of the controlling ideological group. The present study attempts to analyze inflation related print media discourses. It attempts to investigate how inflation and economy related issues are represented discursively for the target leadership. The data collected from the mentioned newspaper has been analyzed by employing Critical Discourse Analysis approach propounded by Fairclough (1995).

Literature Review:

Miller et al., (2022) contends that the print media shows economic difficulties, especially inflation, through representations which integrate crisis severity with the political conditions of each situation. The media has a central function in modifying public understanding of economic matters and it is highly ideological and different visual and verbal practices are employed to propagate it. Shiller, (2020) believes that economy shapes and raptures people's world view and such issues play a significant role in knowing a country's worldview towards the betterment of its masses. Mostly, such issues are highlighted through different discourses to gain certain political ends. Arkadeva's article (2022) oppoints that the task of print media outlets in showing inflation serves both educational and political purposes. Sirin et al., (2023) maintains that it is usually observed that media discourses link inflation to increasing food costs and other commodities of life. Runge (2020) is of the view that media representation related to inflation is never ideology free and it is framed in a desired manner to gain desired results. Usually, it is maintained that media discourse is one of the best ideological sites to invest any type of ideology including Marxist perspective. He argues that highly loaded and politicized language is used to create unrest among the general masses. Some of the examples of the highly loaded language embodying economy related issues include economic storm, price hike, financial crises, and economic emergency. Lackoff and Johnson (1980) state that the use of metaphors highlights the intensity of a certain issue. Different political and linguistic moves are employed to make the issue more serious. Such examples include serious financial strain households.

Research Gaps:

Sajid and Tasleem 2025 conducted research on economy related semiotic scientific discourses. The study focused on highlighting that graphic style is one of the important genres of print media and it can be employed tactfully to disseminate different desired ideologies. The study focused on IMF related caricatures. It employs an integrated research approach by drawing upon Fairclough (2003), Kress (2010) and Kruger's (2002) research models to analyze visual and verbal modes used in economy

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related cartoons to show Pakistan's dependance on IMF for sustainability. The study concludes that price hiking and dependance on IMF have become common phenomenon. Besides, the study contends that print media semiotic discourses mirror prevailing socioeconomic reality of any country and are one of the best sites for ideological investment.

Naz and Hassan 2024 conducted a study in analyzing inflation related metaphors from Pakistani and Sri Lankan newspapers. A corpus assisted comparative discourse approach was adopted to analyze the data. The keywords related to inflation in metaphorical forms were located by using Sketch Engine Software. Lackoff's model of conceptual metaphor was used to analyze the data. The study finds that the frequency of occurrence of inflation related metaphors in Sri Lankan newspaper is higher as compared to its counterpart Pakistani newspaper Dawn. The percentage of metaphors embodying the concept of inflation varies, with a frequency of 15 instances in Pakistani newspapers and 62 instances in Sri Lankan newspapers. It maintains that different discursive patterns have been used in the forms of keywords, concordance and collocations. The study, besides, infers that such media representation of inflation highlights prevailing social belief system of a particular context.

Sarah Arndt's research (2023) examines the nature of print media discourses in influencing the household inflation expectations in Germany. The study analyses the indicators of two newspaper types, tabloids and reputed sources with the help of text analysis and large language models. The results indicate obvious heterogeneity as tabloid news stories have a bigger impact on less-educated and lower-income households. Whereas, reputable newspapers have more impact on better-educated and higher-income readers. Besides, the response to sentiment changes following shock to monetary policy; tabloid sentiment responds more short-term. Whereas reputable sources have smaller but delayed responses. The research points to the fact that the kind of media and the audience have a combined impact on the way inflation signals are perceived, which has significant consequences to policymakers regarding inflation and economy.

The present study is different from the above-mentioned researches as it attempts to decode print media discourses of a Pakistani daily Dawn newspaper. The articles which appeared related to the subject mentioned have been analyzed from a Marxist perspective focusing on linguistic moves employed to highlight the issue of inflation and economy. The time span for data collection and the research approach employed are still other factors providing rationale of the present study.

Research Questions:

How is inflation represented discursively through the articles of daily Dawn from 2020-2024?

How do media representations of inflation shape public perceptions of economic hardships and influence individual attitudes toward the economy?

Methodology:

Research Design

This study employs a mixed method with findings of quantitative and qualitative data to support each other. The questionnaire measures how often people are exposed to

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inflation-related news, what they think of the tone and information from the news, their thoughts and lasting effects and how much they trust government work to address inflation. The quantitative part of the study deals with the administration of a structured questionnaire. It is used to measure society's involvement, opinions and awareness of media news about inflation. Besides, Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of Discourse Analysis has been used to analyze selected data. This model works at the following levels.

Text analysis (description): This dimension emphasizes linguistic features of the text, such as the choice of words, metaphors used, location of the ideas upon the sentence and paragraph structure, and another embodied rhetoric. Special emphasis is placed on the extent to which inflation and economic hardship are named, the implied meaning of word choices, and the key metaphors of the stories.

Interpretation: The second level focuses on how texts are interpreted, focusing on how texts are constituted. Here in the present study, it examines how journalists and editors construct economic perspectives, what linguistic means are employed to mobilize the knowledge, and what roles intertextual connections and intertextual references play in the organization of the meaning.

Sociocultural practice (explanation): At this level, data is analyzed at broader level. And this level usually includes social, political and economic centered features. By employing the mentioned model, the present study attempts to analyze how inflation related discourses are constructed and represented in the selected media group. It also examines how inflation, as represented in media, involves Pakistan's socioeconomic structures, political concerns, and social anxieties.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this mixed methods study consists of two complementary parts: qualitative discourse analysis of media texts and quantitative analysis of questionnaire responses. This section provides an in-depth analysis of the data collected for the study by employing the devised research model. Four articles related to the selected theme have been analyzed using the mentioned model at the textual level, interpretation and sociocultural levels.

Text Analysis

Fairclough (1995) argues that media discourses mirror prevailing sociopolitical tendencies of a particular context. This is done to disseminate our desired version of reality among the target audience and to win their consent related to any social issue. Similarly, the selected chunks from the data embodying ideology related to inflation illustrates that, at the textual level, there is a conscious choice in use of language that represents inflation as a serious social problem. The language is saturated with metaphors, emotionally charged adjectives and rhetorical terminology which together evoke the idea of crisis.

For example, in the article "Economic hardships in the holy month", the word "strain" is broadly used to denote the economic stress by raising prices for households in

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Ramazan. This choice of word illustrates the fact that economic difficulties are like a pressure on families to the extent of 'breaking.' This metaphor not only describes the challenges individuals face but also connotes to consumer's emotions due to the use of an unavoidable primary physiological experience.

Similarly, the use of expressions such as "Unjunking Pakistan's Economy" highlights the nation's economy as an "economic quagmire," which means it hinders the growth of a country. When one tries to move, one only ends up sinking more. The words used, like 'quagmire,' signify a situation of stagnation where one cannot find a way out, indicating the grim picture of Pakistan's economy where consumers especially middle class are facing a lot of troubles because of ever increasing price hiking.

Another prominent and significant feature is the use of passive constructions. In phrases such as 'the economy is under strain' or 'reserves are being burned through,' several actors are mentioned, but no concrete subject is assigned. This construction seems to undermine the agency and produce an account of inflation and economic collapse that appears almost like a natural disaster rather than a consequence of policymaking. The use of passivization is a technique to hide the identity of doer deliberately. In such cases, the actual agents of some misdeeds are kept concealed and only the consequences are highlighted. It could have been highlighted by using activization to blame the government agencies and officials responsible for price hiking. This is how Fairclough argues that language works as an insidious weapon to position ingroup positively and vice versa.

In the article 'Economy in distress,' the use of visual metaphors such as the 'painting of a grim picture' shows how emotions and aesthetics are used to present economic facts. Instead of giving straight facts on inflation, the media paints a picture that the recipient can relate to emotionally, thus amplifying the disaster caused by inflation.

In the selected articles, the use of expressions such as "boom-bust cycles," "nerve centers," "negative spirals," and "burning reserves" illustrate the hardships people are facing even during the Month of Ramadan by giving the issue a religious touch indirectly an attempt has been made to represent the government and the authorities concerned as insensitive and careless about this serious issue faced by the people. This is how the concept of otherization has been plaid up through the loaded discourses of the articles under analysis

Therefore, examining the print media language used, print media does not just inform its audience about inflation; it explains it with captivating and evocative language that works to create an atmosphere of crisis.

Discourse Practice (Interpretation):

At this level of analysis, the selected articles demonstrate the presence of specific discursive practices in the construction and interpretation of the inflation discourse. Such strategies are used to influence perceptions and emotions of a particular audience regarding the national economic matters to be addressed.

Another linguistic move that has been used to highlight economic crises is the use of personification technique. In articles such as "Economic hardships in the Holy month," the viewer gets to feel the pain of individual families who are having it hard to make both ends meet during Ramadan. In this way, the target readership is guided to perceive inflation from the human-interest point of view instead of simply viewing

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it as an economic phenomenon.

Similarly, the use of metaphorical intensification can be considered as an procedure which has been employed in the selected data. This is evident through relativity, such as 'spiraling out of control' or 'sinking deeper into crisis,' which shapes the reader's sentimental response. These linguistic strategies put the audience in a state where they are ready to see inflation as a catastrophe, not an everyday economic occurrence.

Fairclough (1995) argues that intertextuality is a discursive move used to connect different texts embodying different or similar messages and meanings. Intertextuality is also notable. It is obvious that previous economic downturns, the International Monetary Fund, and previous trends of economic instability in Pakistan are mentioned. For instance, the "State of the economy" links it with previous boom-bust periods, relating it to historical economic inflation crises attributed to poor economic management. Such intertextual references provide the necessary framing for understanding the meaning of current troubles within a historical context and making the use of present difficulties more authoritative.

The way inflation is framed also reveals ideological stance of editorial writer. For instance, the articles present a balanced but critical form of knowledge construction by explaining both external factors—global commodity price rises—and flaws in domestic policy. This framing enables the audience to understand that inflation is a complex phenomenon, but inadvertently, it points to inadequate governance as one of the main causes.

The interpretation phase finally shows that the media constructs inflation as a statistic, individual, national, and historical issue that evokes an emotional response and provokes thinking from the audience.

Sociocultural Practice (Explanation)

Fairclough (1995) maintains that, at broader level the analysis of the language is done by keeping in view linguistic and contextual factors. It involves correlation between linguistic and metalinguistic features of a text under analysis. The selected articles depict inflation in ways that mirror and strengthen widespread societal fears about politics and economic instabilities in current-day Pakistani culture. The repeated use of economic descriptions "such as junked," "strained, "and "sinking" matches nationwide public skepticism about government competencies to manage financial difficulties. The article "Unjunking Pakistan's Economy" demonstrates public belief in reckless administration by describing burning through foreign reserves while reinforcing a systemic incompetency claim. People from the lower and middle classes feel increasingly trapped in economic constraints as the "negative spiral" image of inflation lacks any clear pathway to resolution. Many Pakistani citizens experience life situations like the language used in media, which builds consensus about their shared feelings of vulnerability and unjust treatment. "Economic hardships in the Holy Month " analyses the economic difficulties of sociocultural holy months such as Ramadan, thus providing essential context to inflation's moral and social impact on society. Rising prices create a national crisis by disrupting Pakistan's traditional practices of communal charity and generosity, which cause an ethical and social breakdown. Societal discourse about economics mirrors public thinking by depicting economic conditions through mechanical failure metaphors ("nerve center collapse")

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and natural disaster metaphors ("quagmire"). These expressions suggest authorities believe economic issues are beyond management through structural reforms. The way people discuss inflation through this pattern helps generate public feelings of helplessness that reduce group confidence in potential economic remedies. The sociocultural evaluation shows that through the use of linguistic choices; it can be inferred that an attempt has been made to propagate something alarming that inflation is deep rooted issue in Pakistani context and with every passing day it is getting from worse to worst.

Table 1: Summary of Analytical Themes

Dimension	Analytical Theme	Examples from Articles	Explanation
Text Analysis (Description)	Use of Metaphors	- "Economic quagmire" - "Negative spiral" - "Boom-bust cycle" - "Burning reserves"	Inflation is portrayed as an unavoidable, sinking, or worsening crisis through vivid imagery.
	Emotional Language	- "Strain on households" - "Dreaded deficit" - "Sinking into crisis"	Affective word choices heighten the severity of economic hardship.
	Passive Constructions	- "The economy is being strained" - "Reserves are being burned"	Obscures direct agency, making inflation seem certain rather than blamable.
Discourse Practice (Interpretation)	Humanization of Economic Impact	- Focus on Ramazan household suffering - Struggles of common citizens	Personalizes inflation effects, making the abstract relatable and sentimental.
	Framing Inflation as Crisis	- Comparisons to disasters and medical emergencies ("nerve center collapse")	Frames inflation as an urgent, catastrophic event demanding immediate attention.
	Intertextuality	- References to IMF, historical crises	Embeds inflation within broader economic and historical narratives to reinforce credibility.

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Sociocultural Practice (Explanation)	Societal Vulnerability	- Depiction of middle- and lower-income groups' struggles - Inflation during cultural events like Ramazan	Reflects public anxiety and the disproportionate burden on vulnerable populations.
	Political Distrust	- "Junking the economy" - Lack of faith in governance reforms	Reinforces narratives of governance failure and eroded public trust.
	Fatalism and Hopelessness	- "Spiraling out of control" - "No way out" metaphors	Creates a perception of economic conditions as irreversible and beyond corrective measures.

The questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive methods for quantitative analysis to measure public engagement with inflation-related media coverage, emotional responses, trust in government efforts, and behavioral changes resulting from inflation. The analysis included:

Calculating frequencies and percentages for key variables such as frequency of media consumption, perceptions of media tone, emotional impact, and trust levels.

Identifying patterns and potential correlations between respondents' media perceptions and their trust in government policies, as well as between emotional responses and reported behavioral changes.

Integrating quantitative findings with the qualitative discourse analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of how media representations of inflation influence public attitudes and actions.

Summary and Interpretation
High media engagement: Half of the target audience consume inflation news daily, indicating the topic's prominence

Media framing: One third of respondents see the media as framing inflation as a severe crisis with dramatic and alarming language.

Causes blamed: The media is perceived as blaming government policies and corruption more than external global factors.

Emotional impact: Anxiety is the dominant emotional 72% responses, though 28% find motivation to plan financially.

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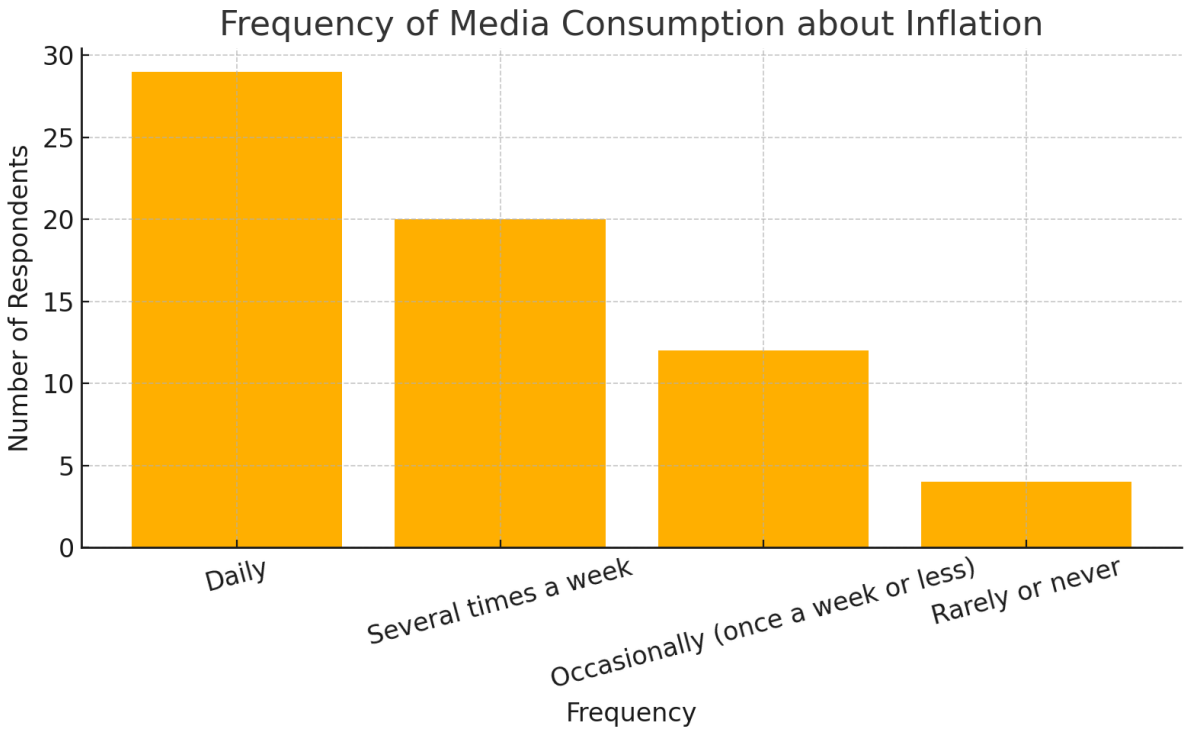
Trust in government: Trust is mixed, with 69% respondents find government efforts as skeptical.

Behavioral impact: 62 % respondents report lifestyle changes due to inflation, but fewer are motivated to engage actively in economic discussions or activism.



Here is a bar chart showing the frequency of media consumption about inflation among the respondents. It highlights that the majority consume inflation news daily or several times a week, while fewer do so occasionally or rarely.

Conclusion:

The study was undertaken to analyze the discourse of selected newspaper about the representation of inflation. The data for the study was collected from the articles that were published in the mentioned newspaper. The findings of the study reveal that the social issue of dearness is of vital importance in Pakistani society. The language use such as economic quagmire, negative spiral, the boom in prices, busty cycle, and burning reserves is ideological and illustrates the gravity of the issue. Moreover, the use of passive voice form is not neutral. In this way a deliberate attempt is made to keep the identity of the agents hidden. The findings also reveal that the class which is directly affected by this phenomenon is middle class and its reasons are social injustice, inequality and lawlessness. Besides, the study finds that print media discourses mirror social reality and are considered as one of the important sites for ideological investment.

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