Chapter 7

Conclusion: Discussion and Recommendations
7.1 CONCLUSION

The present chapter discusses in detail conclusion derived as a result of systematic analysis and interpretation carried out in previous chapters (chapters four, five and six). An attempt is made to discuss concluding observations about role played by Indian and Pakistani English press, role of subcontinent’s media in general, with respect to conflict mediation. Conclusion derived for each research objective is also elucidated. Towards the end, the chapter presents a comparative analysis of the Indian press vis a vis the Pakistani press. Comparison between role of traditional print media and new (alternative media) represents functions of two different popular mass media in conflict mediation. A section on discussion presents derived insights on the subject. Additionally, conclusion is interspersed with responses obtained from interviews with subject experts. These have facilitated the researcher in corroborating findings derived from media content analysis. The chapter concludes with a section on recommendations about possibilities for future investigation in the area.

7.1.1 Role of India’s English Press

Analysis of the mainstream Indian English press (The Times of India and The Indian Express chosen as sample newspapers) revealed that conflict occupied mainstay of news stories on front and national pages. Event-driven coverage is what the Indian press followed immediately after any confrontation between India and Pakistan. Though coverage in the Indian press fairly attempted to provide a balanced view on issues of peace and conflict, it was conflict that prominently made it to news headlines. The press in India operated within frames of ‘blame-game’, ‘demonization’, ‘emotional appeal’, ‘victimhood’ and ‘elite opinion’ during confrontation with Pakistan. It employed the language and tone of conflict,
antagonism and hostility to perpetuate already existing differences. The Indian press also gave undue importance and coverage to elite political opinion. As a matter of ritual, statements from leaders, diplomats, ministers etc were reported and issues examined within a frame of political reactions emanating from the leadership. Excessive reportage of political statements and an overdrive of official reactions was the hallmark of coverage. It was evident that coverage in the Indian press fluctuated in accordance with the political situation, and turn of political events in the country as well as the neighbourhood.

During significant events (read media-driven events) such as the Agra Summit, the Indian press freely indulged in speculation about summit developments. As a result, content served to readers and their resultant perceptions were impacted. Both The Times of India and The Indian Express contributed to an information overload through their coverage of the summit, which were both an advantage (in terms of richness and diversity of perspectives) and a disadvantage (in terms of lack of clarity and increased ambiguity for readers). Discourse in the Indian press identified the ‘other’, labelled it as an ‘enemy’ and consolidated opinion against it. Mundane details about conflict situations were covered repeatedly to hammer readers with similar information under pretext of multifaceted opinions. Indian press aggressively played the ‘victimhood’ card, linked Kashmir to Pakistan sponsored terrorism and rejected suggestions of international mediation. Every action of the ‘self’ was justified vis-a-vis an action by the ‘other’. For instance, Indian troop mobilization in 2001 was a response to Pakistan backed Parliament attack.

Conflict was treated as a ‘commodity’ to be sold to readers. Various aspects of the conflict were covered in detail to satiate information appetite of readers. While The Indian Express in its coverage emphasized on intellectual opinion, The Times of India projected diplomatic exchanges and war of words between the conflicting parties. Press coverage spelt out details of diplomatic strategies adopted; hence both parties looked to media coverage as a cue to devising policy responses. For instance, during the Mumbai attacks that resulted in a freeze in diplomatic communication, media facilitated dialogue between the two sides. Dominant opinions about India’s supremacy in the conflict, victimhood
at the hands of Pakistan and US support to India’s stand (framed as an achievement) figured in coverage. Divergent and critical opinions were also found as an attempt to pave way for an alternative discourse. As compared to conflict coverage, peace related coverage was limited. However, the Indian press is not disillusioned with the idea of peace, even though it is obsessed with conflict.

Hype and sensationalism emerged as functions of the press during peace and conflict events. During peace events, a spurt in positive coverage was observed; the other extreme was adhered to in events of conflict. This is especially true of border confrontations and terrorist attacks since the border is viewed as sanctimonious and terror attacks on political and civilian symbols are seen as a threat to integrity. Stance adopted by the Indian press was supportive of statist overtures. For instance, coverage of LoC violations and Afzal Guru’s execution (2013) was reduced to rhetoric, accusations, blame-game through display of political and diplomatic one-upmanship. In this case, government machinery employed media discourse to fulfil its political agenda vis-a-vis Pakistan.

There was more focus on political issues as compared to humanitarian issues. There were repeated references to a possible South Asian union modelled on the lines of European Union. News stories were largely elite-centric whereas opinions were people-centric to a limited extent. Commentaries were prescriptive in nature while offering advice on how to deal with a state of crisis, desired response and action. Discourse on secular and right-wing politics in the country vis-a-vis relations with Pakistan reinforced commitment to India’s secular socio-political fabric. The secular-communal debate in context of India-Pakistan was addressed in the purview of right-wing politics and belief in Nehruvian ideas of secularism.

7.1.2 Role of Pakistan’s English Press

Analysis of Pakistan’s English press involves the context in which it operates. Workings of Pakistan’s press are influenced by factors such as role of military in Pakistani politics, role of the government, lack of democratic norms and increasing threat of fundamentalist elements. It is not as commercially sound and vibrant as the Indian press, however it mirrors the state of Pakistani politics.
and society appropriately. It is constrained by several internal and extraneous elements. Therefore, it comes across as a forthright institution holding together citizen’s belief in the idea of Pakistan. Nevertheless, it remains hawkish and nationalistic in its coverage as manifest in reader’s opinions in both newspapers which were studied as part of this research. Despite this, coverage is rich, deep and puts forth a multiplicity of views. It is mature and resilient despite all odds faced. One may do well to recall attacks on eminent Pakistani journalists Hamid Mir and Raza Rumi in recent past. Pakistan’s press is vehemently critical of state-led discourse and a support of the official stance is accompanied by sharp criticism of certain aspects of political reality. It affirms an unwavering commitment to the ideology behind Pakistan’s creation and presents the idea of Pakistan as sacrosanct and beyond criticism.

For all events analyzed in the present study, the Pakistani press resorted to repetitious use of ‘conspiracy theory’ as a news frame. For instance, it referred to the attack on India’s Parliament and the Mumbai attacks as stage-managed by India to defame Pakistan. Finger-pointing towards India for maligning Pakistan internationally and reference to an Indian hand in terrorist strikes regularly surfaced in the discourse. For instance, during the Agra summit, hard-line elements in India were blamed for sabotaging peace talks to achieve political gains. Such conspiracy theories lacked any basis. Thus, media discourse in India-Pakistan relations is extremely polarized, presents extreme versions of public opinion, denies possibilities of shared views rooted in ground realities and offers no shades of grey.

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1 “English press in Pakistan is far more critical of government policy than English press in India”, opines a peace activist cum educationist from India. Similar views were echoed by a Pakistani journalist. According to her, the Pakistani media is now far less beholden to state narratives, and there are substantial discords between what the state wants the narrative to be and what the media wants. Often, the only time that the two narratives combine is during periods of heightened tension between the two countries, and over the past 5-8 years, Pakistan’s media has become more reflective of what Pakistanis think. Owing to privatization in Pakistan’s media it has become more open to diverse views about India.
More than the Indian press, extraneous elements influenced the functions of Pakistan’s press. These were – political leanings of media houses, religion, culture, extremist elements and non-state actors, political culture and role of military. Commercial inclinations have a limited impact on press in Pakistan. The Pakistani press is steeped into values propounded by Islam. It often adopts a pro-Muslim stance while referring to Hindu domination in India, subjugation and discrimination of Indian Muslims, demonization of right wing Hindu nationalist parties, excessive questioning of Muslim well-being in India and an obsession with the two-nation theory that was the raison d’etre of Pakistan’s creation. Religious undertones project India as a country dominated by Hindus, not reconciled to existence of Indian Muslims and Pakistan as separate entities. For instance, the ‘victim’ and ‘saviour’ frame is dominant in concerns expressed for India’s Muslim population. (Dawn, Agra Summit, June 26 – pg 15: Indian film on partition angers Muslims, Dawn, Parliament attack, Jan 15(2002) – pg 14: Indian Muslims spurn talks to settle temple row). The Pakistani press has not shed its partition related baggage as a result of which religion and culture are deeply embedded in its body politic. Pakistan’s media is also viewed by few as a threat to Islamic religious and cultural values. Sentiments to this tone were expressed in letters by readers’ section on edit pages in both Dawn and The News. Any media that exposes Pakistani youth to Indian (read enemy) values through Indian movies and television soap operas is believed to have a corrupting influence, distort their cultural values and alienate them from Islamic culture.

Characteristic features of Pakistani press discourse following analysis are as below:

2 Recurrent mention of Hindu terror networks in Pakistani media must be understood and analyzed from the standpoint of ideology and creation of Pakistan on the basis of two-nation theory. Pakistan emerged as a theocratic state while India was envisioned as a secular state. Since then Pakistan has thrived on the Hindu-Muslim divide and the Pakistani press has forwarded ideas about Indian Muslims being an aggrieved lot, ill-treated by majority Hindus. Brief reports on the Hindu minority community in Pakistan are present to augment Pakistan’s secular credentials.
• Reference to Kashmir is limited to frames of human rights violations, freedom struggle, sympathy to and solidarity with the cause of independence, Kashmiri suffering, brutalities by the Indian army and a sense of affinity with the Kashmir cause.

• Criticism of India’s actions in relation to Kashmir, India’s rejection of international mediation. Pakistan’s press links the Kashmir cause to the idea of Pakistani nationalism.

• Pakistan’s press demonstrated keen interest in India’s internal political dynamics, to which it believed the fate of India-Pakistan relations was intricately linked. However, commentary on India’s political dynamics was stereotypical and forwarded a limited world view. For instance, Congress party was framed as secular and liberal while the BJP was labelled communal, right-wing and hawkish.

• Exchange of letters by Indian and Pakistani readers was found in both Dawn and The News. Letters in Pakistan’s press provided a platform for expression of popular sentiments. Such interactions though were absent in the Indian press.

• Reports in Dawn and The News quoted extracts from popular Indian newspapers, though such sourcing of information was selective and bereft of context, carried out to suit particular news framing and agenda.

7.1.3 Role of New Media

New media’s role in India-Pakistan conflict mediation was analyzed from the lens of forums created in collaboration between Indians and Pakistanis with an emphasis on shared content creation. New media’s role in enabling Indians and

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3 A Kashmir-centric discourse was found in Pakistan’s press and issues of trade, culture, people to people contact were relegated to the background. Indian Kashmir was labelled as ‘occupied Kashmir’ while reference to Azad Kashmir was found in form of positive news stories that demonstrated AJK’s support to Pakistan’s claim on Kashmir. Terms such as ‘aggressor’, ‘oppressor’, ‘killer state’ were used to describe India’s actions and policies in Kashmir.
Pakistanis to engage in sustained and meaningful conversations is a subject of recent inquiry. New media space has allowed conflicting populations to question mainstream narratives of peace and conflict, enmity, nationalism, patriotism etc. It has contributed to a search for alternative narratives. New media in context of the present study was found as a space employed for cultivation and mobilization of pro-peace opinion. New media has also been used to further the peace constituency and initiated peace related activities. New media content studied as part of this research is a counter-force to content that promotes antagonistic relations and a straight-jacketed view of the ‘other’. New media is a free space for deliberations as it is not constricted by state led (official) narratives, and hence contributes to innovation and creativity for ideas in conflict resolution. Groups under the study purview act as cross-border networks essaying roles such as:

- Criticism and eradication of deeply entrenched stereotypes
- Building trust on a people-to-people level
- Boost to people-to-people ties and cultural contact, both virtually and in real life
- Advocacy of a more responsible role for media in conflict
- Creation of indigenous/local content by users

Membership of these forums is diverse as same people are part of various networks to promote peace. Networking among these forums ensures that peace content is made widely available. Content aims at educating and sensitizing users towards deeply entrenched stereotypes and negative perceptions of the ‘other’. Even after more than six decades of partition, Indians and Pakistanis hold antagonistic perceptions of the ‘other’. To counter these hate narratives, such

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4 Mainstream media coverage is dominated by elite political opinion and its structure of operations is not inclusive. This constraint is overcome by new media in terms of facilitating an exchange of ideas among rival populations. For instance, on a new media forum called Friendships Across Borders: Aao Dosti Karein on Facebook, people from India and Pakistan share real-life stories of friendships with cross-border friends.
forums highlight shared historical roots, legacies and beliefs and common values that can bring people closer. Creators/pioneers of these forums opine that educating users about common challenges faced by India-Pakistan is important for young members active on new media. For instance, archival clippings from Pakistan Times (a newspaper published from Lahore) were shared to educate members about events during Pakistan’s creation. Photographs and content on historical events attempt to trace long lost friends and relatives and re-establish old ties.

These new media forums facilitate a change of perceptions, trust building, questioning stereotypes, enhance peace dividends, provide out of the box solutions, augmenting people-centric approach to conflict resolution, offer fresh narratives in the Indo-Pak discourse, initiate informed debate on contentious issues, broaden perspectives on peace and conflict, engage important stakeholders in dialogue. Track II and Track III initiatives in the India-Pakistan peace process run the risk of being elitist. In contrast, new media forums ensure democratic engagement in the peace process.

Thus, presence of alternative peace media in case of India-Pakistan conflict mediation though limited to the online sphere is a noteworthy attempt to prescribe to principles of peace journalism. Even the ‘Aman ki Asha’ campaign utilizes power of new media technology to endorse the cause of peace.\textsuperscript{iv} Scope of these forums in emergence as centres of citizen-driven peace journalism remains a concern for future investigation in the area.\textsuperscript{v}

\textbf{7.2 OBJECTIVE-WISE CONCLUSION}

In this section, the researcher presents objective-wise conclusion derived from analysis and interpretation of data.
Table 7.1: Media’s various roles

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<tr>
<th>Nature of different roles played by media in India-Pakistan conflict</th>
<th>mediation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Media as creator and carrier of stereotypes</strong>: Not only does media coverage work to reinforce and perpetuate already existing conflict related images and stereotypes of the ‘other’, it also creates stereotypes that discourage audiences from questioning mainstream narratives. Constant reinstatement of negative references in media coverage leads to negative perceptions of the ‘other’. For example, Indian media refers to ‘terrorism’ and ‘Pakistan’ in same vein which has contributed to strengthening popular perception about all Pakistanis as ‘fundamentalists’. In a similar way, discourse in Pakistan’s English press makes constant references to a ‘Hindu’ conspiracy against ‘Muslim’ Pakistan, thereby pitting religious beliefs against each other.</td>
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<td><strong>Media as carrier of nationalist ideologies</strong>: Press reportage by and large confirms to nationalist agendas set out by the state. Exceptions can be found on new media platforms. However, mainstream news media adhere to nationalist narratives irrespective of the government in power. Despite media discourse being critical of government policies and actions, loyalty to nationalism, ideology, idea of nation and state is reaffirmed. Media discourse also strengthens nationalist identities by proclaiming superiority of one identity over the ‘other’.</td>
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<td><strong>Media as platform for blame-game and jingoism</strong>: With a few notable exceptions, press coverage during both events of peace and conflict blames the ‘other’ for all problems in one’s country and promotes ideas of jingoist nationalism. During events of conflict, press coverage blames the ‘other’ for their role in exacerbating tensions, while during peace talks, failure to reach an agreement is blamed on the ‘other’. Though style and form of coverage in both media is different, objectives remain the same. Subtly, the press in India and Pakistan strengthen voices of hate and hostility. According to a prominent Pakistani journalist interviewed for the study, “media play a key role in fanning and sensationalizing conflict.”</td>
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5 In the words of an expert, “The English press in India tends to contribute to the bombs and burqas image of Pakistan. It is hardly interested in developments in arts, education, and literature in Pakistan.”
Media as creator of political ‘realities’/narratives: Media’s role in Indo-Pak conflict mediation is not limited to that of a ‘communicator’. It facilitates creation of political realities/narratives through which issues of peace and conflict are absorbed and understood by readers. News discourse in the press should be viewed from the prism of dichotomous/binary realities. Political realities of conflict are not merely presented by the media; these are framed, constructed and then put forward to audiences in tandem with a set agenda.

Media as channel of communication: Media discourse serves as carrier of official and popular views. It plays the role of a facilitator for accommodating diversity of views and is a space for deliberating various aspects related to peace and conflict such as – which side is right/wrong, proposing solutions to the conflict, mobilizing public opinion in favour of or against a proposed solution etc. During a diplomatic stalemate, media acts as a channel of communication between antagonists. In case of India-Pakistan, state apparatus looks to the press for cues on formulating policy responses. The mediating aspect of the media’s role thus comes to fore.

Both Indian and Pakistani press operate in terms of binaries while reporting on the ‘other’. There is little scope for alternative narratives to emerge in the mainstream news media. Despite questioning and critique, the mainstream press prefers to operate in a static and restrictive terrain. For the present study, media’s role cannot be limited to frames of ‘good’ versus ‘bad’, ‘positive’ versus ‘negative’, ‘constructive’ versus ‘damaging’. The attempt has been to instead identify varying shades of media’s role.
7.2.2 Determinants of media’s role

Figure 7.1: Determinants of media’s role in India-Pakistan conflict mediation

Among the many factors that influence media’s role in India-Pakistan conflict mediation, historical relations, imprints of shared legacy between the two countries, influence of past events, socio-cultural realities and practices, commercial interests of media houses, news routines, newsworthiness, media’s own sources of information, ideological affiliations of media, constraints put by extraneous elements are significant. Each factor operates with varying degree of significance for the Indian and Pakistani media. While some factors impact workings of the press in Pakistan, others are significant as far as reportage in the Indian press is concerned. For instance, constraints of relationship with the army and religious extremists apply to the press in Pakistan whereas media’s own commercial motives apply to the Indian press. Two major determinants identified
by experts were personal opinions of journalists and a compulsion to sell and be first with news.

7.2.3 Conflict communication strategies

For coverage on issues of peace and conflict, media in India and Pakistan employ strategies to communicate with audiences. These have been delineated in the figure as under:

Figure 7.2: Conflict communication strategies employed by media

Indian and Pakistani media accommodate diverse perspectives on issues concerned. Readers are provided a holistic view of contradicting opinions and given freedom to decide. However, by means of hype, intrusion, reinforcement of opinions and one-sided reporting of facts wherein the ‘self’ is rarely negative, readers are subtly directed to accept and support one opinion as legitimate and other as unreasonable. A Delhi-based peace activist interviewed for the study referred to media’s use of selective, exaggerated and suggestive reportage which in her view should be refrained from. For instance, opinion in the Indian press on international mediation in Kashmir reinforces the argument that Kashmir is an internal matter that India can resolve without outside interference. In the Pakistani
press one finds a reiteration of India’s commitment to solve Kashmir by involving the United Nations and failure to do so is framed as betrayal by India.

Each unit in a newspaper performs communicative functions meant for it. For example, front page stories are a tool for eye-catching and sensational headlines, whereas opinion and commentary pieces provide for reflective analysis. Other communicative aspects such as cartoons, graphics, and niche columns provide additional information and perspective to readers. Each unit should be assessed through its functions in the media matrix. For example, in the confines of a routine news report, analytical commentary cannot be accommodated. Similarly, opinion pieces are meant to build perspectives on issues rather than merely document facts and information. In the opinion of an Indian media critic, “to communicate conflict, media depends on stereotypes, exaggeration, one-sided reportage and a sense of victimization. Efforts at communicating peace are rare and include references to religious pluralism or feel-good human interest stories (Pakistani children receiving medical treatment in India, for example).”

Interviews with prominent stake-holders in form of expert and scholarly opinions, conversations with and views obtained from those occupying political office were found in media coverage. Interviews are thus an important strategy used by media to communicate about the ‘other’ and with the ‘other’. They provide in-depth and analytical perspectives on complex socio-political processes. Indian and Pakistani press often employ interviews as a basis for developing news stories and source opinions from interviews given by stake-holders in the conflict. This stands significant in view of limited media exchange and contact between the two.

All four newspapers under study incorporated readers’ opinions. Letters by readers served as expression of popular sentiments and gave room to response on specific issues of conflict. Letters published in Pakistani newspapers by Indian readers emerged as a chain of conversations between people across borders. These letters facilitated an exchange of ideas among rival populations\(^6\). Letters by Indian

\(^6\) Pakistani newspaper Dawn devoted a major section of its page 6 – ‘Opinion’ to a section called ‘Letters to the Editor’. Many Indian readers contributed to this section.
readers in Pakistan’s newspapers appeared more frequently as compared to those written by Pakistani readers in India’s newspapers. Apart from routine/regular coverage, the Indian and Pakistani press employed innovative communication tools such as niche columns, cartoons and graphics, extracts from press coverage on ‘other’ side and contributions from diverse opinion makers to help readers attain multiple perspectives.

7.2.4 Nature of media-state relationship

Since both India and Pakistan are young political entities where the state has played a role in shaping political, civil society and popular institutions, it is relevant to examine media-state relationship in conflict mediation. The press played an important role in undivided India’s freedom movement and post-independence, Indian media has contributed to preserving the edifice of democracy. In Pakistan, media-state relationship is complex owing to a history of dictatorial rule and turbulent relations with the army and fundamentalist elements. Pakistan’s media is a ray of hope amidst political crisis and instability. For two different political frameworks, one with strong roots in democracy and pluralism, and the other afflicted by misrule and sectarianism, an examination of media-state relationship was deemed essential.

Due to various dimensions of the conflict, media-state relationship is dynamic, complex and multi-dimensional. It is difficult to describe this relationship without reference to context brought of historical events. The relationship is both cooperative and conflictual depending on the event concerned. Primarily, it is the state that sets the peace-conflict agenda for media, however at times media discourse too assumes power and compels the state to transform its agenda in response. The media’s subservient position vis-a-vis the state is owing

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7 News Analysis and Summit Solutions in The Times of India, Idea Exchange and Pakistan Periscope in The Indian Express, Dawn 50 Years Ago Today & Dateline New Delhi in Dawn. In this case, Dawn’s use of cartoons and graphics to convey a sarcastic and light-hearted take on serious issues was an innovative feature of its coverage. It was representative of a defiant and bold streak in Pakistan's press.
to the state’s primacy as an actor and media’s dependence on state for conflict related information. Government and allied sources are major tools of information for media (leaders, ministers, diplomats, foreign offices are sources of conflict related information). Hence, a statist perspective is dominantly found in media’s coverage. This is the reason why media discourse adheres to nationalist projections of conflict and an anti-state stance is considered equivalent to anti-nationalism.

Criticism and questioning of government actions and policy responses is found in both, more so in the Pakistani press. It is extremely critical of those in power. Media acts as a representative of people demanding accountability and answers from those in power. Alongside this, there is a subtle reinforcement and propaganda of views held by the state, those that endorse official positions that project one’s stand as morally superior and legitimate vis-a-vis the ‘other’. Media in both countries rarely question ideas of nationhood, state creation, ideology on which the state thrives (for India this signifies reverence to ideas forwarded by Nehruvian secularism, for Pakistan this represents legitimizing religion as the basis of state creation).

Media in the India-Pakistan discourse have emerged as a powerful agency in their own right. Media is not always overpowered by the state; since it drives state agenda and response to the enemy. Representing their own ideology and interests, media are not merely a platform for views of powerful vested interests. For instance, during the Mumbai terror attacks (26/11), the Indian media went on an overdrive to blame Pakistan for hatching a plot to destroy India, framed responses in a nationalist zeal, created frenzy around Pakistan’s involvement and contributed to compelling the government to break diplomatic ties with Pakistan. Media’s interaction with state in a conflict situation is influenced by factors as mentioned in figure 7.1. In a conflict-ridden South Asia, media operate and thrive in a framework set developed by the state and its ideological underpinnings.

The peace-conflict agenda cannot be set in exclusion. The state and media collude to deploy each other’s power for pursuit of own agenda. During a diplomatic cold-war, government functionaries pass messages and feelers to the
‘enemy’ through media by giving interviews on television or statements in the press. The state also employs media as a platform to project tough/belligerent response to the enemy, to intimidate it and win over domestic constituencies by projecting itself as a strong entity. Media on both sides is thus a primary agent of communicating political intentions to one’s enemy. On the other hand, media pushes its own agenda by generating public pressure on the state, mobilizing public opinion for action, and criticising lack of ‘stern’ response on part of official machinery.

7.2.5 Role of alternative peace media

For conclusion specific to this objective, refer to section 7.1.3 – Role of New Media (page 6-8).

7.3 COMPARATIVE DERIVATIONS

7.3.1 Indian and Pakistani Press

Differences observed in coverage of the Indian press vis-a-vis the Pakistani press were analyzed in context of nature and workings of media in respective socio-political scenarios prevalent in both countries\(^8\). The historical context and circumstances in which the Indian and Pakistani press are placed is important to carry out such a comparative evaluation. India has been a functioning democracy since its independence and with a brief exception of the 1975-77 national emergency; freedom of the press has been firmly enshrined in India’s Constitution. For most part of its history, the Indian press has supported democratic endeavours as a free and vibrant institution. Liberalization of Indian economy in 1991 opened up doors for the entry of foreign media in India’s media landscape. Today, a plethora of media choices right from print to audio-visual to community and digital media are present to strengthen the idea and practice of democracy. As opposed to this, Pakistan’s press has been struggling to deal with the state, military and extraneous elements. During the heydays of Pakistan’s formation as an independent state, press was used to strengthen the hold of Islam

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\(^8\) For an overview of the nature and workings of Indian and Pakistani media see Chapter 3.
on people’s lives. With a long history of military rule and foundational roots in religion, it was only in 2002 that Pakistan’s mediascape opened to privatization.

Earlier it was the state-controlled media that dominated Pakistan’s socio-political fabric. In the present scenario of political crisis in Pakistan, one finds that its media is at the receiving end. In the recent past, life-threatening attacks on Pakistan’s media have increased and the state’s failure to provide protection to media personnel is evident. In this light, scrutiny of coverage in Pakistan’s press depicted maturity, resilience and zeal to confront unjust actions of the state. Compared to the Indian press, the press in Pakistan, with its tradition of struggle for freedom of expression questioned government actions with relative ease. For example, during terror attacks on Mumbai’s premiere locations, both Dawn and The News while defending Pakistan from India’s accusations also admitted to the existence of terrorist factories in the country and vociferously demanded accountability and responsibility on part of the state. On issues of national security, terrorism coverage was forthright and critical of mainstream narratives. Indian press on the other hand, chose to align with state-led opinion. It often remained silent and marginalized issues such as controversial role of army and state of human rights in Kashmir, intelligence failure in India. As reiterated by two experts, Pakistan’s press covered issues of Indo-Pak relationship more frequently and highlighted positivity in the relationship more than the Indian press. Both pointed out to regular and dedicated coverage to the Aman ki Asha campaign in The News international as compared to infrequent coverage in Times of India.

While discourse in Pakistan’s press owned up to problems that afflicted the country’s socio-political fabric, the Indian press remained in denial and addressed internal issues such as growing majoritarianism and treatment of minorities in restrictive news frames. In contrast, Pakistan’s press addressed a wide range of issues such as internal sectarian strife, increasing social inequalities, rising extremism and conditions of minorities and women. Through commentaries, solutions and course corrections to problems encountered were offeredvi.
Another difference in coverage was focus on domestic and internal issues. Pakistan’s press did not abandon coverage of significant domestic issues. Even as issues of India-Pakistan conflict were covered on national and international pages, domestic news was not relegated to the background. The Indian press however, in providing leverage to the India-Pakistan conflict neglected domestic concerns. Contradictory narratives emerged in the Indian and Pakistani press on issues of conflict and peace. The table below elucidates the same:

Table 7.2: Comparative analysis of coverage given to conflict and peace issues

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Indian Press</th>
<th>Pakistani Press</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opposing news-frames in the Indian and Pakistani press as derived from analysis and interpretation of coverage in four select newspapers</strong></td>
<td>Clash of narratives to describe the same phenomenon, opposing prisms of understanding and disseminating conflict-related news (eg: ‘terrorists’ versus ‘freedom fighters’)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Indian narrative of blame and finger pointing towards Pakistan (eg: Pakistan responsible for sponsoring terrorism in Kashmir)</td>
<td>Pakistani narrative of denial, defence and playing a victim to India’s hegemonic designs (eg: India responsible for crushing Kashmir’s indigenous freedom struggle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>KASHMIR</strong></td>
<td>Status of Kashmir: Kashmir as ‘atoot ang’, Kashmir as inseparable part of India</td>
<td>Kashmir referred to as disputed territory, Indian occupied Kashmir whereas Pakistani Kashmir referred to as ‘Azad Kashmir’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pakistan backed terrorism in Kashmir, reference to ‘infiltrators’ and ‘terrorists’</td>
<td>Reference to the violence in Kashmir as indigenous freedom struggle against Indian occupation, reference to infiltrators as ‘freedom fighters’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indian army</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pakistan’s army</strong></td>
<td><strong>Kashmir</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>framed as protector and guardian of rights and dignity of Kashmiris</td>
<td>framed as violator of human rights, perpetrator of violence and atrocities on Kashmiris</td>
<td>as one among the many issues that impact bilateral relations between India and Pakistan. Discussion on Kashmir as part of a comprehensive composite dialogue.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>as a force of solidarity and support to the freedom struggle in Kashmir</td>
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<td></td>
<td>as abettor and facilitator of terrorism and mayhem in Kashmir</td>
<td>as the core issue between India and Pakistan. Primacy of talks on Kashmir as the centre-point of discussion between the two countries.</td>
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<td>MEDIATION/EXTERNAL ELEMENTS</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Stand on the issue of international mediation – India’s strong rejection of third party mediation, display of commitment to bilateral mechanisms to solve contentious issues</strong></td>
<td><strong>Favorable stance towards international mediation, call for an active role on part of United Nations and international community in resolution of outstanding issues</strong></td>
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<td>Pakistan’s repeated demands for international mediation seen to be against the spirit of Simla accord; Pakistan’s maneuvering at internationalizing a bilateral issue to evoke sympathy at global level</td>
<td>India’s rejection of international mediation was framed as reinforcement of evil designs with respect to Kashmir, failure to abide by commitment given to the UN</td>
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<td><strong>Role of Hurriyat – Vehement opposition to involvement of Hurriyat in India-Pakistan talks</strong></td>
<td><strong>Hurriyat as important actor in Kashmir conflict, support to a more pro-active role played by Hurriyat in the dialogue process</strong></td>
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<tr>
<th>WORLD-VIEW</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>The Indian Press views Pakistan as a Muslim country that is anti-India, haven of Islamic terrorism with no respect for minority rights. Concepts of ‘religion’ and ‘terrorism’ are linked and terrorism is viewed from a religious prism</strong></td>
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<td><strong>The Pakistani press views India as a Hindu dominated country where Muslims are subjugated to ‘Hindu imperialism’. Resorting to a world-view influenced by the partition, it flays the multicultural and secular fabric of Indian nationhood. Clear articulation of Indian politics in terms of ‘right’ and ‘left’, ‘communal’ and ‘secular’, ‘hard-line’ and moderate’ is found.</strong></td>
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9 Use of terms such as ‘Hindu dominated India’, ‘right-wing Hindu protestors’, ‘Hindu conspiracy’ was found in Pakistani newspapers.
Other than above discussed differences observed in Indian and Pakistani press, media discourse reflected similar trends as outlined below:

- Indian and Pakistani newspapers under study chose to operate within limited news-frames while describing the ‘other’. The attempt was to restrict to a pre-determined agenda and not address larger concerns.

- Both media accorded prominence to elite political opinions whereas concerns of common people were reflected only in human interest stories.

- Language employed by both media was confrontational, aggressive and demonizing of the ‘other’. It also carried emotional appeals to citizens. Use of such language strengthened polarization and ingrained enemy images. Media on both sides thus served as a platform for levelling accusations. Opposing ideas were reinforced on daily basis, leaving little scope for reconciliation.

- Victim-perpetrator frame was used extensively in both media. Each identified their own country as victim and other as ‘perpetrator’. For example, Pakistan’s problem of terrorism was not addressed in the Indian press and achievements of Indian Muslims were not highlighted in Pakistan’s press. For both media, one’s own tragedy was superior to that faced by the ‘other’ (for Pakistan, its own problems of terrorism and sectarianism require more attention than terrorism faced by India).

- In the India-Pak conflict, media served to intensify polarization, enemy images and hatred of the ‘other’. Selective representation of facts without context was also common. Even as alternatives were presented, these are they were placed within framework of mainstream narratives. Media reduced the relationship to a verbal duel, giving an impression of war fought under media glare.

- Conflict coverage dominated both media and was valued over news on peace and reconciliation. Having said this, intense media scrutiny on issues of peace and conflict is a reality in both countries.

10 Media in India and Pakistan used popular news frames such as – victimhood, extreme representations, polarized positions, blame, exalting the self, and demonization.
• The Indian and Pakistani media gave disproportionate attention to opinions emanating from the western world. This was at the cost of ignoring opinion generated in the immediate South Asian neighbourhood. For example, statements from leadership in the United States made it to headlines in all four newspapers while opinions from sub-continental leaders were relegated to inside pages.

• The press on both sides of the border served as a tool to repeatedly remind its people of past confrontations, bitterness in the relationship and represent peace as an unsustainable option. Legitimacy was granted to state actions, morality and superiority of response to the enemy. For instance, in case of coverage on border clashes, repeated reference was made to past confrontations to depict one side as a habitual offender\textsuperscript{11}.

• Despite their role as opinion-makers, the press in India and Pakistan failed to mobilize public opinion and emerge as an advocacy platform for important issues such as nuclearization of South Asia, arms race in the sub-continent, issues of rights and justice in the conflict zone, environmental impact of the conflict, concerns of refugees and displaced populations (in this case the Pandits of Kashmir and Kashmiris divided by the conflict).

7.3.2 Traditional (Press) and New media

A comparative evaluation between traditional and new media is relevant in context of the present study since different roles played by two mediums in conflict mediation have driven inquiry. A traditional medium like the press in both countries is an established entity with a wider reach than new media. The press has significant opinions to offer; it covers issues in depth and provides a range of perspectives on conflict. In developing countries like India and Pakistani, it is the press (more significantly the regional press) which is as a carrier of opinion and source of perceptions built around the ‘other’. The English press in both nations serves as a platform for projection of elite political opinion around which issues of

\textsuperscript{11} Repeated reference to ‘enemy’s’ crime, silence on transgression by self, ‘Other’ as serious offender while absolving self of blame.
foreign policy are decided. Though limited, the press also offers scope for exchange of opinions among readers and novel perspectives on conflict resolution. The nature of this medium allows for diversity in coverage, but also reinforces dominantly held opinions on inter-state relations. The press is an important ‘political’ actor in conflict mediation, its role influenced by determinants ranging from history, culture, religion, politics, ideology and media environment.

New media on the other hand has only recently emerged as a medium that promotes alternative narratives in the India-Pakistan discourse. Distinct from the mainstream press, it is a citizen-driven medium where cross-border interactions are facilitated. As a medium promoting alternative views, its role is significant in creation of indigenous content and sharing of views absent from mainstream news. Ease of access, fewer constraints of time and space, interactive nature have propelled people in both countries to forward peace narratives through new media. New media ensures people’s involvement in issues of peace and conflict and allows questioning of mainstream narratives. In the India-Pak scenario, new media is gradually expanding its orbit to accommodate as many diverse perceptions as possible to play the role of a peace-building forum. New media’s capability to innovate in terms of media content and practices is noteworthy. Future studies can specifically build upon knowledge and practices generated by cross-border peace forums active on new media along with prospects and challenges that lie ahead of them. “New media has played an important role in initiating conversations across borders and much new media content is also being translated and presented on mainstream media forums such as blogs and websites of mainstream newspapers (For example: Express Tribune blogs). A lot of what is shared on new media also now appears in mainstream media especially content shared on blogs and social networking sites”, opined an expert interviewed for the study.

In the present study, comparative evaluation between mainstream and new media confers emphasis on greater synergy, interaction and collaboration between the two mediums for a constructive role in conflict mediation.
7.4 DISCUSSION

The ‘mediating’ role of media as an agent in the India-Pakistan conflict has to be understood beyond values of ‘positive’ versus ‘negative’. There are instances of media promoting discord along with examples of its contribution to peace. The India-Pakistan conflict is different from conflicts in the western world and hence an explanation of media’s role should venture beyond a political perspective. Social, cultural, religious, economic and historical factors are deeply embedded in any explanation about media’s role. Present day inter-state conflicts are under media scanner and media’s function is much more than reporting facts and figures. Media’s role is immensely powerful in creating a shared agenda, shaping opinions and transferring images and impressions into people’s minds. Media itself are quite aware of their impact on local public sentiments and international opinion. Indian and Pakistani mainstream media however do very little to further a shared agenda. They contribute rather to reinforcement of differences thereby widening already existing gap. Media discourse in case of India and Pakistan indulged in ‘labelling’, attributing specific characteristics to the ‘enemy’, promoting stereotypes and predetermined ideas about conflict. A trajectory of peace and conflict events in the more than six decades long relationship indicates that media contribute to exacerbation of conflict. However, the burden of peace should not rest entirely on media. Expectations from it should be grounded in reality and shaped by acceptance of a framework beyond ‘good versus bad’, ‘positive versus negative’.

A well-known Pakistani journalist interviewed for the study pointed out that media is vulnerable to propaganda since it can be used as both, a tool to disseminate information about injustices perpetrated in conflict zones and also to suppress voices in conflict. It serves as a tool for propagating official versions of contending issues and contrary to assumption, the English press is at the forefront in this matter. As Huma Yusuf points out, media on both sides cover threats from the elite leadership, domestic exchanges of barbs between politicians about being soft on the ‘enemy’ and thus give credence to hysteria, jingoism, xenophobia, blame game and finger-pointing (Yusuf, 2014). Post-conflict, the press jumps to conclusion about the event, without taking time to place things in perspective and
engage in contextual reflections (*pieces and facts being strung together without any contextualization* – expert’s view). This of course, is attributed to nature of media operations, news routines and an emphasis on immediacy. It also invokes familiar, repetitive and easily accepted frames of news coverage to reinforce reader beliefs and values associated with conflict. Use of emotional undertones in coverage and misleading perspectives was also rampant in coverage by the press in India and Pakistan. 

During events of conflict and peace, media relies heavily on state and military sources for information. This is especially true for border clashes wherein only available firsthand source of information is the armed force. Means for verification of this information are limited. It is difficult for media to raise questions over army operations as these are considered to be above scrutiny. Any attempt on part of media to indict the army is construed as anti-national. The media-military relationship in India and Pakistan is complex (delicate in context of Pakistan since army is a crucial stakeholder in political power). At the same time, media presents the soldier as an epitome of sacrifice and valour to evoke nationalist sentiments. Once the fog of conflict subsides, the soldier conveniently fades from media frames and consequently from public memory. In many news stories on conflict, non-identification and secrecy of sources was strictly maintained by media.

In consonance with functions of sensationalism and exaggeration, media simplify complex issues such as terrorism, war, clashes, peace process etc leading to trivialization and lack of attention towards the bigger picture. Media’s financial co-option with state and national security apparatus is also a factor in its emphasis on conflict vis-a-vis peace. Media discourse on peace in case of India-Pakistan is shaped from the prism of conflict. Media’s support to peace overtures remains till the time an event compromises national security of the country. The Times of

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12 News stories carried statements by the leadership making emotional appeals to citizens to unite for the sake of national security. On many occasions, the researcher came across news stories that either had a misleading headline with a purpose to capture reader attention or those where the main text of the story deviated from its headline.
India involved in a major peace journalism campaign with The Jang group in Pakistan, despite its commitment to ‘Aman ki Asha’ chooses to abandon its support during events of political and military tensions.

As conflicting countries whose populations have limited chances of interaction, three significant pointers emerge from the above discussion:

• **Media objectivity** – Since conflict involves sentiments associated with patriotism and nationalist fervour, one cannot expect media to be absolutely neutral in its reportage. However, what is desirable is dispassionate reporting by not distorting and misleading readers into believing that the ‘other’ deserves only hatred. In a well-informed socio-political structure, media should not seek to socialize citizens into favourable and dominant opinions, but rather work towards moulding diversity, maturity and balance in perspectives. In the views of a peace activist – “the media’s role in conflict is not value-free as it carries out selective reportage on selective conflict zones. Media reporting at most times is driven by agendas, nationalistic and commercial both”. Instead of complete surrender to the state’s agenda, media’s aggressive questioning, thorough investigation and dissociation of fact from fiction can go a long way in conflict mediation. According to an expert, both the Indian and Pakistani press should move towards a more critically aware and analytical view of the ‘other’. This does not mean that they should stop reporting conflict but do it in a more nuanced fashion. Objectivity and mediation are different and media should try and incorporate both in its functioning, according to another Pakistani journalist.

• **Media’s commitment to peace** – Contrary to propositions presented by peace journalism, it is media’s right to report on both positive and negative aspects of conflict related developments. The onus of conflict resolution does not lie totally on media’s shoulders. There are other forces which ought to contribute to this role, however since media is a powerful force in shaping public opinion, its ‘mediating’ role is more important than its role in mitigation, transformation and resolution. Even without a direct stake in peace, it can play a significant role in the way conflict is understood, absorbed and internalized.
in South Asian societies. For instance, as suggested by an expert, new media is a potent force attempting to bring forth positive/alternative voices in the Indo-Pak domain. It is through the rise of an ‘alternative’ peace media and its commitment to a peace discourse that mainstream news media finds itself more compartmentalized when reporting on conflict and peace issues. Media reportage during peace is equally important as coverage of conflict.

- **Media practices** – Evolution of media practices and media environment in India and Pakistan is also a factor. Lack of infrastructure and resources for reporting news from a cross-border perspective, lack of opportunities to engage in exchange with media personnel on the ‘other’ side, state restrictions on media exchange are constraints on media to interact with the ‘other’ and widen its frame of operations. Advent of online news portals, e-papers and other means of accessing news from the other side is a sign of encouragement. Sustained and substantial nature of media exchange would enable Indians and Pakistanis to accept the ‘other’ in portrayals other than extreme representations. It would serve as a step ahead in resolving this intractable conflict and strengthening media’s capacity to perform a mediatory role. In words of a Pakistani journalist interviewed for the study – “exchanges between both countries’ press corps would help them better understand how discourse and agendas work in both countries, as well as how the press reacts to or presents public perception; leading to a better understanding of politics and the issues that influence it in each country.” Media can play an important role in translating people’s perceptions into policies and hence its mediating role is important.

### 7.5 FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

In view of the present study, following suggestions can be offered for future research. These suggestions are presented vis-a-vis limitations encountered while conducting this research:
Table 7.3: Limitations juxtaposed with suggestions for future research

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Study Limitations</th>
<th>Suggestions for future research</th>
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<tr>
<td>The study follows a dominantly qualitative approach influenced by a constructivist paradigm. The task of drawing generalizations is thus limited and inclusion of statistical aspects such as number of news stories, their placement, weighted space occupied by articles and other elements of quantification are absent.</td>
<td>Dominant studies in this area have been carried out with a quantitative focus. However, a combination of qualitative and quantitative research aspects can be useful to delve deeper into understanding the media’s role in conflict. Research on statistical aspects of coverage can lend precision and a scientific character to research in this area and reveal more insights about patterns of media coverage in conflict.</td>
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<td>Present study remained limited to examining discourse in mainstream English press in both countries. The regional press (Hindi, Urdu and other languages) was not covered within the ambit of this study due to a lack of knowledge of regional languages(^{13}). The domain of popular culture was also left out from under study purview.</td>
<td>A wider range of the English press could be undertaken for study in future research work. This could include lesser known newspapers with limited circulation. Selection of newspapers could also be done on the basis of readership, ideological affiliations, and popular appeal. Study of mediums of popular culture such as cinema, literature, folklore, music etc can further scholarship in this area along side research on the regional press and audio-visual media.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study period was limited to a particular phase in the trajectory of India-Pakistan relations. This was chosen keeping in mind rationale and significance of the study.</td>
<td>Different phases in India-Pakistan relations can be studied for a more comprehensive understanding of the media’s role. For example, crucial events such as post-partition, post Bangladesh war, post-Mumbai phase can be selected.</td>
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\(^{13}\) The regional press in India and Pakistan is a widely acknowledged for shaping public opinion with respect to conflict based relations. The researcher strongly recommends more number of studies to be carried with regional media content along with an examination of its impact on popular opinion.
Analysis of both past and contemporary events can lend understanding and explanations about the media’s role over a period of time through which similarities, variations and evolution in its role can be discussed.

Study focus was on events and content – both of which were used as premise to examine the media’s role. Thereby, conclusions could be drawn only for select events under study. Newspaper content was the primary tool to answer research questions and interviews with experts were employed for the purpose of secondary analysis.

Though an amalgamation of theoretical underpinnings to explain the media’s role in conflict have informed this study, these may have acted as limitations to inferences derived.

Future research may shift from an event-centric examination to analyzing phases of conflict not under media glare. Studies can also elicit popular and expert opinion on media’s role in conflict mediation. Tools such as FGDs and in-depth interviews shall serve this purpose. Content specific to conflict and peace-building initiatives can also be examined through a separate study.\(^{14}\)

Theoretical underpinnings informed by news narratives and news discourse, critical social theory, semantics of media coverage and use of media as a political tool in international conflict can be employed to study finer aspects of the media’s role. Theoretical propositions from political theory, international relations, studies of culture and religion can be of benefit in examining factors that determine media’s role in conflict. Research in this area should move beyond content studies and adopt innovative theoretical dimensions to generate relevant knowledge.

\(^{14}\) Audience studies are also extremely relevant in the domain of media and conflict since as an agency that contributes immensely to mobilizing and shaping popular opinions; media’s role ought to be studied from the standpoint of audience perceptions. This becomes important in the case of new media as a tool for citizen-driven opinion on conflict.
Notes

i The Indian press does not frame right-wing political sections of the country favourably in the context of Indo-Pak relations (so does the Pakistani press). The right wing is seen as a threat to the country's secular fabric, their practices as an opposition to normal relations with Pakistan. Thereby the secular-communal debate is reduced to a criticism of right wing politics vis a vis relations with Pakistan and the state of minorities in the country. These ideas are heavily influenced by memories of India's partition and the Nehruvian, left-liberal ideas of secularism. No alternative line of thinking is proposed as far as complex issues surrounding secularism-rightwing politics-Pakistan are concerned.

ii The discourse on Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) presents the region as an integral part of the Pakistani state and frames emerging responses as reaffirming commitment to Pakistani nationalism. There is an absence of discourse that discusses AJK as a disputed area captured by Pakistan in 1947. The attempt is to frame AJK as a peaceful and prosperous area within the domain of Pakistan, juxtaposed with Indian held Kashmir. The discourse on AJK prominently focuses on statements made by its leaders and people's views shown as supportive of Pakistan and opposed to Indian occupation.

iii A peace activist from India who is also the founder of a popular online forum for peace and friendship between India and Pakistan is of the opinion that new media is more democratic than mainstream media. Setting up a blog or Facebook page does not require the kind of money and permissions required to set up a newspaper or TV channel. He says that new media empowers young and old alike in reaching out across the divide and humanizing the 'other'.

iv A few experts showered praise for the Aman ki Asha campaign but at the same time referred to Times Now's hawkish role in reportage on Pakistan.

v Even as these new media forums (for detailed analysis of content presented in these forums, see Chapter 6) are offering fresh perspectives, they are open to misuse. For instance, one can find hate and propaganda web content on both sides of the border. To simplistically assume that alternate media is being used only to spread the message of peace would be incorrect. The alternate media is prone to being used for spreading hate, conflict related sentiments and reinforce stereotypes. With an increasing population having access to new media content in India and Pakistan, credibility, veracity and accountability of new media content is an issue to be discussed in the research community.

vi During the terror attacks in Mumbai, both newspapers under study were critical of state support to terrorism in Pakistan. Commentaries advised caution and restraint in dealings with India, abhorred the idea of war, advocated human security concerns to be prioritized over arms race and military build-up in South Asia and called for cooperation with India in the fight against terror. These were found along with routine news frames dominated by conspiracy theory and blame game.

vii Contemporary conflicts are characterized by media scrutiny over each and every aspect of conflict under the pretext of demand from readers. In reality however, conflict is a profit making venture for present day global as well as sub-continental media.