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**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Current Affairs Talk Shows on Leading TV Channels in Pakistan:  
Agents of Political Harmony**

Dr Asmat Ullah<sup>1</sup> Dr. Shabir Hussain<sup>2</sup> Dr. Muhammad Rashid Khan<sup>3</sup>

1. Independent Researcher and Development Expert, Islamabad, Pakistan
2. Associate Professor, Media Studies Department, Bahria University Islamabad, Pakistan
3. Assistant Professor, Institute of Communication Studies, University of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

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**Corresponding**

**Author**

asmatpk@yahoo.com

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**ABSTRACT**

In this study, the researchers have investigated the escalatory and de-escalatory potential of current affairs talk shows in the leading TV channels in Pakistan. The data was analyzed through content analysis by applying the war and peace journalism model developed by Johan Galtung. We found the five leading talk shows produced more escalatory content like pitting the political parties against each other to create more drama, decontextualize the political issues and proved to be politically biased. Moreover, the issues of political nature were mainly of escalatory nature as compared to the non-political issues. The study concludes that to create a more democratic culture in the country, the media should educate people in democratic traditions like tolerance, political knowledge and including popular perspectives on important national issues

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**Introduction**

Media role in democratizing conflict has been investigated in many unconsolidated democracies (Esser&Vreese, 2007; Mittell, 2010). While normatively media are expected to promote broader understanding in a society through debates and exploring all possible avenues, practically, their role degenerate into dysfunctions. Studies have shown a dysfunctional media create pessimism among audiences about the democratic process. Keeping in view these limitations of media, many researchers have analyzed media role in semi-democratic regimes. However, no such study is available in Pakistan to determine the function-dysfunctions of media. In this study, we attempt to investigate the role of media in Pakistan through its conflict escalation or de-escalation potential.

After the proliferation of mass media in Pakistan most of the people spend their leisure time in front of television listening and watching the daily news and current affair programs to inform themselves about the different issues of their interest (Hussain, 2015). This consumption of television news is responsible for changing and making the perception of the audience about the world. The news channels talk shows appeared as very influential component of the modern journalism which not only shares the information about an event but also giving a well-constructed opinion about the event or issue. The talk-show journalism represents the specific development in the TV journalism providing large variety of topics with light discourse in the form of hard and soft news making journalist seductive and reliable to the home audience (Ahmad, 2010).

These talk shows are produced on daily basis on different news channels and some channels are aired live to keep the live contact of audience and giving people chance to participate in the live news event. The model of talk show take us back to the talk shows of the radio in which the audiences have the chance to participate and putting their contribution in these talk shows. After the de-generation and privatization of media channels in Pakistan gave spark to the talk shows trends which were able to grab the public attention by providing the different varieties of public interests in their show (Yaseen et al, 2018).

Talk shows of the television provided the platforms to the people and to the opinion leaders from the different way of lives. As Pakistani talk shows play vital role in politicizing the public debates and providing freedom of speech at a vast level while discussing the political issues. Talk shows of the different news channels provide different news and opinion with different agenda, the political and economic inclination of media houses also molds the policy of the channel or news programs (Ahmad, 2010).

In time of newspapers and radio talk shows, the opinions were influenced for different goals through the live talk shows on radio while articles and editorials in the newspapers were used to manage the public perception, but the news talk shows provided the journalists an opportunity to be a host and the guest of these programs, and their interpretation of an issue became more significant than the coverage of the same news story with objectivity. This overcoming representation of news anchors and journalist, made them stars of the television news providing an opportunity to the news talk shows to mine into the opinions of the audiences and providing them smooth way to the emotional pulse of their audience, regarding different issues or events (Yaseen et al, 2018; Hussain, 2015).

Discussing the talk shows in the light of above premises in this study, we tried to investigate the development and success of talk shows with in-depth focus on the framing inclination of the talk shows content. Framing concept in journalism is often used as the schema of a message interpretation allowing people to perceive or identify the message in concrete occurrences defined in its limits. In another definition the framing could be defined as making some elements salient of the

perceived reality to audience consumable while ignoring other. These dynamics of the framing attracts the scholars from the communication and journalism and compel the news talk shows producer and developers to make complex situation to simple theme for their audiences.

### **Literature Review**

Chauhan (2001) in his book *Television and Social Transformation* highlighted the importance of political talk shows in creating affinity between the viewers and media. However, it has also been divulged through this study that audience prefer entertainment programs than the rest of television genres. Kuo-Yi Wu (1990) reckoned Taiwan television role in forming social perception on sex, crime and violence, inter-personal relationships and ageing along with background and social condition exerts substantial effect. Shanahan and Morgan (1992) study of adolescents' exposure of television and its effect on family members' interaction described strengthening of adolescents and parents in a family. However, Kang (1989) did not find strong connect between high school children television programs viewing and traditional sex roles, the liberal attitudes towards dating, marriage and distorted social reality on violence and social dominance.

Although peace research in media is a recent phenomenon but the war and propaganda studies to understand the role of media is on board since 16<sup>th</sup> century (Knightley, 2011; Carruthers, 2011). It has been observed by many scholars that use of media in war escalation sentiments remained in vogue and could be discerned through Crimean war, Spanish incursion of Cuba, cold war era, Operation Iraqi Freedom and Middle East youth revolution, (Knightly, 2004; Allan & Zelizer, 2004; Lynch, 2008; Youngblood, 2017). The neutral or non-partisan media over the past hundred years in US also follows the war journalism approach in the name of national interest (Hammond, 2007). Wolsfeld (1997) shared the position of modern day journalists that are required by the state to follow the policy during the crises or war situation that definitely clips the freedom of press and twists its coverage in favor of war rhymes. This legacy then travels onward and even during the normal course of time the state machinery uses the media in its own favor on war peace scale of understanding.

The peace role of media is very fundamental for the prevalence of peace instead of war amongst the audience and this could be seen in the post Second World War era in Europe particularly by the radio at that time which harbored peace broadcast projects that galvanized the role of League of Nations, Howard (2003). The same is being repeated in many Asian and African conflicts to strengthen peace perspectives in the war-torn hotspots. Definitely, such media efforts diminish escalation of war and plays role in the prevalence of peace Becker (2004). The pattern of reporting we see at occasions of conflict projects 'us vs. them' which escalates the conflicting views and set stage for violence and it diminishes the chances of rapprochement between the conflicting groups (Lynch, 2013; Galtung, 1998).

We do not know whether our talk shows anchorpersons know the scientific nature of the impact of their war laden programs or not but the researchers like Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) shared the findings that war reporting created an aura of misunderstanding and uncompromising tendencies among the warring factions and bleaks down the prospects of peace or win-win situation. Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) have set the anvil for reporters, anchors and talk show hosts that relates to their value in imparting and boosting peace journalism pertaining to their domains through which the audience may well follow the non-violent reactions/statements to the violent conflicts. Similarly, Kempf (2012) highlighted the importance of seasoned media workers in shaping the public opinion in line with peace or war standings.

Fahmy (2004) disclosed the popular news agencies portrayal of beyond veil afghan women environment during post-Taliban period which was episodic and against the mainstream ground realities in the country. King and Lester (2005) held that favorite media persons are assigned the coverage task that led to project the viewpoint of state in its coverage as that was evident in gulf war 1992 and Iraq invasion of 2003. Neumann&Fahmy (2012) found that the major wire services like AP, AFP, Reuter favored the American and European viewpoint while covering civil war in Sri Lanka. The study of Neumann&Fahmy (2016) pointed out the political and cultural moorings as the galvanizing factor behind war peace reporting. Responding the same through the research study of Hoffmann, (Ed.), Hawkins, (Ed.) (2015) on post conflict nations where media functions without guards on professing war journalism tidings and that are why conflict remains alive.

Hussain (2017) on conflicts in Karachi epitomized the inclination of media towards crisis escalation and spread of sensations and toes partisan approach on political lines to project miseries of a specific political group and keeps in oblivion the sufferings of the other group reported. Similarly, Hussain and Munawar (2017) concluded about the Taliban coverage in major Pakistani newspapers from war and peace journalism perception that tilts towards war journalism. Based on the above literature, the following main question is asked in this study.

## Material and Methods

In this study we selected five leading TV channel including Geo, ARY, Dunya News, Express News and Sama TV. Five primetime current affairs programs that are telecasted at 8pm were selected from these channels that included Capital Talk, Off the Record, KalTak, Live with Nadeem Malik, and Dunya Kamran K Sath, for the month of January of 2020. Hence a total 87 talk shows were included through a census approach.

**Table 1**  
**Table of talk shows in the study**

SN	Talk Show	On aired Programs
1	Capital Talk	17

2	Off the Record	16
3	KalTak	16
4	Dunya Kamran Khan k Sath	21
5	Live with Nadeem Malik	17
	Total	87

The time period for the study was the month of January. All the selected talk shows that were conducted during this month were part of the study. For the data analysis, an original escalatory and de-escalatory model was developed. We borrowed from Johan Galtung model of Escalatory and De-Escalatory journalism as well as the relevant scholarship on De-Escalatory journalism developed by Jake Lynch and Wilhelm Kempf. As shown in the table 1, the two key categories of escalatory approach and de-escalatory approach are both conceptually defined.

**Table 2**  
**War and peace journalism model**

Escalatory Coverage	De-Escalatory Coverage
Approach	
<b>Reactive approach:</b> Instead of predicting the situation before hand, media awaits events and then report these.	<b>Proactive approach:</b> media predict a situation and calls for actions before a situation worsens.
<b>Lack of context:</b> The topics selected are mere events and not linked to the background knowledge, socio-politic and economic realities. (-.5)	<b>Context and background:</b> the topics reported contain proper context and history of the issues...detailed info is provided and all sides of a topic are reported.
<b>Dividing:</b> The coverage is dividing. Only those events, issues and topics are selected that divide the parties/groups and commonalities are ignored. (-1)	<b>Uniting:</b> The coverage is uniting the parties to face mutual challenges and issues that the groups confront. Commonalities are stressed.
<b>Win vs. lose scenario:</b> If the political battle between the groups/parties is so reported that win for one is the defeat for the other. Compromises are ridiculed. (-1)	<b>Win-win scenario:</b> There are no losers, all are winners.
Representation of Actors	
<b>Partiality:</b> If the media openly sides a party in a debate. (-1)	<b>Impartiality:</b> If the media does not take side.
<b>Not-representative:</b> The actors invited in the program are not in line with the topics selected.	<b>Representative:</b> The actors invited in the program are in line with the topics selected.
<b>Popular perspective is ignored:</b> If on any given topic, the perspectives, opinions of common people are excluded and only viewpoints of politicians, bureaucrats, military people are sought (-.5).	<b>Popular perspective is stressed:</b> If on any given topic, the perspectives, opinions of common people are included and their issues highlighted.
Language	

**Problematic Language:** If the language is demonizing, bombastic, victimizing etc. **Serious Language:** If the language is objective, serious and terse.

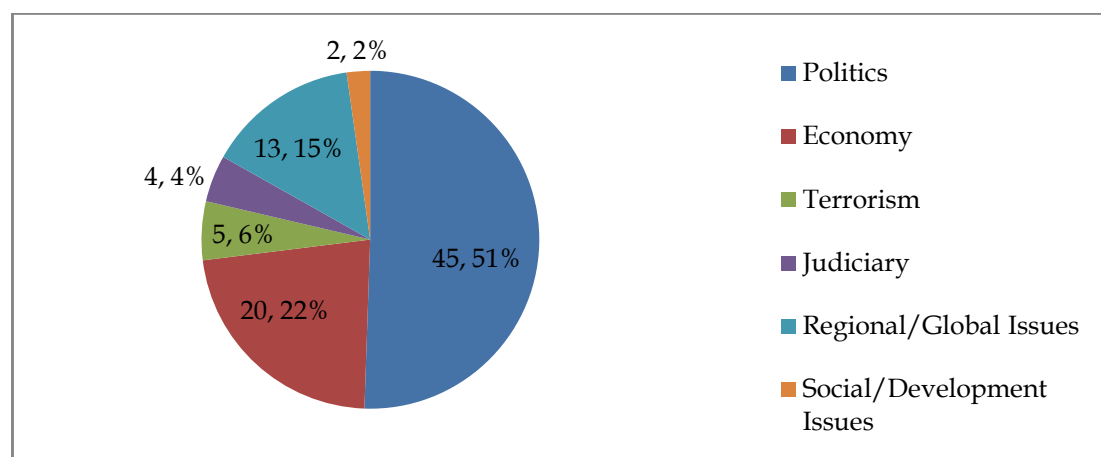
(-1)

Unit of analysis was a single question and answer. The supplementary questions were also treated as a unit of analysis. The overall dominant impression for any of the variable decided its placement in the coding sheet. All the telecast shows were retrieved from YouTube. Five coders were trained in the coding scheme. These sessions remained for a full week. One of the authors of the study coded two talk shows from each channel to check the inter-coder reliability. The overall agreement was over 80 percent for all the five channels. The level of measurement was nominal and descriptive statistics was used analyzing the data.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 4**  
Distribution of key topics in the selected talk shows

Topics	Discussed time	Percent
Politics	45	50.56%
Economy	20	22.47%
Terrorism	5	5.61%
Judiciary	4	4.49%
Regional/Global Issues	13	14.60%
Social/Development Issues	2	2.24%
Total	89	99.97%



The analysis of the data shows variety of results, defining the different frames used by different programs regarding the topics which were discussed in the programs. The graphs of the analysis show that the politics is discussed in most of the programs taking 51% of the whole programs while economy is followed with 22% in the whole data. Regional issues are discussed 13 times with 15%, Terrorism discussion is 6%, Judiciary related issues are discussed 4% and Social/Development

Issues are 2% of the whole data. The 2<sup>nd</sup> graph of the results show the Escalatory and De-Escalatory frames of the talk show in coverage of selected topics.

**Table 4**  
**Distribution of escalatory and de-escalatory frames in the selected talk shows**

Talk Show	War Frames	Peace Frames	Total
Capital Talk	168 (67.2%)	82(32.8%)	250(100%)
Off the Record	133 (68.55%)	61(31.44%)	194(100%)
KalTak	112 (58.94%)	78(41.05%)	190(99.99%)
Dunya Kamran Khan k Sath	128 (65.30%)	68(34.69%)	196(99.99%)
Love With Nadeem Malik	105(55.55%)	84(44.44%)	189(99.99%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>646</b>	<b>373</b>	<b>1019</b>

The talk show Off the Record provided total 194 frames in which 68.55% (133) were in Escalatory frames while 31.45% (61) were in De-Escalatory frames. The KAL TAK talk show provided total 190 frames in which 58.94% (112) were framed in Escalatory frames and 41.05% (78) in De-Escalatory frames while the talk show Live With Nadeem Malik provided less frames as compared to all the other shows with numbers of 189 frames in which 55.55% (105) are in Escalatory frames while 44.44% (84) in De-Escalatory frames.

In the figures we see that all the programs framed most of their question in the Escalatory frames as compared to De-Escalatory frames. Capital talk program have more frames of Escalatory as compared to all the other programs. Capital talk provided 67.2% (168) escalatory frames while 32.8% (82), in De-Escalatoryframes. Following capital talk the Dunya Kamran K Sath total provided 196 frames in which 65.30% (128) while 34.69% (68) in De-Escalatoryframes.

In the context of Escalatory and De-Escalatory frames the whole data provided different results regarding different programs in which average Escalatory frames are provided by the Off the Record program while followed by Capital Talk with slim edge. While average high rate in production of De-Escalatory frames, Live With Nadeem Malik show provided more frames in their content. Analyzing the data while finding the framing of news in the selected topics of the study we found different frames of Escalatory andDe-Escalatory nature in the coverage of different issues.

**Table 5**  
**Distribution of key attributes of escalatory frames in the selected talk shows**

	Lack of Context	Dividing	Win-lose scenario	Partiality	Not Representative	Not Popular	Problematic Language	Reactive	Total
Politics	4 (2.25%)	22 (12.42%)	26 (14.68%)	29 (16.38%)	17 (9.60%)	26 (14.68%)	28 (15.81%)	25 (14.12%)	177 (99.9%)
Economy	7 (7.29%)	12 (12.5%)	13 (13.54%)	10 (10.41%)	21 (21.87%)	21 (21.87%)	7 (7.29%)	5 (5.20%)	96 (99.9%)
Judiciary	10 (11.23%)	14 (15.73%)	13 (14.60%)	16 (17.97%)	8 (8.98%)	13 (14.60%)	5 (5.61%)	10 (11.2%)	89 (99.9%)
Terrorism	5 (5%)	12 (12%)	13 (13%)	17 (17%)	14 (14%)	12 (12%)	17 (17%)	10 (10%)	100 (%)

Local issues	12 (14.28%)	3 (3.57%)	5 (5.95%)	13 (15.47%)	13 (15.47%)	8 (9.52%)	20 (23.80%)	10 (11.9%)	84 (99.9)
Social Development	6 (7.31%)	11 (13.41%)	9 (10.97%)	15 (18.29%)	9 (10.97%)	7 (8.53%)	14 (17%)	11 (13.41%)	82 (99.8%)
Total	44 (7%)	74 (11.78%)	79 (12.57%)	100 (15.92%)	82 (13%)	87 (13.85%)	91 (14.49%)	71 (11.3%)	628 (99.9%)

As per our framing analysis design, the topics were analyzed in which Escalatory and De-Escalatory frames are further divided into subcategories. Here the results show that in total frames of the content triggered by the selected talk shows, most of the political issues are in Escalatory frames. The total number of questions related to politics in Escalatory frames are 177, in which 2.25% are covered in the Lack Of Context, 12.4% of the Escalatory frames are in Dividing category, Win -Lose Scenario is 14.6%, Partiality is 16.38%), Not Representative is 9.60%, Not Popular perspective is 14.68%, Problematic Language is, 15.81%, and Reactive Approach is, 14.12% in the whole coverage of political issues which were framed in the Escalatory frame.

Total number of question related to the Economy which are framed in the Escalatory frames are 96 in which 7.29% are in the Lack of Context, 12.5% of the Escalatory frames are in Dividing category, Win-Lose Scenario is 13.5%, Partiality is 10.41%, Not Representative is 21.87%, Not Popular perspective is 21.87%, Problematic Language is, 7.29%, and Reactive Approach is, 5.20% in the whole coverage of Issues related to Economy which were framed Escalatory.

In the topic of Judiciary total 89 stories are framed in the Escalatory frames in which 11.23% of units covered in the Lack Of Context, 15.73% of the Escalatory frames are in Dividing category, Win-Lose Scenario is 14.60%, Partiality is, 17.97%, Not Representative is 8.98%, Not Popular perspective is 14.60%, Problematic Language is, 5.60%, and Reactive Approach is, 11.2% in the whole coverage of Issues related to Judiciary which were framed Escalatory.

Terrorism stories presented in the Escalatory frames are 100 in numbers in the whole talk shows and further division of these frames show that 5% falls in the category of Lack of Context, 12% in the Dividing, 13% in Win-Lose, 17% in Partiality, 14% in Not-Representative, 12% in Not-Popular, 17% in Problematic Language and 10% in Reactive.

Local Issues are framed 84 time in the Escalatory frames in which 14.28% in the Lack Of Context, 3.57% of the Escalatory frames are in Dividing category, Win -Lose Scenario is 5.95%, Partiality is, 15.47%, Not Representative is 15.47%, Not Popular perspective is 9.52%, Problematic Language is, 23.80%, and Reactive Approach is, 11.9% in the whole coverage of Local Issues which were framed Escalatory.

In the category of Social/Development Issues total number of frames which are presented Escalatory are 82 and in further categorization of Escalatory frames



7.31% of units covered in the Lack Of Context, 13.41% of the Escalatory frames are in Dividing category, Win -Lose Scenario is 10.97%, Partiality is, 18.29%, Not Representative is 10.97%, Not Popular perspective is 8.53%, Problematic Language is, 14% , and Reactive Approach is, 13.41% in the whole framed in the war.

Following the analysis model the De-Escalatory frames are also generated from the analyzed data which also provided different frames while covering the selected topics of the study.

**Table 6**  
**Distribution of key de-escalatory frames in the selected talk shows**

	Context & Background	Uniting	Win-Win scenario	Impartiality	Representative	Popular Perspective	Serious Language	Proactive Approach	Total
Politics	11 (22.44%)	5 (10.20%)	3 (6.12%)	4 (8.16%)	10 (20.40%)	3 (6.12%)	8 (16.32%)	5 (10.20%)	49 (99.9%)
Economy	10 (17.85%)	8 (14.28%)	7 (12.5%)	6 (10.71%)	6 (10.71%)	3 (5.35%)	12 (21.42%)	4 (7.14%)	56 (99.9%)
Judiciary	8 (12.90%)	10 (16.12%)	10 (16.12%)	8 (12.90%)	4 (6.45%)	6 (9.67%)	14 (22.5%)	2 (3.22%)	62 (98.9%)
Terrorism	6 (7.89%)	14 (18.42%)	11 (14.47%)	12 (15.78%)	8 (10.52%)	12 (15.78%)	4 (5.26%)	9 (11.84%)	76 (99.9%)
Local issues	14 (15.55%)	11 (12.22%)	13 (14.44%)	18 (20%)	12 (13.33%)	6 (6.66%)	8 (8.88%)	8 (8.88%)	90 (99.9%)
Social Development	5 (8.47%)	9 (15.25%)	5 (8.47%)	12 (20.33%)	6 (10%)	12 (20.33%)	4 (6.77%)	6 (10%)	59 (99.9%)
Total	54 (13.77%)	57 (14.54%)	49 (12.5%)	60 (15.30%)	46 (11.73%)	42 (10.71%)	50 (12.75%)	34 (8.67%)	392 (99.92%)

Following the explanation of the previous graph and comparatively presenting the figures of the Escalatory versus De-Escalatory frames in the selected topics of the study, starting from Political Frames which are total 49 in the different categories of De-Escalatory frames. 22.44% in the whole De-Escalatory frames of politics fall in the category of Context and Background, 10.20% frames are in Uniting, Win-win Scenario is 6.12%, Impartiality is 8.16%, Representative is 20.40%, Popular Perspective is 6.12%, Serious Language is 16.32%, and the Proactive Approach is 10.20%.

De-Escalatory frames in the topic of Economy related issue are total 56 in the different categories of De-Escalatory frames. 17.85% in the whole De-Escalatory frames of Economy fall in the category of Context and Background, 14.28% frames are in Uniting, Win-win Scenario is 12.5%, Impartiality is 10.71%, Representative is 10.71%, Popular Perspective is 5.35%, Serious Language is 21.42%, and the Proactive Approach is 7.14%.

Judiciary Frames which are total 62 in the different categories of De-Escalatory frames. Here, 12.90% in the whole De-Escalatory frames of Judiciary falls in the category of Context and Background, 16.12% frames are in Uniting, Win-win Scenario is 16.12%, Impartiality is 12.90%, Representative is 6.45%, Popular Perspective is 9.67%, Serious Language is 22.5%, and the Proactive Approach is 3.22%.

Frames related to Terrorism are total 76 in the different categories of De-Escalatory frames. Here, 7.89% in the whole De-Escalatory frames of Terrorism falls in the category of Context and Background, 18.42% frames are in Uniting, Win-win Scenario is 14.47%, Impartiality is 15.78%, Representative is 10.52%, Popular Perspective is 15.78%, Serious Language is 5.26%, and the Proactive Approach is 11.84%.

Local Issues are framed 76 in the different categories of De-Escalatory frames in which, 15.55% in the whole De-Escalatory frames of Local Issues falls in the category of Context and Background, 12.22% frames are in Uniting, Win-win Scenario is 14.44%, Impartiality is 20%, Representative is 13.33%, Popular Perspective is 6.66%, Serious Language is 8.88%, and the Proactive Approach is also 8.88 %.

Social/Development issues are framed 59 times in the different categories of De-Escalatory frames in which, 8.47% in the whole De-Escalatory frames of Social and Development issues falls in the category of Context and Background, 15.25% frames are in Uniting, Win-win Scenario is 8.47%, Impartiality is 20.33%, Representative is 10%, Popular Perspective is 20.33%, Serious Language is 6.77%, and the Proactive Approach is 10%.

## **Conclusion**

This study tried to investigate the escalatory and de-escalatory potential of current affairs talk shows in Pakistan. The study investigated that most of the content in the talk shows are framed in the escalatory frames. This is in line with previous studies that most of the Pakistani media framing of conflicts is escalatory that provided further ignition to conflicts rather than finding solutions through consensus.

Identifying the most discussed topics in the talk show the gallop survey report 2019 concluded that politics is the most discussed topic in the talk shows, now these findings are also supporting the current study. The result show that politics is most discussed topic in the talk shows with highest frequency in the Escalatory frames, while in De-Escalatory frames politics falls in the lowest degree. Terrorism, Economy, Judiciary, Local Issue and Social/Development issues get their position after the political issues in the Escalatory frames.

The De-Escalatory Frames in the talk shows are also found in selected topics in which most of the frames are used while covering the Local Issues as compared to other topics which were selected for the study. The high numbers of frames in De-Escalatory in talk shows, show that talk shows are framing local issues differently as compared to news stories in which usually local issues are presented. The Local Issues are followed by Terrorism, Judiciary, Social/Development, Economy and Politics.

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