

REPRESENTATION OF MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES IN PAKISTANI AND INDIAN MEDIA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This study compares the portrayal of the marginalized groups in Pakistani and Indian media. It explores and analyzes the misrepresentation of minority religious groups, ethnic communities, women, transgender communities and poorer segments of the population in both the traditional and digital media domain. The research is based on the latest research in the field of media studies, political economy, and communication theory and acquires the method of qualitative comparative analysis. The results show that, although brought up with the goal of equality and the freedom of expression in print journalism of both countries, the media portrayal is more episodic, more crisis-related and is interpreted in a way that can be identified as a dominant narrative in the ideological spectrum. The media sector in Pakistan is more focused on PEMRA, whereas in India it reflects more of a business oriented and also politically divided sector. Both systems lead, however, to a marked lack of representation of marginalized voices in structures. The study sees limitations in the legal frameworks in terms of ensuring inclusive representation and suggests formal diversification in media, ethical reforms in journalism and algorithmic accountability to make the media more inclusive in South Asia.

KEYWORDS: Media Representation; Marginalized Communities; Pakistan; India; Comparative Media Studies; PEMRA; Framing Theory; Digital Media; South Asia; Minority Rights

1: INTRODUCTION

There is no denying the fact that the media plays a very vital role in today's democracy as it not only spreads information but also dictates the perceptions of the minds of people regarding various issues that become part of their social and political consciousness. Media institutions affect the perception of individuals, communities, through the process of agenda-setting, framing and selection in society. The marginalized communities are especially affected by media representation in terms of their access to rights, participation in politics, and social recognition. A balanced and fair treatment of topics can engender inclusion and social cohesion, while their stereotyping and exclusion might reinforce discrimination and deepen inequalities. The last few years have seen growing attention to the fact that media coverage is not simply an accurate reflection of reality, but an accomplishment of society that shapes power dynamics and public policies (Anderson & Lawlor, 2016).

Media representation issues have received much attention in research and policy from a global perspective, especially in South Asia where ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural differences are an important concern in Pakistan and India. Despite having common colonial past and common administrative and legal structures, the media spaces of both countries have developed in different ways under different political and constitutional frameworks; both traditions are already distinctive if not clearly different. In spite of these differences, both media environments are criticized for failing to reflect on the minority and are accused of generating majority social narratives over minorities (Jamil & Retis, 2023).

The term marginalized communities is broader than minority numbers. It includes communities that suffer from social, political, or cultural marginalization due to their cultural or structural relationship to society. Examples in Pakistan are religious minorities, ethnic groups, transgender persons, persons with disability, women with systemic disadvantage and those living in economic deprivation. In Indian context, people with religious difference or minority status, Dalits, Adivasis, Muslim, women, and LGBTQ+ people are also socially disadvantaged groups that constitute the marginalized communities. Media representations may convey a stereotyped version of these populations or oversimplify their problems and situations, thereby exacerbating problems faced and difficulties faced by their own members (Habes et al., 2025a).

With the processes of traditional media to be transformed by the digital technology, the issue of representation has been further complicated. New opportunities for marginalized voices in public discussion through new technology such as social media networks, digital journalism, social information systems and algorithms. While these technologies have empowered some to have more agency, new types of exclusion have emerged as a result, including misinformation, online harassment, algorithmic bias, and unequal access to the digital world. New scholarship in the evolving legal landscape portrays cases in which technologies can be tools in creating social inequalities if designed without inclusive, fair principles. Such a view is increasingly important to grasp the current structures of media in South Asia (Sultan et al., 2025).

Pakistani media has undergone substantial changes during the last two decades. Private TV channels, digital news outlets and social media have added multiple new sources of information. However, research shows that coverage of minorities and women, as well as other vulnerable groups, can be sporadic and event-driven rather than issue oriented. Marginalized communities are often featured in the headlines of news articles during conflict, crime or when social crises break, but their role in national development is relatively small. Likewise, studies examining the media coverage of the "old" tribal areas and ethnic groups show how the history of stereotypes persists in the media narratives (Jan et al., 2025).

Television, digital media and a world-beating entertainment industry have spurred comparable shifts in Indian media. It has been noticed however, that media imaging of Muslims, Dalits and Adivasis and other minority groups is influenced by political polarization and commercial pressures. As traditional and digital media have become increasingly converged, so have the threats of misinformation, hate speech, and discrimination based on identity, as well as opportunities for social activism. For this reason, issues of the ethics and social responsibilities of media are appearing with great importance in both these countries (Ilyas, 2025a).

A comparative study of Pakistani and Indian media is educational and can help locate similarities if any in their structural limitations and different institutional response to these limitations. While there are significant differences in arrangement, regulation and political context at State and national levels, they have many common characteristics here that have an impact on media production: historical, socio-cultural etc. Therefore, comparative analysis can highlight the different ways in which legal and institutional frameworks either render marginalized communities visible or invisible, portray and engage with them, or keep them out of public discourse.

The present study aims at investigating the marginalization of the marginal communities in the Pakistani and Indian media via the qualitative and comparative method. It explores the issue of "social inclusion" and/or "social exclusion" in the context of media institutions. The study also assesses the impact of traditional and nontraditional media on perceptions and the policy dialogue about vulnerable groups.

The current study aims to address the following questions: How is 'the other' (marginalized) represented in Pakistani and Indian media? (2) In what ways do the two media systems represent vulnerable populations in similar and different ways? (3) In what ways are these representations affected by legal, political and technical issues? (4) How can both countries make efforts that will help them make inclusive and equitable media practices?

The aim of the study is to examine the representations of marginalized groups in media in the present context, to compare the media governance systems of Pakistan and India, to assess the impact of digital transformation on representation on the media and to suggest recommendations for more inclusive media governance. In terms of methodological approach, the research uses qualitative and comparative doctrinal method in examining the academic literature, media studies, legal regimes, and human rights literature covering the period from 2020 to 2025.

Comparative study of mainstream and digital media of Pakistan and India is the scope of the paper. It does not claim to be a content analysis of every media, instead it focuses on synthesizing what is already done in the field to show "big picture" trends and patterns. This study attempts to contribute to the burgeoning conversation on media diversity, social justice and democratic inclusion in South Asia.

2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

Analysis of marginalized groups' representation in media must come with an adequate theoretical framework to clarify how media systems traverse, shape and create, or often threaten to break down, social hierarchies. Media in both Pakistan and India is more than a medium of information, it is a potent ideological institution that helps in molding a collective vision of identity, citizenship, and belonging. The section is based on the key traditions of theory such as representation theory, framing theory, agenda-setting, media hegemony/social responsibility theory and a focus on digital public sphere, looking to create an analytical lens for the comparative assessment.

According to representation theory, the media does not present reality neutrally, but has the ability to produce meaning. The concept of representation attributed to Stuart Hall is particularly important, as it has highlighted that meaning is generated through the language, signs and cultural codes within media which are often encountered. In contemporary scholarship, this is extended by the fact that representation is inherently political as it allows for the visibility and positioning of certain struggles, the determination of how the struggle is described, and the assigning of value to the struggle or to its visibility (Hall et al., 2024). When talking about South Asia, representation theory is important

because when marginalized communities are represented in mediated narratives, they may not be seen as an actor in society but instead stereotyped or see situations portrayed in crisis terms.

Selecting what reality to show and what reality to hide, as done by the media, can be elaborated by the framing theory. According to Entman's model of framing, three basic processes that shape the public's view of reality are the selection of content, making it salient, and emphasizing issues. In the model of framing, three processes of shaping the public's understanding can be identified: selecting content, making it salient, and emphasizing issues (Entman, 1993). In Pakistan and India, the framing often dictates between marginalized groups, either as victims or threats, or as beneficiaries of the state-beneficiary that are "passively" involved. For instance, in some of the media reports about religious minorities or the less-affluent citizens, one can see a focus on conflict or dependence; this diminishes the recognition of structural inequalities in public statements.

Media framing is necessary but insufficient to explain what audiences think when it comes to Agenda-setting theory: it is an explanation of how the media affects media content, but not necessarily what people think. In his classical formula, McCombs and Shaw (1972) propose that issues (when they are highlighted by the media) have an impact on public salience (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In South Asia, a region characterized by highly politicized and commercialized media, agenda-setting effects tend to lead to relatively brief, unchanging, and limited media coverage of minority issues. Representations about Dalits of Indian origin or religious minorities in Pakistan are likely to be sporadic and seldom keep a long-term profile unless there is a political controversy.

Based on Gramscian theory, the concept of media hegemony offers a structural framework for accountability of differences and inequalities in representation. In this view, ideology control is achieved by the dominant social groups not only through coercion but also through cultural consent created through media institutions (Ortu & Pontarelli, 2025). Within both Pakistan and India majority cultural, religious and political frameworks tend to be audible while the voices of the minorities are sub-structurally marginal. Sometimes this process of hegemony is "hidden" in newsroom practices and ownership, as well as the wider socio-political landscape.

Social responsibility theory of media looks on the ethical aspect of the media, in which the responsibility of all media institutions is to serve the public good, fair, and balanced coverage of all social groups. According to democratic theory, it is the media role to serve as a watchdog on one hand, and to provide chances for others' voices to be heard on the other hand (McQuail & Deuze, 2020). Nevertheless, the ideal of a normatively empowered media is not achieved in practice in both media systems because of commercial objectives, political pressure, and inadequate application of ethical norms for journalism.

The term "Digital Public Sphere" has become more pertinent in the discussion on online media representation in recent years. The concept of the public sphere has been swept up into digital settings, where social media platforms offer increased opportunities to engage in public debates. Digital public spheres are also divided and unequal, however, dominated by algorithmic amplification and algorithmic echo chambers (Fekir & Ali, 2025). In South Asia, digital platforms have become a space for marginalized communities to raise their voice, advocate for more support, and suffered from -or been excluded of- digital divides because of online harassment and misinformation.

Their fusion creates a whole framework to analyze media representation in Pakistan and India. Representation theory is used to explain how the meaning is constructed, framing theory for the structure of the narrative, agenda-setting theory for the concepts of issue priorities, structural power theory for the concept of hegemony, social responsibility theory for concepts of evaluation of social responsibility, and digital public sphere theory for the concepts of the dynamics of the digital public sphere.

Importantly, such theories need to be placed in the socio-legal contexts of South Asia. Pakistan and India have regulatory systems for media that affect editorial independence, content filtering and licensing of broadcast media. Theoretical mechanisms are linked to each other through legal and institutional mechanisms. For example, regulatory pressures can deepen agenda-setting biases while ownership structures can heighten hegemonic narratives.

Furthermore, recent research indicates that algorithmic governance represents yet another new strand that affects representation. Digital platforms employ automated content delivery platforms and algorithms that decide a piece of content's visibility, frequently prioritizing marketable, or 'mass' over 'alternative' content. These engage a new component to classical media theory as digital, computer and legal aspects integrate with traditional notions of communication (Pariyar, 2026).

Therefore, the theoretical approach used in this research is interdisciplinary, which is a combination of the classical communication theories and the current communication in digital governance literature. It equips analysts with the required tools for analyzing marginalized communities' representation, misrepresentation or non-representation in Pakistan and Indian media systems.

3: Representation of Marginalized Communities in Pakistani Media

The presence of marginalized groups within the Pakistani media is influenced by interplay of constitutional protection, regulatory frameworks, political economy of media ownership and socio-cultural norms. The case of Pakistan's Constitution and the formal equality and free expression protections that were established are AFAIR respected but it is not always and everywhere done equally. Gender-based additional research has shown that the voices of marginalized groups such as religious minorities, women, ethnic minorities, transgender persons and those living in

poverty are not just absent from the discourse on social issues, but are also depicted using stereo-typical and crisis-oriented approaches instead of rights-lensed ones (Muhammada & Ismailb, 2024a).

3.1 Constitutional and Legal Framework: Rights versus Regulatory Practice

Part of Pakistan's Constitution guarantees equality in the face of the law and non-discrimination under Article 25 and 36, and freedom of expression as per article 19 by laying down reasonable restrictions. In the field of media regulation, Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) is the main regulatory body regulating the broadcast media contents. However, PEMRA's role, as put forth in theory, is to ensure the availability of diverse content, ethical standards in reporting and safeguarding the public-interest storytelling.

Empirical analyses, however, also indicate that there is a discrepancy between regulations and media practice. Attempts by PEMRA to monitor content often focus on moral, cultural, and national-security concerns, thus creating a 'scare6' effect on sensitive issues, like minority rights and sectarian violence or gender discrimination, within mainstream broadcasting (A. Asghar & Tabassum, 2025). This regulatory culture has fostered a media landscape which tends to obscure explicit condemnations of politics and structural debates on the nature of inequality, in favor of episodic reporting in which poor activists are unable to voice their problems with any seriousness.

Recent studies have explored Pakistani media diversity in relation to how media structures and regulations have failed to provide inclusivity in media representation, with a focus on minority religious groups (Habes et al., 2025b). Rather than that, editorial selection and pressures of political economy select the issues that minorities will be visible. Many issues of minorities, especially those that call into question the state hegemony, only show up in their visibility based on high profile incidents, instead of an ongoing issue

3.2 Religious Minorities: Episodic Visibility and Crisis Framing

Among other dimensions of marginalization which are widely studied in the Pakistani media is the portrayal of religious minorities of the Pakistani media, which include non-Muslims such as Christians, the Hindu minority and Sikhs. But a series of studies reveals that the coverage of these groups is more of an event, often when there is drama like violence, forced conversion or lawsuits; it is less likely to show them, albeit in the media, everyday socio-economic participation or cultural contribution (Muhammada & Ismailb, 2024b).

For example, analysis of the major Urdu newspapers reveals that the news on minorities is being reported as a negative and conflict story. This is a discursive formulation that casts minorities as vulnerable and/or victim which affects their social distance and not inclusion (Ashfaq, 2024a). In TV talk shows the same can be said, e.g. minority issues may be mentioned in "Political" rather than "Human Rights" related terms.

Minority women, particularly, are seen to suffer 'double marginalization' because religious and gender identity get compounded in the study of Ayesha Ashfaq, which furthers leads to the lack of their inclusion in mainstream discussions (Ilyas, 2025b). These depictions may be considered symbolic exclusion because as a part of the media discourse the communities are present, but they have no speaking or acting voice.

3.3 Ethnic Marginalization and Regional Disparities

In Pakistan, ethnic minorities such as Pashtun, Baloch, Saraiki and Sindhi are also not being adequately represented in the media. Research has found that above-ground information in a country's media comes from dominant centers (Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad) covering the territorial regions, and peripheral regions are covered from security, development and conflict perspectives.

Habes et al. (2025c) revealed that the newspapers did not have sufficient and detailed information about ethnic minorities, and the information they provided infected with politics of instability or underdevelopment instead of topics of structural inequalities or cultural identities (Habes et al., 2025c). This trend exemplifies the increasing centralization in the Western media echo chamber that tends to be shaped by the national political debate and commercial considerations.

Ethnic minorities can be triply embedded in security discourses in conflict reporting, for instance, in the reporting of insurgency or counterterrorism operations. Consequently, this serves the narratives of hegemony, rather than community experiences.

3.4 Gender Representation and Structural Silencing

The problem of marginalization on a gender basis is one of the most visible yet at the same time persistently existing problem in Pakistani representation in the media. Women are represented in newsrooms in greater number and as media professionals, but due to lack of representation, they are stereotypical when it comes to content.

In recent years, discourse analyses of Pakistani talk shows have shown that women are often included in narrow categories of identity (e.g., victims of violence, cultural symbols or entertainment figures) as opposed to being allowed to become political and economic agents (Ghaffar et al., 2025). This framing somehow diminishes women's experiences, and still conveys other norms of the patriarchy, which are already held in other parts of society.

Furthermore, trans people are one of the most invisibles groups in the dominant media as they are mainly reported on in sensationalist or crime news. While there are normative changes under the Transgender Persons (Protection of

Rights) Act, 2018 in law, this has not yet been reflected in the media, and there is thus a gap between the legal act and representational practices. Digital media, transformation, and new kinds of exclusion.

3.5 Digital Media Transformation and New Forms of Exclusion

With the development of digital media in Pakistan, opportunities and challenges have come up for the representation of the marginalized groups. On the other, social media has created a culture more in tune with minority culture and signaled to them that they belong to and have a voice in public discourse. However, new vulnerabilities have emerged as a result of algorithmic amplification and online harassment.

However, recent analyses of media representation in Pakistan by the computer modelling suggest that internet platforms tend to favor activist and polarizing content and limit the consideration of more nuanced minority points of view (Tariq, 2025). Additionally, misinformation disproportionately affects low-income and low-literacy populations, reinforcing informational inequality and limiting meaningful participation in digital public spheres.

The socioeconomic disadvantage is also closely tied with the marginalized communities like Pakhtun and the structural hindrances they encounter in accessing credible information ecosystems also reveal Pak Info sec status is generally lower (Sohail et al., 2025). This perpetuates a cycle of exclusion that seems to be that when somebody becomes digital, it does not automatically grant him or her discursive power.

3.6 PEMRA, Content Regulation, and Narrative Control

The narratives within broadcasting are an important part of the regulatory framework of PEMRA. Though it has a formal roll as the watchdog of diversity and ethical reporting, its actions frequently are directed towards the morality of the content, culture sensitivities, or political compliance.

The existence of documented cases of regulatory action shows that PEMRA has issued directions regarding the drama content, the moderation during a talk show and the morality during broadcasting, with public morality and protection of “national culture” being the main emphasis. While those interventions have a direct impact on the ways in which the voices of marginalized individuals are represented, they can also impact the ways in which these voices are represented indirectly, such as in the case of socio-politically charged issues like trafficking in persons or gender-based violence.

Critics say that this environment can lead to some self-censorship among media outlets, and restrict the coverage of structural inequalities. As a result, media house might be enticed to communicate safe or state-oriented narratives rather than studying dissenting voices of marginalized communities and segments.

4: Representation of Marginalized Communities in Indian Media

Stereotypes of marginalized groups in Indian media are a multifaceted by-product of constitutional protections, profitable media growth, polarization, and a changing digital environment. It has formal equality, non-discrimination and freedom of expression commitments in the constitution of India that are strong: Article 14, 15 and 19. But the implementation of these normative protections in the actual practice of media are inconsistent. In the present days, studies support that mainstream Indian media, more than often, normalizes dominant hierarchical structures of society, especially caste, religion, gender and tribal identity, leading to disparities in visibility of marginalized groups and stereotypical images of marginalized communities (Saha, 2026).

4.1 Constitutional Context and Media Political Economy

Media in India exists in one of the largest and most diverse communication systems in the world, in terms of size and commercialization. Indo's media landscape, as opposed to more centralized regulatory framework in Pak, is a mix of state regulation, private ownership of media and very competitive digital environment. Contents are regulated by self-regulatory principles and bodies like the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, which has very little enforcement area particularly due to the pressures of politics and market competition.

The political economy of Indian media has a profound impact on representation outcomes. When big companies are behind the production of a news media or an entertainment corporation, it's going to be about sensationalism, electoral politics, and predominant content that has a lot of people watching. Recent analysis indicates the extent of “visibility without voice”, as marginalized groups tend to be included in news cycles more often, but are much less likely to determine the narrative framing (Bendukurthi & Raman, 2016).

4.2 Religious Minorities and Polarized Media Narratives

A major area in Indian media which is subject of debate is the depiction of religious minorities, especially Muslims. Media narratives can increase in these days of election wars, communal violence, and political tension, this research was found out from an empirical standpoint, resulting in episodic, yet visible media coverage. This coverage is often told in security, nationalistic or conflict terms.

In recent communication research, such framing results in the embracement of the idea of ‘otherness’ in which the “other” (here minority communities) is perceived as socially or politically suspicious in an implicit or explicit manner

(Mehta, 2020). Although not the case with all media, the fast-paced news cycle along with primetime television debates that growing in scope and impact often highlight confrontational over nuance reporting styles. Meanwhile, other digital media outlets and alternative news sources have tried to balance out dominant stories by bringing more minority voices to the fore and revealing incidents of discrimination. These efforts are, however, disorganized and have not always reached the networks of the main television stations.

4.3 Caste Representation: Structural Invisibility and Selective Visibility

Media representation as one segment of a pronounced marginalization is found in relation to caste in Indian society which is one of the most complex forms of marginalization. Researchers have shown that Dalits and the other SCs are often underrepresented in mainstream newsrooms and editorial decision-making forums as well as in prime-time talk. Where caste issues are discussed, they tend to come across not in terms of structural disadvantage but through a series of violent episodes, political mobilization or social conflict.

Recent studies in media sociology indicate that caste is a "rewritable variable" in newsroom processes, affecting the processes of hiring, choice of stories and framing of stories (Ratnamala, 2024). The consequence is an "epistemic exclusion", meaning not only is their voice missing in media production, but also their knowledge is excluded from the production process.

With the advent of digital activism and the social media, however, there are new arenas for caste-based counter-narratives. Digital activism efforts like the Dalit online have produced other narratives and broken through with the mainstream media. Even then, such complaints are commonplace and experience algorithmic targeting, trolling or coordinated disinformation campaigns.

4.4 Tribal and Indigenous Communities: Developmental Framing

In India, the adivasis' and the tribal communities' position in India is generally discussed either from a development or ecological or security perspective. Rarely does a news report highlight subjects like under-development, forced migration as a result of industrial developments or tensions in an insurgent area.

The development of complex socio-cultural identities is often oversimplified by this framing into binary opposition categories of vulnerability/backwardness. More recent academic discussions have suggested that coverage of these events has supported paternalistic discourse that portrays tribal communities as recipients of state intervention as opposed to active political players (Nixon, 2025).

Media narratives frequently reflect the state security sensibilities of conflicts, especially in areas of insurgency, blurring in many instances the local experiences or grievances. This leads to asymmetric visibility, which characterizes a situation in which native or indigenous groups stand on the periphery in discussions and the state and institutions are influential.

4.5 Gender and LGBTQ+ Representation

The depiction of gender representation in Indian media gives some indication of how far we have come and possible structural inequalities that still persist. Although women have gained more prominence in newsrooms, in politics and in entertainment media, women's presence in news content is often based in stereotypical thinking concerning their family roles, their looks, and/or their concerns as victims.

Recent research calls attention to how much attention gender-based violence is getting in the media, but predominantly in a sensationalist way that dresses up the issue rather than dissecting it structurally (Prabhu A & Thirumalaiah, 2024). This means you have increased visibility and lack in meaningful empowerment.

There has been progress since the law and society started acknowledging and protecting LGBTQBT rights. Yet images in the media remain uneven: on the one hand, there is progressive visibility within urban digital landscapes, and on the other, stereotypical and/or missing representation within the dominant television news media.

4.6 Digital Media Transformation and Algorithmic Bias

The Indian digital media universe has grown considerably large and it is one of the largest online information markets. While some marginalized groups have traditionally had limited access to such, social media platforms, short-form video consumption, and digital news sources have opened possibilities for marginalized communities to be part of the public conversation.

But algorithmic systems make an important contribution in making things visible. Emotionally charged, politically polarizing, sensational content is generally seen to gain more engagement, thus potentially skewing rep patterns. Studies performed recently with computational media experimentation suggest that marginalized voicings are rendered invisible and unclear unless they work with the dominant algorithms of engagement produced by current media computation (Tsojniashvili, 2026).

In addition, disinformation and harassment has also spread to digital space, with minorities being most affected. Internet-based awareness and misinformation campaigns and networks can reinforce stereotypes and reaffirm social groups.

5: Comparative Analysis of Marginalized Representation in Pakistani and Indian Media

A comparative analysis of Pakistani and Indian media systems identifies convergence of structures but on a context-specific basis, shows some differences in the representation of marginalized communities. The media systems mediating these rights in both states are part of constitutional contexts that formally ensure equality, non-discrimination and freedom of expression, but are particularly influenced by socio-cultural hierarchies, regulatory structures and political economy of the media. Through both contexts marginalized communities are structurally underrepresented and are only focused on when a crisis occurs and not regularly visible nor subject to a rights or agency-centered approach of talking about issues.

5.1 Structural Convergence: Commercialization and Episodic Visibility

One of the most noteworthy commonalities between Pakistan and India is the growing commercialization of media systems. Media systems in Pakistan and India are becoming increasingly commercial, one of the most telling similarities, is important. Advertising revenues, ratings and political party loyalties of ownership figures significantly drive the amount of advertising in a media product in both countries. This commercialization fuels sensationalism and event-oriented news reporting, consequently depressing the aspirations and the presence of continuous coverage of structural inequality that hits the disadvantaged peoples.

Therefore, marginalized group coverage is episodic in nature, and is not continuous. When it comes to religious minorities, caste discrimination, gender inequality or ethnic marginalisation, the events of the crisis are likely to be highlighted, not seen as a perpetually ongoing issue. This form of pattern results in a 'visibility without depth' of representation as communication scholars write, when someone is present in the media, this presence does not lead to a meaningful representation or agency (Girija, 2020).

5.2 Divergence in Regulatory Environments: Control versus Fragmentation

The similarities in structure convey a growing sense of differences in the regulatory frameworks. The media system in Pakistan is relatively centralized with the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) having the authority to regulate content and for licensing radio and television. In India, on the other hand, there is a more decentralized framework of statutory regulation, judicial review and self-regulation.

Regulatory pressure in Pakistan tends to lead to indirect content, through self-censorship and poses a risk among editorial framing, especially sensitive political and social issues. Compared to other nations, the relatively weak central regulatory authority in India results in greater pluralism and also leads to increased polarization in the media, particularly in the case of television news reporting (Moroojo et al., 2024).

Hence, Pakistan illustrates a model of regulated visibility while using India illustrates competitive visibility, where several different narratives exist, and sometimes aren't balanced nor inclusive.

5.3 Comparative Representation Patterns Across Key Social Groups

This is an overview of the key representational patterns:

Category	Pakistan	India
Religious minorities	Crisis-driven, security-oriented framing; limited agency representation	Highly politicized, often polarized during elections or communal tensions
Ethnic minorities	Development/security framing; urban bias in coverage	Development/displacement framing; regional imbalance persists
Women	Victimhood and cultural framing; limited structural discourse	High visibility but often sensationalized (crime/gender violence focus)
Transgender/LGBTQ+	Minimal representation; often stigmatized or invisible	Increasing visibility post-legal reforms but inconsistent framing
Digital activism	Emerging but constrained by access and regulatory limitations	Highly active but polarized and algorithmically uneven
Media ownership influence	Politically affiliated concentrated ownership	Large corporate conglomerates with strong commercial incentives

Here, comparative mapping shows that although there may be institutional differences between these two countries the representative gaps are fundamentally similar.

5.4 Framing Differences: Security versus National Identity Discourses

The emphasis of the two countries on framing mechanisms varies. Media frame is a process that is carried by national security discourse, cultural preservation narratives and even sensitivity of government regulators in Pakistan. Consequently, marginalized groups are generally depicted in a way that they are placed in situations of vulnerability, exposure, or disruption, a reflection of the state's actions rather than as subjects of rights as citizens (Ashfaq, 2024b).

In India, framing is more related to thoughts of electoral politics and polarization, and commercial competition. While caste and tribal issues are discussed in terms of a development story or conflict; religious minorities are often discussed with regard to the concept of 'nationality'. This gives a fragmentary representation, as often, visibility is determined by the political cycle and not by a substantial analysis of the structures (Bali & Jagan, 2017).

5.5 Political Economy of Media Ownership

Representation outcomes in both countries are shaped by a strong influence of the media ownership structures. The Pakistan media landscape is characterized by a high level of private ownership and the use of the media as a reflection of the dominant political business groups, which indirectly shapes the framing of narratives and their content. There are no other media institutions powerful enough to match the corporate media conglomerates that have taken over the Indian space, with its focus on profitability and their own narrative in the dominant mannerism.

The intersection of the political and corporate agenda leads to similar structural implications: marginalized communities are not directly erased by gatekeeping, but rather by the emphasis on stories that promote the Centre. The intersection of the political agenda and commercial agenda entails similar structural implications as marginalized communities are not systematically erased through the gatekeeper process, but rather by the promotion of the center through the focus on stakeholders' narratives that resource the news agenda (Habes et al., 2025d).

5.6 Digital Media, Algorithmic Governance, and New Inequalities

The advent of the digital transformation era has created new types of convergence between Pakistan and India, especially the algorithm-curated media platforms. While the use of social media has helped marginalized communities to circumvent traditional gatekeeping systems, algorithms that prioritize engagement-based posts often help to promote sensational or emotional, or "polarizing" narratives.

In both countries, there are an increased risks for marginalized groups to be targeted for online harassment, misinformation and orchestrated disinformation. As a consequence the algorithmic system works to augment people's opportunities to be expressed but to simultaneously reinforce structural inequalities in visibility and discourse quality (Khelalfa, 2026).

5.7 Constitutional Guarantees and Implementation Gap

There are good constitutional safeguards for equality and freedom of expression in both Pakistan and India. The articles of Pakistan incorporate the idea of inclusive representation and that of India and the two, when juxtaposed with one another alongside article 37 of the UN Charter, deliver strong normative supporting systems for inclusive representation. In either, however, there is an enormous gap between the ideals as expressed in the constitution and the actual use of media.

This is an institutional and a structural void as well as a legal gap. It is indicative of low levels of media organization accountability, media organization diversity and the lack of arrangements to ensure accountability in the microsphere. Thus, representational justice is not guaranteed automatically with the right guaranteed at the level of constitution of the media system (Siddiqui et al., 2025).

6: CHALLENGES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Persistent Structural and Institutional Challenges

With regards to the guarantee of equality and freedom of expression provided by the constitution of both nations, Pakistan and India, the comparison shows that marginalized communities are still not getting a place in the media in accordance with its structural and institutional constraints. The challenges consist of political, economic, technological and cultural dimensions which impact on the production as well as circulation of media narratives.

(a) Political Economy and Ownership Concentration

Over the years, two recurring issues have had a major effect in both media systems: the grip of politically and/or commercially powerful groups on power and ownership. Ownership structures in Pakistan tend to be tied up to the politically inclined business class, and a big business house circle dominates the Indian corporate media, respectively. This focus runs the risk of doctoring editorial agendas, favoring elite focused narratives, and allowing little in-depth attention to marginalized groups (Agarwal, n.d.).

(b) Episodic and Crisis-Driven Representation

The second challenge is episodic coverage of the participants' families. People living in marginalized areas are often only mentioned in connection with crisis (and violence, political controversy, legal issues, etc.) and not in a regular way through the reporting of structural inequalities. This leaves us with multiple visibility gaps and a lack of sustained support and awareness creation among the public of systemic exclusion (Udupa, 2015)

(c) Framing Bias and Stereotypical Narratives

In both countries, media discourses tend to "straighten out" multifaceted identities. In both countries, media framing is often reductionist with regard to many identities. Religious minorities are often perceived in terms of security or conflict, Women often in terms of victimization, ethnic and/or tribal communities often in terms of development or

underdevelopment. A frame of religious minorities is security or conflict, a frame of women is a victimization frame, a frame of ethnic or tribal minorities is a development or underdevelopment frame. This way of framing decrease the agency and strengthen the social orders (J. Asghar & Shahzad, 2018).

(d) Weak Newsroom Diversity and Epistemic Exclusion

One also is the challenge of the lack of diversity in the media institutions themselves. Editors' decision-making processes tend to be dominated by privileged social groups, which lead to epistemic exclusion of marginalized views. This imbalance in structure not only and always is reported but interpreted and presented as such.

(e) Digital Inequality and Algorithmic Distortion

New inequalities and disparities have emerged in today's digital age. Content distribution systems featuring algorithms focus on engagement metrics, which can cause amplification of sensational and/or polarizing content. The absence of participation from marginalized communities, unless their stories fit certain modes of engagement, diminishes their visibility. Furthermore, vulnerable groups are more vulnerable to online harassment and misinformation. Also vulnerable groups are disproportionately exposed to online harassment and misinformation (Habes et al., 2025e).

(f) Regulatory Gaps and Enforcement Limitations

Although there are legislation to ensure equality and freedom of media in both countries, there is a lack of consistency in enforcing them. Regulatory controls in Pakistan via PEMRA are based on content control which can in some cases limit thoughtful discourse. While the constitution seems to provide greater protection for child rights in India, such protections have not been evenly availed of due to the lack of a comprehensive regulatory framework and political pressures in its enforcement. In India, although the protections offered by the constitution have been strengthened, this protection has not been uniformly honored due to weak regulatory frameworks and political pressures affecting the process of enforcement(Shahzadi & Fazail, 2025).

6.2 Policy and Institutional Recommendations

Representational inequality can only be addressed through complex reform agenda that bring together legal, institutional, educational and technological measures to the reform program.

(a) Diversification of Media Ownership and Leadership

Public policies must be formulated in both countries that will foster a more diversified media ownership and newsroom leadership. Journalists from minority groups can help bring a richer diversity of voices that can mitigate structure of bias in decision-making.

(b) Shift from Content Control to Ethical Journalism Frameworks

Pakistani regulatory authorities like PEMRA and Indian media councils should adopt a more wholesome approach to regulatory regimes rather than morality regimes of content. Reporting practices, anti-stereotyping and hate speech prevention should be clearly defined, institutionalized and followed.

(c) Journalism Education and Capacity Building

Diversity, intersectionality and human rights journalism should be part of the journalism education system. There are opportunities to improve the quality of reporting by participating in continuous professional development (CPD) programs, which will increase sensitivity to marginalized communities.

(d) Algorithmic Transparency and Platform Accountability

With digital platforms rapidly setting the tone for everything these days, transparency in algorithms is crucial. Content recommendation systems should be disclosed and measures put in place to limit expansion of harmful/discriminatory content (Gorwa, 2019).

(e) Support for Independent and Community Media

Independent news outlets and community media bequests should be legally safeguarded, financially sustained via support, methods, and development of capacity. These platforms are also likely to give more authentic and localized representation to disadvantaged voice.

(f) Strengthening Constitutional Implementation Mechanisms

The constitutional rights and practice of the media need to be reconciled in both countries. Equality and non-discrimination principles should be put into practice in an effective framework of media accountability, which extends beyond formative legal guarantees.

CONCLUSION

The comparison of Pakistani and Indian media shows that although they have different regulatory frameworks and media systems, they have one thing in common that the marginalized communities are underrepresented and misrepresented in the media. The Indian media landscape is more fragmented and commercially competitive while Pakistan has a more "controlled" and "regulated" media landscape via PEMRA. But the disparities are not necessarily meaningful with regard to representational justice.

On the contrary, both systems lead to visibility, framing bias, and structural marginalization, in what can only be described as episodes. They have become so entrenched within the political-economic systems, newsroom hierarchies, and algorithmic governance systems that make up today's media landscapes.

The findings of this study indicate that guarantees through law and constitution are not enough to bring in an inclusive representation. To ensure sustainable change, long-term structural, ownership model, editorial culture, regulation and governance of digital platforms must be transformed. But if they are unable to change, the media system of Pakistan and India may continue to create similar social inequalities.

Inclusive media representation must not only be about being seen but about being heard, have a voice and be in power. For enhancing democratic inclusion in the South Asian context, it is vital to represent marginalized groups as engaged in public discourses.

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