

Protest or Disorder? Media Narratives and Framing of 2025 Youth Mobilization in Nepal

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how Nepal's September 2025 Gen Z protests were framed in local (The Kathmandu Post) and international (Al Jazeera English, BBC News) outlets. This research employs a quantitative content analysis of 102 articles published over 22 days across the three outlets. Utilizing Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) five-frame model, articles were assessed for dominant frames to identify discourse on political legitimacy and reform. Results indicate that Human Interest (32%) and Responsibility (24%) frames predominated, positioning youth activism as a legitimate movement for accountability rather than episodic unrest. While BBC News frequently employed Conflict framing, highlighting public disorder, The Kathmandu Post prioritized contextual analysis and sustained reform discourse. Additionally, tonal analysis revealed a shift from crisis-oriented narratives during peak mobilization to reform-centered discourse in the aftermath period, particularly in domestic and regional reporting. Collectively, these framing patterns normalized youth activism as a valid form of civic participation. The research contributes to protest communication scholarship by illustrating how news ecosystems shape political legitimacy and support democratic resilience in emerging democracies.

Keywords: Gen Z protests, political crisis, media framing, youth activism, digital activism, protest communication, civic engagement.

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INTRODUCTION

Youth activism coupling with media technology has reshaped contemporary political participation and digital discourse, allowing the new gen to raise questions and resistance against authority. Digital platforms facilitate organization, fast communication and notably shapes how protests are perceived and legitimized within public discourse (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013; Lynch, 2015). Similarly, media coverage can influence engagement and policy by amplifying certain narratives while silencing others. In this context, tech-savvy Gen Z-led movements represent a new phase of civic engagement that reflects broader trends in online activism, which can be seen across the Arab Spring to recent South Asian protests (Honwana, 2019).

The 2025 Gen Z protests (8-13 September) in Nepal marked as a youth-led movement against government corruption, censorship, and nepotism, considered as a pathway to the country's democratic evolution. Though, the immediate trigger seemed to be the government's ban on major social media platforms, including Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, following a Supreme Court order requiring registration to monitor "undesirable content," the protests were seen by many as an attempt to suppress the ongoing viral #NepoKids campaign against government corruption and nepotism ("Nepal's Gen Z Rises," 2025).

What began as digital activism soon transformed into widespread demonstrations demanding the lifting of the social media ban, and the resignation of PM K. P. Sharma Oli, and the establishment of an independent anti-corruption watchdog (de Guzman, 2025). The "Occupy Maitighar" campaign became a symbol of resistance against corruption, nepotism, and censorship, echoing global movements such as Occupy Wall Street, South Africa's Fees Must Fall and the Arab Spring (Honwana, 2019; "Nepal's Gen Z Rises," 2025; "Assessment: Social Media Inspires," 2025).

Despite the large scale and symbolic significance of the protests, there has been little research on how the movement was framed in the media or how those frames affected public perception. Moreover, while existing studies often debate the effectiveness of social media/youth activism (Acharya, 2024), there is yet to explore understanding of the actors behind these movements, their identities, motivations, and perceptions of impact (Jude & Padmavathi, 2025). This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the tone, language, and framing strategies used in reporting on Nepal's 2025 Gen Z protests and comparing them with global movements like the Arab Spring.

The general objective of this study is to investigate how the Sept. 2025 Gen-z protests in Nepal were framed in select English-language local and international media using Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) typology of news frames and to understand how these outlets constructed the meaning of the movement within public and political discourse. The specific objectives are threefold: i) To identify and quantify the frequency of the five generic news frames in the coverage of one domestic and two international news outlets (The Kathmandu Post, BBC, and Al Jazeera). ii). To analyze the tone, language, and dominant frames in their coverage. iii) To interpret how frames and tones reflected broader media narratives of crisis, reform, civic engagement or generational change.

The central research questions guiding this study are: Which of the five generic news frames (conflict, responsibility, human interest, morality, and economic consequences) were most frequently used in English-language domestic and international media coverage of Nepal's Gen Z protests?; What do the dominant frames and tones suggest about how Nepal's Gen Z protests were represented — as a crisis, a disruption, or a call for reform?



Analyzing how the media frame youth movements and respectively shape narratives is crucial for the transitional democratic landscape like Nepal. As the country navigates post-conflict reconstruction and institutional fragility, youth activism reflects growing public engagement and demands for accountability in the Global South. Examining the framing will reveal how the media ecosystem influences public trust, state response, and the legitimacy of citizen participation in digital democracy (Acharya, 2024; Cottle, 2011).

Academically, this study broadens the scope of protest communication research by providing evidence from the Arab Spring and Nepal, a context rarely examined in global framing scholarship. Practically, the findings offer insights for journalists and policymakers on fostering balanced, dialogic coverage, while contributing to wider debates on the media's role in conflict, peacebuilding, legitimacy, engagement, and democratic resilience (Afzal & Harun, 2020; Honwana, 2019; Wolfsfeld et al., 2013).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, youth-led movements have become powerful drivers of political change and policy reformation, challenging corrupted systems and advocating for accountability, transparency, and social justice, as seen in the Arab Spring (spreading from Tunisia to Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and beyond), #EndSARS in Nigeria, and student protests in Chile. In Nepal, also, young people have historically shaped political transitions, from the 1990 People's Movement to the 2006 Democracy Movement, now in 2025 protest (Acharya, 2024).

This generational shift reflects a broader pattern across Asia and the Global South, whose political realm is often characterized as a “young country, old leaders” dynamic (Jude & Padmavathi, 2025). This literature review will examine how the Arab Spring was framed by global and local media, through four analytical lenses (Actor Roles, Strategies, Goals, and Audiences) and five dominant framing types (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). It concludes with a comparative discussion linking the analysis with the framing of Nepal's youth-led digital activism, setting the foundation for a broader study.

The Arab Spring (Dec. 2010) started with Bouazizi's self-immolation in Tunisia, triggering nationwide protest against authoritarianism, corruption, and unemployment, which quickly spiraled to neighbouring Arab countries (AlSayyad & Guvenc, 2015; Cottle, 2011). Youth and digital platforms (ex- FB), and hashtags such as #Jan 25 #Tunisia played key roles and transformed the online protest into offline mobilization via physical occupation of places like Egypt's Tahrir Square (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011), exemplifying the hybrid activism (Cortés-Ramos, 2021). Which is why it is a critical comparative framework for the understanding of Nepal's Gen Z protests in a similarly mediated environment.

Theoretical Framework: Framing Theory

Framing is the way information is presented to shape the audience's understanding. The theory that will guide this study is framing theory (Entman, 1993), which explains how media select and emphasize certain aspects of reality to promote a particular interpretation. Frames influence how audiences perceive an issue, assign blame, and evaluate legitimacy. Ophir et al. (2023), expand framing theory by suggesting that frames can also open dialogic spaces for democratic debate, while Eltantawy and Wiest (2011), highlight how digital affordances enable activists to construct counter-frames that challenge dominant media narratives.



Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) identify five common news framing types: conflict, human interest, economic consequences, morality, and responsibility. All of the framing types reveal how journalism can either empower or marginalize dissent. For instance, the conflict frame dramatizes opposition, transforming political reform into existential struggle; the human interest frame humanizes individuals, fostering empathy; the economic consequences frame focuses on disruption or cost; the morality frame positions events within ethical dimensions; and the responsibility frame attributes blame or credit to specific actors. These frames are crucial analytical tools to identify how media constructed meaning, mediated legitimacy, and transformed these protests into a global narrative and most importantly do they frame protests as a dialogue or debate between policy and political agendas (Ophir et al., 2023).

Framing the “Arab Spring”

Actor Roles: Youth and Government

During the Arab uprising, Youth (as-hero or naïve disruptors) (McDonald, 2019), and governments were the main actors within a polarized media landscape. The conflict frame was the most dominant in the coverage, the uprisings in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya were portrayed as a direct confrontation between the people and regimes (Afzal & Harun, 2020). Western outlets such as BBC and CNN illustrated young activists as digital revolutionaries (AlSayyad & Guvenc, 2015), “the people versus dictators.”

Conversely, state-controlled Arab media reversed the polarity, depicting governments as defenders of order and protesters as sources of chaos (Lynch, 2015). This contrasting framing turned reform efforts into spectacle, simplifying the complex political dynamics into a stark clash between freedom and stability. The morality frame reinforced this polarization. Activists claimed their struggle as a fight for dignity, justice and truth, while governments framed obedience, loyalty and stability as moral virtues.

Al Jazeera amplified ethical narratives of resistance, but domestic channels in Egypt and Bahrain characterized dissent as immoral or un-Islamic (Cottle, 2011). Competing narratives of blame shaped perceptions of legitimacy, whether the protests were seen as righteous reform or reckless rebellion. Western media largely attributed responsibility for unrest to authoritarian regimes and their failure to reform. In contrast, regional state outlets deflected responsibility, blaming foreign powers, Western media, or “misled youth” (Afzal & Harun, 2020). In addition, some American media provided a misleading narrative, stating it as a “Hip-Hop Revolution” (McDonald, 2019).

Strategies

Beyond portrayals of actors, the media also framed the strategies and tools used during the uprisings. Their focus on digital activism brought out human interest, technological tension, and questions of accountability. The narrative of the “Facebook Revolution” or “Twitter Revolt” personalized digital activism through compelling stories of individual activists and bloggers (Tudoroiu, 2014), figures like Asmaa Mahfouz or Wael Ghonim became symbols of courage. Personal YouTube videos of protests also made into traditional coverage as Al Jazeera and CNN republished those, transforming citizen footage into international news (Cottle, 2011).

This transformed technical coordination into emotional storytelling. Furthermore, social media was portrayed as a new battleground between power and citizen empowerment, resurfacing the conflict. Western outlets described activists as “online warriors,” while authoritarian regimes accused social media of spreading misinformation and fueling unrest. Governments in Egypt and Syria even



resort to shutting down the internet, framing digital platforms as weapons of destabilization rather than instruments of dialogue (Tudoroiu, 2014; AlSayyad & Guvenc, 2015).

Finally, a morality frame surfaces in the dual portrayal of social media as both a “democratic catalyst” and a potential source of chaos, framing digital activism as morally empowering while cautioning against its destabilizing effects (Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011; Lynch, 2015).

Goals: Reform, Dialogue, or Destabilization

Media framing of the Arab Spring showcased competing media coverage of goals. The morality frame dominated protester narratives highlighting reform as a moral imperative for dignity and justice (Lynch, 2015). Western and Al Jazeera coverage echoed this, linking democratic aspiration to universal ethics of freedom, a dialogue frame emphasizing reform and accountability (AlSayyad & Guvenc, 2015). Conversely, government-controlled and western-policy oriented media deployed a counter-frame: rebellion as ungrateful, unpatriotic, or religiously deviant (Cottle, 2011).

Moreover, headlines emphasizing violence, looting, and the collapse of governance, suggesting that reform had devolved into anarchy (Lynch, 2015). The Syrian and Bahraini regimes, for instance, cited moral duty to defend “national order” against “traitors.” The economic consequences frame was strategically employed to delegitimize protest. State and business media focused on declining tourism, capital flight, and “economic paralysis,” warning citizens of material loss (as seen in Hong Kong; Ye, 2016). Western media occasionally adopted the same focus, portraying revolts as “economically risky experiments.”

Yet alternative outlets reframed economics as the cause of protest, unemployment, inequality, and corruption, rather than its destructive effect (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011). The conflict frame again simplified political purpose into binary struggle: revolution versus regime, victory versus collapse (Ophir et al., 2023). Coverage rarely emphasized dialogue or incremental reform, constructing protests as confrontational.

Audiences: Domestic and International Spheres

According to Tudoroiu (2014), framing also depended on the intended audience and media reach. The same events appeared radically different in domestic and global media. For international audiences, networks like Al Jazeera English and CNN used the human interest frame, they broadcasted videos made by citizens as testimonies of courage and grief to foster empathy (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011). These emotionally charged stories mobilized transnational solidarity, depicting pan-Arab youth as part of a global democratic movement (Cottle, 2011).

Domestic audiences, however, were often targeted with morality and responsibility frames that emphasized obedience, religion, external threat and censorship (Tudoroiu, 2014). State media in Egypt and Bahrain portrayed protests as foreign-funded or conspiratorial (Afzal and Harun, 2020), urging citizens to remain loyal to the state. This responsibility attribution deflected blame from the regime to “external agitators,” maintaining internal cohesion amid the crisis. The morality frame however split across geographies: abroad, the struggle was moralized as universal freedom (McDonald, 2019); locally, morality justified social order (Ophir et al., 2023). This framing duality produced contrasting emotional perspectives, hope internationally, fear domestically (Lynch, 2015).

Comparative Analysis of Framing: Arab Spring Vs. Nepal’s Gen Z protest

Nepal’s 2025 Gen Z protest coverage echoes the Arab Spring in several ways. International outlets (BBC and Al Jazeera) used Human Interest, Responsibility, and Morality frames to portray youth as legitimate reformers and stress state accountability, much like global reporting on the Arab



uprisings (AlSayyad & Guvenc, 2015; Cottle, 2011). The Kathmandu Post gave the most sustained and emotional coverage, like the reporting of domestic media during the Arab Spring (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013; McDonald, 2019).

However, unlike many state-aligned outlets in Egypt or Bahrain (Afzal and Harun, 2020), it framed the protests positively as a call for reform rather than a crisis or threat to stability. Conflict framing was prominent in Arab Spring stories, yet in Nepal it appeared mainly in international reports, whereas domestic coverage stayed balanced and solution-focused.

As stated by Tudoroiu (2014), social media's revolutionary role dominated Arab Spring narratives, but for Nepal's case reporting centered on governance failures and ethical issues. In short, both cases featured youth-driven, ethically charged stories, but Nepal's media landscape was less polarized and more open to viewing the protests as a constructive push for democratic change.

METHODS

This study employs a basic quantitative content analysis approach guided by Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) typology of five generic news frames, supported by light qualitative interpretation, to examine the framing of the September 2025 Gen Z-led protests in Nepal across three domestic (The Kathmandu Post) and global (BBC and Al Jazeera) media outlets. The purpose is to systematically identify which frames were used, how frequently, and what kinds of tones (positive, negative, or neutral) accompanied them.

A purposive sampling method guided by Jupp (2006) was adopted to collect the sample. A total of 102 items, a mix of news articles, editorial or opinion pieces from three media outlets were selected, from September 1 to September 22, 2025 covering: before the protests (1–7 Sept.), during the peak period (8–13 September) and after (14–22 September). Articles were collected from the media outlets' official websites and were included, if they covered, "Gen Z protest/movement," "social media ban," "nepo kids," "Nepal's youth protest," and "political resignations."

Most of the articles came from The Kathmandu Post - 71 pieces (before 2, during - 32 and after - 37). Al Jazeera ran 19 stories (during -14 and after - 5), and the BBC published 12 (during - 9 and after - 3). This numerical disparity is a deliberate reflection of the media landscape, the local outlet carries the primary and continuous narrative, while international outlets serve global comparative perspectives. The time window captures the development of the coverage and illustrates the media's immediate response to a rapidly changing event.

Coding is based on Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) 20-questions framework. Each article was systematically assessed using their operational questions for each frame i.e., conflict, responsibility, human-interest, morality, economic consequences.

Because the framework relies on standardised yes/no indicators, this binary approach ensured a clear and systematic basis for identifying dominant frames (strongest presence). To determine the primary frame in each article, this study employs a cumulative scoring based on the indicators of the framework. The frame receiving the highest number of 'yes' responses is designated as the dominant narrative. In instances where multiple frames score equally on 'yes' indicators, a tie-breaking rule is applied; priority is given to the frame most explicitly present in the article's headline or the lead (the first two paragraphs).

Additionally, it naturally supports coding tone by providing a structured evaluative base. This base was adapted for the purposes of the current study to evaluate whether an article portrays actors

positively (supportive, reform, hope, civic engagement, accountability), negatively (death, blame, failure, conflict escalation, chaos, instability, violence, threat), or neutrally (factual, descriptive or balanced reporting).

Table 1. Framing Criteria and Operational Questions. *Source: Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000*

Frames	Criteria & Operational Questions
Attribution of Responsibility	- Does the story suggest that some level of government has the ability to alleviate the problem? - Does the story suggest that some level of the government is responsible for the issue/problem? - Does the story suggest a solution(s) to the problem/issue? - Does the story suggest that an individual (or group of people in society) is responsible for the issue/problem? - Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action?
Human Interest	- Does the story provide a human example or “human face” on the issue? - Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy, caring, sympathy, or compassion? - Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem? - Does the story go into the private or personal lives of the actors? - Does the story contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy, caring, sympathy, or compassion?
Conflict	- Does the story reflect disagreement between parties, individuals, groups, or countries? - Does one party, individual, group, or country reproach another? - Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue? - Does the story refer to winners and losers?
Morality	- Does the story contain any moral message? - Does the story make reference to morality, God, and other religious tenets? - Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?
Economic Consequences	- Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future? - Is there a mention of the costs or degree of expense involved? - Is there a reference to the economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?

This study conducted a descriptive analysis of 102 news articles to explore the framing pattern of Nepal's Gen Z protests. Frequency counts were used to examine how often each of the five news frames appeared across the sample, which helped reveal the dominant patterns in the media narratives. A comparative analysis was then carried out between domestic coverage in The Kathmandu Post and international reporting from BBC News and Al Jazeera English.

This comparison showed whether local and global outlets took different directions in portraying the protests within broader political and social contexts. Additionally, the tonal valence (positive, negative, or neutral) was assessed for each article to determine whether the protests were illustrated as sources of conflict, calls for reform, or part of a wider generational shift.

These analyses offer a clear and systematic basis for understanding the narrative strategies and nuanced differences in English-language Nepali and international news coverage's portrayal of the unfolding events.

Intercoder Reliability:

To ensure the replicability and trust of the content analysis, an inter-coder reliability test was conducted. Two independent coders were trained using the standardized 20-questions coding sheet (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Prior to the full coding process, both coders participated in a pilot coding session to clarify operational definitions, category boundaries, and coding procedures.

The pilot session focused on distinguishing between the five framing categories, as well as the coding of tone and reform emphasis to ensure consistent application of the codebook across all 102 articles sampled from the three news outlets. A randomly selected subsample (15%) of the total articles was independently coded by both coders.

Table 2. Intercoder Reliability Results (Cohen's Kappa)

Frame	Cohen's Kappa (κ)	Level of Agreement
Conflict	0.81	Almost Perfect
Human Interest	0.90	Almost Perfect
Economic	N/A	Not present in the subsample
Moral	N/A	Not present in the subsample
Responsibility	0.80	Substantial
Tonal Valence	0.79	Substantial
Emphasis on Reform	0.83	Almost Perfect

Reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa (κ) to measure agreement beyond chance. The coefficients were interpreted using the Landis and Koch (1977) benchmark, with values of 0.61–0.80 indicating substantial agreement and 0.81–1.00 indicating almost perfect agreement. This value was calculated as the arithmetic mean of the individual kappa coefficients for Conflict (0.81), Human Interest (0.90), Responsibility (0.80), Tonal Valence (0.79), and Emphasis on Reform (0.83). Economic and Moral framing were not present in the subsample and were therefore excluded from the mean calculation.

This indicates almost perfect agreement according to the Landis and Koch (1977) benchmark. The individual coefficients indicated substantial to almost perfect agreement, confirming acceptable

to strong reliability. After reliability testing, discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus before proceeding with the full dataset coding.

FINDINGS and ANALYSIS

Framing of Nepal's Gen Z Protest

The analysis, based on Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) five generic frames, reveals distinct yet overlapping patterns in how The Kathmandu Post, BBC News, and Al Jazeera English covered the September 2025's youth-led movement.

Overall, Human Interest (32%) and Responsibility (24%) frames dominated (See: Figure 1). The coverage prioritized emotional storytelling and questions of accountability over purely political or economic explanations.

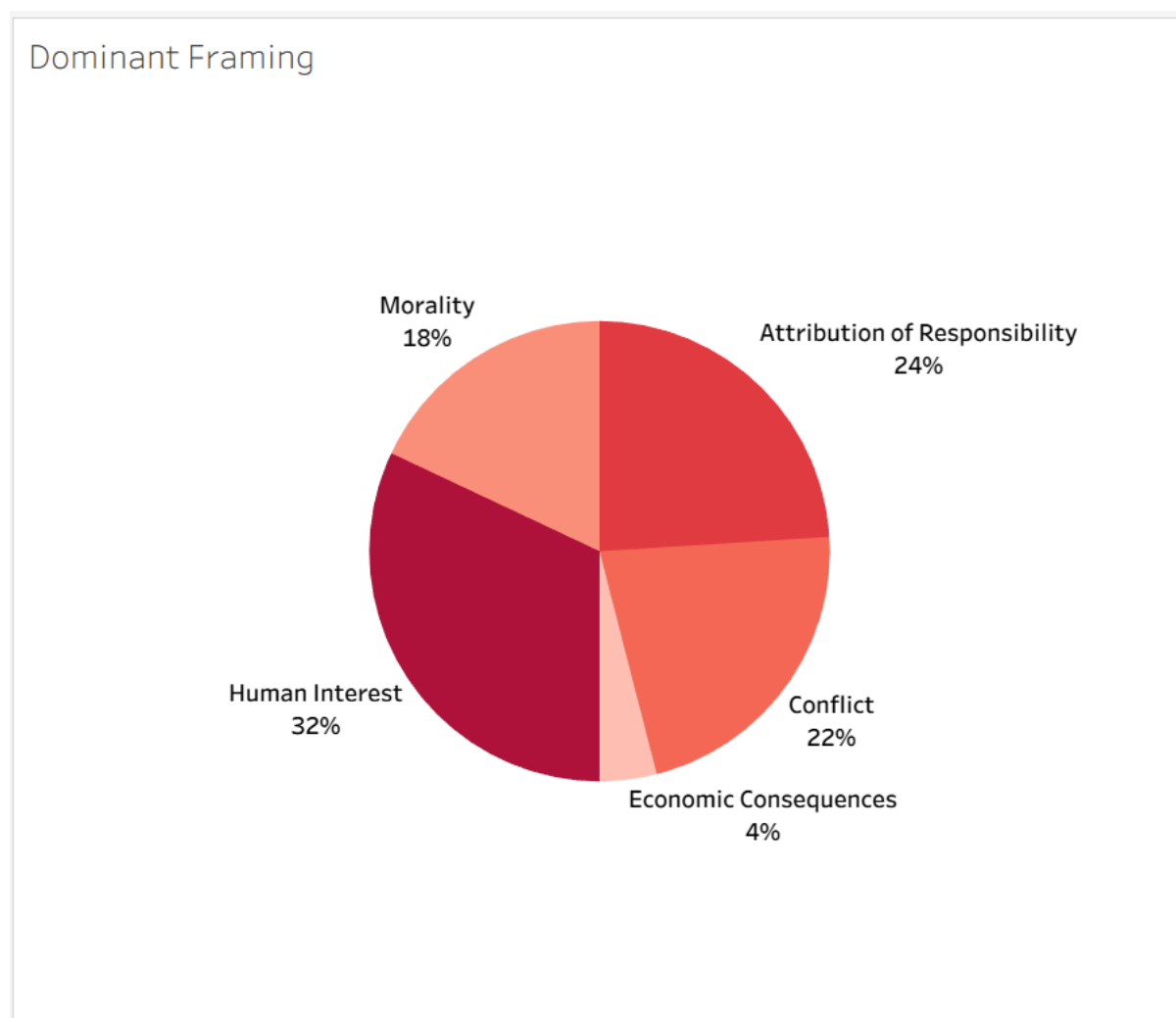


Figure 1. Distribution of Framing Devices

This dominance aligns with global patterns in protest reporting, where media frequently humanize unrest and emphasize blame attribution, as seen during the Arab Spring (Cottle, 2011; Afzal

& Harun, 2020). BBC (42%) and Al Jazeera (37%) used human interest frames more frequently than Kathmandu Post (30% of its articles).

This reflects their editorial priorities: international interest and usual practice of humanizing political unrest through individual narratives. Similar tendencies can be seen in the Arab Spring and Black Lives Matter (McDonald, 2019; Honwana, 2019).

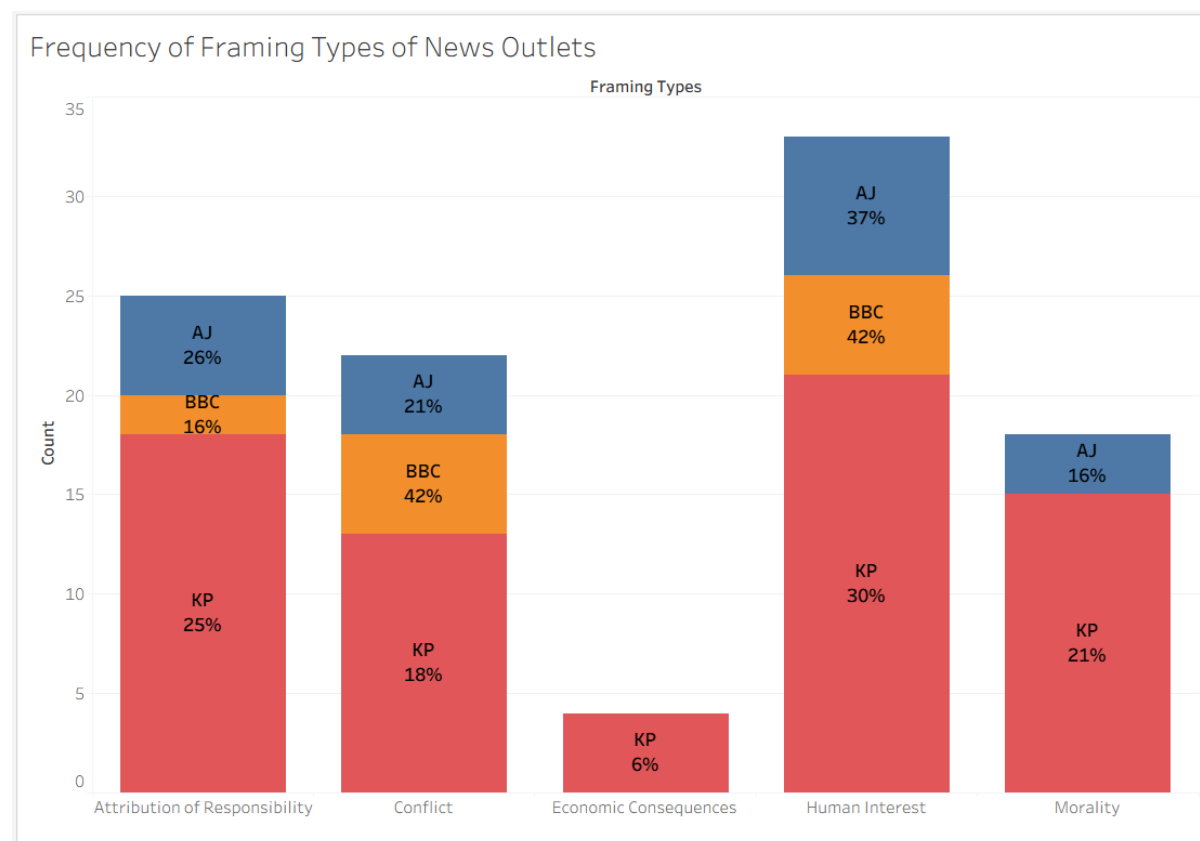


Figure 2. News Framing of Nepal's Gen-Z Protest by Al Jazeera, BBC, and The Kathmandu Post

In addition, both Kathmandu Post and Al Jazeera coverage used responsibility frames at almost similar rates, 25% and 26%, and 16% of the BBC's reporting had this framing. Which highlights a shared concern with who was answerable (Ophir et al., 2023), their way of handling the crisis, and what should be done. The Conflict frame, however, showed the clearest divergence.

The BBC used it most often, 48% of their articles frequently highlighting clashes, violence, and public disorder, reflecting usual Western media coverage patterns of political crises (Cottle, 2011; Ye, 2016). Al Jazeera (21%) followed a similar but somewhat more balanced approach. In contrast, The Kathmandu Post employed the Conflict frame far less, only 18%, preferring to place events within a wider sociopolitical context rather than focusing primarily on confrontation.

Morality considerations appeared regularly as well, except for BBC, counting 18% of total articles. Which reveals the ethical dimensions of the movement as issues of justice, civic duty, and the legitimacy of youth demands were common in Kathmandu Post (21%), also in Al Jazeera's reporting (16%) (see: Figure 2), which often framed the protests in terms of dignity and generational rights (AlSayyad & Guvenc, 2015). The Kathmandu Post included moral dimensions too but tended to root them in local political traditions.

The Economic consequences frame, however, was minimal; only Kathmandu Post (6%) reported it, suggesting that reporters gave little importance to immediate economic impacts over moral and political grievances when covering the protest (Cortés-Ramos et al., 2021).

Analysis of Tone and Sentiment Patterns

While frame frequencies show what aspects of the protests were emphasized, tonal analysis reveals how the events were emotionally evaluated. Each of the three outlets adopted a distinct tone or sentiment in their reporting of the 2025 protest. The Kathmandu Post and Al Jazeera both used strong emotions in their stories.

Table 3. Sentiment Analysis Across Outlets.

Outlet	Sentiment	Before	During	After	Total
Kathmandu Post	Positive	1	9	12	22
Kathmandu Post	Neutral	0	7	7	14
Kathmandu Post	Negative	1	16	18	35
BBC	Positive	0	4	1	5
BBC	Neutral	0	4	0	4
BBC	Negative	0	2	1	3
Al Jazeera	Positive	0	4	5	9
Al Jazeera	Neutral	0	3	1	4
Al Jazeera	Negative	0	6	0	6

KP published 35 negative articles, mostly during and right after the protests. They focused on violence, state responses, police actions, and political crises. At the same time, the outlet produced the highest number of positive articles (22 total) too, most of which appeared after the protests, presenting the events as a chance for reform, youth activism, and real political change.

This duality reflects sentiments observed in transitional democracies, where media narratives often oscillate between crisis and guarded hope during moments of acute political upheavals (Acharya, 2024). Al Jazeera adopted a similar pattern, publishing 6 negative articles during the unrest, that described state repression and clashes and escalation.

After the protests, however, they produced 5 positive pieces, where the narratives emphasized political transition, accountability, and possibilities for reform, and 0 negative pieces after, showing a clear shift from crisis to hope (Tudoroiu, 2014; Lynch, 2015). BBC News on the other hand took a far more balanced approach from beginning to end. On average, its articles simply reported what happened, without strong emotions or judgements.

Overall, negative feelings dominated the coverage (43%). Positive reporting didn't occur until after the prime minister resigned. The Kathmandu Post and Al Jazeera included clear moments of hope, presenting the protests as a possible turning point for democracy and youth power. In summary,



local and regional outlets (Kathmandu Post and Al Jazeera) told an emotional, crisis-focused story with some hope mixed in, while BBC stayed calm, factual, and largely neutral throughout. Broadly, this mirrors global media behavior: protest movements are framed negatively during escalation and more positively after political breakthroughs (Ophir et al., 2023; Lynch, 2015).

Analysis of Emphasis on Reform

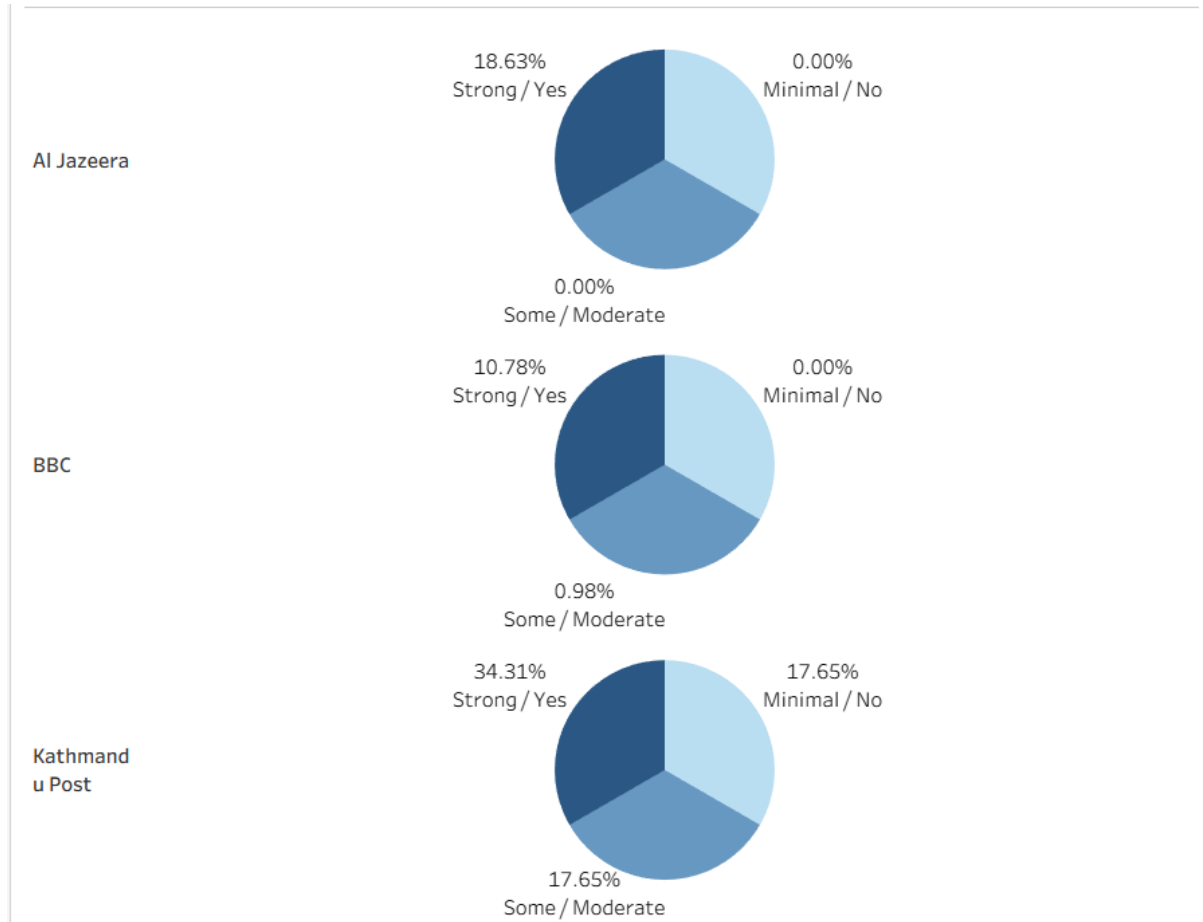


Figure 3. Emphasis analysis of Reform (% of total samples) in AJ, BBC, and KP

Overall, the emphasis patterns reveal a clear contrast. The Kathmandu Post provided the most intensive coverage, with 49% of its total articles showing strong emphasis on reform (Acharya, 2024) throughout the protest period, reflecting deep and sustained engagement with the events and in-depth coverage throughout the crisis.

Both Al Jazeera and BBC adopted a focused approach, emphasizing fully on reform. Which indicates attention to key political and human-interest turning points and selective but concise reporting of major developments, respectively.

This finding aligns with existing framing research, which shows that independent domestic media typically provide continuous, high-intensity reporting during national unrest, whereas international outlets tend to be more episodic and strategic in their attention to foreign protest movements (Wolfsfeld et al., 2013; McDonald, 2019)

Interpretation of Frames and Tones in Broader Media Narratives



The analysis of Nepal's Gen Z protests coverage in The Kathmandu Post (KP), BBC, and Al Jazeera (AJ) demonstrates a largely constructive media narrative shaped by both tone and framing.

Crisis vs Reform: Though negative tones were present, particularly in KP articles, those were consistently balanced with positive and neutral reporting that stressed solutions, accountability, and reform (see: Table 3). Even when conflict appeared, responsibility frames pointed toward constructive action rather than mere disruption (Ophir et al., 2023; Ye, 2016). All three outlets treated the protests as a serious governance challenge that could lead to improvement, not just as a crisis to sensationalize.

Civic Engagement: Positive and solution-oriented stories by KP and AJ, highlighted youth participation and clear calls for change. Responsibility frames in those coverage repeatedly identified who needed to act, encouraging public dialogue and democratic participation. BBC and AJ further reinforced this by placing the protests in a wider societal context that featured the actor's contribution and policy implications. This echoes patterns documented in youth-led movements from the Arab Spring to Chile (Honwana, 2019; Cortés-Ramos et al., 2021)

Generational Change: Coverage patterns suggest a recognition of Gen Z emerging as a distinct and legitimate political and social force (AlSayyad & Guvenc, 2015). Positive and neutral articles portrayed young protesters of Nepal as catalysts for long-term reform and generational reform, rather than simply as agitators (Jude & Padmavathi, 2025).

Overall Interpretation: The combination of frames and tones produced a balanced, forward-looking narrative of the media coverage of Nepal's Youth-led protests. Domestic and international outlets alike presented the protests as significant events that exposed real problems, demanded accountability, and opened space for civic participation. This framing reinforces the role of media in supporting informed public discourse and situates Gen Z as an active agent of change in Nepalese society.

Limitations

This study contains several methodological limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the uneven sample size, comprising 71 domestic and 31 international reports, limits the comparability and generalizability of findings across media types. This "intensity gap" was intentional, with a view to capturing the primary narrative of the movement and proportional frequency analysis (percentage) was employed to offset its effect and ensure balanced framing comparisons.

Second, the research was limited to English-language media, meaning the findings may not represent the narratives, cultural and linguistic nuances present in vernacular (Nepali-language) media. Finally, the fixed three-week temporal timeframe (September 1–22, 2025) confined the study to the media's immediate crisis response, leaving the long-term trajectory and evolution of these frames over subsequent months unexamined. These constraints call for future research that incorporates multilingual data and extended longitudinal frameworks.

CONCLUSION and RECOMMENDATIONS

The comparative framing analysis of coverage by The Kathmandu Post, BBC News, and Al Jazeera English shows clear differences between domestic and international reporting, yet all three outlets focused heavily on human stories and questions of governance. The Human Interest and Responsibility frames were the most dominant framing, which presented the September 2025 Gen Z protests in Nepal as a legitimate demand for accountability, democratic reform, and youth agency.



As shown in Figure 2, The Kathmandu Post delivered the deepest and most continuous coverage, combining emotional intensity with political analysis, while Al Jazeera emphasized ethical, humanitarian and institutional angles. BBC, in contrast, stayed selective and largely factual, avoiding strong emotional or advocacy tones. Though negative sentiment peaked during the protests across all sources, KP and AJ balanced this with positive framing of reform and civic awakening. However, BBC remained closer to neutral reporting in this period too.

In the end, the findings suggest that the Gen Z protests were portrayed less as chaos and more as a generational turning point. Conflict surely appeared, especially in international reporting, but it did not dominate; themes of justice, youth empowerment and participation, and change stood out more strongly.

This pattern supports communication theories that the media can shift from pure crisis reporting to narratives that encourage social progress and democratic dialogue (Entman, 1993). It is important to acknowledge that these findings should be interpreted with humility, given the study's English-language focus and deliberate but imbalanced sample size.

Building on these findings, future research could broaden its scope through native-language media, visual analysis, and longitudinal approaches to better assess the lasting influence of these narratives on institutional reform.

Recommendations:

Expand Coverage Beyond Crisis Moments: Media need to follow movements before and after peak events to show their longer-term importance.

Enhance Contextual and Preventive Narratives: News media should explain root causes, historical grievances, and possible reforms instead of focusing only on daily clashes.

Integrate Ethical and Solution-Oriented Journalism: Coverage should follow peace journalism principles (such as Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005) to highlight dialogue, empathy, and concrete paths toward change.

Include Economic and Social Impact Frames: Future coverage should pay attention to how protests affect jobs, inequality, and everyday life too.

Support Collaborative Research and Training: Newsrooms, universities, and civil society should work together on training programs to improve conflict-sensitive and youth-focused reporting.

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