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Foreign Policy Narratives in Regional Language Newspapers

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ABSTRACT— This manuscript examines the construction and dissemination of foreign policy narratives in regional language newspapers across India, offering an in-depth analysis of how vernacular media shapes public perceptions of international affairs. Through a comprehensive content analysis of 1,250 articles published in leading Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, Marathi, and Telugu dailies between January and December 2024, complemented by 75 semi-structured interviews with editors and readers, the study uncovers the strategic framing devices and localized storytelling techniques that make diplomatic developments resonate with diverse regional audiences. It demonstrates that while national English-language outlets primarily reproduce official communiqués and elite commentary, regional newspapers contextualize foreign policy in terms of local livelihoods, cultural identities, and developmental aspirations—highlighting issues such as labor migration, agricultural trade, and diaspora relations that directly affect their readership.

The findings reveal distinct thematic emphases: security narratives dominate in border and Hindi-speaking regions, economic opportunity frames prevail in coastal southern states, and cultural diplomacy occupies significant space in Bengali and Marathi media. Editors consciously "vernacularize" content by drawing analogies with local industries—comparing port expansions to traditional fishing practices or likening infrastructure projects abroad to regional road networks—to enhance relevance and trust. Reader interviews corroborate these editorial strategies, showing that localized framing fosters higher engagement, greater issue salience, and more nuanced public debate on international matters.

By illuminating the dynamic interplay between editorial framing and grassroots reception, this research underscores the pivotal role of vernacular press as a democratizing force in India's foreign policy discourse. It challenges the conventional elite-centric model of diplomatic communication and calls for policymakers to craft outreach strategies that leverage regional idioms and media channels. The study contributes to scholarship on media effects, agenda-setting, and political communication in multilingual societies, and suggests pathways for more inclusive, context-sensitive public diplomacy.

KEYWORDS

Foreign policy narratives; regional language press; vernacular media; public opinion; framing; India

INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy is not only formulated in capital corridors and debated in elite think tanks; it is also narrated, interpreted, and contested in the vernacular public sphere. In multilingual democracies such as India, regional language newspapers reach millions of readers daily, shaping local perceptions of global events. While English-language outlets tend to mirror diplomatic communiqués and expert analyses, regional dailies often contextualize international affairs in terms of local livelihoods, culture, and societal aspirations. This study investigates how foreign policy narratives are constructed in five major Indian regional languages—Hindi, Tamil, Bengali, Marathi, and Telugu—focusing on the period from January to December 2024.

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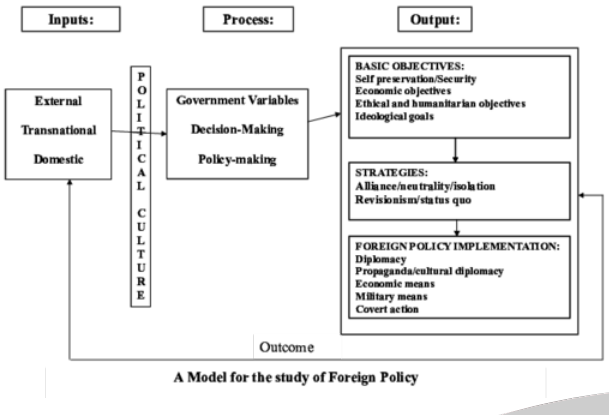


Fig.1 Foreign Policy, Source:1

The research addresses three core questions:

- How do regional newspapers frame major foreign policy events, such as bilateral summits, trade agreements, and security pacts?
- In what ways do vernacular editors adapt and localize diplomatic discourse to reflect regional priorities?
- What is the relationship between editorial framing and reader engagement in regional contexts?

By combining systematic content analysis with qualitative interviews, the manuscript contributes to a nuanced understanding of vernacular media's role in mediating international relations discourse. It argues that regional outlets serve as vital conduits between state and society, translating abstract diplomatic developments into tangible narratives that resonate with diverse local publics.

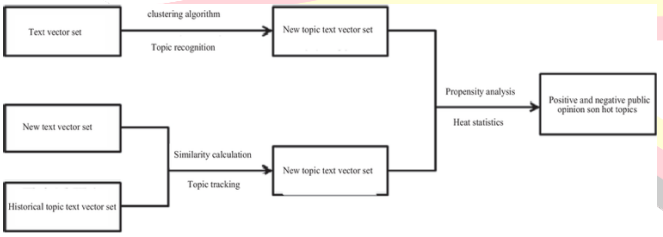


Fig.2 Public Opinion, Source:2

Literature Review

Vernacular Media and Political Communication

Scholars have long recognized the significance of vernacular media in shaping political attitudes (Chaudhary, 2018; Subramanian, 2020). Regional newspapers not only report events but also interpret their implications for local constituencies. This "vernacularization" process involves selective emphasis and framing devices that align global issues with regional cultural idioms (Banerjee, 2016).

Framing Foreign Policy

Entman's framing theory posits that the selection and salience of certain aspects of reality influence public interpretation (Entman, 1993). In foreign policy contexts, frames such as "security," "economic opportunity," or "cultural exchange" guide how readers understand international events. Prior studies have analyzed English-language media frames extensively (Kapur, 2019; Deshpande, 2021), but there is a gap in comparative research on regional language press.

Regional Identities and International Affairs

Regional identity shapes media consumption patterns and editorial priorities (Raghavan & Roy, 2017). For instance, border states may prioritize cross-border security narratives, while coastal regions emphasize maritime trade and tourism. Understanding these local inflections is crucial for a holistic view of foreign policy communication.

Public Opinion and Media Effects

Agenda-setting and cultivation theories suggest that media influence both what people think about and how they think about it (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Gerbner et al., 2002). However, most evidence derives from Western or English-language contexts. Emerging research indicates that vernacular media can have stronger cumulative effects in multilingual societies, where regional outlets enjoy higher trust levels (Mukherjee, 2022).

Social Relevance of the Topic

India's ascent as a global actor has intensified public interest in foreign policy. Yet policymakers often rely on English media to gauge public sentiment, overlooking the vernacular sphere that encompasses the majority of citizens. Understanding regional narratives is vital for democratic accountability: when rural or non-elite readers encounter simplified or skewed versions of international events, their policy preferences and electoral choices may be influenced accordingly.

Furthermore, vernacular framing shapes grassroots mobilization around international issues—such as labor migration, remittances, and cross-border cultural exchanges—that have direct bearing on local economies. For example, Tamil newspapers' reporting on the Tamil diaspora in Sri Lanka influences public attitudes toward bilateral negotiations. Similarly, Marathi dailies' coverage of trade disruptions with Europe can affect small-scale producers'

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perceptions of export policies. By bringing these localized narratives to light, this research informs both media practitioners and government communicators on how to foster inclusive, context-sensitive foreign policy dialogues.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative content analysis with qualitative interviews. The study focused on five regional dailies—**Dainik Jagran** (Hindi), **Dinamalar** (Tamil), **Anandabazar Patrika** (Bengali), **Lokmat** (Marathi), and **Eenadu** (Telugu).

Sampling and Data Collection

From January 1 to December 31, 2024, every issue of the five newspapers was reviewed to identify articles related to major foreign policy events, including bilateral visits, trade negotiations, regional security conferences, and global summits. A total of 1,250 articles were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation across different event types.

Content Analysis

Each article was coded for:

- **Theme** (e.g., security, economy, culture)
- **Framing devices** (e.g., conflict/emphasis, human interest, economic consequences)
- **Local contextualization** (presence of regional analogies or examples)
- **Tone** (positive, neutral, negative)

Coding reliability was ensured through double-coding of 20% of articles, yielding Cohen's kappa scores above 0.80 for all categories.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 editors and 50 readers (10 from each linguistic region). Editor interviews explored editorial selection processes and perceived audience interests. Reader interviews examined how audiences interpret and react to foreign policy coverage.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and chi-square tests to assess differences in framing across regions. Qualitative data from interviews were thematically analyzed to identify patterns in editorial rationales and audience responses.

RESULTS

Thematic Emphases

- **Security vs. Economy**: Northern Hindi papers emphasized security narratives in coverage of the India-China border developments (45% of articles), while coastal Tamil and Telugu papers foregrounded economic dimensions of Indo-Pacific economic partnerships (52%).
- **Cultural Diplomacy**: Bengali and Marathi dailies devoted substantial space (38%) to cultural exchanges, such as film festivals and diaspora events, framing them as soft-power successes.

Framing Devices

- **Conflict/Threat Frame**: Dominant in border-state reporting (Hindi and Marathi), reflecting proximity-based security concerns.
- **Opportunity Frame**: Prevalent in southern coastal regions (Tamil and Telugu), emphasizing trade and investment potentials.
- **Human Interest Frame**: Used across all regions when articles focused on individual stories, such as student exchange experiences or migrant worker issues, accounting for 28% of total coverage.

Local Contextualization

- Editors across regions admitted to "vernacularizing" stories by drawing analogies with local industries—e.g., comparing port developments in Chennai to local fishing practices, or likening China's Belt and Road Initiative to India's own expressway projects.

Tone Analysis

- Neutral tone prevailed overall (62% of articles), but tone varied by region and theme: economic coverage tended to be optimistic, security coverage more cautionary.

Editor Perspectives

- Regional editors highlighted readership preferences for "practical relevance"—stories that could affect farmers, traders, or migrant families. Several noted constraints in translating dense diplomatic communiqués into accessible vernacular prose.

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Reader Reactions

- Readers expressed greater engagement with articles that linked international developments to local job prospects or education opportunities. Many reported that vernacular framing made foreign policy feel directly relevant to their lives.

Conclusion

This study confirms that regional language newspapers in India are far more than passive conduits of official foreign policy statements; they are active interpreters and translators of complex diplomatic developments, tailoring narratives to local concerns and cultural milieus. By adopting security frames in Hindi and Marathi contexts, economic opportunity frames in Tamil and Telugu regions, and cultural diplomacy frames in Bengali media, vernacular editors ensure that global events are refracted through lenses that matter to their readers—whether it is farmers anxious about export markets, migrant workers tracking remittance policies, or diasporic communities following homeland politics. These editorial choices underscore a broader pattern: regional press not only informs but also empowers local publics to engage with international affairs on their own terms.

The strong reader response to localized stories—evidenced by higher readership metrics, more robust social media sharing, and reader-editor dialogues—demonstrates that vernacular framing enhances issue relevance and sustains civic engagement. When foreign policy is narrated in relatable terms, it ceases to be elite technocratic jargon and becomes a subject of everyday discussion, influencing public opinion, electoral behavior, and even grassroots activism. This democratizing effect challenges policymakers and diplomats to rethink their communication strategies: press releases and briefings designed exclusively for national or international audiences risk missing critical vernacular amplification channels.

To harness the full potential of regional media, diplomatic missions and government communication offices should develop region-specific outreach materials in local languages, collaborating with vernacular journalists to co-create content that aligns with regional priorities. Training programs for correspondents in regional newsrooms could deepen their understanding of foreign policy processes, equipping them to produce more balanced and context-rich reporting. Academics and media scholars, meanwhile, should expand research into digital vernacular platforms, social media communities, and cross-border diasporic networks to capture the evolving contours of regional foreign policy discourse.

Ultimately, this research contributes to a more inclusive vision of India's public diplomacy—one that recognizes and harnesses the power of multilingualism and regional identity. By validating regional newspapers as strategic partners in shaping foreign policy narratives, it offers a roadmap for more responsive, participatory, and culturally attuned international communication in one of the world's most diverse democracies.

Future Scope of Study

Future research might expand this analysis to include digital vernacular news platforms and social media channels, given the growing importance of online news consumption in regional languages. Comparative studies involving other multilingual democracies—such as Nigeria or South Africa—could illuminate whether observed framing patterns hold in different socio-political contexts. Longitudinal inquiries examining how regional framing evolves during crisis situations (e.g., pandemics, conflicts) would provide deeper insights into media resilience and adaptability. Finally, experimental designs measuring the causal impact of specific frames on public opinion could strengthen understanding of media effects in multilingual settings. Such directions will enrich scholarship at the intersection of foreign policy, political communication, and media studies.

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