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# Divine Intervention and National Legitimacy: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Asim Munir's Post-Operation Sindoor Speech

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## Abstract

In a conflict situation, the political and military speech is, in many cases, not just a strategic communication but rather an ideological and propagandistic speech. This study seeks to critically analyze how the Army Chief of Pakistan, Asim Munir, uses the religious and nationalistic discourse in the post-Operation Sindoor speech in order to create an ideological legitimizing language, influence the cognitive thoughts of the audience, and support the institutional authority. The study follows a qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) paradigm, combining a three-dimensional model of Norman Fairclough with a socio-cognitive paradigm of Teun A. van Dijk. The data includes reported quotes of Munir's speech at the National Ulema Conference (December 2025), complemented by media coverage and public discussion of the speech. The findings showed that Munir's speech employed religious lexicon, Quranic allusions, and ethical metaphors strategically and presents the conflict as being God-approved. In-group solidarity is strengthened through repetition and experience of the language, whereas the selective circulation of media increases the strength of ideological discourse and curtails the possibility of opposition. In conclusion, the study states that religious-military discourse is an effective ideological instrument in establishing legitimacy and collective cognition in the Pakistan-India conflict arena, which illustrates the strong intersection of religion, power, and political communication.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis; Pakistan-India Conflict; Religious Lexicon; Political Communication; Nationalistic Discourse.

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## 1. Introduction

The May 2025 Indian move to counter the Pahalgam attack through Operation Sindoor led to a serious increase in tensions between India and Pakistan and the initiation of an intensive stage of military, political, and informational hostility between the two countries (Fahmi et al., 2025). In addition to the direct military aspects of the operation, conflicting accounts, propaganda campaigns, and rhetoric were created to influence local and international perceptions. Political and military discourse in this context is an important point of power, ideology, and legitimacy production and combat (Haroon et al., 2025). The reaction of Pakistan to Operation Sindoor was not merely restricted to the strategic or diplomatic actions, but a well-considered discursive reaction of the state authorities and military command (Vashishtha et al., 2025). These reactions were aimed at responding to Indian claims, preserving domestic morale, and enhancing the ideological stance of Pakistan in a very polarized geopolitical context.

In accordance with this, the speech of Field Marshal

Asim Munir presented at the National Ulema Conference in Islamabad in December 2025 has special importance. Focusing on a religious audience, Munir placed the experience of Pakistan in the post-Operation Sindoor war not on a strategic or military basis, but on a highly religious and moral basis (Bagaitkar-Palkar, 2025). His constant appeal to divine assistance, to Quranic texts, and to righteousness made the conflict not of a traditional geopolitical conflict but of a story of spiritual validation and ideological legitimacy (Dasari, 2025). Through the appeal to religion, Munir established the Pakistani state and military as the actors who were morally approved, and it was only by chance that they were successful, resilient, or survived in the conflict, but not because of material force (Panda & Pankaj, 2025). This kind of framing is particularly effective in a society where religion assumes a preeminent position in social life, the realm of politics, and national consciousness.

Another significance of this speech is its tactical orientation to the audience and discursive timing. The

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speech, which came several months after the Operation Sindoor, when the stories of success, failure, and propaganda were still under discussion, served as a retrospective justification and ideological unification of the Pakistani position (Yusuf, 2025). By dealing with religious scholars, Munir enabled him to place the state policy in the framework of an Islamic approach, thus justifying the political and military authority based on religious approval (Arif et al., 2025). Moreover, the speech was extensively spread both in local and international media coverage, so the selected quotations, especially those that focused on the divine intervention, could be heard by a considerably larger audience, not confined to the local meeting (Ganguly & Warren, 2025). Consequently, the speech overcame the status of a powerful discursive artifact in the information strategy of Pakistan in general after the Operation Sindoor. Even with the prevalence of this type of rhetoric, a significant gap in the scholarly literature that has addressed the Pakistani official discourse following the Operation Sindoor has not been filled, especially using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Whereas the literature available has collectively examined issues of Indian strategic communication, media framing, and counterterror discourse, there is a relative lack of literature that examines how Pakistani military leadership utilizes language to form ideology, legitimacy, and collective belief systems during a crisis (Prayogo & Sari, 2025).

This study is thus aimed at providing a critical analysis of the post-operation Sindoor speech of Asim Munir with the view to studying how language is employed to create religious-nationalistic discourses, manipulate audience cognition, and project ideological legitimacy. Based on the three-dimensional model of CDA and Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, the study aims to reveal the linguistic strategies, discursive practices, and ideological suppositions within the speech (Mohammadi et al., 2025; Xing, 2024). In particular, it seeks to show how religious allusions and moral framing are used to strengthen in-group identity, justify state authority, and respond to external discourse. Placing the speech in its socio-political framework and exploring its possible cognitive influence on the audience, the present research helps to better understand the issue of political-military discourse as a means of reproducing ideologies in conflict situations.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Political Discourse and Critical Discourse Analysis.

CDA has become an eminent approach to studying

the way language acts as a power, ideology, and social control mechanism in political situations (Dunmire, 2023). Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk are among the scholars to have played key roles in the evolution of CDA, especially in political speech analysis, media texts, and propaganda. The three-dimensional model by Fairclough accentuates the interaction of the textual features, discursive practice, and the wider social structure, enables to consider how the political discourse reproduces and reflects the power relationships (Fairclough, 2023). This has been extensively utilized to analyze speeches given by political leaders to reveal the use of lexical decisions, rhetorical strategies, and narrative to legitimize authority and policy decisions (Wajdi & Asrumi, 2024).

Similarly, Van Dijk uses a socio-cognitive approach that builds upon CDA and is concerned with the models and belief systems that audiences use to make sense of discourse (Othman, 2023). Van Dijk maintains that socially shared knowledge, ideologies, and attitudes that are manifested in political discourses are constructed and constructed, especially by constructing in-group and out-group identities. It has found wide application in studies of nationalist discourse, the discourse of war, and political rhetoric, showing how discourse can manage to affect the opinion of a population by playing to collective cognitive schemas (Van Dijk, 2022). The analyses with the Van Dijk model have revealed how language is manipulated strategically by political leaders to strengthen the ideological hegemony and legitimize the specific interpretations of conflict and power (Arkawazi & Sherwani, 2025). The approaches of Fairclough and Van Dijk can be considered as complementary tools in the analysis of political speeches as the exponents of ideological production and mental influence.

### 2.2. Political Communication with Religion and Nationalism

The connection between religion and nationalism has been a major issue in the research of political communication, especially in postcolonial societies, as well as in conflict-prone societies (Anand & Lall, 2022). Religious discussions have been observed to be a strong symbolic tool in the development of national identity, legitimizing political power, and generating popular backing (Shahin, 2021). Religious references are often applied in political groups and campaigns to portray a national fight as a moral or religious crusade, which overrides purely political or strategic interests (Aktürk, 2022). This type

of framing is more emotional and powerful in asserting a shared identity by providing political goals with strongly held beliefs.

Studies on religious framing of political communication have revealed that talking about God or using religious books can be a kind of moral authority, which can lead to the suppression of opposition and the presentation of political behavior as natural or holy (Oran, 2022). In the Muslim-dominant settings, allusions to the Quranic verses, the will of God, or moral obligation have been observed to be influential towards the citizens forming their perceptions of leadership and the undertakings of the state (Haynes, 2021). According to scholars, religious-nationalist discourse is especially successful during the period of crisis because it gives the population a sense of purpose and psychological satisfaction (Williams, 2024). This study emphasizes the importance of religion not being simply a personal ideological belief system, but it is a tactical communicative instrument in political oratory.

### **2.3. Propaganda and War in South Asia**

South Asia is one of the places where propaganda and military discourse have been examined widely, particularly in relation to India-Pakistan relations (Nawaz et al., 2022). Studies have been interested in the way the two states use media stories, governmental messages, and the use of symbolic language to construct conflicts, endorse military interventions, and influence domestic and international attitudes (Feyyaz & Husnain Bari, 2024a). According to a study conducted on the military discourse, armed conflicts are also accompanied by information wars, where language is a strategic weapon, which is utilized to create a narrative of victory, victimhood, or moral superiority (Parveen, 2023).

Scholars have explored the utilization of historical grievances, national myths, and security discourses in the official rhetoric in the South Asian context (Shaheen et al., 2021). It has been demonstrated that Indian and Pakistani political and military leaders depend on the ideological narratives in which the self is presented as the one who is defensive and the other as aggressive or illegitimate (Murtaza et al., 2022). Studies of propaganda in the aftermath of occurrences like the Kargil conflict, the Pulwama, Balakot crisis, and transgressions across borders have shown that there is selective framing, repetition, and emotional appeal to ensure that people continue to support them and enhance unity in the country (Feyyaz & Husnain Bari, 2024b). However, much of this literature has been

focused on media framing or state narratives without taking serious cognition effects of such narratives on audiences.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

This study is based on CDA, while relying on the theories of Norman Fairclough and Teun A. van Dijk as the two complementary perspectives. The combination of these frameworks allows for analyzing the political-military discourse in a multidimensional way by connecting the linguistic characteristics with ideological arrangements, social dominance, and the cognition of the audience.

#### **3.1. Norman Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model**

The three-dimensional model by Norman Fairclough is a systematic approach to the analysis of discourse at the interrelated levels, which includes text, discursive practice, and social practice (Khan, 2025). On the textual level, one is concerned with linguistic characteristics of the speech, such as vocabulary, grammar, rhetorical devices, and style. This level analyses the use of certain lexical elements, metaphors, repetitions, and syntactical patterns to deliver meaning, underline authority, and persuade audiences (Xing, 2024). Textual analysis in the context of political and military speech shows that the language forms the paths to legitimacy, authority on morality, and ideological stance.

The second dimension is discursive practice, which is about the mechanisms of production, distribution, and reception of discourse (Shakeel & Arshad, 2023). This level analyzes the source, the purpose, and the audience of the speech and how the discourse gets spread through the media and received by listeners (Bezar et al., 2023). In this study, the analysis of discursive practice is performed with respect to how the speech of Asim Munir is strategically placed before a religious target audience and subsequently enhanced by the national and international media, thus molding the narratives that people have and subjugating the narratives that are dominant.

Social practice is the third dimension, placing discourse in a bigger socio-political and ideological context. This level is concerned with the way discourse is reflexive and reproductive of power relations, institutional authority, and dominant ideologies (Molla-Ebrahim & Kamali, 2025). Through the analysis of social practice, the study explores the role of religious-nationalist discourse to justify state power, strengthen military authority, and address geopolitical tensions after Operation Sindoor.

### 3.2. *Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach*

The socio-cognitive approach that Van Dijk applies supplements the model by Fairclough because it focuses on how cognition, as part of discourse, is interpreted (Mohammadi et al., 2025). Cognitive dimension concentrates on the mental models, common knowledge, and ideological schema that contribute to the way in which the political discourse is perceived by the audience. These comprise in-group and out-group building, where the self is described in a positive way and the other in a negative way (Noor, 2025). This type of cognitive framing is important in forming the perceptions of conflict, morality, and legitimacy.

The social aspect of the framework by Van Dijk identifies the interrelation between discourse and social systems, including institutions, hierarchies of power, and relations within groups. Political speech is regarded as the way in which the powerful groups affect the shared ideologies and preserve their ideological dominance (Ab Rashid & Al-Ramahi, 2025). Lastly, the dynamics between language and cognition are what lead to the formation of audience beliefs and ideological orientation over time by means of repetition of linguistic patterns and the use of symbolic references (Othamn & Salih, 2022). Integrating the theoretical approach of structural analysis of Fairclough with the cognitive approach of Van Dijk, the present study provides a complex model of the functioning of religious-nationalistic discourse as a linguistic and ideological tool in political conflict.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1. *Research Design*

This study applies a qualitative research design based on CDA to observe the ideological, linguistic, and cognitive aspects of the post operation Sindoor speech of Asim Munir. The qualitative approach is especially appropriate since the proposed study seeks to understand the meaning, intentions, and power relations within language and not to measure linguistic aspects. Through the synthesis of Fairclough and Van Dijk frameworks, the research design enabled a multidimensional analysis that establishes a linkage between the textual features and the socio-political contexts and audience cognition.

### 4.2. *Data Collection*

The major sources used in this were the excerpts of the speech of Asim Munir during the National Ulama Conference in Islamabad in December 2025.

The analysis is based on the verbatim quotations and summarized statements published by reputable national and international media, since no official full transcript of the speech is publicized. These passages are discussed as the true reflections of the main ideas and rhetoric of the speech. The secondary data used were media coverage, social media response, and government response towards the speech and Operation Sindoor. These materials gave background information and contributed to the explanation of how the discourse was spread, interpreted, and argued in the public arena.

### 4.3. *Data Analysis Procedure*

The data analysis procedure included a systematic multi-layered process comprising a combination of Fairclough's three-dimensional model and Van Dijk's socio-cognitive methodology.

#### 4.3.1. *Textual Level (Fairclough)*

This involves a discussion of lexical decisions, especially the application of religious and nationalistic languages like allusions to divine intervention, morality, and collective identity. Rhetorical tools such as metaphors, repetition, and emphatic expressions, which make the message more persuasive and authoritative, are also considered. Also, syntax and stylistic patterns, including the sentence structure and modality, are discussed in order to see how certainty, power, and legitimacy are represented in language.

#### 4.3.2. *Discursive Practice (Fairclough)*

The second phase revolves around the discursive practice, which analyzes the manner in which the speech was created, spread, and interpreted. This is regarding the context of the speaker, such as the institutional power of Munir, the religiousness of the audience, and the communicative objectives of the speech. How the circulation works, i.e., how the media and social media exaggeration, is also considered by the study to know how they chose to highlight and frame the excerpts to be more widely consumed. This level showed how discourse is created and re-created as it traverses through distinct communicative channels.

#### 4.3.3. *Social Practice (Fairclough)*

This step examines the way the speech replicates and supports the current power structure, especially how the military constructs national histories. It also looks at

how religious speech is deployed to form moral authority and political legitimacy and makes the state and military ideologically righteous agents.

#### 4.3.4. *Socio-Cognitive Analysis (Van Dijk)*

The socio-cognitive analysis is based on the model of Van Dijk and analyzes the ability of the discourse to affect the cognition of the audience. It involves the detection of in-group and out-group schemas, with the self being depicted positively and the other being implicitly or explicitly opposite. Other aspects, including the process of belief formation and perceptions of the audience, are also analyzed with regard to the possible ways in which repeated religious and moral framing could influence shared perceptions and acceptance of ideological narratives. Lastly, it evaluates the role of such speech in internalizing ideology by believing in common ideas and social images.

#### 4.3.5. *Integration of Models*

The last phase involved the incorporation of the two models, and in this case, the framework by Fairclough offered structural, discursive, and social explanations of the process, whereas the approach by Van Dijk offered a more in-depth point of view into the cognitive mechanisms. Such a mixed approach guaranteed a thorough examination of language-ideology-cognition interplay as reflected in political-military speech.

## 5. Results

This segment of the study summarizes the results of the discourse analysis of the speech by Asim Munir after Operation Sindoor. The findings are systematized on the thematic levels of textual, discursive, social, and cognitive levels, and the focus of meaning building, ideology, and legitimacy construction using the language is present.

### 5.1. *Textual Analysis*

The analysis showed that there was a high dependence on religious lexicon as one of the central textual characteristics of the speech. The statement by Munir, one of the most repeated phrases in the excerpts covered by the media, was, "We felt it... we saw divine help coming." The use of the term "divine help" multiple times predicts the spirituality of military strength in opposition to material power, which places the final result of the conflict in the context of the morally endorsed fight rather than an intelligent struggle. Also, when Munir quotes a verse

from the Quran, stating that "If Allah helps you, none can overcome you," the political discourse of the speech was put within the context of the sacred power, thus shaping the speech to a higher plane of political defense.

The image of divinity was repeated in order to make the concept of spiritual intervention more normalized, and the metaphors of moral struggle show the conflict as a challenge of faith and righteousness instead of a traditional geopolitical conflict. An example is the fact that Munir focuses on emotion and sees the divine assistance, and creates the perception of an experience that is communal and impossible to doubt.

Syntactically, the speech contained a high number of short, declarative sentences when making assertive ideological claims (e.g., "We felt it"), which demonstrates certainty and power. Conversely, the length of explanatory sentences was increased in the case of contextualizing religious or ideological arguments. The use of the active voice puts the agency of both military and divine forces in the foreground and makes it stronger and more legitimate.

### 5.2. *Discursive Practice Analysis*

At the discourse level, the findings support that the speech became prominent by way of selective media publicity. The electronic, print, and social media always display quotes about divine intervention, while ignoring the strategic military information. This bias amplification determined the way the speech was perceived by the majority, being interpreted as a religious-moral speech, but not a policy speech.

Despite being addressed to the religious scholars during the National Ulema Conference, the wider audience of the speech shows that it was addressed to the domestic people and political followers with a specific interest. The religious framing enables the message to go across social levels, particularly where the religious authority is morally binding.

Intertextual references are important in this process. By using Quranic verses and religious symbolism of the past, Munir connects the narratives of the conflicts with the discourse of religious and national identity that have existed in the past. To elaborate, he mentioned that Pakistan had been assigned the "honoured with responsibility" in the Islamic world, which places the state in a historical mission guided by God. These allusions allow the links of the modern war stories with the religious and national identities that were not so superficial.

### 7.3 Social Practice Analysis

At the social practice level, the discourse works to create an image of morally and divinely approved Pakistan in the aftermath of Operation Sindoor. Munir restates the conflict result as a moral event instead of a political one by virtue of attributing success or resilience to heavenly help. Such framing is a means to counteract criticism and to shift the emphasis of the public on material results, and make it a moral victory.

Power and authority, which of the military, are also strengthened in the speech. Munir, by saying that “no one can declare jihad without the authority of the state,” makes the military and the state organizations the only ones that are legitimate in interpreting religious action. It is also a statement that asserts institutional authority and controls the discourse of religion, in that the power is centralized in the hands of the state.

Meanwhile, there is a discourse that is co-existent with the counter-narratives, such as the Indian fact-checks and international scepticism about claims of success or divine intervention. These conflicting meanings point to the

conflicting aspect of legitimacy in the greater information war after Operation Sindoor.

### 5.3. Socio-Cognitive Analysis

The outcomes show that there is a definite development of in-group and out-group cognitive schemas. The in-group, which is constantly addressed with the help of collective pronouns, e.g., “we,” is depicted as righteous, faithful, and supported by God. The out-group is still mostly implicit and is placed in opposition to this moral superiority.

Such utterances as “We witnessed Allah’s help” form an audience belief, leading the audience to accept the conflict narrative as a morally necessary situation. In the long term, such framing becomes increasingly fixed, and the ideological assumptions solidify, the ties of religious-national identity form, and faith, nation, and military power are all united in one thought system. Table 1 shows the speech excerpts and discursive functions from the speech of Asim Munir.

*Table 1-Speech excerpts and discursive functions.*

Quoted Excerpt	Discursive Function	Interpretive Outcome
“We felt it. We saw divine help coming.”	Experiential legitimation	Normalizes divine intervention
“If Allah helps you, none can overcome you.”	Sacred authority	Reduces scope for dissent
“We witnessed Allah’s help.”	Moral framing	Shifts focus from strategy to faith.
“No one can declare jihad without the state.”	Institutional control	Reinforces military authority

## 6. Discussion

The findings of the study correspond with and expand the current literature on political speech, propaganda, and ideological messages in conflict situations (Barreto & Medina-Arboleda, 2021). Aligning with past analyses of political and military speech as a form of critical discourse, the current study also provides evidence that the post-Operation Sindoor speech of Asim Munir is more of a symbolic and ideological narrative than an account of the facts, and is intended to create such a perception and legitimacy (Ramberdiyeva et al., 2025). This affirms the fact stated by Fairclough that political discourse usually serves as an arena in which power relations are replicated rather than explained (Xing, 2024).

Relatively, previous research on political speech during conflict scenarios, including post-9/11 rhetoric, the

Pulwama Balakot crisis, and speeches by state officials during wars in South Asia, revealed that the moral binaries and emotional appeals are very often used by the leaders when they need to build in-group solidarity and justify the state’s actions (Husnain et al., 2021; Ristevska & Prezelj, 2025). The findings from this study also align with this pattern, especially when one considers the frequent usage of religious and moral terms by Munir to put the situation of Pakistan in the context of the righteous and the divinely approved one. However, this study provides a new perspective as it shows how religious framing, and not blatant nationalist or security rhetoric, is the dominant approach to legitimacy in the post-Operation Sindoor environment.

With respect to the works of religion and political speech, the result aligns with the literature that supports the power

of references to sacredness in endorsing power (Yang & Li, 2021). Those scholars who examine the rhetoric of politics in the Muslim majority contexts have suggested that citation of the Quran and imagery of god serves as an effective means of moral persuasion and ideological sealing (Fuadi, 2024). The appeal to Godly assistance and Quranic verses, made by Munir, is more or less similar to such patterns, which supports the concept that the discourse related to religion can change political assertion into a moral obligation. Simultaneously, the present research offers an addition to the literature on this topic, placing such religious framing in a military-centered narrative, demonstrating how the spiritual legitimacy could be applied to the political power, as well as to the enhancement of the institutional military domination.

The results are also quite similar to the socio-cognitive investigations of ideology and in-group/out-group polarization by Van Dijk. Just like the earlier analyses of nationalist propaganda, the use of collective pronouns and collective religious experience, which builds a morally superior in-group, and implicitly places external actors as wrong or unjust, in the speech of Munir (Mohammadi et al., 2025). This confirms that ideological discourse is functioning using mental models and shared beliefs, as argued by Van Dijk, concerning the way the audiences understand conflict and responsibility. The unique aspect of the current study is that it addresses the significance of the narratives of divine intervention as being more apt in increasing cognitive closure, and the alternative interpretations do not seem to be just politically incorrect but also morally invalid.

Relative to previous studies of South Asian CDA, where most of them focus on media framing or state propaganda, this research study is novel in that it anticipates the role of military religious rhetoric as a unique and powerful discourse genre (Hina, 2024; Nawaz et al., 2024). Most of the previous studies of India-Pakistan conflicts have focused on nationalistic slogans, victimization, or strategic communication (Yasmin, 2024). In comparison, the present evidence shows that the role of religious language is a stronger and more emotional propaganda, especially during times when the empirical assertions are not valid or when the assertions are threatened by outside forces.

These findings have important implications for the field of political communication. Other related studies have cautioned that moral absolutism in the political discourse diminishes the chances of dialogue and increases polarization (Anderson & ANDERSON, 2022; Schledorn,

2024). The issue is validated by the current analysis, which demonstrates that the presentation of conflict as something approved by God restricts the discursive space of negotiation, criticism, or de-escalation. In the Pakistan-India case, this kind of discourse serves as a step backwards to cement ideological differences and solidify long-term animosity between these two countries at the level of civil society consciousness.

## 7. Limitations and Future Research

The key strength of this study is based on the CDA where Fairclough's three-dimensional model is combined with the ideological framework of Van Dijk to analyze the political-military discourse through linguistic, ideological, and cognitive lenses. The study provides a unique input in the field of religious-military rhetoric within the context of the Pakistan-India conflict, as the post-Operation Sindoor speech of Asim Munir is a topic that has not been studied extensively in the CDA. The main limitation, however, is that only one speech of Asim Munir was considered, which allows the analysis to go only so far in the transcript, which can constrain the number of textual patterns discovered. This limitation should be replaced in future studies by including his other speeches, comparative studies of similar discourse in Indian politics or military, and studies of audience reception in order to empirically test the effect of such religious-nationalist discourses on the opinion and belief formation of the audience with time.

## 8. Conclusion

This study has shown that the post-Operation Sindoor speech by Asim Munir uses religious diction, moral framing, and experience rhetoric strategically to create the ideo-moral image of Pakistan as both morally and divinely approved, support military leadership, and have an impact on audience thinking. The findings indicate that selective media distribution, intertextual references, and cognitive polarization collude and enhance national and religious identity, normalize ideological discourse, and justify state authority in a bitter conflict situation. In general, the speech is based on the success of ideological persuasion that combines religion and nationalism in the perception-shaping process. Further studies on audience reception are necessary in the future to learn more about its cognitive influence.

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