



## The Portrayal of Pak-US Relations in Print Media: An Analysis of War on Terror and Militancy in Pakistan during the Republican and the Democratic Regimes

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### Abstract

*This study has examined how the leading Pakistani and American newspapers portrayed the war on terror and militancy in Pakistan during Republican (George W. Bush) and Democratic (Barack Obama) regimes. All the editorials were analyzed which were published on the subjects during the timeline of sixteen years (January 2001 – January 2017). The results show that both the newspapers are independent, balanced and suggestive. Overall coverage of editorials remained higher (59%) in the democratic regime as compared to that of the republican regime (41%). On the issue of Pakistan's support in the war against terrorism, both the newspapers gave mixed framing. Dawn gave Pakistan more favorable portrayal. NYT remained more unfavorable towards Pakistan, especially during democratic regime. The study reveals that Pak-US relations remained more hostile during Obama regime. However the overall foreign policy remains similar in America irrespective of its administration.*

**Key Words:** War on Terror, Militants, Democratic, Republican, Pakistan, United States, Media

### Introduction

Pakistan and the United States have always had 'working relationships' across many ups and downs. There has been a constant trust deficit between both countries. After 9/11, Pakistan decided to be a US ally in its 'War on Terror' and, as a result, faced many challenges in combating the terrorists within its own territory (Rafique, 2013). During the war, media in both countries significantly covered Pak-US relations and portrayed a specific image of each country for their domestic audiences. The current study is an attempt to explore how media in both countries covered Pak-US relationships, and if there was any difference in coverage in democratic and republican regimes in the US.

In the following passages, we not only aim to present a contextual framework of the situation in both the democratic and republican regimes but also present a summary of relevant studies. This will then be followed by supporting data and analysis.

Due to the unstable nature of Pak-US relationships, and after 9/11, it was important for Pakistan to establish good relations with the United States as it had been facing almost a decades' long sanctions. Moreover, the country was in poor economic conditions and international assistance was direly needed to improve its economic situation. President Musharraf without taking much time joined the United States in the war against terrorism. The situation proved favorable for him at personal as well as for the country at that time. He was ruling the country after forcefully removing an elected government and there was international demand to restore democratic rule in the country. By joining the United States, he was not only praised for his contributions but also the United States accepted him as a Pakistan's ruler, and an important ally against militants and Al-Qaeda. For the country, this alliance helped to remove sanctions on Pakistan which then helped Pakistan to receive financial as well as military relief (Kronstadt, 2005).

The post 9/11 coalition between Washington and Islamabad was based on the interests of both countries. To some extent, and arguably, Pakistan had the intention of eradicating extremism, but mainly it just avoided

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the US anger and attracted US aid and support (Jabeen, 2010). These mutual interests in Afghan war did help improve the relationships between the two states. However, this was not enough to influence public opinion in both countries. There is a common perception among Pakistanis that America is not Pakistan's trustworthy ally and this may be the same in the US. This study, therefore, is an attempt to explore this further and understand how the relationship between both states is seen by the media in their respective countries.

Within the backdrop of this situation, it becomes pertinent to have an understanding of these changing but interest-based relationship particularly when the US is in the process of withdrawing troops from Afghanistan.

## **Objectives of the study**

This study aims to:

- Investigate the frames and slants used by *the selected newspapers* towards Pakistan
- Assess the difference in the framing of the selected issues during republican and democratic regimes
- Assess the difference of coverage by the selected newspapers

## **Significance of the Study**

Moreover, considering media as a major player in opinion formation, it is important to understand how media play its role in changing public opinion in both countries and also if the media changes its stances with the change in governments specifically in the US. This study analyzes the influence of two different political party systems in America and its influence on the relations with Pakistan and to what extent the change in the administration affects Pak-US relations.

## **Literature Review**

Pakistan has a distinguished history to combat terrorism due to its geopolitical location in the world and its past and present engagements with global powers. Pakistan's stance, similar to the US has been changing with the changing nature of geopolitical changes. The Afghan mujahedeen which were once the heroes, later they were labelled as terrorists (Powell, 2011). This was a big shift for Pakistan's policy. However, in the United States of America (USA) where mass media plays an important role by framing global issues and public view in the country's favour not only criticized Pakistan strongly but there have been very rare instances when the US media acknowledged its sacrifices (Sultan, 2014).

The US media did not just criticize Pakistan but a very visible difference of approach could also be seen within the top media organizations in the US. For example, the comparative study of NYT and the Washington Post found that the later used terrorists, Al Qaeda, policy, combatant, attack, war, Iraq, and other terminologies to actually emphasize the Interests of United States (Altheide, 2007). Whereas NYT analyzed the key players such as people and politicians who were linked to the main events, the Washington Post focused more on the issues.

This could have been in the Iraq War when the US government presented similar rhetoric which was used to caution the public in the U.S. about a possible cold war (Goodall, 2006). The audience was not informed properly about the Iraq war similarly the Bush administration tried to propagate about war against terrorism. The media coverage and the incident of 9/11 divided the views and initiated different debates across the world (Seib, 2004). Other than using the mainstream media effectively, the Bush administration took a step further by starting the office of Global Communication (OGC) to work as public relations mediator and assigned it to portray a specific image of terrorists, death squads and thugs to the Iraqi soldiers who were loyal to Saddam Hussein (Kumar, 2006; Elter, 2008). Through a sub-discourse of threats and insecurities, the American media covered news throughout the war against terrorism. News media mainly emphasized the uncertainties and threats after the incident of 9/11 instead of justification of war or the war crimes in those regions (Altheide, 2007; Calabrese, 2005).

Geographical and cultural differences influence the coverage of international news (Galtung & Vincent, 1992). The western media uses negative terms like terrorists and extremist which create a negative perception in the native people (Baran, 2004). In U.S. media Pakistan has also been framed on the grounds of cultural

differences and the conflict between West and Islam. American media portrayed Pakistan as a fanatic country (Saleem, 2007), and politically a destabilized country that has become a center of religious terrorism (Ali, Jan & Saleem, 2013). This was not just in the case of Pak-US relations but the U.S. media continued to portray Pakistan unfavorably even in the conflicts between India and Pakistan (Khan, 2008). Pakistanis were framed as a risk to regional stability as they were perceived as the ally of fundamentalist religious groups. Islam was depicted as an extremist religion than Hinduism while stating the role of religion in India-Pakistan conflict (Atre, 2013).

The U.S. policy for war against terrorism in Afghanistan was supported by Pakistan in the region however the failure of the U.S. was also linked to Pakistan's lack of cooperation. Moreover, Pakistani society was portrayed as an intolerant society where women, children, and minorities lack their basic rights (Yousaf, 2015). In Pakistan, since the 9/11 incident, war against terrorism was the major subject in the coverage of Pakistani media, which focused more on the international conflict touching its tribal areas. However, in past, the major issues in media coverage used to be social, domestic and political. Pakistani newspapers gave significant coverage to 9/11 and subsequent events, which contributed more favorable coverage to the policy statements of local government and unfavorable coverage to the stance of the United States regarding war against terrorism (Ahmed, Mahsud & Ishtiaq, 2011). Yousaf (2015) states that Associated Press (AP) framed

Pakistan negatively in its coverage of the news related to terrorism. The United States presented itself as having serious concerns for the region while showing a skeptical approach to the capability and willingness of Pakistan's military to eradicate terrorism.

## Theoretical Framework

Framing theory provides a better understanding of the portrayal of the issues by the mass media. The current study uses framing theory for the analysis of the editorials of selected newspapers. Framing theory not only highlights significant aspects of an issue but it also looks at other contextual features in order to understand the interpretation of news among the audience. The framing techniques provide different perceptions on issues that leads audience towards concluding the intended meanings (Entman, 2007). Scheufele (2006) believes that today media's effects can be classified as the 'social constructionist' approach (p. 103) because the audience receives socially constructed realities in the form of media content by the media persons. Similarly the existing research work regarding media framing covers a number of topics which indicates how different local and international events are framed in the media (Saleem. N, 2011; Yusof, Hassan, F., Hassan, S., & Osman 2013; Ali, Jan, & Saleem, 2013).

## Research Questions

- RQ.1 Was there any difference between newspapers and regimes in terms of the amount of coverage given to the selected issues?
- RQ.2 What was the difference in the slant of the selected newspapers?
- RQ.3 Was there any difference in slant during both the regimes?
- RQ4. To what extent slant of the newspapers was different on the topic of the war on terror during the democratic and the republican government?
- RQ.5 How the newspapers framed 'Militancy' and 'War on Terror'?

## Hypotheses

- H<sub>1</sub>:** *Dawn* is more favorable towards Pakistan than the *NYT*
- H<sub>2</sub>:** Both newspapers – The *Dawn* and the *NYT* will give more unfavorable coverage to Pakistan during democratic regime than republican regime on the topic of Militancy

## Methodology

This study will analyze the editorials of the selected newspapers by using a content analysis method. Content analysis is an effective research methodology for examining press content. The content analysis focuses on the primary arrangement of a message (Neuendorf, 2002). Gilly and Yale (1988) considered content analysis as

fastest growing technique in the field of mass communication and that continues to be one of the most used research methods for studying news content.

For the selection of news contents, we chose Dawn and The New York Times (NYT) which are the leading newspapers of Pakistan and America respectively. Both the newspapers enjoy a wide readership in their respective countries. It is generally perceived among media scholars that both the newspapers deal issues according to the socio-political environment of their respective countries. However, there is also a consensus that the selected newspapers are relatively balanced, independent and suggestive in their policies. This study will analyze the editorials of the selected newspapers by using a content analysis method. Content analysis is an effective research methodology for examining press content. The content analysis focuses on the primary arrangement of a message (Neuendorf, 2002). Gilly and Yale (1988) considered content analysis as fastest growing technique in the field of mass communication and that continues to be one of the most used research methods for studying news content.

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## **Variables**

Selected Topic, Slant, and Frames are the variables of this study.

## **Coding Unit**

A single paragraph is a coding unit, if an editorial has 10 paragraphs out of which 6 paragraphs are favorable, editorials have been coded as favorable. For equal favorable and unfavorable paragraphs editorials were coded as neutral and for more unfavorable paragraphs an editorial has been coded as unfavorable. Frames have been coded on the basis of wording used in the editorials. If a frame depicts Pakistan as extremist country and non-cooperative in war on terror then it will be coded as anti-Pakistan, whereas the frames acknowledging Pakistan's sacrifices in war on terror will be considered as pro-Pakistan.

## **Reliability**

A subsample of 10 percent was taken from the sample. Holsti's (1969) reliability test, as suggested by Wimmer and Dominick, was performed to check the inter-coder reliability that showed a gratifying result.

## **Findings & Discussion**

The sample of the study was 242 editorials which included 136 (57%) from Dawn and 106 (43%) from NYT. Among these, 126 (52%) editorials appeared in the republican regime and 116 (48%) editorials were published during the democratic regime.

Out of 136 editorials of Dawn 59 (43%) and 77 (57%) editorials were published during Republican and Democratic regimes respectively. NYT published 106 editorials, out of which 67 (63 %) editorials appeared during the republican regime and 39 (37 %) editorials appeared in Democratic regime.

In the following section, we present the answer to our research questions as per the data analyzed.

**Q.1:** Was there any difference among newspapers and regimes in terms of the amount of coverage given to the 'Topics'?

Militancy got more coverage with 128 (53%) editorials out of a total of 242 editorials. War on terror was the second frequent topic with 114 (47%) editorials.

Overall 128 editorials appeared on the topic of Militancy. Out of which 69 (54%) and 59 (46%) editorials were published in Dawn and NYT respectively. In 69 editorials of Dawn 17 (24.6%) and 52 (75.4%) were published during republican and democratic regimes respectively. From the 59 editorials appeared in NYT 36 (61%) and 23 (39%) were published during republican and democratic regimes respectively.

War on terror got coverage in 114 editorials out of which 67 (58.8%) and 47 (41.2%) editorials were published in Dawn & NYT respectively. Out of 67 editorials of Dawn 42 (62.7%) appeared during the republican regime whereas 25 (37.3%) were published during democratic regimes. From the 47 editorials of NYT 31 (66%) and 16 (34%) were published during republican and democratic regimes.

**Q.2** Was there any difference among the newspapers and regimes in the number of editorials by slant?

Most of the editorials carried unfavorable slant towards Pakistan. Out of 242 editorials, 98 (41%) editorials were unfavorable to Pakistan, whereas 88 (36%) editorials were favorable to Pakistan and 56 (23%) editorials were neutral. Overall Dawn published 136 editorials out of which 76 (56%) editorials were favorable, 34 (25%) unfavorable and 26 (19%) were neutral to Pakistan. Dawn published 59 editorials during republican regime out of which 39 (66%), 12 (20%) and 8 (14%) editorials were favorable, unfavorable and neutral respectively. However, during democratic regime Dawn published 77 editorials out of which 37 (48%), 22 (29%) and 18 (23%) editorials were favorable and neutral respectively.

Overall The NYT published 106 editorials, 12 (11%), 64 (60%) and 30 (28%) editorials were favorable, unfavorable and neutral respectively. NYT published 67 editorials in the republican regime out of which 8 (12%), 42 (63%) and 17 (25%) editorials were favorable, unfavorable and neutral respectively. During democratic regime NYT published 39 editorials, 4 (11%), 22 (56%) and 13 (33%) editorials were favorable, unfavorable and neutral respectively.

**H1:** Dawn is more favorable towards Pakistan than the NYT

Dawn Published 56% editorials favorable to Pakistan whereas NYT has published only 11% favorable editorials. Hence the hypothesis has been approved, the statistics results indicate (Table 4.1, 53.112a; p: .000).

**Table 1.** Overall Slant of Selected Newspapers

Newspapers Variables	Dawn (% against total editorial of each category)	NYT (% against total editorial of each category)	Total (% of each category against total editorials of all newspapers)	X <sup>2</sup>
Favorable	76(56)	12(11)		
Unfavorable	34(25)	64(61)		
Neutral	26(19)	30(28)		
Total	136	106		53.112 <sup>a</sup> ; p: .000

\*X<sup>2</sup> 53.112<sup>a</sup>; p: .000

**Q3.** To what extent the slant of the newspapers was different on the subject war against terrorism during two regimes?

Overall 114 editorials were published on the subject “war against terrorism” out of which Dawn published 67 (58.8%) and The News York Times published 47 (41.2%) topics. From the overall 67 editorials of Dawn, 42(63%) were published during the republican regime and 25(37%) were published during democratic regime. Out of 42 editorials during republican regime Dawn published 28 (66.66%), 7 (16.66%) and 7 (16.66%) editorials favorable, unfavorable and neutral respectively. While during democratic regime Dawn published 25 editorials out of which 12 (48%), 3 (12%) and 10 (40%) editorials were favorable, unfavorable and neutral.

NYT published 47 editorials, 31 were published during the republican regime and 16 were published during democratic regime. Out of 31 editorials of republican regime 3(9.7%), 18(58%) and 10(32.3%) editorials were favorable, unfavorable and neutral. However 16 editorials were published during democratic regime out of which 3(18.75%), 4(25%) and 9(56.25%) editorials were favorable unfavorable and neutral respectively (X<sup>2</sup>: 7.402<sup>d</sup>; p: .025, Table No.4.2).

**Table 2.** Editorials Coverage in Both Newspapers of The Study (Topics & Slants)

Newspapers Variables	<i>Dawn</i> (% against total editorial of each category)	<i>NYT</i> (% against total editorial of each category)	Total (% of each category against total editorials of all newspapers)	$X^2$
War on terror				
Favorable	40(60)	6(13)	46(40)	7.402 <sup>d</sup> ; p: .025
Unfavorable	10(15)	22(47)	32(28)	
Neutral	17(25)	19(40)	36(32)	
Total	57	47	104	
Militancy* <sup>2</sup>				
Favorable	36(52)	6(10)	42(32)	.381 <sup>m</sup> ; p: .827
Unfavorable	24(35)	42(71)	66(52)	
Neutral	9(13)	11(19)	20(16)	
Total	69	59	128	

\*<sup>1</sup>  $X^2$ : 7.402<sup>d</sup>; p: .025

\*<sup>2</sup>  $X^2$ : 1.741<sup>g</sup>; p: .419

**Table 3.** Distribution of Frames in the Editorial Coverage of Selected Newspapers

Newspapers Variables	<i>Dawn</i> (% against total stories of each category)	<i>NYT</i> (% against total stories of each category)	Total (% of each category against total stories of all newspapers)	$X^2$
Frame A				
‘WOT’				5.39 <sup>a</sup> ; P: .301
‘Pro Pakistan’	47 (69)	21 (31)	68 (68)	
‘Anti-Pakistan’	15 (47)	17 (53)	32 (32)	
Total	62(62)	38(38)	100	
Frame B				
‘Militancy’				23.312 <sup>a</sup> ; P: .000
‘Pro-Pakistan’	42 (78)	12 (22)	54 (34)	
‘Anti-Pakistan’	34 (33)	68 (67)	102 (66)	
Total	76 (51)	70 (49)	156	

Note: \*<sup>1</sup>  $X^2$ : 5.39<sup>a</sup>; P: .301 \*<sup>2</sup>  $X^2$  23.312<sup>a</sup>; P: .000

#### Q.4 To what extent slant of the newspapers was different on the topic “Militancy”, during two regimes?

Overall 128 editorials were published on the topic “Militancy. Out of which, 69(54%) editorials were published by *Dawn* and 59(46%) editorials appeared in *NYT*. From the 69 editorials of *Dawn* 17(25%) were published during republican regime, out of which 11(65%), 5(29%) and 1(6%) editorials were favorable, unfavorable and neutral respectively. However during democratic regime *Dawn* published 52(75%) editorials out of which 25(48.07%), 19(36.53%) and 8(15.38%) editorials were favorable, unfavorable and neutral respectively. From the 59 editorials of *NYT* 36(61%) were published in republican regime and 5(14%), 24(66.6%) and 7(19.4%) editorials were favorable, unfavorable and neutral respectively. During democratic regime *NYT* published 23(39%), 1(4.3%), 18(78.3%) and 4(17.4%) editorials were favorable, unfavorable and neutral respectively ( $X^2$ : 381<sup>m</sup>; p: .827, Table No. 4.3).

**Q.5** How the newspapers framed Pakistan’s support in the war against terrorism?

Overall 100 frames appeared about Pakistan’s support in the war against terrorism. Out of which 65(65%) frames were favorable and 35(35%) frames were unfavorable to Pakistan. Overall 65 frame appeared during republican regime out of which 45(69%) were favorable and 20(31%) were unfavorable however during democratic regime, overall frames of both newspapers were 35 out of which 23(65%) were favorable and 12(35%) were unfavorable.

62 frames appeared in *Dawn* out of which 47(76%) were favorable and 15(26%) were unfavorable. 42 frames appeared in *Dawn* during the republican regime out of which 34(81%) were favorable and 8(19%) were unfavorable however 20 frames of *Dawn* appeared during democratic regime out of which 13(65%) were favorable and 7(35%) were unfavorable.

38 frames of Pakistan’s support/hindrance to the US in war against terrorism appeared in *NYT* out of which 21(55%) were favorable frames and 17(45%) were unfavorable. 23 frames appeared during republican regime out of which 11(48%) were favorable and 12(52%) were unfavorable however during democratic regime 15 frames appeared out of which 10(67%) were favorable and 5(33%) were unfavorable ( $X^2: 3.755^a; P: .053$ , Table No. 4.4).

**Q.6** How the newspapers framed Militancy?

Overall 174 frames appeared on “Militancy”, out of which 80(46%) frames appeared during the republican regime and 94(54%) frames appeared during democratic regime. In total 60(34.5%) frames were favorable and 114(65.5%) frames were unfavorable.

89 frames appeared in *Dawn* out of which 48(54%) were favorable and 41(46%) were unfavorable frames. During republican regimes 23 frames appeared out of which 14(61%) were favorable and 9(39%) were unfavorable. However, 66 frames appeared in democratic regimes out of which 34(51.52%) were favorable and 32(48.48%) were unfavorable.

In *NYT* 85 frames appeared out of which 57(67%) frames appeared during republican regime and 28(33%) frames appeared during democratic regime. From the 57 frames of republican regime 8(14%) were favorable and 49(86%) were unfavorable. From the 28 frames of democratic regime 4(20%) were favorable and 24(80%) were unfavorable ( $X^2 30.507^a; P: .000$ , Table, 4.5).

**Table 4.** Frames in the Editorial Coverage of Both Regimes

Newspapers Variables	Republican (% against total editorials of each category)	Democratic (% against total stories of each category)	Total (% of each category against total stories of all newspapers)	X <sup>2</sup>
Frames				
Frame A				
‘Pro-Pakistan’	45 (69)	23 (66)	68 (68)	
‘Anti-Pakistan’	20 (31)	12 (34)	32 (32)	.129 <sup>a</sup> ; P: .443
Total	65(65)	35(35)	100	
Frame B				
‘Pro-Pakistan’	21 (28)	33 (40)	54 (35)	2.420 <sup>a</sup> ; P: .082
‘Anti-Pakistan’	53 (72)	49 (60)	102 (65)	
Total	74(47)	82(53)	156	

*Note:* <sup>a</sup>X<sup>2</sup>: .129<sup>a</sup>;P: .443 <sup>a</sup>X<sup>2</sup>: .129<sup>a</sup>;P: .443

H<sub>2</sub>: Both newspapers – The *Dawn* and the *NYT* will give more unfavorable coverage to Pakistan during democratic regime than republican regime on the topic of Militancy

During republican regime 29% and 67% unfavorable editorials were published on the topic respectively by Dawn and NYT (Table 4.5, \*1  $\chi^2$  14.214;  $p$ : .001). However, during democratic regime, 37% and 78% editorials were published respectively by Dawn and NYT (Table 4.5 \*2  $\chi^2$  14.463;  $p$ : .001). Overall Dawn published 35% unfavorable editorials whereas NYT contributed 71% unfavorable editorials in both the regimes (Table 4.5 \*3  $\chi^2$  96.018a;  $p$ : .000).

**Table 5.** Distribution of Editorials on the Topic, ‘Militancy’ Coverage in both Newspapers and Regimes by Slants

<b>Newspapers Variables &amp; Regimes</b>	<b>Dawn (% against total editorial of each category)</b>	<b>NYT (% against total editorial of each category)</b>	<b>Total (% of each category against total editorials of all newspapers)</b>	<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>
Republican Militancy				
Favorable	11 (65)	5 (14)	16 (30)	
Unfavorable	5 (29)	24 (67)	29 (55)	
Neutral	1 (6)	7 (19)	8 (15)	
Total	17 (32)	36 (68)	53 (100)	*1 $\chi^2$ 14.214; $p$ : .001
Democratic Taliban & Al Qaeda				
Favorable	25 (48)	1 (4)	26 (35)	
Unfavorable	19 (37)	18 (78)	37 (49)	
Neutral	8 (15)	4 (18)	12 (16)	
Total	52 (69)	23 (31)	75 (100)	*2 $\chi^2$ 14.463; $p$ : .001
Total Favorable	36 (52)	6 (10)	42 (33)	
Total Unfavorable	24 (35)	42 (71)	66 (51)	
Total Neutral	9 (13)	11 (64)	20 (16)	
Total	69 (54)	59 (46)	128 (100)	*3 $\chi^2$ 96.018 <sup>a</sup> ; $p$ : .000

## Conclusion

It is evident from the above-mentioned data that the overall policy of the US, as it has been reflected in NYT, does not change much with change of political regimes. In core international issues, both the regimes expected similar contributions from Pakistan, like combating militants, stopping nuclear proliferation and providing assistance to the United States in South Asia. The Democratic regimes tend to be stricter to Pakistan but they too follow a mixed policy of praising and pressurizing Pakistan. President Bush overlooked military dictatorship in Pakistan and its nuclear program to win support for the US war on terror in Afghanistan. Later, when Pakistan and the world realized that it has become Pakistan’s war as well, the relations between both countries started deteriorating again. There was clear evidence of blaming each other, particularly when both President Bush and President Musharraf were near to quit their offices. With Musharraf’s departure from office, America’s policy towards Pakistan changed and even got worse in the early years of President Obama. The Democratic administration had been more demanding and kept asking Pakistan to do more and also accelerated the frequency of drone attacks in Pakistan.

Due to a long timeline of sixteen years, the researcher found it difficult to analyze opinion articles and news stories and the inclusion of more newspapers in the study. Such studies can be more comprehensive by analyzing a single topic. Due to a long timeline of sixteen years, the researcher found it difficult to analyze opinion articles and news stories and the inclusion of more newspapers in the study. Such studies can be more comprehensive by analyzing a single topic.

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