

Thematic Analysis Of Government And Military Press Releases : A Literature Review

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Abstract

This review paper explores how the Indian Armed Forces portray power through official press releases disseminated by the Defence Public Relations (DPR) division between 2019 and 2022. Drawing from a wide body of interdisciplinary literature, the study examines the role of language in shaping military narratives and influencing public perception. It focuses on qualitative methodologies including thematic and content analysis. The review highlights how these elements contribute to strategic communication, reinforce nationalistic ideals, and legitimize military actions. Comparative insights from global case studies further contextualize the Indian experience within broader military communication frameworks. Emphasis is placed on the use of rhetoric and persuasive language to construct an image of strength, readiness, and moral authority. The paper brings out the utility of integrating linguistic and discourse analysis methods to uncover deeper ideological patterns and power dynamics embedded in military messaging. Ultimately, the findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of defence communication as a potent tool of soft power and perception management in contemporary India.

Keywords : Indian Armed Forces, Strategic Communication, Defence Public Relations, Thematic analysis, Lexical Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

The examination of press releases issued by state and military institutions—such as Ministries of Defence, Armed Forces, Homeland Security departments, Ministries of External Affairs, and executive offices—has gained prominence as a critical area of inquiry within contemporary communication studies (Powell, 2012). These documents serve as formal instruments of narrative construction and public persuasion, offering fertile ground for empirical analysis. Thematic analysis, as a qualitative research methodology, facilitates a structured yet flexible approach to interpreting these official texts. It enables researchers to identify, analyse, and report recurring patterns of meaning that reveal how institutions construct discourses of authority, security, and governance (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis distinguishes itself from other qualitative methodologies such as discourse analysis, grounded theory, or interpretative phenomenological analysis by its inherent adaptability to various theoretical paradigms (Nowell et al., 2017). This flexibility allows scholars to tailor their analytical lenses in alignment with the research objectives and context of the data. As Alfred and Taiwo (2019) argue, thematic analysis offers “a nuanced understanding of how narratives are crafted, messages are framed, and influence is exerted on public sentiment,” particularly when analysing communication from state actors. In this regard, press releases act as curated expressions of institutional intent and legitimacy, especially in high-stakes domains such as national security and diplomacy.

Applied to governmental and military messaging, thematic analysis proves particularly effective in uncovering embedded ideological constructs, rhetorical strategies, and policy framings designed to influence public perception and media discourse. These include recurring themes on national sovereignty, counterterrorism, civil-military cooperation, and international diplomacy. The ability of thematic analysis to expose how communications are “tailored to influence public discourse on matters such as security, diplomacy, and defence policies” (Alfred & Taiwo, 2019) positions it as an essential tool in the qualitative researcher’s methodological repertoire.

However, the reliability and depth of insights derived from thematic analysis depend on the careful application of its procedural stages. Braun and Clarke (2022) emphasize the importance of “critical interpretation and researcher reflexivity,” particularly in the selection and naming of themes. Moreover, as Sundler et al. (2019) point out, thematic analysis necessitates a balance between systematic coding and

“interpretive engagement with lived meaning.” The subjective judgment of the researcher plays a pivotal role in shaping the analytical outcome, and as Lochmiller (2021) notes, such analysis must be conducted with “methodological clarity and transparency” to ensure scholarly rigour.

Thematic analysis stands as a robust and adaptable methodology for unpacking the strategic communications disseminated by state and military institutions. When conducted with analytical integrity and theoretical awareness, it unveils the complex interplay between power, discourse, and public messaging in institutional communication.

This chapter has four key goals: (a) to give an overview of the main procedures and tasks involved in doing a stand-alone literature review (b) to explain the different kinds of review articles that can help build the knowledge base for press release analysis (c) to find out from published research how to analyze government press releases and (d) to show that theme analysis is a good way to review in this area.

2. Thematic Analysis As A Methodological Tool For Examining Government And Military Press Releases

Braun & Clarke, 2006; Percy et al., 2015 state, “Thematic analysis is widely recognised as a versatile and accessible qualitative research method employed across multiple disciplines. It is particularly well-suited for analysing both manifest (explicit) and latent (implicit) content within textual data, such as official press releases.” Nowell et al.(2017) point, “The method allows for adaptation based on the research objectives, theoretical orientation, and data structure .” As a structured process, thematic analysis typically follows six phases: data familiarisation, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report state Heriyanto (2018) and Nowell et al. (2017).

The initial phase requires researchers to immerse themselves in the dataset to develop a comprehensive understanding of its content. In the context of government and military press releases, this involves not only reading the texts but also recognising the strategic purpose, political intent, and audience orientation embedded within the communications. Researchers then generate codes by identifying meaningful data segments aligned with their research questions. “These codes are subsequently organised into initial themes that represent recurring patterns of meaning across the dataset,” put forth Bakokonyane (2022). Themes are refined through critical review to ensure internal coherence and thematic integrity. Importantly, thematic analysis is not confined to a single epistemological stance; it accommodates both inductive approaches—where themes emerge directly from the data—and deductive approaches—where theoretical constructs guide the analysis (Ahmed et al., 2025). When applied to press releases from government or military sources, thematic analysis enables scholars to reveal dominant narratives, rhetorical strategies, and event or policy framings embedded in institutional messaging (Lochmiller, 2021). “The final stage involves constructing a thematic framework that conveys findings in a logically sequenced, conceptually sound, and academically persuasive manner,” noted Ahmed et al. (2025). This methodological flexibility and analytical depth make thematic analysis especially valuable for understanding how state institutions shape public discourse, justify policy decisions, and manage perceptions through strategically crafted communication.

A structured approach to writing a review article typically involves six fundamental steps, as outlined by Templier and Paré (2015). These steps begin with clearly defining the research questions and objectives, which provide direction and scope for the review. Following this, a comprehensive search of existing literature is conducted to gather relevant sources. The next stage involves screening these sources to determine their suitability for inclusion based on predetermined criteria. Once selected, the quality of the primary studies is assessed to ensure reliability and relevance. Data is then systematically extracted from the chosen studies, after which the final step involves analysing the collected data to identify key patterns, findings, and gaps in the literature. This process ensures methodological rigor and enhances the credibility of the review. The researcher has followed this step by step in this research paper.

3. Theoretical And Conceptual Frameworks In Thematic Analysis Of Government And Military Communication

The type of literature review the researcher has done is Scoping Review and the review paper is a methodology based one. This means look, assess the size and range of the existing literature on a topic and the various keywords identified, which is usually done when there are many different types of

literature. This type of research doesn't try to answer a specific question. It is strict with a clear and repeatable process. There are criteria for inclusion, search methodologies, and methods. So the review included papers on theoretical and conceptual frameworks.

The robust application of thematic analysis in qualitative inquiry requires a clear articulation of both theoretical and conceptual frameworks that underpin the research design. "A theoretical framework operates as a comprehensive lens through which the study is conceptualised, shaping the development of research questions, informing data collection strategies, and guiding the interpretation of findings," Ayre & McCaffery (2021) states. It aids in identifying thematic patterns in qualitative data and provides a structured mechanism for organising and reporting those patterns. In contrast, a conceptual framework offers a more narrowly focused analytical map, highlighting specific constructs and their interrelations that are relevant to the phenomenon under study.

When analysing press releases issued by governmental and military institutions, several communication theories are particularly pertinent. Framing theory allows for an investigation into how institutional actors selectively present and structure information to steer public interpretation. Agenda-setting theory, meanwhile, examines how repeated exposure to specific issues in the media elevates their prominence in public consciousness. Additionally, theories from the domains of political communication and public relations enrich the analysis by elucidating strategic messaging approaches and reputation management efforts deployed by state entities. Thematic analysis is inherently flexible and can be situated within diverse theoretical paradigms to suit a range of analytical objectives states Nowell et al., (2017). "For instance, framework analysis—a methodology developed specifically for applied policy research—is well-suited for practical, policy-driven studies," insisted Goldsmith,(2021). Complementing these approaches, the integration of critical discourse analysis facilitates a deeper interrogation of language use in constructing power relations, legitimising political agendas, and reinforcing institutional ideologies. As Jabareen (2009) argued, "selecting appropriate theoretical and conceptual frameworks must be closely aligned with the research questions and intended contributions of the study." This alignment ensures that the findings are grounded in scholarly rigour while offering contextually relevant interpretations of institutional communication practices.

4. Application Of Thematic Analysis To Press Releases From Government And Military Institutions

Thematic analysis offers a systematic approach to dissecting the intricate communication strategies employed by governments, militaries, and related institutions through their press releases. Press releases, as official statements disseminated to the media and public, serve as critical tools for shaping narratives, managing perceptions, and advancing strategic objectives. As Lechtenberg (2013) states, "press releases serve as critical tools for shaping narratives, managing perceptions, and advancing strategic objectives." By applying thematic analysis to this type of data, researchers can reveal the underlying messages, values, and priorities that these institutions seek to communicate (Nowell et al., 2017). The identification of dominant themes within press releases can shed light on the key issues and concerns that are being emphasized by these organizations, as well as the specific language and rhetoric used to frame these issues in a particular way. As noted by Rebich-Hespanha et al. (2014), "analysis may reveal recurring themes related to national security, economic stability, humanitarian efforts, or diplomatic relations." Furthermore, thematic analysis can help uncover the subtle yet powerful ways in which government and military institutions construct their identities, legitimize their actions, and cultivate support for their policies. This rigorous methodology enhances transparency and reduces bias in qualitative analysis through step-by-step implementation. According to Mackieson et al. (2018), "this rigorous methodology enhances transparency and reduces bias in qualitative analysis through step-by-step implementation." Through careful examination of the language, imagery, and overall tone of press releases, researchers can gain valuable insights into the strategic communication practices of these institutions and their impact on public discourse. As Mwita & Mwilongo (2025) explain, "thematic analysis is a useful tool for qualitative researchers, although its philosophical underpinnings and imprecision in how it has been described have complicated its use and acceptance among researchers."

The process of thematic analysis minimally organizes and thoroughly describes a data set. According to Nowell et al. (2017), "thematic analysis minimally organizes and richly describes the data set in detail." Thematic analysis can be seen as a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes)

within data. Braun and Clarke (2006) state, “thematic analysis can be seen as a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data.” By systematically coding textual data and identifying recurring patterns of meaning, thematic analysis enables researchers to extract key insights and draw meaningful conclusions about the ways in which these institutions communicate with the public. Thematic analysis focuses on identifying patterns of meaning across a dataset, providing a systematic way to condense large amounts of information into manageable themes. As Yip et al. (2023) explain, “the technique focuses on finding recurring patterns of meaning within a dataset and offers a methodical way to reduce enormous volumes of data into workable themes.” The systematic nature of thematic analysis, which involves structured, sequential steps to interpret research data, ensures a comprehensive understanding (Naeem et al., 2023). The flexibility of thematic analysis allows researchers to adapt the method to suit their specific research questions and data, making it a versatile tool for qualitative inquiry (Mwita & Mwilongo, 2025). As Boyatzis (1998), Green et al. (2007), and Lochmiller (2021) note, “thematic analysis, underpinned by either a data-driven inductive approach or a theory-driven deductive approach, is instrumental in qualitative research for pinpointing, scrutinizing, and reporting recurring patterns of meaning within data.” This versatility makes it invaluable for researchers aiming to explore complex communication strategies in varied contexts. The researcher keeping the data in mind can incorporate either inductive or deductive. This researcher keeping the study of press releases in mind decided on inductive thematic analysis and creating a code book along with.

5. Transcription, Data Familiarization, And Quote Selection In Thematic Analysis

In qualitative research, the initial phase of thematic analysis—comprising transcription, data familiarization, and quotation selection—plays a foundational role in guiding the analytical trajectory (Naeem et al., 2023). This stage requires researchers to immerse themselves deeply in the dataset to “extract significant themes,” thereby ensuring that the analysis remains firmly anchored in the content while remaining attuned to the nuanced communication strategies employed by the institutions under study (Naeem et al., 2023). Within the specific context of press releases disseminated by governmental and military entities, this entails a meticulous review process involving textual analysis, auditory or visual assessment of press briefings, and scrutiny of supplementary materials such as visual aids or infographics. A key requirement in this phase is the production of an “accurate word-for-word transcription,” which, when paired with a high-quality audio recording, allows the researcher to “manually highlight patterns in the data to identify the most relevant statements” (Naeem et al., 2023). By closely engaging with elements such as linguistic choices, tonal inflections, and contextual references, scholars can identify preliminary themes that merit deeper exploration (Ahmed et al., 2025). This process begins with “familiarization with data through repeated reading to identify meanings and patterns” (Hemming et al., 2021), progressing to the identification of passages that “appear to reveal the topic under consideration” (Singh et al., 2019). These emergent excerpts serve as representative quotations that “encapsulate the essence of the identified themes” (Naeem et al., 2023), offering a qualitative distillation of the overarching discourse.

Furthermore, the extraction of meaningful content during this immersion process is governed by the study’s objectives, which delineate a specific analytical domain (Naeem et al., 2023). This ensures that both the thematic outcomes and the supporting quotations align with the intended research inquiry. The structure for implementing such analysis is often modelled on the six-phase framework developed by Braun and Clarke, which includes “familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and writing the report” (Ahmed et al., 2025). This framework supports the iterative and cyclical nature of the method, encouraging researchers to continuously refine their interpretations. Throughout this process, reflexivity remains a crucial component. Researchers are advised to “maintain a reflexive stance,” whereby they critically examine their own theoretical biases, methodological assumptions, and personal perspectives (Ahmed et al., 2025). Such introspection enhances the trustworthiness of the analysis and ensures that interpretations remain contextually grounded and analytically transparent.

6. Reading, Open Coding & Categorisation : Thematic Analysis Of Governmental Press Releases

Thematic analysis is widely acknowledged as a flexible and methodologically rigorous approach to qualitative research, particularly suited for uncovering latent and manifest patterns of meaning within

textual data (Wakelin et al., 2024; Nowell et al., 2017). Defined by its systematic process of identifying, analysing, and interpreting recurring themes, it enables researchers to structure large volumes of unstructured data into meaningful categories (Ahmed et al., 2025). This analytical method has demonstrated utility across a spectrum of disciplines, offering both breadth and depth in qualitative inquiry (Chadwick & McLoughlin, 2022; Xu & Zammit, 2020).

In the context of official communications, press releases disseminated by government, military, and diplomatic institutions serve as vital instruments for public engagement. These documents are often purposefully crafted to “shape public opinion, disseminate information, and advance specific agendas,” and thus, they become an essential corpus for thematic inquiry. As Tuckett (2005) argued, such structured documents encapsulate embedded narratives, making thematic analysis a “foundational method for scrutinizing qualitative data by pinpointing, dissecting, and detailing recurring patterns of meaning.” Thematic analysis focuses on the interpretation of non-numerical data through techniques such as reading, open coding, and categorization (Nowell et al., 2017). It “acts as a flexible research tool, providing a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data,” offering researchers a lens to examine how communication is strategically constructed and disseminated (Chadwick & McLoughlin, 2022). Unlike statistical methodologies, it does not rely on quantification, but rather on contextual and iterative engagement with the data (Mwita & Mwilongo, 2025). According to Ahmed et al. (2025), “thematic analysis involves a systematic process of reading, coding, and interpreting qualitative data to identify recurring themes or patterns of meaning.” But thematic analysis cannot be complete without lexical analysis. This means that the language of the press releases in this case will have to be understood and themes will find their basis on this. The study of language analysis, word count, repetitions, rhetoric, and the use of words to portray the power of the defence forces contributes to a more nuanced understanding of military communication and its impact on public perception (Dolphin, 2005). Strategic communication requires understanding the population composition, voter turnout, and baseline support to predict policy support levels and opposition patterns (Baldwin, 2007). By understanding how military narratives are crafted and disseminated, one can critically assess the messages conveyed and their potential effects on shaping attitudes and behaviours. (Baldwin, 2007). Military strategic communications seeks to change target audience behavior, informing, influencing, and reinforcing opinions to gain compliance or conformance to new behaviour patterns (Baldwin, 2007). Crucially, researchers employing thematic analysis are encouraged to highlight statements that “reveal the subject under study” (Nowell et al., 2017). These statements serve as anchors around which broader narratives can be constructed. Furthermore, the method can be executed through either inductive or deductive reasoning (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). An inductive approach allows themes to “emerge directly from the data,” enabling a grounded and exploratory analysis, whereas a deductive strategy applies pre-existing theories or frameworks to identify themes aligned with predefined questions (Mwita & Mwilongo, 2025). The conceptual integration of theoretical frameworks adds additional structure to thematic investigations. According to Vaismoradi et al. (2016), “conceptual frameworks offer a structured approach to analyzing data,” which ensures that the analysis remains aligned with established scholarly discourse. While thematic analysis is often regarded as a technique rather than a rigid method, its adaptability allows researchers to align it with various epistemological positions—including constructivist, positivist, and interpretivist paradigms (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Naeem et al., 2023). Applied to press releases from political and defense entities, thematic analysis offers insights into institutional priorities and rhetorical strategies. As Xu and Zammit (2020) explain, the use of a “hybrid approach combining both data-driven and theory-driven coding” enhances thematic robustness, particularly when dealing with policy-driven texts. Through this lens, recurring narratives around national security, diplomacy, defence readiness, and humanitarian engagement can be identified and analysed. Furthermore, thematic analysis supports a wide range of research questions and can be tailored to the specific characteristics of different data sources (DeJonckheere et al., 2024; Nowell et al., 2017). However, as Nowell et al. (2017) caution, “thematic analysis is not a one-size-fits-all method,” and demands a firm grasp of its philosophical underpinnings for it to be effectively utilized. Researchers are also reminded by Lochmiller (2021) and Vaismoradi & Snelgrove (2019) that thematic analysis “can provide rich and nuanced insights into the complexities of human experience and social phenomena,” particularly when implemented with precision and transparency.

As qualitative research continues to gain recognition in academic and policy domains, the call for methodological integrity becomes more pronounced. Gavade (2024) asserts that “researchers must adopt a rigorous and systematic approach to data collection, coding, and analysis in order to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of their findings.” This emphasizes Boyatzis’ (1998) and Nowell et al.’s (2017) position that “the credibility of qualitative research hinges on the researcher’s proficiency in understanding, describing, and explaining data.” Therefore, misuse or superficial application of thematic analysis may compromise the validity of the results. To avoid these pitfalls, it is imperative that scholars develop proficiency in all stages of the analysis—from data immersion and code generation to theme refinement and reporting.

7. METHODOLOGY AND FRAMEWORKS IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION THROUGH PRESS RELEASES: A THEMATIC ANALYSIS PERSPECTIVE

Thematic analysis provides a structured and rigorous approach to deciphering the intricate narratives embedded in government, military, and diplomatic press releases. This method facilitates the deconstruction of official communications to reveal the core messages, ideologies, and institutional priorities that underpin them. The process enables researchers to uncover embedded meanings, implicit assumptions, and strategic rhetorical choices aimed at shaping public opinion and advancing policy goals. As Mwita and Mwilongo (2025) note, “thematic analysis in qualitative research can be challenging due to a lack of understanding regarding the systematic steps involved in conducting the analysis,” yet it remains a cornerstone method in qualitative inquiry. It is further emphasized by Nowell et al. (2017) that thematic analysis “should be regarded as a fundamental qualitative analysis method, as it equips researchers with essential skills applicable to various qualitative analysis techniques.”

To ensure analytical rigor and relevance, the application of thematic analysis should be grounded in established theoretical and conceptual frameworks. A well-defined theoretical framework serves as a guiding lens, allowing researchers to interpret data meaningfully and to contextualize their findings within broader scholarly discourse. In this regard, frameworks such as critical discourse analysis and framing theory have proven particularly effective for analysing institutional press releases.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) interrogates how language is strategically deployed to construct and sustain power dynamics, legitimize ideological positions, and reinforce institutional authority. As highlighted in *Writing Up Thematic Analyses* (2012), CDA “examines how language is used to construct power relations, legitimize ideologies, and shape public opinion.” This approach emphasizes the contextual embeddedness of discourse, taking into account the social, political, and historical milieu in which these communications are produced. Importantly, CDA is adept at discerning both explicit narratives and implicit assumptions encoded within texts. According to Dehchnashki and Kohi (2015), CDA “can illuminate power dynamics in language,” by exploring “language texts, discourse practices, and discursive events as sociocultural practices” (Dijk, 2015). Furthermore, as Leotti et al. (2021) assert, CDA allows researchers to “explore power and dominance enacted and reproduced in texts.”

In parallel, framing theory offers another valuable analytical lens. It facilitates the exploration of how institutions select, emphasize, or omit specific elements of information to construct a preferred narrative. According to Garvey and Jones (2021), “framing theory is a valuable framework for analysing how governments, militaries, and diplomatic institutions frame issues and events in their press releases.” The act of framing involves emphasizing certain aspects of reality while diminishing others, thus influencing how audiences interpret events and policy issues. Suharyo (2018) elaborates that “framing analysis takes into account schematic, script, thematic, and rhetorical aspects, as well as writing strategies,” providing a multidimensional view of institutional narratives.

The thematic approach, when informed by framing theory, allows researchers to identify dominant frames that reveal institutional intentions, target audience expectations, and the broader socio-political messaging embedded in the discourse. As Prastya (2016) suggests, “organizations can engage in social construction of reality through their official statements.” These constructions are not neutral; rather, through “the careful selection of language, images, and narratives, they can construct particular versions of reality that align with their interests and goals” (Wicks, 2005). The ideological undertones and value-laden language choices in these texts often serve to legitimize specific courses of action or to frame

institutional identities in a favourable light. According to AlAfnan (2019) and Jahedi et al. (2014), thematic analysis “helps make visible the ideological loading of particular ways of using language and the relations of power which underlie them.” Salma (2019) further contends that “critical discourse analysis considers power relations as erratic,” thus requiring close, iterative engagement with texts to map these shifting dynamics.

In sum, when applied alongside robust theoretical models such as CDA and framing theory, thematic analysis becomes a powerful tool to decode institutional communication. It enables a layered understanding of how language is strategically crafted to manage perception, assert dominance, and shape socio-political discourse. Such interdisciplinary grounding enhances the reliability and interpretive depth of qualitative studies, especially those investigating media and communication strategies employed by government and military bodies.

8. Application Of Thematic Analysis To Governmental And Military Communications

Thematic analysis offers a systematic and rigorous framework for examining how governments, militaries, and diplomatic institutions construct strategic narratives through official press releases. These public communications serve as deliberate tools to disseminate institutional viewpoints, influence public opinion, and legitimize policy directions. Applying thematic analysis to such texts allows researchers to derive insights into the strategic intentions, policy priorities, and discursive strategies adopted by these institutions to shape public discourse. As Pan (2008) notes, “thematic analysis is suitable for examining various research questions in order to understand the experiences, thoughts, or behaviours of individuals or organizations.” Moreover, the method aids in identifying similarities and differences across datasets, thereby increasing the robustness of qualitative inquiry.

Press releases from governmental and military institutions function as key instruments for framing public perception around national security, foreign policy, defence operations, and economic agendas. The language employed in these statements often reflects carefully curated narratives intended to construct institutional legitimacy. These communications attempt to “legitimize their actions and policies, often by appealing to shared values, national interests, or security concerns,” a pattern particularly visible in statements issued by defence agencies and armed forces. Militaries, in particular, utilize press releases to highlight “operational successes, humanitarian efforts, and contributions to national security,” thereby enhancing institutional credibility and societal support.

In the diplomatic domain, press releases issued by foreign ministries and heads of state are vital tools for projecting soft power and signalling policy positions in the international arena. As Kurniawan et al. (2021) emphasize, “governments can shape public opinion to suit their interests,” highlighting the centrality of media narratives in governance. These official narratives often reflect evolving geopolitical realities and the challenges of maintaining foreign policy coherence. According to Goldsmith et al. (2021), “governments utilize public diplomacy as a tool to shape global affairs by improving perceptions of their leaders, country, people, and core values.” Consequently, thematic analysis becomes instrumental in unpacking the communicative architecture of diplomacy.

Press releases, press conferences, and official websites act as conduits for disseminating “information to the public regarding the intentions, decisions, and actions of governments” (Pasquier, 2017). As institutional communication involves “communicating notifications, news, and reports, and building relationships” (Rus et al., 2021), the strategic choices behind these messages reveal both organizational priorities and targeted messaging efforts. Ecker-Ehrhardt (2023) further reinforces that “organizations understand the importance of communicating with the public,” indicating a growing emphasis on participatory governance and transparency.

Furthermore, press releases serve as vehicles for constructing dominant policy narratives. The analysis of such texts “can shed light on the construction of narratives related to policy-making” (Suswanta et al., 2021). Understanding these narratives requires unpacking which discourses prevail, who drives them, how they evolve, and “how they can be framed to achieve policy objectives” (Ancker et al., 2017). In this context, thematic analysis allows researchers to track the emergence of discourse coalitions and the dynamics of agenda-setting within government communication. However, challenges exist in media engagement; for instance, Aronoff (1976) observed the tendency for “media practitioners disagreeing on the volume of press releases they can handle,” which continues to impact strategic communication

effectiveness. As Habibullah et al. (2022) observe, the “ability to manage media relations and handle the volume of press releases can affect the success of strategic communications,” highlighting the need to recalibrate engagement strategies.

Thematic analysis also helps identify recurring actors, issues, and symbolic events that shape the policy environment. This analytical lens facilitates the exploration of how various stakeholders seek to influence policy outcomes through language and discourse. Yu-lian (2021) notes that “the study of diplomatic discourse can reveal complexities and subtleties that depend on speaker and situation,” suggesting that thematic analysis can reveal nuanced rhetorical devices and cultural framing strategies within diplomatic communication.

The growing importance of digital platforms has further complicated the communication ecosystem. These platforms are now central to public diplomacy efforts, allowing governments to “engage with global audiences and share information” in real-time (Sheikh, 2024). The emergence of “data diplomacy” as a concept illustrates how governments and international actors are leveraging digital information flows to enhance their diplomatic objectives (Boyd et al., 2019). However, this digital evolution introduces new challenges, including misinformation and manipulation. According to Boyd et al. (2019), Habibullah et al. (2022), and Rachmawati et al. (2024), thematic analysis can be instrumental in understanding these digital threats. Manor (2019) also argues that “digitalization has changed the way public diplomacy is conducted,” reinforcing the urgency of studying communication patterns in online spaces.

In this context, thematic analysis provides a valuable methodological tool to uncover the strategies adopted by governments and diplomatic institutions in their attempt to ensure accurate representation and counter disinformation. By examining the structure, language, and themes within official press communications, researchers can gain nuanced insights into the institutional logics that drive public messaging in a digitized world.

9. RESULTS INTERPRETATION: ENSURING RIGOR IN THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL PRESS RELEASES

To yield meaningful insights, thematic analysis must be conducted with methodological rigor and transparency. As Haas and Western (2021) assert, “thematic analysis will need to be robust in order to generate insights,” necessitating well-defined procedures for data collection, systematic coding, and interpretive analysis. A robust thematic analysis hinges on a clear understanding of the context in which press releases are developed and circulated. This includes a critical appraisal of the political, social, and cultural environments that shape the communication, the specific objectives of the issuing institution, and the characteristics of the intended audience (Wash, 2020).

The value of thematic analysis lies in its capacity to reveal recurring patterns and discursive regularities, provided that the source data is sufficiently comprehensive and well-contextualized. As Milev (2021) notes, “thematic analysis can be used to reveal regularities in results depending on the data sources being analysed.” This form of analysis is inherently reflective and experiential, rooted in the “lived experiences” of the subjects under study and requiring “reflective writing” to capture its depth and nuance (Sundler et al., 2019). In this sense, thematic analysis intersects with qualitative epistemologies that prioritize meaning-making over mere description.

In parallel, the integration of comparative-historical analysis further strengthens thematic interpretation by grounding the findings in historical continuity and institutional context. Ohnesorge (2021) emphasizes that “comparative-historical analysis emphasizes the importance of examining the historical context in which events unfold,” recognizing the cultural and political dimensions that underpin institutional communication. Such a perspective is critical when analyzing the rhetoric and strategies employed in press releases, which are often shaped by legacy narratives and shifting political landscapes.

However, researchers must remain vigilant against the risk of analytical bias and subjectivity. Boyd et al. (2019) warn that “data must be rigorously sourced when conducting thematic analysis” and that researchers must “strive to minimize bias and ensure that their interpretations are grounded in the data.” Reflexivity is essential, particularly when researchers’ personal values or theoretical orientations might color their interpretation. Ahsan (2024) similarly cautions that “researchers need to be aware of their own biases and assumptions, and to take steps to mitigate their influence on the analysis.”

Transparency in the analytical process is crucial to establish credibility. Green et al. (2007) stress that “transparency in the data analysis process is essential for assessing the evidence that is generated.” This includes documenting every step of the analytical journey—from initial coding procedures to the rationale for theme development—and ensuring reproducibility of results. Researchers are now expected to provide detailed accounts of coding strategies, decisions made during data reduction, and procedures for maintaining analytic consistency across datasets.

Moreover, thematic analysis demands iterative engagement with the data. This includes the practice of constant comparison, where “data is collected concurrently as researchers check the fit between data and analysis” (Green et al., 2007). Each stage of the analysis must be substantiated with textual evidence, linking themes explicitly to the content of the press releases. As Braun and Clarke (2006) define it, “thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data,” highlighting its role in distilling complex textual material into coherent thematic categories.

The trustworthiness of thematic conclusions depends on the depth of evidence provided. As Nowell et al. (2017) emphasizes, “it is essential to draw conclusions based on sufficient evidence.” Illustrative quotations from the dataset not only bolster the validity of interpretations but also enhance the clarity and accessibility of the findings. Ahmed et al. (2025) emphasize that “the findings of thematic analysis should be presented in a clear and accessible manner, using illustrative examples from the data to support the interpretations.” This communicative clarity is particularly important when the audience includes policymakers, media professionals, and scholars from interdisciplinary backgrounds.

Finally, the adaptability of thematic analysis is one of its strengths. It “is flexible and can accommodate various approaches based on research objectives” (Nowell et al., 2017). This versatility allows researchers to tailor the method to suit both inductive and deductive analytical orientations and to address a wide array of research questions across different institutional contexts. In studying official communications, such as military or governmental press releases, this adaptability proves essential for navigating the interplay of institutional rhetoric, public narratives, and policy discourse.

10.THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS AND METHODOLOGICAL PRECISION IN THEMATIC ANALYSIS : DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis is increasingly recognized as a foundational method in qualitative research, offering a structured yet flexible approach to analysing qualitative data. As Braun and Clarke (2022) assert, “thematic analysis has theoretical underpinnings, as well as detailed guidance on how to effectively approach the method,” making it an essential technique across disciplines. While its origins lie within psychology (Braun & Clarke, 2006), its utility has expanded significantly, being adopted in fields such as health studies, education, media, and communication (Ayre & McCaffery, 2021; Nowell et al., 2017).

Thematic analysis proves particularly useful when dealing with large qualitative datasets or when working in collaborative research teams, given its capacity for systematic coding and pattern identification (Nowell et al., 2017). The process involves diverse forms of data collection, including interviews, focus groups, field observations, textual analysis, and the interpretation of visual materials (Nowell et al., 2017). Its adaptability allows researchers to engage with a wide variety of qualitative material, making it an appropriate methodological choice for multidisciplinary investigations.

At its core, thematic analysis emphasizes the identification, examination, and interpretation of recurring patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Percy et al. (2015) reinforce that “thematic analysis is a process that is used to conduct an analysis of qualitative data,” highlighting its procedural clarity and stepwise design. Despite its wide applicability, scholars have acknowledged that thematic analysis is sometimes “poorly defined in qualitative research” (Lochmiller, 2021; Mwita & Mwilongo, 2025), which necessitates careful methodological planning and transparent reporting practices.

Researchers must remain reflexive throughout the analytical process. This includes engaging critically with the data and “acknowledging theoretical positioning and biases throughout the process” (Ahmed et al., 2025). Reflexivity ensures that interpretations are both analytically sound and ethically grounded. Maintaining such reflexivity also contributes to the credibility of the research, particularly when exploring complex socio-political or institutional narratives.

A key consideration in thematic analysis is the articulation of theoretical and conceptual frameworks. According to Mwita and Mwilongo (2025), “theoretical frameworks provide a structure for understanding the relationships between different concepts and variables, while conceptual frameworks offer a more specific and context-bound understanding of the research problem.” Therefore, researchers must clearly state how their chosen frameworks inform data interpretation. Braun and Clarke (2006) and Heriyanto (2018) argue that researchers “should clearly articulate the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that inform their analysis, and explain how these frameworks guide their interpretation of the data.” Furthermore, the rigor of thematic analysis is enhanced when researchers anchor their findings to clearly identified patterns and themes supported by empirical evidence. Green et al. (2007) emphasizes this point by asserting that “thematic analysis is enhanced when researchers anchor themes to the data that supports them.” This practice not only improves the transparency of findings but also strengthens their interpretive validity.

In some studies, researchers may begin with a preliminary framework to guide their analysis, which provides structure without constraining the emergence of new insights. “A preliminary framework to guide a qualitative thematic analysis is very common” (Nowell et al., 2017), especially in exploratory or hybrid approaches that blend inductive and deductive techniques. This framework may evolve during the research process, shaped by the data and the theoretical lens applied.

Thematic analysis is particularly effective when integrated with conceptual framework analysis. Jabareen (2009) introduced this integration by stating that “conceptual framework analysis offers a procedure of theorization for building conceptual frameworks based on grounded theory method.” Garvey and Jones (2021) further elaborate that “the theoretical framework can provide a sense of the story emerging from the analysis,” suggesting its utility in constructing cohesive narratives from thematic data.

Ultimately, while thematic analysis is a flexible and accessible method, it demands careful attention to epistemological assumptions, methodological rigor, and analytical coherence. Researchers must approach it with “a high level of confidence about the information reported” (Lochmiller, 2021), ensuring that each thematic construct is thoroughly substantiated and contextually grounded.

11. CONCLUSION

This literature review has emphasized the significant role of thematic analysis as a robust qualitative method for examining the strategic communication practices of state actors, including governments, militaries, and diplomatic institutions, particularly through their press releases. As these official statements are carefully crafted to shape public perception and support policy agendas, their systematic study offers critical insights into the dominant themes, recurring narratives, and framing mechanisms utilized to influence discourse. Through thematic analysis, researchers can discern patterns of meaning that reflect broader institutional goals and sociopolitical intentions. As Boyatzis (1998), Braun and Clarke (2006), and Mwita and Mwilongo (2025) emphasize, thematic analysis involves “a systematic search across a dataset to identify repeated patterns of meaning,” which can be particularly illuminating when applied to politically charged or ideologically driven communication. By “familiarizing yourself with the data” (Bakokonyane, 2022), the method allows for an in-depth engagement that reveals the subtle construction of narratives used to shape public understanding of complex issues such as national security, diplomacy, and defence. The review also draws attention to the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of thematic analysis, stressing the need for clearly articulated frameworks to support analytical depth (Ahmed et al., 2025; Braun & Clarke, 2006). As emphasized by Goldsmith (2021), thematic analysis should be viewed not only as a methodological tool but also as “a mechanism for critical inquiry and informed decision-making.” Furthermore, the success of thematic analysis in producing valid and credible insights depends heavily on the transparency of research procedures and the reflexivity of the researcher throughout the analytical process (Mackieson et al., 2018; Naeem et al., 2023). This entails a commitment to clearly documenting coding decisions, ensuring inter-coder reliability, and acknowledging potential biases in interpretation (Vaismoradi et al., 2016).

Looking forward, future research should refine and expand the application of thematic analysis to the domain of strategic institutional communications. Scholars are encouraged to explore hybrid analytical models, such as integrating thematic analysis with content or discourse analysis, to deepen insights. The

flexibility of thematic analysis makes it adaptable to various research paradigms—whether deductive or inductive—and suitable for different theoretical orientations (Hoose & Králíková, 2024; Thornton, 2011). Ultimately, when properly implemented and transparently reported, thematic analysis “gives insight into a specific research question” (Lochmiller, 2021) and supports the construction of methodologically rigorous, theoretically grounded, and socially relevant research outputs. Its continued development will enhance its applicability and trustworthiness across disciplines, especially in politically sensitive domains where the analysis of public discourse remains essential.

As this review paper is on the decision of methodology to be used in the research and analysis, the concept of gap in research methodology is not valid here. Most of the press release studies as per the literature review have used the thematic analysis approach for data examining and analysis of the results. It fits in appropriately with the data the researcher planned to study.

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