



Zarb-e-Azb Operation: Agenda Setting Role of Newspapers on a National Issue in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study aims to see the relationship between framing of Zarb-e-Azb operation in the dailies of Pakistan and the public opinion on the operation. It is a content analysis of four Pakistan leading newspapers two English (Dawn and The News) and two Urdu newspapers (Nawa-i-waqt and Daily Express). Survey was conducted to measure public opinion. The findings show that there is a relationship between the way media framed the operation Zarb-e-Azb as the step in the right direction with the support of the government and the way people perceived the issue. Findings show that there is a positive and strong relationship between newspaper agenda and public agenda on this national issue (Zarb-e-Azb operation) of Pakistan.

Keywords: *Zarb-e-Azb operation, Media agenda, Public agenda.*

Introduction

Media, in the modern times are indisputably an instrument of war. This is because winning modern wars is as much dependent on carrying public opinion as it is on defeating the enemy on the battlefield. It remains true regardless of the aspirations of many journalists to give an impartial and balanced assessment of conflict. Media played a vital role in forming public opinion about the wars as witnessed in Vietnam War, Iraq and Afghanistan War. The role of media to act as watchdog, surveillance, verification of facts accuracy they receive, publish and provide timely information to public become imperative especially in war situations. On the other side, they also have to rely on information received from official sources

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and they are never really independent from prevailing notions of what is in the national interest (Dimitrova & Stromback, 2008).

The incident of 9/11 escalated the wave of terrorism around the world. This had a great effect on Pakistan, which came as a forefront country in the global war against terrorism. The incursion of terrorist's outfits in North Waziristan agency took place after the armed forces started the military offensive Rah-e-Nijat in South Waziristan Agency in 2009 (Javaid, 2015). Peace talks between Government and Taliban groups failed and terrorist groups continued the terrorist activities in the country. Ten militants attacked the Jinnah International Airport located in Karachi in which 36 people along with militants were killed and 18 people were wounded (Hameed, 2015). This episode of terrorism further alarmed the security situation in Pakistan.

Pakistan Armed forces launched the comprehensive operation against the local and foreign terrorists who were hiding in the North Waziristan Agency (tribal belt of Pakistan). This operation was named as "Zarb-e-Azab". It was the joint decision taken by the Government as well as the Army to start this operation and clear the Pakistan from the terrorists who for many years have used the land of Pakistan for their purposes. The main targeted groups in the operation were Tahrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Al-Qaeda and Haqqani groups (Wolf, 2015). According to ISPR (Inter Service Public Relation) press release, around 30,000 army troops took part along with artillery, air force and tanks. The Special Service Group (SSG) Commanders also participated in this ongoing Zarb-e-Azb operation. Army successfully rescued the common people living in these tribal areas. Political administrations as well as Disaster Management

Agency made administrative arrangements for these internally displaced persons (IDPs).

Camps and registration points were made and surrender points established for those militants' who had weapons and yet wanted to give up their arms. Army chief categorically said that ongoing operation would target all the militants without any discrimination whether it was Haqqani group or Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). It was not just the military offense against the terrorism but it was the concept to defeat the terrorism in all its manifestations and forms. Zarb-e-Azb operation got great achievement in 2015. According to ISPR press releases, over 2763 terrorists were killed in the Operation, 837 hideouts were destroyed; 253 tons explosives were recovered and 347 army soldiers gave their precious lives to Pakistan (ISPR, 2015). The Zarb-e-Azb operation continued with success in 2016. One and a half years after the start of the Zarb-e-Azb, phenomenal successes were achieved, with the last pockets close to the Pakistan-Afghan border cleared. Much has been achieved and terrorists' backbone was broken; structure dismantled; nexus with sleeper cells largely destroyed, 3,400 terrorists killed; and 837 hideouts from where they were carrying out terrorist activities destroyed.

Success came at a heavy price, 488 valiant officers and men of Pakistan army have been martyred (Ispahani, 2016). The operation received intensive support form civilian, defense and political sectors in the country. The Pakistani nation, Government and Army united against the terrorists. The world also praised the efforts of Pakistan against the war of terrorism and international media appreciated the efforts of Pakistan Army.

Pakistani newspapers covered the Zarb-e-Azb operation and

bombarded the public with the information on this operation. News stories focused on the success of Army in the ongoing operation and portrayed positive image of Army in the newspapers stories. Regular press releases from ISPR on the operation showed the unity of Army and Government in the elimination of terrorism from Pakistan. Newspapers provided constant information on the operation. Many journalists went to the place of operation and the Army provided them the access to the place of operation. These journalists provided the information (about factories, suicide jackets, explosive devices used by the terrorist group) to the people by covering the stories in newspapers (Daily Times, 2014). The news stories regularly updated the people about how many terrorist groups killed and how many soldiers have given their precious lives for the country. In short, media highlighted the sacrifices of the armed forces (Daily Times, 2014).

The main objective of this research study is to investigate the relationship between print media agenda and public agenda on a national issue (Zarb-e-Azb) in Pakistan. Present study focuses on the news stories about Zarb-e-Azab reported in two english newspapers (Dawn and The News) and two urdu newspapers (Daily Express and Nawa-i-waqt) from September 2014 to January 2015. Survey technique was adapted to record public opinion on Zarb-e-Azab along with content analysis of news stories.

This issue was of direct concern to the public as they suffered before and after the operation started apart from the overall security of Pakistan. This study examines how the media (newspapers) covered this operation and influenced the public formation and opinion about this operation. There are number of studies that have

conducted in the developing countries to investigate the relationship between media agenda and public agenda. This area is select because there is a need of agenda setting researches with reference to Pakistan when an issue is of National concern.

Agenda Setting Theory

McCombs and Shaw purposed agenda setting theory in 1972. This communication theory is about the transfer of salience from the media pictures of the world to those in our heads. Elaborating Cohen's idea (the press is not much successful in telling the people "what to think" but it is more powerful in telling the people "what to think about"). The core idea of agenda setting theory is that elements prominent in the media's pictures became prominent in audience's pictures or discussions. In the metaphorical language of the theory, media agenda sets the public agenda. Theoretically, these agenda can be composing of any elements. In practice, the vast majority of the studies to date have examined an agenda compose of public issues. For these studies, the core theoretical assertion was that the degree of emphasis placed on issues in the mass media influence the priority accorded to these issues by the public (McCombs & Ghanem, 2001).

McCombs in 1998 expanded the scope of this theory and included the phenomenon called "Framing". He argued that media not just told us what to think about; it also told us how to think about a story. There are two levels of agenda setting. The first level is about the rank of the issue's importance in the manner of presentation of information in the media. In this level, the media through vast amount of coverage suggests and guides public that what they should think about. In the second level of agenda setting, the media focuses on the characteristics of the objects and issues. The media tells

and suggests that how the people should thought about the issues (Yang & Stone, 2003).

Media Agenda and Public Agenda

Media scholars and experts expanded McCombs research on the agenda setting theory. Funkhouser (1973) used agenda setting theory and investigated the core important issues of United States people during the year of 1960's. Comparison of news coverage of issues and public opinion revealed that the strong relationship existed between the media agenda and public agenda. Likewise, Canel, Llamas & Rev (1996) took six public concern issues and compared them with the newspapers' coverage on the issues. The result indicated the strong and positive relationship between media agenda and public agenda on public issues. Similarly, Onyebadi (2007) explored the agenda setting effects of newspaper on Kenya public. Content analysis and survey were performed to measure media and public opinion. The results confirmed the basic assertion of agenda setting theory that there was a strong relationship between media agenda and public agenda.

Framing and Agenda setting Role of Media

Relationship between media and public is very imperative as people depend on media for their information. Media played an imperative role in making their agenda a public agenda by framing issues in certain ways. Pakistani print media gave heavy coverage to Lal Masjid issue and supported the agenda of Government. In order to form favorable public opinion towards the Government, print media framed the issue according to Government agenda (Hassam, Ali, Iqbal and Raza, 2013; Rahaman & Eijaz, 2014). Research study by Hameed (2015) analyzed the portrayal of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan

(TTP) in two leading newspapers (Jang and Dawn). Content analysis of these newspapers showed that TTP framed as a terrorist groups rather than friends. These selected newspapers used unfavorable tone to project them in their news stories. Media portrayed negative image of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan and strongly criticized their role in the country. US news media linked Pakistan with terrorism and portrayed negative image of Pakistan. News related to terrorism frequently framed Pakistan in such a way that projected and held Pakistan responsible for extensive terrorism in the world. On the other hand, after the Zarb-e-Azb operation, Chinese media especially framed Pakistan as the sufferer and victim of terrorism activities. Chinese news media endorsed Pakistan's security strategies of encountering the terrorism (Yousaf, 2015).

Because of media framing, public also framed the issues in the same way as media guides them. In another research study, Muin (2011) found that media gave heavy coverage to three core issues (Weapons of mass destruction, Iraq war and 9/11 attacks) and framed news in such a way that favored the US administration. Due to this coverage, public agenda built on the same line as their media framed the specific issues. Ayoubi & Ahmed (2013) examined the news coverage about drone attacks and found that Dawn and The Nation did not give positive coverage of drone strikes by USA on Waziristan. Due to this news coverage, people developed negative feelings, aggressions, bitterness and anger for American Government. Similarly, Dar & Ali (2015) analyzed framing agenda analysis of leading newspapers articles on Drone attacks and found that New York Times took positive stance and projected the issue in favorable tone that supported their government's policy. On the

other hand, The News took negative stance and portrayed the issue in unfavorable tone.

Hypotheses

H1: Public framing coincides with media framing on Zarb-e-Azb operation.

H2: Public slanting coincides with media slanting on Zarb-e-Azb operation.

Methodology

The research study also followed the conventional research method and applied content analysis to measure the newspaper agenda and survey to explore the public agenda (Althaus & Tewksbury, 2002; Cassara, 1998, Shafi, 2011; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The study was quantitative in nature and explored the relationship between newspaper agenda and public agenda on a national issue (Zarb-e-Azb operation) in Pakistan.

Communication scholars agree and believe that few newspapers occupy a vital position in the media landscape (Weiss, 1974). Content analysis of four newspapers (Dawn, The News, Daily Express and Nawa-i-Waqt) conducted. The reason for the selection of these four newspapers is that they are most widely circulated newspapers and owned by dominant, strong print media groups in Pakistan. The study considers all the news related to Zarb-e-Azb on the front and back pages of the selected dailies from September 2014 to January 2015.

The 'slant' of news stories published in the selected sample were analyzed in favorable and unfavorable categories. A story was coded as 'favorable slant', if the news story was in praise of Pakistani government for their supportive stance for the Army Chief Raheel

Sharif on the Zarb-e-Azb operation (capturing of terrorist, explosives etc.), support of Government to the Army, Government acknowledgment of army people for sacrifices of their live to the nation, Government positive stand on the operation and promise of support by the army at every level, core commander's meetings discussing the success of operation and briefing to Government. A story was considered to be 'unfavorable slant', if the news story was about political parties blaming government on their stance of operation against the terrorist. Slant was measured by analyzing coding units of analysis, which were paragraphs of news stories. Paragraphs analyzed separately and coded as favorable and unfavorable in the code sheet.

Frame means how the news stories about the issues framed. Two frames used for the study of Zarb-e-Azb operation, which were "operation required" and "operation not required". The "operation required" frame depicted Pakistan Government as a strong supporter of Zarb-e-Azb operation; it wanted serious elimination of terrorists. The "operation not required" frame depicted Pakistan Government as they should first dialogue with terrorist group, mismanagement of Government on the internally displaced persons (IDPs) issue, Government not wanting to start operation at this time.

Survey

To examine public agenda, a survey conducted of students (both male and female). The sample size of 300 students selected from the student studying in four major universities in Rawalpindi and Islamabad, which included International Islamic University Islamabad, Bahria University Islamabad, Fatima Jinnah University Rawalpindi and Quaid-e-Azam University Islamabad. These

universities were selected because their student's population was quite large and the students came from all the strata of society for studies in these universities; they belonged to places all over Pakistan. The sampling method used was the convenient sampling. Graduate and postgraduate students from each of four universities were approached and asked to fulfill out the questionnaires. In all three hundred questionnaires were distributed. Framing defined as how the people framed the issue. To measure framing, respondents were asked different questions on Zarb-e-Azab operation. Slant was what image people built about the Government on Zarb-e-Azab operation. The respondents were asked to indicate the image of government as favorable and unfavorable.

The data of newspapers gathered in coding sheets and survey data tabulated using SPSS. Phi and Cramer's V nominal correlation test performed to explore the relationship between the newspaper agenda and public agenda on a national issue (Zarb-e-Azab operation) of Pakistan.

Findings and Discussion

The content of four newspapers (Dawn, The News, Daily Express, and Nawa-i-waqt) explored. In all 600 newspapers were analyzed. In these papers in all 300 news stories were published on front and back pages of the selected newspapers. Nawa-i-waqt had given the highest coverage 103(34.2%) as opposed to The News 83(27.5%), Dawn 58(19.2%) and Daily Express 57(18.9%). Total lines devoted to Zarb-e-Azab operation were 14888: Nawa-i-waqt 10323(69.3%), The News 2456(16.4%), Dawn 1065(7.1%) and Daily Express 1044(7.0%).

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Demographic Characteristics	Description of characteristics	f	%
Age	18-35	289	96.3
	36-50	011	03.7
	Above 50		
Gender	Male	150	50.3
	Female	149	49.7
Education	Undergraduate	007	02.3
	Graduate	111	37.0
	Masters	155	51.7
	MPhil	027	09.0
Political Affiliation	PTI	104	03.7
	PML-N	130	43.3
	PPP	030	10.0
	PML-Q	014	04.7
	MQM	013	04.3
	ANP	009	03.0
Ethnicity	Punjabi	209	69.7
	Sindhi	017	05.7
	Balochi	026	08.7
	Pashtuns	028	09.3
	Sariki	012	04.0
	Kashmiri	008	02.7
Economic Status	Poor	083	27.7
	Middle	122	40.7
	Rich	095	31.7

Some general questions asked from the respondents. In order to know about the newspaper reading habits, the question asked if they read a newspaper daily. The response showed that 90% people regularly read the newspapers, 6% often read newspaper, 2% sometimes read newspaper, 1% occasionally read and only 1% never read the newspapers. Another question asked about the choice of newspapers. 75% respondents said that they read Dawn newspaper, 74% said they read The News, 73% said they read Daily Urdu Express, 75% read Nawa-i-waqt and 3% respondents read other newspapers. Another vital question asked from the respondents that if they get information from any source other than the media. The response clearly showed that 90% people never get the information about the issue (Zarb-e-Azab operation) from any other source

(internet) except print media, 4% said sometimes, 2% said occasionally, 3% said often and 1% said they regularly get the information about the issue (Zarb-e-Azab operation) from any other source (internet) except print media. The response also indicated that 82% of respondents never shared information about the issue (Zarb-e-Azab operation) with others, 7% respondents said sometimes, 6% said they occasionally shared the information, 3% said often and 2% said they regularly shared the information about the issue (Zarb-e-Azab operation) with others.

Hypothesis Testing

H1: Public framing coincides with Media framing on Zarb-e-Azab operation.

Public framed the Zarb-e-Azab operation as same as the media framed this issue (Table 2). Nawa-i-waqt used the frames “operation required” 101(98.0%) and “operation not required” 2(1.9%), The News framed “operation required” 79(95.1%) and “operation not required” 4(5.0%), Dawn used the frame “operation required” 58(100%) and Daily Express used the frame “operation required” 57(100%). Results show that media and public framing (Cramer's $V=0.281$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, H1 “Public framing coincides with media framing on Zarb-e-Azab operation” is accepted.

Table 2 : Media and Public: Framing of Zarb-e-Azab Operation

Zarb-e-Azab Issue	Media(N%)	Public (N%)
Frame		
Operation required	295 (98.0)	270 (90.0)
Operation not required	6 (1.99)	30 (10)

$\Phi = 0.397$; Cramer's $V = 0.281$; $p .000$

H2: Public slanting coincides with media slanting on Zarb-e-Azab operation.

Public perceived the Zarb-e-Azb operation as same as the media slanted this issue (Table 3). The results showed that The News portrayed unfavorable image 15(18.0%) and favorable 68(81.9%), Nawa-i-waqt portrayed unfavorable 2(1.9%) and favorable 101(98.0%), Dawn presented unfavorable 3(5.1%) and favorable (94.8%) Daily express depicted unfavorable 1 (1.7%) and favorable 56 (98.2%). Results show a relationship between media agenda and public agenda on the issues (Cramer's $V=0.148$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, H2 “public opinion coincides with media slanting on Zarb-e-Azb operation” was verified.

Table 3: Media and Public: Slanting of Zarb-e-Azb Issue

Zarb-e-Azb Issue	Media (N%)	Public (N%)
Frame		
Slant Favorable	279 (93.0)	275 (91.6)
Unfavorable	21 (7.0)	22 (7.3)

Phi= 0.148; Cramer's V= 0.148; p .038

Discussion

The role of media is very critical in intra-state conflict because public gets the information directly from the news media. Media has certain powers to build public opinion and transfer their agenda to public. War makes news, as conflict has a time tested news value. The level and orientation of coverage of a war by the mass media may easily escalate or reduce it. The news media accomplish the agenda setting function by telling the people which issues are more important but by also giving heavy and frequent coverage to those issues, it also provide indicators about the importance of certain issues.

The aim of research was to find the relationship between print media agenda and public agenda on the national issue, Zarb-e-Azb operation in Pakistan. The content analysis of four newspapers (Dawn, The News, Nawa-i-Waqt and Daily Express) show that media

played a positive role by building favorable image about Pakistan Government and Army. Newspapers displayed the news stories about Zarb-e-Azab operation on the front pages of the newspapers which shows that they gave the military operation priority over the other national issues. While covering the details of operation Zarb-e-Azb, Pakistan's print media showed reverence for the country's armed forces. Media appears to have exercised restraint and prudence while covering operation Zarb-e-Azb. Irresponsible reporting and signs of sensationalism kept out, thereby, attaining credibility and earning appreciation of the entire Pakistani nation. They played responsible role in building the people opinion in favor of the operation by highlighting the successes of Armed forces in eliminating these terrorists' roots from the country. Media used "operation required" frame more in the news stories.

These results are in accordance with the research conducted by Waal and Schoenbach (2010) who found that print media was a stronger medium when the people depended on the newspapers and it increased the awareness and importance of issues in public mind. Print media (newspapers) are dominant in shaping the public agenda (Aaron, 2010). Survey results confirmed the agenda setting theoretical contention that there was transfer of salience from the media pictures of the world to those in our heads. The findings show that the public also framed and slanted the Zarb-e-Azb operation in the manner the media guided them to do so. Zarb-e-Azb received frequent and prominent coverage in the newspapers and public diverted their attention towards that operation as media guided them. The degree of emphasis placed on issues in the mass media influences the priority accorded to these issues by the public. The

results are greatly in accordance with the previous researches done on agenda setting theory that proved there was a relationship between media agenda and public agenda. This is also in accordance with the research by Muin (2011) who found that the public agenda build on the same line as their media framed the specific issues. News media established the salience of the issues among the people by placing the issues on the priority of people's agenda, diverting their attention and focusing it on these issues is the initial stage of public opinion (McCombs, 2004).

This research study opens the gates and provides the support for the future agenda setting research studies. Content analysis of new media as well TV can explore and observe which media has stronger agenda setting effects on the public. In this research study, one national issue (Zarb-e-Azb operation) examined to find whether there is a relationship between public and newspapers agenda. The future researches on more issues like social issues (unemployment, drug abuse, poverty etc.) can take and will be analyze. Longitudinal studies will also propel to examine whether the change in media agenda affects the public opinion over the passage of time or not. In the future research, open-ended questions can ask in the questionnaire from the respondents rather than just the closed ended questions. Agenda setting researches will conduct in future by using more than one theory like agenda setting theory in combination with framing theory and spiral of salience theory.

There are a few limitations of this research study. Only front and back pages of four newspapers content analyzed. Resources did not allow the researcher to expand the content analysis of newspapers to the inner pages of the newspapers. Finally, the biggest problem the

researcher faced was the load shedding of electricity that affected most of the research work that done using different computer applications. However, research done with great patience. In spite of all the limitations and problems researcher faced in compiling this research study, it is an authentic research paper.

Conclusion

The content analysis of newspapers and survey revealed that people frame and slant the national issue (Zarb-e-Azb) in the same way as the newspapers guide them. The results confirms the agenda setting theoretical contention that there is relationship between the level of attention given to particular issue in the media and the level of significance assigned to that issue. The findings of the research study are also in line with the arguments of several other researchers (Llamas & Rev, 1996; Onyebadi, 2007) who found that there is the strong relationship between media agenda and public agenda.

The media coverage of operation Zarb-e-Azb proves that domestic media has shown signs of conscientiousness, sense of patriotism, and proclivity to support anti-terror campaign. As terrorists pose a serious threat to Pakistan's internal security, therefore, all segments of society including media fully support the government's decision to eliminate the terrorists. To sum up, this research study concludes that there is the positive and strong relationship between media and public agenda on a national issue (Zarb-e-Azb operation) in Pakistan.

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