

Thematic analysis of the international pages of Pakistani English dailies

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyze the international pages of three most widely read English dailies of Pakistan i.e. the Dawn, The News and the Nation after 9/11. In this paper, the focus has been the analysis of ten years' time period starting from 9/11 incident. Qualitative thematic analysis is done through selecting 42 stories from three newspapers. Themes are operationalized. The results indicated that foreign news agencies had a great impact on what they said and conveyed to the public especially in the underdeveloped countries to the extent that they sometimes influenced the judgments made by the news receiving countries like Pakistan.

Key Words: *Pakistani media, conflict, war on terror*

Introduction

Global press covered all events like 9/11, Afghan war, Iraq war, Al-Qaeda, Taliban factors and terrorist activities according to US policies. These media mostly portrayed one sided picture of all these events which was predominantly influenced by American stance on the issues. Further, the global media have very wide network of journalists all over the world. On the other hand, the print media of developing countries like Pakistan do not have sufficient sources for gathering information and not so wide networks of journalists to visit conflict areas. Besides, US Government never allows access to their secret institutions like CIA or other institutions. As a result the Pakistan media is completely dependent on global print and electronic media

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and news agencies for collection and access to information.

In recent years, media sector has been booming in Pakistan and it has been mainly driven by rising levels of literacy and technological advancements. A large number of newspapers and news channels are being launched regularly. These are positive signs that indicate that Pakistani media has grown in scale, access and influence it yields. Nevertheless, it is also accompanied by a significant improvement in the coverage of news including the international news. However, the fact remains that there is resource concentration i.e. only a very limited number of transnational, news providers which do on-the-field reporting and the remaining recycle their news with slight changes (as it has been established by the content analysis in the case of the most widely read Pakistani English newspapers with 70% of the news coming from only two major news organizations). This trend of over dependence, in case of a democratic nation, is harmful and the harm is mainly caused by paucity of diverse viewpoint. In this age of internet technology, Pakistani journalists visit the websites of global print media and lift the news stories, reports, comments, analysis, and photographs etc. from there tracing the lines of global print media and in this way Pakistani print media is being influenced by foreign media.

In any democracy, people are the prime focus and for citizens to make well-informed decisions regarding their welfare and governance, it is important that they are provided an access to a range of ideas and quality analyses. Thus, Media's job is to bring forward a range of ideas and opinions on the forum of discussion and deliberation. This acquaints the people with the multidimensionality of events thereby allowing them to understand the complexities of a certain situation. This, as a result, enriches the public intelligence on

world events and they are able to make wise decision in their own interest.

This study encompasses a period of ten years of post 9/11 events to see how the international print media has an effect on Pakistani English newspapers. This study also analyzes whether Pakistani newspapers followed the same slant of the stories as they were given in the foreign news media and how far, if at all, they have been able to justify their own position and point of view. At the same time it tried to observe as to what extent they had been influenced by international media in terms of news contents and lay out.

The study aims to see the level of dependency of English newspapers in Pakistan on the foreign press and foreign news agencies of economically strong countries in terms of contents of news items regarding destruction and terrorist activities in the west. The focus is also on exploring whether the English press of Pakistan was able to defend its position vis a vis war on terror, or it has just been pursuing global media agenda of being a subordinate country. Further, whether Pakistani press was the reflection of global press in the process of war against terrorism or it defended Pakistan's position and was able to answer back or to develop a different narrative of its own.

Literature review

A study on the utilization of the expression of war on terror by the Bush administration explains the surrounding of news stories about terror and terrorism and the social development of reality about the war. News transcripts from the ABC, CBS and NBC system evening reports were examined to know predominant subjects from 966 news stories in the initial three years after the 9/11 assault. It was affirmed that Bush has received the expression 'war on terror' as an instrument

to assemble help for his policies. The results demonstrated that media made affiliations and acknowledged political elites. This has been a source for controlling and manipulating public opinion. It was further said that political performers control occasions to their profit by utilizing the receptive public mind by controlling media coverage. Network television news may be a standout amongst the most paramount sources of domination regarding war on terror. The study suggests that media specialists ought to abstain from hooking on to the abuse of such phrases.

In the U.S., the expression War on Terror turned into a socially shared organizing rule through its dispersal by means of the US press. It was more than a policy label. It was a compelling organizing rule and it made a positive news talk atmosphere for military activity in Iraq (Reese, & Lewis, 2009).

In are search article Wiggins and Campbell (2015) say that the US media covered war on terror totally in a different way from other times of war or emergency. It influenced the objectivity of media with the utilization of successful dialect coupled with specific news coverage.

Dooley and Corman (2002) examined Reuter's coverage of September 11 and distinguished examples of impact for deciding topics and examples in scope. They discovered proof of a 'jolt reaction' model, in which an activating occasion, for example, an assault, prompted an institutional military or political reaction and resulting sense-production of the societal effect of the terrorist act (as cited in Oliveira&Papacharissi, 2008).

The proverb goes like 'rehash a lie so frequently that it seems, by all accounts, to be a truth'.The Jewish publicity of 5 million Jews

executed in France had picked up overall sensitivity for them. A couple of years ago, a researcher computed and numerically demonstrated that the figure couldn't surpass 80,000. The story was distributed by 'Liberas' every day. The Jews were so incensed at the shattering of the myth that the main three journalists were sacked and the story was muffled (Hali, 2011).

Dooley and Corman (2002) analyzed Reuter's coverage of September 11 and identified patterns of influence for determining themes and patterns in coverage. They found evidence of a 'stimulus-response' model, in which a triggering event such as an attack, led to an institutional military and/or political response and subsequent sense-making of the societal impact of the terrorist act (as cited in Oliveira& Papacharissi, 2008).

The adage goes like 'repeat a lie so often that it appears to be a truth'. The Jewish propaganda of five million Jews executed in France had gained world-wide sympathy for them. A few years ago, a scientist calculated and mathematically proved that the figure could not exceed 80,000. The story was published by 'Liberas' the French daily. The Jews were so infuriated at the shattering of the myth that the top three correspondents of the daily were sacked and the story was muffled (Hali, 2011).

The 9/11 terrorist attacks were a shock for the entire world and later attacks such as those in London and Madrid were covered in the newspapers of many countries. Ruigrok & Van(2007), studied the international coverage of these events in the context of globalization versus localization and the creation of the dominant post-cold war frame of the War on Terror. Using automatic co-occurrence analysis based on the notion of associative framing, he investigated whether

these events were mainly framed in a local or global way in the American, British, and Dutch press. The authors found that although proximity is still a strong determinant of attention for events, the framing of these events was more affected by the global event of 9/11 than by local considerations.

Dr. Bonn applied the moral panic concept to the Iraq war using quantitative analysis of public opinion polls and presidential rhetoric pre- and post-9/11 in the news media. He demonstrated how the Bush administration created a self-serving public panic in the U.S. after 9/11 over alleged Iraqi (WMDs) weapons of mass destruction with the support of the news media. He presented a critique that the war and occupation of Iraq were a violation of domestic and international law.

That due to heavy reliance on copied material certain narratives arose about Al Qaeda and Pakistan's alleged involvement in 9/11. Those narratives became the center story by which the news outlets were funneled and resultantly public opinion was affected in favor of a biased narrative. The paper aims to describe those narratives with reference to newspapers under study through thematic analysis.

Methodology

The study is based on qualitative thematic analysis which is one of the qualitative analysis methods for 'identifying, analyzing and reporting themes and patterns within data. It interprets various aspects of the research topic.'(Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.79) As Boyatzis (1998) observes in *Transforming Qualitative Information* that the thematic analysis is a process of encoding qualitative information. Boyatzis further explains, "Codes are a list of themes, a complex model with themes, indicators, and qualifications that are causally related; or

something in between these two forms" (p. vii). Boyatzis explains how researcher could take a variety of approaches in using thematic analysis to interpret data.

Time period considered for this study is ten years from 11th September, 2001 to 11th September 2011 to find out the focus of massive media coverage worldwide. The first US media reaction to the 9/11 incident is to declare it as 'war on terror'. The context allows a simultaneous exploration of both global dynamics of news reporting and local coverage. **For** qualitative thematic analysis, three most widely read newspapers i.e. The News, Daily Dawn and The Nation are selected. The international pages of these newspapers are selected for study. Purposive sampling technique is used and the sample size is 45 news stories taken from the defined categories. A purposive sample is a kind of non-probability sample in which the researcher can select a sample in accordance with some fixed criteria that serves the purpose. Thus, the units are selected into a sample on the basis of pre-specified characteristics so that the total sample carries the same distribution of characteristics assumed to exist in the population being study.

The main queries explored in the study include the following:

1. Do global news agencies set the agenda for mainstream English newspapers of Pakistan?
2. Whether Pakistan print media adopted its own independent stance on the taken issues?

In order to obtain the answers of above mentioned question, news stories appeared on international/foreign/and world pages related to these issues are under study. Following categories for qualitative analysis are devised:

- News stories which carried incident of 9/11
- Response of US in the form of war on terror
- All news stories related to Al-Qaeda, Afghan issue and Osama bin Laden
- All news stories related to Iraq war, weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and Saddam Hussain.
- All news stories related to Iran's nuclear program and sanctions by the US

The qualitative data analyzed in this paper concerns the effects of complete reliance of the national newspapers on the foreign news agencies and the one sided image of the post 9/11 events and underlying themes that emerged from the sample as a whole. The overall tone of the news items picked from the foreign news agencies from the western countries in sample is coded as positive, negative or neutral. This is an important aspect of the study as it informs how many of the news items could be regarded as 'positive', 'neutral' or 'negative' and are published as such by our national newspapers without any intervention of their own perspective on a particular issue or event. This analysis focuses on discerning the extent to which newspaper items displayed overtly positive or negative tones and the possible effects. These tones could make an overall thought process in the reader. In cases, where such tones are not identified, the newspaper item is coded as factual and portraying a 'neutral' tone.

Negatively toned article could include descriptions like, 'Muslims being fanatics... You are Al-Qaeda. Go back to your country... ... etc.', and is relatively straightforward to code. Such descriptions are coded as 'negative' in orientation. Clearly positive descriptions are, by contrast, very few on the ground with very few

articles of the 'good news' variety. The rest of the articles are considered "neutral" in tone.

Tone is closely related to the topic being reported as the dominance of 'coverage of news on Afghanistan and Iraq and the other conflict ridden areas with critical and hypocritical disposition and a preconceived fundamental narrative of 'proven guilty unless proved otherwise'. General trends of negatively oriented stories in the International newspapers are picked up as such and published in the local newspapers resulting in the creation of bad image not only in the minds of the outside world but in the minds of those who are being reported upon in these news items. While those who are coded as positive tend to be linked to the topics of 'humanitarian efforts' and 'the good response' by the Pakistan government as an ally on war on terror. The criticism raised by the French Government on US attack on Iraq to counter terrorism is not highlighted. The research indicates that a 'negative' standpoint appears to dominate coverage of events regarding Muslim countries after 9/11.

The following discussion focuses on trends that emerged in these thematic representations across all the sampled newspapers items.

Thematic analysis of coverage

Themes are fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a piece of writing. Thematic analysis is made of all the news articles in the sample to ascertain the kind of thematic representations that emerged from the coverage. Efforts are made to look beyond the basic descriptive content of an article, and instead focus is to explicitly unveil some of the more subjective and hidden meanings embedded within

the text, including themes, depictions, motives, stereotypes and symbolic images or metaphoric elements.

Studies on the media coverage of post 9/11 are also contextualized while doing this qualitative analysis. It helped to identify the range of possible themes that define media coverage of the post 9/11 events. A list of thirteen different categories of themes have been identified which are as follows:

1. **'Give a dog a bad name and hang him'**: This is a major theme running throughout most of the post 9/11 news stories reporting on the Muslim world. There is a saying in French, "Lorsqu'on veu tnoyer son chien, on dit qu'il a la rage," which translates as 'give a dog a bad name and hang him.' It means that a bad reputation, even sometimes wrongly construed, is a very difficult thing to shake. This has been the dilemma with Muslim world and that is how the image of Muslim world is formulated in the eyes of the West. The use of terms and vocabulary like 'rogue states', 'terrorist nations', 'violators of human rights....etc. highlight the underlying theme. Media can easily manipulate future observations by declaring and stamping someone as 'difficult', 'manipulative', 'violation of law'.
2. **'War on Terror'**: The theme is identified as a fundamental narrative and a central rhetoric in almost all the post 9/11 news as determinant of all the US foreign policy and military issues towards Pakistan, Afghanistan and the other Muslim states.

3. **The Great Divide:** One very strong and recurring theme, in almost all news studied, is the theme of classic great divide between the Muslim and the western world. Most Muslims and Westerners are convinced that relations between them have always been generally bad. Many in the West see Muslims as fanatical, violent, and as lacking tolerance and this has been overtly depicted in the post 9/11 news stories.
4. **Self-fulfilling prophecy:** This theme signifies how self-identity and behavior of individuals may be determined or influenced by the terms used to describe or classify them and whether the 'evaluators' see through the act, or whether they would interpret *any* behavior through the lens of the label. Studies have found that people given power in experiments are more likely to rely on stereotypes when judging others, and they pay less attention to the characteristics that define those other people as individuals. Predisposed to stereotype, they also judge others' attitudes, interests, and need less accurately. Would 'a terrorist' label determine that the professionals would look for evidence for 'terroristic' behavior even in quite normal behavior as the case has been in cases of Iraq, WMD and Pakistan.
5. **'Be careful what you call yourself':** Labeling oneself as a 'type' is dangerously easy. This attitude, with the passage of time, becomes a self-imposed psychological strait jacket which prevents people from doing things which are against the self-assigned label. For example, if somebody sees himself as

'fragile', 'stupid', or 'awkward' it will be much harder for him to behave in a manner that goes against these labels. This theme is prevalent in the news stories in the form of apologetic gestures of the Muslim countries like Iraq and Iran towards the blame game set forth by the west.

6. **'Hypocrisy and contradiction'**: This theme has been identified in common behavior of the western nations and especially the US in indulging a frequent habit of saying one thing and forcing it on others then doing the opposite, even with the best of intentions. The theme is depicted through ideas like, *'The Us is deeply concerned about the humanitarian situation and the protection of innocents'* but at the same time found committing worst human rights violations in the war ridden countries like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq and Iran.
7. **'Helping Hand'**: The common and only point of agreement between the West and Muslims is that both believe that Muslim nations should be more economically prosperous than they are today. Yet both see the problem differently. Muslim countries have an aggrieved view of the West. They blame western policies for their own lack of prosperity. On the other hand, West points out corruption, lack of education and Islamic fundamentalism as the biggest obstacles to Muslim prosperity. This theme emphasizes the importance of aid and humanitarian efforts as a moral or historical obligation on the West depicted through the ideas like *'Every child in Iraq depends to a large extent on us'*.

8. **'Inferior Others':** This theme is identified in the news items through the frequent use of terms like 'corrupt nations', 'failed states', 'despotic leaders and their cronies'. It also includes post-colonial discourses of 'Othering'.
9. **'Special Position' of the US:** This theme places emphasis on US assuming a position of authority and their concern and efforts to combat terrorism and uphold human rights situation.
10. **'Us vs. Them':** This theme emphasizes cultural differences, contrasts and similarities identified in the coverage sometimes in a positive and sometimes in a negative manner.
11. **'Threat Perception':** It is believed that only the perception of threat may lead to statistical incidence that can form and finally drives public opinion. The theme indicates that the US perceives threats from the Islamic culture and values for their national security and people's psyche.
12. **'Conspiracy':** It is an explanatory proposition that accuses two or more persons, a group, or an organization of having caused or covered up, through secret planning and deliberate action, an illegal or harmful event or situation.

Findings and conclusion:

Kellner (2003b) noted that prominent private media houses in the U.S, especially broadcasting houses are instrumental in spreading propaganda for the Bush administration and Pentagon during post 9/11 period. The said propaganda involves presenting information of a biased nature to promote a political cause or point of view with no proper and intelligent critique. Certain propaganda techniques are

found in the news coverage of post 9/11 scenario to promote negative tones, themes and the stereotype images with reference to the issues related to Pakistan in specific and the other Islamic countries in general by the local print media unknowingly. Thus Pakistani media itself served as a propaganda tool and promoted the hegemonic discourse. A comparative analysis of news coverage of the conflicts and issues support the argument that Pakistani newspapers served as tools of propaganda and worked against the national interest.

The terror images of 9/11 incident were highlighted and unfolded in a city that is considered to be one of the most media saturated cities in the world. The images of the terrorist planes hitting the World Trade Center twin towers and their collapse were broad casted repeatedly, as if repetitions were necessary to increase the intensity of a highly traumatic event (Kellner, 2003b).

A simple repetitive approach , like 'Ad Nauseam' that is to repeat a slogan enough times so as to be taken as truth, is also used exhaustively by the foreign press. This approach worked best due to media sources being limited and controlled by the few influential propagators. In this study this has been identified as an overlapping theme. At times it appeared as a case of 'Mis-labeled identity' i.e. war on terror and sometimes as a part of recursive name calling in the coverage. Therefore war on terror became a socially shared organizing principle through its transmission via the US press (Reese & Lewis, 2009). In the four news items studied under the theme of mis-labeled identity, the tone of three news stories is found negative and sarcastic. Only one is positive in which Iran invited the UN observers to visit its nuclear plants. Under the theme of war on terror, three news stories are

found and analyzed from which two are found neutral and one is negative.

Likewise, joining on bandwagon and feelings of 'inevitable-victory' appeals are made to persuade audience so as to join hands and take the course of action that the super powers are taking. In the U.S, the private media houses followed the Bush administration in their attempt to demonize Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein while celebrating the U.S. military interventions at the same time (Kellner, 2003b). The theme associated with demonizing the targets is the use of age old adage of giving a dog a bad name and hanging him. Most of the news stories fall under this category. Total of nine news stories are found under this theme and all conveyed a negative tone except one.

The theme of 'inevitable victory' is highlighted to convey a signal to invite those, who are not already on board, to join hand with the winning and on the road to definite victory. Those who are already on board 'the bandwagon' are reassured for taking the best course of action.

Another very prominent theme appeared in the news stories is 'Join the crowd'. This technique reinforces people's natural desire to be on the winning side. This technique is used to convince the audience that the action taken is an expression of an irresistible mass movement and that it is in their best interest to join. This propaganda technique has been identified in themes like 'Special position of the US', 'Inferior others', portrayal of the enemy as an ultimate threat, military threat from oil rich nations, consequential threat to international stability and technological warfare. As these themes provide a model for the analyses and understanding of propaganda content in the press during

these conflicts involving U.S. and British forces, they also provide the background through which general issues regarding propaganda can be discussed. An effort has been made to analyze the role of journalists in the war coverage. Significance of the press increases in a news market which is presently dominated by 'instant' visual media and at the same time the effectiveness of propaganda in specific cultural and political contexts.

The broadcasting apparatus of the U.S. portrayed a sensitive image of the war whereas other western networks highlighted mega view of civilian atrocities committed in war. Coverage in the electronic media was tilted towards patriotism, slogans for the military and propaganda. Whereas, other world networks gave a critical view of the U.S. and the Britain's military actions presented negative images of the assault on Iraq and the high-tech massacre done by the U.S army.(Kellner, 2003a)

A possible underlying effect of dependence on foreign news agencies by Pakistani English newspapers is the assumption of role of de-facto agenda-setting by the foreign news agencies and the recipient news agencies as the propaganda tool. The fact remains that providing a major chunk of stories to these newspapers is not the only role undertaken by foreign news sources.

From September 11, to the start of the U.S war in Afghanistan, the media heightened the war. Slogans of patriotism were raised frantically like 'America is under attack' to 'America strikes back' and 'America's new war' much earlier when any combat was started and it seemed that the media was trying to make up the military response (Kellner, 2003a).

It also influenced the independent' coverage by the media

houses that subscribed to services of foreign news agencies. This indicates that the popular trend is that English newspapers in Pakistan would like to dedicate less space to a foreign story which is about a neighboring country but will highlight stories about US and stories reported by western news agencies. This trend is evident in the set of stories analyzed. This trend of prioritizing the news stories according to the importance given by the foreign news agencies is definitely not reflective of the state's priorities.

Archetti (2008) maintains that a dependent positioning of developed countries in the international system and a lack of resources lead to reporting from wider array of sources. Although this in turn broadens the scope of the news, yet at the same time the news related to less developed countries are influenced more and the possibility increases for the domination of content from the developed countries.

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