



Ready-made content: is that fair? Pakistani English

Newspapers Reliance on International News Agencies

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Abstract

A major portion of Pakistani national press is filled with news and commentaries taken from the global press i.e., Agency France-Presse, Associated Press, Reuters, Washington Post, The New York Times, Los Angeles Times etc. News from foreign press are reproduced on multiple pages in Pakistani English newspapers. The study based on nine in-depth interviews with the journalists¹ responsible for content selection and formation of foreign pages in the three newspapers i.e., Dawn, the News & the Nation. The results of the study showed that National English Newspapers are highly influenced by the global press. It was also noted that the national press lacked resources, commitment and capacity to gather international news of its own. As a result, they just relied on the foreign press for information.

Keyword: *Agency France-Presse, Associated Press, Reuters, Washington Post, The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Global Press, Foreign Press.*

Introduction

Generally, what people know about the world is largely based on what the media decides to tell them. The fact is that the priorities of the media strongly influence the priorities of the public. Issues prominent on the media agenda become important in the public mind too (McCombs, 2002). The agenda setting effects are more when the accessibility or availability increases (McCombs, 2004). Media coverage, besides increasing public concern with certain

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issues, can also decrease concern as well (Wanta, 1993). People learn from the media what the important issues are" (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Mass media can play an important role in influencing the minds of the people. Due to the agenda setting role of mass media, the agenda of media becomes the public agenda with the passage of time (Riaz, 2008).

Media's treatment of the issues of the Iraq War, weapons of mass decimation (WMD), and the assaults of September 11, 2001 creates a connection between media motivation setting and open plan building (Muin, 2011). The Iraq war provided the communication researchers a most convincing case where agenda- building and agenda-setting theories could be successfully applied. The public depended solely on the media for information about the Middle East, the war on terror, and other events were deeply affected by the way these issues were presented in media. Studies in the early period mostly focused on how the media sets the agenda for their audience (Kellner, 2004).

Literature review

The news agency's role is important because they set the agenda for national media of developing countries through the choice of stories they distribute.

In spite of the vicinity of an extensive number of news benefits all through the world, most news, printed and showed, is taken from just a couple of real sources, the three biggest of which are the Associated Press in the United States, Reuters in Great Britain, and Agency France-Press in France. These and a couple of others news organizations have the monetary assets to dispatch accomplished columnists in practically every niche and corner of

the universe of the world, where news creates oftentimes and consistently (to guarantee access to generally sorted out transmission offices) or to send them wherever news creates suddenly. These offices are likewise completely prepared to circulate the administration immediately (News agency, 2016). Accordingly, the worldwide stream of data, news and pictures are created and controlled by a selected news gathering of Anglo-American news organizations. Though, In the past reporting of outside news depended for the most part on three major sources i.e., national and transnational news orgs, outside journalists or unique emissaries and articles created by editors or staff authors (Van Dijk, 2013).

Presently, the position of outside reporters has been annulled in many news gathering organizations because of absence of assets. Almost eighty percent of the worldwide news is currently circulated by the three news offices Associated Press (AP), Reuters, and Agency France Press (AFP). This not just shows the significance of Western news organizations in the worldwide procurement of news, yet it additionally demonstrates the force and potential of these few news offices to set the worldwide news motivation (Boyd-Barrett & Rantanen, 1998).

Lent (1976) concluded that "charges of bias in international news flow were 'intuitive, (and) not based on research facts'. This response to Lent's comment empirically confirms that there is indeed a flow bias in international news in favor of the North and that the bias is reflected even in African newspapers due to their dependence on Western News Agencies for their sources of news on other African countries. It suggests

that African media organizations should Increase their sourcing of news from PANA to reverse the current trend” (Bosomptra, 1989, p.13).

Tussue, 2010, writes that after the end of cold war and the breakup of Russia, US emerged as a key player in international communication, and its news agency associated press appeared as a strong news provider of the world (Arya, 2011). In 1942 the general manager of Associated press wrote in his book about the news agencies that these news agencies have put controlled the free flow of information in the world and unless freedom of free flow of information is guaranteed peace can't prevail in the world (Read, 1999).

Davis (2008) conducted a study to understand the relationship between news agencies and newspapers for this purpose the local news content of five major UK newspapers was taken in order to establish the fact as to what journalists depended on public relations and wire services for reporting of local news. The results that emerged showed that 80% of stories consisted either completely or partly of PR material. Another study by DJosef & Husmin (2011) supports this argument of dependency of foreign press on national press in the case of Indonesian & Indian newspapers. They observed that the Journalists from Jakarta Post and the Times of India for the most part made a considerable measure of utilization of remote news organizations as hotspots for their articles on global news. Remote news organizations compensate for 86.7 percent of the aggregate sum hotspots for worldwide news articles in the Jakarta Post. For the Times of India this rate is much lower at 37.7 percent. This distinction can to a

limited extent be clarified by the way that numerous articles in the Times of India neglect to give sources.

The reason that how the flow of information was made unbalanced and how the west generated contents are disseminated has been given by the UNESCO Commission Report titled "Many Voices one World" and presented by McBride released in 1980 stated the negative trend of control over information that leads to one way flow on information. This flow is directed towards smaller to larger countries, from less powerful to powerful nations, from developed to developing countries and from technologically less advanced to advanced (MacBride, 1980). Another study conducted by Kayser (1953) and quoted by Arya (2011) under the aegis of UNESCO concluded that most newspapers are dependent on foreign news agencies. He researched 17 newspapers and said that newspapers make no permanent effort of maintaining their own international correspondents.

The three identified global news agencies are blamed for building news agenda. MacGregor remarked that News and legislative issues were interwoven in the representation. AFP was distinguished to be candidly propagating French interests in its initial days, though Reuters was out rightly pro- British, and the AP was affected by the news office to which it had a place. These organizations have as of late been acknowledged and also reprimanded for setting the worldwide news plan. They let us know what really the "news" is (Macgregor 2009).

Iwokwagh & Akogwu (2008) introduced a diagram of western news offices and their parts in global correspondence. It contends

that the greater part of these parts has a few outcomes undesirable to the Third World Nations. As opposed to encouraging the improvement of the poor countries of the world, the study uncovers that the real news organizations by their overall operations are obstructing the advancement of the under developed countries.

The study criticizes the real news organizations for being a stop up in the formative wheel of Third World Nations. It has been further called attention to out that they contrive with other blocking components to render the aggregate formative deliberations of the majority of the creating nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America as unbeneficial. Its further traits issues, for example, the diminishment of the world to a "worldwide town", social dominion, ethnocentrism, media government, media reliance, worldwide plan setting and the lop-sidedness in world data request to these worldwide news organizations. It closes on a hollering call for developing countries to search internally for their re-conception, re-disclosure and development (Iwokwagh, & Akogwu, 2008).

Methodology

In-depth interviews of the journalists were carried out to observe the reasons of dependence, its effects, consequences and the factors which influence their choices.

In-depth interviews are used in qualitative research technique. It involves conducting intensive individual interviews selecting a small number of respondents to record their perspectives on a particular idea or situation (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Keeping in view the importance of in-depth interviews this

technique has been applied in this study. As observed by different researchers, "In-depth interview is a major technique in qualitative research which is extensively used by researchers" (Markham, 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Nocera, 2000; and Williamson, 2000), Due to their reliability for gaining in-depth and rich response of individuals' perceptions about the issues (Fontana & Frey; 2000 Kumar, 1996).

In-depth interviews were necessary to observe the possible effects and ramifications and to study the factors responsible for the selection of the foreign news agencies news content as agenda building of national media.

To conduct in-depth interviews, the technique of purposive sampling was used. The study based on nine in-depth interviews with the journalists¹ responsible for content selection and formation of foreign pages in the three newspapers i.e., Dawn, the News & the Nation. The researcher conducted a detailed meeting with all the respondents¹ and also provided them with a brief introduction and objectives of the study. All the interviews were conducted at the newspapers' offices. Before conducting interviews, their consent was taken in writing.

Results

The results of the Interviews provided more substantial and concrete grounds.

Dependence of Pakistani press on global press

The respondents were asked the question about the dependence of Pakistani English press on global press for news. All the respondents agreed that Pakistani English press was heavily

dependent on foreign press and foreign news agencies. One of the respondents observed,

“Mostly major newspapers tried to catch the international news agencies like AFP, AP etc. directly, but local B class newspaper used Associated Press of Pakistan – APP”.

The reason for this dependence in the opinion of the respondents was that the Pakistani press was depending on the foreign news wires due to financial constraints, as one observed that

“We need to admit that top newspapers rely on international news agencies like AFP, AP etc. as they do not afford to have an access to the sources of international news due to financial constraints”.

One respondent replied that “most of the time Pakistani English press replicates the stories taken from the foreign press”. Another respondent who was editor foreign desk said that, “This is unpleasant but it is a fact that newspapers follow the international news agencies like AFP, AP etc”.

The respondents from Dawn were of the view that their newspaper not only relied on the major news wires for news stories but also, they took news from foreign press i.e., Washington Post, LAT, etc. One of the respondents answered that the reason for dependence was “vast and speedy coverage” and also that these syndicated services provided material on very “economical price”.

Important factors contributing in the selection of news

Most of the respondents were of the view that their newspaper policy decided the selection criteria from the foreign news stories.

Besides their policy, some other considerations were also observed by the newspapers. One of the foreign desk editors responded on the issue as under;

“The most important factors were policy considerations, new developments/threshold etc. The newspapers try to cover follow ups for the demands of their regular readers, and almost all media houses strive to do the same”.

One of the editors from foreign desk came up with the observation:

“From among large number of syndicated news, only ten to twenty find space on the limited international pages of the national press. Mostly unusual and the news related standoff get space”.

The respondents, in response to the question as what factors attracted their choices, gave different opinions; almost all considered that “proximity” was one of the most important factors which was considered primarily for selection of news.

“The news related to Muslim countries, where Islamic values are highlighted and neighbouring countries’ news found to be more interesting items for us”.

Some of the respondents were of the view that news focusing the US got space and were considered important. Cultural similarity was also considered an important factor which fulfilled the “demands of the readers”.

The editor foreign desk observed;

“Reliability, flow of news, dynamic content & credible news story gets more coverage”.

The foreign desk editor on the issue that how the given thesis categories were portrayed, said; "Most reliable factors were policy shift, new development/threshold".

Is editing process considered important for content taken from foreign press?

Most of the interviewees, on the question of importance of editing, replied that editing was done in most of the news stories and photographs but sometimes they "replicated" the original stories taken from the foreign press. They were also of the view that editing process included trimming of the longer stories and sometimes "change of few words".

One of the Editor foreign desk said,

"We edit both text and photos, but photos are more lucrative and we chose more big sized photos because photos are worth million than text".

Another newsperson answered that,

"The editor foreign desk is responsible for selection of news, selection of pictures& editing for maintenance of accuracy and layout/designing".

The selection of the foreign page among many pages

Another important question was that how the editors decided which content was to be given space on front page and which news story will be placed on the foreign page, while the events being the same. The respondents replied that the stories which found their place on the front pages often had maximum factors like story must have something new in it. The stories though important in nature are placed on the foreign pages often are follow ups and related to the front-page news coverage. The

stories which are frequently coming also take their place on the foreign pages.

As an editor came with the opinion that,

“Though the important news gets coverage also on front and back pages from the foreign pages but mostly and usually the specific pages are devoted to that news”.

One more response was that,

“Quality editors often point out that news which should be sent to front pages or foreign pages”.

The selection of particular news wires if the same story is given by more than one global press

On the issue of most preferable news agency all the newsmen who were interviewed had the same opinion that, the foreign press AFP, Reuters and AP provide services to all these newspapers and Dawn also takes syndicated services from Washington post, New York time etc. But AFP is most reliable news provider among all these three newspapers.

Do these foreign news providers influence the national press?

This was one of the most important questions but asked at the last to make a flow of conversation, the foreign news editor from one of the newspapers said that,

“Yes, foreign newspaper impact on Pakistani papers and journalist, especially on those who don't understand the real agenda behind it. Even our analysts are influenced by the international media groups”.

Another came up with the views that,

“Pakistani press being used as propaganda tool after 9/11 and they are also being supported financially as well”.

According to most of the respondents, it is needless to say that foreign newspaper influence Pakistani press as the news stories from abroad are “copied”. Effort is made to clarify Pakistan ‘s point of view in major issues. Even media reporters and journalists get influenced by the international media groups. One point of view was that,

“To some extent Pakistani press has been used as propaganda tool and the reason behind it is that they are being supported financially”.

One respondent concluded that

“Foreign newspaper does have a great impact on Pakistani papers especially on those who are not able to identify a motive behind it”.

Conclusion

The findings of the in-depth interviews revealed that at the first level of agenda building the most important factors contributing in the selection of news from global press included proximity, threshold, unusual news and interest of the readers. Qualitative data strengthened the notion that media dependency is due to lack of resources and the selection of one story among hundreds of news story largely depend upon the decision makers and gatekeepers’ choices. Findings supported the idea that the choices of the editors are affected by the five factors mentioned in this study. It is also observed that among all the newspapers AFP was the most reliable news agency.

End notes.

1. Respondents of in-depth interviews: The data for in-depth interviews was collected from respondents of three selected

newspapers that included; Dawn, The News and The Nation and the respondents who were interviewed were,

- A. The Nation. Reporter Foreign monitoring desk Editor foreign monitoring desk
Quality Editor
- B. NEWS
Editor the News
Editor foreign desk
Quality editor
- C. Dawn
Editor foreign desk

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