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Analyzing Negativity in Democratic Media Setup: Case Study of PDM

GMCR
GLOBAL MASS COMMUNICATION REVIEW

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Headings

- Introduction
- Media and Democracy
- Negativity in Media
- Pakistan and PDM Perspective
- Problem Statement
- Hypothesis
- Methodological Design
- Results and Analysis
- Discussion and Conclusion
- References

Abstract: *Negativity is a widespread concept in media and literature. The study attempt to analyze negativity in Pakistan's news media from the perspective of PDM (Pakistan Democratic Movement). The study applied standardized operationalization of the concept by Lengauer, Esser, and Berganza (2012). The negativity index includes tonality, pessimistic outlook, conflict centeredness, incapability, and actor related negativity. Content of print and electronic media was analyzed for thirty days. The results of the study revealed that electronic media has more actor related negativity. The reaction of the sitting government had more actor related negativity while news stories about government criticism were more pessimistic in nature. The coverage given by media was not sufficient as it is a country wide protest, on average 10 news stories per day were published/ broadcasted by both news outlets. Overall PDM coverage highlight negative, sensationalized phrases by government and opposition leaders.*

Introduction

Overview of the Study

In literature there are many forms of democracy, it ranges from direct to representative. The practically most common form of democracy is a representative democracy. Representative democracy is defined as rule by the people, where representatives are elected through the process of election and are held accountable to the citizenry. In a democratic setup mass media plays a vital role and is considered as a vehicle between the citizenry and those elected representatives (Dumitrescu & Mughan, 2010). In the pioneer work of Gurevitch and Blumler (1990) few functions of the democratic media were identified. Authors argued that media must hold elected elites accountable in front of the public, highlight

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public issues, develop the interest of the general public towards politics, and should provide citizenry a platform for debates and discussion.

In a democratic country, citizens must have access to multiple media sources, so that they can have access to multiple media perspectives. Dumitrescu and Mughan (2010) consider plural sources of media as the essence of democracy.

The study under investigation focuses on the performance of news media during the coverage of the "Pakistan Democratic Movement". PDM is a democratic movement by the opposition parties to derail the democratic government. The study investigated the concept of negativity in the case of PDM i.e. how media has covered PDM.

Media and Democracy

The media is expected to serve the general public for the larger interest of the nation. Media provide information to citizens regarding different political actors and their activities. They identify and highlight the issues of the general public and communicate to those in power. In this way, media serves as a bridge between elites and the public (Kellner, 2004). Blumler and Coleman (2015) argued that it's the responsibility of the media to resist the efforts of external powers that destabilize the system and independence at large.

Literature is critical towards the function of media towards democracy. Fog (2013) explored that serious media debates are missing; they are not providing meaningful information to citizenry. there is no information in the news, it only supplies politics as entertainment and gossips (as cited

in Bagdikian, 2007; Capella & Jamieson, 1997; Bennett & Entman, 2001; Barnett, 2002). Furthermore, literature is also evident that media is working under the umbrella of conglomerates. The conglomerates have the power to frame the news and information in favor or against those in power (Kellner, 2004).

Political communication deals with the interaction between political elites, media and audiences. Each one of them is receiving, producing and interpreting political content. All of them are interdependent and they operate in a complex web of interactions (Voltmer, 2006, p.6). "Media is no more external to politics" (Voltmer & Sorensen, 2019, p. 39). The Scholar has argued that in developed democratic countries there is a concept of political trivialization. This results in negativity in media where sound bites and objective information is lacking (as cited in Bennett, 2002; Farnsworth and Lichter, 2007). Esser and Matthes (2013) argued that it also rises interpretative journalism.

Furthermore, the author explained that boundaries between entertainment and politics are also blurred:

"Key boundaries that previously shaped the political communication field seem to be dissolving for example, between 'political' and 'nonpolitical' genres, between matters of 'public' and 'private' concern, between 'quality' and 'tabloid' approaches to politics, between journalists serving audiences as 'informers' and as 'entertainers', and between 'mass' and 'specialist', 'general' and 'attentive' audiences" (as cited in Blumler and Kavanagh, 1999, p. 225)

Few studies had been conducted to evaluate media performance in times of crisis.

Cappella and Jamieson (1997) argued that the standard of political news is declined and has a negative impact on the political life of actors. Patterson (2008) explained that media is providing less amount of hard news or serious news. Media content lacks factual reporting, good journalism and it misinterprets opinion polls. These negative practices lose the interest of the public towards politics (Albeak, 2014).

Scholars have also argued that with the passage of time media gave more importance to consumer needs which leads to populist media culture. This media culture produces simplified, dramatized and negative political news (Esser & Matthes, 2013). The author also argued that media focuses more on personalities rather than issues and events.

The way media covers political issues and events poses a challenge to democracy. The negative coverage regarding politicians and political institutions creates a negative public perception. It affects the credibility of the institution, political actors and news itself (Esser & Matthes, 2013).

Media marketization increases competition, it reduces time and cost of production, which leads to less investigative media reporting. The market-oriented media become more profit oriented and newsworthiness is no more a priority of media. The market-oriented media pressurizes to cover political "information with entertainment values" (Nai, 2019, p. 5).

"In recent decades a shift toward "infotainment journalism," "soft news," and a preference for "hype" over substance, leading "to the news becoming entertainment programs" (Nai, 2019, p. 5).

Nai (2019) explored that negativity and personalization have increased in recent times and it focuses more on individualized political actors rather than political parties (as cited in Lengauer, Esser, & Berganza, 2012). Politicians use to ignore the media messages because they are afraid that negative media coverage can lose their voters (Ullah, 2009). The author called media as "day-to-day parliament of the people".

Negativity in Media

Lengauer, Esser and Berganza (2012) endeavored to develop a standardized operational definition of negativity in media. Negativity was dissected into two parts i.e. frame related negativity and actor related negativity. Benson and Hallin (2007) explored that critical news coverage on political issues and events gave an image that they are independent. It maximizes audience ad well because it gives the impression that core political issues are being highlighted by journalists. Its coverage is dramatized, sensationalized, eye catching and can easily be understood (Dunaway, 2009). It is the journalist who adds negativity in news for commercial and professional gains (Berganza et al., 2010).

Min (2004) argued that the events which are negative in nature and are conflict centered receive more negative coverage as compared to positive ones (as cited in Kendall 2000; Min 2002; West 2001). The author also argued that negative coverage leads to negative voter turnout and is considered a threat to the democratic setup.

Guggenheim, Kwak and Campbell (2011) conducted a study on nontraditional TV

programs. Author study TV programs in the context of political and media distrust. The study concludes that nontraditional satirical programs focus on apparent characteristics of politicians while serious political debates are missing. Many times, these programs create a negative image of politicians in a satirical way. Conde, Calderón, Pascual (2016) studied the level of negativity in Spanish media. The author explained that European media is more negative towards politics as compared to Spanish media.

The level of negativity varies in private and public media. Hanitzsch and Berganza (2012) argued that the journalist working in public news organizations tend to have less negativity as compared to private news organizations.

The current study under investigation is inspired by the study of Lengauer, Esser and Berganza (2012). The operationalization of negativity was also adopted by Lengauer's study. The author divided negativity into three dimensions i.e. non-directional negativity, directional negativity and actor related negativity. Nondirectional negativity is further divided into overall tonality, pessimistic outlook. Directional negativity is divided into conflict centeredness and incapability and misconduct. The third dimension is individual actor related negativity.

Pakistan and PDM Perspective

Pakistan has a fragile form of democracy with a mixed government system. Since independence there always had been a transition from democracy to dictatorship and vice versa. As far as media in Pakistan is concerned before 2002 there were only state controlled media. after 2002 media had mushroom growth due to the privatization of news media. Media privatization generated critical media debates. Before 2002 media was the only mouthpiece of government there was no critical and oppositional point of views (Gul, Obaid & Ali, 2017; Pintak, Bowe & Nazir, 2016).

Literature is evident that media in Pakistan has never enjoyed freedom. In most government regimes restrictions were imposed in order to hide the critical voices. Waqas and Khattak (2017) argued that democracy and media in Pakistan faced many challenges. The media failed to produce well informed public because of the distorted political system and culture. The second challenge is multiple ideologies. Fragment media and fragmented political ideologies tend to have an effect on public information because they only adopt information which they like to have regarding their favorite ideological perspective. Furthermore, Heil (2008) mentioned the interview of a female journalist i.e., 'free media emerges out of democracy, but here, in Pakistan, democracy is emerging out of free media' (as cited in Khan, 2009).

Political movements are considered a democratic charm. In Long March of 2014 two parties protest against the government in Pakistan. the parties were led by Imran Khan and Tahir-ul-Qadri. After 12 years of establishment of privatized media, the protest was staged. The media gave massive coverage to the protestors and their leaders. It was covered in talk shows, live coverage, news packages and discussions. The coverage was "simplifying, polarizing, personalizing, intensifying, concretizing and accentuating the political crisis" (Abbas, 2017, p.49). The case under investigation is PDM (Pakistan

Democratic Movement). It is the protest launched by opposition parties against those in the government. Its countrywide protest and major political parties are taking part to derail the power of government. So, the researcher has studied PDM from the perspective of negativity.

Qadeer, Shehzad and Chishti (2017) analyzed media discourses and explained that coverage of print media is highly personalized in nature. On the other hand, Siraj and Hussain (2017) explained that journalists in Pakistan are not given due autonomy to select and present the information. The decision is limited to the hands of the editorial board.

The researcher has not found any landmark study on democracy and negativity. The studies conducted to evaluate the democratic performance of news media are western based. In local settings, media performance in a democracy is lacking. There are few studies in the literature that cover critical movements but from the perspective of framing theory and from new media's perspective (Qadeer, Shehzad & Chishti, 2017; Eijaz, 2013; Mangi & Soomro, 2018; Michaelsen, 2011; Sadiq, Mohd, Zain & Ajis, 2018).

Problem Statement

Democracy and media are interconnected. Media is a bridge between the public and politicians for part and parcel of information. In literature, many functions of the media are explored towards citizens in a democratic country. The study under investigation analyses the coverage of PDM (Pakistan Democratic Movement). The study was conducted to analyze the level of negativity in print and electronic media coverage. The basic assumption of the literature is the negative nature of events tends to have negative media coverage. The study analyzes negative through standardized operationalization of negativity by Lengauer, Esser and Berganza (2012).

Hypothesis

The study under investigation has the following hypothetical assumptions:

- There is no relationship between placement of news and level of conflict centeredness
- The news about government criticism tend to have more actor related negativity as compared to news about government reaction to PDM
- The level of pessimism and tonality does not vary with the type of media
- The tonality varies with the type of media
- The news about government reaction has a more pessimistic outlook

Methodological Design

Procedure and Sample

The study focuses on Pakistan democratic movement so, the data collected was for 30 days were collected in which massive protests had been launched. Daily Dunya (newspaper) and Express news (Tv channel) was selected to collect the data. These news were outlets were selected because of the availability of news content. In Daily Dunya Front and back pages were analyzed and 9 p.m. news bulleting of express news were coded.

Variables and their Description

Negativity was the dependent variable for this

study while the type of the media, placement of news and topic of news were independent variables of the study.

Type of the Media

It refers to the medium of communication i.e., print media and electronic media.

Placement of the News

It refers to where news story coded was placed, either it was in the front page or back pages or at what place in the news bulletin. The placement was divided into two categories i.e., prioritized and non-prioritized. For print media prioritized news belongs to front page news while the first five news stories of the 9 p.m. news bulletin were considered as prioritized. Back page news and news items after five in electronic media were considered as non-prioritized.

Topic of news

It is referred to as the main theme of the news story, for example, criticism on government, government reaction, political meeting and formation of alliances etc.

Negativity

Negativity was divided into three dimensions i.e., directional negativity, non-directional negativity and individual actor related negativity. Directional negativity has further two indicators i.e., conflict centeredness and incapability and misconduct, while non-directional further have two indicators i.e., the overall tone of the story and pessimistic outlook (Lengauer, Esser and Berganza, 2012).

Measurement and Coding

In order to measure negativity in the news, an index was developed with the help of literature (Lengauer, Esser & Berganza, 2012).

Tonality (-1 negative, 0 balanced or neutral, +1 positive)

It about the overall tone of the story. If news story indicates disappointment, failure, frustration, blaming each other etc. were considered as negative tone. Positive tonality is political success, improvement, political gains etc. If the news story is neither positive nor negative it was considered balanced.

Pessimistic Outlook (-1 pessimistic outlook, 0 balanced or neutral, +1 optimistic outlook)

A pessimistic outlook is when a news story depicts a hopeless situation, while optimism is a hopeful situation about the future. If the news story does not belong to any of both categories then it was considered balanced or neutral.

Conflict centeredness (-1 conflict centeredness, 0 balanced or neutral, +1 consensus oriented)

Conflict centeredness refers to disputes, disagreement and controversy among individuals, political actors and political parties. Consensus oriented is when political parties, political actors and individuals are agreed, willing to work together etc. If a news story does belong to any of the above categories they were considered as balance or neutral.

Incapability (-1 incapability, 0 balanced or neutral, +1 capability)

The news story related incompetence, criticism and acquisition were considered as incapability while news story about competence, political developments etc. was considered as capability while if news story does not belong to any of both category they were considered as balance or neutral.

Actor related negativity (-1 actor negativity, 0 balanced or neutral, +1 actor related positivity)

The news story highlights negative elements about individual political actors that were considered as actor related negativity. If the news story depicts the achievement, the success of individual actors they were coded as actor related positivity. If the story does not belong to any of both category they were considered as balanced or neutral.

Reliability Index

Interitem reliability was checked using SPSS. The value of Cronbach's Alpha was 0.653. 0.65 indicates the accepted level of reliability.

Results and Analysis

To investigate negativity in the news coverage of PDM (Pakistan democratic Movement) both print and electronic media were analyzed. There were total 322 news stories, 233 news stories published in print media while 89 news stories related to the case were broadcasted in electronic media.

Results of the study indicated electronic media has more negative tonality as compared to print media while the number of balanced and neutral toned news was common in print media. Actor related negativity was more frequent in new related to the reaction of sitting government as compared to criticism on government by opposition alliance (PDM). Actor related negativity is common in high prioritized news as compared to low prioritized news. Hard news is more negative as compared to soft news. Soft news related to PDM is less in number that's why negativity is common in hard news. News about government criticism was less pessimistic in nature as compared to news related to the reaction of the sitting government.

Furthermore, the p-value ranges between 0.000 to 0.001 shows the strong relationship between the topic of the news and the negativity index. The type of the news and negativity index is moderately correlated as their p values ranges between 0.5 to 0.7.

H₁: There is no relationship between placement of news and level of conflict centeredness

The P-value for this hypothesis was 0.000 which is <0.05. It indicates that there is a strong relationship between placement of news and level of conflict centeredness. So, the first hypothesis is rejected.

H₂: The news about government criticism tend to have more actor related negativity as compared to news about government reaction on PDM

Table 1. Topic * Actor Negativity Crosstabulation

		Actor related negativity			Total
		Actor related negativity	Neutral/ balance	Actor related positivity	
Topic	Others	14	36	6	56
	Criticism on government	68	23	1	92
	Political meetings	10	20	1	31
	Democratic accountability	0	1	0	1
	Reaction of sitting government	81	50	9	140
	Public protest	1	1	0	2
Total		174	131	17	322

Table 1 shows that actor related negativity is more in news stories related to the reaction of the sitting government as compared to news stories about criticism on government. Out of 322 news items, 174 news items belong to actor related negativity. 81 news stories related to the reaction of the sitting government and 68 news stories related to criticism on government have actor related negativity. So, the second hypothesis is rejected.

H3: Level of pessimism and tonality does not vary with the type of media

The P-value for pessimism and type of media is 0.14 which is >0.05. It indicates that the relationship between pessimism and the type of media is weak. The first part of the hypothesis is partially accepted. The p-value for

tonality and type of media is 0.000 which is <0.05. It indicates there is a strong relationship between tonality and type of media. So, the second part of the hypothesis is rejected.

H4: The tonality varies with the type of media

Table 2 indicates that print media has more negative tonality as compared to electronic media. The overall tone of 67 news stories of print media out of 233 were negative in nature, and 55 news stories out of 89 had a negative tone in electronic media. When it comes to percentages 61% of electronic media news stories have negative tones as compared to 28.7% of news items in print media have a negative tone. So, the table indicates variation in negative tonality with the type of media.

Table 2. MediaType * Tonality Crosstabulation

		Tonality			Total
		Negative tonality	Neutral/ balance	Positive tonality	
Media Type	Print media	67	159	7	233
	Electronic media	55 61%	27	7	89
Total		122	186	14	322

H5: The news about government reaction has a more pessimistic outlook

Table 3 shows the cross-tabulation between pessimistic outlook and news about the reaction of the sitting government. Results indicate that there are 63 news stories that show a pessimistic outlook. The fifth hypothesis is accepted.

Table 3. Topic * Pessimistic Crosstabulation

		Pessimistic			Total
		Pessimistic	**Neutral/balance**	**Optimistic**	
	Others	5	43	8	56
	Criticism on government	50	35	7	92
	Political meetings	7	20	4	31
Topic	Democratic accountablity	1	0	0	1
	Reaction of sitting government	63	40	37	140
	Public protest	1	1	0	2
Total		127	139	56	322

Discussion and Conclusion

The news about the protest against the sitting government indicates a high level of negativity and sensationalization. Abbas (2017) investigated the long march of 2014. This protest was of same as of PDM, the author explored that the news in 2014 about the long march was sensationalized, exaggerated and personalized in nature. In the current study actor related negativity was more common in Pakistan's media both print and electronic, it shows that if personalization were the variable of the, it is assumed to be higher in news stories.

When the data about PDM was analyzed, the researcher observed that news published or broadcasted only focused on the difference of opinion of both parties rather than constructive news coverage. While covering the PDM protest especially electronic media ignored the part of speeches by political leaders

if they were positive optimistic in nature. Print media highlighted sensational elements in headlines and subheads but also provided the complete news that's why the number of balance stories are more in print media as compared to electronic media. Overall, the constructive information was missing and the result was not different from Waqas and Khattak (2017).

Qadeer, Shehzad and Chishti (2017) argued that coverage of print media is highly personalized but the researcher has examined that electronic media is more personalized in nature. Electronic media was focusing on leaders of the political parties. They are not highlighting issues and demands of opposition alliance but rather focused on what the leader has said.

PDM is a negative event by nature because the protest was to derail the sitting

government. Min (2014) argued that the event which is negative in nature tend to have negative coverage. the results of the study justified the argument of Min (2014). For this study both commercial news organizations were analyzed, it is examined that both print and electronic media highlight negative, sensational words more to get commercial gains and more reader/viewership, Berganza et al. (2010) had similar results.

The most common news about PDM published and broadcasted in news media were about criticism on government and reaction of the sitting government on PDM protest and their leaders. Both the parties i.e., government and opposition blaming each other for misconduct and incapability. They were blaming each other for corruption and misuse of government resources. Even they were targeting each other personally and morally.

The government spokesperson called one of the female party leaders "Rajkumari" (negative connotation). While PM was called "Tabedaar Khan" (negative connotation), blamed him for getting support from the military otherwise he is not capable of holding the power as PM of Pakistan.

The concludes that PDM is a massive countrywide protest but the coverage given by news channel and newspaper was less than required. Although print media and electronic media prioritized news the number of stories was not sufficient. Total 322 news stories were published in 30 days both in print and electronic media. On average 10 news stories were published/ broadcasted. The author observed that negativity especially actor related was a common element of news items in news coverage of PDM.

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