

Irem Sultana *

Rao Shahid Mahmood †

Hamid Yaseen Ahmed ‡

Pakistani Print Media as Political Propaganda Tool: A Study of Panama Issue

Vol. VI, No. II (Spring 2021)

URL: [http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2021\(VI-II\).10](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2021(VI-II).10)

Pages: 92 – 98

p- ISSN: 2521-2982

e- ISSN: 2707-4587

p- ISSN: 2521-2982

DOI: 10.31703/gpr.2021(VI-II).10

Headings

- [Introduction](#)
- [Literature Review](#)
- [Methodology](#)
- [Results and Discussion](#)
- [Table 1](#)
- [Table 2](#)
- [Table 3](#)
- [Figure 1](#)
- [Conclusion](#)
- [References](#)

Abstract

This research study examined the scenario of media as propaganda tool keeping in view the news reportage of the Panama issue as well as editorial coverage in Urdu print media. The study investigated the situation of whether the Urdu print media remained unbiased during reportage and editorial coverage of the big corruption scandal or it was used as a propaganda tool for the psychological warfare of the political arena. The paper assessed the position of factual and non-factual reportage and framed news reportage on the country's game-changer phenomenon. The study might be helpful to understand the scenario of news reportage on big corruption issues in the Urdu Print world of Pakistan. The results presented the outlines behind the framed news coverage, the picture of alteration into non-factual news, ignoring the facts and figures, and just focusing on the statements. The study also presented the view of meandering policies between reportage and editorials. It also indicated the changing policy regarding news reportage in terms of editorials and exposed the view of smearing position regarding ethical lees of news coverage. The study was the outcome of content analysis of Pakistani Urdu Dailies (three newspapers, Daily Jang, Daily Express, and Daily Dunya, were chosen as sample) to study the phenomenon, and in-depth interviews of senior communication experts were done to understand the scenario deeply.

Key Words: News Coverage, Reportage, Editorials, Panama Issue, Game-Changer, Alteration in Facts, Dailies, Psychological Warfare, Political Arena, Meandering Policies

Introduction

The role of print media has been considered very significant to enlighten the public regarding the goings-on in society as well as interpretations of the political events, social dealings, economic dealings, cultural occasions, administrative procedures, and public actions with pros and cons. The current study is about to the use of Pakistani Print Media as a political propaganda tool to handle the situations in

favor or against some political forces, especially in the context of the Panama Issue, which remained a big game-changer phenomenon of country's political history. The role of media to update society by giving information to the populace cannot be denied. It was observed that the society always demands, as a basic requirement, info from media and information delivered by media has effects on

*Assistant Professor, Department of Mass Communication, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: iremsultana@gcuf.edu.pk

†Assistant Professor, Department of Media Studies, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan.

‡PhD Scholar, Department of History, Government College University Faisalabad, Punjab, Pakistan.

beliefs and thoughts of masses, but it is very man to man and time to time on members of society. It was explained by the scholars as, "Media can inspire the society by several roles. Delivering information to society is one of the prime responsibilities of the media. Society depends on media, as media deliver facts and figures so that society could take decisions according to that" ([Lombardo, 2017](#)). The "TRUTH" is a universal fact and cannot be denied by any community, society, institution, or religion, and none of the sectors of life permits to go against the actuality. Society always seeks truth-finding by the media and demands that the media persons must play a role as watchdog of society for tracing the hidden treasures of realities. The constitution of Pakistan, by article 19-A, permits every citizen to have information of their interest from all public sector organizations; the same is a requirement of society by the media. The favoritism preferential and biases in media reportage destruct values and imbalance the societal structure and public opinion. The studies clarified the phenomena as, "Ethical issues related to the role of media in influencing antisocial behavior include all three functions of mass media: news program, entertainment, and advertising. To consider the information ethics issue means to stick only to the aspects related to the function that is given to journalists" ([Nadrjanski & Buzasi, 2011](#)).

The studies presented a view that specifying the information with focusing on some of the particular personalities and propagating the particular and chosen part of the information may be considered as propaganda which harm the realities and destruct the truth. This type of reportage by media had to be chosen for manufacturing and shaping the public consent in favor or against the personalities, parties, groups, and communities. The political propaganda theory of Lasswell clarifies that "Propaganda is the management of collective attitudes by the manipulation of significant symbols" ([Lasswell, 1927](#)). It is further explained as, "Besides all conceivable and often valuable distinctions, propaganda may be conveniently divided according to the object toward which it is proposed to modify or crystallize an attitude. Some propagandas exist to organize an attitude toward a person" ([Lasswell,](#)

[1927](#)). The use of media as propaganda has been defined by [Chomsky & Herman \(1973\)](#) defined that media plays a significant role in political moves and its content outlined, reshaped and destruct the public opinion about personalities, groups, parties, and political moves.

Mass Media has been considered the 4th pillar of the state, and its importance for reshaping the society's opinion has significant importance. [Firoozi et al. \(2014\)](#) explain it as "Media, rather it is print or electronic, as an information provider and a watchdog is the important part of the society." [BBC \(2013\)](#) explained it in three dimensions, "Media can be attributed to three levels of interconnected functions such as gatekeepers, watchdogs and agenda-setters." [Sadaf \(2011\)](#) explained the influence of media for making public opinion as "It has become a reality that the media influences and shapes public opinion." The communication experts have declared today's world as the age of the information revolution. The spread of information has two aspects, negative and positive, which have been admitted by the media too. It was elucidated by BBC a report as, "Media has a vibrant role in society and it can be affect the society positively and negatively in many aspects by its content created by the personals working in that media outlets" ([BBC, 2013](#)).

The Panama issue was not just an investigative story about corruption scandal as for Pakistani context, but it became a political game-changer marvel as well as reshaped public opinion about political leadership and destruct the social structure. It was defined as "Panama issue prevailed only to change the political game set up. The country's social setup and public opinion changed in the context of Panama reportage, and media is the key player in all this activity. The all the game was played in the context of media. The players of the game is still behind the scene, but the time will open these hidden faces" S. I. Naz, personal communication, October 21, 2018). The Panama issue was filed by a journalistic body, "International Consortium of Investigative Journalists," after thorough and comprehensive revision. In Pakistan, media outlets presented the issue as a whole at an early stage, but later it was reshaped into totality to partiality and

used for public opinion formation in a political, financial, and social context.

Literature Review

[Happer & Philo \(2013\)](#) stated that "The framed information spread by some media outlets always are with a set agenda, it is observed obviously. This set agenda information pinch the people like needle and bullet as it is stated in bullet theory". [Ward \(2011\)](#) elucidated the phenomenon of subjective and altered news reportage and linked it with the framed news content as well as agenda set behind the news reportage as, "the agenda-setting function considers media as bullet instrument which used to shape public opinion in as that media could not asked the people what they have to think but same time media told them that on what about they have to bethinks and often issues are highlighted by media would take more importance in public." [Sadaf \(2011\)](#) examined the phenomena of framed news reportage as well as agenda-setting behind and said that, "it has become a reality that the media influences and shapes public opinion. As the Media professionals frame the issues and apply the gatekeeping process on the common content and information that become food for thought for a common man. Media content force and attract people to think in the way which the media suggest. It can be said, in other words, that media content works like a propagate tool. Media content pinches the audience to think about that way which media outlet suggest by its content. It is clearly shown that if the adopted content of media personals is in a positive way that leads the society for betterment but in another negative hand content of media can harm the society very much. The social scientist presents it with the words Public Perception is basically a term used or processed when people think about certain events, issues, situations, or any particular belief or ideas in the form of knowledge, patterns of culture, or any other activity which they have performed or experienced".

Methodology

The content analysis provides the probabilities to assess the news reportage style while it offers space reportage on news pages, but just calculating and quantifying the space on news pages by flashing or

stretching the reportage may not be considered enough for understanding the phenomena. The phenomena might not be understandable without having the knowledge and information policies behind the news coverage. In this situation, the editorials of the understudy newspapers were also go through to check the policies of the sampled newspapers for linking them with the news reportage style. Understanding the complete phenomenon behind news reportage style cannot be done by knowing the editorial policy only. In this scenario, thorough and intensive interviews of senior journalists as well as communication experts were also conducted. By interviewing the media professionals, the pragmatic position of journalistic ethics on news reportage of Urdu Dailies in regards to propagating the Panama issue for political propaganda.

The objectives of the study were to assess the scenario of Pakistani print media whether it was used as a propaganda tool during coverage of game-changer phenomenon of the Panama Issue or not. The shift-change in policies of the dailies was also assessed by a difference of focusing the issue in reportage and editorials written in the same newspaper. The in-depth interviews of the senior communication experts were also done to understand the phenomenon. The Panama issue-related news reportages and editorials of Daily Dunya, Daily Express, and Daily Jang were quantitatively analyzed. The newspapers were assessed for 482 days, from the first day when the issue surfaced (April 05, 2016) to the day when the Supreme Court verdict against the former Prime Minister of Pakistan (July 29, 2017). The spaces of news coverage of the scandal were measured, and editorials on the issue were counted. The news items as well as editorials were assessed according to three categories as, Positive (collective on the issue), Negative (ignoring collectiveness and focusing the specified personalities and itemized issue), Neutral (having aspects, collectiveness as well as specification). For examining the phenomenon qualitatively, senior communication exerts Absar Alam, Chairman PEMRA (at that time); Afzal Butt, Former President Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), Shamsul Islam Naz, Ex-Secretary PFUJ; Sharharyar Khan, Ex-President

National Press Club (NPC); Shafqat Munir, President JDHR, Khalid Jamil, Executive Director JDHR; CR. Shamsi, Ex-Secretary PFUJ; Fauzia Shahid, Ex-Secretary PFUJ; Dr. Arshad Ali Senior Communication Expert; Abdul Rauf Yausafzai, Senior Communication expert; Fauzia Rana, Ex-Joint Secretary NPC; Aslam Dogar, Senior journalist, were interviewed.

Results and Discussion

The results clearly showed that Pakistani Urdu Print Media was used as a propaganda tool with political motives behind. Although the players behind the scene had not been shown the game of political propaganda was opened by the massive news reportage with focusing the specified personalities in reportage as well as editorials indicated the framed reportage with set agendas.

The study presented the view that massive news reportage on Panama issue in Pakistani Urdu print media remained negative but huge coverage on pages. The study explored that Urdu print media printed Panama-related news items on huge space thru the sixteen months of the Panama scandal. It is

assessed that sampled three newspapers of Pakistani Urdu print media published 41175 news items on the issue of Panama out of total 90904 news stories published on front and back papers of understudy three sampled newspapers.

The study presented a view that three sampled Urdu dailies highlighted the issue with huge space with a little difference between their spaces. Just three newspapers gave 3,34,769 centimeter space to the "Panama-related news items. Daily Dunya gave 106020 centimeters, Daily Express 119637 centimeters, and Daily Jang gave 109142 centimeter space to the Panama issue-related news stories during the understudy time period. The study presented another aspect that Daily Express published a lower number of Panama-related news stories, but by giving space, it remained in a higher position, which shows that daily express flashed the issue by giving more space to the news related to the issue than other papers. The study presented another view that the Panama coverage remained the second-biggest matter on the news pages during the time period understudies; the first was advertisements.

Table 1. Comparison of news coverage of Panama issue in Urdu dailies

Newspaper	Total News	Total Space of News Pages (Front/Back) (c.cm)	Panama issue News Items	Space of Panama Related News (c.cm)
Daily Dunya	33509	419040	14252	106020
Daily Express	26183	419040	14507	119637
Daily Jang	31212	419040	12416	109112
Total	90904	1257120	41175	334769

The study presented another view that there was negativity in the coverage of the Panama Issue. Out of 41,175 Panama-related news items, 2372 were positive. It means the understudy newspapers (Daily Jang, Daily Express, Daily Dunya) did not

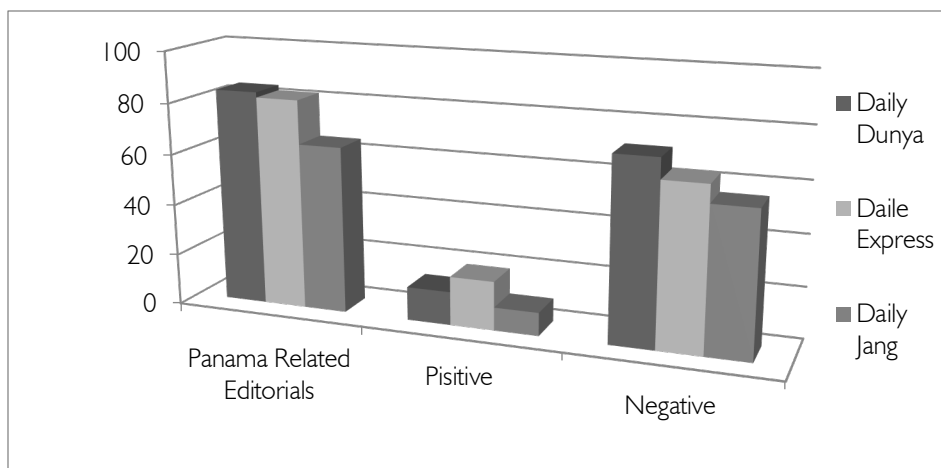
cover the Panama issue as a whole issue but focused on the particular personalities and fixated matter. All three newspapers published an almost equal number of news items on the Panama Issue.

Table 2. Coverage of Factual Positive, Negative, and Neutral News on Panama issue in Urdu Dailies

Newspaper	Total News	Panama issue related news	Factual News			
			Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total
Daily Dunya	33509	14252	33	274	191	498
Daily Express	26183	14507	22	131	43	196
Daily Jang	31212	12416	509	383	119	1011
Total	90904	41175	564	788	353	1705

Table 3. Coverage of Positive, Negative, and Neutral Statements on Panama issue in Urdu Dailies

Newspaper	Total News	Panama issue related news	Statements			
			Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total
Daily Dunya	33509	14252	952	11379	1423	13754
Daily Express	26183	14507	439	13268	604	14311
Daily Jang	31212	12416	417	10161	827	11405
Total	90904	41175	1808	34808	2854	39470

**Figure 1:** Comparison of Editorials on Panama issue in Urdu dailies

The data clearly shows that the Urdu print world was ignoring the positivity by losing the totality as well as collectiveness in issue and promoting negativity by focusing on specified personalities. There was vast reportage of the Panama Issue in negative perspective as that the collective issue was intimidated and the matter was presented by focusing some particular persons and their acts.

The senior media professionals and communication experts also validated the results of content analysis. The interviewees agreed that if they see the ethical part of the news coverage of Pakistani media on the Panama issue, there are two aspects. Firstly, there were more than 400 names of Pakistanis figured in the Panama papers, but media by and large confined it to some individuals; therefore, it was a negative aspect; thus, it was an unethical act of the media. Secondly, media have all the privilege and right to report, publish, highlight individual issues cases, but there should be balance therein. The media should have the version and facts from both sides as well as not to single out any individuals out of big lot. In this backdrop, the Panama issue was a collective investigative story,

and it should have been reported as a whole; thus, media portrayed this issue subjectively and not objectively, accurately, fairly, which is basic norm of journalism. Added further as, the tone and tenor over Panama issue has been overly hyper and intemperate which ultimately led to use of inappropriate terms like pajama, (pointing shamelessly to shalwar or trouser to rivet attention to dirty things of social taboos.), hangama, drama, and other similar phonemes or just only to create sensation and satiate taste for vulgarity and impropriety, destroying the fabric of ethics and morality". The attitude of the media as a whole did not remain according to the journalistic ethics and norms.

The editorial policy of the newspapers also did not be paralleled to the news reportage style. The editorial policy reflected more positivity while news reportage was negatively focused. As compared to the news coverage, the position of editorials was bitter better in terms of positivity on the issue, but the factual position of the editorials was also not according to the journalistic values. The experts commented on the editorials on Panama Issue as,

"Mostly, analysis of all editorials of news dailies have largely been uninformed, void of genuine subject-matter and essence of Panama papers. Most contents was slanted and presented to achieve particular agenda to target a specific person. Most editorials were based on biased coverage therefore the same were also missing with the prerequisite aspects of truthful and opinion-making comments". Added further as, "a bare reading of the coverage of this issue itself speaks biased coverage missing the fundamental ethical aspects in the coverage thereof".

The experts raised serious questions about the capability and integrity of Urdu print media of Pakistan as that "It's very clear, the way the issue was reported, analyzed in the media from all angles it was neither fair, nor accurate rather it was portrayed with a set agenda and ulterior motives. Unfortunately, by and large Pakistani media do not adhere to the ethics of unbiased reporting and prefer to portrayed issues in a ridicule, unjust, hatred and judgmental manner".

Conclusion

The results of qualitative as well as quantitative data

clearly exposed the weak position of Pakistani Urdu Print World during reporting the game-changer phenomenon of Panama Issue, and it seemed that the media was used as a propaganda tool for political motives of some unseen forces. Pakistani print media turned into particularized matter while ignoring the collective issue against the journalistic ethical grounds. Media was played in the hands of some hidden forces which can only be assumed but not seen. The ulterior motives of the media owners were also observed by molding and framing the issue from collectiveness to individualization. The study also resulted as that "there was meandering editorial policy of Urdu media and policy changed with a shift in agenda was also observed which ratified by the in-depth interviews same change is seen by the results of quantitative data in news policy and shift of policy reflects the early positive and collective news toward the negative and individually victimized news policy which prove that Pakistani Urdu print media frame the Panama issue with set agenda". The motives behind this shift change was not openly seemed but reflected the ulterior motives of media owners under the lines of the meandering and framing style of reportage.

References

- BBC. (2013). *The media of Pakistan: Fostering inclusion in a fragile democracy*. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/mediaaction/publications-and-resources/policy/briefings/Asia/Pakistan/policy/Pakistan>
- Chomsky, N. & Herman, E. S. (1973). *Counter-Revolutionary Violence: Bloodbaths in Fact and Propaganda*, Andover, Mass: Warner Modular Publications Inc., Module 57, 1-46.
- Firoozi, H., Mostafaye, F., & Khaledian, M. (2014). The Strategic Role of the Mass Media in Strengthening the Discourse of Moderation and Rationality. *International Letters of Social and Humanistic Sciences*, 25, 26–32. <https://doi.org/10.18052/www.scipress.com/ilshs.25.26>
- Happer, C., & Philo, G. (2013). The Role of the Media in the Construction of Public Belief and Social Change. *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*, 1(1), 321–336. <https://doi.org/10.5964/jssp.v1i1.96>.
- Lasswell, H. D. (1927). The Theory of Political Propaganda. *The American Political Science Review*, 21 (3), 627-631.
- Lombardo, J. (2017). Media Industry, <http://study.com/academy/lesson/the-media-industry-roles-impactethics.htm>
- Nadrjanski, M., & Buzasi, Z. (2011). New Media – Ethical Issues. *Information Sciences and e-Society*, <http://infoz.ffzg.hr/INFuture/2011/papers/503%20Nadrjanski,%20Nadrjanski,%20Buzasi,%20New%20Media%20-%20Ethical%20Issues.pdf>
- Sadaf, A. (2011). Public Perception of Media Role. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 1 (5), 228-236.
- Ward, J. A. (2011). *Ethics and The Media: And introduction*. London: Cambridge University Press.