

Political Arena in Pakistan and Objectivity of Urdu Print Media: A Study of Panama Issue

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Abstract

This research paper examined the scenario of objectivity in Pakistani print media keeping in view the reportage of Panama issue in leading Urdu Dailies. The study investigated the situation whether the Urdu print media remained objective, unbiased, and non-judgmental during reportage of the big corruption scandal of the history of the political arena in Pakistan. The paper assessed the position of factual and non-factual reportage rate in three big Urdu Dailies. The study might be help full to understand the scenario of reportage on big venality issues in Urdu Print World. The results presented the outlines behind the picture of alteration in facts and framed news coverage. The study is concluded with the indications of policy change on news reportage. The applying position of ethical grounds of news coverage of Panama Issue also remained questionable. The study is the outcome of content analysis and in-depth interviews of senior communication experts.

Key Words: Objectivity, Non-Judgmental, Political Arena, Urdu Dailies, Venality Issues, Unbiased, Political Arena.

Introduction

The Media's role for enlightening the populace about occurring in society always remained substantial, but media has to act this role objectively, accurately and reliably; otherwise the information can harm the baseline of the society. The social decisions might be on the bases of reliable information and facts and figures provided by media or official sources. Sometimes the media might be the basic source of data, so the biased content harms the reliability and social planning. It was explained as, "Media is the primary source of information in a democracy. Accurate and reliable information is the basis of a democratic process" by [Radojkovic & Miletic \(2006\)](#). Lombardo (2017) also clarified the position of media with the words, "Media can inspire 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".

The "Truth" is a universal reality. There is not a single religion, community or society which oppose or instruct versus the Truth. For finding out the truths always remained a demand for media from society. The populace expected that media personals must act as a watchdog of the community for searching the

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“Truths”. The favouritism of media owners or personals urge to modify the media content, harm realities and destroy societal values and norms. Renowned social scholar [Nadrjanski & Buzasi \(2011\)](#) characterize this sensation with the words, “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.”

The print media (newspapers, journals, magazines) were mainly considered journalism for many decades. The journalists and journalism had been considered as a noble and respected work in its spirit and consequence. The word “journalism” has been originated from “journal” which has been meant as “daily writing material which can be in any language and would be on any issue, phenomena or routine life”. The word “journal” indicates the positive meanings in its wisdom. The Cambridge dictionary identifies the journal as, “a written record of what you have done each day, something including your private thoughts and feelings”. The dictionaries also present the word “journal” with the sense of diary writing. At the time of initiation of journalism, the word “journal” was used for magazines and newspapers only. The personals work to arrange or provide written material for journal had been called as Journalists. Later the profession of arranging and providing written material for magazines and newspapers had been called as Journalism.

The objectivity (factual news items) and subjectivity (statement news items) in reportage always remain a big question for the reliability of news outlets. It's not only the issue news pattern but also the credibility of news and news outlets too. The archetype of news reportage itself explains the positivity and negativity. [McCombs & Shaw \(1972\)](#) had been investigated the phenomenon in their study about framing as well as agenda-setting and elucidated the situation as, “agenda of media outlet may be captured by its style of reportage on issues of communal interest as some periods expend. It is very important for the objective news coverage that media persons have to be unbiased, impartial, neutral and honest to collect facts and not to become a propagate tool”. Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists has been provided code of conduct for journalists and defines objectivity for the journalist as “honesty while collecting the material for news stories” clearly.

It was observed that media outlets commonly focused on statements and neglected the fact base news stories. Even during reporting on big issues, the media outlets had not been focusing on facts but statements of different sides. The same was seen during the news coverage of the Panama issue, a big corruption scandal of Pakistan's political history. The situation had been shown the Panama Issue as a game-changer spectacle for the political arena of Pakistani ruling corridors. It was explained in these words, “Panama issue prevailed only to change the game set up. Country's social setup and public opinion changed in the context of Panama reportage and media is the key player of all this activity. The all the game was played in the context of media. The players of the game are still behind the scene, but the time will open these hidden faces. It is very clear that Pakistani media used as propagate tool and neglect the objectivity element, there was very small scale factual news on the Panama issue all around” (S. I. Naz, personal communication, October 21, 2018).

Literature Review

[Arshad & Ashraf \(2016\)](#) says that “The importance of media to informing the people is recognized worldwide and society rallies on media much more, but the objectivity of media is the basic need and demand by the society”. They further clarified as, “in this regard, keep in consideration that media has a vital role in collecting data, editing and transcribing the information in a story and present this information to masses. They also presented a view about the ethical presentation of media. The hidden interests of media owners and policymakers of the outlets damage the abilities journalists and credibility of media content. This all altered the objectivity of news stories. Their study also presents an eye view on the issue as often. It seems that media is used as a propaganda tool during Panama like issues. The history shows that media outlets were used to propagate the matters and conflicts with hidden agendas”.

[Sidra \(2015\)](#) stated as, “the current Pakistani media landscape reflects a multi-linguistic, multi-ethnic and class-divided society. There is a clear divide between Urdu, the national language, and English, official language, media. The Urdu media, particularly the TV channels and newspapers, are widely viewed and read by the masses—both in urban and rural areas. However, the English media is urban and elite-centric. English print, television and radio channels have far smaller audiences than their Urdu counterparts, but have greater leverage among opinion-makers, politicians, the business community and the upper strata of society”. She further explained the situation as “Before 2002, Pakistan’s electronic media was under heavy control of the government. And new developments in electronic media in Pakistan started in 2002 with the promulgation of the Freedom of Information Ordinance of 2002 and the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) ordinance of 2002. The freedom of information ordinance contains positive features acknowledging citizens’ right to know. To bring its vision of liberalized media in the country, the military government of Pervez Musharraf, promulgated PEMRA Ordinance in 2002 to establish Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority. The mandate of PEMRA is to improve the standards of information, education and entertainment, and to enlarge the choice available to the people of Pakistan Including news, current affairs, religious knowledge, art and culture as well as science and technology. To meet this mandate the ordinance provided to open up broadcasting media for the private sector. In addition, it contains provisions to regulate the operations of all the broadcasters and cable television stations established under this ordinance”.

[Firoozi, Mostafaye & Khaledian \(2014\)](#) presented a picture about the role of media as, “media, rather it is print or electronic, as an information provider and a watchdog is the important part of the society. Media has different functions and many roles and affects society in many aspects. Media affects the social, cultural, economic, and political structure of society and guides the communities positively and negatively. Media has an important role in socio-economic development and building values of the nations”. They also elaborated it with the words, “although, electronic media role has been increased in various fields such as political awareness, culture transformation, strategic multi and bi-literal relations of countries and increased in the participation of civic roles still the print media role could not be denied as it is premier media and influence the policies of the nation. Print media still the very vibrant medium of the literate class who leads the society and turn it positively or negatively. Not only electronic but the print media has been grown time by time with the use of technology, especially the digital version of printed newspapers has become a vibrant aspect of the expansion of media not only in Pakistan but also around the world”.

[Sadaf \(2011\)](#) stated as, “the phenomenon of framed media content and asked 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 the people to think with that way which media suggest. It can be said in other words, that media content work like a propagate tool. Media contents pinch 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”. It is further explained as, “public perception is basically a term used or processed when people think about certain events, issues, situation or any particular belief or ideas in the form of knowledge, patterns of culture or any other activity which they have performed or experienced”.

[Jan \(2009\)](#) stated that “the information always be framed due to some hidden motives and agendas behind the sphere. Media outlets spread framed information with set agendas. The outlined information always smidgin the populace like a needle and hit the target audience at large. [Ward \(2011\)](#) elaborated the “agenda-setting phenomena that media is used as a bullet tool to modify the public opinion when presented mounted information. Media could not only ask the people what they have to think but same time media told them that on what about they have to bethink and often issues are highlighted by media would take more importance in public”.

Methodology

The purpose of the study was to assess the picture rather the Pakistani Print Media works objectively or not. The study also examines the judgmental news item's rate on news pages of Pakistani Urdu newspapers. In this study, quantitative content analysis ([Berelson, Bernard, 1952](#)) and qualitative in-depth interviews ([Jhon T. Chirban, 1996](#)) techniques were employed to confirm the hypotheses and answer the research questions. To gauge the objectivity elements in reportage researcher analyzed the content of Panama related news items of Daily Jang, Daily Express and Daily Dunya, during the period of 482 days from April 5, 2016; when the Panama papers issue firstly reported till July 29, 2017; when the Supreme court decided Panama case and declared the Prime Minister of Pakistan disqualified for public representation and holding any public office. The basic purpose of the content analysis and in-depth interviews was to congregate the estimation about objectivity, impartiality and factual reportage ratio in newspapers.

The coding sheet was used to collect the data. First of all; the content categories were established as, 1st – “Positive news – a news story with the collective aspect of Panama issue”, 2nd – “Negative news – a news story which is ignoring the collective aspects and individually focused on personalities or parties” and 3rd – “Neutral news – a news story have both aspects collective issue of Panama papers and also hitting individuals or parties. The in-depth interviews of the senior media professionals and communication experts were also conducted. The coding sheet for quantitative content analysis and questions asked in in-depth interviews a were composed with the factors, objectivity in news reportage, coverage style and the ratio of the factual and the judgmental news on Panama issue in Urdu Dailies of Pakistan. The researcher conducted interviews with senior communication experts to identify the phenomenon with the statements of the experts. The senior journalist and Chairman PEMRA, Absar Aalam; President Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ), Afzal Butt; senior journalist and Former Secretary-General PFUJ, Shamsul Islam Naz; Former President of “National Press Club Islamabad (NPC)”, Shaher Yar Khan; Senior Journalist of Islamabad and President Journalists for Democracy and Human Rights (JDHR) Shafqat Munir; Executive Director (JDHR) and communication expert Khalid Jamil; Former Secretary-General PFUJ C.R. Shamsi; Former Secretary-General PFUJ Fauzia Shahid; Senior Journalist and PhD scholar Arshad Ali; Senior Journalist from KPK and Communication expert Abdur Rauf Yousafzai; Senior journalist of Islamabad Aslam Dogar; Joint Secretary of NPC Fauzia Kalsoom Rana had been interviewed for qualitatively inspecting the issue under study.

Results and Discussion

The results are clearly presenting the scenario that Pakistani Urdu Print Media remained judgmental, subjective and non-objective, especially during reportage of Panama Issue. It was also demonstrated that Urdu Print World ignored the factual news stories, depends on statements and made a collective issue towards an individually focused matter that damaged the issue itself and credibility of Pakistani media too.

The scenario of Panama issue reportage presented a view of lethargic, languorous and indolent newsgathering abilities of Urdu Dailies. According to data Urdu Dailies published only 4% news stories based on facts but depends 96% on statements. There is a huge difference between factual and judgmental news items. The factual news was only 1705 in number out of 41175 and statements are 39470 in number. There is a huge representation of daily Jang in figures of factual news items. The scenario presented alarming situation regarding reporting abilities of Urdu print world in Pakistan.

The reportage style of Pakistani Urdu dailies did not match with international standards and code of ethics introduced by professional bodies was also not found reportage of Panama Issue in media. Especially Urdu Dailies neglected all standards and focused just some individuals on pointing out their culpabilities but neglect their own standards. The high rate of non-factual news items clearly showed the non-objective behavior of Pakistani media, especially Urdu print world. The quantitative data published in Urdu dailies, as

well as opinion of communication experts, clearly rejected the objectivity standards in reportage of Panama Issue in Urdu Dailies.

Table 1. Factual Stories & Statements on “Panama Issue” in Urdu Newspapers

Newspapers	Panama issue Stories	Factual Stories	%age of Factual Stories	Statements	%age of Statements
Daily Dunya	14252	498	3	13754	97
Daily Express	14507	196	1	14311	99
Daily Jang	12416	1011	8	11405	92
Total	41175	1705	4	39470	96

The results also presented a languorous, torpid and stagnant newsgathering aptitude; indolent and somewhat evenhanded newsgathering capacities and abilities of Urdu Dailies. Although the overall factual news ratio was four percent, Daily Express had only one, and Daily Duniya had only three percent ratio of factual news stories which presented a much lower rate of objectivity aspect in news pages of Urdu Dailies but statements all around, even during the reportage of big corruption scandals like Panama issue. The dependency of media outlets upon statements to publish as news items at large, presenting a view that they had no capable reporting team to be cover this type of issue.

The data showed another apathetic aspect of news coverage during Panama issue reportage. There was no continuity of publishing factual news items but in statements; even daily express did not publish factual news stories for months but presented statements continuously. Data shows a view that daily Jang published a handsome number of factual news continuously, although it is not a big number as compare to statements but good in number as compare to other papers. The data also presented another picture which indicates towards unenergetic and non-skilled newsgathering squad of Urdu dailies in Pakistan. The neglected aspect of ethical standards in reportage also hit the credibility of media outlets and media owners too. The situation showed another perspective that there is a lack of professionals in these media outlets which may compete the ethical standards during the coverage of Panama like big corruption scandal. The detailed view about the coverage of Panama Issue also supported this position.

Table 2. Reportage of “Panama Issue” in Daily Dunya

Month/Year	Total News	Panama issue News	Factual News	%age of Factual News on Panama Items	Statements	%age of Statements on Panama issue
Apr-16	2247	1231	53	4	1178	96
May-16	2198	1129	46	4	1083	96
Jun-16	2104	926	56	6	870	94
Jul-16	2007	897	25	3	872	97
Aug-16	1992	881	31	4	850	96
Sep-16	2204	721	26	4	695	96
Oct-16	1921	698	41	6	657	94
Nov-16	1886	928	16	2	912	98
Dec-16	2117	792	22	3	770	97
Jan-17	2403	759	16	2	743	98
Feb-17	2291	824	17	2	807	98
Mar-17	2127	739	37	5	702	95
Apr-17	2081	1054	16	2	1038	98
May-17	1997	871	13	1	858	99
Jun-17	2007	721	30	4	691	96

Jul-17	1927	1081	53	5	1028	95
Total	33509	14252	498	3	13754	97

Table 3. Reportage of “Panama Issue” in Daily Express

Month / Year	Total News	Panama issue News	Factual News	%age of Factual News on Panama Items	Statements	%age of Statements on Panama issue
Apr-16	1951	1109	30	3	1079	97
May-16	1927	1341	12	1	1329	99
Jun-16	1479	771	52	7	719	93
Jul-16	1893	1249	12	1	1237	99
Aug-16	1718	943	23	2	920	98
Sep-16	1843	824	19	2	805	98
Oct-16	1424	719	10	1	709	99
Nov-16	1321	842	12	1	830	99
Dec-16	1647	1049	7	1	1042	99
Jan-17	1819	759	2	0	757	100
Feb-17	1727	729	0	0	729	100
Mar-17	1749	839	0	0	839	100
Apr-17	1619	1054	3	0	1051	100
May-17	1523	871	0	0	871	100
Jun-17	1249	627	0	0	627	100
Jul-17	1294	781	14	2	767	98
Total	26183	14507	196	1	14311	99

Table 4. Reportage of “Panama Issue” in Daily Jang

Month / Year	Total News	Panama issue News	Factual News	%age of Factual News on Panama Items	Statements	%age of Statements on Panama issue
Apr-16	2261	1167	132	11	1035	89
May-16	2189	1156	65	6	1091	94
Jun-16	2098	876	63	7	813	93
Jul-16	1872	941	47	5	894	95
Aug-16	2095	738	73	10	665	90
Sep-16	1986	617	70	11	547	89
Oct-16	1891	519	46	9	473	91
Nov-16	2019	742	48	6	694	94
Dec-16	2271	849	46	5	803	95
Jan-17	2073	579	38	7	541	93
Feb-17	1767	629	34	5	595	95
Mar-17	1861	739	41	6	698	94
Apr-17	1916	657	93	14	564	86
May-17	1429	571	40	7	53	9
Jun-17	1472	627	46	7	581	93
Jul-17	2012	1009	129	13	880	87
Total	31212	12416	1011	8	11405	92

The data showed the ignorant behavior of media outlets regarding factual news publishing. The continuity in publishing statements but ignoring the factual news was showing the laziness and slackened approach of media representatives, especially associated with the Urdu print world.

The senior communication experts and media professionals also ratified the results of content analysis. The interviewees were agreed that "Pakistani media didn't present the Panama issue objectively. They added that 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 did not adhere ethics of unbiased reporting and prefer to portrayed Panama issue in ridicule way, unjust, hatred based and in a judgmental manner".

The communication experts stated upon the question about objectivity as that, "Pakistani media was not objective during reportage of Panama Issue and media could have been objective." A media expert answered in detail and articulated as, "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 is a ridicule, unjust, hatred and judgmental manner". The journalists and experts criticized the role of media during Panama reportage, one of them replied upon the question of objectivity in media coverage of Panama Issue, with these words, "No, not at all, it was totally subjective journalism when it comes to Urdu media outlets".

Experts notion about the right way of coverage and disparaged the style of reportage. They mentioned the scenario as, "It's clear, Pakistani media included judgments in news items on Panama issue, and this practice might not be called ethical. Negatively portrayal is also another aspect". Furthermore, as "there was no objectivity whatsoever in the presentation of news. Well before the court verdict all the big anchors and columnists had already declared Nawaz Sharif the most corrupt person on the planet". The decision about the corruption and responsible for this mall practices would be decided in court, but the media clearly declared the Premier of Pakistan as involved in the corruption before the court verdict. This situation and pros and cons presented a picture that the media has been feeding upon the issue, and it had no independent expression.

The communique specialists commented with a positive view about the early days of the issue but presented the entire scenario with negative observation as, "initially for a very short span of time, Pakistani media seemed objective when it published the leaks though with some colouring while naming only noted politicians. But later on, it was acutely divided and turned judgmental. In fact, Panama leaks turned to be one of the biggest causes of biased and judgmental media reporting". Another expert observed the situation as, "it's very clear, by presenting a collective issue, Pakistani media did not remain objective. Judgments are also included in news stories or statements are also presented as news items. The issue of the negative portrayal of specified personalities was also another negative aspect". Another expert commented as, "Pakistani media included that judgments in news items and many news items are just based on statements, all this can't be called ethical for media".

The reason behind the non-objective behavior of Pakistani media seemed like ulterior motives which were pointed out by the experts clearly. Another aspect behind the subjective reporting was found political affiliations of the media owners as well as media professionals. The notion of political or societal affiliation in reportage could also be considered a huge violation of ethical standards of reporting. Experts expressed about it as, "Unfortunately, the media is completely divided over matters of sensitive reporting. Now even a layman can observe that divide with a simple understanding of politics and political parties. It is a commonplace fact that all the political parties and other stakeholders have their own channels to campaign their agenda. Again, media remained biased, malicious, and contemptuous in reporting of Panama papers. It has been overplayed, keeping aside larger interests of the country". Further another expert answered upon the issue as, "Pakistani media did not present Panama issue objectively, there are a large number of

judgments and statements were included, and the facts were molded in someone's favor and against someone. It seems that the reporting on the Panama Issue is done with the favoring political attitude. Every tried to show his/her political affiliation and support in favor or against the ruling party”.

Conclusion

The study presented a clear picture that there are some loopholes in news gathering and report constructing of Pakistani Urdu print media. The picture also presented a view that there might be the poor capacity of media personals to present the issues objectively, which is an alarming and serious situation for the media industry at large and Urdu print world as special. Not attended at large on factual news stories instead of statements is also shown a non-objective, inert and worthless behavior of Urdu print media and unpracticed of code of ethics of media and biasness in news coverage on Panama like issues. The representation of issue on media is also remain meandering, and huge news coverage of issue put many questions in the minds of people, especially ignoring the collective news context becomes a big question mark on the objectivity of media and its credibility. The media experts consider the situation much harm for moral and democratic grounds of the society.

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