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## Political Content and Television Channels in Pakistan: Investigating the Professional and Sensational Tendencies on Panama Issue

Vol. VI, No. I (Winter 2021)

URL: [http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2021\(VI-I\).08](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gpr.2021(VI-I).08)

Pages: 91 – 100

p- ISSN: 2521-2982

e- ISSN: 2707-4587

p- ISSN: 2521-2982

DOI: 10.31703/gpr.2021(VI-I).08

### Headings

- [Introduction](#)
- [Literature Review](#)
- [Research Hypotheses](#)
- [Research Method](#)
- [Findings](#)
- [Conclusion](#)
- [References](#)

### Abstract

*This study analyzes the content and Presentation of the Panama issue in Pakistan's two leading TV channels; Geo TV and ARY TV. Through the content analysis technique, it was found that both the channels professionally present the controversy on the Panama issue in terms of camera techniques, music, and other production skills. However, the content was very sensational on both channels. Separately, ARY TV was more sensational both in Presentation and Coverage of the Panama issue than the Geo TV, which was more professional.*

**Key Words:** Sensational Presentation, Sensational Coverage, Professional, Panama Leaks, ARY, Geo News

### Introduction

Infotainment, sensationalism, tabloidization, and entertainment are all used interchangeably for sensationalism in the media. Hujanen (2005) defines tabloidization as the change in emphasis away from serious reporting and toward salaciousness, sensation, and entertainment. Sensationalism may also be defined as 'the utilization of striking details to provoke intense emotions or attention' or 'empiricism that limits the experience to sensory experiences or sensations' (Meriam-Webster, 1828). Numerous researchers believe that sensationalism may be operationally defined as material that possesses the ability to arouse the senses of media viewers (Slattery and Hakanen, 1994). Sensationalism is described either as 'the utilization of striking details to generate powerful emotions or attention' or 'empiricism that restricts experience to sensory experiences or sensations'

(Meriam-Webster, 1828). Generally, the news transmission formula is based on the notion of Newsworthiness. 'While the news is a social construct, a physical object, a commodity, newsworthiness is a cognitive construct, a mental assessment' (Shoemaker, 2006 p.105). Galtung & Ruge's approach to news values is strongly focused on how events become newsworthy. Baloach, Z., Qamar, A., & Tariq, A (2018) observed that audiences that gravitate toward political parties and their ideologies identify with or support them. They like watching news channels such as ARY or GEO.

### Panama Leaks

Panama Leaks is about the 11.5 million documents of Mossack Fonseca that got leaked. A German Newspaper obtained Panama Papers from an anonymous source with a pseudo name John Doe.

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When the German paper received the data, it was 2.6 TeraByte, and because of the enormous amount, the Newspaper contacted ICIJ. One hundred ninety investigative journalists from this International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) network in more than 65 countries completed their research. On April 03, 2016, we had this whistleblower. Panama Papers mentions 14 thousand clients from all over the world. They have used tax havens like United Kingdom, Hong Kong, British Anguilla, Nevada, Samoa, Niue, Seychelles, and the Bahamas, with Panama and the British Virgin Islands at the top.

The present leak being the fifth and the largest of its type, has received global significance. This trend started in 2010 with Wiki leaks, followed by Offshore leaks (2013), Luxembourg leaks (2014), and Swiss leaks (2015). But this time, this 2.6TB of data has shaken the culprits. The prime minister's two sons Hassan Nawaz and Hussain Nawaz, and the only daughter, Ms. Mariam Safdar, were alleged to have offshore companies.

The case against PM got registered in the Supreme Court of Pakistan in the first month of 2017. Its last hearing took place on February 23, 2017. The Supreme Court declared to be releasing a full judgment on the case at an appropriate time. Five larger benches of the Supreme Court (SC) released their judgment on April 20, 2017. Two judges declared the PM as disqualified, but the three demanded to form a Joint Investigation Team (JIT). JIT released its report within 60 days of the SC judgment. This report was reviewed in one week by the implementation bench of three judges. While the consequences are still awaited, the media again is crammed with different debates.

## Literature Review

All the elements that arouse human emotions are generally considered 'sensational content' ([Grabe, Zhou, and Barnett, 2001](#)). Sensationalism arouses emotions through exaggerations. Gatlung and Ruge(1965) analyzed news cuttings. They found out that the news is chosen on certain factors and is different from reality. Several scholars have criticized Gatlung and Ruge (1965). A scathing criticism from Tunstall states that they have ignored

the visual media in their analysis. [Harcup and O'Neill \(2001\)](#) assert that Gatlung and Ruge (1965) failed to see that either the news itself is newsworthy or becomes newsworthy after instilling the News Values.

A move away from professional reporting was witnessed when a typhoon, Yolanda, hit the Philippines. Aguinaldo & Nazal (2015) stated that the media failed to explain the terms like 'storm surge' adequately and provided an outdoor coverage that gave a misconception about the intensity of the winds. In 2015 media was announced to be an essential stakeholder in the United Nations Conference on Disaster Management. But journalists still focus on 'episodic' Coverage.

The way media provides information is beneficial for those who already have some background knowledge. [Lewis, Cushion, and Thomas \(2005\)](#) say they entertain place of facts. Commercial media is somehow compelled to provide such shallow news because of the 24 hours demand for news. [Lewis \(2001\)](#) found news stories challenging to understand by the general audience. The stories do not focus on detailed and background knowledge.

Similarly, Hussain (2015) found that Pakistani media was both sensational and escalators while reporting on the political rift between the Government and judiciary over the NRO issue. The study discovered that the mainstream Pakistani media deliberately exaggerates stories for ratings rather than impartiality and balance.

The theoretical framework of the study by [Slattery, Doremus, and Marcus \(2001\)](#) points out the normative theories that state that the news media's job is to educate and inform the public. The Social Responsibility Theory of the Press (p. 298) provides the details of the actual role of the journalists. McManus (1992) stated the Theory of News as a Commodity (p.299), highlighting that media does not spend resources on informative and investigative reports. Instead, it tends to report sensationalist stories. Iyenger (1991) has laid stress on the Coverage of being 'more episodic than thematic.'

News reaches us after being 'stylized.' As [Nimmo and Combs \(1982\)](#) quoted, Walter Lippmann stressed that news and reality are two different things. It also discusses the element of pseudo-reality. The news media is referred to as the story media, which tends to create drama. It uses the formats of the entertainment industry and creates a fiction story out of reality.

There must be more professional criminologists to provide information on the given event. One of the aspects of moving away from professional content is the incorporation of nonprofessional sources. Barak (1988) said that there is more focus on government officials and less focus on academic experts.

[Vettehen, Nuiten, and Beentjes \(2001\)](#) suggested that though the audiences are diversified yet, some common themes generate a sensory reaction in all human beings. Background music, camera angles, specific effects are the indicators used to probe into the depth of the news story. These features are named 'tabloid packaging'.

Kozakowska (2013) said that Media Theory points out that it is no longer a question of 'information' rather a question of 'attention'. News on television is becoming famous for its entertaining qualities. It suggested that a moderate level of emotional element in the news story increase the liking of that story for the viewers ([Vettehen, Nuijten, and Peeters, 2008](#))

Hence it has been understood that journalism's move away from the typical trends is a matter of concern. According to [Kayode and Ridwan \(2003\)](#), to regain the public's trust, the news media must

abandon sensationalism and infotainment. Specific values are expected from journalists all over the world.

### Research Hypotheses

- H1:** Both Geo TV and ARY TV predominantly give sensational Presentations of the Panama Leaks issue.
- H2:** ARY gives a more sensational Presentation of the Panama Leaks issue than Geo News.
- H3:** Both Geo TV and ARY TV predominantly give sensational Coverage of the Panama Leaks issue.
- H4:** ARY gives more sensational news coverage of the Panama Leaks issue than Geo News.

### Research Method

In this study, the researchers applied content analysis to investigate the professional versus sensational tendencies in the Coverage and Presentation of Panama issues in Geo TV and ARY TV. The data for this study comes from April 4, 2016, to April 17, 2017) of Panama leaks reported on ARY News and Geo News. Only the 9 pm Bulletins were selected.

Gabel et al. claimed that sensationalism is similar to inducing a powerful sensory reaction in humans. They divided sensationalism into four categories: '(a) Basic Needs Content, (B) Tabloid Packaging, (C) Concreteness, and (D) Proximity' ([Vettehen, Nuiten, & Beentjes, 2001](#)). The present research takes the first two categories as building points. It adds a category of 'informative or shallowness' for the analysis.

Table I

Channels	Indicators
Geo News ARY News Tabloid packaging Camera angles	Criteria of the analysis Browes. SK discussed names and descriptions of shots defined by Thompson and associations of such shots to sensationalism ( <a href="#">Thompson &amp; Bowen, 1988</a> ).
Editing effects	Video effects and transitions like, Wipeouts, dissolves, fades, and cuts (what do they portray, e.g., emotional arousal, tension, action, etc. ( <a href="#">Thompson &amp; Bowen, p.76-96</a> ))
Background music	The signature tune of the news channel is not considered to be creating sensationalism, but Music/song from other forms of mass media or Sounds other than natural sounds are considered to be creating sensationalism

Channels	Indicators
Tone by the anchor/reporter	Taunting or Irrelevant rise and fall of the voice is considered sensationalist
Basic content needs	
Tickers	If it adds something regarding the issue or quotes the exact words = Professional Uses taunt and humor(entertaining) = sensationalist
Experts contacted for deep insight	Professionals/ academics scholars are considered experts
Intro of the news	Taunt = sensationalist Adds something to the knowledge = Professional
Informative or shallow	
Contribution to know the issue at hand	New concepts/resolutions/issues etc. discussed are explained in detail For those who do not have any background knowledge about the issue, does the news provides them insight?
Research about the facts and figures	If details/background knowledge about the documents/organizations/legislation has been put forward.

## Variables

- Sensational Presentation
- Professional Presentation
- Sensational Coverage
- Professional Coverage

attention-grabbing editing techniques, exciting and magnificent music effects and songs, taunting remarks and exhilarating laughers that result in rousing tone and funny and sniping tickers.

## Conceptual Definition

### Presentation

"Something presented: such as

- A: a symbol or image that represents something
- B: something set forth for the attention of the mind."

### Professional Presentation

Professionalism is defined as the use of precise and sleek camera angles, seamless transitions and consistent editing effects, natural background sounds, non-provoking anchors and reporters, and tickers that cite the topic.

### Coverage

"Inclusion within the scope of discussion or reporting, e.g. the coverage is given to the trial of the convicts."

### Sensational Coverage

Suppose news lacks the inclusion of experts on the subject matter and has only contacted the leaders from the political parties. In that case, the intro changes the pace of the entire subject. If the news story fails to educate people about the subject, if it simply educates the already-informed and focuses more on the conflicts, strikes, and criticism than on the facts and data, it falls under the category of sensational Coverage.

### Sensational

"Arousing or tending to arouse a quick, intense, and usually superficial interest, curiosity, or emotional reaction, e.g. sensational tabloid news."

### Professional

"Characterized by or conforming to the technical or ethical standards of a profession."

### Professional Coverage

Most media coverage is professional if it brings in relevant specialists from the area, begins with the introduction line that moulds the importance of the problem and public feelings, and educates the public about happenings. It gives in-depth study on all the organizations, issues, legislation, resolutions, and discussions on the topic.

## Operational Definition

### Sensational Presentation

Sensational news presentation contains dramatic and suspenseful camera angles, compelling and

## Findings

**Table 2.** Presentation of News

Tabloid packaging Basic content needs												
Channel	Sensational					Total	Professional					Total
	Camera Angles	Editing Effects	Background Music	Tone of reporter	Tickers		Camera Angles	Editing Effects	Background Music	Tone of Reporter	Tickers	
ARY News	5	126	87	119	78	415	54	50	21	117	286	528
Geo News	2	19	22	26	28	97	35	66	61	90	395	647
Total	7	145	109	145	106	512	89	116	82	207	681	1175

As shown in Table 2, the Panama issue is mainly presented in a professional manner on the two TV channels. As suggested by the larger frequency for the professional category, the hypothesis is not supported. Very few camera angles were dramatic, including the one in Imran Khan's address which had some quick zoom-ins and outs and dolly shots of the setting. The Rolling of the screen was concluded with some dramatic musical effects. News had some eye-catching wipeouts, blinking images, vibrant wipeouts, along with the black and white effects and quick, dramatic transitions. Though no to very less information was provided on details like CPIJ, Judicial Commission, Punjab Assembly's protest, PM's offshore companies, 7 Agenda's given by Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf Party (PTI) in National Assembly, but the overall professional Presentation outnumbered these flaws. Most of the camera shots during SOT, PTC and conferences were according to the ethical norms.

Professional editing moves were taken even when there was room to play with it, e.g. while showing tweets of the stakeholders of Panama Leaks, certain fights and PM's medical examination in London that gave rise to a lot of controversies, including Imran Khan's tweets against PMLN's protest outside his first ex-wife's home, nothing was sensationalized.

The use of music was careful, especially while showing serious details like a virtual map of Nescol and Nelson limited and protested against David Cameroon. Also, PM's flight to London, Aitaza Ahsan's (PPP member) speech and several other fights in Parliament, nothing was sensationalized.

Sensational Presentation was more prevalent in ARY News than that of Geo News. Its use of dramatic camera angles and editing effects were more than that of Geo News. Mr. Musharaf's tweets, pictures of Tehmina Durrani, fight between ARY and PML (N) govt., National Assembly's boycott of PTV was sensationally presenting the news. Striking editing effects during Bilawal Bhutto's speech and black and white transitions in Chaudhry Nisar's and Imran Khan's fight were amalgamated with red fire flames that bisected the screen into two halves. But camera angles and editing effects of Geo News were comparatively professional.

Be it the lightning editing effects, quick wipeouts. Be it the taunts or turning the image into mosaic-like whitish pictures during the fights, ARY exceeded the sensational Presentation of Geo News. Black and white effects, split screens, folding images, dramatic wipeouts, discolouring the images, blackouts, and echo of words to stress them marked the Presentation of issues like PM/Zardari's fight, Tahir ul Qadri's remarks, meeting between finance ministers of Panama and Pakistan, rejection of the heading of Panama case by Judges, etc.

Press releases by PMLN, tweets of Mariam Nawaz, National Assembly's session nothing was sensationalized. In addition to that, ARY's use of background music also added a stunning effect. Reporting about the details of offshore companies, allegations on Shaukat Khanum, Hassan Nawaz's interview, address of Imran Khan were sometimes sarcastically supported by a National Anthem and sometimes by other dramatic musical effects. Song

rah mein un says mulaqat hogae(we met them accidentally on the way) was inserted in the background of a sudden meeting between Khan and Nisar. Though the meeting prompted Geo News to include a song in the background, ARY took the lead by including others such as is pyar ko mein kia nam dun (what should I call this love), a

song like gol maal hai sb (all is well) while showing interviews with the Prime Minister's son, and dramatic music in the background of specific tweets by officials. Apart from using different musical beats on Imran Khan's request to use PTV for his public address, Geo News did nothing.

**Table 3.** Coverage of Panama issue in Geo TV and ARY TV

Basic Content Needs Informative or Shallow										
Channel	Sensational				Total	Professional				Total
	Experts	Intro	Issues	Research		Experts	Intro	Issues	Research	
ARY News	75	4	29	45	153	13	10	41	9	73
Geo News	46	6	20	9	81	8	8	35	28	79
Total	121	10	49	54	234	21	18	76	37	152

As shown in table 3, the two TV channels mainly reported the Panama issue through sensational lenses. Most of the time, there wasn't even a single law expert on a given day. All the politicians like Chaudhry Nisar(Interior Minister), Maula Baksh Chandio(PPP), Zahid Khan(ANP), Khwajah Asif(PMLN), Imran Khan(PTI), Khursheed Shah(PPP), Denial Aziz(PMLN), Fazal Ur Rehman(JUI-F), Iftikhar Chaudhry(Former Chief Justice), Advocate Salman Ahmad Raja(PMLN's Advocate) were contacted. No expert opinion was fetched on the issue of protest on the D Square of Islamabad. Instead, the entire focus remained on the arguments and escalating fight between the Government and opposition. The main focus was on the relationship between Chaudhry Nisar and Imran Khan.

Inquiry commission that remained in the news for the number of days was never the central focus. Law experts who belonged to specific parties like Ahmer Bilal Sufi and Salman Akram Raja (PMLN) were merely shown as law experts instead of mentioning their party affiliations. Though the issue at hand was well explained most of the time, fewer details about judicial commission, Committee under Chief Justice, Punjab Assembly's resolution, and PTV's boycott of National Assembly's Session were given. Reporting left a lot of vacant spaces by providing less to no details.

Regarding the research about facts and figures, no details on the probable Inquiry Commission or

handling of the issue to Supreme Court, no law mentioned regarding judicial commission under Chief Justice, no details or law experts on the debate about Shaukat Khanam endowment funds. Possible Terms of Reference (TORs), Punjab Assembly's resolution, and International Audit Company were not given much attention. News provided no in-depth information about the Inquiry Commission under Chief Justice of Supreme Court.

The news's introduction included allegations and fights in the National Assembly's Session, including taunts on Government. The sensational intro also included mocking the politicians by pointing out that politicians went to London, leaving their politics in Pakistan. But most of the introductions were professional in both Geo and ARY.

The news did provide firsthand information in most cases and had informative intros. However, it lacked behind in providing expert opinions and well-researched material on the issue, lacking the issue's overall in-depth Coverage. The Coverage is thus considered to be more inclined towards sensationalism rather than professionalism.

As shown in table 2, ARY TV coverage was more sensational than the Coverage by Geo TV. ARY focused more on the politicians who were part of the scandal or opposed to that scandal like Aitazaz Ahsan, Imran Ismael (PTI), Rana Sanullah(PMLN), Imran Khan, etc. No one was contacted for the legal details of Shamrock Limited,



the 200 elite families mentioned by Arshad Sharif, no judge was contacted for the details of the Judicial Commission and Shoab Saral's rejection as chairman, the address on State Television (PTV), and no details about Hassan Nawaz's flat. Clips of the Bollywood film Knockout were also added. At the same time, expert opinion and analysis were obtained from Kashif Abbasi and Waseem Badami Senior Anchor Persons, Arshad Sharif as an analyst, Indian Finance Minister, and British Newspaper Independent.

Intro of the ARY news was more professional than that of Geo news. It gave more factual information, e.g., information about the issue being discussed. Others included wording like *Panama mein aik our Tehelka khez inkashaf* (one more revelation in the Panama Leaks).

The way it provided information to the uninformed audience was also equal to that of Geo News. But ARY provided no background on the legalities and demand of Imran Khan for the address on PTV as that of Geo news. Geo News covered the Election Commission's suspected role, money transfer regulations, retired judges in-depth, the participation of institutes like the NAB and their probable responsibilities, and footage from extensive talk programs.

It also discussed in depth what Panama Leaks is and what offshore companies and ICIJ is. The Australian investigations or how the material was leaked were not mentioned by ARY. There is no evidence or records to back up the PM's claim of incompetence. Proposed law creating a panel to be led by the Chief Justice lacks specificity. There were no specifics concerning Shamrock Limited, the participation of around 200 wealthy families, the legalities surrounding Prime Ministers and the opposition's address on PTV, or Cameron's travel to Panama; instead, the attention was only on the protest and called for Cameron's resignation. Geo News provided details about the possible Inquiry Commission, gave details on the Ethics Committee.

In contrast, ARY did not give any such details. It also provided pointers of the meeting between PTI and PPP leaders, but ARY focused more on how this meeting got planned live in an ARY talk show. Geo News focused more on the possible

head of the inquiry commission. He put forward all about Justice Usmani in a more detailed way. Geo News provided more details about the officials' meetings, about London visits, about protests outside Imran Khan's ex-in-laws, and TORs. Thus ARY's coverage was more sensational than that of Geo.

## Conclusion

This study investigates how the two leading TV channels Geo TV and ARY TV, presented and covered the Panama issue. While applying the theory of News Values by Galtung and Ruge, the study found that both the channels professionally presented the row over Panama. However, the content (Coverage) was more sensational than professional. Separately, ARY News presentation and Coverage were more sensational than Geo News.

The two most competitive channels of Pakistani news media were found to be in utter competition while encountered the most controversial issue, The Panama Leaks. The reporting on the issue hit the screens in mid-April of 2016. With the issue of being national and international, the role of the news media was not only discussed on public forums. However, it was also considered in the court hearings of the Panama issue. Being the most significant stakeholder, the media presented the issue professionally but lacked in providing professional content.

The Presentation of the news channels was more professional than sensational. While analyzing the news presentation, five essential categories, including Camera angles, editing effects, background music, and tone of the reporter and tickers, were analyzed. Apart from editing effects, all the other four cues were found to be more professional. A total figure of 1175 from both the channels portrayed the professional practices compared to that of only 512 sensational.

When channels were assessed separately for their sensational Presentation, ARY was found guiltier with the figure of 415. In contrast, Geo News only indicated sensationalism in its Presentation 97 times. In all the five cues, the

sensational practices of ARY outnumbered the Geo News stunning presentation.

Coverage was analyzed with the four essential indicators, including input from the experts, intro of the news, tendency to which the news added about the issue at hand, and research about the reported events. Though the intro and the firsthand information of the channels were more professional than sensational, the sensational practice in the inclusion of expert opinion and research about the facts outnumbered professional practices—the

assessment of all these cues brought forward a figure of 234 sensational indicators compared to 152 professionals.

When the Coverage was assessed separately, ARY was more sensational than Geo News. Apart from the intro of the news, ARY was found to be more sensational in all the other cues. Overall, 153 sensational indicators proved it to be more sensational, with only 81 cues of Geo news being sensational.



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