Agenda Framing of Social Issues in Pakistani Press: A Study of Daily Dawn and Daily Jang

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Abstract   *Media shape public opinion. As a powerful tool of communication, it prioritizes issues and gives them coverage according through editorial judgment. Agenda-setting theory explains how media influences the topics in public agenda. In 1968, McCombs and Donald Shaw studied presidential elections of the United States and established a strong relationship between election issue and media coverage. This study has used their theory of agenda setting to explain how two daily newspapers of Pakistan, Dawn and Jang has covered unemployment and energy crisis on their front and back pages during a time period of one year. Content analysis method is applied to investigate the treatment of news in both papers. Findings explain that Jang gave more coverage to these social issues as compared to Dawn. This study recommends more attention to social issues.*

Introduction

Media is an effective tool in reality construction. It seeks attention and eventually changes the pattern of minds of its viewers. It is a powerful medium to inform and educate us about the world we are living, realities around us and their intentional shaping of our opinion about issues and affecting our understanding of their importance. Precisely, it makes a rundown of issues in our mind with priority to those it covers more frequently. Therefore, media managers give repeated coverage to those stories they find news worthy but in the contrary those stories are considered more significant by the viewers as compare to those not repeated again and again. Print media has a different science. Front and back page of any newspaper is always considered the most important one. Therefore, any story if get its coverage on front as lead or super lead or back page, it makes more impact and gets more attention of the people (McCombs, 2002). This role of media is taken by scholars as a role which shapes opinions and portrays reality (Yousuf, et.

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al., 2013). That is why Russell believes that newspaper coverage and public opinion has a direct link and relationship (Russell, 2013).

News coverage has implausible role in nation's agenda. It helps the people to focus on few key problems and that focus is solely an outcome of news coverage. People by default cannot pay attention to independent sources to acquire, confirm and analyze news. Their facts and reality about the world they are living is shaped by the information provided by the media. They attach their attention to certain topics and problems, which is a result of the influence of news they get day by day (McCombs, 2002).

Development scholars believe that media is the foremost tool or the medium in agenda setting of the people. People by nature are seeking knowledge and media provide it to their door step. It is easily accessible, smartly digestible. This role of being a primary source of information places it at the top of the pyramid (Vasterman & Dirkzwager, 2005). Therefore we need to look into how media frame information and tells the people about "what to think" but this what leads towards not only what to think but what to think about (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Focus of this research is that how our national media place social issues on its agenda. Print media is still popular in rural as well as urban centre of Pakistan. Dawn is popular among upper middle and upper class as well as educated elite, students and top businessmen. Whereas, Jang is popular among all those can write and read Urdu. This study is meant to explore:

- How print media treat news items related to the social issues of the country?
- How media plays its agenda setting role?
- How innate power and influence of media is being used to shape public opinion about the issues directly related to the quality of life of a commoner?

Study has used content analysis method. An opinion survey was conducted about local issues and content of both DAWN and Jang was analyzed to understand which issues are more frequently covered, how framing is applied on news stories concerning social issues and which paper gives more coverage to social issues.

About the Study

Walter Lippmann (1922) pioneered the discussion of agenda-setting in his book, "*Public Opinion*". It was Lippmann who first wrote about pictures and events of the world and the role media played in it (Vu, H. T. & McCombs. 2014). Walter in his discussion pointed out that pictures of media do not provide enough information for comprehensive understanding rather it provides a distorted version of reality. Media provides images of reality which possible can be different from

reality itself. Besides this critical commentary he acknowledged this fact that images are important because they help us in our perceptions.

Mostly, scholars' focus has been on social issues when they are looking at agenda-setting. Issues directly related to the lives of the people. Therefore, Agenda-setting studies revolve around public opinions, role of media, influence study and perception (Vu, & McCombs, 2014).

This study is an investigation into how our national press perceive issues, how it make their rundown, how it prioritize news items, and eventually influence the silence of agenda in national discourse (Mikusova, 2010). This study is following McCombs and Shaw model in which they had tested this hypothesis and further has theorized the results (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). This study would look deeply into the national issues of Pakistan through a comparison of public and print media agendas. Two newspapers are selected for their reach and popularity which are Daily Dawn and Jang. One is English and other is Urdu newspaper. One year time period (1st of January 2015 to 31st of Dec. 2015) was taken to analyze the content of both the papers. This study is following the pattern of research done by McCombs on Chapel Hill voters in the presidential elections of United States back in 1968. In that study, voters were asked about the key issues of the campaign and the result was compared with the content of media (McCombs, 1972).

Sadaf (2011) made a similar study on the coverage of judicial restoration movement in both English and Urdu dailies. He explored how both the newspapers in Pakistan gave coverage to the issue of judicial restoration. His findings suggest no different between English or Urdu dailies coverage.

Ashid Shafi (2001) asserts that agenda-setting theory is tested mostly in developed democracies. Therefore he believes that this theory needs to be tested more frequently in developing countries to get an even handed picture. His work was based in Bangladesh where he studied the effects of agenda-setting in developing countries. He applied same survey and content analysis techniques to gather the data. His study suggests the application of agenda-setting more in developing countries.

Freyenberger (2013) study concentrates on Amanda Knox who was charged in Italy and sentenced for imprisonment for four years. Freyenberger looked into five hundred newspapers, published around the globe. He found interesting trends through that content analysis. His findings suggested that 25.9% coverage in UK was not in favor of Knox. Various newspapers of Thailand, China, Korea, Australia and New Zealand covered that story on front or back pages. He established a relationship between his trial and news coverage in international press.

Riaz (2008) measured the coverage of news in two national dailies, Dawn and Jang. He found terrorism, judicial restoration, Lal Masjid issue, Indo-Pak and energy and food security as the main issues covered by both the newspapers. He

prioritized these issues according to their coverage and food security got fourth position in his rundown.

Social Issues

Kee explained in his work that constant projection of any issue by the media convince its audience to think about it (Kee, *et. al. ,* 2017). When issues related to society and her everyday problems are taken up for constant coverage by the media; it certainly impacts the minds of the people. Life of a common man is not affected directly by foreign policy, fiscal management and national security decisions but from price hike, electricity shortage, traffic jams, waste management, environment, health and education. Watson, therefore wrote in his book that social issues are everyday issues, problems of the people, entire society (Shakespeare & Watson, 2001).

Social Issues of the time

Energy Crises (Electricity)

This study made a survey and asked people about the problems they are facing. Maximum reply by the people talked and focused energy crisis. Other than energy crisis, good governance, corruption, poor situation in lower courts were few other items on the list.

Energy crisis is a global issue. Many countries are facing this problem and Pakistan is among top ten. Various scholars and energy experts suggest various measures to settle this issue. Solar power, wind power and hydal-power are alternative solutions, quite suitable with the natural resources of Pakistan (Siddique, & Wazir, 2016).

Energy availability and prices determine the cost of production. Country cannot compete in global market of exports if its input cost is higher and electricity determines input cost. Energy cost is the primary reason behind shrinking volume of our exports and country progress is severely at stake (Agarwal, 1986).

Masood, & Shah. (2012) assert that energy crisis is defining Pakistan's' problems. It is the main hindrance in its development. Ali also has the similar conclusion. He believes that economic growth is not possible a goal until energy problem is not fixed (Ali, 2010). Some researchers highlight the gravity of situation and quote numbers to further their stance. Kokas shared data that 75 industrial units in Karachi and ten more in Faislabad were closed down because energy shortage made it impossible for them to operate (Κόκας & Kokas, 2015).

Unemployment

If people those are able and willing to work fail to find it, they are called unemployed. This is considered as an important "social issues of market economies" (Akram, 2011). There are two kinds of issues; one is that human resource is underutilized. This is a chronic social and economic issue in which highly qualified individuals do such a job which does not fit and suites to their credentials. Second issue is that available labor force fails to get any job. Between 1990 and 2011, lowest unemployment rate was 3.13 and highest was 7.8. Lowest unemployment was in December 1990 and highest was in June 2002. Asif has noted reasoning of this trend and pointed out population increase, budget deficit, imbalance in imports and exports, growth rate and foreign direct investment as primary reason behind unemployment (Asif, 2013).

Unemployment is caused by various factors including counseling and guidance, non-availability of data about professions and the demands of professions, poor level of education, no connection between industry and academia, and all of these factors are responsibility for this problem in Pakistan (Qayyum, & Siddiqui, 2007).

Aqil estimated two million unemployed work force in Pakistan and concluded that many of our social and economic problems are directly linked to unemployment (Aqil et. al., 2014). When global financial crunch occupied the world economics, nearly 34 million people get unemployed in 2007. In coming three years young population also increased from 73.5 to 77.7 million (Cheema, 2014). Unemployment has direct link with crimes. Youth, undirected and disillusioned, becomes a potential security threat (Gillani, 2015). This problem has no easy and simple solution. Society and government has to work on multiple ends to meet this goal. Overall growth rate, more investment, more employment opportunities, stability and peace, a well thought out plan to restructure economy, industry and services, more coordinated education according to the requirements of job market, all and many other factors can help in the solution of this problem of unemployment (Fujita & Kanemoto, 2014).

Media should divert peoples' attention towards issues like unemployment, energy and environment. This study is an attempt to explain that to what extent it is actually happening in Pakistan. This study would help us understand how news is covered and framed, to what extent it hit the core of our social problems, whether it enable the reader to understand the issues or not and what scope it has to do its job properly by sensitizing the people at large.

Agenda Setting and Framing

After the ground breaking study of Chapel Hill several hundred studies have been done. Scholars have analyzed the coverage of media with their personally conducted surveys to get more reliable results (Moy, & Bosch 2013).

Winter and Rogers (1982) has come up with a new dimension of this theory which says that timing and strength of the theory changes when issue is changed. Inflation, unity, and unemployment all three are different issues and when theory is applied relationship of agenda-setting changes. They explained that one single issue could have direct correlation with agenda setting coverage but when issues are multiple, it is more likely that attention of the viewer would change and divert among them.

Salwen and Matera (1997) conducted a study in which they looked into illegal immigration and news framing. This study was conducted in two states of United States named Arizona and Phoenix. People were asked about most important and significant issue. Audience of the survey was consisted on both Hispanics and non-Hispanic population. Because Hispanic felt illegal immigration as a threat therefore they found it the most important issue but those who migrated and were not Hispanics, they differ with Hispanics on this account.

Framing

It is a technique through which issues are presented with a clear meaning. Reality does not exist but the way we perceive it. When media presents a reality it actually highlights some of its aspects and downplays some others. This technique is called framing. Framing can change the perception of the audience about any issue. When media report any event, he frames it in a context. That context helps to shape the reality of that information. For example, twin tower attacks in New York were framed by mainstream media as an act of terror but Jihadi organizations frame the same story as a success to their agenda, reach and influence. It also was framed to establish this fact that USA is not invincible and it is possible to attack her from within. On foreign policy front, most of the times, media frame news within national security doctrine. Every country has its version of reality and news is framed to endorse that particular version.

Different studies have been done by researchers to explain and explore this concept of framing (Okoro, & Odemelam, 2013). Framing research explains that any alternative way to present the story could and would have a different impact on the audience. People would have perceived the issue differently (Iyengar & Simon, 1993). Agenda-setting and framing are interconnected concepts. Agenda setting helps us understand the macro level agenda but framing helps us to understand the micro management of news to further the agenda already decided. Framing theory states that, "media focus attention on certain events and then places them within a specific meaning" (Riaz, 2008).

Methodology

This study will use content analysis technique. This study will collect all the news

 stories about energy crisis and unemployment published on front and back pages of Dawn and Jang from 1ˢᵗ of January 2015 till 31ˢᵗ of December 2015. The selection of the papers is based on purposive sampling. Lahore edition of both the newspaper is taken for this research. The rationale for the selection of these papers is based on the fact that in English, Dawn is the most popular and read newspaper of the country whereas in Urdu newspaper Jang stands ahead of all others. Both have considerable influence on their audience and both media houses have their own television channel as well.

Findings and Discussion

The space (length) for each social issue story was measured centimeter per column. Daily Dawn donated a space of 5150 centimeter to energy crises and 1402 centimeter to unemployment. On the other hand Daily Jang (Urdu newspaper) donated a space of 8820 centimeter to energy issue and 1560 centimeter to unemployment.

Table 1. Slant of the Issue of Energy Crises in Dawn and Jang

Newspapers	Favorable (%)	Unfavorable (%)	Neutral (%)	Total	X^2	df	p
Daily Dawn	130 (54.16)	60(25)	50(20.84)	240(100)			
Daily Jang	162(54.19)	92(30.76)	45(15.05)	299(100)	4.10	2	ns
Total	292	152	95	**539**			

This table illustrates the computed value of chi square, which is 4.10. This value is lower than critical value which is 5.99 at 0.05 and 9.21 at 0.01. This trend makes it insignificant. However, if we look at the null hypothesis, that is very much present and cannot be rejected.

That is why, data does not support the claim of any significant difference. Both the papers, Dawn and Jang have covered the stories of energy shortage. If we look into the percentage, Dawn stands on 54.16% and Jang at 54.19.

Table 2. Slant of the Issue of Unemployment

Newspapers	Favorable (%)	Unfavorable (%)	Neutral (%)	Total	X^2	df	p
Daily Dawn	190 (69.85)	55(20.22)	27(9.93)	272(100)			
Daily Jang	195(69.15)	55(19.50)	32(11.35)	282(100)	0.31	2	ns.
Total	385	110	59	**554**			

Chi square value of 0.31 is lower than critical value which is 5.99. Similarly 0.01 is lower than 9.21. Therefore is not significant at all. Therefore, null hypothesis can't be rejected. By looking at this trend we can safely conclude that no prominent difference is found in the coverage of both the newspapers on the stories of unemployment. Another trend, visible from this data is evident on this fact that 69.85% stories of Dawn were in conformity with the policy of the Government whereas 69.15% of Jang. We can conclude that Daily Dawn and Daily Jang both the newspapers cover stories of unemployment and gave significant coverage to the issue.

Framing of the Issues

Framing of both the issues, energy and unemployment were positive and negative. Positive means such a framing which favor the government and negative means such a framing which criticize the government. This study has categorized framing as pro and antigovernment.

Table 3. Framing of Energy Crises

Newspapers	Friend / Pro Govt. (%)	Foe/ Anti-Govt. (%)	Total	X^2	df	p
Daily Dawn	66(38)	110 (62)	176			
Daily Jang	80(36.36)	140 (63.64)	220	0.02	1	ns.
Total	146(100)	250 (100)	**396**			

This tale explains that critical value of chi square is 3.84 at a significant level of 0.05. Computed value of chi square is 0.02 which is less than 3.84. This difference cannot be taken as significant. Nevertheless, null hypothesis can't be rejected. Therefore it is concluded that newspaper has used pro-government framing. When we look at the framing of Dawn its 38% stories are pro-government. However, 62% stories of Dawn are anti-government. In comparison to Dawn, 36.36% stories are framed in favor of the government and 63.64% are anti-government. It means both the papers, Dawn and Jang have taken anti-government stance in their framing.

Table 4. Framing of the Issue of Unemployment

Newspapers	Friend / Pro Govt. (%)	Foe/Anti-Govt. (%)	Total	X^2	df	p
Daily Dawn	13 (37)	22 (63)	35			
Daily Jang	16 (39.02)	25(60.98)	41	0.16	1	ns.
Total	29(100)	47 (100)	**76**			

The table (on previous page) explains that chi square is 0.16. However the critical value is 3.84. The level of significance according to this table is 0.05. Therefore it is not significant. We can conclude from this table that newspapers have used anti-government framing on the issue of energy crisis. As far the issue of unemployment is concerned, 63% stories published by Dawn were anti-government, whereas, Jang published 60.98%. This result explains that both the newspapers used anti-government framing in their news about unemployment.

Conclusion

This study has found that daily Jang has been giving more coverage than Dawn to the issues of energy crises and unemployment. Daily Dawn and Daily Jang gave more importance to the social issues of energy and unemployment. The framing of the papers in their news stories was anti-government. This trend explains the way these two national dailies cover stories on social issues and contribute into their role to educate the people about the issues of their daily lives.

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