

Media and Journalism

Conflict in Balochistan and its Impact on the objectivity of news reporting in mainstream media; A comparative study of TV and Press

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Abstract

This study provides a comparative study of media coverage of issues of the province arise by the recent conflict in mainstream media of Pakistan. Thematic content analysis method has been applied in the study to determine how media covers issues subjectively. The study tries to determine the reasons why mainstream media prioritises the issues and covers selective issues due to filters and how that ultimately costs the media its journalistic objectivity while covering conflict in journal and the province of Balochistan in particular. Systematic sampling of two leading newspapers and two TV channels were done and the stories were divided in themes to understand the objectivity of the news stories. The study tries to identify the factors due to which TV and newspaper set their priority in selecting and covering issues of regions in conflict.

1.1 Introduction

Conflicts have powerful impact on social economic and political domains of societies. The conflict in Balochistan has same effect on every aspect mentioned which also include Mass Media. Media has power to mediate, inform and even conflagrate the crisis. The study tries to understand how the conflict and its peripheral issues effect the objectivity of media. In the times of crisis people depend on the media for information that shapes their opinion about certain issues. The opinion is important because people react and respond to their opinions shaped by the media.

During crisis people rely on mass media which provide them with the facts and information which ultimately help the common man to form their opinion about certain event or issue. "The world that we have to deal with politically is out of reach, out of sight, out of mind. It has to be

explored, reported, imagined. Man is no Aristotelian god contemplating all existence at one glance". (Walter, Lippman 1922) The study will determine that how state institution influence the message of the media which untimely shapes the mainstream popular discourse about the certain communities and regions in times of conflict. "Research on the role of the mass media in the social construction of reality carries important social implications" (Bandura, 2002,).

The expected outcomes of the study will determine the journalistic objectivity in covering Balochistan in conflict and will try to investigate whether the coverage is objective or subjective to implicit or explicit filters.

1.2 Background and Rationale of the Study

It was the British Imperial regime where the journalism for the first time started as a profession. In its first phase journalism was dominantly done by business communities of Parsis and Hindus. The sole purpose of the newspapers was to advertise and publicize the products and policies of British Rulers. The journalism was done in English language which was an alien language for the common masses of Balochistan. Calling these printed materials newspapers is just formality because 'News' did not exist in these papers from scratch (Naghmana Tahir, 2006).. Historically, there was no force to effect the objectivity of the newspapers. In the subsequent years during the last quarter of the second decade of the 20th century local political activists and parties started using journalism as a tool for political mobilization and criticizing the ruler for their misdoings; these are the times where the laws were made as the objective news reporting started creating problems for the rulers. They started forcing the journalists through laws to influence their objectivity.

After Partition of the Indian subcontinent and annexation of Balochistan with Pakistan a faction in Balochistan resisted the annexation and revolted against the government. The conflict between the state and the dissidents still continues with ups and downs with its pace. Media and its message becomes important when it comes to politicization and mobilization, this importance of the media and its influence in opinion formation. The current investigation seeks to add to the body of research literature by analyzing the content of mainstream media and their coverage of different issues in a conflicting situation. Moreover, the study will also help in determining the factors which affect the objectivity of the media. The research will also try to answer the questions that in the federation of Pakistan how disproportionate dissemination of information through mass media is. Answering these questions may help us to understand our place in a mediated global village subjected to terrorism and other disasters and conflicts.

1.3 Objectives

The objectives of the proposed study are to:

- a) Determine the objectivity of journalism and influences on it in covering issues of Balochistan.
- b) Understand that how mainstream media gives coverage to the province of Balochistan, whether the coverage is objective or subjective to any implicit and explicit filter.
- c) to understand the phenomenon how there is a difference in policy of newspaper and television covering Balochistan and its issues

1.4 Objectivity and Mainstream media in Pakistan

The journalistic objectivity has its two components. First, a journalist should not express their personal convictions and beliefs and second enough space must be given to the parties without favoring one. (Entman, Nelkin 1989)

After promulgation of PEMRA media witnessed mushroom growth, apparently the objectives of PEMRA were to accommodate social responsible press to make media an important tool for change but the neo-liberal press proved otherwise. The media is founding component of the democracy but in Pakistan it has become a challenge to the society (Gul, Mehnaz & Obaid, Zia & Ali, Shahid. (2017).

Lack of training to journalistic investigation and media pressure by the state covering Balochistan the mainstream media in Pakistan is functioning as propaganda tool instead of reporting issues and events objectively.

“The media covers Baluchistan's ethnic and sectarian issues with a propagandistic approach and supports the stances of human rights abuses with nationalistic approach and covers the objectivity under national security”. (M.Z Zubair Iqbal, Shabir Hussain)

1.5 Theoretical and conceptual framework

There are number of studies conducted to identify and determine the factors which effect the objectivity of media in general and in conflict situations in particular. State and the political and administrative system of the states determine the relationship of press and state and its public and then the media is allowed to play its role. The following theories may help to identify how the following filters effect the media objectivity.

1.5.1 Normative theories of press

The normative theories of press and state try to understand the relationship of the mass media and its impact on society ((Sibert et al, 1956). The press is divided in four categories in the normative theory of press which are:

- i) *Authoritarian theory*
- ii) *Libertarian theory of press*
- iii) *Social responsibility theory* and;
- iv) *Soviet press*

Press is restricted and all news and stories are published with strict press advice in authoritarian press. The press is authoritarian in countries with dictatorial regimes and monarchies. There is no space for criticism of the authorities. The freedom of press is subjected to the will and interests of the ruling class. Countries with mature democracies have free press and the press has liberty to say and criticize the rulers but absolute freedom and according to socially responsible press which believe in freedom of press but with certain accountabilities and responsibilities.

The nature of press and state relationship determines the objectivity of media. The press in Pakistan is mix of all models. The media is free by constitution but there are number of restrictions and filters in practice. ((Sibert et al, 1956)

According to Noam Chomsky's big media model Ownership of media, Advertising, the source news, common masses and a common enemy filters the message which costs media its objectivity and freedom Similarly, the same filters function, influence and pressure the media in Pakistan which directly has effect on coverage issues prevailing in Baluchistan (Hermen, Chomsky.1988)

1.4 Methodology

Media content opens a window which gives us access to the process of mass communication.

“medium is the message” ultimately means that message is as important as the medium. In this respect, the difference between meaning and the message is significant. The visible text are not what seen, the meaning imbedded in message different imbedded meanings in it.

Systematic sampling is relatively more accurate and have particularity than random sampling (Babbies,1986) by keeping this in view we selected 4 months TV programmes of two news channels and two newspapers and further divided issues and covered events in themes for thematic content analysis. To identify the Universe in sample unit every news story where the word Balochistan has been used with its relevance to cover any event and issue regarding Balochistan were added.

to identify the universe and the followed procedure of selecting the stories was designed to; every news story where the word Balochistan has been used with its relevance to coverage of its issues. Audit Bearue of Circulation and Target Rating Points were taken as primary source for newspaper and Television respectively.

Systematic sampling of Last six months' newspapers was done with interval of 07. Two highly circulated newspapers Daily Dawn and Daily Express Tribune were selected as Unit of analysis. 9:00 PM News Bulletin was selected from Two news channels with highest TRP ratings. The fours news outlets make these reflection of mainstream media.

1.5 Results and conclusion

In the conducted study and doing comparative analysis of National news stories of newspaper and television brought substantial information that due their difficulties and nature both medium have their own specific characters regarding the objectivity.

The results of the study were accomplished by following two major steps. One, gathering the content and second analyzing it. A general perspective and ground is important to analyze the results in specific perspective.

A total number of 328 news stories were analyzed and coded. The stories covered in the daily Dawn and The Express Tribune were 201 (88.41 percent) and two research questions were tested. The objectivity itself is subjective to different explicit and implicit filters but the results showed that the print media give more objective coverage to the issues of Balochistan then Television.

. The results of the shows that the selected newspaper give more coverage to the issues of Balochistan than selected TV channels. Fig.1

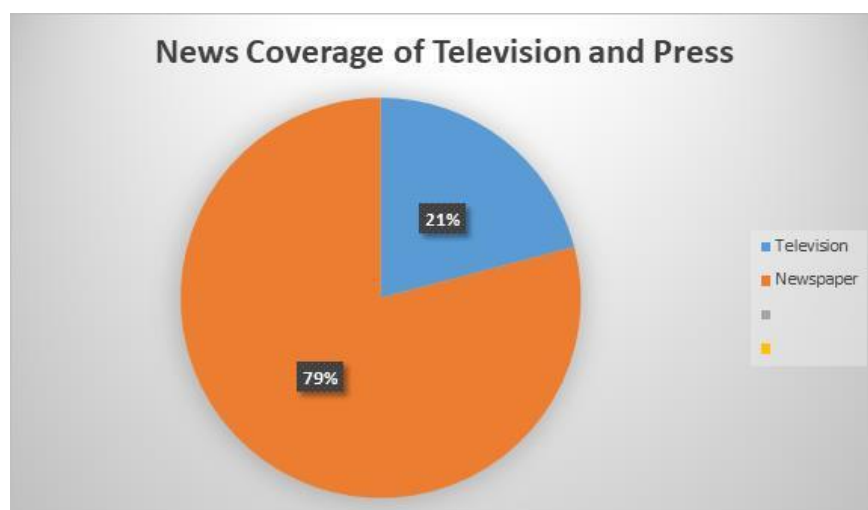


Fig.1

The other research question was that *How and which news filters effect the news objectivity of news while covering the issues of Balochistan and much time and space are given to the issues (political, social, economic) of Baluchistan in mainstream media?*

The figures.1 328 stories were published which reflected the selected themes opted for the analysis showed that the number of selected issues were relatively irrelevant to the issues regarding conflict or issues that subsequently emerged from conflict.

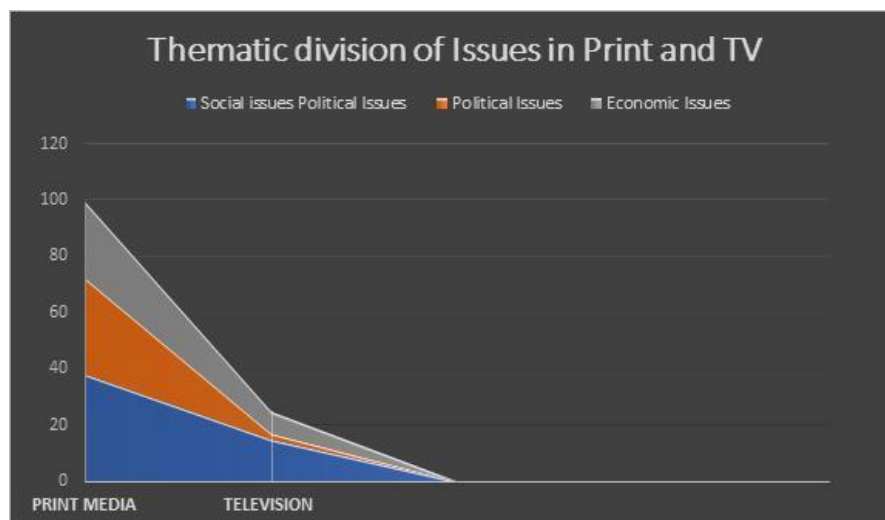
The number of stories published and broadcasted in the two leading newspapers and TV channels for selected sample of six months is only 146. Daily Dawn which is the highest circulated national newspaper published only 651 column inches in thirty editions. Balochistan is 45% landmass of the country and the daily space on mainstream newspaper is only 21 inches. The data shows that the time and space given to the province is very less and the data validates the research questions that different pressure and filters leads to less coverage of issues of the province.

While analyzing the content for selected sample for television the number of news in 6 months broadcasted was only 03. the sample size was extended to 8 months to remove the reliability test. The numbers validate the hypothesis that the province has not given enough space on mainstream media for its issues.

Total number of news stories on selected TV channels were 28 with average of 54 seconds. Total broadcasted time on selected sample was 25 minutes in aired time of 900 minutes. The nature of the stories was mostly in form of political statements.

The data analyzed in the study testifies and confirms the reported content in mainstream media is selective, filtered and biased. To test the validity and objectivity of published content was coded into: one, issues reported on desk, second, issues in form of statements and third issues that were identified by opposition. The results showed that 58 percent of stories were in form of statements by ruling parties and officials which carried verbs like CM “stressed” “ordered” and “showed concerns” Fig.2

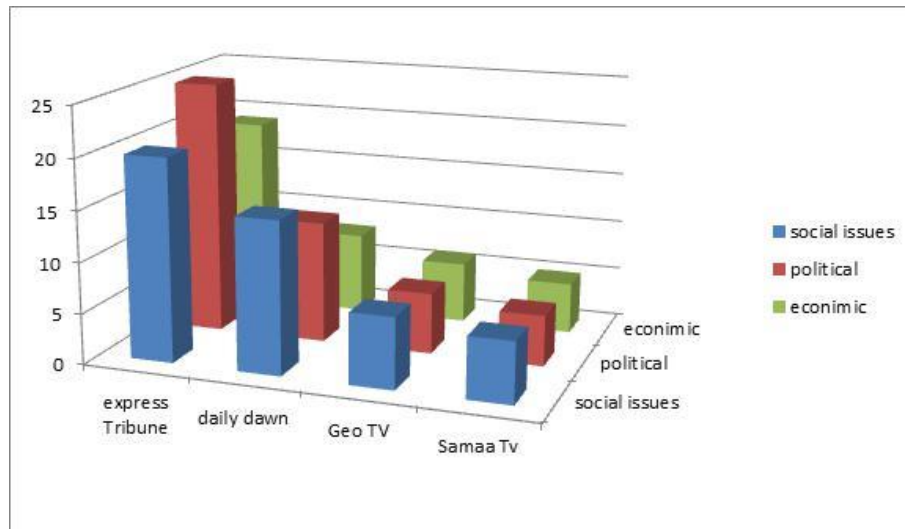
Fig.2



The analyzed data showed that dominantly the stories were from state corridors to support the government and propagate and reinforce its agenda in issues to discourage media outlets to discuss conflict and issues born in result.

Systematic sampling for three months of August, September and October 2019 shows that not even a single story was broadcasted on Samma TV with any story reflects the province and its issues. It does not mean that no event newsworthy happened in the mentioned time. Fig.3

Fig.3



In the same time news stories aired in channel which are: “Goats in Multan on august 9, singing kids event in Lahore on 24 august 2019, and a story showed teacher demonstrating for their permanent status. This shows that the mainstream media gives time and space to non-issues in rest of the parts of country and on the contrary there cannot be a single issue to report in three months’ data above-mentioned shows that the issues of province are least covered in mainstream media and the covered content lacks the objectivity and presents one-way information dominantly in form of statements from government officials and Member of Parliament from the ruling party.

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