



Representation of Trivial Issues and Characters in Pakistan's Print Media: Analysis of The News & Daily Jang

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Abstract

Present study is focused to analyze the presence of nonissues and unwanted characters in Pakistani newspapers. Study's main aim is to highlight the reason behind presenting trivial issues and characters in newspapers and what kind of tactics have been used by newspapers for representation. Researchers chosen papers of large circulation under same ownership as 'Daily Jang' and 'The News' from January 1st 2014 to 30th June 2015. Front page of every second day of newspapers has been analyzed with the help of coding sheet. Results indicate that English newspaper print less stories on trivial issues and characters, although the number of news stories on trivial issues was low but coverage was strong.

Key Words:, trivial issues, Un-wanted characters, newspaper, Pakistan's Print Media, Daily Jang, The News.



Introduction

Society is the combination of different ethnic groups, sharing multiple demographics at the same time. Each member is having unique placement in the society. In this way same environment produces an extraordinary array of subjects and characters. Above all these, media plays the role of a representative of its society. The fact that unusual incidents and personalities attract the most amount of attention affects the priorities of media houses. It has been observed that newspapers have to fill the space by giving news stories of insignificant issues and characters. From last few years this trend has highlighted various different subjects/characters in our society at every level. More captivating, imaginative and controversial the headline is, the more popular the newspaper. Most of the headlines are about the trivial incidents and characters. These characters do not have any contribution towards the society except being nuisance.

In current scenario Pakistani famous newspapers with larger circulation rate in country has introduced new trends in layout of printing news in grid of boxes right beneath the headline. In these boxes chunks of current occurrences in news events have included. Most of time these grid boxed news items include news of such unimportant characters. This diverts the attention of the readers. People get attracted towards these news items in newspapers like extraordinary coverage of Sikander in Blue Area Islamabad on August 15, 2013. Who had converted the police, elite forces, media and public into dumb observers by showing weapons treating his own children and wife as hostages for six hours. The whole incident was covered by all private news channels for approximately three and half hours without any break.

English news format in comparison with Urdu dailies is entirely different. In English newspaper, news related to society's unwanted characters is present in side columns on page corners. This format of paper does not divert the attention of the reader from the important current issues. Comparatively English newspaper's language is not very blunt and spicy.

Rationale

It has been observed that Pakistani media is covering non issues at much greater space. It has also been observed by researchers that many of serious issues have side lined by both print and electronic media by highlighting non issues and characters. Like on 15 August 2013 there was a person named Malik Mohammad Sikander with guns in his hands made his own wife and children hostages in Blue area Islamabad for many hours. The whole drama was covered by electronic news media for continuous 6 hours and next day newspapers' front pages also had that news items related to the said issue. Newspapers cover the news item as "lone gunman holds capital hostage for five hours"(The News). These practices become very common in both news airing and printing trends. That's why researcher's aim to dig out the reasons of why our news media is repeating the practice of covering non-issues and unwanted characters more than real issues. The aim of present study is to explore the coverage of trivial issues and characters in The News and Daily Jang. This study analyzes the causes and tactics of highlighting trivial issues and characters for hiding real issues, sensationalism which are used to exploit the real scenarios.

Problem statement

The aim of present study is to explore the reasons behind extra projection of unwanted subjects of society in Pakistani Print media. And how trivial issues and characters have been portrayed and represented in Daily Jang and The News.

Following objectives have been developed for the analysis of trivial issues and characters.



1. To find out the percentage of covering trivial issues by Urdu and English newspapers.
2. To analyze the portrayal of trivial issues and characters in Daily Jang and The News.
3. To explore the tactics behind representing trivial issues and characters in Daily Jang and The News.

And to attain the objectives, analysis has been done via following research questions.

RQ1: What is the amount of overall coverage in English and Urdu dailies related to trivial issues?

RQ2: What is the amount of coverage for each issue and character in Daily Jang & The News?

RQ3: How trivial issues and characters have been portrayed in The News and Daily Jang?

RQ4: What tactics have been used in representation of trivial issues and characters in Daily Jang and The News?

Present study is linked with Agenda setting theory which was proposed by Maxwell McComb and Donald Shaw in 1972 during an election campaign. Theory defines that media performs two functions simultaneously by both highlighting the issues and by defining their importance hierarchically for grabbing reader and viewer attention. The initial argument of the theory was that media sets public agenda. But after further developments in theory researchers derive three main discretions for agendas as public, media and policy agendas. The aim of adding this theory in theoretical framework is to explore the practice of media in declaring anything into news item. And what are the goals behind publishing any news? Agenda setting theory defines the goals and aims for selecting any issue and then creating its hype among the society.

Priming is one of the important levels of Agenda setting that was transformed into theory by Lyengar et al 1982. This theory is considered by researchers to explore the causes of covering trivial issues in newspapers. Priming is a key technique to hide major happenings behind any unimportant discussion or character. Like Gullu Butt news overplayed the Lahore Model town incident. Instead of focusing on why and on whom orders 14 people had been killed in Model town incident, all news media were busy in showing Gullu Butt footages. In this way government negligence had been overshadowed by Gullu Butt. That was one example of how priming is practiced by news media. This research is focused to inquire more incidents of such trivial characters which had used by news media to hide real issues.

Siraj conducted survey analysis in 2009 to inquire the press and media freedom in Pakistan during Musharraf era. Findings shows that apparently the situation of freedom of press in country was very favorable but there are many factors like power holders and authorities who restricted the freedom in reality. According to Siraj, the indicating factors are, “mostly media contents are related to politicians, political candidates, Ministers, leading federal and provincial officials, alleged and actual violators. Only 5% coverage relates to the unknown, these are strikers, protestors, victims and rioters. Major topics in the media include, Government conflicts, disagreements, decisions, proposals, and ceremonies; protest, violence, crime, scandal, disaster and investigations”.

Ejaz(2012)described that in Pakistani media elite culture and representation of elite culture is more common than ordinary people’s representation.

Raza et.al(2012) refers that sensationalism created by the Urdu private news channels like Geo, Dunya, Express, ARY etc and explored that Geo and Urdu channel’s percentages remained high as responsible of producing sensationalism among youth.



Brandenstein in 2011 front pages of all elite newspapers as “New York times”, “Washington Post”, Philadelphia Times”, “San Diego Union”, “San Francisco Chronicles”, and “Denver Post” for two weeks. All that newspaper’s front pages were examined to analyze the political and sensational content in headlines. Researcher indicates that in near future the trends of sensationalism and exaggeration will increase in print media to keep the readers interest intact to cope with the competition of new technologies as internet, eBooks and other high tech inventions.

Content analysis is the method to analyze newspaper’s content regarding coverage of trivial issues and unwanted characters in Daily Jang and The News respectively for present study. The purpose of taking media mogul for this study is to conduct comparative content analysis of both Urdu and English newspapers under same ownership.

Present study only focused on news stories related to trivial issues and characters which are not significant to print on front page of the newspapers from 1st Jan, 2014 till 30th June, 2015.

Sampling

Newspapers in two languages have been taken to explore whether English dailies covers more non issues or Urdu press does this practice more frequently.

Sample is taken to analyze the newspaper issues from 1st January 2014 till 30th June 2015. Data was analyzed via systematic sampling and newspaper of every 2nd day was considered as part of sample. This time span has been chosen because many major events in the past two years have been sidelined due to various unnecessary issues.

The front page of the newspaper has been selected for this study. The reason behind the selection is that front page highlights most important stories and events. But when trivial subjects or stories are highlighted on the front page it gives an image that newspapers have nothing pivotal to report.

Coding Sheet

Microsoft Excel is used for coding of proposed themes in coding sheet for the calculation of collected data. For this purpose all themes mentioned below are coded for further simplification and understanding.

Portrayal

“The act of showing or describing someone or something especially in print formats.” (Merriam Webster Dictionary).

Portrayal explains the overall picture of the story regarding particular trivial issues and characters. All stories or characters have been portrayed as protagonist or antagonist or neutral. Protagonist means to present any subject in a positive light while antagonist means to present any subject in negative way. (Oxford dictionary)

Over praising any personality

Over praising means to give extra importance to any news by giving more space to story on the front page of newspaper. In this research, researchers analyzed the over praising through content analysis. Thesis analyzed either the chosen story regarding trivial issues and unwanted character was over praised in paper or not.

Politicizing the issue

To politicize is portraying an issue in light of a political scenario for various purposes. Many of irregularities concerning the government stakeholders are conveniently masked



using the print media. Minor details relating to political leaders and their whereabouts are glorified in paper. Some news stories covers only blame games among politicians.

Law and order

Law is the written form of rules and regulations of any institution or state. The State has different institutions to reinforce all the laws respectively in their original form. In this study researchers inquired the newspaper front pages to found out the orientation and situation of law and order through the analysis of news stories on trivial issues and characters. The news regarding any unwanted character like Gullu butt who was also indulged in violation of law and order of country. Researchers also evaluated whether all the selected non issues and characters were violating the law and order of country or not and was coded as 1. Abide , 2. Violated and 3.Neutral.

Results &Data Analysis

Researchers explored nine unwanted characters and trivial issues in newspaper front pages of 1.5 years from 1st January 2014 to 30th June 2015. Which is very modest in number as per expectations.

Data collected and analyzed with the help of research questions as follows.

RQ 1: What is the amount of overall coverage in English and Urdu dailies related to trivial issues?

The analysis has been done on two newspapers under same ownership to find out the difference of news stories on front pages of English and Urdu newspapers. It is common believe that English newspapers covers more of serious news items as compared to Urdu press. Urdu press is more towards spice, drama, suspense and sensationalism. The overall percentage of covering trivial issues and characters is shown in following table.

Newspaper	Percentage of trivial Issues
1.The News	23.0%
2. Daily Jang	76.92%

Table1.1. overall coverage

The number of news stories related to trivial issues and characters from The News is 23.0% while 76.92% material is from Urdu newspaper “Jang” which is more than double. It clearly shows that Daily Jang covered more trivial issues and characters in the said time period as compared to The News.

RQ2: What is the amount of coverage for each issue and character in Daily Jang & The News?

This study is focused on finding out the amount of coverage for different trivial issues and characters and how news media alter any issue or hide facts and figures. As table shows Model Town incident was played down by highlighting Gullu Butt over the murder of 14 people during clash of public and police on 17th June 2014.

The percentage for each issue and character for The News and Daily Jang is mentioned in the table given below.

Trivial Issues and Characters	The NEWS	JANG
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Gullu Butt	23.07%	30.67%
Malala	7.69%	30.76%
Imran E. Bills	7.69%	23.69%
Nine month child	7.69%	7.69%
JamshaidDasti	Nil	7.69%
Musharaf Doc	7.69 %	7.69%

Table 1.2. amount of coverage for issues & characters

Findings reveal that the character “Gullu Butt” covered more by both newspapers. There was 23.07% coverage of Gulu Butt in The News, and 30.67% coverage in Daily Jang. Whereas news stories on Malala, news on Imran Khan’s electricity bills and news related to nine months old child charged with murder and each news item received 7.69% of coverage in The News. Whereas news stories on Malala received 30.76%, news about Imran Khan’s electricity bills received 23.69% coverage in Daily Jang, there was 7.69 % coverage on news story related to nine month old child in Daily Jang. There was no coverage related to Jamshaid Dasti in The News, while 7.69% of coverage appeared in Daily Jang. News story related to Musharraf’s doctor received 7.69% coverage in both newspapers.

RQ3: How trivial issues and characters have been portrayed in The News and Daily Jang?

The portrayal of characters and issues have been portrayed as protagonist, antagonist and neutral like characters i.e, Gullu Butt, Jamshaid Dasti and Imran Khan due to issue of electricity bills are portrayed as antagonist by newspapers as mentioned in given table. On the other hand only Malala has been portrayed as protagonist by both newspapers and news stories on nine month old child and about Musharraf’s doctor stayed neutral.

	The News	Daily Jang
Antagonist	Gullu Butt,Imran E.Bills,	Gullu butt,Imran E.Bills, Jamshaid Dasti,
Protagonist	Malala,	Malala,
Neutral	Nine month old child, Musharraf’s Dr.	Nine month old child, Musharraf’s Dr.

Table 1.3. Portrayal of trivial issues & characters

In short results indicate 15.38% characters have been portrayed as protagonists in news stories, 30.76% issues related to different personalities and characters as antagonist.



RQ 4: What tactics have been used in representation of trivial issues and characters in Daily Jang and The News?

Representation of trivial issues and characters has been measured via three variables

	Gullu Butt		Malala		Imran E.bills		9 month child		Jamshaid Dasti		Musharraf's Dr.	
	<i>The News</i>	<i>Daily Jang</i>	<i>The News</i>	<i>Daily Jang</i>	<i>The News</i>	<i>Daily Jang</i>	<i>The News</i>	<i>Daily Jang</i>	<i>The News</i>	<i>Daily Jang</i>	<i>The News</i>	<i>Daily Jang</i>
Over Praising	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Nil	Yes	Yes	Yes
Politicizing	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No	Nil	Yes	Yes	Yes
Law & Order	Violated	Violated	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral	Nil	Neutral	neutral	Neutral

i.e, *over praising, politicizing the issue and violation of law & order* as shown in the given table.

Statistics shows that 41.6% trivial characters have been over praised by newspapers including Gullu butt, MalalaYousaf Zai, Imran Khan, Jamshaid Dasti and Musharraf's Doctor. It is common in news reporting trends to add political spice in news story for the interest of readers and according to data 58.3% issues and characters were politicized. Whereas 16.6% issues and characters according to analyzed data showed violation of law and order while other stayed neutral.

Discussion

Newspaper is the printed form of all recent happenings of public interest regarding politics, crime, economy, disasters and so on. Majorly newspaper is composed of hard and soft news items, from which newspaper front pages mostly covered with hard news items due to factual and current (time sensitive) information, while soft news stories are of human interest topics like sports, entertainment, celebrity gossips etc. soft news item were not found on front page of newspaper in early days but now the trend has slightly changed. Now soft news items are also present on front page to attract reader's attention.

By calculating the percentage of news stories from both papers "The News" is less abundant with cluster of news stories. Findings reveal that presenting news stories on trivial issues and characters on front page of newspapers is actually distracting public from real issues.

Like Model Town (Lahore) incident was played down by highlighting Gullu Butt over the murder of 14 people during clash of public and police on 17th June 2014. In this respect researchers found 3 news items in both Jang and The News. Those news items stated that

1. "PML N's activist remains active during Model Town operation" (translation from Urdu newspaper Jang).
2. "Public, lawyers beat Gullu Butt at Model Town Katcheri" (from The News).
3. "Gullu Butt issue dominates National Assembly proceedings" (from The News).

These news stories are from front pages of news paper in which print media highlights Gullu Butt more than the murder of 14 innocent people during operation against barriers of Minhaajul Quran secretariat in Model Town, Lahore. Gullu butt is believed to be a Tout of a political party; he remained active as he destroyed cars and private property of people in presence of Police in Model Town, Lahore. Now Gullu Butt has been sent to jail for 11 years but the case of 14 innocent citizens is still pending.



Findings reveal that Gullu butt, PTI chairperson Imran Khan, Jamshaid Dasti were covered very negatively in news stories.

All the mentioned non issues like Gullu Butt, Malala, Imran Khan, Jamshaid Dasti and news related to Musharraf were found on front pages of both The News and Jang. Front page of any newspaper is the identity of the paper. According to Goran (2015) many editors put trivial news contents and sensational content on front page or cover of paper to attract its readers but it is not good practice.

It has observed by researcher that most of newspaper front page is covered by huge and colorful advertisement and less news items.

Words like 'Gulluism', 'Button ki Bitallion' and 'Lifafa journalists', should avoid to keep the social and sophistication level of society. Newspaper is considered the medium of literate class of society so the moral and ethical values should keep in consideration while finalizing any news story on editor's end.

One news story which was very interesting but also portraying painful reality of our institutional corruption as well was news item regarding nine month old child accused of murder and fraud charges. The story was on front page with photograph of child and his father while taking his thumb impression on bail application in court.

Conclusion

On the basis of findings it is concluded that the number of irrelevant news stories recorded during the past one and half year is relatively less and the frequency with which these trivial issues and characters appeared in the paper is quite low but this practice is still prevailing.

In Pakistan important news stories are sidelined whereas spicy and alluring news elements are highlighted to gain popularity among the masses. This practice is increasing by days and is deteriorating the credibility of popular newspapers.

So the recommendations are

- Newspaper's front page is the face of newspaper organization as well and it is the utmost duty of the editor to keep the organization face fresh and flawless by keeping all trivial stories away from front page to secure the credibility of newspaper.
- Proper news should be recorded and reported accurately till the final full stop.
- Unnecessary and trivial news items should be avoided.

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