

Express News Channel on Coverage of National Issues in Pakistan

(Measuring Correspondence between News Bulletins and Talk Shows)

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Abstract

The study aims to explore the coverage pattern of Express News on national issues of Pakistan through tracking correspondence between news bulletins and talk shows. For the purpose, two samples based on news bulletins and talk shows of prime time of the respective news channel for one year were drawn. The issues include Corruption, NRO, Memo Gate Scandal, Energy Crises, Price Hike, Pak US relations, Democratic Process, and Law n Order covered widely by the channel during the study period of one year. Results of the study reveal that news channel remained out of proportion in all the studied issues. Coverage of some issues is far greater than the coverage of the same issue in talk shows and vice versa. The results reveal that the issues in talk shows were remained unfavorable to the government while favorable tilt towards the government is not significant. The results also indicate that weak correspondence is existed among most of the issues presented in news bulletins and talk shows. Gate keeping and agenda setting theories were applied to check the news filters and agenda of the media organization.

Key Words: Correspondence, Bulletins, Talk shows, out of Proportion, anti-government agenda-setting.

Introduction

The media boom in the field of electronic media in Pakistan during the last ten years has totally changed the information utility patterns of the public. Since the literacy rate in Pakistan is less than 60%, (FBS, 2011) the readership of newspapers is not an encouraging for print media. However, the news channels are becoming major tool for having news and other information for illiterate people. Although these news cables are still dominated in the urban and big cities but it is expanding to rural areas at moderate pace.

Agenda setting is the most applied and practiced theory since 1970. Since most of media communication is based on political communication, the theory has a great importance in media organizations. Framing and Gatekeeping are considered to be the extensions of the Agenda setting theory. The present study focuses on these two theories to explore the role of gatekeepers and agenda setters in news channel. A number of studies have been done to explore the agenda setting effect on the media users during the last 40 years. More or less strong relationship has been found in the media and public agenda when the media set the public agenda and vice versa.

The media people, reporters, editors, photographers, camera men, anchor persons and producers are playing major role in setting the tone and outlook of the news story which ultimately set the agenda of the public towards the issue. In a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society of Pakistan where after a long martial law a weak democracy is existed, media freedom is remained a big challenge. Apart from the government restrictions on the media freedom, interests of pressure groups like religious, ethnic, business, extremists, and interests of the media owners as well have been some major hurdles in the way of freedom of press in the country. Pakistani people have spent their lives more under military regimes than the democratic regimes. However,

the situation is becoming better for democracy and media by the every passing day. The present study is an important study to explore the electronic media presentations, priorities by tapping into the correspondence and relationship between news bulletins and talk shows. Express news group is a third big media group in the country which has cross media outlets in the country including The Daily Express, Express news channel and some entertainment channels as well. Express news is considered as one of the most watched and credible news channels. (Raza, 2011).

Media have the power to remind us which issue for the public is an important issue among countless issues of the day. According to Lippmann, “since people had only limited opportunities to observe important events in a firsthand manner, they were dependent upon the press to provide them with information on what those events were like. The role of the press, he observed, was to provide us with views of “the world outside” from which we can form “pictures in our heads.”

The information which we receive is mostly second hand and it is rare to be witnessed a news story first hand. People rely on media to have latest news stories or having the latest development about the ongoing issue. People do not have the source to get the news even of their own city without media. To get news at country and global level become more difficult without media. This dependency of the people on media give a chance and opportunity to media organizations to apply agenda setting techniques on the issues the media may deem fit. Most of the channels telecast news bulletins on half hourly basis with its breaking news during the whole day. The news bulletins at 9 pm at every channel are considered to be the prime and detailed bulletins. The researcher has chosen the news bulletins at 9 pm. The other sample of the study is consisted on prime time talk show namely ‘KAL TAK’ with Javed Chaudhry at 10 pm.

Apart from the talk shows, electronic media has the tendency to give news in ‘opinionated manner’. Media persons like news casters, reporters, sub editors, editors, producers and even media owners frequently doing the subjective approach. The anchor person on one channel is an expert on the other channel. People generally assume that these mainstream news channels including Express news are being out of proportion and biased towards national issues like corruption, energy crises, judicial crises, NRO, memo gate scandal and Pak US relations etc. The theory of gatekeeping has also been practicing extensively in media for the last some decades. Since the movement of media persons from print to electronic after the influx of dozens of news channels in the national arena, there has not been a big shift as far as the content generation is concerned. Similarity and resemblance in content among the mainstream media can be observed in its soft and hard news. Sometimes, same news is shared among the reporters, anchors, camera men, photographers of different channels. In other words, the same content in its same tone is telecast on different media outlets. This practice is commonly used to lead the market to ‘break the news first’ concept. In this study, the pattern of news bulletins and talk shows of Express news are going to be analyzed by applying Agenda setting and Gatekeeping theories.

RQ1. Whether and to what extent the Express News remained out of proportion on covering of national issues?

RQ2. Whether and to what extent the Express news was remained favorable, unfavorable and neutral to Government on the issues, Law n order, others, Democratic process, Pak-US relations, Energy crises, NRO, Corruption, Memo gate scandal and Price hike?

RQ3. Whether and to what extent the issues of the talk shows were corresponded with news bulletins of Express news?

Literature Review

Stories that fit with the media's expectations receive more coverage than those that defy them (and for which they are thus unprepared) (Wikipedia, 2014) the consonance between media expectations and original content is also a criterion for media coverage. The consonance in producing and presenting news stories really does matter. Media outlet is reluctant to print or broadcast the news story which is contrary to their policy. This policy comes from top to down at every level like reporter, camera man, sub editor, editor, photographer, anchors, and program producers. Even in some cases, those experts are called who have the same views on the issue which a media outlet has. In the whole process of news, media agenda of the organization is kept in front of content generators of the media outlet.

“Through selection and salience, the media suggest to people what issues to form opinions about, regardless of whether or not the issues emphasized by the media are dominant in reality.” (Severin & Tankard, 2001)

Media have the power to guide and suggest the people what issues are important and meaningful to them. The issues covered by media, at times, do not match with the existing reality. Through different techniques of agenda setting the media emphasizes and creates hype to think about the issue presented. News bulletins are more reliable and correspond with the reality as compare to the talk shows because there is a big margin in selection process of the issues to be discussed in talk shows. Time factor is also a matter of less choice of issues among the latest news stories as one of the important values of news is timeliness. The news which is telecast today by the mainstream media will be of zero value on the next day. To check pattern and nature of gatekeeping, it is more viable way to measure the correspondence between the news stories covered and stories discussed in talk shows.

Hassan (2010) observed that “Print media during the last decade, has gone through noteworthy decline in number of daily newspapers and magazines and it has been losing its business and readership to growing television exposure though it has shown a steady increase in readership in last 6 years. Newspaper and magazine sector are on the second and third position respectively as per media exposure to Pakistani consumers. Total exposure of print media including newspapers and magazines (72%) is still less than 89% exposure of the television which has become a dominant medium in last one decade. All three most circulated newspapers and top two most circulated magazines are owned by the same media groups who are influential in the TV market.” In another study conducted by Huma (2013) stated that “the average daily sale of all Pakistani daily newspapers fell from 9.9 million in 2007 to 6.1 million in 2008, reaching less than 4% of the population at that time. Further, the number of publications in the country peaked in 2007 at 1,820 and then fell to only 749 publications in 2011.” It is a common intellect that illiteracy and non-democratic culture are the basic causes of media illiteracy.

McCombs & Reynolds, 2002 of the view that “ Movement towards one issue in the public agenda represents movement away from others, making the implications of agenda-setting and the paradigm it represents significant.” On the one hand media focus and highlight the issue of low significance among the people as a most important issue of the day. By sidelining some important issue through screening and gatekeeping, the media outlets have a greater space to do the job in the way they may deem fit. News events that have some personal and individual actions of will have more attraction than the issue which has no human interest. Claes (2004) quoted Neuman et al. (2001) that “many authors suggest that news frame consists of specific elements, also called framing devices (e.g. headlines, introduction, lead-outs etc). It is a common phenomenon to give information as a lead or introductory story regardless of the core values of the news. Especially, in the television news these termed as breaking news or headlines after every thirty minutes regardless of the characteristics of breaking news. The news channel, in general, are more eager to cover human interest stories or the stories of some prominent personalities, it could be the story of corruption, personal scandals, misuse of authority etc. “Bad news is more newsworthy than good news” (Wikipedia, 2014). It has been noticed through different studies that people are more alert on the news which has some negative element than the news which has some positive elements. Therefore, media organizations to maximize their viewership / readership are ready to cover such stories regardless of the effects by projecting the stories out of proportion. Independent voice of the media is a matter of having financially sound foundation and missionary approach of the media organization. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, there are few media moguls who hold the complete outflow of the national media. Obviously, they can build or modify public opinion on any national issue through its widespread transmission.

Methodology:

For the purpose, as a first sample, news bulletins of 9 pm were selected for one year on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday. The period has been commenced from October, 2011 to September, 2012. Altogether 156 news bulletins (3x52) were selected to tap the important news stories during the study period. For the second sample of the research study, the researcher got 156 talk shows (3x52) of 10 pm at Tuesday, Thursday Friday to check the correspondence between news bulletins and talk shows on one hand and track the slant of the programs discussed in talk shows on the other. There were 8 issues selected and categorized for the study which widely covered by Express news. The issues include, law n order, democratic process, Pak US relations, energy crises, NRO, corruption, memo gate scandal, price hike. The issue category of ‘others’ has been created for the news out of these selected issues like economy, sports, entertainment etc. The results were correlated and analyzed in percentage method to measure the prominence, and coverage of the issues for issue correspondence purposes between news bulletins and talk shows of Express News. Agenda setting and gatekeeping theories were applied to measure the phenomenon.

Findings, Analysis and Discussion:

Table 1.

Talk Shows	News Bulletins
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Issue	Issue Time in Percentage	Issue Time in Percentage
Democratic Process	48%	21%
Corruption	16%	6%
NRO	11%	6%
Others	5%	22%
Law n Order	2%	23%
Pak US relations	8%	9%
Memo Gate Scandal	4%	4%
Energy Crises	5%	7%
Price Hike	1%	2%
Total	100%	100%

Table Showing Difference of Correspondence between News Bulletins & Talk Shows

Table 2.

Express News			
Issues	Favorable to Govt / US. (in minutes)	Un-Favorable to Govt / US. (in minutes)	Neutral (in minutes)
Democratic Process	119 (4%)	356 (11%)	2488 (85%)
Corruption	61 (6%)	292 (29%)	656 (65%)
NRO	27 (4%)	463 (68%)	191 (28%)
Others	--	--	331 (100%)
Law n Order	5 (3%)	37 (25%)	103 (72%)
Pak US relations	18 (4%)	150 (33%)	287 (63%)
Memo Gate Scandal	19 (7%)	139 (50%)	120 (43%)
Energy Crises	24 (8%)	73 (25%)	197 (67%)
Price Hike	3 (7%)	21 (52%)	17 (41%)

Table Showing Slant of Issues in Express News

As above table reveals that there is not a single issue which has hundred percent correspondences between news bulletins and talk shows. Presence of issues in news bulletins like, Democratic process, law n order, corruption, NRO and category of others is significantly different proportionately in talk shows. NRO can be seen at number 6 in the news bulletins while it was placed at top most among the issues of talk shows. The above table indicates that the channels was remained excessive in coverage in four issues, Democratic process, Memo Gate Scandal, NRO and corruption while remained less in five issues, Price hike, Energy crises, Pak-US relations, others and law n order. Normally, the team of news section is different from the team of talk shows. Anchors and producers, more or less, set the day to day agenda of the media outlet. Although, the media owners and the advertisers agenda may be different from the agenda of the people at work in news room. Slant of the issues was remained unfavorable towards government. The most negatively covered issue is NRO (National Reconciliation Ordinance) which got 68% coverage in a negative manner. Only 4% news programs of the channel remained in favor of government. The third most negatively portrayed issue is Price hike which got 52% coverage in negative frame while 7% coverage on the issue got favorable slant. Results indicate that the issue of Memo gate scandal was also remained 50% in negative category. Pak-US relations received 33% coverage negatively. It has only 4% coverage in a positive frame towards

the government. It is clear from the table that law n order received 25% coverage negatively while the score in the positive category is remained 3% towards government. The issue of corruption is also got negative coverage in its 29% programs while only 6% is remained positive. The issue of Democratic process got 12% while the issue of others remained blank in the category of negative slant. Interesting to discuss that democratic process gave maximum coverage to the issue by shifting from 21% in news bulletins to 48% in talk shows. There is a weak correspondence has been existed on the issue of democratic process. At the same time this issue remained least negative in talk shows. The issue of law n order got the top most rank in news bulletins while it was placed and considered to be the second least covered issue in talk shows. It also shows a very weak correspondence between news bulletins and talk shows.

Conclusion:

It is clear from the analysis that Express news set the public agenda by using gatekeeping techniques on national issues. For doing so, channel was remained out of proportion in almost all the issues but with wider gap in four issues like democratic process, corruption, memo gate scandal and NRO. The issue of law n order was covered less to its proportion in news bulletins. It might be the agenda of media organization or media people at work to cover the issue rarely in talk shows. Almost all the issues were covered negatively in talk shows. Slant of most of the issues were remained negative towards government. The issue of Law n order in Pakistan has been in the news headlines in the media especially for news channels. 9/11 incident and the birth of Pakistani cable channels took place in the same year in 2001. The issue of law n order has been more or less in the mainstream media due to its importance since 2001. Moreover, the issue has roots in the country's politics, therefore, the issue depicted regularly in most of media's news outflow. But the news channel did not discuss this immense important issue in talk shows. The issue has been discussed rare and with wider gaps. The NRO was presented at rank 6 in news bulletins while it has promoted as top most issue. The agenda setting and gatekeeping techniques have been applied to highlight some issues and undermine the others.

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