

News Treatment of the Energy Crisis and Shaping the Public Opinion: An Analysis of Agenda Setting and Framing of Press in Pakistan

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Abstract

Media plays an important role in shaping the public opinion by covering societal issues. The obstinacy of this study was to investigate the role of Pakistani press in the issues regarding the energy crisis and its framing. The objectives of the study were to find out that is there positive relationship among readers of Jang Daily who prioritized energy crisis and discussion of the issue with their colleagues and friends & is there positive relationship among the readers of Daily Dawn who prioritized energy crisis and discussion of the issue with their colleagues and friends. The population was the Daily Dawn and Jang Lahore. The social issues covered by the both newspapers published on their main and last pages during the year 2015 was chosen as the sample for this research. The convenient sampling method was used to determine 300 respondents to collect their opinions through survey technique. Daily Jang was resulted the more prominent in placement of news regarding the social issues than the Daily Dawn. The close association was observed between the media agenda and public opinion while assessing the issue of energy crisis covered by Daily Jang. The social issues were covered by the both dailies with different agendas meanwhile promoted the media agenda instead of public agenda. This study recommended that a proper coverage of the social issues should be maintained by the dailies. Furthermore, the press should have kept an eye on the agenda setting and framing theories by focusing on the public agenda.

Keywords: Framing, Energy Crisis, Media Agenda, Public Agenda, Print Media

Introduction

Media focuses on shaping the perceptions of its audience related to their lives and future. Media is most reliable source of information in reshaping the perceptions of its audience. Some of the scholars have considered the importance of media as change agent because of its attribute (Raza, 2013). It was further explained that the phenomenon was most important as the media construct a social reality and create awareness about the issues like environment (Mercado, 2012). The scholars have argued that the media has the power to create selective awareness among the audience (Deegan & Tobin, 2002). Language, treatment and editorial judgment of print media have remained the theoretical implications in agenda setting (Deegan, & Tobin, 2002). Many of the media scholars have focused on the function of agenda setting (Mrogers, & Wdearing, 1988). The researchers have applied the techniques of content analysis and survey to disclose the portrayal of the media. They found that amount of coverage to a particular issue make it more prominent among the audience. Media selects any particular issue and highlights some or any of its aspects (Kim & Shanahan, 2002). It has been argued that the theory of agenda setting is “most worth pursuing” even after three decades (Coleman, & Weaver, 2009). More coverage to any issue eventually leads to convince the audience about its importance (McCombs, 2005).

Historical background

The scholars studied the phenomenon of agenda setting during presidential elections in United States back in 1968. The research work was carried out among one hundred residents of Chapel Hill, North Carolina. The study resulted that the media coverage and people’s perception was very much the same. From 1968, more than 400 similar studies have been conducted, time and again, and every time their theory continues to endorse the previous results (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

News Treatment

The researchers have been arguing that the media mostly covered the issues in favor of their states (Becker & Vlad, 2009). Epstein’s (1974) in his classic study explains that TV networks influence through their structured news coverage. This perspective is extremely influential and most of the researches in the field have taken it as a foundation.

Media Handling of Issues related to the Societies

Many media outlets including print and electronic media are the main sources of information for the media persons. Such information is then reshaped in the form of news. The studies on agenda setting have concluded that more coverage led to more public attention (Scheufele, 2000).

Framing

This is always the media, copy editor or the reporter who frame news in a certain way. This art or science of framing is used as a tool to effect, influence and shape public opinion. Mostly the research of a commoner goes through media outlets, websites, channels and papers. Media construct real or imagined reality and agenda setting is the technique which is the most powerful in this process (Okoro&Odoemelam, 2013). Some scholars have analyzed the effect of news framing on readers and viewers. They have studied that how people got attached to the issue and feel responsibility as a citizen (Iyengar, & Simon, 1993). The theory of framing helps to understand that how various news items are framed under certain themes, how every new news is framed into the broader theme and how it eventually built pressure on policy makers and citizens at the same time (Riaz, 2009).

Daily Jang

It's most circulated newspaper and a well known print medium in Pakistan. It is also well liked among the people who are responsible in policy making (Bhat, 2015). It was initially started before the independence in 1939. Hussain (1998) examined 800,000 circulation of Daily Jang per day.

Daily Dawn

Daily Dawn newspaper was launched by Quaid e Azam in 1940. The number of daily circulations of Dawn in Pakistan is above one hundred thousand. It is believed that every bureaucrat, top industrialist, students of higher education, professors and intelligentsia of the country regularly read Dawn (Hussain, 1998).

Statement of Problem

Energy crises are one of the leading issues in Pakistan. The researchers were interested to study that how media framed the energy crisis issue in the leading print media and how it set the agenda of its readers. McCombs explains that importance of any issue in public eye is directly linked with the news coverage. Media makes a main function to end the conflict through their news writing and, build and modify the public opinion through its framing role. The role of media has been recognized as a main tool in making policy of any country especially talking universal communication (Raza, *et al.* 2012). The media sets the agenda among its audience to be thinking about (Scheufele, 1999). Keeping in view it was essential to not only study the framing of the issue but how it affected the public opinion at large.

Significance of Study

This study focused on the portrayal of energy crisis in the leading print media in Pakistan and public opinion about that crisis. The effective role of the media as fourth pillar of the state has been recognized in all over the world. It performs a decisive role in shaping public opinion about the issues and realities they are part and living in it. Media coverage does have decisive influence on policy makers. The media as a social change agent is the key element (Deep-house, 2000).

Literature Review

This section is dealt with the theoretical framework of the study with special reference to the previous researchers in the field. This chapter is intended to understand the studies that explain the "public opinion" formation and "agenda setting" role of media. Media covers the societal issues and builds a specific public opinion.

Social Issues

Kee&Hoong while researching in 2017 have resulted the stories which were more expressed by the media as the social issues. The scale of repetition and its news frequencies about any issue make its dimensions. Agenda setting strategies are mostly used to make political senses (Raza, 2013). Hilgartner&Bosk (1988) examined the troubles in societal functioning as the social issues. Many differences may also be observed while talking about the social issues (Hilgartner, &Bosk, 1988).

Energy Crisis

Pakistan is facing severe problems in the energy sector especially electricity shortage, however, energy issue has jammed the monetary progress. Due to the deficiency of governance, dishonest leaders, insufficient and imperfect arrangement, and non-availability of speedy judgments of cases were the main reasons behind the energy crisis (Masood, & Shah, 2012).Energy crises has, considerably, anguished all division of Pakistan apparatus spreading through economy to industry, giving an angle to social life, engorgement to poverty and hindering development of the region (Agarwal, 1986).As Masood, & Shah (2012) elaborated that Pakistan could not be able to become economic power unless the problem would be solved resolved (Ali, 2010). People are continuously suffering from load shedding and the people are in uncertainty of losing their means of earning as they are highly dependent on availability of electricity. Javaid&Idress

(2011) resulted that the energy crises was badly disturbing industrial units, business and everydaylife of the people and the country was trying to generate resources for electricity generation. Hall (1993) argued that Pakistan had sufficient technology to generate energy resources and further accessibility of biomass in country.

Research Hypotheses

H1: There is positive correlation among readers of Jang Daily who prioritized energy crisis and discussion of the same issue with their colleagues and friends.

H2: There is positive correlation among readers of Dawn Daily who prioritized energy crisis and discussion of the same issue with their colleagues and friends.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

The researcher has selected survey and content analysis methods for the study. The study considered the portrayal of the news in the sense of agenda setting. The study has been carried out with the open-ended approach to ask audience about most important issues in regions as they consider and close ended in the inquiry of the issues which are prominent in society (Iyengar, 1992).

Population of the Study

The population of the following research include all the dailies of Pakistan issued in the country. The continuous published newspapers fall in the category.

Sample of the Study for content analysis & Survey

The selected parts of the newspapers for analysis were “front, back and editorial pages” from “January 1, 2015 to December 31, 2015”. The other sample of the study consists of 300 respondents from which 150 are Dawn (English) newspaper reader and other 150 are Jang (Urdu) newspaper reader. The sample selection was based on “convenient sampling technique” from the readers of two dailies. This study includes the news stories from front and back page of the paper. It is because both front and back pages cover all important stories of the day.

Statistical Methods for Analysis

The information composed by the data cited was tabulate. Contingency test applied to explore the information; “percentage and chi-square”. The Garrett’s formula introduced in 1997 was used for the study.

Content Analysis

Many of the authors and researchers have been extensively focusing this method (Wimmer& Dominick, 2000).

Variables forContent Analysis

The variables under study are:

Frequency and Length

The number of stories published on “front and back pages of the papers” and also the “length” in terms of “centimeters per column”. The pictures and their space were also measured and included in the study.

The Slanting

The observance of the published issue to “favorable, neutral and unfavorable”. It is analyzed in the “paragraphs” and “coding unit”. The coding is based on the sheet with “favorable, unfavorable and neutral” units to study them independently.

The Framing

This is always been key element in “agenda setting” belongings. It is the method to know the techniques and somehow relates the problems those are prearranged by the media outlets (Reese, 2001).The framing of the news items were designated impositions of “friend, or foe”, impartial in the coverage of terrorism and other problems that were “pro government or favor in government, anti-government or against the government”. “Framing “as shaping factor for creating sense of related incidents and proposing the problem.

The Placement of the New Story

The placement in the print media has been evolved as a technique to make the news more observable by the readers. In this regard, the media indoor officials including the editors and the desks become more important. The users of the print media perceive the importance of any published issue by its placement and the measurement (McCombs & Shaw, 1991). In this study, “upper half of front page”, “lower half of front page”, “upper half of back page”, “lower half or back page”.

Unit of Content Analysis

Contents are measured by indicating a code in coding sheet. The paragraphs considered in position as favorable, neutral and unfavorable. In case the paragraph in favor or unfavorable mood then that is measured as neutral.

Intra Coders & Inter-Coders Reliability

Intercoder reliability test applied for “validity and reliability” purpose and the results were received and were respectively. Inter coder reliability is explained as an equality of the coding in the same manner/s (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006).

Defining the key Concepts

Energy Crises

An energy crisis is a situation where industry and household needs energy but demand exceeds supply. Energy also includes electricity and gas.

Public Opinion

Media is primarily responsible in shaping public opinion about the reality they are living in. Every important organ of state from individual to institution looks towards media to see how it is reporting about them and the world. They are influence and being influenced from the reporting of media. Media, in modern times define and shape political discourse which dominates political agenda (Russell, 2013).

Coding

News stories of the two dailies related to the energy (electricity) generation, distribution and shortage of energy will fall in this category. News about reactions of public on energy (electricity), statements on this issue will fall in this category. Content, Date, favorable, unfavorable, neutral and total sentences used to analyze the results. Coverage to issues has been analyzed by counting the stories and the length of the story published in “centimeters per column”. The angle of the story has been analyzed in the perspective of “favorable, unfavorable and neutral” in which the issues included in this study are categorized in “pro-government and anti-government” as they are related to the internal situation of the state. The space and place of the publication is nominated in “front page upper half, front page lower half, back page upper half and back page lower half” mentioning position to issue according to its importance for the study of “agenda-setting”.

Results

The “chi-square contingency test” has been very useful while analyzing the nominal data.

Content Analysis

The intra and inter coder reliabilities were checked to confirm the data results as 95% and 85% respectively.

News Placement

Table 1.
News placement in the two dailies on energy crises

		Placement				Total	Comparison			
Newspaper		FPUH	FPLH	BPUH	BPLH		Dawn/Jang	Df	X ²	P
		Dawn	24 13.04%	40 21.74%	58 31.52%			62 33.70%	184	3
	Jang	47 20.62%	54 23.68%	67 29.38%	60 26.32%	228				
Total		71	94	125	122	412				

The results indicated that the Dawn reported energy crisis on the front page as 13.04% on the upper half and 21.74% on the lower half while, Jang gave 20.62% on upper half, 23.68% on lower half. The analysis of back page resulted that Dawn gave coverage to energy crisis on the upper half as 31.52% and 33.70% on the lower half. Daily Jang was found with 29.38% on upper half and 26.32% on lower half. The value of chi-square=5.6 indicated that the both dailies have focused on the issue of energy crisis.

Table 2.
Frequency of published news

The of crisis	Issues	Ranking	Ranking	issue water in
		Dawn	Jang	
	Energy Crises	184	228	

Pakistan has been published in news stories 36 times in Dawn and in Jang 47 times. This issue has been on 6th rank by the papers.

Table 3.
Measurement (length) of news stories

The Study Issues	Space covered (cm per column)	Space (cm per column)
	Dawn	Jang
Energy Crises	5130	8630

Dawn given 5130 “centimeters per column” to energy crisis and Jang given 8630 subsequently.

Table 4.
Slant of the news items on energy crisis

Newspapers	Favorable (%)	Unfavorable (%)	Neutral (%)	Total	df	X ²	p
Daily Dawn	125(53.6)	59(25.3)	49(21.0)	233			
Daily Jang	159(53.0)	89(29.7)	52(17.3)	300	2	1.8	ns
Total	284	148	101	533			

The mentioned table resulted, Dawn published “125 favorable news-stories, 49 neutral, and 59 unfavorable” and Jang published “159 favorable of Government, 89 unfavorable and 52 neutral”.

Table 5.
Distribution of respondents by their information source on energy crisis

Media Category	Occurrence	%	Valid %	Cumulative %	Mean	σ
PM	207	69.0	69.0	69.0		
EM	33	11.0	11.0	80.0	1.51	0.80
IPC	60	20.0	20.0	100.0		
Total	300	100.0	100.0			

It was analyzed that 69% of the respondents were agreed with the notion that the press had become a major source of information for them while getting information regarding the energy crisis, 11% among them responded “electronic media” and remaining 20% favored interpersonal communication.

Table 6.
Energy crises as an issue in discussions with the colleagues and friends

Occupation	Always	Often	Some times	Never	Not at all	X ²	df	P
Govt %	12 20.0%	26 43.3%	19 31.7%	3 5.0%	0 0.0%			
Pvt %	28 19.9%	60 42.6%	48 34.0%	4 2.8%	1 0.7%			
Business %	1 12.5%	2 25.0%	2 25.0%	3 37.5%	0 0.0%	32.51	12	.001
Student %	12 13.2%	54 59.3%	20 22.0%	3 3.3%	2 2.2%			
Total %	53 17.7%	142 47.3%	89 29.7%	13 4.3%	3 1.0%			

The results examined a significant relationship between the various respondents when they were asked about the discussion habits with their colleagues and friends on the issue of energy crisis as the computed value of chi square = 32.51 and the tabulated value was calculated 21.03 at 0.05 level. The results added that the common people often discuss the issue of energy crisis with each other meanwhile the businessmen rarely discussed. The energy issue has remained important among the common people.

Table 7.
Distribution of respondents regarding newspapers' role on energy crisis

Gender	SA	A	UD	DA	SDA	Total	X ²	df	P
Male f %	19.1%	60.0%	7.0%	13.9%	.0%	100.0%			
Female f %	21.1%	50.8%	7.0%	18.4%	2.7%	100.0%	5.19	4	.26
Total f %	20.3%	54.3%	7.0%	16.7%	1.7%	100.0%			

The survey results display that the computed value of chi square i.e. 5.19 is less than the critical value of chi square = 9.49 at 0.05 and 13.28 at 0.01 significance levels. It was resulted that the respondents were getting very comprehensive information regarding the energy crisis and had much knowledge about the alternate energy sources like biomass, coal gasification, and wind energy to meet their need.

Hypotheses Testing

The results of the hypotheses were analyzed in the following manner.

Daily Dawn Energy Crisis (DDE)

The respondents were the readers of Dawn who put the energy crisis as their most preferred issue which they were discussing with their colleagues and friends. The merging of the six indicators has made its range 1-30.

Daily Jung Energy Crisis (DJE)

The respondents were the readers of Jang who put the energy crisis as their most preferred issue which they were discussing with their colleagues and friends. The merging of the six indicators has made its range 1-30.

Table 8.
Regression analysis of DJE

		Coefficients ^a				
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	11.460	.502		22.828	.000
	DJE	.627	.18	.31	3.48	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Discussion

The results of the above mentioned table were in favor of the hypothesis-1 where the 29% of the variation among the discussions was observed.

Table 9.
Regression analysis of DDE

		Coefficients ^a				
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	10.681	.302		35.367	.000
	DDE	1.242	.27	.29	4.60	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Discussion

The results of the above mentioned table were in favor of the hypothesis-1 where the 32% of the variation among the discussions was observed.

Discussions and Conclusions

The study has indicated importance of print media outlets in shaping the public opinions and reshaping in the form of agenda setting. These were very familiar to the outcomes in the recent researches i.e. Harbert, 2010; Sadaf, 2011. The outcomes are also very near and have resemblance to the results provided by Riaz (2009) which highlighted the role and importance of the press in the process of agenda setting. The hypothetical outcomes were significant which put more pressure and highlight the importance of press in shaping public opinions.

The press in Pakistan has become an important phenomenon which is trusted by the people. More trust leads to put more responsibility on the media. The media effects are common among its users beside their differences in age and education. The media highlights the issues by publishing them to make its users to think about and ultimately makes their opinions. Overall, the news trends make the biasness regarding the issues in specific times. This notion has been found different from what Riaz (2009) reported. The both dailies were found with their agendas different in nature. Although, the media agenda was appeared as similar to the public agenda. The people are satisfied with appearance of the social issues in the press in total. Different public agenda could lead to more critical observance over the coverage. Nevertheless, a minor part of the readers were found dissatisfied. The more interest among the readers to the issues covered by the press is somehow different from the results of what Riaz(2009) reported. More dependence on the information published by the press is making the press a dominant medium as well. Riaz also showed the same reliance on newspapers for most issues.

Recommendations

This research was followed by the following recommendations:

1. 55% of the total respondents were of the view that the construction of new dams was the only solution of the energy crisis and 25% were agreed with the notion that the other sources should be used to generate more electricity. 15% among them favored the construction of new power houses whereas, 10% replied that the line losses should be controlled.
2. It is recommended to policy makers of two dailies that should be focused on public importance while selecting the issues rather than to set any specific agenda. It is the notion for credibility of the institutions.

3. News values are the major concern of media organizations as well. Moreover, the government authorities may take some practical steps to diffuse the highlighted issues.

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