

FRAMING OF PAKISTANI MEDIA REGARDING AFGHAN TALIBAN: BEFORE AND AFTER THEIR TAKEOVER

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study is to investigate the framing of Pakistani Media in the context of the Afghan Taliban before and after their takeover of Afghanistan. The main objective is to explore the shift in media's reporting regarding the said group. To do so, the researcher opted for the qualitative research method and pursued content analysis. Editorials regarding the Afghan Taliban from three English language Newspapers are selected through a purposive sampling method from January 1st, 2021, to December 31st, 2021, for this study. Each editorial is read carefully and broken down into parts to determine the title, the kind of language used, the kind of tone conveyed, and the placement of the certain editorial. After categorizing these characteristics, the editorial is further placed into Negative, Positive, and Neutral categories. These categories are the defining source of the whole investigation. Further statistical testing i.e., Chi-Square Testing is applied to compare the framing before and after the takeover which is before August and after the August of 2021. The testing determined the shift suspected by the researcher and confirmed the hypothesis. The results categorically showed that Pakistani print media shifted from negative to positive reporting of the Afghan Taliban hence proving the researcher's stance.

Keywords: Framing, Pakistani media, Afghan Taliban, takeover

INTRODUCTION

In 2001 after the catastrophic 9/11 attack, America invaded Afghanistan to teach the Taliban is a lesson for what they did on their soil. Taliban had its government in Afghanistan which ultimately collapsed after US troops came. To escape the invasion and find a haven from American forces, fragments of the Taliban took refuge in the hilly North of Pakistan while some still survived underground in Afghanistan. To survive living under the rocks like cockroaches, they needed to strengthen to fight back and continue their twisted mission and let their ideology breathe. Taliban were familiar with the geography and US was fighting another war in Iraq. It was a golden opportunity. During that time, the Taliban started recruiting locals. Not only did they grow in strength, but they also showed it incessantly. Their illegal occupation and terrorist activities in Pakistan invited their army for an operation to eradicate them from the country. During that operation, TTP, an alleged branch of the Taliban, started terror attacks in the major cities of Pakistan, targeting the public and forces. Taliban became a sore problem for the government of Pakistan and with the change in the country's foreign policy, the media started their own attacks through harsh and hateful news stories and editorials (Hartig & Doherty, 2021).

After the Swat operation, some Taliban died, and some ran for safety. They relocated to Afghanistan and North Waziristan region in Pakistan. After years, operation Zarb-e-Azab started to eradicate them from there as well because of their constant attacks on Pakistani soil. Taliban from Pakistan's offshoots in the 20th century became foes in the 21st century. This cat-and-mouse chase continued for more than a decade. The damage it cost Pakistan was more than billions of dollars; thousands of civilian and martial lives were sacrificed during this war on terror (Kugelman, 2021).

This reporting continued for more than a decade. In 2021, US and others withdrew their armed forces from Afghanistan after the decades-long war which ended with no real outcome. (Kugelman, 2021) With the changing environment in politics and policies around the globe, the government of Pakistan also had a huge shift in dealing with the whole situation being the center of it all. Pakistani media followed the policy of its government regarding the Taliban forever. This research is focused on the current scenario of media with respect to the Taliban.

Significance of the Study

This study implored certain aspects of newspaper and news channel policy that entwine with the foreign policy of the country to find out the objectivity of news reporting done by the media conclusively. It shed light on the way news reporting was done by Pakistani Media then vs. now. This research answered many questions like how and why this happened. This study took on different actors involved i.e., Taliban, government, international forces, Pakistani Media, etc. Hundreds of researches have been done regarding this situation but the current events have spurred a big change that needed to be investigated and studied. It answered the questions seriously raised about the news framing done by media and what hidden agenda it had in mind. Control of government on media was further analyzed considering these events.

Rationale of the Study

Afghanistan conflict is a major issue that affects everyone in the region. As the researcher is a Pakistani citizen, it hit home, and she felt more and more invested and compelled in the situation when the US finally started the withdrawal of its forces. The researcher started studying it all in detail. Everything felt uncertain for a while when the Taliban took over the entire country in a few days. The circumstances changed swiftly under the new-age-age Taliban regime. As a journalism and communications student, the researcher started noticing some key changes in Pakistani media's reporting as well as the obvious change in Afghanistan's media under the Taliban siege. (Kalim & Janjua, 2018) And the researcher felt it was her responsibility to dig a little deeper at her expense to uncover the truth and this thesis came as an opportunity to quench the thirst of her curiosity and fulfill her duty as a journalist to contribute to her field. This thesis proceeded to shed some light on Pakistani media, its ethical responsibility, and its duty to the sovereignty of its country.

Objectives of the Study

- To confirm the shift in media's reporting on addressing the Taliban
- To uncover the possible reasons behind this change
- To look for answers regarding the media's newfound support for Taliban regime.
- To find out the reasons behind the dissemination of government's policy by media for Taliban.

Research Questions

- R₁: How did the media use to construct Taliban before and how do they do it now?
R₂: Why is there a shift in media reporting?
R₃: How do the foreign policies of a country affect the reporting of media?
R₄: How can this shift affect the perception of the public?

Hypothesis

H₁: Print Media started positive framing regarding Taliban after the Afghanistan takeover.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Gustav (2021) studied the portrayal of Taliban and Swedish Soldiers in Swedish newspapers. Media has a distinct influence on the public and it uses its power very carefully and tactfully. When it came to the Swedish Soldiers, the newspapers described them very eloquently while at the same time Taliban were presented as religious fanatics. Both the representations were the clear perception of the public as well. The war that Swedish soldiers fought was for a good cause, very professionally and bravely on the other hand Taliban were shown as hot-headed, religious, and emotional. This research was supported by Fairclough's three-dimensional model and its framework was based on critical analysis.

Kauser, Shah, and Waqas (2021) did research on the type of content Pakistani newspapers published related to the Afghan Taliban. Taliban and the whole region after the US invasion became a hotspot for journalism and journalists. Everyone had their eye on this conflict and chaos. Pakistani

media being this close to the situation had its own way of covering the unfolding events in Afghanistan and the Durand Line. In this research, famous newspaper editorials were considered as content for qualitative research. Different charts were made to analyze the editorials. The results showed that most of the news showed Taliban in a neutral state and somewhat negative and a very small number of articles showed Taliban in a positive light. The coverage of the newspapers resonated with the policy of the government.

Rutig's (2021) article implores the truth around the extensive change in Taliban strategy of governance. Taliban of 2001 seems like a dark shadow of the current Taliban. Since 2001 Taliban has changed its stance on so many things of importance that it seems like Taliban have upgraded and improved and have entered the 21st century. The researchers postulated that these changes but be only for political gains and there is not exactly any ideological change. Most Taliban want the same old things but for the sake of negotiations and agreements with the West, they are tolerating it for the sake of getting their state back to them. There is a need for checks and balances for their government by the West to make sure they are on the right path.

Nadeem, Bokhari, Khan, and Mustafa (2019) stated that different newspapers were covered to conclude the same kinds of the result was also reviewed. In this study, the portrayal of Taliban was explored through agenda-setting theory. In this study, two categories were formed: friend and foe. Editorials of both newspapers were analyzed and stories that were coloring Taliban in a bad light were considered foes and the articles that were favoring Taliban were considered a foe. The study was halfway focused on the comparison and halfway on the policies of these newspapers. One newspaper was friendlier to the Taliban while the other one was more on the negative side but in general, both newspapers depicted Taliban as foes, highly reflecting their newspapers' policies. The policy of the country and the newspaper were on the same page as it clearly shows.

Arif, Golan, and Moritz (2014) wrote an article with a new outtake on the Afghan Issue. This article focused on the relationship between Pakistan media and US, Pakistan media, and Taliban. It stated that both these parties look for approval and positive representation from Pakistani media. The authors researched some of the setbacks and possibilities both these sides face to be in the good books of Pakistani media and its public. For this article, several Pakistani journalists were interviewed online to gather information and data regarding Pakistani Media relations with US and Taliban; Taliban or Taliban-related terrorist groups' perception of Pakistani media policy; US authorities' perception of Pakistani media policy; Pakistani journalists using the Internet as a news source.

Communicational Benefits for Political Activism and Maneuvers

Wolf (2021) contemplated the statement given by Dr. Massouda Jalal in which she emphasized the trickery of Taliban. She stated that Taliban can never change, their whole activism is based on their sought-out ideology which they can never deter from. And whoever believes that this can happen is very naive and inexperienced. It can be their propaganda to present themselves as a moderate group, but it is only a deception for greater gain. International forces are trying to withdraw themselves from this war, but they should not compromise on any condition with Taliban. They will return to their old traits in no time. Barthwal (2021) states that after a two-decade-long war Taliban won because of how they evolved. They won the war with 21st-century strategies like hybrid warfare.

They utilized everything they got and used it to their maximum advantage. The opposition forces underestimated the influence of Taliban as well as the power and control they still had over the people of Afghanistan. Their manipulation of media i.e., social media, radio, broadcast tv, etc. became very fruitful. They indeed rose as the most brilliant guerrilla fighters in the history of Afghanistan. Their achievements are not only the result of their brilliance but also the incompetence of the Afghan government and army which proved to be weak and corrupt. Trillions of dollars were spent on them by the West, and all of this brought no difference at all. The last two decades were wasted by US and NATO in terms of money, time, and human life. Social Media is a place where anyone can say anything without any limitations of borders, ideologies, and beliefs. With the increase in this technology, social media is used as a medium to spread all kinds of information regarding anything and everything. It can be used as a negative tool as well in the dissemination of propaganda or any kind of agenda to manipulate and control the information circling around.

Bahar (2020) in his research focused on Twitter use by Taliban. Their tweets were used as content in qualitative research. These tweets were analyzed in contrast with news agencies and a huge number of discrepancies were found in the information shared by Taliban media activists. The

comparison also found the difference in reporting news by mainstream media and Taliban handles.

In Mottet's (2020) thesis, the main objective was to analyze the dissemination of the agenda of terrorist groups through their violent videos. ISIS, Taliban, and AQAP are all extremist groups that retort with violence. In their videos, they are shown executing or holding people hostage giving a powerful reply to their enemies and creating fear among them. These executions are a way of punishment for infidels or individuals that are creating problems for these groups. These groups choose death over rehabilitation. Videos from these groups were analyzed to see the strategies they use to send a message across. The research resulted in finding that ISIS wants to exert fear and show power, and ruthlessness of their group while Taliban wants to be presented as an honorable force trying to get Afghanistan's dignity back.

Behuria, Hassan, and Saroha (2019) discussed the Taliban and US dialogue regarding the pullout of US army from Afghanistan. Taliban seems to be having the upper hand and the US just want to compromise on whatever the agreement happens as it is in a hurry to get out of this situation and all the chaos they will be leaving behind. The pre-invasion situation looks very imminent. This research explored the results of US leaving Afghanistan and life after that situation. The world is in fear of the same old vicious Taliban regime as it was before 2001. Every country associated with Afghanistan has a role to play in not letting that happen. US must put all of its agenda for a better Afghanistan in the agreement for a non-violent and less chaotic situation that will bring peace among the regions.

Ahmad, Rasa, Orcutt, Blanchet & Haqmal (2021) covered the recent events in their study. They found that with the recent events of the fall of Kabul and the new Taliban government, the nation is grief-stricken and having nightmares of the flashbacks from their last Taliban government. Taliban has begun its old tactics of door-to-door inspections and killings of Afghan officials, engineers, healthcare professionals, media personnel, artists, journalists, and many more. One thing new is the social media inspection followed by the killing. The Afghan population faced a sudden spike in physical needs like food, shelter, and medicines as well as psychological needs of trauma counseling for the horrific living conditions that fell on them again, this time with no way out.

Theoretical Framework

Agenda Setting Theory was taken as a theoretical Framework. This theory, in the scenario of Pakistan media, plays a role in creating a perception of Taliban in the public's mind the exact and certain way they want. This research analyzed the shift in their policy has a deeper agenda at hand and finds out if Pakistani media is following the policy set by the government in Taliban matter. With this new wave of change in the government's policy, this theory proved that the media is playing its influencer role for the public of Pakistan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study is primarily a content analysis study of editorials of three selected newspapers to investigate the framing of Pakistani Media in the context of the Afghan Taliban before and after their takeover of Afghanistan. The three newspapers under study are The News, The Nation, and Dawn and the time period was January 1st, 2021 to December 31st, 2021.

Sampling Method

Purposive sampling was used in this research, Using this method, the researcher analyzed all the editorials from the specific time period from the said newspapers and chose those who fit the research.

Unit of Analysis

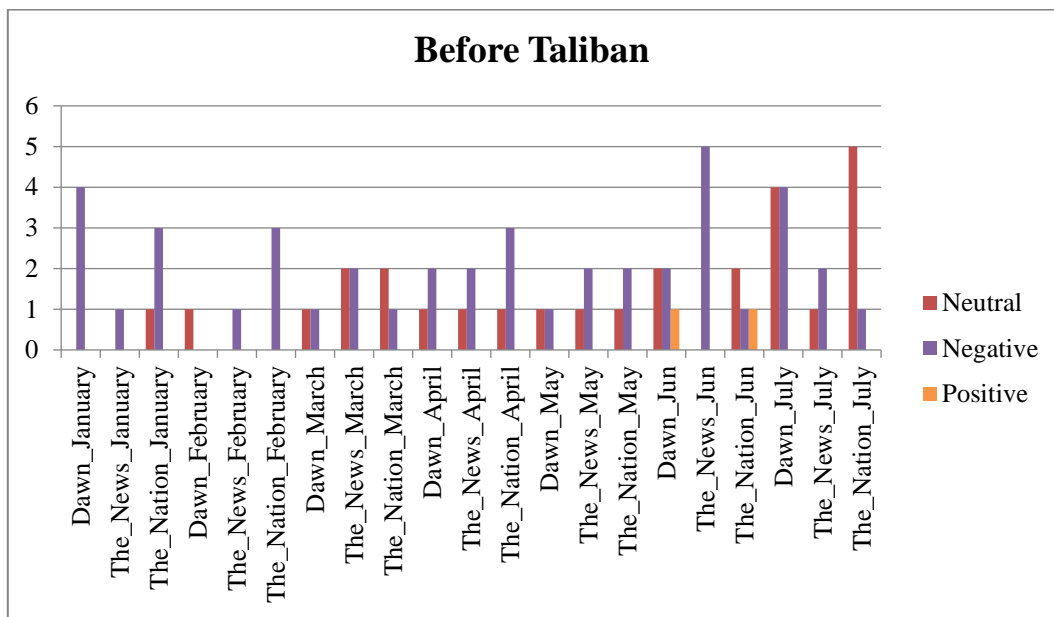
The unit of analysis in this study is the framing of the newspaper regarding the Talibans.

FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

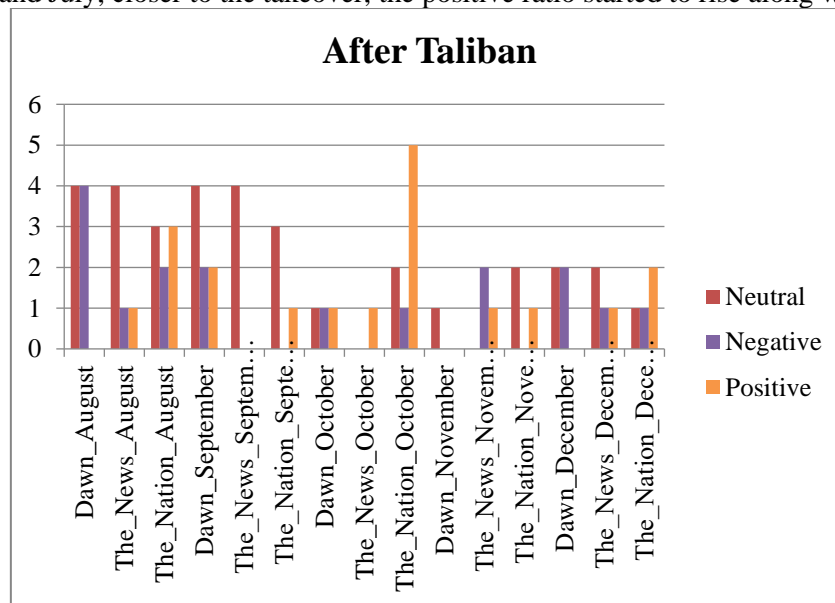
Content Analysis was applied to get the required information. All editorials from the said newspapers from January 1st, 2021, to December 31st, 2021. were gone through. The editorials with Taliban-related content were gathered and further, the editorials which included just Afghan Taliban were shortlisted as they are the focus of this research.

The editorials were analyzed lexically and conceptually to find the expected results for the research. Following are analytical findings with their respective months with their subcategories which were further proceeded to categorize codes: positive, negative, and neutral. A comparison was done between the newspaper editorials before and after the takeover and the graph shows huge

differences in them.



At the beginning of the year, editorials fell more into the negative category. The trend started to shift through March when the ratio of editorials became even between negative and neutral. Through June and July, closer to the takeover, the positive ratio started to rise along with the neutral.



During and after August, at the time of the takeover and after that, trends completely shifted. The negative editorials were published very less, and newspapers portrayed Taliban in a mostly neutral or positive light. Hence it proved the hypothesis.

Hypothesis Testing

Stats regarding all the months were obtained. Entities were denoted by numbers to understand conclusions more accurately i.e.,

- N/A as 0
- Neutral as 1
- Negative as 2
- Positive as 3

	Months	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
1	August	8	12.90	12.90
2	July	8	12.90	25.80
3	October	8	12.90	38.70
4	September	8	12.90	51.60
5	June	5	8.06	59.66
6	April	4	6.45	66.11
7	December	4	6.45	72.56
8	January	4	6.45	79.01
9	March	4	6.45	85.46
10	February	3	4.84	90.30
11	May	3	4.84	95.14
12	November	3	4.84	100.00

Chi-Square Testing

Table No. 1 Months*Dawn

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	44.892 ^a	33	.081
Likelihood Ratio	50.794	33	.025
N of Valid Cases	62		

48 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .19.

Table No. 2 Months*The News

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	55.204 ^a	33	.009
Likelihood Ratio	65.930	33	.001
N of Valid Cases	62		

a. 48 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .19.

Table 3 Months*The Nation

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	51.665 ^a	33	.020
Likelihood Ratio	55.214	33	.009
N of Valid Cases	62		

a. 48 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .39.

H1: Print Media started positive framing regarding Taliban after Afghanistan takeover.

Values in the above tables show that applying Chi-Square test, the values have expected count less than 5. Thus, it is deduced that Print media started positive framing of Taliban after Afghan Takeover and it proved H1 to be accepted.

CONCLUSIONS

The study focused on framing of Pakistani media regarding Afghan Taliban before and after their takeover of Afghanistan. The main purpose of this research was to find out the way Taliban were portrayed for decades of American war in Afghanistan and how much did it change after their pullout. In August 2021, the Taliban takeover and US troops' pullout happened. US supported Afghan administration couldn't survive without US army and in weeks it collapsed like a house of cards. In the literature review, much research was analyzed which concluded the reality of harsh reporting done by Pakistani media regarding Taliban since their last government in Afghanistan. Tens of studies bore

the same results which made the case even stronger.

The researcher went through some groundbreaking studies from the last two decades. They were very helpful in establishing the basis of certain claims. All research were from pre-takeover era, so this research became very necessary to understand more about the circumstances and their fluctuating relation with media. Theory of Agenda Setting seemed to be appropriate as it completed the goals of this research. The researcher applied this theory explain the reason behind the change in Pakistani media's tone.

Media's agenda changed as the takeover happened. Taliban rose to power which created this shift in reporting. The researcher chose qualitative research method of content analysis to support the problem statement. Three English newspapers were selected for this research. All Taliban-related editorials from year 2021 were analyzed. This included pre and post-Taliban takeover era. The months before the takeover was highly negatory as the researcher expected. There were also some neutral editorials, but a negative ratio was a record high. In and after August, the change was evident. The positive ratio in editorials spiked although there were still some negative editorials.

These results were put through statistical testing. Chi-testing was done on all the results obtained from these newspaper editorials. It clearly showed that before Taliban takeover, the newspaper framed Taliban negatively most of the time and after the takeover it drastically changed to positive. All newspapers were almost on the same page regarding this. Thus, it proved the researcher's hypothesis successfully that the "Print Media started positive framing regarding Taliban after Afghanistan takeover".

The change in media's tone was evident for the change in power dynamic in the region. It perfectly corelated to the change in Pakistan government's stance for Afghan Taliban. Before the takeover, Pakistan was urging Taliban for a peaceful solution and after the takeover it urged the world to help and accept Taliban for who they are as an editorial that were analyzed pertained. Newspapers are for the public and this stance was promoted through the power of media towards them.

Overall research bore fruitful results and the qualitative research done on the found data produced useful information. The hypothesis was widely accepted and proved by the completion of the research. Media performed a huge role throughout the critical and chaotic circumstances of Afghanistan and was a key counterpart of this situation. The research proved that media hugely changed its position on the Afghan Taliban. Taliban who were considered to be the sworn enemy by Pakistani media were dubbed to be the saviors of Afghanistan after the Afghan takeover.

Agenda setting theory applied to the research turned out to be an absolute fit for the situation of Pakistani media regarding Afghan Taliban. Their framing of news gave an insight of the government's stance in the high time. Media and the government joined its forces to forward their agenda not just for the general public of Pakistan but also for the world leaders and the forces involved in this. It showed where Pakistan was standing and with whom it is standing. Pakistani media showed flexibility in its own stance and put aside its own animosity for the Taliban in a very subtle way.

RECOMMENDATIONS

While doing this research regarding the works of media, the researcher has some suggestions that could improve the authenticity of reporting to a better and ethical pathway as a duty of being a student of mass communication.

- Media organizations should follow the pursuit of truthfulness and impartiality. Prejudice and bias against any group or subject can hinder away from the path of responsible journalistic integrity.
- While media is called a watch dog, audiences should not be considered as sheep in a herd. They shouldn't be disrespected with maligned and false information.
- A government is the highest authority of a country but it should not control the means of freedom of speech nor should it make its state agenda fed to public by controlling its media.
- Every group, subject or institute should be presented neutrally and the public should be allowed to the judge the situation presented in front of them.
- Media should not allow internal or external forces to use its resources for any negative means and should protect the moral and ethical values at best.

- A government should always do what's best for its own people and support the entities that deserve it. It should not stand to be a puppet of any external force and should take a powerful and strong stance for its own sovereignty.
- Media should wisely use its power of influencing people and should be socially responsible for what it delivers.
- Pakistani media is known to be powerless or sold-out machinery and it should curb this precedence and should work harder and should have a check and balance among itself to rise above this.
- The circumstances this research is based on is very current at this time. Future studies should cover more time from the post takeover to uncover more valuable information.
- Wider scale studies should be conducted which would consist of international media especially the American, Chinese, Indian and Russian media which were mostly involved in this fiasco.
- Future studies should also uncover the effects of this shift directly from the audience i.e., general public's perspective. This could shed more light on why was this shift influenced to happen. In depth interviews and surveys should be included to conclude this in a more precise manner.
- Issue based talk shows and electronic media should also be included in a thorough study to analyze the whole view point on a larger surface.
- The hand of government and external forces should also be researched in order to understand the matter more accurately.

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