

MEDIA DISCOURSE ON BENAZIR ASSASSINATION AND SYMPATHETIC VOTING PATTERN IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the relationship between media and individuals after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. It accounts for the mechanism set by the media which took one simple step to induce sympathy among people by way of framing the incident in favour of the deceased. This ultimately resulted into an immense driving force for 'sympathetic voting', eventually bringing about Pakistan People's Party to emerge on top in the 2008's general elections. The research theoretically dwells on the theory of framing and identifies media direction of framing the assassination. The methodology employed is qualitative analysis using interpretative textual analysis and content analysis. It presents a comprehensive explanation of the findings with respect to various aspects that shape public opinion. The key findings show that media did create sympathy among people which resulted in sympathy voting and this sympathy implanted by the media was a result of how media framed the assassination.

Keywords: Framing; sympathy vote, female politicians, content analysis; media discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Media Discourse on Benazir Assassination and Sympathetic Voting Pattern in Pakistan

Media discourse and political consciousness are two closely interlinked facets of society. Media is considered a channel of persuasion and mobilisation and has consequences for individuals, institutions, society and culture. It affects not only individual political opinions but also the way political activities are organized and conducted acting as a bridge between citizens and government. Past researches on mass media indicate that media has been a very effective tool for opinion formation and the creation of understanding on important issues (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). The notion of framing and framing paradigm can be applied to examine voting trends and public opinion in a society. The media create social reality by creating real image of information for individuals in a patterned and predictable manner (McQuail, 1994) But at the other side, people perceive media messages according to their own preferences. Entman thinks that framing has important implications for political communication because framing draws attention to certain aspects of reality and obscures other elements (Entman, 1993). As Zeller (1992) clearly points out, the frames for information are manipulated by the political elites and the course of public opinion depends on these operated frames. This has grave consequences and is considered potentially harmful for a healthy democratic society. On the contrary, it is thought to have the power of bringing back vanishing voters to the polling stations thus strengthening democracy.

Research efforts have been diverse examining media influence on politics and individuals This study aims to explore whether there exists a correlation between the frames presented by the media and those held by individuals, and how these frames may impact one another relationship that existed after Benazir Bhutto's assassination. It will examine the hypothetical notion pertaining to the victory of Pakistan People's Party emerging victorious after the general elections 2008 as a result of sympathetic framing of the incident by the media. This sympathy as hypothesized resulted into a huge mass of sympathy vote for

the deceased, affecting the democratic electoral process. India also went through a similar situation when Indira Gandhi was murdered by her bodyguards in 1984 and a sympathy vote put the Congress into driving seat as a result of favourable media framing (Mansoori, 2008). This study will examine how media framed Bhutto's assassination and its possible impact (positive or negative) on citizens before the general elections. The questions pursued for the purpose of this research focus on the symbiotic or ambivalent relationship that existed between frames of individual and media in the broader sense of the subject.

Political Assassinations: The Role of Media

There is a glut of research-studies accessible on the relational subject between media and politics. For this research, studies related to framing of politics in news media, feminisation of politics, regulation and policy issues, coverage of assassinated politicians and media's role in elections have been reviewed since these areas are closely connected to the present research study. Indeed, media and politics are mutually dependent institutions of society that provide the primary social needs by giving citizens access to information and governance affairs respectively. The media play a role of bridge between public and rulers and provide aid in exchanging views between citizens to their elected ones. Initial studies in the subject of communication and mass-media suggests that Traditionally, the media have been seen as an significant factor in molding public opinion and fostering agreement on particular values (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Lippman, 1922; West & Turner, 2005). Today, the media havng impact on citizens in many ways and create for them by framing that influence their behavior in the face of external catalyst (Gerbner, 1986; Littlejohn, 2002; Noelle-Neumann, 1973).

Certain academics have highlighted the framing of information by the media and its impact on political processes as a grave concern, citing its increasing influence on the maintenance of a robust democracy (Altschull, 1984; Franklin, 1997; Mander, 1977; Patterson, 2003; Postman, 1985). Another school of thought holds that various media, including entertainment, can play an important role in bringing absentee voters to the polls and that the political frames used by various media strengthen citizenship and democracy (Baum, 2002; Brant, 1998; Gitlin, 2002; Newton, 2003; Norris, 2000; Van Zunen, 2005).

According to McQuail, the history of media effects research can be divided into four distinct phases influenced by different time periods. However, the most recent and so far the last stage began in the early 1980s, described as "social constructivism", where the media have a strong impact on the public and construct social reality for them and since media discourse is part of the process, audiences develop their own meanings from media messages (Scheufele, 1999). Similarly, Berger & Luckmann (1967) noted that In political communication, the media build up civil facts for public by framing politics in different ways, but at the same time, the public uses their framing to understand these treated realities. "News audiences rely on journalists' interpretations of meanings and merits" when they lack adequate information about a particular incident. Thus, media greatly influences public opinion and the fact that a particular news story has received substantial news coverage eventually becomes important and audiences start to rely on them while making political judgements (Graber, 2003).

Nevertheless, according to Zaller (1990), framing has a key role in a democratic process as it is controlled and set by the political elite. It could prove central in shaping public opinion and therefore there is no proper manifestation of true public opinion since there are several angles and frames that could be applied(as already controlled by the political elite) to an issue therefore this questions the reliability of the democratic process (Entman, 1993). One considerable aspect in deciding upon true public opinion could be how women politicians are framed by the media. Studies show that women politicians win in equal percentages as do men but do the media give equal coverage to both men and women? (Newman, 1994). Mohammadi and Ross (1996) in their research conclude that the media frames women in an unfavourable fashion and men in a more encouraging manner. The concept of gendered politics leads to the portrayal of men and women differently which creates an imbalance of valid representation in polls leading to a compromise in democratic representation. On the contrary, Kahn (1994) in his study indicates that gender stereotyped news coverage can sometimes project women in positive fashion which can lead to a positive impact on polls (Kahn, 1994). This can have a wide array of possible impact as per the relevant issue or occurrence of an event such as political assassination and development of sympathy for the deceased female leader.

The cognitive dissonance theory suggest that a attitude change does arise in return to an sudden event (Festinger, Riecken & Schacter, 1956 ; Festinger, 1957; Granberg & Nanneman, 1986). Literature

available on political assassinations indicates similar behaviour such as the unexpected murder of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1984 and a sympathy vote put the Congress into the driving seat as a result of favourable media framing (Mansoori, 2008). The Congress party's campaign began with a focus on Indira Gandhi, with her son Rajiv Gandhi running for election to become the next prime minister after his death. Sympathy was considered a sure factor for Congress to win most seats and votes ever, making up to a total of 401 (79%) surpassing both Nehru and Indira Gandhi at the height of their success (Hardgrave, 1985). A similar situation once again took place when Rajiv Gandhi, was later assassinated in 1991 in the midst of India's parliamentary elections. The Congress emerged as the largest single party since the anti-Congress sentiments started to vanish soon after the assassination and the party stood victorious by acquiring a huge portion of sympathy vote (Andersen, 1991). Both assassinations left masses in a state of shock despite the unsatisfactory image these politicians at some point had of them among people. This well explains that sympathy consciously develops in people in response to an unexpected incident.

Essaiasson and Granberg argue In their study of the assassination of Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme, that research on opinion change confirms the importance of the critical event. According to this perspective, the viewpoints of voters tend to remain relatively constant until a particular 'event' takes place. This event has the potential to redefine how the public reacts to a political party, issue, or other political entity (Essaiasson & Granberg, 1996). Benazir Bhutto's assassination certainly qualifies for this kind of reformation of attitude and opinion considering her time away from the country against charges of corruption, which people of Pakistan had never expected from a politician of her stature. However, what the research clearly lacks is an emphasis on the role of media in shaping public opinion especially since it is based on a political assassination and its effects on the subsequent elections in 1988. Their findings briefly conclude that a critical event is an unexpected incident which dominates media coverage and becomes the main focus of public attention for a sustained period of time. In my opinion this hypothesis or assumption needs to be clearly justified by analyzing the manner in which the critical event dominates media coverage, how it was framed by the media and whether there was a symbiotic or ambivalent effect between media frames and individual frames.

Smith in his research introduces the concept of "Eulogy Effect" which refers to increased positive media coverage of the deceased. Past research on media framing and cognitive information processing shows that the "eulogy effect" can potentially be significant in the process of opinion formation (Smith, 2002). Smith explores how media framed the sudden death of Missouri Governor Mel Carnahan in a plane crash while he was in "the midst of a closely-contested campaign for U.S. Senate, which he later won posthumously" (Smith, 2002). The findings indicate that there was an immense impact of the incident on voting behaviour since the deceased was given increased projection by the media so much so that the opposition leader and his party were completely side-lined. The research although mentions about increased media coverage of the incident but lacks in how media actually affected public opinion and whether there was a reverse effect to it – from public to media. Another interesting aspect could be whether this media coverage created sympathy among people which led to sympathetic voting and what was the extent of "eulogy effect"- whether it continued to last even after several days of the elections or faded with time?

Literature available on regulation and policy is also important for this research study. No doubt, Regulation and policy plays an important role in the process of news framing and formation of public opinion. Herman and Chomsky's 'propaganda model' identifies how power through wealth and politics can dominate the accuracy of news. They differentiate between states where power is in the hands of state bureaucracy and monopolistic media concentrations supplemented by censorship and states where the press is completely free and uncensored. There is marked difference between the outcome of news in both censored and uncensored state affairs which draws a wide contrast between the two in terms of news framing. The resultant public opinion eventually depends on how and what information was allowed to be framed. On the other hand political elite argue that press-censorship arises less frequently and generally involves news pertaining to national security (Graber, 1984). Also, at times the Government and societal institutions hold information that they do not want to publicize and thus the media also loses access to it. This is evident from the days of Cuban missile crisis in 1962 and John. F. Kennedy's presidency during this time. His active participation in press gave rise to the phrase 'news management' as he played a vital

role in what information was relevant for the press and what was not so relevant during that critical period (Small, 1974).

The literature reviewed above in one way or the other associates with media framing of messages and how it affects the meaning or more precisely public opinion. To further rationalize the concept I will now analyse framing in terms of conceptual framework highlighting the main theoretical approach used in framing this research. Entman (1993) refers to framing as ‘scattered conceptualization’ which suggests that nowhere has there been a firm single meaning of framing ever constructed despite its ‘omnipresence across social sciences and humanities’. It is then argued that no matter what its specific use, ‘framing describes the power of communicating text’ (Entman, 1993). Framing theory helps us to know how journalists make certain aspects of political messages more noticeable through repetition and placement. The concept of media frames has helped understand how professional communicators use keywords, images, and symbols to emphasize specific aspects of issues. In political communication, framing has to be defined and operationalized under social constructivism. Media framings are used to sway public opinion in the direction the communicator deems desirable. Recipients use their individual frames and process information to understand media messages. However according to Kosicki & McLeod (1990) there are three forms in which news processing takes place – ‘active processing’, ‘reflective integration’ and ‘selective scanning’ (Scheufele, 1999). Active processing is where audiences seek out more information since they think the information provided is ‘incomplete’, ‘slanted’ or biased. Reflective integrators on the other hand think on what they have gathered and talk to others to acquire more clarity about what they have learned. Lastly, selective scanners choose only relevant information and ignore the uninteresting or not so useful information (Scheufele, 1999). According to Neuman et al. (1992) audiences rely on personal experiences and peers in order to construct meaning of a message. To analyze framing it is important to closely scrutinize aspects related to giving and receiving of information – commonly known as the media frames and individual frames.

Media Frames and Individual Frames: There are various definitions which define framing in the realm of political communication such as definitions offered by Entman and Gitlin. Entman (1991) describes media frames as the ‘attributes of the news itself’ and individual frames as ‘information processing schemata’. However, in Gitlin’s (1980) view frames are “largely unspoken and unacknowledged, organize the world both for journalists who report it and, in some important degree, for us who rely on their reports” (as cited in Scheufele, 1999). Other scholars like Gamson & Modigliani (1987) view media frames as “a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events”. A media frame organizes reality in everyday life turning the non-recognized in to recognized (Tuchman, 1978). Individual frames according to Entman (1993) are clusters of ideas that are mentally stored which guide the information processing in an individual’s mind.

Dependent and Independent Frames: Media frames and individual frames are both dependent and independent. Dependent media frames could be influenced by individuals, ideological variables, social or organizational variables where as at individual level it could be an outcome of direct media message. Scheufele (1999) remarks, that in case of independent media frames the most logical outcome is a link to audience frames. As for independent individual frames it is important to question whether or not individual framing can have an effect on the decision of political actors (Scheufele, 1999).

In this study, we have examined the relationship - symbiotic or ambivalent - between media and individual frames. The coverage of assassination of Benazir Bhutto a few days before general elections in Pakistan has been analyzed to understand how media frames influenced public opinion and consequently were affected by the individual frames in shaping and packaging of the media content. Considering the strong link between politics and media, this research unlike earlier researches addresses the formation of public opinion through media resulting into ‘sympathy voting’. The objective of this research is to discover what kind of relationship (if any) existed between media frames and individual frames and how these frames influenced each other after the assassination of Benazir Bhutto. This research study would focus on framing of Benazir Bhutto’s assassination on December 27, 2007, by the media in Pakistan and it is hypothesized that this framing ultimately won a sympathy vote for Pakistan People’s Party which emerged victorious after February 18, 2008 general elections.

Media and Sympathy Voting: The Research Questions

The research questions for the purpose of this study will focus on the role of media in forming public opinion that. The proposed research questions are as follows:

Research Question 1: Did Pakistan People's Party win Pakistan general elections 2008 due to a sympathetic coverage of Benazir Bhutto's assassination on December 27, 2007?

Research Question 2: What was the relationship - symbiotic or ambivalent - between media frames and audience frames on Benazir Bhutto's assassination before the general elections 2008?

To sum up, the review of the literature provides sound underpinning for this research as it analyzes how media affects individuals by constructing social reality derived from the concept of 'social constructivism' and how individuals perceive or make sense of this reality. It talks about the role of media framing in democratic process and how it may affect public opinion, in which case electoral process could turn out to be biased. This could be a result of sympathy among people as in case of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination which led people cast a sympathy vote. The research done in the past covers most aspects which are required to answer questions for the issue under study. However, in this research I would like to bring to the fore the idea of a female politician assassinated in a third world country like Pakistan where there still exist male dominated values and how this may have affected the individuals as a result of favourable or unfavourable media representation. It will also scrutinize aspects related to dependence or independence of frames, i.e., whether there exists a symbiotic or ambivalent relationship between media and individuals.

METHODOLOGY

The nature and scope of this research scrutinizes two angles of the issue at hand - first allowing the researcher to delve into individual opinions acquiring first-hand information of personal experiences and second to examine the media standpoint on the subject in a broader perspective. Therefore, qualitative method was considered most flexible for this kind of an exploratory research that could allow more flexibility for exploring the issue in the process. Denzin & Lincoln (2000) remark that qualitative research "*seeks answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning*", understanding the world from the subject's point of view forming a positivist epistemological position. On the contrary, it also identifies systematic objectivity of messages from a broader perspective such as constructing its own social reality.

The study aims at developing rather testing a theory and therefore forms an inductive view on the basis of what is unknown (Bryman, 2004). Blumer (1954) draws a distinction between two concepts namely 'definitive' and 'sensitising'. In his view 'definitive' concepts are restrictive whereas 'sensitising' concepts offer a variety and are more general in the way that they provide "*a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances*" (Blumer, 1954). The qualitative approach inclines towards the later and tends to offer a dynamic aspect to study the theoretical approach employed to evolve a completely new aspect from the existing theory.

We decided to conduct content analysis to have a clear understanding of how media construct social reality for individuals and how individuals perceive this constructed reality. Content analysis allows us to explore how media framed the issue and what its stance was, whereas the focus groups probe into the detailed analysis of what individuals experienced and how media affected them. The research was designed to study the hypothetical notion that media created sympathy among people after Benazir Bhutto's assassination by framing the issue in a favourable manner. However, to analyse this it was important to carefully consider both ends i.e. the individual point of view and the stance of the media.

This research employed content analysis to analyse data in the form of text. This method was selected as a follow up of the first stage of the research to gather an insight on how media framed the incident that shaped public opinion in a particular manner. Berelson (1952) defines content analysis as "*a research technique for the objective, systematic and the quantitative description of the manifest content of communication*". However, Krippendorff (2004) in his definition omits Berelson's requirement of quantification as in his view "*all reading of text is qualitative even when certain characteristics of text are later converted into numbers*", therefore this research focused on the qualitative approach of content analysis for maximum accuracy of the context.

Press has been the most reliable of all media institutions in Pakistan and is given paramount significance not only by the political elite but also by citizens in general. Television on the other hand was not considered due to various reasons such as the constant hammering of the same issue with multiple stances and at times a change of stance, similar coverage on every channel and lack of authentic dialogues among opinion leaders. Like editorials depict the policy of the newspaper that allows essential aspects of what needs to be highlighted, television did not hold any such policy but to project everything as it occurred. Scholars like Neil Postman argue that television at times weakens the democratic process which makes it less reliable. Editorial section in any newspaper is considered the most important, since it is representative of the official policy of the newspaper and has an objective tone which is not present in other general news sections. The research therefore was based on the analysis of editorials since they offer a unique opportunity to examine the development of any public policy issue. This eventually shapes public opinion according to the editorial stance guided by a certain policy of the newspaper.

Before deciding upon the selection of the proposed research method, it was important to critically analyse other methods that could have been employed in this research but various concerns were raised. Initially, questionnaire survey was thought to be a useful method but practicality of obtaining a representative sample from a population of 16 million people was not significant. Moreover, the questionnaire survey could only provide one side of the story whereas examining an issue like the assassination and the role of media in shaping public opinion, it was important to equally explore both ends. Other methods like individual interviews or discourse analysis were thought to restrict the scope of findings, therefore were not considered.

Content Analysis of Newspapers

The later part of the research dealt with content analysis for which the unit of analysis were signed and unsigned editorials from two major newspapers 'Dawn' and 'Daily Times'. Dawn is Pakistan's most acclaimed newspaper holding a pro stance for Benazir Bhutto and her party and 'Daily Times' on the contrary is known for having a bouncing policy. The sample comprised of editorials from October 2007-February 2008, examining 302 editorials in total. The reason for not leaving any editorial was due to the short span of the event that could not ensure reliability of what had been informed by the press, had there been material reduced or randomized. However, editorials which were not relevant to the subject were ignored and the results were dependent on a total of 143 editorials that were considered relevant to the research.

To organize the text analysis there were four categories developed under which the editorials were framed depending on ideologies, descriptive phrases, key words, idioms and tone of the editorials. Each category provided examples of frames which were considered by the coders for rating the editorials. The reason for developing a coding frame within each category was to allow more flexibility in gathering useful frames which otherwise would have been restricted, had the coders only followed a few.

1-Benazir Bhutto's return to Pakistan 'A'

This category comprises of editorials dealing with Benazir Bhutto's return to Pakistan after eight years of self-imposed exile to contest in the general elections 2008. It includes frames pertaining to her image as an exiled politician with charges of corruption such as, "*she must however realise that she is returning to a changed country whose people are more aware of their surroundings*", "*It is hoped that by now she has learnt from her past mistakes*", "*egregious follies and foibles of the past*" and "*Bhutto has returned on the basis of a deal*". It also frames the positive and neutral image that she had retained like "*THE Bhutto charisma is not yet over*", "*Ms Bhutto, by contrast, is still quite popular*" and "*Ms Bhutto should be allowed to defend herself and the government should allow the courts to do their job*". All editorials with the mentioned frames will be treated under this category.

2-Benazir Bhutto's assassination - A grave tragedy 'B'

This will examine editorials which marked Benazir Bhutto's assassination as a grave tragedy or a national tragedy. It will include the language and expression stereotypes used by the newspapers to frame the incident such as popular remarks like "*Pakistan has lost much of its hope for a liberal, moderate and progressive society that she wanted to create*", "*whether one agreed with her politically or not, her death is a national tragedy of mammoth proportions.*", "*today we are all united in grief, we are all Bhuttos now.*" and "*her assassination has shattered the nation*". This is a straightforward category and will measure the extent to which newspapers have framed the concept of 'tragedy' overall.

3-Public reaction after the assassination ‘C’

This will include editorials that depicted public sentiments after the assassination such as shock, grief, anger and sympathy. Such editorials will frame adjectives, words, or phrases like, “*violence spawned by public sentiment*”, “*flood of tears*”, “*anger and mayhem ruled the streets of Karachi*”, “*as shocked and numb Pakistan mourns the death of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, it is indeed difficult to provide words that would provide comfort to the grieving nation*”, “*angry mobs*”, “*angry rioters*”. This is another straightforward category which will concentrate on editorials dealing with public reaction.

4-Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) victory in general elections ‘D’

This category explores the possible reasons regarding the assumptions made and causes of PPP’s victory in the general elections 2008. It will focus on the “sympathy” stereotype that has been hypothesized and framed by both newspapers. The frames for it will include idioms, slogans, phrases, headlines or catchy words such as “*Bhutto sympathisers*”, “*sympathy wave for Benazir Bhutto*” and “*PPP’s decision to go for the January 8 elections is the sympathy wave it expects after the assassination of Ms Bhutto.*” Moreover, it will also cover the negative and the neutral stance of the press like, “*will PPP able to translate sympathy for Benazir Bhutto into an electoral victory.*”, “*rulers do not want PPP to get sympathy vote*” and “*the current sympathy wave throughout the country might translate into a bigger voter turnout and more swing votes for the PPP*”.

There were two coders assigned on the basis of their knowledge of the issue and general comprehension. The coders were also trained accordingly to bring maximum reliability in the results. Each editorial was read at least three times which included the headline and body. The editorials were placed under each category based on the content potentially related. However, the coders were carefully instructed to put any editorial that did not come under any of the four categories naming it as ‘miscellaneous’ category. Before proceeding the actual analysis, an inter coder reliability check was performed using 15 editorials from each newspaper using Holsti’s (1969) coefficient of reliability:

$$C. R. = 2m / n_1 + n_2$$

The level of agreement was 96% and no systematic error was found during the check for reliability.

Directions of the content: To measure the direction of the content of each editorial ‘the total problem’ or ‘the totality of the impression’ method was adopted as proposed by Berelson (1952). This was used to determine the direction or orientation of the communication used in framing. To determine the direction of the contents of the editorials, data was ranked on a three point scale: supportive (+), opposite (-), and neutral (0).

Favourable/Supportive (+)

Any editorial will be considered supportive if its stance is framed positive or favourable towards each of the four categories A, B, C and D. This will include key words, phrases, themes or adjectives (such as, Bhutto is invariably more articulate and attractive, ‘grave national tragedy’, ‘daughter of the titan’ ‘countrywide grief’, angry mobs, ‘public sympathy and fascination for Bhutto’ etc.)

Unfavourable/Negative (-)

Editorials will be considered negative if their stance is unfavourable which includes a pessimistic tone towards categories A, B, C and D. This will include phrases, catchy words or adjectives (like ‘the popular image of Ms. Benazir Bhutto and the PPP has suffered following her decision to try and cut a deal with a general’, and ‘the rulers do not want PPP to get sympathy vote’ etc.)

Neutral/Balanced/Mixed (0)

Any editorial will be considered neutral if its stance is balanced or mixed or if the stance is neither favourable nor unfavourable or has a balance of negative and positive arguments. Such editorials will present an unbiased standpoint (such as ‘there is sympathy but in spite of groundswell of sympathy, the PPP is unlikely to translate it into an electoral landslide’.)

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This research employed qualitative content analysis that aimed at examining the topical direction of the editorials categorically. A total of 143 editorials relevantly discussed the categories suggested in the last chapter with various percentages (A = 33.56%, B= 23.0%, C=18.9%, D=25.1%) of articles studied under each category.

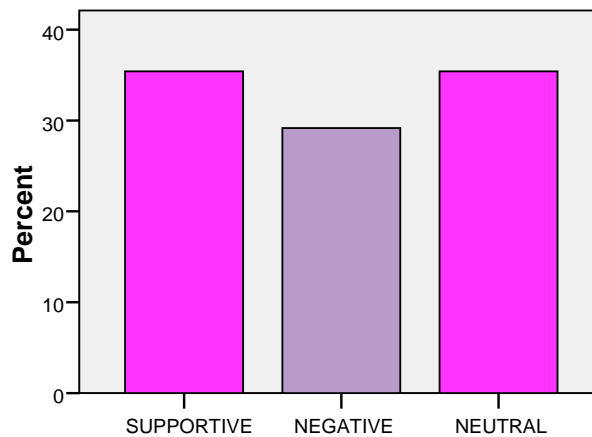
Categories:

- 1-Benazir Bhutto’s return to Pakistan ‘A’
- 2-Benazir Bhutto’s assassination - A grave tragedy ‘B’
- 3-Public reaction after the assassination ‘C’
- 4-Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) victory in general elections ‘D’

Benazir Bhutto’s return to Pakistan ‘A’

Benazir Bhutto’s return to Pakistan after 8 years of self-imposed exile has been an issue of immense importance since the emergence of dictatorship in the country in 1999. Eliasoph (1998) argues that politicians are routinely framed negatively by media (as cited in Van Zoonen, 2005, p. 5). The notion of Bhutto’s return to Pakistan has been portrayed by the media as both acceptable and unacceptable pertaining to the charges of corruption on a political personality of her stature. After a careful textual analysis, results were obtained regarding media framing of Bhutto’s return making category ‘A’ as the most important of all in terms of media coverage. A total of 143 editorials were studied and 33.56% were only focused on category ‘A’. Within this there were 35.4% editorials that had a supportive stance and another 35.4% that had a neutral inclination towards Bhutto’s return to Pakistan. However, 29.2% editorials indicated a negative stance.

BB'S RETURN TO PAKISTAN - A



BB'S RETURN TO PAKISTAN - A

Comparing the two newspapers Dawn as it is also considered pro-PPP (Pakistan People’s Party), was more supportive and neutral than Daily Times which has a bouncing policy and was almost equally supportive, opposing (negative) and neutral for Benazir Bhutto’s return to Pakistan.

BB'S RETURN TO PAKISTAN - A

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SUPPORTIVE	17	35.4	35.4	35.4
	NEGATIVE	14	29.2	29.2	64.6
	NEUTRAL	17	35.4	35.4	100.0
Total		48	100.0	100.0	

Benazir Bhutto’s assassination - A grave tragedy ‘B’

Benazir Bhutto’s assassination was of immense importance not only for the people of Pakistan but for the media due to factors like a female politician of great stature and following assassinated; the assassination was an ultimatum of the Bhutto legacy coming to an end and a long history of political execution and murders in the family. The results obtained marked the assassination as a grave tragedy. A total of 23% editorials were studied under this category from which 100% response had a supportive direction completely sidelining the rest of the two directions such as ‘negative’ or ‘neutral’. There was no difference of reporting between the two newspapers despite the fact that one holds a pro-PPP policy and the other is

relatively neutral in its policy. Therefore, the frames identified by the press were inclined towards the fact that Benazir Bhutto's assassination was a grave tragedy.

BB'S ASSASSINATION - A GRAVE TRAGEDY - B

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SUPPORTIVE	33	100.0	100.0	100.0

Public reaction after the assassination 'C'

A few scholars (Festinger, Riecken & Schacter, 1956; Festinger, 1957; Granberg & Nanneman, 1986) in their study on cognitive resonance remark that change in attitude takes place in response to an unexpected incident. Despite that there was varied opinion regarding Bhutto as a leader especially after her time in exile, the assassination brought positive uniformity in people's attitudes. This is clearly evident from the results which showed that from a total of 18.9% editorials which were analysed under category 'C', all had a 'supportive' view leaving the 'negative' and 'neutral' directions aside.

PUBLIC REACTION AFTER THE ASSASSINATION

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SUPPORTIVE	27	100.0	100.0	100.0

Also, the difference of individual results between DAWN and Daily Times was negligible and both newspapers precisely had a similar stance. This means that the frames analysed confirmed a wave of sympathy, shock and grief among the people as framed by the press.

Pakistan People's Party (PPP) victory in general elections 'D'

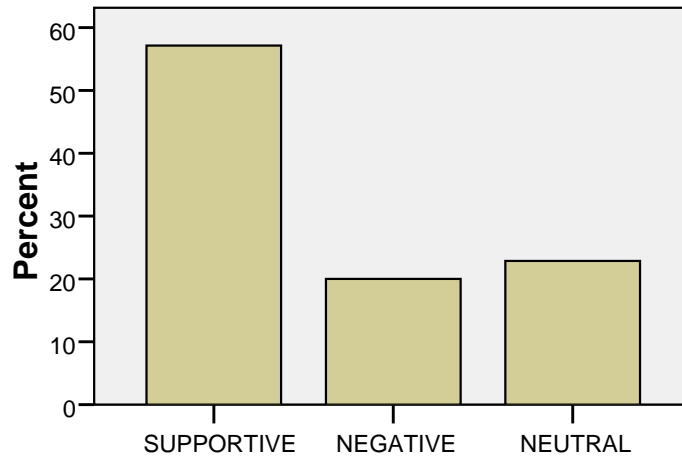
Past researches indicate that change in electoral process does occur in response to an unexpected incident like an assassination of a political leader. This has remained unchanged throughout history which is evident from historical cases like the assassination of U.S President John. F. Kennedy and Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Similar situation took place after Benazir Bhutto's murder but the textual analysis indicates a variety in the direction of media framing. The results mark category 'D' as the second most important category in this analysis in terms of media coverage. There were 24.4% editorials analysed from which 57% were 'supportive', 20% 'negative' and 22.9% neutral.

PPP VICTORY IN GENERAL ELECTIONS

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	SUPPORTIVE	20	57.1	57.1	57.1
	NEGATIVE	7	20.0	20.0	77.1
	NEUTRAL	8	22.9	22.9	100.0
	Total	35	100.0	100.0	

This means that majority of the editorials framed PPP's victory as a result of sympathetic voting whereas there remained less difference between the negative and neutral directions which indicated that an almost equal percentage of editorials indicated that PPP's victory was 'not a result of sympathy' or 'could be a result of sympathy'. It was interesting to note that there was a huge difference between the framing of the two newspapers where Daily Times' coverage was more than twice that of DAWN with a ratio of 25:10. In total, Daily Times had 60% supportive, 20% negative and 20% neutral editorials whereas, DAWN had 50% supportive, 30% negative and 20% neutral editorials. The findings indicate that newspapers did frame PPP's victory as a result of the sympathy wave that had emerged after the assassination.

PPP VICTORY IN GENERAL ELECTIONS



PPP VICTORY IN GENERAL ELECTIONS

In summing up, the findings obtained indicated the following:

- Both newspapers framed Benazir Bhutto’s return to Pakistan as equally favourable, unfavourable and neutral.
- Benazir Bhutto’s assassination was framed as a grave tragedy
- Public reaction was framed as sympathetic towards Benazir Bhutto
- Newspapers framed that there existed a sympathy wave among people for Benazir Bhutto.

DISCUSSION

The findings and analysis obtained from this study provide answer to the research questions. Stage I outlines how media especially television influenced individual opinions whereas Stage II confirms the extent of newspaper coverage and framing of the assassination that resulted in developing sympathy among people. Referring back to the research questions and theoretical background of the topic, the relationship between media frames and individual frames was an interdependent or symbiotic relationship where individual frames received more reinforcement from the media frames.

As a few scholars (Altschull, 1984; Franklin, 1997; Mander, 1977; Patterson, 2003; Postman, 1985) view media’s framing of politics as potentially harmful for the existence of a healthy democratic system. The reinforcement of the media frames on individual frames turned out to have harmful effects on democratic electoral process which is evident by the election results. Frames are indicators of power, as Entman remarks, “the imprint of power” (Entman, 1993, p. 55). By constant reinforcement of similar messages, individuals were attuned to what media wanted them to watch and read which is why biasness was felt in the reactions. Gerbner in his cultivation analysis focuses on television’s contributions to viewers’ conception of social reality. A few scholars (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli and Shanahan) remark television as a centralized system of storytelling (Zillman & Bryant, 2002). Since press is the most reliable of all media institutions in Pakistan, it was made the main source of examining media framing of the assassination. However, it was interesting to explore from Stage I results that respondents unconsciously referred to media as only ‘television’ and did not have much to say about the newspapers, despite that most of them were regular readers of newspaper. The results of this study therefore provide sound underpinning for the research questions from both the television and newspapers standpoint and also confirm that television was a more popular medium than newspapers.

The media while creating sympathy among individuals also benefited from it i.e. inducing sympathy in people and repeatedly reporting the after effects of it. This is evident from the focus groups category E results where respondents indicated an unconscious change in their feelings towards the

deceased which deepened over time. Also, the findings of category B of Stage II (content analysis) confirmed Bhutto's assassination as a 'grave tragedy' with a 100% response towards the supportive direction. Eliasoph (1998) argues that politicians are routinely framed negatively by the media. This study illustrates that the 'sympathy' automatically created a good image of the deceased despite her negative image due to corruption charges and political exile.

The answer to the hypothesis whether media framing ultimately favoured Pakistan People's Party to emerge victorious after the elections was hence proved by the findings. Gitlin (1980) describes framing as "a significant social force" that formulates public ideology and Hackett (1984) further argues "that ideology provides a framework through which events are presented." (Hackett, 1984). The results of category C and D of Stage II (content analysis) clearly indicate the framing of a sympathy wave which resulted in a major change in voting behaviour. On the other hand respondents believed that the excessive coverage created sympathy among people and this sympathy by constant reinforcement dwelled to an extent which resulted in sympathetic voting.

The public opinion depends on the extent to which an issue is framed and how it is framed guided by regulatory policies. Referring to Chomsky's propaganda model, power of wealth and politics can have an effect on the accuracy of news. The results of the focus groups indicate that there was no apparent restriction on the media by the government. Despite that the country was going through an unjust dictatorial rule and the recent closing down of television channels as a result of political riots before the assassination, there was no blame on the government for restricting the media anywhere but media was also thought to have an understated stance. Both television and newspapers openly projected the situation and no bias was felt or indicated in the findings. It is argued that media frames women in an unfavourable fashion. However, the results indicated that there was no such bias in the portrayal of the deceased being a female politician – neither in favour nor against. Nowhere in the results there was such indication that Bhutto had received votes because of gender bias.

The study proves the research questions and clearly indicates that the media framing of the assassination paved way for the Pakistan People's Party to emerge victorious in the elections.

CONCLUSION

Towards the close of the research, it was realized that the relationship between media and individuals cannot be explored without touching nitty-gritty details of the issue under study. According to Goffman, events interpreted in terms of natural frameworks are perceived as unguided therefore the analysis suggests that media frames did impact individual frames without forcing people. It is therefore up to the individuals to perceive from the happening and make sense of the message and situation. Theoretically, it was concluded that frames do contribute in building the sense of a story and constructing social reality for individuals who are influenced by these frames. Reflecting upon the research questions, it was evident that there existed a symbiotic relationship between media frames and individual frames since the views and comments obtained from the respondents were reflected in the text analysed. Also, the comments indicated variation of similar ideologies under different categories but the core thought remained unchanged.

Methodologically, qualitative analysis proved to be a very sound method of examining individual opinions and media framing but there remained scope for quantitative analysis that could provide figures for additional reliability. A triangulation research approach combining both qualitative and quantitative methods could prove very beneficial for future researchers with a relatively larger size of the population sample. The advantage of the research decisions taken benefited the research in terms of analysing the data almost from every possible angle. The obtained findings may or may not prove to be representative of the voting behaviour as a result of media influence but stand sufficiently justifying for further research.

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