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Measuring Correlations between Media Agenda and Public Agenda: The Case of Cable Channels in Pakistan

ABSTRACT

Four national issues were analyzed to tap the relationship between media agenda and public agenda on two mainstream cable channels; Express News and Geo News. This study involved the random selection of talk shows and news bulletins broadcast during prime time over the course of a year. The study adopted a mixed methodology approach and the information collated was centered on matters of law and order, corruption, democracy, as well as memo-gate scandal, in terms of content analysis. At the same time, 500 TV viewers were analyzed via a survey to obtain an understanding of the valences and connections on these subjects. In total, there were 312 news bulletins and also 312 talk shows that were utilized in the study. As part of the analysis, theories of framing and agenda setting were key mechanisms deployed in order to assess the project's initial thesis. The project's conclusions demonstrated a significant Results of the study indicated strong link between the public's issues and the

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media's issues agenda on all matters save for memo-gate scandal. Correlations varied from +.20 to +.92, the p values being lower than .001. Furthermore, the findings suggested a substantial alignment between the stance taken on matters on the shows and the stance of the TV viewers, again with the exception of memo-gate scandal.

Key Words: *Media Agenda, Public Agenda, Correlations, Cable Channels, National Issues.*

Introduction and Literature Review

Media in this digitized world has captured a premier place in the development and progress of a social system. Peoples' news consumption patterns have been changed entirely and at the same time media's production patterns have also been drastically changed in the recent decades. It became only possible with the rapid and sharp growth in the field of telecommunications. The last decade in Pakistani media landscape was not less than a dream for the people when monopoly of the government in the field of electronic media came to an end with the influx of private cable channels. Print media in general and electronic media in particular could not play its 'institutional role' in the country as the country forced to bear four dictatorships since its 68 years of independence from British. Time to time media regulations and restrictions were some of the main drawbacks in the poor growth and freedom of press. General Musharraf regime claimed to have a credit of the liberalization of private cable channels in the country. In contrast to the policy of news and analysis of mouth piece state-run PTV; the people now have a number of options to get information

from different media outlets with diverse expert opinion. News event's happening to news delivery time has been reduced due to these technological advancements. All such positive moves have been helpful in making awareness among the people about national and international issues. At present, more than 90 cable channels are functioning in the country which is governed by a Pakistan media regulatory authority (PEMRA). Further, about hundred FM radio channels under PEMRA and dozens of illegal FM radio channels under the control of extremist organizations are also functioning in the country. It can be said; in general, that media in Pakistan is enjoying noteworthy freedom. . In the Pakistani media landscape, the Jang group has been leading media groups for the last 7 decades and now holding a series of widely watched channels include Geo News, Geo Super, Geo Entertainment, Geo Kahani, Geo Music and Geo Tez a breaking news channel. Daily Jang is a popular Urdu language newspaper that has a great impact on the readership of the society for being its sustained popularity, credibility and wide circulation. The Express News is also an Urdu language news channel launched on January 1, 2008. The Express media group is also owned a third largest Urdu daily, Daily Express¹. "At all Pakistan level, 51 percent of households claim to have a cable connection. This would lead to around 13 million cable connections in the country" Gallup Pak². A study explored that percentage of users of these private channels is about 85 percent in urban areas while it is about 50 percent in rural areas during the year 2013. The study also showed the sharp increase in viewership during the last two years, Gallup Pak³.

Media in this contemporary society is believed to be a mirror of society. It holds a vital position in a digitized form

of social system of the present age. Today's media has acquired a prominent and decisive position with the help of sophistication of media technologies. 'Events happening to news delivery time' has been reduced sharply due to the advancement in the field of telecommunication. Media organizations and their staff are remained conscious and alert to report and disseminate these events to the people on time. Countless news events are happened daily in the country and it is not possible for media outlets to present all these due to time and space limitations. Media determines the priority and importance of the news issue and they decide what to be published or telecast and what not to be. Since the people do not have access to first hand information from the problematic and restricted war and conflict region, therefore, they are dependent on media to have latest on the issues. In simple words, without taking advantage of media, the people cannot not keep themselves inform about the incidents which are happened even in their own town. Media brings news, footages and analysis round the clock for their audiences. Halbrook states that "at broader level media can be divided in to two types, news media and non-news media including newspapers, television and internet, news media are all actively providing news and information on all happenings across the world, whereas non news media generally include the entertainment media responsible for providing entertainment to each and every echelon of society."⁴

Shearon and DeFleur⁵ quoted Walter Lippmann's writing that "since people had only limited opportunities to observe important events in a firsthand manner, they were dependent upon the press to provide them with information on what those events were like. The role of the press, he

observed, was to provide us with views of "the world outside" from which we can form "pictures in our heads." Peoples' dependency on media is increased manifold in the recent decades of technological advancements. Media has acquired a room for setting the priorities of the news for the people through making, arranging, re-arranging, and modifying. In simple words, the media has the power to influence the people more who they are media reliant than the people otherwise, McCombs & Shaw,⁶ McCombs⁷ further of the view that "Paying attention to some issues and neglecting others will have an effect on public opinion. People will tend to know about those things which the mass media deal with and adopt the order of priority assigned to different issues." Michael⁸ opined that "since the early 1970's, the belief that mass communication is a powerful force has gained strength, in part from studies that document a correspondence between the amounts of media attention an issue receives and the amount of public concern about the problem." Walgrave⁹ cited Jinnings that "for three decades, the notion of agenda-setting has provided one of the most influential and fertile paradigms in media and communications research." Brosius & Kepplinger conducted a study about the role of agenda-setting in television network news in West Germany in 1990. They conducted a survey to enquire about 16 issues. However, the study showed that television news media influenced only four issues defense, energy supply, environmental protection and European politics during study period. Further they explored that by giving awareness on these issues, the TV media influenced some other issues like pension, public debt, and public security. They also found that sudden and extensive coverage caused the public awareness on some other issues.

The researchers found strong correspondence between coverage of news programs and public preferences about the issues. However, effects and influence about the issues may vary based on the frequency, exposure and environmental conditions. Werner & Tankard¹⁰.

Godil¹¹ quoted Noam Chomsky's interview that:-

I spent three weeks in India and a week in Pakistan. I would be surprised to find that the media in Pakistan is more open, free and vibrant than that in India." He added: "In Pakistan, I listened to and read the media which go to an increasingly large part of the population. Apparently, the government, no matter how repressive it is, is willing to say to them that you have your fun; we are not going to bother you. So they don't interfere with it."

In this sense one can be convinced for having relatively a free media in the region. On the other hand, critics opine that there has not been any tremendous transformation taking place in the running patterns of the media contents. However, these cable channels have been successful to a great extent in creating awareness on political and social arenas. Since their inception, these channels were covered some major events like Mukhtaran Mai rape case 2002, earthquake 2005, Lal Masjid operation 2007, lawyer's movement 2007, law and order, Swat military operation 2009, US raid on Bin Laden's compound 2011, Salala check post attack 2011 and election 2013. The channels arranged extensive debates on their prime time transmissions that helped the masses in making opinions on these critical issues. For example, media portrayal of lawyers movement in 2007 onwards helped a lot to brought the movement into a historic success. Even hours long live coverage was arranged by these cable channels to support the cause of deposed

judges of an apex court. However, critics of the view that media should have been avoided such partisan activities to achieve sole objective of the journalism.

Lynger & Kinder¹² quotes Bower, "By a wide margin, they believe that television - not magazines, not radio, not newspapers - provides the most intelligent, complete, and impartial coverage of public affairs, and goes furthest in clarifying the candidacies and issues at stake in national elections." Among media effects theories, agenda setting has been extensively applied theory since first application in 1968 during US Presidential election.

The audiences in Pakistan do have, comparatively, a better and more options to get news information with a diverse opinion for taking a suitable position on political and social issues, however, at the same time, a fierce rating run has been underway among these channels. Breaking news syndrome has been using extensively on these channels to become a 'news breaker'. People in their leisure time do watch news commentaries and talk shows to get updates on national as well as international issues. It is also a fact that the people are more conscious and inform to assess the watchdog role of the media. Cable channels have been successful in highlight the corruption, embezzlement, nepotism, injustice, bad governance, abuse of power and other social evils etc.

In the light of literature review and background of the topic, the following two hypotheses were posed:-

H1. There will be a strong relationship between media agenda and public agenda on the issues of democratic process, corruption, law and order and memo gate.

H2. There will be a strong relationship between slant for the issues and opinion of the viewers on these channels.

Research Methodology

A mix method strategy (content and survey) was designed to measure the correlations between media agenda and public agenda. News bulletins and talk shows of two elite Urdu news channels Express News and Geo News have been selected as a universe while for the purpose of sample, news bulletins and talk shows of prime time at 9 pm and 10 pm respectively was chosen for content analysis. The study period for one year started from Oct 2011 to Sep 2012. The reason for selecting these cable channels is that both these channels are popular and broadly watched news channels, Gallup Pak, [2]. Both these channels have the potential and capability to construct and reconstruct the opinion of the public. The channels are owned two media moguls of Pakistan which have media networks countrywide. Two prime time talk shows Aaj Kamran Khan Kay Saath and Kal Tak of Geo News and Express News were selected respectively. 156 talk shows (Monday, Wednesday and Friday of every week) of Geo News channel were selected. On the same pattern, 156 talk shows on alternate days (Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday of every week) of Express News were chosen as a first sample. For the second sample of the study, prime time news bulletins at 9 pm were selected for the same period. 156 each news bulletins were available as a second sample of the content analysis to tap the media agenda. Altogether, 312 talk shows while the same numbers of news bulletins were available for analysis to tap the media agenda. On the other hand, a survey was conducted to measure the public

agenda through a closed ended questionnaire. 500 viewers (250 for each channel) of these channels were approached to get ranking order preferences and viewpoints on the four understudied issues. The viewers of these channels living in Islamabad city and having cable connections at their homes were selected as the sample of the study. The list of the viewers of these channels obtained from cable operators of respective sectors of the city. Data was collected in face to face meeting to avoid any confusion on the questions asked.

McCombs¹³ of the view that:

The nine major news sources used by these voters were also content analyzed. This included five local and national newspapers, two television networks and two news magazines. The rank order of issues on the media agenda was determined by the number of news stories devoted to each issue in recent weeks. Although this was not the very first time that survey research had been combined with content analysis to assess the effects of specific media content, their tandem use to measure the effects of mass communication was rare at that time.

For correlation purposes, total number of stories telecast on a specific issue was counted and correlate with the rank order preferences of the viewers. Respondents of the survey were asked to rank the order of the issues from most important to the least important from a given list. Pearson rank order correlations by using SPSS were measured between media agenda and public agenda. Correspondence between slants for the issues set by the media and opinion of the viewers on these issues was also gauged. Categories from 'low coverage' to 'very

great coverage' for content analysis while 'low priorities to 'very great priority' in the case of survey analysis were designed for correlation purposes. Agenda setting theory was the main theory applied to get the objectives of the study. However, the theory of framing was also applied as a supporting theory to check the relationship between slanted news and viewpoints of the audiences.

Results and Interpretations

Correlation measurement on the Issue of Democratic Process (Geo News)

Issue		Public Agenda	Media Agenda
Democratic Process		Priority of viewers	Coverage of Democratic Process
Priority of Democratic Process	Pearson Correlation	1	.888**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	250	250
Coverage of Democratic Process	Pearson Correlation	.888**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	250	389

Table.1 ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table-1 above shows a strong correlation of (+.88) with p value $< .001$ has been measured between media coverage and ranking order of the viewers of Geo News on the issue of democratic process.

Correlation measurement on the Issue of Democratic Process (Express News)

Issue		Public Agenda	Media Agenda
Democratic process		Priority of Democratic Process	Coverage of Democratic Process
Priority of Democratic Process by Viewers	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 250	.923** .000 250
Coverage of Democratic Process by Express News	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.923** .000 250	1 334

Table.2 ** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Quite similar to Geo News, a perfect correlation (+.92) with p value $< .001$ was observed between the media salience of the issue and rank order of the audiences of Express News as shown in Table-2.

Correlation measurement on the Issue of Law and Order (Geo News)

Issue		Public Agenda	Media Agenda
Law and Order		Priority of Law and order	Coverage of Law and order
Priority of Law and order by Viewers	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 250	.902** .000 250
Coverage of Law and order by Geo News	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.902** .000 250	1 279

Table.3 ** .Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table-3 above shows a almost perfect rank order correlation (+.90) with p value $< .001$ has been achieved between media

agenda and public agenda on the issue of law and order by Geo News.

Correlation measurement on the Issue of Law and Order (Express News)

Issue		Public Agenda	Media Agenda
Law and Order		Priority of Law and order	Coverage of Law and order
Priority of Law and order by Viewers	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 250	.902** .000 250
Coverage of Law and order by Express News	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.902** .000 250	1 280

Table.4 **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

On the other hand, quite similar results have been found on Express News as depicted in the Table-4 above. A perfect correlation (+.90) with p value $< .001$ has been measured between the coverage of the issue and ranking of the issue by the viewers of the channel.

Correlation measurement on the Issue of Corruption (Geo News)

Issue		Media Agenda	Public Agenda
Corruption		Coverage of Corruption	Priority of Corruption
Coverage of Corruption by Geo News	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 125	.734** .000 125
Priority of Corruption	Pearson Correlation	.734**	1

by Viewers	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	125	250

Table.5 ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As apparent from the above table significant rank order correlation (+.73) with p value $< .001$ is examined on the issue of corruption on Geo News.

Correlation measurement on the Issue of Corruption (Express News)

Issue		Media Agenda	Public Agenda
Corruption		Coverage of Corruption	Priority of Corruption
Coverage of Corruption by Exp News	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 100	.688** .000 100
Priority of Corruption by Viewers	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.688** .000 100	1 250

Table-6 ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table above shows a significant correlation (+.68) with p value $< .001$ has been observed on between media salience and priority of the viewers on the issue of corruption on Express News. There is a relationship between media agenda and public agenda on the issue.

Correlation measurement on the Issue of Memo Gate (Geo News)

Issue	Public Agenda	Media Agenda
Memo Gate	Priority of Memo Gate	Coverage of Memo Gate

Priority of Memo Gate by Viewers	Pearson Correlation	1	.545**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	250	106
Coverage of Memo Gate by Geo News	Pearson Correlation	.545**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	106	106

Table-7 ** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Media agenda and public agenda have been significantly correlated on the issue of memo gate as shown in the above table (+.54) with p value $< .001$ was examined on Geo News.

Correlation on the Issue of Memo Gate (Express News)

Issue	Media Agenda	Public Agenda
Memo Gate	Coverage of Memo Gate	Priority of Memo Gate
Coverage of Memo Gate by Exp News	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.203* .033 110
Priority of Memo Gate by Viewers	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 110 250

Table-8 * . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

In contrast to the results of Geo News, a weak correlation (+.20) with p value $\geq .001$ has been observed on Express News as shown in the above table.

Association between Slant for the issues and Opinion of Viewers

To tap the slants for the issues has been a valuable tool to gauge the link between media presentations and public opinions. In this research study, the same has been applied for measuring the trends of media's slant and viewers' stance on the issues.

- Regarding the correspondence between democratic process and viewer's opinion on both these channels, there was a moderate hence positive association existed. Although, the channels were remained, more or less, unfavorable towards government, however, the tilt of opinion of the viewers of both the channels was remained favorable towards government.
- There was a complete consensus between slant for the issue of corruption and opinion of the viewers. Agenda setting did work successfully as its gained almost perfect correspondence.
- The issue of law and order got a perfect association for its slant and viewers' stance on both the channels.
- Regarding the correlation between the issue of memo gate and opinion of the viewers of both the channels, it was observed that there was a positive relationship on the issue of memo gate on Express News while there was a reverse relationship existed on Geo News. The opinion of the audiences as well as channels remained divided significantly.

Discussion on the Results

Both the channels gave equal salience to three out of four issues except the issue of memo gate. Express News gave more coverage to the issue of memo gate than Geo News in their news bulletins and talk shows. The issue of democratic

process was most covered issue among four issues on both the channels. The second largely covered issue was law and order. Corruption and memo gate were remained at third and fourth position respectively.

The results showed that these channels have been very much successful in exerting the influence to public through media presentations. All the results of media agenda and public agenda were statistically significant. The issue of democratic process remained top in terms of frequency and duration on both these channels. The findings of the survey were corresponded with media coverage. A strong (+.92) rank order correlation with p value $< .001$ on the issue has been observed on Express News (Table 2). The rank order correlation on Geo News was very much similar on the issue of democratic process. As indicated in the Table 1, a significant correlation (+.88) with p value $< .001$ has been examined. Media has been successfully exerted influence to their audiences on the issue through exploiting various methods of agenda setting. Respondents of both the channels were also ranked the issue as the most important issue of the country. The theory of agenda setting says, the more issue coverage (in terms of frequency, space, time, audio clips) is granted to some issue, the more salient is given by the audiences to that specific issue. Findings of the issue are very much consistent with the theory of agenda setting.

Regarding the correlation on the issue of law and order, it is crystal clear that media have transferred the salience to their viewers. Since, the issue is an obtrusive nature therefore, there have been a perfect correlations (+.90) with p value $< .001$ observed on these channels (Tables 3, 4). Moreover, the media covered it as the second most covered

issue among four issues. Being an obtrusive issue every common man has been suffering and distressing due to the existing horrible terrorist activities in the country. This theory of media effects asserts to have more influential and powerful if media outlet covers an obtrusive issue extensively. The ranking order of the viewers of both the channels is different from each other. Viewers of Geo News ranked it as the second most important issue while viewers of Express News placed the issue as the least important issue. It might be due to the channels' coverage pattern as the issue was consistently and regularly available in news bulletins of Express News while it has discussed four times in a whole study period of one year. Some, people watch news bulletins while the others do it in talk shows. However, it can be said that the issue of law and order has been remained in a perfect correlation region on both of these news channels. Results show that slants for the issue was consistent with the anti-government tone of the issue by the channels.

Corruption was one of the major issues which has been consistently and extensively debated on these cable channels during the study period. Strong rank order correlations (+.73) and (+.68) with p value $< .001$ were examined on the issue by Geo and Express News respectively (Tables 5, 6). Channels took a clear cut policy on the issue of corruption and they, more or less, remained anti-government in majority of their presentations. Geo News has not telecast even a single story in favor of government in their one year period. The results of the survey were also complemented the slants for the issue with the opinion of the viewers. Viewers of Geo News considered the issue as the third most important issue while viewers of Express News ranked the issue as the second most important issue. Both the channels

were remained anti-government in most of their news stories on the issue of corruption. Correspondence between opinion of the viewers and slant given by the channels was significant on both the channels.

The issue of memo gate was remained as the least covered issue. On the other hand, the issue was ranked as the least important issue by viewers of both the channels. A significant correlation of (+.54) with p value $< .001$ was examined on Geo News that was strongly proved the relationship between media and public agenda (Table 7). On the other hand, correlation (+.20) with p value $\geq .001$ was observed on the issue on Express News (Table 8). Viewers of both the channels ranked the issue as the least important issue among four issues. There was a weak correspondence between the slant and opinion of the viewers on the issue. The channels were remained more aggressive and unfavorable towards government while viewers of both the channels appreciated the government of the issue. It might be due to the complexity of the issue which could not have a solid ground and evidence, therefore, the public was not clear on the issue. The study overall supports the basic assumptions of the agenda setting that media set the public agenda and have the power to exert influence and salience on some issue they desire.

Conclusion

Four national issues, democratic process, law and order, corruption and memo gate have been examined in the light of agenda setting and framing theories to measure the media-public relationship. The findings strongly supported H1 posed in this study that there will be a strong relationship

between media agenda and public agenda on the issues of democratic process, corruption, law and order and memo gate. It is concluded that there is a strong relationship existed between the coverage of channels and priorities given by the viewers to the issues. Although the issue of memo gate was remained insignificant with the media-public priorities but the relationship supported the basic assumptions of agenda setting theory. It is also concluded that valence of the issues have great complementary force to exert media salience to public priorities. It is concluded that slanted news with extensive coverage proved to be a successful way to transfer the salience from media to public agenda. Hence, the outcome of the study also supported the H2 that there will be a strong relationship between slants for the issues and opinion of the viewers on these issues.

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