Media and Taliban: A Test of Media Conformity Theory

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| **ARTICLE INFO** |  | **ABSTRACT** |
| *Article Histor*y: Received Tarih girmek için burayı tıklatın. Received in revised form Tarih girmek için burayı tıklatın. Accepted  Available online Tarih girmek için burayı tıklatın. |  | This study aimed to explore the representation of Taliban in the editorials of two leading English newspapers of Pakistan. Through the content analysis technique, the slant of the contents was measured. The slant of the editorials was further categorized in three subcategories; favorable, unfavorable and neutral. For one year, a total number of 352 editorials were specified for the Taliban by Dawn and The Nation. Findings of the study revealed that the slant of both newspapers was mostly negative towards the Taliban and their slant was noticed to be similar with the stance of government of Pakistan concerning Taliban. The print media have conformed the Pakistan’s foreign policy about the Taliban as they are terrorists. Therefore, the outcomes of this study have supported the Media Conformity Theory in the context of Pakistan.  © 2017 IJERE. All rights reserved |
|  | **Keywords:[[1]](#footnote-1)** Taliban, Media Conformity Theory, Editorial. |

**INTRODUCTION**

Researches on Taliban issue has gained much more attention especially by the mass media researchers right after the 9/11 incident. Even though several attempts have been done by the researchers to explore the coverage given to Taliban by the print media of Pakistan (Ahmad, Mahsud, & Ishtiaq, 2011; Malik & Iqbal, 2010; Shabir, Hussain, & Iqbal, 2014). It is also witnessed that previous researchers about print media of Pakistan have been dealing with the issue of Taliban in context of numerous theories like Agenda Setting Theory (Subhani & Sultan, 2015), Media Conformity Theory (Khan & Safder, 2010), Peace Framing (Raza, Jan, Sultan, & Aziz, 2012) and Framing Theory (Hayat & Juliana, 2016). Thus, it would be worthy to examine the representation of Taliban in the light of Media Conformity Theory.

Taliban issue has been examined through several research practices in different manners. For instance, Subhani and Sultan (2015) focused on a media coverage about the peace deeds among Taliban and the state, Hayat and Juliana (2016) examined the presentation of Taliban in the print media of Pakistan, Madni (2014) found that Taliban as one among all of the important issues of Pakistan and Malik and Iqbal (2010) addressed the image of Taliban through the perspective of Pakistani print media. The lacking administered in these mentioned researches is that they overlooked the depiction of Taliban solely in the researches about the print media of Pakistan.

This research is intended to address all these gaps in the literature of Taliban research. For this study, the researcher targets to investigate the representation of Taliban in the print media of Pakistan with the context of Media Conformity Theory. Therefore, editorials of the leading English newspapers of Pakistan have been chosen to examine the stance of the newspapers about the Taliban and to confirm the whether the stance of media and government are in the same line or not.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Individual who fought against the Soviet Union have been termed as the *Mujahedeen* in Afghanistan. Later these individuals converted into the extremist group which later considered as *Taliban*. During the war in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union, some of the refugees entered the territory of Pakistan and enabling the youth of Pakistan with the military training among the major cities of Pakistan. Madrassa was the institution where they train the individuals to fight against the Russians in Afghanistan and they got support from the government of Pakistan. Meanwhile, several other religious groups have followed the same trend of *Madrassa* in other zones of Pakistan. In the previous decades, the outcome of these *Madrassa* is *Taliban* and which become a serious concern of the whole world due to their abnormal activities (Malik & Iqbal, 2010). *Madrassa* institution have been funded by the friendly countries which includes Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and many other Islamic states (Shah, 2001).

After the tragic event of 9/11, USA has started the war against the terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan stand side by side to USA to eliminate the factor of terrorism. The cost of this war has been paid by Pakistan in the form of sacrificing the lives of more than twenty five thousand of their soldiers as well as the innocent people of the country (Raza et al., 2012). Pakistan have also received the support of logistics to cope with this issue in the country and to launch several operations against the Taliban. But the Taliban appeared to be more lethal for the country and damaged Pakistan in plenty of ways.

Taliban and other militant groups in Pakistan lie under the main group which is termed as *Tahrik e Taliban Pakistan (TTP)* (Abbas, 2008). One of the major concerns of TTP is to exert extreme burden on the state to implement the philosophy of religion in the state and to have a battle against the state of Pakistan (Yusufzai, Berti, Khan, Roul, & Fazlullah, 2009). In 2007, when the TTP emerged in Pakistan the situation and the scenario of the country become more worse in spite of past (Siddique, 2010).

Taliban have been blamed by the state of Pakistan in the involvement of a murder of female politician Benazir Bhutto, but Taliban refused to accept the allegation of their involvement (Laura, 2009). In 2008, they killed a lot of leaders of tribal areas by the suicide bombing besides that, they also tried to cutoff the supplies of arms and food by the NATO forces to Afghanistan by burning their vehicles (Walsh, 2009). They threaten the barbers not to shave the male members’ beards and cautioned to stop sending their females to the schools (Atar, 2007). They banned the tailors not to stich the garments of females and made the *Hijab* compulsory for the females. Furthermore, the females should not go outside the home without the presence of male members if they found they will be punished. They were not in the favor of Polio campaigns and having a rigid mindset that it a plan of non-Muslims to make the Muslim males impotent (Yousafzai, 2007).

The scenario of Taliban started in two different phases and media attention towards them also tilted from one phase to another. In the first phase, when the Soviet Union invaded in Afghanistan these Taliban have been termed as *Heroes* and *Mujahedeen* by the US media. But in the second phase, these freedom fighters have been converted into the *Terrorists* in the next war in Afghanistan by the media of US (Salim, 2010). Right after the 9/11 incident, the representation of not only Taliban as well as Muslims have also been transformed into *Islamic Terrorists* and *Muslim* *Extremists* in the themes of US media.

The influence of media on the individuals could not be ignored as it facilitates the individuals with the issues to think (Cohen, 1963). Thus, the power of media can’t be denied in democratic states where media is free and enjoys the right to freely express their point of views in the front of masses. According to Shaw and McCombs (1977) people not only learn about the issues from the media besides that they also come to know the importance of issues as highlighted by the media. It is not necessary that their stance should be in a same line with the stance of state.

Having an eye on the media of Pakistan, it is witnessed that the criticism has been done by the media on the government but the factor of patriotism do also exists in the media in dealing the international issues (Manzoor, 2002). The print media of Pakistan have practice journalism in two major languages; English and Urdu. The English print media Pakistan is seemed to be more effective than the Urdu print media. Mezzera and Sial (2010) confirmed that the English print media of Pakistan tend to have a strong effect on the business industry, opinion makers, upper class and on the politicians as well. For that reason, this study has adopted the two prominent English newspapers to address the presentation of Taliban.

Fishman (1980) asserted that media must be free from the involvement of the government in the democratic states and practice their routine matters in the light of democratic norms. It is also noticed that the media of UK and USA have been found of conforming the perspective of the state during the situation of crisis. In a same manner, the print media of USA have conform the stance of the state during the war in Iraq (Zheng, 2006). Another study about the Iraq war by Largio (2004) revealed that the foreign policy of USA is conformed by the New York Times towards the war. Khan (2008) also witnessed that the media of America most of the times conforming the foreign policies of the state.

On the other side, Khan and Safder (2010) found that the media of Pakistan have not conformed the narrative of state that America is a friendly country but the print media portrayed America negatively in their discourses. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate that whether the print media of Pakistan conforms the foreign policy of Pakistan about Taliban or not. As the government of Pakistan has already declared that Taliban are terrorists and they are threat to internal security and the government is engaged in several operations to eliminate the factor of terrorism by the Taliban. Thus, this study intends to find out the nature of coverage provided to Taliban in the editorials of leading newspapers in the light of Media Conformity Theory.

The reason behind the selection of *Dawn* and *The Nation* is that the papers are having a good reputation in the Pakistan. Most of its readers belongs to the elite class and policy makers that is why these papers are considered as elite papers. Hayat and Juliana (2016) mentioned that *Dawn* and *The Nation* are popular among their readers and highlights the national and international events. Furthermore, these papers do influence the decisions made by the policy makers and ranked among the top three newspapers of Pakistan. Editorials of the newspapers do have the capacity to critically evaluate the issues besides that they do educate, inform and convince the readers. As the editorials are considered as the opinion of the newspaper so that they point out the issues as well as provide the appropriate solutions for such issues (Hayat & Juliana, 2016).

*H 1: Dawn will portray Taliban as more unfavorable than The Nation.*

*H 2: The Nation will portray Taliban as more favorable than Dawn.*

*H 3: The Nation will portray Taliban as more neutral than Dawn.*

**METHOD**

This study has adopted the qualitative research approach to compare the representation of Taliban in the two well-known English newspapers. The editorials regarding Taliban of two leading English newspapers of Pakistan; *Dawn* and *The Nation* have been considered as the universe of the study starting from March 1, 2013 till February 28, 2014. Sample has been drawn from the online issues of the mentioned newspapers. For this study, the unit of analysis comprises of all the editorials having the term *Taliban* whether in the title of editorial or in any paragraph in between the abovementioned time span. Three categories of slant have been developed to examine the editorials compatible to the Taliban issue. These categories are;

* Any paragraph or title of the editorial is considered as *Favorable* to Taliban if it provides any material or information which is in the support of Taliban.
* Any paragraph or title of the editorial is considered as *Unfavorable* to Taliban if it provides any material or information which is anti to Taliban, in negative tone and distort the image of Taliban.
* Any paragraph or title of the editorial is considered as *Unfavorable* to Taliban if it provides any material or information which is free from any sort of biasedness, ambiguity or having a balanced approach about Taliban.

**FINDINGS & DISCUSSION**

Table 1 represents that the coverage has been provided to Taliban by the Dawn in their slant through three categories; favorable, unfavorable and neutral. The findings of the study based on one year of duration about the editorials and revealed that a total number of 162 editorials have got the stance about the Taliban. In which, they represent Taliban in the 119 editorials as unfavorable, 32 as neutral and 11 as favorable slants respectively. During the one-year, maximum number of editorials have been published concerning Taliban during December to February. The overall coverage pattern is noticed to be unfavorable 73.45% when the newspapers discusses the issue of Taliban in the editorials.

**Table 1** Slant Distribution in Dawn (March 1, 2013 - February 28, 2014)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Duration** | **Favorable**  **N (%)** | **Unfavorable**  **N (%)** | **Neutral**  **N (%)** | **Total**  **N (%)** |
| March 1, 2013-May 31, 2013 | 3  (7.69) | 29  (74.35) | 7  (17.94) | 39  (100) |
| June 1, 2013-August 31, 2013 | 4  (12.5) | 21  (65.62) | 7  (21.87) | 32  (100) |
| September 1, 2013-November 30, 2013 | 4  (10.52) | 27  (71.05) | 7  (18.42) | 38  (100) |
| December 1, 2013-February 28, 2014 | 0  (0) | 42  (79.24) | 11  (20.75) | 53  (100) |
| Total | 11  (6.79) | 119  (73.45) | 32  (19.75) | 162  (100) |

Table 2 shows that the coverage has been given to Taliban by The Nation in their slant through three categories; favorable, unfavorable and neutral. The findings of the study based on one year of duration in the editorials revealed that a total number of 190 editorials have got the stance about the Taliban. In which, they depict Taliban in their 79 editorials as unfavorable, 77 as neutral and 34 as favorable slants respectively. During the one-year, maximum number of editorials have been published concerning Taliban during December to February. The overall coverage pattern is noticed to be unfavorable 41.57% when the paper discusses the issue of Taliban in the editorials.

**Table 2** Slant Distribution in The Nation (March 1, 2013 - February 28, 2014)

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Duration** | **Favorable**  **N (%)** | **Unfavorable**  **N (%)** | **Neutral**  **N (%)** | **Total**  **N (%)** |
| March 1, 2013-May 31, 2013 | 7  (16.27) | 14  (32.55) | 22  (51.16) | 43  (100) |
| June 1, 2013-August 31, 2013 | 10  (27.02) | 13  (35.13) | 14  (37.83) | 37  (100) |
| September 1, 2013-November 30, 2013 | 6  (12.50) | 23  (47.91) | 19  (39.58) | 48  (100) |
| December 1, 2013-February 28, 2014 | 11  (17.74) | 29  (46.77) | 22  (35.48) | 62  (100) |
| Total | 34  (17.89) | 79  (41.57 | 77  (40.52) | 190  (100) |

For one year, a total number of 352 editorials have been published about Taliban in which, 162 editorials of Dawn and 190 editorials of The Nation. The editorials about favorable slant were 45 in which, Dawn contributed 11 and The Nation contributed 34 editorials. Next category was about the unfavorable slant which have 198 editorials, 119 by Dawn and 79 by The Nation. In the last category of neutral slant, Dawn published 32 editorials besides The Nation published 77 editorials and sum of all neutral slant editorials were 109.

Figure 1 indicates the comparison of overall coverage of both the papers about the Taliban. The Nation was found to be using more positive slant of about 17.89% in their editorials about Taliban. For unfavorable slant in the editorials, Dawn has given the maximum coverage of about 73.45% about Taliban. The Nation was seemed neutral in the context of Taliban in their editorials of about 40.52% as compared to Dawn.

Figure 1 Slant Distribution in Dawn and The Nation (March 1, 2013 - February 28, 2014)

As it was hypothesized that the Dawn will have the unfavorable slant towards the Taliban as compared to The Nation in their coverage. The figure 1 indicates that 73.45% of unfavorable slant has been given to Taliban in the editorials of Dawn which is more than The Nation. Therefore, the finding of the study has supported the hypothesis. The subsequent hypothesis was about the favorable slant will be more in The Nation instead of Dawn. The finding of the study revealed that 17.89% of favorable slant have been given to Taliban in the editorials by The Nation, which is higher than Dawn. Thus, the findings confirmed this hypothesis. Lastly, the hypothesis was about the neutral slant towards the Taliban of The Nation would be more than Dawn. The Nation has been found of giving more neutral slant of about 40.52% as compared to Dawn in the editorials concerning the Taliban. To this end, all the proposed hypothesis has been accepted of this study.

The results of the study are inclined with the previous attempts of several researchers about representation of Taliban in the print media of Pakistan. A study by Hayat and Juliana (2016) found that Taliban have been represented negatively in the newspapers of Pakistan with reference to attack on the innocent girl of Pakistan. Malik and Iqbal (2010) also confirmed that the negative representation given to the Taliban in the editorials of the elite newspapers of Pakistan. Furthermore, Subhani and Sultan (2015) found that media of Pakistan and the stance of the state has not been same regarding the peace talks with the Taliban. Therefore, this study further reconfirmed the findings of pervious researches as well as provided a contribution in term of theory.

**Conclusion**

This study has aimed to link the representation of Taliban in the print media of Pakistan with the media conformity theory. The findings of the study reveal that print media of Pakistan is in the same line with the foreign policy of Pakistan. The stance of the state is very clear about the Taliban that they are extremists, brutal killers, terrorists etc. and the state is involved in several operations from time to time to make Pakistan free from terrorism and Taliban. The print media of Pakistan conforms the stance of state in their editorials and both of selected papers of the study have given maximum unfavorable coverage to them. However, The Nation appeared to be more neutral towards the Taliban, but their major proportion was against the Taliban. Hence, the findings of the study confirm the media conformity theory in the context of Pakistan regarding the Taliban.

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