

Shazia Ismail Toor*
Noshina Saleem**

Print Media and Politics: A Comparative Study of Three Leading Pakistani Political Parties in General Elections 2013

Abstract

This research is an attempt to examine the portrayal of the Pakistani political parties in the four leading newspapers of Pakistan during the elections of 2013. As Media assumes great importance during the elections process because of its ability to frame the image of political parties and leadership and influence the public opinion. The comparative study of the leading political parties of Pakistan including PPP, PMLN and PTI in the two English dailies (Dawn and The News) and two Urdu dailies (Jang and Nawa-i-Waqt) was done. This study explored the frequency, placement and tilt of news stories and editorials regarding political parties published on the front page of the selected newspapers from 11th April 2013 to 11th June 2013. For this purpose, qualitative and quantitative content analysis method was employed and the Framing theory was used as an umbrella to explore media's perception about political parties during elections. Findings revealed that the PMLN was given maximum coverage and is framed in a most positive manner rather than PTI and PPP. The Pakistani print media has adopted a supportive tilt towards PMLN by giving maximum as well as the positive portrayal during the general election 2013.

Key Words: *Print Media, Pakistani political parties, General Elections 2013*

Introduction

Media has broadened the mind-set of the people by accumulating the various perspectives and tendencies toward certain issues. It elucidates the problems of society. It functions as a medium for deliberation. The procession in information and technology has brought an elevation for the media houses to correspond with the global world. It has also changed the information usage and consumption patterns. Due to the convergence, media houses, newspapers, television channels are far more interactive than ever in the past. We can see the media all around us in the form of TV, radio, books, magazines, newspapers, social networking sites and web serving. Without media, people in a society may feel isolated from the rest of the world (Dwivedi & Pandey, 2013). Media is powerful enough to construct the attitudes and beliefs of public, paving the way for a societal change. Media coverage has the ability to make someone popular or notorious by framing.

* Shazia Ismail Toor,.

** Dr. Noshina Saleem.

It can influence public debate and input into changes in the pattern of beliefs in society (Happer & Philo, 2013).

The priority and importance of the news items is determined by media outlets and media people. Media reminds us that which issues are to be the ‘prime issues’ of the day among dozens of ongoing issues. Since the people have only partial opportunities to view significant events in an actual manner, they are dependent upon the press to get the required information (Lippmann, 1946). Different forms of media, including the print media provide us with views of the outside world from which we can form pictures in our head. The information about local and global events and the changes taking place beyond our eyes are only possible through the media. Since the audiences are looking towards the media for news and information about the latest events, the role of media has been critical in prioritizing and re-arranging the agenda of news. In this way, the media have the power to influence the people who are media reliant.

Media can ensure smooth functioning of a democratic system by keeping the public informed about the political scenario of a country. Media and politics are in a tense relationship in a democracy, particularly, during the elections process. They have the divergent missions, but also a symbiotic correlation. Political parties need media to campaign their actions, motivations, ideas and agendas to win people’s trust. Media, in turn, has to inform people about the activities of political parties and politicians. They need each other and, at the same time, they acquire benefits from each other. Media is a watchdog also that we rely on for uncovering errors and wrongdoings by those who hold power (Venturelli, 1998). This research work presents a comparative analysis of four Pakistani newspapers, including two Urdu newspapers that are *Jang* and *Nawa-i-Waqt* and two English newspapers that are *Dawn* and *The News*. Coverage patterns of these newspapers are analyzed regarding the three major political parties of Pakistan during the general elections 2013.

Research Questions

RQ1: Which political party was given the most frequent coverage by the print media of Pakistan during the general elections 2013?

RQ2: How did the print media present stance of three political parties of Pakistan during the general elections 2013.

Literature Review

Many international scholars have conducted research on the election coverage. Stromback and Dimitrova (2006) compared the press coverage of the 2004 presidential elections campaign of three Swedish and three U.S newspapers. Content analysis showed that framing of politics as a strategic game was more common in the newspapers of United States as compared to the Swedish newspapers. U.S newspapers were found to be descriptive while the Swedish newspapers adopted interpretive style.

De Vreese and Banducci (2006) examined the news coverage of the 2004 European Parliamentary elections in all the member states of European Union.

They studied three national newspapers and the most watched news channels in each country, two weeks before the elections. The election campaigns were found to be more visible in the new EU member states as compared to the old ones. The results showed that the news in old member states had negative tilt but the new countries adopted a mixed pattern.

Gender biased coverage of the politicians in case of Canada was studied by Gidengil and Everitt (2003). The leaders' debates of 1993, 1997 and 2000 elections were analyzed and the results showed that coverage of the elections of 1993, 1997 and 2000 in Canada used masculine stereotypes. Role of female leadership was projected in a minimal way.

Steger (1999) studied the presidential nomination coverage of 1996 elections in two major newspapers of United States of America. The study examined the *Chicago Tribune* and *New York Times* and concluded that their coverage was biased. Both the newspapers treated the election as a horse race and gave more coverage to leader applicants than the other candidates.

Sodurlund and Wagenberg (1975) analyzed the editorials regarding federal elections that were held in United States of America and Canada in 1972. By using content analysis method, they scrutinized twelve newspapers of both countries. The basic aim of the study was to examine the editorial coverage that was given to American and Canadian candidates in the major newspapers of USA and Canada. Findings of the study indicated that the editorial coverage of newspapers of both the countries was almost same; the major difference between the coverage of both countries was the socio-cultural differences.

Williams and Gulati (2012) examined role of Facebook during 2006 US elections. Researchers explained that all the participants of the political parties used Facebook for their promotion. The study showed that all the political leaders used Facebook to update their important personal and official information. Members of Facebook could show their support to the candidates that provided an estimate of their votes.

Walgrave, Van Aelst and Nuytemans (2008) conducted a research on the electoral campaign contact with voters. By analyzing a Vote Advice Application and a TV show during the Belgian elections in 2004 on internet users, the study revealed that the application had positive impact on the voters. Another study revealed that all the newspapers gave positive coverage to the elections news by giving a positive coverage to the candidates during 1998 presidential elections in Philippines (Rosales and Lowry, 2000).

Riaz (2011) found out that we are living in the age of World Wide Web with the emergence of new media technology. New media trends are creating impact on traditional media as well as political systems in developed states.

Herrnson, Stokes-Brown and Hindman (2007) conducted a research on internet and political parties campaign regarding the political campaign and digital divide. The study highlighted that internet has created a division between digital and political. Participants for the elections other than presidential or congressional are less likely to use internet for their promotion and campaigns. The study further revealed that young candidates with better education were more interested in using internet for their political campaigns. Though the experience of a candidate was

also important but there was a strong impact of candidates' internet activities on peoples' perception.

Theoretical Framework

This study examined the editorial and news coverage of the three leading political parties of Pakistan (PML-N, PPP and PTI) by the two English dailies i.e. *Dawn* and *The News* and two Urdu newspapers of Pakistan (*Jang* and *Nawa-i-Waqt*) from 11th April 2013 to 11th June 2013. In the light of the literature review and objective of the study, researcher found the agenda setting theory relevant to this study.

Agenda Settings Theory as Theoretical Underpinning

Agenda setting is a process through which media tells the audiences what to think and worry about. Concept of agenda setting was put forth by Walter Lippmann in the 1920s. This theory explains that media creates certain images in the minds of people, so the audience reacts according to those images, not to the real and actual world events. Therefore, this theory has been continuously remodeling all the happenings that occurred in our atmosphere, into better and simpler model (Baran & Davis, 2011).

Various studies show that newspapers frequently apply agenda setting theory to their news contents. As this study is based on the examination of news and editorials during the elections period, it gives a better understanding regarding the framing techniques of newspapers with respect to the leading political parties of Pakistan. Newspapers have the power to mold minds of people according to their agendas and people react according to that agenda which is set by the newspapers.

Agenda setting theory refers to the powerful control of media and its ability to tell the importance of an issue to the public. The final form of this theory was presented by McCombs and Shaw in 1972 but Walter Lippmann was the first who explained that media has the power to present desired images to the masses (Lippmann, 1922). Later on, McCombs and Shaw examined the US election campaigns in 1968, 1972 and 1976. In the initial years of the research, researchers focused on two elements mainly; awareness and information. In order to investigate the function of media agenda setting, McCombs and Shaw tried to study the relationship among the real issues of the voters in a community and the original content of the messages delivered by the media during presidential campaigns (Baran & Davis, 2011). In 1972, David Weaver joined Shaw and McCombs in their project while studying the presidential elections 1976 (spring, 2002). Donald Shaw and Maxwell McCombs highlighted the importance of agenda setting after they carried out the Chapel Hill study. They studied all the attributes of the agenda and voters' voting behavior in this project. The researchers pointed out the relationship between public agenda and agenda of media in this study and concluded that media has a strong influence on voters' behavior while considering an issue to be the major one. They found that agenda's second level played very important role which decided the importance of certain parts of the issues regarding the presidential elections (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Agenda setting theory is about playing up and playing down the issues related to reality. There are two basic assumptions put forth by the researches related to the agenda setting theory.

1. Media actually do not reproduce reality. Rather, it shapes and filters it.
2. Media highlights certain issues for the public and as a result public perceives that these issues are highly important for them (Freeland, 2012).

Methodology

Content analysis is one of the most common and popular technique that has been extensively used in the field of social sciences. It has been used in an extensive manner by a good number of social sciences studies like political communication, political science, gender, violence, race, and psychology. Political science researches have used the method to analyze the propaganda devices used by the warring groups (George, 1959; Lasswell et. al., 1965). While talking about the content analysis as a technique to analyze or interpret a text data, Miller and Whicker (1999) termed it as a research method that can be used to make inferences about the content of recorded text. The most essential advantages of this scientific research method are that it provides accurate insight of communication content and its reliability (Berelson, 1952). Benefits of using content analysis method to approach communication research are (1) content analysis can be used as an unobtrusive measure of communications while direct methods might involve bias; (2) content analysis offers potentials for examining effects of various message-content on recipients’ responses (3) content analysis initiates new research on specific subjects of communication; and (4) content analysis can be employed in multi method research (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991).

The researcher created categories to study the treatment given to three political parties of Pakistan by the English and Urdu newspapers of Pakistan. The categories were

1. Party leaders
2. Party candidates
3. Party campaigns

Frequency and direction and of the front page news and editorials related to these categories were analyzed by the content analysis method. Tilt/ direction was measured on five point scale, varying from highly negative to highly positive.

Findings and Interpretations

Table 1: Newspaper & Political Party-wise Comparison of Editorial & News Coverage on Elections

		Political Party							
		PML(N)		PPPP		PTI		Total	
		Eds.	News	Eds.	News	Eds.	News	Eds.	News
Dawn	Count	0	9	4	4	0	3	4	16
	% within Newspaper	0%	56.3%	100%	25%	0%	18.8%	100%	100%
The News	Count	9	25	16	24	2	11	27	60
	% within Newspaper	33.3%	41.7%	59.3%	40%	7.4%	18.3%	100%	100%

Jang	Count	5	10	6	3	0	4	11	17
	% within Newspaper	45.5%	58.8%	54.5%	17.6%	0%	23.5%	100%	100%
Nawa-i-Waqt	Count	11	37	7	16	0	4	18	57
	% within Newspaper	61.1%	64.9%	38.9%	28.1%	0%	7%	100%	100%
Total	Count	25	81	33	47	2	22	60	150
	% within Newspaper	41.7%	54%	55%	31.3%	3.3%	14.7%	100%	100%
Total	Count	106		80		24		210	
Eds. + News	% within Total	50.5%		38.1%		11.4%		100%	

The results in the Table 1 illustrate that PML (N) gained the maximum editorial and news coverage 106 (50.5 %) on the theme of ‘Elections’ by the selected newspapers. PPPP was the second most frequently covered political party with 80 (38.1 %) editorials and front page news stories and PTI remained the least frequently covered political party with 24 (11.4 %) editorials and front page news stories.

On the ‘Elections’ theme, the table depicts that *Dawn, The News and Jang* gave PPPP the maximum editorial coverage with 4 (100 %), 16 (59.3 %) and 6 (54.5 %) editorials respectively. The *News and Jang* gave the second maximum editorial coverage to the PML (N) with 9 (33.3 %) and 5 (45.5 %) editorials respectively. But, on the other hand, *Nawa-i-Waqt* gave PML (N) the maximum editorial coverage with 11 (61.1 %) editorials and PPPP the second maximum editorial coverage with 7 (38.9 %) editorials. *The News* gave PTI the minimum editorial coverage with 2 (7.4 %) editorials but *Dawn* did not give any coverage to the PML (N) while, *Jang, Nawa-i-Waqt and Dawn* did not publish a single editorial on PTI regarding the ‘Elections’ theme.

The findings also show that *Dawn, The News, Jang and Nawa-i-Waqt* gave PML (N) the most frequent news coverage with 9 (56.3 %), 25 (41.7 %), 10 (58.8 %) and 37 (64.9 %) news respectively. *Dawn, The News and Nawa-i-Waqt* gave PPPP the second most frequent news coverage with 4 (25 %), 24 (40 %) and 16 (28.1 %) news respectively but *Jang* gave PTI the second most frequent news coverage with 4 (23.5 %) news stories respectively. PTI was given the minimum news coverage by *Dawn, The News and Nawa-i-Waqt* with 3 (18.8 %), 11 (18.3 %) and 4 (7 %) front page news respectively, while, *Jang* gave minimum front page news coverage to PPPP with 3 (17.6 %) news stories.

Table 2: *Political Party-wise Comparison of Direction of Editorial & News Coverage on Elections*

		Political Party					
		PML(N)		PPPP		PTI	
		Eds.	News	Eds.	News	Eds.	News
Direction of the Highly	Count	0	0	1	0	0	0

Eds. & News on Negative Elections	% within Party	Political	0%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%
	Negative	Count	5	4	8	12	1	3
	% within Party	Political	20%	4.9%	24.2%	25.5%	50%	13.6%
Neutral Mixed	/ Count		6	10	10	20	0	3
	% within Party	Political	24%	12.3%	30.3%	42.6%	0%	13.6%
Positive	Count		13	59	12	14	1	15
	% within Party	Political	52%	72.8%	36.4%	29.8%	50%	68.2%
Highly Positive	Count		1	8	2	1	0	1
	% within Party	Political	4%	9.9%	6.1%	2.1%	0%	4.5%
Total	Count		25	81	33	47	2	22
	% within Party	Political	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

The selected Urdu and English newspapers (*Jang, Nawa-i-Waqt, Dawn and The News*) remained the most negative towards PPPP on the ‘Elections’ theme in their editorial and news coverage with percentage of 26.3 % (highly negative and negative). Then comes PTI which gained the second most negative coverage with 16.37 % and the PML (N) stayed the least negatively covered among the selected three political parties having 8.5 % negative editorials and news stories published on it. The Table 2 shows that the editorials of the selected newspapers covered PTI in the most negative direction regarding the elections as 50 % editorials presented the party in a negative way. Whereas, PPPP got the second most negative direction with 27.2 % editorials. PML (N) received the least negative coverage in this regard with 20 % editorials which had a negative direction towards the party.

Tilt/stance/direction of the selected newspapers reveal that PPPP was given the maximum negative coverage of 26.3% in editorials and front page news stories. On the other hand, PML (N) was framed in the least negative manner by giving only 8.5% negative coverage in editorials and news stories. With reference to stance of selected newspapers on ‘elections’, PTI stood at the second negative position by getting an overall 16.37% negative coverage in editorials and news stories on front page of selected English and Urdu newspapers. On the other hand, news coverage of the leading Pakistani English and Urdu newspapers showed different trend. In front page news stories, PPPP got the most negative coverage as 25.5 % news presented the party negatively. Whereas, PTI received 13.6 % negative coverage which is the second most negative among the three political parties. The news coverage towards PML (N) was the least negative as only 4.9 % news were published on it with a negative direction

Conclusion

PML (N) was at first position regarding the number of front page news stories and editorials published by the selected English and Urdu newspapers of Pakistan. PPPP was covered with the second most frequent number of editorials and news stories on front page, while PTI remained at last position with reference to overall coverage. If we look at the editorial coverage of the selected four newspapers, findings reveal that *Dawn, News and Jang* gave maximum editorial coverage to PPPP but on the contrast, *Nawa-i-Waqt* gave the maximum editorial coverage to PML (N) during the 2013 elections. So *Nawa-i-Waqt* turned out to be a pro-PML(N) newspaper as compared to rest of the three newspapers. Another important point from the results shows that *Jang, Nawa-i-Waqt* and *Dawn* did not publish even a single editorial on PTI. If we look at the tilt of selected newspapers during the elections, the both English and Urdu newspapers were the most critical towards PPPP in their editorials and news coverage. PPPP was portrayed as a party that failed to gain public support during the elections 2013. PPPP won the elections 2008 and completed its 5 years term for the first time in the history of Pakistan, but they failed to deliver to the masses of Pakistan. So they lost popularity in public and at the same time in the leading newspapers of Pakistan. The selected newspapers set an anti-PPPP agenda during the elections 2013 because the party could not implement its manifesto practically during its government. According to the findings, PML (N) was at first position in the front page news stories and editorials published by all four selected newspapers of Pakistan with reference to the favorable coverage, as only 8.5% editorials and news collectively portrayed it negatively. PPPP's stance was framed in the most negative way on the various issues related to elections by the selected Urdu and English newspapers of Pakistan (*Jang, Nawa-i-Waqt, Dawn and The News*). PPPP got overall 26.3% editorial and front page news stories carrying a critical tone. PTI was the second most negatively framed political party with a percentage of 16.37.

To sum up, PML (N) was not only given maximum coverage in terms of frequency by the four selected newspapers i.e. *the Dawn, The News, Jang and Nawa-i-Waqt* , but at the same time PML (N) was framed in the most positive manner by all the selected newspapers as compared to other two political parties. So the quantitative and qualitative analysis reveal that both Urdu (*Jang, Nawa-i-Waqt*) and English print media (*Dawn and The News*) of Pakistan adopted a supportive tilt towards PML (N) by giving maximum as well as the positive portrayal during the general election 2013.

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