



THE ELITES' RHETORIC AND RALLY-ROUND-THE FLAG PHENOMENON ON THE ISSUE OF KASHMIR: ANALYZING THE COVERAGE OF DAWN AND NAWA-E-WAQT AT THE TIME OF VIOLENCE

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Abstract

This article investigates Pakistani media approach towards Kashmir conflict at the time of violence, whereas the researcher evaluates the overall media coverage on the basis of elites' debate (Bennett, 1990), and Hallin's spheres (1986) with major objective to add the influence of 'popular support' of public i.e. rally-round-the flag phenomenon into the available scholarship on political communication. To carry out this study contently, the researcher selected two newspapers i.e. the English language newspaper- Dawn, and Urdu daily Nawa-e-Waqt as both have their active role in highlighting the policy issues, especially the issue of Kashmir. The overall findings of this study suggest that elites' consensus over the issue of Kashmir activated highly supportive coverage in media while the prevailing environment around Kashmir conflict- after the incident of Burhan Wani- created sphere of consensus, which mobilized popular support against the Indian aggression, establishing the rally-round-the flag phenomenon.

Keywords: Kashmir conflict, Burhan Wani, Indexing, Sphere of consensus, Rally-round-the flag phenomenon.

Introduction

The relations between media and policy issues have been studied in the context of different theoretical perspectives- ranging from Hallin's spheres (1986) to elites' debate (Bennett, 1990) and Pier Robinson's model (2000). Hallin explained the nature of the US media coverage during Vietnam war, and presented three spheres that determine the media coverage of the conflict, while Bennett (1990), mainly, argues that media will follow the guidelines of governing elites [on policy issue] when there would be 'elites' consensus'. Similarly, Robinson (2000) views the media and policy relations on the basis of policy certainty, arguing that media will extended its support to government's policy stance when there would be policy certainty, and will give critical viewpoints at the time of policy uncertainty. This article, mainly covers the theoretical perspectives of indexing theory (Bennett, 1990), explaining the nature of media coverage of the 'politically controlled' issue of Kashmir that shapes elites' rhetoric. However,



the theoretical debate, in this study that focusses on the violent phase after the killing of young Kashmiri commander- Burhan Wani, is coupled with one of the spheres of Hallen (1986) i.e. sphere of consensus to evaluate the public protests, shaping the rally-round-the-flag phenomenon.

The Elites' Rhetoric: From Challenging Perspectives to Consensus

The elite-driven models/ theoretical perspectives have been criticized on different grounds as Robinson (2017) argues that elite-driven approach fails to consider the relatively important factors that have power to shape media coverage. Likewise, the conditions that have been identified by Wolfsfeld, G., & Gadi, W., 1997; Lawrence, 2000; Robinson, 2000 and Entman's, 2003, which are responsible for challenging the elites' perspectives, some other studies have also found significant shift in media approach towards government in context of political/policy debate. In this connection, it is argued that media, sometimes, tended to its professional norms and obligations, hence generate narrative that counters the elites' stance, indicating that media is not restricted to elite sources nor it [media] promotes the political ideology and patriotism (Robinson, et al., 2009).

Similarly, the dominant perspectives of political elites on the issue of foreign policy, especially at the time of war when it [war] causes human casualties, have often been challenged by media. For example, Hallin (2005) argues that media criticized the U.S. officials for the compound bombing of "the Amiriya air raid shelter", which resulted a number of civilian deaths during the Iraq war (1991). After the incident, the U.S. officials failed to control the situation that generated a conducive environment of independence for media organizations, which produced critical coverage while focusing on human's suffering. Similarly, Althaus et al (1996) argue that reporters, covering the Gulf war, mostly presented the challenging perspectives, hence they were acted as the initiators of the critical viewpoints. Summing up, it can be argued that the foreign policy matters generate critical media coverage at the time of war, especially when human are suffering of the harmful effects of war as in shape of injuries and deaths. In such circumstances, media, especially the war reporters are presenting the challenging views in their reports.

This trend of reporting, after the advent 24/7 transmissions of television, shaped another scholarly debate on CNN effect as the news coverage of the cable television, seemingly, influenced the [foreign] policy of the United States during the 1990-91 Iraq War (Bennett, 1990). The way the CNN covered other international crisis such as the famine crisis in Somalia (1990-1991), Bosnia war (1995) and Kosovo war (1999) proved itself as prominent actor, influencing the scholarship to advocate that the media can have their influence on policy making, which is the central belief of the "CNN effect" scholarship. Though it is argued that the frequent TV coverage of hunger Somalian, especially children forced the American government to interfere on humanitarian grounds (Cohen, 1994), however, Livingston & Eachus (1995) presented a contrary view in this regard, arguing that the U.S government, mainly, taken a policy decision to intervene in Somalia in light of political and administrative operations, "whereas the news coverage coming in response to that decisions". In light of the



arguments about the U.S. decision of intervening in the conflict of Somalia signify a minor or, in other words, a weak influence that media exerted in the case of policy issue relating to Somalia. The scholarship indicates that the U.S. intervention in Somalia was not happened due to the television's power, but it, seemingly, showed that the government used its power to use and mobilize television for its support (Mermin, 1999).

The discussion explains some factors that force/ motivate media to give critical coverage on policy issues such as official's failure to control over policy debate, human's suffering in shape of hunger, shelter and/or injuries and deaths. All these factors shaped critical or independent media coverage in [western] media due to the nature of conflicts [conflicts at distance or the western media covered conflicts that occurred other than their own countries] while Pakistan media covered the selected issue relating to Kashmir conflict that falls in the category of issue at home (Jamal & Hussain, 2021).

Rally- Round- the Flag Effect and Kashmir Conflict

Likewise, different scholarly views on the CNN effect and the elites' rhetoric, the rally round the flag effect also discusses the influences of political elites, but more in the context of public trust on government. The literature in this connection symbolizes the popularity of the president of the United States or government (Brody, 1991; Lambert, et al., 2011). However, it is not an easy phenomenon to understand the public support for government [particularly at the time of policy crisis] on the basis of its popularity as there is a lot of variations in public support. Baum, M. A & Groeling, T., (2008) summarize these variations into three levels of explanations i.e. event-based, individual-level and 'domestic political' explanations. The scholarship in this regard, more, focusses on the event-based explanations, highlighting the characteristics of the conflicts/ events themselves, where the government or, in the case of the United States, the president sustains public support for military engagement [mostly abroad], primarily, on hope of success (Aldrich, J. H, Gelpi, Feaver, and Reifler 2006; Kull and Ramsay 2003).

Advocating the event-based explanation Jentleson (1992) called the American public, apparently, more supportive to those military[defensive] actions, which are aimed at imposing some sort of "foreign policy restrictions" on opponents than those offensive actions that are inevitable for "internal political change". Though rally-round-the flag phenomenon explains the influence of government in determining the nature of media coverage of the policy crisis and/or military intervention, however it [nature of media coverage] depends on domestic political environment surrounding the crisis, wherein the elites exert their influence to frame the event/ policy issue in their favor (Entman 2004).

Discussing the Kashmir conflict in the context of rally-round-the flag phenomenon it can be argued that out of three levels of explanation about public support, which were summarized by Groeling, T., & Baum, M. A., (2008) i.e. event-based, individual-level and 'domestic political' the first and last explanations- event based and domestic political explanations are, seemingly, more applicable in the case of Kashmir issue. The event of Burhan



Wani's killing sparked a series of protests in Indian-held Kashmir, which triggered a hot debate in domestic politics of Pakistan too, leading media to give more dominant and supportive coverage to the freedom struggle of people of Indian-held Kashmir.

Theoretical Framework

Researchers in the field of political communication have studied, and have been studying the media and policy/ politics or government relations in the context of different theoretical frameworks since the seminal work of Hallin (1986), whereas he drew three spheres that determine the nature of media coverage, especially at war time. Taking the first sphere of consensus (Hallin, 1986) coupled with indexing theory (Bennett, 1990) this study is theoretically conducted in the context of following theoretical perspective [shown in table No. 1 below] that has been constructed after synergy of Hallin's spheres (1986) and indexing theory;

Table No. 1 Determinants of media coverage on the basis of prevailing environment.

Environment around the issue	Media approach towards policy issue/ conflict
Elites' consensus	• Supportive to government when elites hold control over debate/ issue. • Neutral when oppositional voices get space in media. • Critical or oppositional at the time of elites' dissent or failure of elites to control debate.
Sphere of consensus	• Most probably, the media will be supportive on policy issue/ conflict when it falls in the sphere of consensus.
Sphere of consensus coupled with elites' agreement	• Majority of [media] coverage will be supportive, whereas the media will seemingly advocate the government's stance[s] in their routine coverage.

Applying the above-mentioned parameters in the table No. 1, this study evaluates the nature of media coverage in light of elites' rhetoric [as in case of elites' consensus on the issue of Kashmir] and rally-round-the flag phenomenon [that shapes sphere of consensus for public support on the issue of Kashmir]. In this study, the researcher outlines a research question and two hypotheses to reach the conclusion.

R.Q.: What is the possible outcome of the framing categories in determining the nature of media coverage at the time of violence in Indian-held Kashmir?



- H1:** The violent nature of issue generates high supportive coverage on the issue of Kashmir.
H2: Elites' consensus and the sphere of consensus are more like to shape media coverage in support of government's policy stance[s].

Research Methodology

To analyze the media approach towards 'politically controlled' policy issue of Kashmir, the researcher selected two newspapers, one each from English and Urdu language newspapers i.e. *Dawn* and *Nawa-e-Waqt*. Both newspapers have been actively playing their role in policy issues since their inception before Pakistan's independence. For thoroughly investigation of media role in the context of Kashmir conflict, the timeframe of this study consists of first three months [July to September, 2016] after the killing of Burhan Wani on July 08, 2016. The researcher selected front and back pages of newspapers, purposefully, and read the entire news stories relating to Kashmir conflict.

The coding sheet was used for data collection, whereas total 226 news stories were obtained after reading both the selected newspapers. All these news stories were evaluated on the basis of four identified frames. The [representative] frames are used to get a clear image of issues (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989) while the slants help researchers to determine the nature of media coverage (Entman, 2007). Applying four selected frames including lawful struggle, oppression of Kashmiri, peaceful resolution and role of international community", the researchers used slant's categories to evaluate the media approach towards the issue of Kashmir at the time of violence.

Findings and Discussion

R.Q.: What is the possible outcome of the framing categories in determining the nature at the time of violence in Indian held Kashmir?

Table 2. The selected frames shape the nature of media coverage on the Kashmir issue.

Newspapers	Lawful struggle N (%)	Oppression N (%)	Peaceful resolution N (%)	Role of global community N (%)	Total N(%)
<i>Dawn</i>	23	42	08	19	92
<i>Nawai-e-Waqt</i>	63	31	19	21	134
Total	86(38)	73(32)	27(12)	40(18)	226(100)
X ² (3, N=226) =63. 21, p<0.01					
Frames	Supportive		Neutral		Oppositional
Lawful struggle	55(38)		28(46)		03(15)
Oppression	58(40)		10(16)		05(25)
Peaceful resolution	16(11)		08(13)		03(15)
Role of international community	16(11)		15(25)		09(45)
Total	145(100)		61(100)		20(100)
X ² (6, N=226) =79.03, p<0.002					



The above table No. 2 indicates the frequencies of frames [refer to first part of the table], and their effects on the media coverage [refer to part II of the table]. The findings show that the issue of Kashmir, which became violent in its nature after the killing Burhan Wani, was dominated by the lawful struggle by 38% media coverage of the total 226 news stories, followed by oppression of Kashmiri (32%), the role of international community (19%) and the frame of peaceful resolution (12%).

Statistically, there is significant transformations in distribution of frames i.e. $X^2(3, N=226) = 63.21, p < 0.01$. This overall coverage on the basis of frames/ framing categories, especially the issue of oppression and the lawful struggle people for their right to self-determination, reflects the foreign policy objectives of Pakistan that urge for “safeguarding national security and geo-strategic interests, including Kashmir” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019).

The findings $X^2(6, N=226) = 79.03, p < 0.002$, in part-II of the above table, shows the substantial association between the frames and nature of media coverage, or in other words, the findings show the effects of frames on the nature of coverage. Both the newspapers reported high the issue of Kashmir in the context of oppression as the frame of ‘oppression of Kashmiri’, generated 40 % favorable coverage, followed by ‘lawful struggle’ that shaped 38% favorable coverage while the two frames i.e. peaceful resolution and the role of International community shaped 11% coverage each/ equally. The neutral category of slant was dominated by lawful struggle by 46% while the critical/oppositional category of slant was highly shaped by the role of International community (45%). These findings in the second part of the table suggest that Kashmir conflict generates more supportive coverage due to elites’ consensus (Bennett, 1990) on the issue, where general public also put their weight in support of government- creating a sphere of consensus (Hallin, 1986).

H1: The violent nature of issue generates high supportive coverage on the issue of Kashmir.

Table 3. Distribution of coverage of Kashmir issue in term of violence and slants.

Newspapers	Supportive(N%)	Neutral(N%)	Oppositional (N%)	Total (N%)
<i>Dawn</i>	52	29	11	92
<i>Nawai-e-Waqt</i>	93	32	09	134
Grant Total	145(64)	61(27)	20(09)	226(100)
$X^2(2, N=226) = 113.09, p = 0.01$				
Nature of issue	Supportive (N%)	Neutral(N%)	Oppositional (N%)	
Violent	124(86)	15(25)	04(20)	
Nonviolent	21(14)	46(75)	16(80)	
Total	145(100)	61(100)	20(100)	
$X^2(2, N=226) = 73.06, p < 0.01$				

The above table No. 3 shows the nature of media coverage in selected newspapers and the way the nature of issue i.e. violent and non-violent nature shapes the media approach



towards the issue of Kashmir. The findings in part-I of table indicate that both the selected newspapers [*Dawn* and *Nawa-e-Waqt*] reported the issue of Kashmir in support of policy line of government, collectively, i.e. 64% of the total 226 news stories in a given timeframe of this study. The selected press gave 27% neutral and 09% critical coverage to the issue of Kashmir, whereas the government was, mostly, criticized for its weak stance in international community. Statistically, the differences between the selected media and slants are $X^2(2, N=226) = 113.09$, $p=0.01$, showing that Pakistani media organizations were more inclined to supportive stances on the issue of Kashmir at the time of violence.

Part-II of the table shows the influence of violence over shaping the media coverage on the issue of Kashmir. Statistically, the differences between the nature of issue and slant's categories are significant i.e. $X^2(2, N=226) = 73.06$, $p<0.01$ indicate that violence has its due influence over media coverage. The findings show that violent nature of the issue shaped 124(86%) supportive coverage out of the total 145 supportive news stories. The non-violent nature of issue dominated both the neutral category by 75% and critical coverage by 80%. These findings of the above table confirm the first hypothesis of this study, which predicts that "The violent nature of issue generates high supportive coverage on the issue of Kashmir".

H2: Elites' consensus and the sphere of consensus are more like to shape media coverage in support of government's policy stance[s].

Table 4. The influence of story actors over news coverage of the issue of Kashmir.

Newspapers	"Official" (N%)	"Unofficial" (N%)	Other (N%)	Total (N%)
<i>Dawn</i>	37	27	28	92
<i>Nawai-e-Waqt</i>	48	46	40	134
Grant Total	85(38)	73(32)	68(30)	226(100)

$X^2(2, N=226) = 09.71$, $p=0.03$

Story actors	Supportive	Neutral	Oppositional
Official	60(41)	21(34)	04(20)
Unofficial	39(27)	20(33)	14(70)
Other	46(32)	20(33)	02(10)
Total	145(100)	61(100)	20(100)

$X^2(4, N=226) = 51.28$, $p<0.01$

The above table No. 4 shows the influence of story actors in determining the news coverage on the Kashmir conflict. Falling in the scholarship on elites' debate (Bennett, 1990) and sphere of consensus (Hallin, 1986), the findings show that debate over Kashmir conflict, almost, equally dominated by [political] elites, opposition parties and public including the people of Kashmir, who have been struggling for their right to self-determination [forming a sphere of consensus over the issue of Kashmir]. As shown in the table that official actors shaped 38% media coverage, the unofficial dominated 32% while the other [... including the people of Kashmir] influenced 30% media coverage on the issue of Kashmir. Statistically, there is



significant difference in categories of story actors and newspapers ($X^2(2, N=226) = 09.71, p=0.03$).

The second part of the table carries the findings relating to influence of story actors over the nature of media coverage indicate significant relationship between story actors and nature of media coverage i.e. $X^2(4, N=226) = 51.28, p<0.01$. The findings show that official actors and other [people of Kashmir and other representatives of civil societies] shaped 41% and 32% supportive coverage respectively. While, the unofficial actors, mainly the opposition leaders, generated 70% critical coverage out of total 20 oppositional news stories on the issue of Kashmir, where the unofficial actors criticized either the government for its weak stance over Kashmir issue at different global forums or international communities for their cold response to the Indian aggression against Kashmiri people.

The overall findings confirm the second hypothesis of this study, which states that “Elites’ consensus and the sphere of consensus are more like to shape media coverage in support of government’s policy stance[s]” as the overall environment around the issue of Kashmir not only strengthen the elites’ consensus (Bennett, 1990) over Kashmir issue, but it also shaped a ‘sphere of consensus, (Hallin, 1986), motivating the general public, especially the people of Kashmir to organize their protests against Indian government.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the politically controlled issue of Kashmir (Hussain, 2020) after the killing of Burhan Wani turned into a violent phase that shaped high supportive coverage in Pakistani media, whereas this dominant approach in media falls in theoretical perspectives of Indexing theory (Bennett, 1990) and Hallin’s spheres (1986) that have been theorized by researcher in table No.1, where I explain that when the prevailing environment causes ‘elites consensus’ the media approach towards conflict would, possibly, be;

- Supportive to government when elites hold control over debate/ issue.
- Neutral when oppositional voices get space in media.
- Critical or oppositional at the time of elites’ dissent or failure of elites in maintaining their control over [policy] debate.

In case of sphere of consensus, when it will form, the media approach towards policy issue would, likely, be;

- Highly supportive on policy issue/ conflict as in the case of Kashmir.

However, when there will be sphere of consensus coupled with elites’ agreement the media would, more obviously, be;



- Highly supportive, and will seemingly advocate the government's stance[s] in their routine coverage as it happened at many times in the case of Kashmir conflict.

Though all the parameters that have been explained above are, apparently, applicable in the case of Kashmir conflict, but the last one i.e. spheres of consensus coupled with elites' agreement is the key determinant of media coverage on the issue of Kashmir. In this context, the overall findings of this study conclude that due to elites' consensus over the issue of Kashmir not only activated supportive coverage in media but it [Kashmir conflict] also created spheres of consensus, motivating general public to raise their voices. Thus, all these circumstances after the incident of Burhan Wani mobilized popular support against the Indian aggression, forming the rally-round-the flag phenomenon.

Limitations

This study has certain limitations as the researcher evaluated the nature of media coverage on the issue of Kashmir on the basis of elites' debate, sphere of consensus that not only strengthened the elites' rhetoric but also highlighted the due influence of rally-round-the flag phenomenon. This study is also limited to the news contents of two newspapers [one each English and Urdu], whereas the researcher contently analyzed the selected media' approach towards Kashmir conflict. Future research studies may be conducted to examine the media-government or policy relationship by analyzing;

- The contents of cross-national media organizations
- The approach/ media coverage of electronic media.
- The approach of media practitioners or experts by conducting in-depth interviews.



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