



REVISITING THE INDEXING THEORY IN THE CONTEXT OF AFGHANISTAN CRISIS: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE CROSS-NATIONAL MEDIA'S COVERAGE

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Abstract

This article analyzes the theoretical perspectives about media and government relationship, whereas the study, mainly, revisits the application of 'indexing theory' in the context of media's coverage on the issue of Afghanistan. For the purpose, the researchers have selected four newspapers, one each from Pakistan, the United States [US], the United Kingdom [UK] and India. Hence, the paper attempts to evaluate the cross-national media coverage on the issue of Afghanistan in the context of policy that determines the soft or otherwise critical relationship between media and government. The results, which are mixed in their nature, suggest that indexing theory is, comparatively, more applicable in this study. The elites' differences on the issue of the US forces' withdrawal from Afghanistan, coupled with the state of uncertainty over the issue



activated oppositional voices in the United States, hence the US newspaper i.e. *the New York Times* and, even, the UK newspaper- *the Guardian*, were found more critical to the government than daily *Dawn* and the *Hindu*, who highlighted the issue of Afghanistan more in the context of 'proximity' extended support to their respective governments- Pakistan and India respectively.

Keywords: Indexing, the US withdrawal, Taliban, Insurgents, Afghanistan Fall.

Introduction

Examining the role of media during conflict and political controversies - determining the relationship between media and government at the time of conflict- is the interest area for many of communication scholars, especially in the field of political communication. The studies on media-government relationship got due space in literature after the seminal work of Hallin (1986), who evaluated the US media reporting on the Vietnam war. This article evaluates the relationship between media and governments of Pakistan, the US, the UK and India in the context of Afghanistan's crisis after the US forces' withdrawal. The researchers, first, generated a scholarly debate over the issue of relationship between media and government[s] that led them forwarded to investigate the theoretical application and draw findings of the research studies.

Media-government relations in the context of policy issues

The relationship between media and government drew, obviously in today's digitalized world, significant attention of researchers, who have been theorizing this relationship, mainly, in the context of policy matters. The debate on media role in policy issue[s] has generated different scholarly perspectives as some of the researchers believe that the media role is subject to the prevailing [political] environment, arguing that media will play its independent role, promoting the critical narrative and its agenda when dramatic and troubling events occur (Bennett & Lawrence, 1995; Lawrence, 2000). However, Herman and Chomsky (1988) argued that some factors including commonality of interests, media's dependency on advertisement, and [in case of getting information] media trust on official sources made media an obedient to the government.

In light of the above two different perspectives, most of the available scholarship can be ordered into elite-driven approach, which evolves around the scholarly work of Daniel Hallin's media spheres model (1986), Herman and Noam Chomsky's manufacturing consent model (1988) and Lance Bennett's indexing model (1990), emphasizing, mainly, on elite's powers to control media. These models are not only



focusing on the factors, which restrict/ limit the media independence but also identify some of conditions, which provide media an opportunity to play its role, more, independently, or work free from the control of the state (Robinson, 2017) however, the critical or independent coverage of [war in] media has, mostly, been shaped after the differences among political elites (Hallin, 1986).

For instance, the Daniel Hallin's media spheres model (1986), which is considered the first theoretical endeavor that analyzed, systematically, the media-government relations in the context of policy issues, identified three different spheres i.e. sphere of consensus, sphere of legitimate controversy and sphere of deviance. Evaluating the U.S. media coverage of Vietnam war, Hallin found that the U.S. media was more inclined to report those aspects of conflict, which were falling in the sphere of consensus, hence this first sphere got majority of the coverage during conflict. The second sphere i.e. the sphere of legitimate controversy received, comparatively, more coverage than the last one i.e. the sphere of deviance that attracted a small amount of coverage. Hallin (1986) termed this pattern of coverage is a result of the cold war ideology and professional tenet of objectivity, mainly focusing to report the war/conflict in broader perspective of consensus.

Incongruous to the Hallin model, the manufacturing consent model gives, comparatively, more power to media as it seeks the media as an active participant, which plays its role dynamically, hence this model when using, can be a better [theoretical] option to analyze the role of media in the policymaking process (Kennis, 2015; Zollman, 2015). However, the manufacturing consent' school of thought argues that the media has a primary function of mobilizing the support for the policy of governing elites (Chomsky and Herman, 1988; Hammond and Herman, 2000).

The available scholarship on manufacturing consent identify two versions of the manufacturing consent, an executive version and an elite version. In the executive version, the government officials are taken as members of executive, whose agendas and frames of reference have usually been followed by the media in its contents (Chomsky and Herman, 1988; Entman, 1991; Herman, 1993; Philo and McLaughlin, 1993). For instance, Robert Entman (1991) in a study found that the U.S media framed two similar nature of air attacks in different perspectives. In case of Iran Airline shoot down, the U.S media framed the attack as a result of technical failure, aiming at protecting the U.S from accountability of the attack. Contrary, the U.S media framed the USSR responsible for shooting down the Korean Airline, calling it as a moral atrocity. The executive version of manufacturing consent looks at media as an institution that avoids criticism on executive policy lines, making an agreement between the media coverage and policy interests of executive, hence



preventing the media from influencing and/or challenging the executive policy (Robinson, 2001).

On other hand, the elite version [of the manufacturing consent model] views media coverage as a tool, which is designed to safeguard the interests of political elites including all those who are in the executive, legislative or holding any powerful political position (Bennett, 1990; Hallin, 1986). Daniel Hallin (1986) found in his study 'The Uncensored War' that critical/ oppositional coverage during the Vietnam war was shaped after some political segments of the Washington came forward against the war. These findings show that the media has no or little influence on policymaking process, rather, mostly, they are taking into consideration the interests of political elites and their policy lines in news coverage.

The Bennett (1990) indexing model, which is an extension of the Hallin's media spheres (1986) and Herman and Noam Chomsky's manufacturing consent model (1988), is considering, comparatively, more influential model that explains the way the U.S media index the perspectives of elites in a [political/policy] debate. Indexing explains the level of confidence that exists between media coverage [discourse] and elites' debate. Three indicators that Bennett (1990) has identified in his seminal work on indexing model, are responsible for pushing the media to trust on elites in a political debate i.e. (I) avoiding any sort of disturbance that may [harmfully] effect the the powerful political and economic interests (II) the professional relationship between journalists and politicians, where politicians exchange information with journalists for their gains and (c) a function in a democratic system, where journalists have to get information from elected representatives/officials.

The above three mentioned models of elite driven approach give more focus to the important role of governing elites, ignoring the significant role of media in policymaking. Modifying these elites driven models, researchers including Wolfsfeld's (1997); Lawrence (2000) and Robinson (2000) presented their theoretical work, identified some conditions that shift the media from, merely, follower of the elites' guidelines to a tool of critical discourse, performing more independent role during the policy crisis/ wartime.

Wolfsfeld's (1997) political contest model determines the media and policy relation on the basis of political environment, whereas, he argued, the control over political environment increases the media's reliance on officials/ political elites, hence give support to elites' stance[s]. however, if government fails to maintain its control over the political environment, the oppositional/critical media coverage would, more obviously, be triggered (Wolfsfeld, 1997). Unlike control over political environment, the event-driven news model (Lawrence, 2000) clarifies a specific condition that leads media to shape critical coverage



i.e. dramatic and tragic events, which can influence policy by advocating critical news narratives.

On other hand, policy-media interaction model argues that policy uncertainty, a political scenario where government fails to adopt a clear and well-articulated policy line, causes, eventually, critical media coverage, forcing government to do something or otherwise face public [relations] disaster. In such scenario the media can, significantly, influence the policymaking process (Robinson, 2000).

Likewise, the Entman's (2003) cascading activation model, which reunites the conflicting perspectives of the event-driven model and indexing model (Aday, 2010), explains three conditions that are responsible for critical media coverage of policy issue[s], determining the relationship between media and government in the context of policy matters. The media can play its role more independently, and hence shape critical coverage, if (I) the official circles engage in conflicting situation (II) counter frames are generated with the help of mid-level sources (III) culturally ambiguous events that are occurred, shaping critical frames (Entman, 2003).

When concluding the above discussion, it can be argued that the nature of media coverage [supportive to government or challenging the stance of political elites] depends on some conditions including the nature of event, cultural values associated with a particular [policy] event and the relations that exist between media and government, even the power relationship among political elites (Aday, 2010; Bennett et al., 2006). The officials/ political elites can sustain their stance[s] when they are united, hence minimize the counter frames; however, serious disagreement in official circles, especially on policymaking process, provides the media an opportunity to magnify their counter frames (Robinson, 2017).

An overview of indexing theory

Despite of the criticism on elites perspectives, the indexing theory has potential to discusses the state of relationship between media and government, primarily explained this relationship in term of media treatment toward elites' [political]debate. Bennett (1990) argues that "mass media news professionals, from the boardroom to the beat, tend to "index" the range of voices and viewpoints in both news and editorials according to the range of views expressed in main- stream government debate about a given topic. Hence, the theory, basically, predicts the nature of media coverage on the basis of elites' consensus/ agreement and elites' disagreement.



The available scholarship on indexing reflects different perspectives of the scholars in the field of political communication. In case of supportive literature, the researchers including Bennett., et al, 2006; Groshek. J,2008; Ha, J. S., 2017; Kennis, A., 2015; Zingarelli, 2010. tested the indexing theory in their studies and found it an appropriate theoretical framework for analyzing the relationship between media and government. For example, in an extensive media study of forty-two foreign policy crises, the researcher applied the indexing theory and found that unlike the CNN effect the “indexing hypothesis” is holding true stance (Zingarelli, 2010) while explaining the effect of indexing, Groshek, J (2008) examined *The New York Times* and *Washington Post*'s coverage of Iraq crisis [before and after the U.S. parliament through its resolution authorized government for the militarily intervention in Iraq] and identified the “tripartite version of indexing i.e. official consensus, critical coverage and frames” as the findings of his research confirm the influence of official consensus on determining [minimizing or, even, controlling] the critical coverage, thus they [officials] as major news source shape functional frames, which, more obviously, support their position in elite debate on policy issues. However, Bennett., et al (2006) termed the media inclination toward elites as “respect to political power”, where media, in case of Abu Ghraib scandal, followed the likely pattern of indexing. Studying the U.S media coverage of Abu Ghraib scandal Bennet, Lawrence and Livingston argued that media turned the policy of torture into unfortunate and “isolated” abuse, indicating the mainstream media trend to protect the U.S government from possible public criticism on account of ‘torture’. The researchers, however, viewed that the consistent pattern of reporting of an issue can have its impact on the policy making. For instance, the continuous photographic media coverage of Abu Ghraib scandal influenced the public debate, mainly, in long-term and indirect manner, compelling the U.S government to introduce the McCain torture bill (Bennett., et al, 2006).

Similarly, the U.S media, seemingly, highlighted the American perspectives of liberalism and idealism while ignoring the perspectives that dominated realism during the Arab Spring. Ha, J. S. (2017) argue that media’s independent role was found largely restricted to the elites debate as the opinion pieces of *New York Times* and *Washington Post* carried less criticism on the U.S. government’s policy of supporting the Arab dictatorship, contrary, the elite newspapers largely advanced the viewpoints of political elites in their coverage of the Arab Spring.

Summing up the supportive literature on indexing theory, it can be argued that, theoretically, it is not clearly justified to label media as the follower of elites’ guidelines, especially, on policy matters. Rather, it is a complex phenomenon that needs to be evaluated, more, in critical perspectives. In this regard, some of the studies including Althaus at el, 1996;; Hamilton, J.et al., 2010; Harp, et al., 2010; Klein, et al., 2009;



Robinson, et al., 2009; reflect the challenging perspectives of indexing theory, identified some of the conditions that lead media to play its role, more, independently during policy crisis. For example, the professional practices of balance and objective reporting, in many cases, shape the counter frames that, more obviously, challenge the perspectives of elites, even jingoism and [political] ideology (Robinson, et al., 2009).

The prevailing [political] environment around a policy issue is another condition that determines the nature of media coverage, especially when the human's casualties caused policy crisis during Gulf war (Althaus et al., 1996), failing the government to hold its controls on war reporters (Zaller and Chiu 1996) the media exerted the challenging perspectives; hence war reporters were, seemingly, the initiators of the critical viewpoints at that time. Hamilton, J. et al (2010) while suggesting a deep paradox that underlies in indexing system, put forward another condition- "the media carefully guard their credibility", which guides the routine reporting processes, where the reporters sometimes challenge the official line. Broadly speaking, the professional role of journalists at the time policy crisis is also important to analyze as Althaus et al., (1996) studied the media-government relations in the context of the U.S.-Libya crisis of 1985–1986, and found that journalists through incorporating the opinions of opposition and/or foreign sources in their reporting, marginalize some stances of the U.S. elites on foreign policy issues. Further, Bennett et al. (2008) have suggested three factors for minimizing the reliance/ dependency on [indexing] elites, which would, more obviously, shape the critical media coverage. These factors are (a) linked with the event-driven news model i.e. unexpected and dramatic news events, probably causing critical coverage (b) associated with counter-narrative i.e. communications strategies of skillful opposition, triggered media coverage that challenge the dominant/ elites' narrative and (c) related with professional norms and practices i.e. investigative journalism, producing independent media coverage. Similarly, Bennett and Manheim (2006) stress on two conditions relating to media independent role and public's interest of becoming news detectives. They argue that elites would dominate their control over policy debate until the media decide to report the issue [policy crisis/ war] independently and the people are provided conducive environment to become news detectives.

Afghanistan Crisis: Revisiting the Indexing Model

The indexing theory, which has its roots in the U.S democratic system, is useful to test in the current political crisis in Afghanistan, where the Taliban took control of the government soon after the U.S forces' withdrawal in August, 2021. The theory presents an insight about the elites' role in controlling the political situation or debate, forcing media to index the elites' consensus to achieve the broader goal of convincing the public about



foreign policy's events like war or conflict (Bennett, 2016; Robinson, 2017). The Afghanistan crisis presents different perspectives in international politics as the Taliban emerged as dominant elites, generated their own political stance, which is seemingly soft in its nature this time as compare to their previous harsh political narrative (Schulze, et al., 2021). On other hand, the U.S, which has been facing criticism at home (Yashwant Raj, 2021) keeps a political position on the issue of withdrawal as saying president Joe Biden "I was not going to extend this forever war, and I was not extending a forever exit", (Jeff Mason and Steve Holland, 2021) while, Pakistan and other neighboring countries of Afghanistan and some of leading countries of the world, , especially China [and India], look at the issue of Afghanistan in the context of their own [political and economic] interest (Janka, O and Andrew. S, 2021). The complexity around the recent crisis of Afghanistan, and the visible and invisible interests of other countries turned the situation so ambiguous that many of the countries, who have their concern on Afghan-crisis, seemingly failed to draw their clear policy goals.

In this study, the researchers are interested to revisit the indexing model to investigate the pattern of news coverage regarding Afghan-crisis in media of different countries, who have directly or indirectly [political and/or economic] interests that are linked with political affairs of Afghanistan. Hence, unlike the above-mentioned studies [in literature] on indexing theory, this study is based on the analysis of cross-national media organizations, evaluating the news coverage in the context of elites' debate on Afghan-crisis.

Whereas, the study is conducted in light of two out of the three following guidelines, which Bennett et al., (2018) have suggested after defining that how the political communication has, most often, been shaped by some of the conditions including minimized citizen attention, mixture systems of media, the development of undemocratic movements and parties, interacting with flow of information, which is often polarized in nature.

First guideline is relating to increasing pattern of digital information, it is worth to investigate critically that "how these hybrid media ecologies feed into decision making in political institutions and reporting in the press". Second, when researchers are interested to conduct comparative studies, it is important to examine the differences in politics/ political stance[s] of different countries instead of, merely, discussing the differences in frames. In this regard, Bennett et al., (2018) quoted an example of climate change, arguing that comparative research on climate change can tell us about the differences in frames of media of different [selected] countries, but the basic question that needs to be investigated that "what do the frames tell us about the differences in underlying politics"? Third,



urging for the need to rethink methods, Bennett et al., (2018) argue that due to “volumes of “big data” in hybrid information networks” instead of conventional sampling and content analysis methods it is, now, necessary for researchers that they “must address methods and models for understanding problems of organization and agency that are based in communication and algorithms/procedures and are not fully controlled by humans.

In a nutshell, the analysis of this study is based on first two guidelines of Bennett et al., (2018) to examine the level of media independence, a challenging perspective, on the basis of framing of Afghanistan issue, which determines the nature of relationship between media and their respective government in the era of digitalized information.

Research Method

To examine the media reports on the issue of Afghanistan in the context of national policy, the article’s findings are based on content analysis of four newspapers’ coverage on the issue of Afghanistan, [one each from Pakistan, the United States, UK and India]. The newspapers including *Dawn*, *the New York Times*, *the Guardian* and *the Hindu*, were purposely selected on the basis of their popularity and influence over policy debate in their respective countries.

The timeframe of the study spanned from one month before and after the Taliban victory, whereas the co-authors have collected the data by applying census sampling technique. Total 464 news stories were retrieved after using the selected keywords, and consulting the front, back and international pages of the selected newspapers i.e. *Dawn*, *the Hindu*, *Guardian* and *the New York Times*. Both the coders/ co-authors have judged and assessed the news stories on the basis of headlines, intros and first two paragraphs after intro.

For thorough examination of the media coverage, news stories were not only coded on basis of sources i.e. officials and unofficial sources, but the overall media coverage was also being evaluated on the basis of subjects that were highlighted by selected newspapers. The subjects were included politics, terrorism, diplomacy, society and others [* news story was coded in subject of ‘other’ when it didn’t fall in any of the mentioned subjects]. Besides, news treatment was also evaluated on basis of ‘slants’, which create or shape when [media] coverage of an issue support one side over the other, especially in a prevailing issue or, even, in a potential issue/ conflict (Entman, 2007). In this study, the slant categories i.e. supportive, critical and neutral, were analyzed on basis of the unit of analysis, which was a single paragraph that was aimed at thoroughly capturing the nature of media content.



For reaching to a comprehensive approach of the selected newspapers toward the issue of Afghanistan, the researchers determined the three slants after reading all the paragraphs in a story. After reading a news story, paragraphs were counted and the particular news story was coded in that slant category, which dominated most of paragraphs. For instance, when there was more than one slant in a news story, consisting on three supportive paragraphs and one critical paragraph, that particular story was coded in the supportive category. However, in case of equal supportive and neutral, or supportive and critical coverage was reported in paragraphs, the headlines were consulted for determining the nature of media coverage [slants].

Finding and Discussion

RQ1: How the newspapers of Pakistan, India, US and UK reported on the Afghanistan crisis in terms of support to national policies?

Table 1: Coverage in the selected press in term of national policies.

Newspapers	Supportive	Critical	Neutral	Total
<i>Dawn</i>	88 (33%)	32(26%)	14(19%)	134(29%)
<i>The Hindu</i>	75(28%)	14(12%)	21(29%)	110(24%)
<i>The Guardian</i>	61(22%)	42(34%)	16(22%)	119(25%)
<i>The New York Times</i>	45(17%)	34(28%)	22(30%)	101(22%)
Total	269(100%)	122(100%)	73(100%)	464(100%)

The findings in above table No. 1 show that, mainly, supportive coverage dominates the slant categories, reflecting the media tendencies toward the issue of Afghanistan in the context of their relationship with government of their respective countries. Referring to the Bennett (1990) indexing theory, which argues that “mass media news professionals, from the boardroom to the beat, tend to “index” the range of voices and viewpoints in both news and editorials according to the range of views expressed in main- stream government debate about a given topic. For example, in one of supportive news story in the selected



Pakistani newspaper while reporting the fall of Kandahar and Herat, argued that “*they [Taliban] captured the country’s second and third largest cities in a lightning advance just weeks before America is set to end its longest war*” (Dawn, 2021), supporting Pakistani government’s stance over the US forces withdrawal, framing this [advancement] as uncertain scenario that happened, even, before ending of the US war in Afghanistan. On other hand, *The New York Times* (2021), while criticizing its government [referring to elites’ disagreement that trigger critical coverage] argued that “Kandahar, in particular, is a huge prize for the Taliban”. Similarly, the Indian newspaper, referring to the US claim that they have trained and equipped the Afghan forces, termed the fall of Afghanistan as a ‘*weak response*’ of the Afghan forces to Taliban. One of its news stories *The Hindu* (2021) argued that “*The Taliban’s march through northern Afghanistan gained momentum overnight with capture of several districts from fleeing Afghan forces.....*”.

RQ2: What sources are highlighted more in the newspapers of Pakistan, India, US and UK in media coverage on the Afghanistan crisis?

Table 2: Sources-wise distribution of news stories in the selected newspapers

Newspapers	Official Sources	Unofficial Sources
<i>Dawn</i>	25%	21%
<i>The Hindu</i>	29%	15%
<i>The Guardian</i>	24%	33%
<i>The New York Times</i>	22%	31%
Total	100%	100%

The findings in above given table No. 2 indicate that the Pakistani and Indian newspapers [because of proximity] covered the issue of Afghanistan more in the context of official sources i.e. 25% and 29% respectively in daily *Dawn* and *The Hindu*. Unlike, the US and UK newspapers i.e. *The New York Times* and *The Guardian* framed the issue of Taliban more in perspectives of unofficial sources, 31% and 33% respectively out of the total news stories, where unofficial sources were mentioned by all the selected newspapers.



These findings show that the issue of proximity or the [war] at home, likely, to be framed favorably, whereas the media would be following the policy of government, hence media will index the official sources more in their reports. This argument is being supported by many research scholars including Bennett & Paletz, 1994; Carpenter, 1995; Reese & Lewis, 2009 and Jamal & Hussain, 2021.

The findings also supplement the key assumptions of Pier Robinson (2000) policy-media interaction model, whereas he argues that media will tow the policy line of government when there is policy certainty, and will trigger critical/ oppositional coverage when there prevails policy uncertainty, failing the government to adopt a well-defined policy line on any issue/ conflict. Both arguments of his model may, partly, be applicable in this study as the findings show that the US and its western ally- the UK had, seemingly, failed to give a clear policy line or strategy for sustainable peace in Afghanistan after the US withdrawal- the issue that was remained uncertain for years. In this regard, the CRS Report (2022) says;

“After over a year of negotiations initiated in 2018, Trump Administration officials signed a February 2020 agreement with the Taliban in which the United States committed to the withdrawal of all international military forces and contractors by May 2021.”

After changes in government, the report further says;

“In 2021, President Joseph Biden announced that the United States would withdraw its troops, though several months later than the date to which it agreed in the U.S.-Taliban accord. On August 15, 2021, two weeks before that withdrawal was to conclude, the Taliban entered Kabul, the culmination of a rapid nationwide military advance that shocked many in the United States and Afghanistan. In the last two weeks of August, U.S. military forces oversaw the evacuation of over 120,000 individuals, including U.S. and international diplomatic personnel and Afghan partners, from Kabul’s international airport, before departing on August 30, 2021. No U.S. military or diplomatic personnel are in Afghanistan as of June 2022.”

Hence, the issue of Afghanistan in the context of the US withdrawal- passed through stages of uncertainty- generated more independent/ critical coverage in the US and UK’s newspapers than Pakistani and Indian newspapers. The responsible factor for critical coverage was the policy uncertainty- referring to the policy-media interaction model (Robinson, 2001). Similarly, the findings -on basis of sources, also indicate that the critical coverage in The New York and The Guardian was more reported while quoting unofficial sources.



RQ3: In what topics, the newspapers of Pakistan, India, US and UK reported on the Afghanistan crisis in terms of support to national policies?

Table 3: Distribution of coverage in terms of topics being covered

Issues	Favorable	Unfavorable
Politics	30%	17%
Terrorism	14%	26%
Diplomacy	23%	23%
Society	12%	19%
Others	21%	15%
Total	100%	100%

The table No.3 reflects the distribution of topics that have been given prominent display by selected newspapers in their reporting on the issue of Afghanistan. The findings show that the topics of politics and diplomacy dominate the favorable reporting, as both the terms were reported favorably by 30% and 23% respectively. The findings, further, explain that unfavorable or critical/opposition coverage was shaped high in the context of terrorism i.e. 26% and, even, diplomacy (23%) that indicates the weak diplomatic process or channels were responsible for turning the issue of Afghanistan violent. Referring to the political move/ decision of the then president of Afghanistan- Ashraf Ghani, *Dawn* (August 16, 2021) reported that;

“Presidents Ashraf Ghani fled the country on Sunday as the militants entered the capital virtually unopposed, saying he wanted to avoid bloodshed.”

In the sub-part of the news report, daily *Dawn* (August 16, 2021) highlighted the issues being faced by locals of Afghanistan [in context of society], critically framed the situation in restive Afghanistan;



“..... most people hid in their homes as the Taliban deployed fighters at major intersections. There were scattered reports of looting and armed men knocking on doors and gates.”

Concluding

The researchers, mainly, studied the relationship between media and government in the context of Afghanistan's crisis, where two out of four newspapers were selected on the basis of 'the issue of proximity', aiming to determine whether or not the proximity to the issue influence the media coverage, and either it has influence over the elites' debate on the policy issue i.e. Afghanistan's crisis. The findings illustrate that the critical coverage was, comparatively, triggered more in the US and the UK media than newspapers of Pakistan and India. At this juncture of the research, it can be argued that the issue of proximity has to influence, potentially, the media coverage on one side and on other side, the findings suggest that the oppositional voices were highlighted by media on the basis of elites' disagreement- one of the key assumptions of indexing theory (Bennet, 1990).

Besides, the findings of this study also, seemingly, advocate one of the key assumptions of Robinson (2000) policy-media interaction model i.e. the policy uncertainty, which was prevailed in the United States regarding the timeframe for its forces' withdrawal from Afghanistan, responsible for critical coverage in the US media. However, the supportive coverage in other newspapers, especially in Pakistani media, was shaped more in the context of 'proximity' to the issue than policy certainty, which motivated the media to highlight positively the government's concerns about changing scenario in neighboring country-Afghanistan.

Limitations

The research article is limited to the news contents of four newspapers [one each from Pakistan, the US, the UK and India], future research studies may also be conducted to evaluate the media-government relationship by analyzing the contents of electronic media, which play their role as "active actor" in the field of political communication. Similarly, this study is limited to the examination of media coverage on Afghanistan's crisis quantitatively. In future, researchers may also apply mixed method to explore the relationship between media and government, especially in politically vibrant countries like Pakistan, in more details.



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