Manipulative Role of Pakistani Print Media in Construction of Political Discourse before Elections and its Impact on Public opinion

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ABSTRACT

Determining the role of print media in construction of political discourse has been a debatable issue in global academic and scholarly arena of Political Science, Social Sciences and Humanities at least for last two decades. Therefore, this study aims at exploring the role of print media in propagation of political discourse before elections in Pakistan. The data were collected from the sample of 500 educated samples of Pakistani individuals through Convenient Sampling Technique by using Close-ended Questionnaire. The obtained data have been analyzed through Uni-Variate analysis of Pearson's Chi-Square test. The findings of the study reveal that majority of Pakistani educated individuals preferably read the headlines of English newspapers. Significant results have been found about the biased role of Pakistani print media on the issue under consideration. Moreover, the findings also reveal that Pakistani print media propagate the political campaigns before elections due to their social and economic concerns with particular politicians and political parties. Therefore, the study concludes that Pakistani print media is biased and launches political campaigns before elections to influence the public opinion in a particular direction.

KEY WORDS: Manipulative role, Print media, political discourse, Pakistani elections, Public opinion

INTRODUCTION

Media plays significant role in construction of political discourse before elections. However, its role becomes multi-fold in the developing countries, like Pakistan because the public heavily rely upon the news stories published in media. Media joins its citizens close to each other on various matters and activities in a particular region. The citizens of a state are updated through media. This is a matter of fact that various TV channels and websites telecast current information to the public, nevertheless, in Pakistan, the public is keen to read newspapers and it is believed that media presents unbiased and transparent information. In this situation, the responsibility of media becomes multi-fold to produce and disseminate true and valid information, principally before the elections. However, Van Dijk [17] claims that the role of media is not unbiased and it does not disseminate true information, instead it uses discursive strategies that affect the local semantics of text and talk, as in dominant U.S political discourse. Generally, it is perceived that media creates awareness and has no hidden motives or interests of its own and performs it without any discrimination and influence. Moreover, it is conceived that freedom of expression ensures the objectivity of media in production of the news and that the news reports of media exhibit truth and reality exclusive of bias and prejudice. To structure these news discourses, there are social, institutional and political power relations which have their own vested interests to regulate power in the way to satisfy the expectations of the public as stated by Catenaccio et al. [5]that the significant feature in the production of media discourses is the role of audience in relation to what the media produces. Likewise, the aspect of intertextuality cannot be ignored, as claimed by Philips and Jorgensen [11], that Fairclough's [10] discourse analytical model is based on, and promotes the principles that texts can never be understood or analysed in isolation---they can only be understood in relation to webs of other texts and in relation to the social context. Moreover, media exploits its institutional power and purposefully misdirects the public opinion regarding the elections. Therefore, in order to view the manipulative role of print media of Pakistan, literature from the previous media studies needs to bring under consideration. In this respect, the studies conducted by Pasha, T. [13]; Ezeifeka [9]; Valdeon's [16]; Elbdari [8]; Abid and Shah [1]; Chauhdri N., I. and Ashraf [6]; Riaz [15]; Ahmed, Masud and Tilak [2]; Raza and Sajid [14] have been focused to establish the current study on stronger grounds.

With respect to find the biased representation of emergence of Brother's political growth and potential threat in Egyptian media, particularly, al-Ahram, a critical study had been conducted by Pasha, T. [13] using van Dijk's ideological square[18] well suited to describe the relationship between the Islamists and Egyptian regime. For

this purpose, newspaper's front page news reports were selected to see how Islamists are represented socially, discursively and linguistically in the selected newspaper, the period between 2000 and 2005. To examine, both discursive and social practices, first, the study investigated the process of news making, role of ideology, history of Islamism and type (s) of relationships between Islamists and regime. On the second place, news headlines were analysed linguistically in terms of Idealized Reader (IR) framework, lexical choices, presupposition, sourcing and transitivity as well. The study concluded that Egyptian regimes practiced a constant and systematic strategy of exclusionary nature towards the Muslim Brotherhood implementing two sources: First one was sheer power, for example, prison, detention and military tribunals, secondly, through soft power (media). Moreover, the analysis also concluded that the selected newspaper, al-Ahram adopted the technique of silence to conceal the positive aspect of Muslim Brotherhood. It also revealed the relationship between the discourse and Orientalism as well. The study exposed the negative representation of the Islamists which highlight the government's fear of the Islamists who continuously tended to participate in democratic and civil society of the country.

Another study published in the journal, Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across Disciplines, titled 'Strategic Use of Metaphor in Nigerian Newspaper Reports: A Critical Perspective' by Ezeifeka, [9] disclosed the use of metaphor as cognitive phenomenon incorporated in a privately-owned Nigerian newspaper, the Guardian, reporting Nigerian Union of Teachers' strike for swaying public opinions and supposing harmony for the argument they want to project as the 'reality'. The data was analysed by taking insights into Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Critical Discourse Analysis and Critical Metaphor Analysis. The findings discovered the newspaper's outwardly unintended ideological cohesion with the power elite, back grounded under the façade of metaphors in its endeavour to enact its watchdog role in the case of teachers. The study was conducted to evaluate the phenomenon either an intended tactical choice to articulate new as well as exploit forerunning conceptual structures as oppressive contraption against the Nigerian teachers' demand in order to get a distinctive salary structure. In order to serve the purpose, the data was selected in the form of headlines and reports of the Guardian. The period was selected from June and July 2008 on industrious action taken by the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT) to demand a special Teachers' Salary Scale (TSS). A total of twenty-eight (28) editions of the newspaper containing reports on the strike were analysed. In this regard, the methods of metaphor identification, interpretation and explanation were adopted based on linguistic, cognitive and pragmatic criteria. The conclusion revealed the ideological underpinnings in the form of metaphoric use to shift the reality from the original context or domain to another context in order to serve ideological purposes.

Moreover, Mustafa Elbdari[8] in his PhD Thesis, titled 'News on the Web in Arabic and English: a Discourse Analysis of CNN's Websites' has used mix-method approach (both qualitative and quantitative) to analyse the primary data consisted of news stories collected between 25 May, 2004 and 5 July, 2004. He followed the news stories posted on CNN Arabic website and corresponding stories posted on CNN international website in English. For the collection of news stories related to the Middle East, the site was visited during the period mentioned above at least twice a day. Furthermore, questionnaire was used and distributed to 52 respondents to collect the data to supplement the study.

Additionally, focus is now turned to the related studies held on Pakistani news media. In this concern, the study of Abid and Shah [1] conducted on "Representations of Corruption in the English Print Media in Pakistan". Four English newspapers were selected for study purpose, including The News, The Nation, The Express Tribune and DAWN. Indeed, the data provided by Transparency International was judged by news coverage of the phenomenon. Chauhdri N., I. and Ashraf [6] organized study on, "Agenda setting and Framing of Elections during Musharraf Period in Pakistani Print Media (1999-2008)" published in International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences. Content analysis of three English newspapers, DAWN, The News and The Nation was used to examine editorial coverage of polls held under Musharraf regime.

Riaz, S.[15] conducted his study on the topic "The Relationship between the Public and Print Media Agendas on National Issues in Pakistan (A Study of the Agenda Setting Role of Print Media in Pakistan). Two mostly circulated newspapers, Dawn (English)and Jang (Urdu) were selected to examine the relationship between the public and the print media agendas in Pakistan. The content analysis of the most widely circulated English and Urdu newspapers was done for the whole one year about the six important issues including terrorism, Indo-Pak relations, Energy crisis, Food crisis, Judicial crisis and Lal Masjid (Red Mosque). Moreover, sample survey of 300 readers of the selected newspapers' readers was used to compare with the results of the content analysis to investigate the relationship between the print media agenda and the public agenda.

Ahmed, Masud and Tilak [2] conducted study on, "Pakistani Press and War Against Terrorism in Democratic Era" published in Berkeley Journal of Social Science. Quantitative research was organized around four national dailies (two Urdu: "Jang" and "Nawa-e-waqt" and two English: "The News" and the "Nation") between the period November 26, 2008 to January 26, 2009 are the universe of the study. The news stories were selected through systematic sampling. "Jang Group of Publication" (Jang and The News) and "Nida-e-Millat Group of Publications" (Nawa-e-waqt and The Nation analysed with content analysis using coding sheet: a device used for collection of the data in scientific manner.

Raza and Sajid [14] organised their study on "Discourse Analysis of Coverage Regarding Drone Attacks: A study of Pakistani Print Media" that had been published in Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences. The news items of front and back pages related to drone attack issue were selected from two leading newspapers "The Nation" and "Naw-e-Waqt". Research design was based upon content analysis to find out the media coverage to the issue, as well as, on the survey of the 100 readers of the newspapers from the period between 1st August, 2011 and 31st October, 2011. Apart from the research on media text, various studies in Pakistan have been developed on other forms of text which misrepresent and misdirect the opinion of the readership. A recent study developed by Khan, M. U. [12] on the issue of representation of women in Atiq Rahimi's, A Patience Stone is another example which shows that discourse producers misrepresent political and social realities that is not confined to the print media only but in other forms of texts as well. However, the focus of the present study is mainly on the issue of print media and its manipulative role in construction of political discourse before elections.

The above studies address the role of Pakistani print media on representation of corruption, agenda setting, war against terrorism, and discourse analysis of coverage regarding drone attacks. Moreover, except Abid and Shah's [1] study on corruption and Ahmed, J., & Hussain, S. [3] study on Coverage of Pakistan General Election 2008 in Leading Pakistani English Newspapers: Exploring Agenda Setting are drawn upon English newspapers only, the other studies are based upon both Urdu and English newspapers. Similarly, beside, the studies on corruption and agenda setting, above mentioned studies about Pakistani media investigate the international issues, while this study is delimited to representation of political discourse on national issues only.

However, these previous studies view the role of media through narrow perspective which is particularly subjective in nature while the current study investigates the phenomenon of political discourse with view to the opinions of the Pakistani educated individuals using Uni-Variate analysis of Chi-Square test; therefore, it sets the departure point for this study to probe the issues with critical perspective. In other words, there is dire need to investigate media discourse in critical manner because it plays a role of interface between the process of discourse production, its dissemination and the readership.

Objectives of the Study

This study aimed to achieve the following objectives:
This study aimed to accomplish the following objectives:
1. To explore the kind of media Pakistani educated individuals read or watch.
2. To investigate that which particular section or program of media Pakistani individuals read or watch.
3. To evaluate the opinions of Pakistani individuals regarding the biased role of Pakistani print media in construction of political discourse and its impact on public opinion.
4. To investigate the opinions of Pakistani individualsregarding media houses in propagation of political campaigns before elections to manipulate public opinion because of their social and economic concerns associated with particular political parties.

Research Questions

This study aimed to accomplish the answers of following research questions:
1. What kind of media (electronic, print, digital) Pakistani educated individuals preferably read or watch?
2. Which particular section or program of media, Pakistani individuals preferably read or watch?
3. To what extent Pakistani print media is biased and manipulative in construction of political discourse and exerts its impact on public opinion?
4. What are the factors involved in manipulation of political discourse which force Pakistani print media to launch political campaigns before elections to regulate the opinion of the public in a particular direction?

Significance of the Study

This research study is significant in focusing critically on widely accepted notion of media discourse as legitimate and transparent source of distribution of information. It would also reveal the process that constructs media discourse as a discursive practice, influence of institutional power (Fairclough, 1992) and the vested interests of media related personnel in order to manipulate the opinion of Pakistani public before elections. It would also focus on the consumer orientation and concerns involved in the construction of particular type of discourse to manipulate them in a systematic manner. Moreover, this study would also endeavour to explore how media discourse is produced, which factors contribute in its production, what are the concerns of those whose representation is included and why, which kind of audience is intended and what are the motives behind the scene to achieve to manipulate and construct the particular opinion of the public in Pakistan. This study would contribute a lot to the pre-existing research works; would reveal the opacity, constituted and constitutive nature of political discourse embedded in the headlines of Pakistani English newspapers. Likewise, it would also facilitate Pakistani public to view the print media language with a critical look that can initiate a healthy change

in the society. It would also guide the media houses to review their biased policies in order to create and maintain public trust.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This is postmodern quantitative study which allows the researchers to probe into the phenomenon of manipulative role of print media of Pakistan and its impact on public opinion.

Population
Bachelor level, Master level, M Phil and PhD level students of National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Iqra University, and Federal Urdu University Islamabad are the population of this study. Islamabad is the capital of Islamic Democratic Pakistan and the students from all the four provinces get admissions in these universities for better and quality higher education. Therefore, the study conducted in Islamabad can be generalized to the entire country.

Sample and Sampling Technique
The sample of the study is 500 respondents from the selected population**.** The data were collected by using Convenient Sampling Technique.

Tools of Data Collection and Data Analysis
Close-ended Questionnaire has been used to collect the data from the educated sample of the study regarding their opinion about the manipulative role of print media of Pakistan and its impact on public opinion. The Questionnaire was consisted of two parts. Part I was based on demographic information of the individuals while Part II of the Questionnaire was based on 09 statements established to probe into the phenomenon under consideration. The data were collected personally; therefore, the response rate for the pilot study was encouraging. In order to find the reliability of the data collection tool, Cronbach's coefficient Alpha formula was applied by using SPSS Version 16 to estimate the internal consistency of items. The obtained Cronbach's Alpha was 0.87. However, the Questionnaire was improved with slight modifications in order to make it more comprehensible for the respondents. Uni-variate analysis of Pearson's Chi-Square test was used to analyze demographic characteristics of the respondents, as well as their views regarding the role of print media in construction of political discourse in tabulated form presented in frequencies and percentages. These percentages provided the base for discussion and interpretation of the tabulated data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to find the results of the phenomenon of manipulative role of Pakistani print media in construction of political discourse before elections and its impact on public opinion, the data collected in the form of responses of the individuals have been put into data sheets of SPSS Version 16 to run Uni-Variate analysis of Pearson's Chi Square test. Table 1 indicates that majority of the respondents read print media, therefore, their responses are reliable, whereas, table 2 shows that the individuals prefer to read political news. Table 3 reveals that media guards the political interests of certain politicians and their political parties. Table 4 indicates that media has its own political interests in representation of political reality. Moreover, table 5 highlights the issue that media is biased and manipulative due to its social and economic concerns with political workers, politicians and their political parties. Presenting the obtained results in the form of frequencies and percentages, the findings of the study have been discussed under the tabulated data.

Table No.1 Frequency distribution of the respondents who preferably read or watch media

Kind of Media	Frequency	Percent
Electronic Media	85	17.0
Print Media	288	57.6
Digital Media	78	15.6
Others	49	9.8
Total	500	100.0

Table No.1 shows the views of the respondents regarding their preference towards modern source of communication whether it is electronic or the print Media. A question asked to the respondents about preference regarding reading/watching the media source for which 17 percent of the respondents have their preference to electronic media. On the other hand, 57.6 percent of the respondents prefer reading newspapers, 15.6 percent of the respondents use Digital Media and 9.8 percent use other sources. The most significant point is that the respondents of print media are greater in number, for example, 288 respondents with 57.6 percent of the whole population. The analysis reveals the fact that the readership of print media is apposite in order to provide sufficient data regarding the role of print media in construction of political discourse and its impact on public

opinion. Although, the use of mobile phone and internet has affected the number of readership of newspapers, especially, of English newspapers, even then, the number and percentage shown by table No. 1 is evidence that still English print media is popular source of information. The respondents of electronic and digital media are almost same and smaller in percentage, however, if someone uses, for example, electronic media, ultimately, he/she would pay some attention to the news headlines as well because everybody prefers to be aware of the news round the corner. In the same way, if someone uses digital media, he/she would have almost the same concerns to keep himself/herself updated. Only, the category, 'others' does not clearly indicate the possibility of the readers to read newspaper headlines, otherwise, if small number of the readership from electronic and digital media along with the readership of print media is added, then the data obtained from the respondents presented in the table above indicate the appropriacy and validity of the data collected from the selected individuals.

Table No.2 Frequency distribution of the respondents according to their reason of reading the newspaper

Reason for reading newspaper	Frequency	Percent
To know about the political activities in the country	133	26.6
For sports	104	20.8
For knowing opinion of the columnists	103	20.6
For business matters	63	12.6
For all purposes	97	19.4
Total	500	100.0

The above table shows the frequency distribution of the respondents in terms of the reason behind reading the newspaper. 26.6 percent of the respondents stated that they read the newspaper because they want to know about the current political activities in the country that shows their political affiliation, 20.8 percent read sports news, 20.6 percent of the respondents read the columns for knowing about the opinion of the columnists, 12.6 percent read newspapers because of knowing about business matters. On the other hand, 19.4 read for all purposes. Therefore, in concern to find out the relevant readership of political discourse, it is professed that the selected sample is relevant because 26.6 percent of all the selected respondents read to know about the political activities and 20.6 percent read to get informed about the opinions of the columnists that, we know, are mostly politically charged. Similarly, 19.4 percent of the respondents who read for all purposes also read the political news that determines the relevance of the respondents with issue selected. However, 20.8 percent of the individuals have interest in sports and they read the newspaper to satisfy their recreational interests. The interpretation shows that the least number of the respondents are those who read the newspapers to know about the business matters. In this way, 40.2 percent of the individuals use print media with the purpose other than the political one. Otherwise, almost 60 percent of the respondents are the readers of political discourse; therefore, their views regarding the role of print media, its discursive strategies in construction of the political discourse and its impact on public opinion are apposite and trustworthy.

**Table No.3 Frequency distribution of the respondents in terms of guarding the
political interests of the politicians**

Responses Regarding the Matter of Guarding the Political Interests of the Politicians	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	12	2.4
Disagree	142	28.4
No Idea	39	7.8
Agree	275	55.0
Strongly Agree	32	6.4
Total	500	100.0

The above table shows the responses of the individuals regarding a question of key nature. It is evident that 2.4 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed in respect of the issue that media guards the political interests of the politicians or not. In this concern, 28.4 percent disagreed, while, 7.8 percent did not have any idea about the issue. On the other hand, 55.0 percent of the respondents agreed and 6.4 percent strongly agreed with this opinion. Therefore, the results indicate that media guards the political interests of the politicians. In this respect, 55.0 percent of the respondents agreed and 6.4 strongly agreed (totally 61.4 percent agreed) that is a strong deliberation of the respondents in favor of the matter. Taking responses of the individuals in the form of frequencies and percentages into consideration, it is apparent that media constructs and portrays the politicians in a positive way and thus, guards their interests. Media highlights the loyal and unprejudiced image of the certain politicians and political parties, especially Mian Brothers. Similarly, Zardari's reconciliatory policy is admired and appreciated, Musharaf's enlightenment doctrine on the basis of which he ruled the country for almost nine years under the umbrella of Martial law has been legitimated by Pakistani media. In the same way, rest of the Pakistani political parties have been portrayed in a positive manner and the language used for these politicians and their political parties has been ideologically charged. Consequently, media endorses and empowers the ideological voices of the politicians representing them as the benefactors and saviors of the

country and nation as well. Therefore, it is clear that instead of raising the actual reality, media highlights the ideologies of the politicians of their favor and excludes their political rivals in political discourse. Therefore, it is evident that media guards the interests of the politicians.

Table No.4 Frequency distribution of the respondents in terms of considering the role of media without any political interest

Responses for responsibility of media without any political interest	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	26	5.2
Disagree	67	13.4
No Idea	62	12.4
Agree	264	52.8
Strongly Agree	81	16.2
Total	500	100.0

Media is one of the major sources in the political arena as well as in the political domain of a society. Whether media should play its role without political interest or not, a question had been asked to the respondents for which 5.2 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed, 13.4 disagreed, while, 12.4 percent did not have any idea of the matter. On the other hand, 52.8 percent of the respondents agreed and 16.2 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that shows the opinion of the respondents that media should take its responsibility and play its role without any political interest. The analysis and interpretation indicate that public expects the transparent and unbiased representation of truth and believes that media should present the events as they are viewed. As most of the studies reveal the fact that media feels its responsibility and responsible role in construction of political discourse but as it is concerned with its political interest, media does have political interest that's why, it foregrounds and backgrounds the individuals, groups or parties from the headlines on different occasions. Media has its concerns with politicians and political parties due to which it highlights the image of some parties and downplays the image of some others which is a clear indication of media's manipulative role and political interests as well. Therefore, as a whole, media needs to review its policies and should ensure its responsibility to produce political discourse without any political interest so that the trust of public should be maintained. Otherwise, the well aware and critical public would lose its interest in reading English newspapers which would conversely be a loss of media houses. Moreover, the analysis extends its concerns to remove the uncertain circumstances and reviewing its policies it should satisfy the rights of readership of the concerned newspapers.

Table No.5 Frequency distribution of the respondents regarding the public belief that media houses propagate political campaigns before elections to manipulate public opinion because of their social and economic concerns associated with particular political parties.

Media houses propagate the political campaigns before elections to manipulate public opinion because of their social and economic concerns with particular political parties.	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	42	8.4
Disagree	88	17.6
No Idea	62	12.4
Agree	192	38.4
Strongly Agree	116	23.2
Total	500	100.0

Table number 5 shows the responses of the individuals regarding their belief that media propagates political campaigns before elections to manipulate public opinion in favor of certain favorite political parties or not. The table clearly shows that only 8.4 percent of the respondents strongly disagreed, 17.6 percent disagreed, while, 12.4 percent had no idea regarding the matter. In contrast to the respondents who strongly disagreed and disagreed, a considerable majority that is 38.4 percent of the respondents agreed and 23.2 percent strongly agreed respectively concerning to the issue. The analysis and interpretation provide us most significant information about print media that it propagates political campaigns in favor of certain political parties before the elections. As majority of Pakistani public strongly believes in the transparent and unbiased role of print media, therefore, their trust should be respected and their right of getting true and neutrally disseminated information should not be violated. However, the media related individuals have social links with the political workers and politicians, so they have to appease them through their positive projection in the English newspapers. Moreover, the media houses design their policies under the influence of their economic concerns in the form of government ads of millions of dollars during the five year tenure of a government; as a result, they are forced to give them more coverage in their papers. The discussion finds the political role of print media before elections to propagate the political discourse before elections in order to manipulate the opinion of the public.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that Pakistani print media plays manipulative and biased role in construction of political discourse before elections and misguides and misdirects the opinion of the public. The major causes of manipulative role of print media are its social, economic and political concerns associated with political workers, politicians and political parties. On the basis of these associations, print media is forced to project certain politicians and their political parties in a positive way and their rivals as negative way. By adopting such role, not only media exploits its slogan of freedom of expression, it also violates the right of the citizens of the state depriving them from the transparent and unbiased coverage of the political activities. Hence, if the same mundane routine is continued, it would reduce the trust of the public on print media of Pakistan, consequently, their attention may be entirely diverted to other forms of media or they may be disinterested to purchase and read the print media. Therefore, this study is very significant for the journalists, editors, media groups and their owners to review their production policies in favour of highlighting the truth and political reality in their respective papers.

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