

Understanding Breaking News from Viewer's Perspective: A Phenomenological Approach

Nosheen Hussain¹, Syed Azfar Ali², Samreen Razi³

¹Sindh Madressatul Islam University, PAKISTAN.

¹nhussain@smiu.edu.pk, ²sazfar@smiu.edu.pk, ³srazi@smiu.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

Number of news channels in Pakistan is increasing since the emergence of electronic media in the country and it get boost with the establishment of a regulatory authority PEMRA, which aimed at managing the content and issuing the licenses to all electronic media channels (including radio & TV). Emerging trends of providing news, information & knowledge creates a huge scope for news channels which further leads to the innovating ideas of news production. This trend gave birth to the concept of 'Breaking News', in which sudden news comes on the TV screen with eye catchy screen enhancements to attract majority of viewers. Keeping in view the effects of hard core news, this study wants to understand the meaning of the term 'Breaking news' from participant's perspective. This research also aims at identifying the significance and impact of breaking news on viewers. This qualitative study is done through the unstructured interviews conducted with individuals with high news exposure. It is found from the results of the research that people perceive breaking news as sudden shock & information provided in a gist or summery. It is also found that individuals consider breaking news highly effective in providing immediate & recent information especially in bad law & order situation that makes them take extra safety measures & care. The results of this study suggests that media should show some sensibility and maturity in considering any news as breaking so as not to make the viewers desensitized toward it or to ignore it.

Keywords: Media, Breaking News, Impact, News Channels

INTRODUCTION

Preamble

As electronic media is flourishing in Pakistan since the establishment of PEMRA in 2001, audience is experiencing new and innovative things which they have not experienced before, due to the huge flow of information. So, individuals may have different reactions toward it. Media in order to capture the eyes of audience use various strategies and varieties in their programs to ensure the maximum viewership. Viewership is directly associated with ratings of a particular program and these ratings make the industry competitive. So this high competition is changing media priorities continuously. These quick changes may have various influences on the viewers, as media effect theories also suggest the same. In the last one decade, Pakistan's electronic media has experimented lots of ideas, some borrowed from international media and others were initiated. People accepted many things initially, because of the charm and attraction of a new medium but as time passes and viewers become use to of it, they then have their own choices and preferences to select the message. And in the availability of wide range of TV channel options, it become easier for viewers to choose among them. Electronic media has changes the concept of many things from hard core issues till the entertainment zone.

News may not have one single and unique definition but in short it is something which everyone wants to know and is interested to know. News is something which provides

viewers; listeners and readers updated information, knowledge & facts through different medium of communications.

Defining News

One of the famous definitions of news has given by an American Journalist Charles Anderson Dana, he said,

“When a dog bites a man that is not news, but when a man bites a dog that is news.” (The News manual, 2013) Another definition was given by Galtung & Ruge suggests that news is something which is unexpected or which is not happening on regular basis or something that is not routine. (Galtung & Ruge, 1965) Roscho considered news as an abstract that is difficult to define but easy to understand and carry. According to him, “News is more easily pursued than defined, a characteristic it shares with such other enthralling abstractions as love and truth.” (Roscho, 1975)

Harrison on the other hand argues that searching the meaning of news has been the job of generations of journalists but still world could not have find one unified definition of it. (Harrison, 2006) He also argues that we can't make static functions, elements and structures of news as they are changing always and they requires flexibility, they may also vary according to the situation so in short many factors constitute news. He associates news with reality, fact, truth and to follow these ethical principles. He defined news characteristics as to be accurate, true, sincere & neutral.

Kelly has claimed that people are too much addicted toward TV news that they are following it just like a religious duty or custom. (Gans, 1979) Jones sees three perspectives of news, one as an optimist, one as pessimist and another as realist. (Jones, 2009)

Types of News

News may be divided into many types. Hard news typically focused and defines hard and core issues like crime, international affairs, law and order situation, politics, economy etc. while soft news caters light and soft information like entertainment, film, cinema, hobbies, sports etc. Hard news affects maximum viewers and soft news creates interest among viewers. (Dominick, 2007)

News Values

Journalist consider news as one of the important instrument in the world in transforming information but along with this credit , huge responsibility comes and this responsibility is to follow the basic principles, ethics and values of journalism. According to Professor Thomas E. Patterson, in journalism ‘situational bias’ exists & these biases are of 5 categories including “what is news, what is bad, what is dramatic, what is most readily available, and what can be readily understood.” (Grossman, 1995)

Theories That Suggest Media Effects

Different theories discussed the way, how media creates impact or effect on an individual or a society but two among those theories will be discussed here.

- a. Cultivation Theory
- b. Magic Bullet Theory

George Garbener by presenting Cultivation theory argued that media messages has long term effects on viewers but at the same time this theory is also linked TV viewing for long hours as it says more an individual has exposure of TV, more strong effects it will create. (Shanahan, 1999) Magic Bullet theory also deals with media effects and it claims that media

directly affects its target audience and they professed the same message which they are getting from the media without further critical thinking. (Biagi, 2011)

Breaking News

NewsLab defined breaking as news which is usually belongs to hard category of news, it is also not pre-planned, it comes suddenly and shocked everyone, it cannot be predicted earlier. However the media industry has changed the meaning within the time and now the meaning are much broader than this. (NewsLab, 2014)

THE PROBLEM

In Pakistan, media get the boom in last one decade & have experience and innovate many new ideas in this era. Many ideas are copied from international media. Even specialized channels were also initiated including news channels, entertainment channels, health channels, cooking channels etc. News channels are among the top rated channels in Pakistan & its main content is 'Breaking News' which aims to inform viewer all the time, so this research aims at identifying the meaning & effects of breaking news.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

From the perspective of viewers,

- I. What is the real meaning of 'breaking news' presented on TV news channels?
- II. What effects it has on individuals who have continuous or regular exposure of breaking news?

RESEARCH METHOD

Husserl's phenomenological approach will be used to describe this phenomenon, because in Husserl's approach lived experience of participants are taken for account to describe any phenomenon. According to him, meaning lies in individual's experience and when we collect experiences of all participants, it can interpret a situation (Moustakas, 1994). Here the experience of participants regarding breaking news, its effects and importance will be taken in account.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Media through different programs affects its viewers and creates impact on their mind. Many studies have proved it. One study on breaking news and mass media effects has shown that mass media became one of the biggest factors in creating fear among the audience, especially when it comes to television news related to local and recent incidents. (Weitzer, 2004)

Tuggle (2001) considered TV breaking news as black holes. He imagined a time when TV did not had the concept of breaking news. He also argued that the concept of breaking news was not planned but it started by giving the live coverage of an event or incident. (Tuggle, 2001). It means he wanted to claim that breaking news concept was emerged accidentally and there was no pre-conceived idea or notion that created it.

While breaking any news, one should keep it mind and answer the question first that what effect will it has on viewer's mind, are all breaking news good? Obviously the answer will be 'No', even many researchers have claim that most of the breakings are Worst or negative news. So, do the media men follow the same treatment while breaking all kind of news, again the answer will be 'No'. Buckman considered breaking terrible news as a negative sign for human health, according to him many precautions needed in breaking worst scenario and phenomena. (Buckman, 1992)

But one cannot entirely escape from the scenario and cannot deny the effectiveness and importance of getting the information, knowledge & updates revealed & provided by these media channels. Effects of breaking news can be observe from the fact that when CNN start live coverage of international events, a new term “CNN effect” coined in the world, just to observe and summarize the effects it has produced by giving live and updated account of an incident. ‘CNN effect’ is still a terminology and phenomena discussing worldwide to be researched and analyzed. (Strobel, 1997)

Content which news channels are producing & showing to viewers in form of breaking news and live updates creates an unconscious understanding of things in viewer’s mind. A research on crime construction suggests that media becomes one of the critical tool in defining the social issues and problems. Media is constructing these social realities and their meanings for the viewers who unconsciously start believing on it and media mostly is promoting and spreading sensation and fear (Potter, 2006)

Images are one of the important tools to make breakings and normal news highly authenticated, eye appealing and factual. A research on images shown in news and breaking news suggests that media while revealing news portray relevant images which stimulate terror, anger and antipathy in the viewers. (Newhagen, 1998)

Either the content is important, the way of presentation or it is the teasers that makes a viewer more curious and attentive towards the news, Study on Mass Media effects concluded that it is the news content that affects the viewers politically and socially, this study also said that sometimes it is the medium and sometimes it is the message that affects in different way. (Newton, 1999) Same matter has been more specifically discussed in another study conducted on the “On-screen enhancement’ aimed at noting the different tactics including scroll, teasers, breakings etc to get maximum attention of viewers, this research concluded that there is a positive recall of those stories which were presented with different enhancement as compared to those which were presented normally or without enhancing the screen technically. (Josephson, 2006)

Experts and media persons, who have long term experience and exposure of spending major part of their life in media industry, also have their opinion, views and judgments of this phenomenon. Matthew R. Kerbal (Professor & Producer) describes this scenario as,

“Every day the particulars of television news- the news stories- are different but the tone and feel of the newscast remains the same.” (Kerbel, 2005)

Another news anchor from PBS, named Robert MacNeil explained the relationship of viewers with news especially with local news, he said,

“What do they get the viewers who watched at 11 pm? They get (local) news with extreme prejudice....normally 30 minutes of hell & blather.” (McCrum, 1993)

Hilt on the other hand, considered local news a part of everyday life. According to him most of the viewers of news channels get nothing except criminal content, specially the live coverage of any incident is presented like a drama or fantasy. Exposure towards politics, crime becomes huge in local new channel content. (Lipschultz, 2003)

THE DESIGN

Procedure

Semi structured interview questionnaire conducted and participants were interviewed by assuring their privacy. Their interviews were then verbatim transcribed. Essential statements from participant’s interviews taken in account as their specific experiences and researcher’s

perceptions bracketed out to avoid biases. These statements were then joined to form themes and clusters to identify and extract meaning of the required phenomenon.

Data Collection

Both primary and secondary data has been used in this research. Primary data in the form of interviews of the participant, while secondary data in form of prior researches and study on the same topic. Around 10 participants were interviewed to conduct this study, they were asked to share their experience of watching breaking news. Detailed interviews were taken.

Participants were given the verbal instruction, they were also informed the purpose of this research, their privacy was also assured and their right to withdrawal at any time was also guaranteed. They were informed the whole process, they knew that their input is being recorded and will be used for analysis. They were also assured to keeping their personal information secret and were informed of being anonymous. All instructions were given to them before interviewing. Whole discussion was then recorded. Questions were asked clearly and were clarified with appropriate probes and prompts. An average interview length was about 15-20 minutes.

Data Treatment

Recorded raw data was verbatim transcribed and then the required meaning was extracted by using this data. Following steps were followed to take out the required result.

- I. Whole transcription was read thoroughly.
- II. Important statements were underlined
- III. They were then extracted
- IV. Meanings of those statements were created
- V. Different emerging themes were formulated from these statements
- VI. Clusters of the created themes were arranged
- VII. Clusters were then described according to the research questions
- VIII. These themes and descriptions were analyzed by comparing it to the original raw data just to validate that real essence has not lost and can be found in the categorical clusters.

Population

Population of this research is not very large and consists of very small sample size of those individuals who are consistent and regular viewer of news channels and have sound exposure of breaking news and its usual content especially in Pakistani media scenario. In qualitative research rich data is required to get the details and in depth experiences of participants rather than quantifying it.

Sampling Method

Purposive sampling method is used in the research and only those individuals were chosen as participant who watch breaking news on news channels on regular basis.

Setting

Participants were asked for their free time and availability, they were interviewed at their place just to make sure that they must feel comfortable in that environment.

Data Analysis

Data that was tapped was then transcribed verbatim and then vital accounts were extracted, modified and transformed into themes and clusters to get the common essence of the phenomenon. Devised connotations were taken to describe the phenomenon.

Validity & Reliability

After extracting the statements of participants of this research, when themes emerged and clusters were formed and a significant description in the form of meaning was created, the results were matched with the original raw data and it was taken back to the participants of the research to validate whether these meanings which were drawn from their experiences, really represent what they meant.

Discussion of the Findings

This phenomenological study concluded with exhaustive description of finding that was initiated from participant's interview and then linked to their significant statement, these statements were then derived into specific meanings, themes and then in clusters to form a comprehensive data results and findings. Following are the significant statement which derived from participant's opinions and views. It has different opinions, some think breaking news is a summary, a gist and others think it as detailed information with all aspects and perspectives of a story.

Table 1. Significant statements of the 'Meaning' of breaking news

-
1. Information that is unusual
 2. Investigative journalism
 3. Dragging the inner information out of the big picture
 4. something out of the box
 5. Some information that is very new
 6. No other channel has shown it yet
 7. It is exclusive
 8. News from different angles
 9. Different perspectives of a story
 10. I immediately think of something 'unusual'.
 11. Updates about the current law and order situation
 12. Immediate news and gist of an incident
 13. Different aspects and angles of a news
 14. Breaking news is recent
 15. It is Updated
 16. It is immediate
 17. It helps us in identifying the 'What' factor in news
 18. Urgent or immediate news
 19. Breaking news is immediate gist of any current happening.
 20. Something new, don't know good or bad
 21. Something different.
 22. It is not in detail
 23. it is a sudden shock for the audience
 24. Explaining the 'what' factor of a news
-

25. Intentionally eye catching
26. It is sudden
27. Unpredicted news
28. Something you should listen carefully
29. spicy content
30. Summary of whole incident in short time
31. Revealing big news in minimum time
32. It is sensational
33. It is something that diverts attention
34. Every recent national or international happening
35. Highly unusual thing
36. Something worst
37. A news which has not being on aired before
38. Any channel is revealing it for the first time
39. It is urgent
40. It is important news
41. it should be highly important

Example: Statements 5-7 are taken from the following transcription. "In Pakistan there is a misconception & I would say a blunder by media channels is that we merge breaking news, news alert and news update altogether, although they all are different, Some information that is very new, and no other channel has shown it yet and if you have it exclusively, then you have the right of on air that information as 'Breaking News' because no one else has break it."

Example: Statements 20-22 are taken from the following transcription. "It is not in detail, it is a sudden shock for the audience, explaining the 'what' factor of a news."

Another example is statements 14-18 which have been taken from the following transcription. There is a big difference, breaking news is recent, updated and immediate, it helps us in identifying the 'What' factor in news, the details of the news we may get later but the urgent or immediate news we can get through breaking news. Common and simple news is interpretive and investigative type of thing. Breaking news is immediate gist of any current happening.

Meaning of breaking news in views of participants were presented above, now its significance is being discussed in form of its impact, effect and influences on an individual to cater the idea that how much it is an important issue for those who are exposed to it on a daily basis. So, the significant statements of individuals related to the impact and effects of breaking news are now presented.

Table 2. Significant statements of the 'Significance' & 'impact' of breaking news

-
1. One can't deny its exposure & importance
 2. Helps in updating the current situation of the country
 3. This trend is removing trust of viewers
 4. Hit the authenticity of news and channel both
 5. It is creating sensation
 6. It has a vast impact on daily routine
 7. Updates about the current law and order situation
 8. Helps in finding an alternate
 9. Sometime disturbs but it helps as well
-

10. Create interest in current affairs & politics.
11. I feel uncomfortable after watching them
12. I feel frustrated after watching them
13. Only few breakings are good and they relax the mind
14. It affects our psyche
15. We are become use to of it
16. Provides information
17. I feel empty without it
18. Inform about the law and order situation mostly
19. It makes me aware about the priorities and policies of different channels
20. I want to know who is biased
21. It has great effect on your perception, thinking, believing
22. It helps in critical thinking process
23. It makes your opinion
24. Makes me aware of current happenings in the country
25. It tells us our role in society
26. Creates feeling of fear
27. It has become important part of our life
28. It has now become a habit
29. We are used to of it
30. Give me updates about safe areas of the city
31. It gives information of country's current situation
32. It highly affects
33. Makes me aware of the conditions of different areas in city
34. Inform me of any mishap
35. Tells me the worst condition
36. Reduces doubts
37. It is highly important for viewers
38. It has created competition
39. It becomes highly challenging
40. Gives wrong information sometimes
41. Give political details and information
42. I remain update with my surrounding
43. See different views of one big picture
44. Easy to form my own opinion accordingly
45. It has created so called competition
46. It has created a "Sale Market" of news
47. It has high effect
48. Make you aware of the whole situation.
49. We have become habitual of it
50. Become an important part of life.

Example: Statements 11-13 have been derived from the following transcription, "I feel uncomfortable after watching them because most of the time breaking news in Pakistan is bad so I feel frustrated after watching them, only few breakings I found are good and no doubt,

they relax the mind.”

Example 2: Statements 27-29 have been taken from this transcription, “Yes it feels like you are missing some very important thing from your life, may be a part of your life, because it has now become a habit and we are used to of it.”

These significant statements are describing the whole phenomenon in a wider range, to make it at abstract level, themes and cluster need to be emerged. Following are the said themes and clusters that are being emerged from the above statements for the meaning of breaking news.

Table 3. Clusters of Common themes “Breaking News”

-
1. Informative & Knowledgeable
 - a. Breaking news are something which keep information and knowledge.
 - b. It is aim at informing viewers about their surroundings.
 2. Immediate Summery
 - a. It is immediate and urgent.
 - b. It basically focused on recent events to explain the news.
 3. Gist of recent happening
 - a. It is a gist and summery of incident.
 - b. It explains the whole incident in short and specific focused words to focused audience.
-

To explain the significance and impact of breaking news, following clusters are driven from the significant statements representing the impact of breaking news.

Table 4. Clusters of Common themes Significance of Breaking News

-
1. Desensitization
 - a. Concept of breaking news has made the audience desensitized toward it.
 - b. Viewers feel that giving breaking news on every small happening may devalue this concept.
 2. Build Public Opinion
 - a. It helps viewers in building their opinion by providing all angles of a story.
 - b. Different channels facilitates in comparing news content and finding out the real issues.
 3. Guide precaution measures
 - a. In current scenario of the country, news channels specially breaking news facilitates viewers in taking early precautions and measures against it.
 - b. They make themselves aware of any mishap in the city and country and avoid visiting affected areas and places.
-

This whole abstraction leads to the formulation of exhaustive interpretation and description of breaking news, its meaning, significance and impact in th following two tables.

Table 5. Exhaustive Description of Breaking News

Breaking news is perceived by the audience as an immediate, recent and urgent finding of a national or international event or happening. This is presented in a gist to give the quick account of what happened exactly. In short, it basically gives the idea of “what’ factor of a news and look deeper into it through various angles and perspectives. It gives knowledge and information to viewers regarding themselves, their city or their country. Sometimes, it lose its credibility in order to meet the competition by giving false or incorrect information.

Table 6. Exhaustive Description of Significance of Breaking News

Breaking news is highly important in informing viewers about their surroundings and in helping them identifying the good or bad secure areas near their location. They take advance precautions and measures to ensure the security reasons. Too much exposure of breaking news has also desensitized viewers toward it and they have now become used to and habitual of it. Sometimes viewers also feel insecurity and fear. They also feel to have exposure towards the bad and mishap situations all the time.

CONCLUSION

This research is concluding that the meaning of breaking news for viewers varies according to their exposure and experience of breaking news. Most of the participants of this research said that they take breaking news as a new, sudden and unpredictable information that is being on aired for the first time in media, that creates sensation and fear together for the upcoming happening or news that usually breaks after the ticker of 'Breaking news'. Some participants of this research also think that this trend is becoming too much common now which reduce the credibility and authenticity of the news because in quick competition often news channels break incorrect information and spread rumors and this practice damage audience trust.

While discussing significance and impacts of breaking news, audience thinks that this is highly informative, time saving and quick way of transforming information, it is a great source of updating about law and order situations, about security issues and about sudden mishap or any information that is immediate or urgent but on the other hand, it is also producing fear, sensationalism and desensitization in the target audience.

REFERENCES

- [1] Biagi, S. (2011). *Media Impact: An Introduction to Mass Media: An Introduction to Mass Media*. Stamford: Cengage Learning.
- [2] Brighton, P., & Foy, D. (2007). *News values*. Chicago: Sage.
- [3] Boczkowski, P. J. (2005). *Digitizing the news: Innovation in online newspapers*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- [4] Bruyn, S. T. H. (1966). *The human perspective in sociology: The methodology of participant observation*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- [5] Buckman, R. (1992). *How to break bad news: a guide for health care professionals*. JHU Press.
- [6] Creswell, J. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage
- [7] Dominick, J. R. (2007). *The dynamics of mass communication: Media in the digital age*. Tata McGraw-Hill Education.
- [8] Galtung, J., & Ruge, M. H. (1965). The structure of foreign news the presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus Crises in four Norwegian newspapers. *Journal of peace research*, 2(1), 64-90.
- [9] Gans, H. J. (1979). *Deciding what's news: A study of CBS evening news, NBC nightly news, Newsweek, and Time*. Northwestern University Press.
- [10] Griffin, A. P. (1980). Philosophy and nursing. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 5(3), 261-272.

- [11] Harrison, J. (2006). News. Oxon.
- [12] Jones, A. (2009). *Losing the news: The future of the news that feeds democracy*. Oxford University Press.
- [13] Josephson, S., & Holmes, M. E. (2006, March). Clutter or content?: how on-screen enhancements affect how TV viewers scan and what they learn. In *Proceedings of the 2006 symposium on Eye tracking research & applications*(pp. 155-162). ACM.
- [14] Kerbel, M. R., & Bloom, J. D. (2005). Blog for America and civic involvement. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*, 10(4), 3-27.
- [15] Lipschultz, J. H., & Hilt, M. L. (2003). *Crime and local television news: Dramatic, breaking, and live from the scene*. Chicago: Routledge.
- [16] Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage
- [17] Newhagen, J. E. (1998). TV news images that induce anger, fear, and disgust: Effects on approach-avoidance and memory. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 42(2), 265-276.
- [18] Newton, K. (1999). Mass media effects: mobilization or media malaise?. *British Journal of Political Science*, 29(4), 577-599.
- [19] Potter, G. W., & Kappeler, V. E. (2006). *Constructing crime: Perspectives on making news and social problems*. Waveland Press.
- [20] Roshco, B. (1975). *Newsmaking*.
- [21] Shanahan, J., & Morgan, M. (1999). *Television and its viewers: Cultivation theory and research*. Cambridge University Press.
- [22] Strobel, W. P. (1997). *Late-breaking foreign policy: The news media's influence on peace operations*. US Institute of Peace Press.
- [23] Tuggle, C. A., & Huffman, S. (2001). Live reporting in television news: Breaking news or black holes? *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 45(2), 335-344.
- [24] Weitzer, R., & Kubrin, C. E. (2004). Breaking news: How local TV news and real-world conditions affect fear of crime. *Justice Quarterly*, 21(3), 497-520.

**UNDERSTANDING BREAKING NEWS” FROM VIEWER’S PERSPECTIVE: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH”**

Semi Structured Interview Questionnaire

Interview Protocol

With your permission I’ll be asking you few questions related to your experiences on the topic of “Understanding breaking news” from viewer’s perspective: A phenomenological approach”

Name: _____

Introductory Question

- Tell me a little about your background.
 - What is your profession?
 - What are your hobbies?

Main Questions

1. While watching TV, how much exposure do you have of news

Probes:

- Do you watch any ‘fulltime’ news channels for example GEO NEWS, ARY NEWS, BBC NEWS?
- Do you watch news for any particular purpose or just because they appear during the program you are watching?
- Do you watch news on local channels only or on international channels as well?

2. If you watch news, what is your purpose of watching them

Probes:

- What sort of information you seek while watching news? like (politics, law & order situation, sports etc.)

3. While watching TV, how much exposure do you have of breaking news?

Probes:

- Do you switch channels to search for same news on other channels or watch it on only one channel of your choice?

4. In your opinion, what is the meaning of breaking news?

Probes:

- According to you, what is difference between normal news and breaking news?
 - Do you think the channels you watch show this difference properly?
5. What impact does breaking news have on you?

Probes:

- What thoughts come in your mind when you watch breaking news?
- How do you feel after watching them?
- Does it have an effect on your daily routine? If yes, then how?
- If sometimes (for any reason) you can't watch news, what will you feel then? Do you think you will lack anything?

Ending Question

Would you like to add anything else that has not been discussed?