

## Editorials in the Leading English Press in Karachi: An Analysis of Their Representation\*

Samreen Razi

Department of Media Studies, Sindh Madressatul Islam University, Karachi  
PAKISTAN.

[srazi@smiu.edu.pk](mailto:srazi@smiu.edu.pk), [samr.malik@gmail.com](mailto:samr.malik@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*The present study explores the analysis on the editorials in the leading English dailies of Karachi as to whether these are serving their fundamental objectives. For this purpose, qualitative research approach is used along with interviews and direct observation of content analysis. The study was limited to two leading English dailies of Karachi namely, Dawn and The News International. Tailor-made questions were prepared in order to carry out the research through interview protocol. The content analysis was done through direct observation based on analyzing the fundamental purpose of editorials analyzing the narration, arguments, language, word choice, and description, objective style of representation, topic choice and type of readership. The findings suggested that although the dailies under study appear to fulfill their basic and principal purposes of informing, stimulating thinking and influencing the masses, yet these seem to waver to some extent from their objective slant in the matter of language and presentation of subject and ideas. On the basis of findings, complete recommendations were made.*

**Keywords:** Editorials, leading, content analysis

### INTRODUCTION

Media is one of the greatest social forces in any society and plays a responsible part by acting as a harbinger of social change. Media can bring destruction in any society or can bring prosperity, progress and alleviate any society and brace it up (Abbas, 2003). Regarding it, press is a major driving force for development purpose and social change in any society. Media inform, educate and influence the masses. Editorials for this purpose are vital in a newspaper. Editorials are the considered opinion of a newspaper reflected by its owners as represented by the publishers or editor. Opinion belongs in the editorial but prejudice and bias do not. The editorial is not a place to show or display a person's pet ideas and blind spots. The readers look for intelligent guidance/direction and not biased leading (Shahid, 2011). Therefore, the present study examines editorials of two leading English dailies of Karachi to analyze their practices of informing, stimulating thinking, influencing and entertaining as intelligent direction or prejudiced leading.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In any research study, literature review is the life blood. The definition of literature review is a logical and organized exploration of information which has already been brought in front of the audience by famous scholars and researchers on any topic as per the hypothesis or the desires of the researcher. This helps in gaining the knowledge in our required research field and information of the like sort pertaining to our research area and enhancing the scope (Cooper, 1998). The media has the power to provide change in perceptions through

---

\* The initial findings of paper were presented during the National Media Conference at Marriott Hotel, Karachi, Pakistan on 3rd February, 2014.

empowering the masses with knowledge and information (Vladimir and Lisa, 2007). The media has the power to alter the world and viewpoints and lays the societal concepts and its every aspect thus, media's arguments are essential (Gillani, 2002). The emphasis is on performing all the necessary media functions morally, functions such as informing, educating, entertaining, influencing the masses morally towards the media (Nasir, 2013). Press is generally considered as the most accountable and authentic source of the media of mass communication even considered more authentic than the other mass media such as the electronic, while press has an important function of highlighting critical or burning issues both national and international (Hassan, Ali, Iqbal, Raza, 2013). The organization of the editorials revolves around three parts. First is the definition of the situation then come the summary of the issue and then the evaluation of the entire situation and finally offering practical, logical and realistic conclusions, solutions, recommendations and suggestions (Van Dijk, 1992). In this regard, English press in Pakistan has been considered effective in performing their function (transmission of messages, information, views, perceptions etc. all over the country since long (Uzair, Mahmood, Raja, 2012)

The media ought to be more ethical because it has greater impact and influence on the society (Kieran, 1997). Social responsibility theory talks about a press that is free but at the same time they have the right to criticize the government but they do have some responsibility for the stability of the society (Shahid, 2011). There can't be two opinions about the importance of editorials. Editorials help in forming and shaping the ideology of readers i.e. the perceptions (Hall, 1996). The fundamental purpose of editorials is to express and persuade through communicating of opinion (Van Dijk, 1996). Editorials form the greater ideological stand of any newspaper's owners and managers (Henry and Tator, 2002). Through editorials the newspapers have the chance to communicate with the readers by commenting on different issues (Reath, 2002). Pakistani print media covered some major issues in the past. But the question is: Are these presentations ethical? In order to grab readers' attention, print media in Pakistan is seen to adopt a model "Hedonism model" which says "Do what feels good whatever cost might be." (Akbar, Raza, Hussain, Ali, 2013). The newspapers are influenced commercially with newspaper policies according to the government and financiers (Altschull, 1984). *Dawn and The News International* both have private ownership, and are influenced by the government as they are dependent on government for advertisements to an extent (Tawab, 2000). Bernard Cohen (1963) also gave the idea of the agenda setting is a means of producing the lasting effect on the masses which is simply a list of issues to give priority causing the public to recognize issues as selected by the media as important and critical for the knowledge of the public (Kosicki, 1993). Agenda Setting was also discussed in an article by Norton Long in 1953 in which he stated the newspapers are the core transporters in this agenda setting function, giving the masses conversational currency about the stuff to view, the stuff to think as facts and how to tackle the problems. (Long, 1958). The media constantly impose on the public the issues portrayed by the media in terms of images of people and issues, so as to make the masses know what to know, think and feel, that means media speaks to the masses in terms of what to think and perceive (Lang and Lang, 1959)

The media not only gives the masses the knowledge and information about issues but also the masses get the idea of the amount of worth to place on any issue due the exposure the media gives to that particular issue (Maxell Mc Combs and Donald Shaw 1972). Op-eds are the sections for supporting ideas, and supporting debating on important issues (Salisbury, 1988: 317). Currently Pakistani editorials function in the manner that editorials are the places where newspapers speak out their viewpoints on the most pertinent issues the nation encounters while performing their function of influencing the public and the government both to have the knowledge of the issue and the viewpoint and to understand the viewpoint as realistic.

Editorials force the readers to understand that the suggestions made must be heeded upon and implemented. A number of anonymous editorial writers write the editorials and these editorials depict steady viewpoints about each subject thus predicting to the readers the stand of the newspaper towards any subject. (Nadia Farrah Shoeb, 2008). There are several studies that place special emphasis on the viewpoint that media is powerful in the sense that to draw the weight of coverage towards the masses and how much the masses are perceiving the issue to be important. The masses have knowledge about the vital issues from the media which belong to the second-hand reality in turn establishing misrepresentation in the information the masses receive from the media. In this regard, the agenda setting function of the media cannot be ignored as the media enhances issues through its agenda as the core issues without media survival of the society cannot be thought of especially without a self-governing media with the masses perceiving everything through the viewpoint of the media with media setting new realities each time through agenda setting or gate keeping etc (Michael, 2011). Pakistani media today holds a big media scene in terms of mushrooming and growth (Hijab, 2010). The audience have restricted ways to witness events as they happen naturally, they depend on the media for their source of knowledge, thus catering to their needs and desires of the knowledge of affairs of the globe out of reach of the human eye, the media's function in this regard becomes crucial in providing news and information to the audience and in influencing and persuading them through setting their agenda in what to reveal to the audience. After the introduction of cable TV, newspapers developed a competition with the TV and in order to maintain and attract readership, adopted television's belligerent and bold style without giving heed to the ethical standards and code of conduct thus ignoring the earlier concepts of ethical and objective ways giving birth to the antagonistic, brittle and popular style of representation making news as opinionated with the media professionals instead of objective adopt subjective means in portraying events.(Jan, Raza, Siddiq, Saleem, 2013)

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, qualitative method of content analysis is relied upon. The study focuses upon primary as well as secondary sources such as newspaper *Dawn* and *The News International*, communication theories, interview protocol, journals and archival records pertaining to the relevance of the study. The thing being studied is the unit of analysis which is the negligible of the content analysis but very vital such as a word, symbol, theme etc. In the study, the unit of analysis will be arguments, language, sentences, and paragraphs, word choice, description, objective style of representation, topic choice and type of readership, informing, influencing, stimulating thinking and entertaining factors of editorials which indicate the presence of one of the categories mentioned above.

## DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS

### Analysis of the Data

For this purpose, the researcher analyzed the editorials of both *Dawn* and *The News International* in the past month. The researcher chose Dawn as the first newspaper under the umbrella of Herald group of publications. The policy of the newspaper is a worldly and liberal approach to the issues of the society while the group claims to be authentic, self-governing and impartial (Mezzera and Sial, 2010). ***The News International, a sister publication of Jang Group, holds more or less the same policy of Dawn, i.e. credible, independent and neutral player in covering of issues.*** However, although, the topic choice in the editorials of these two newspapers under study appear to cover issues of national and international significance, however, their building the arguments, word choice, tone and style of representation seem questionable, especially, regarding objectivity. For instance, in a

sample of editorial published in *The News International* last month titled “Action or what?” discussing the government’s incompetency in handling state affairs was observed using inappropriate words such as “The impression the government is giving is of a headless chicken that has no idea where it is going.” Throughout the editorial, in various places it was observed that a specific focus was on words with negative connotation in describing the government and the system. Upon observing editorials of the daily Dawn, more or less the same kind of practices were seen, for instance, take a sample of an editorial published in Dawn last month titled. “State of Paralysis” which discusses the government’s governing inabilities indicated with the words, “There seems to be a complete lack of commitment and resolve on the state’s part to go after the militants. Where is the much-needed leadership in such a state of crisis?” Moreover, some underhand practices such as offensive and slang word choice is directly being used throughout the editorials even in titles as is seen in the sample of an editorial titled “Dangerous Idiocy” published in *Dawn* last month. Other tactless words in the name of entertainment and humour are also being employed frequently which speak volumes about the unethical practice in both the dailies under study, words such as ‘ridiculous, idiocy, headless chicken, ageing batsman, silliness-and it is silliness, touting the scalp of Adnan Rashid’ etc. The tone employed is sharp, harsh and authoritative which indicates that the dailies are giving the masses the impression of authority while commanding them to think in a specific direction as is desired by these publications. The editorials are further seen utilizing accusing approach along with clichéd statements repeating throughout the editorials in various places, for example, “ Much is still desired, doom and gloom, failed leadership, lack of commitment, shrinking-violet, red faced school boys” etc. The unprincipled practice of focusing more on the negative rather than the positive side of the picture in covering of issues in the editorials is evident from the opening statement of an editorial published in Dawn lately as, “Pakistani society is growing increasingly conservative.” Regarding the topic choice and the negative focus in the editorials, tailor-made questions were asked and majority participants revealed that the focal point is more on covering the bleak side of the issue rather than showing both the sides of the coins as is the widely acknowledged pattern of objectivity and balanced coverage. Some other negative statements and words were observed in these editorials such as, “Refusal to make hard choices”, “inability, unwillingness, failed policies, false pretence, pass the buck, government policy riddled with holes” etc, while in several places throughout the editorials repetitions of certain statements such as “ failing to provide the right leadership and display some leadership,” indicating a specific emphasis on the idea that the government and their policy are a complete failure and are incompetent. Although with time, print media along with other media of mass communication have mushroomed with greater freedom of expression however upon observing the editorials of Dawn and *The News International*, it seemed that they have wavered from authentic expression towards misuse of power and freedom. Furthermore, the aforementioned newspapers in their editorials are usually seen to set the agenda of employing such unethical expressions to impose on the audience the idea that the pertinent issues must be seen and perceived only through the eyes of the editorials as they give the audience the impression that they are credible.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In Pakistan, English Press is thought to be as more credible and responsible member of mass media and enjoys good status and repute. Such as, the decision makers rely on the English Press for in-depth understanding of different pertinent issues with the help of editorials which form the essence of any newspaper and acts as a reflection of its policy. Through the analysis, the study identifies that the leading English dailies of Karachi are seem to be misusing their freedom to opinion through their editorials via using inappropriate practices such as ‘The

Hedonism Model'. Therefore, there is a need for mild and balanced word choice and tone along with the proper and practical solutions rather than clichéd repetition of statements in the editorials in order to serve the function of neutral and objective coverage and right guidance to the masses through balanced and unbiased information.

## REFERENCES

- [1] Shahid, M. I. (2011). *Mass Communication (Revised Edition)*. Lahore: Caravan Book House.
- [2] Mezzera, M., & Safdar, S. (2010). *Media and Governness in Pakistan: A Controversial Yet Essential Relationship*. Online Available at: <http://www.initiativeforpeacebuilding.eu/pdf/pakistanOct.pdf>
- [3] Reath, D. (1998). *The Language of Newspapers*. New York: Routledge,
- [4] Van Dijk, T. (1996). Opinions and Ideologies in Editorials. *4th International Symposium of Critical Discourse Analysis, Language, Social Life and Critical Thought, Athens*, 14-16 December, 1995.
- [5] Henry, F., & Tator, C. (2002). *Discourse of Domination: Racial Bias in the Canadian English- Language Press*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- [6] Hall, S. (1975). *Paper Voices: The popular press and social change 1935-1965*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- [7] Hassan et al. (2013). Comparative Study of Editorial Treatment of Dawn and The News regarding Lal Masjid Operation. *The International Asian Research Journal*, 1(1), 22-35.
- [8] Akbar et al. (2012). Photojournalism in Pakistan: Ethics and Responsibilities, Analysis of Urdu Newspapers Front Pages. *Journal of Mass Communication and Journalism*.
- [9] Matthew, K. (1997). *Media Ethics: A philosophical Approach*. New York: Greenwood Publishing.
- [10] Abbas, M. (2003). Media and Society. *Pakistan Times*. <http://pakistantimes.net/2003/11/20/guest1.ht>
- [11] Tawab. (2000). *Editorial Coverage of Women Right*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Punjab University, Lahore.
- [12] Kosicki, G. M. (1993). Problems and Opportunities in Agenda-Setting Research. *Journal of Communication*, 43, 100-127.
- [13] Cohen, B. C. (1963). *The Press and Foreign Policy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- [14] Long, N. E. (1958). The Local Community as Ecology of Games. *American Journal of Sociology*, 64, 251-261.
- [15] Lang, K., & Lang, G. E. (1959). *The Mass Media and Voting*. In E. Burdick and A. J. Brodbeck (eds.). *American Voting Behaviour* (pp. 217-235). Glencoe: Free Press.
- [16] McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36, 176-187.

- [17] Copper, H. (1998). *Synthesizing Research: A Guide for Literature Reviews*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications
- [18] Rafiq, A. (2007). *A Comparative Analysis of Editorial Coverage Regarding Judicial Crises*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, Punjab University, Lahore.
- [19] Van Dijk, T. (1992). *Racism and Argumentation: "Race Riot" Rhetoric in Tabloid Editorials*. In F. H. Van Eemeren (Ed.). *Argumentation illuminated* (pp. 242-259). Dordrecht: Foris
- [20] Shoeb, N. F. (2008). *An Analysis of Urdu and English Editorial Coverage of the 2007 Emergency from Pakistani Newspapers*. PhD Thesis, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Georgetown University, Washington DC
- [21] Harrison, S. (1988). *A Time of Change: A Reporter's Tale of Our Time*. New York: Harper & Row.
- [22] Shah, H. (2010). *Inside Pages: An Analysis of the Pakistani Press -The Tongue-tied Press of Pakistan: Comparing English and Urdu Newspapers*, South Asia Monitor
- [23] Jan, M., Raza, M. R., Siddiq, M., & Saleem, N. (2013). Print Media on Coverage of Political Parties in Pakistan: Treatment of Opinion Pages of the 'Dawn' and 'News'. *Gomal University Journal of Research*, 29(1), 118-128.