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Overtness vs Covertness: Operations of Propaganda Model Filters in Pakistani Newspapers

Abstract

Engineering consent of people and policymakers through media is an art which has helped influential actors in power structure affect the nations and institutions at mass level through their decisions. In spite of reporting news in objective manner, opinions are injected in many important news items in newspapers. Herman and Chomsky (2003) have defined five filters i.e. ownership, sourcing, advertisement, flak, dominant ideology in propaganda model which are working in newspapers to fulfill specific agenda of influential factors in the society. Whereas opinionated news items are considered to strengthen one's existing thoughts and beliefs or manufacture one's consent towards a specific ideology/thoughts. Ideas are produced, distributed and consumed within the audience through opinionated news. Through content analysis of news items published in Pakistan's leading English language dailies (*Dawn and The News*), this study aims developed a nine-point model to detect the application of these propaganda filters. The study found that both *Dawn and The News reports published on front and back pages during 2013 included opinion and made predictions of future with relevant attributions, which lead to propaganda in news. Also, The News made more propaganda through news reports as compared to Dawn* during the year 2013.

Keywords: Propaganda model, opinionated news, Pakistan newspapers, Dawn, The News

Introduction

Edward S Herman and Noam Chomsky (1988, 2003) presented the propaganda model and argued that the five filters including advertising, source, ownership, flak & Communism (the dominant ideology) impinge upon performance of media. They thought that key objective of their model was to discover mass media performances without dealing with upshots on the different audiences. They argued that there are structural elements which work in construction of a news story. The structural constituents create meaning to phenomena in news content and narrate structured meanings. They give new definition to the news, an elaboration of ideas to urge audiences' thinking in a specific direction.

Herman and Chomsky (1988, 2003) argue that media is a power tool which controls it eventually. Editorial policies, financial interests, ideologies, pressures and affiliations influence the way of thinking of working journalists about a news event. Herman and Chomsky (2003) argue there is liberty in the media is allowed with limitations and some professional ethics do work.

Advertisements are primary source of media for its survival. There is no doubt that the sectors which make financial contributions to media organizations influence editorial and news polices. Throughout the world, government advertisements are one of the leading financial sources of newspapers. This makes sense. The advertisers thus propagate in favor or against any idea with the help of the media.

Mosco (2008) states communication action is merely not so simple as to convey information only but how the ideas and thoughts can be constituted and meanings can be put forward. Mosco (2008) states communication system is being manipulated by businesses, society's structural forces and the government for social constitution of communication. In the practices of communication, media content is perceived as commodity and content, audiences and labor are commodified.

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Many lines are drawn for defining news, editorials, columns, features and other varying segments of newspapers. Weber (2015) argues news items are objective as well as balanced. Schiffer (2006) states that opinions in personal approach are given in the editorials for the acceptance of 'subjective' knowledge. In the newspaper column, personal opinion is expressed.

However, original news content is maneuvered and manipulated. Opinions and biases are instilled, sometimes visibly and sometimes silently, in the news stories. Reality is self-constituted, rather simply reflected through influenced content of news. There are many factors pertaining to structure and culture which impinge upon content in a news production process. Objective allowance of social reality is not represented in news content against the claims of being fair, objective and unbiased.

Literature Review

According to Tong (2015), despite the fact that objectivity is a fundamental base to the journalistic code of ethics, the study's participants, 15 journalists covering environmental issues for two Chinese newspapers, recognize the objectivity as ethical for organizing news report within the limitations set by personal judgments about news events.

The political protection of participants is improved by the appropriation and concept of objectivity in American journalism, and these are acceptable in playing their roles as educators and guardians of the community. While doing so, in order to define reality, they negotiate various social sectors and merge societal cultural authority.

Wanless et. el. conducted a study in 2018 by deploying triangulation technique to analyze the impact of propaganda on the users of digital media and they came up with a term 'Participatory Propaganda'. Since the dynamics of tech-powered communication are quite different from the one driven through traditional media, it is necessary to understand and evaluate the persuasive content coming through various digital platforms. The propaganda in the digital age tends to be participatory as all the information and content dissemination platforms are interactive where audience can consume and produce content at the same time. Thus, the above study suggests that in digital media, audience are actively engaged by the propagandists in the creation and dissemination of persuasive messages. The campaigners of Donald Trump during the American presidential elections of 2016 used this propaganda model to garner large followership. The modern propagandists have more effective tools and techniques to shape up opinions and challenge existing beliefs without even letting the audience know that they are being manipulated.

Zollmann (2017) exhibited propaganda manifested in news media content of liberal democracies. Results demonstrated that institutional structure of news media allows powerful elites and groups to manage the news arena. Powerful agents also create influence on journalists which affects the selection and production of news. As a result, journalists produce and distribute the propaganda on behalf of dominant state-corporate elites. Propaganda found in structure of media texts includes the selective use of facts, emphasis or de-emphasis of certain perspectives, prevalence of ideological media content. Indicators to measure mediated propaganda in news content were also proposed in this study. However, researcher suggested to develop other indicators as well to detect propaganda in news media content.

Elejalde (2019) attempted to check the validity of propaganda model on new platforms of communication. This study focused on the presence of only first two filters of PM in Chilean media (i.e. ownership and advertising). For this, researcher has used large scale datasets of digital Chilean news outlets to determine the impact of propaganda model's filters in new modes of communication. Results of the study showed that Chilean media is reflecting the biasness in their content by showing favour to ruling political parties. Moreover, economic topics which are sensitive areas for economic elites receive more coverage with a significant biasness. In comparison to economic topics, other subjects get weaker and more heterogeneous coverage.

Bahar (2020) examined how social media specifically Twitter is used for disinformation and propaganda in war. To meet that purpose, researcher has analyzed the posts of Afghan government and Taliban on Twitter. Findings showed that like mainstream media, social media is also used for propaganda in war and conflict in Afghanistan. Belligerents are actively using social media to spread disinformation to meet their desired interest. Warring parties and mainstream media showed disparity in terms of numbers of

causalities which reflects propagandistic traits of the Taliban. Study confirmed that social media has become the asset of weaker and less-heard people (In this case, they are Taliban). It also provides the suitable space to those who have limited resources because its structure does not demand expertise and infrastructure. Thus, it can be analyzed that belligerents have comparatively less resources but they disseminate more information in terms of amount and frequency as compared to government. This widens the danger of victimization of netizens because they are not equipped with the media knowledge and literacy.

Maweu (2017) analyzed the coverage of Kenya election 2013 by the largest circulating newspaper of Kenya named as Daily Nation by using the third (official sources) and forth (flak) filter of Herman and Chomsky's Propaganda Model. Qualitative content analysis of Daily Nation and the semi-structured interviews of the civil society organizations revealed that the Daily Nation avoided to report any controversial issues related to elections due to fear of flak. Along with that, it only relied on the official sources of Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission (IEBC) of Kenya and government agencies for the critical information of elections. This is because several institutions including IEBC and MCK (Media Council of Kenya) organized workshops for journalists and media owners before elections in the name of "Peace journalism" to ask them to avoid such coverage which results the repeat of 2007/2008 post-election violence. For being accused of causing post-election violence in 2007/2008, media imposed extensive self-censorship and framed the events according to the political elites. Although, efforts paid off and there was no post-election violence but in the name of peace journalism, media's democratic role of vigilant watchdog was compromised.

Prier (2017) did two case studies including Islamic State(IS) as a non-state actor and Russia as a state actor to demonstrate that social media has become a tool of modern information-age warfare. It is used to employ propaganda techniques to produce far-reaching results as both IS and Russia produce productive results in influence operations by using social media. Propaganda is a powerful tool to manipulate people at mass level and social media has made the spread of propaganda easier than ever before for both state and non-state actors. It has become a weapon which can be used against the minds of people.

Bergman (2018) explains that American media is based on the concept of consumerism. The only goal behind TV is to sell goods and services. American's media is in elite hands whose sole purpose is profit generation. He further proves that American television is a clear manifestation of actual model of propaganda. American television is fulfilling all the filters of actual propaganda model with slight differences. However, this is the time of internet and technology. But even after advent of social media public haven't raised much voice against propaganda tools. The researcher concludes that it is highly unlikely that American media will quit its propaganda techniques as long as the first two filters of the model remain in place.

Likewise, LaPrairie (2017), while doing content analysis of news stories of The New York Times during NATO intervention of Libya, brings to light that the newspaper adopted the policy of doing propaganda. Gaddafi's image was badly demonized and news related to him were highly exaggerated. Sympathetic compliments were being given to the victims of Gaddafi's regime whereas no space was given to news stories mentioning violent behavior of anti-Gaddafi element (USA). Thus, The New York Times, which is one of the leading dailies of United States of America, was found fulfilling all the major aspects of the propaganda model during American intervention of Libya.

Farooq (2018) investigated that how political propaganda is carried out in India through WhatsApp in form of fake news. It has been explored that WhatsApp's feature and its reach make it a potent tool to spread propaganda in India. WhatsApp has become an ideal medium to spread rumors and fake news as its conversation is end to end encrypted which makes difficult to trace out the origin of a message. Along with that, it is easy to make groups for communication on WhatsApp. People join WhatsApp group which serves their ideology. So, the content share in the groups usually reinforce their biases. That's why, political parties use WhatsApp to communicate and to influence public thinking over an issue. However, fake news spread through WhatsApp not only helps in influencing people of India but it sometimes also incites violence and creates panic.

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Research Objectives

The objective of this study is to develop a model and test a tool for scientific identification of application of propaganda model in opinionated news items of leading English dailies.

Research Questions

RQ1: Is there prediction of future in form of opinion without citing a document, personality or any forum in the news reports published in leading English newspapers of Pakistan?

RQ2: Is there mentioning of apprehension (s) which is not raised by any personality, document, organization etc in the news?

RQ3: Is there publication of a news report which is not based on facts rather on analysis and contains material to form an opinion?

RQ4: Whether there are any suggestions in news items?

Hypothesis

The hypotheses of the study follow:

H1: Dawn and The News published opinions and analysis in news items without relevant attributions

H2: The News published more number of opinions and analyses in news reports on front and back pages as compared to Dawn.

Methodology

The objective of this study is to develop a model and test a tool for scientific identification of propaganda filters in news items of leading newspapers of English dailies. Research methodology of content analysis is employed.

Population and Sampling

The universe of the study is front and back pages of *Daily Dawn and The News* Lahore editions from January 1, 2013 to December 31, 2013.

With the systematic sampling, every 7th, 14, 21st, 28th editions of newspapers were selected of the whole year 2013.

Table 1. *Sample Size (n=228)*

Year	*Dawn*		The News		The Nation		
	Front Page	Back Page	FP	BP	FP	BP	Total pages
2013	48	48	48	48	48	48	288

Content Category

Shahzad (2016) the news items, having opinion/observation and no attributions to the opinion/observation, will be included.

Table 2. *Instrumentation*

Sr.no.	Indicator	Operationalization	Methodology
1	Prediction of future in form of opinion without citing a document, personality or any forum etc in the news	That A's act will bring prosperity to the poor and there is no mention who said this	Content Analysis
2	Mentioning of apprehension (s) which is not raised by any personality, document, organization etc in the news	That it is mentioned that some action would put the government in danger	Content Analysis
3	Analysis of any incident, happening, situation, development etc which is attributed to "sources"	That a resignation of somebody was due to his honesty and he did not bow to officials	Content Analysis
4	A news report which is not based on facts rather on analysis and contains material to form an opinion	Mentioning history of any event or latest development in which facts are not quoted or/and opinions and observations are being made without citations	Content Analysis
5	An analysis of the personality and their actions which does not have proper citation in the news	That the politician and bureaucrat is ambitious to serve people and his action is tantamount to his love with his country or work	Content Analysis
6	A news item in which analytical questions are raised and there is no mention who raised those questions?	That whether somebody has followed the rules while doing some action?	Content Analysis
7	A discussion in the news where there is no proper citation that where the discussion happened	Where the news journalist mentions that it is being discussed, public sector are taking some action negatively/positively, political circles are objecting on or favoring some ABC	Content Analysis
8	Any news item which is including suggestions	A should do B to avoid C.	Content Analysis
9	Opinion-based reasons behind any incident in the news	The news not mentioning a proper source and saying that the failure or success of A was because of B.	Content Analysis

Content Analysis of *Daily Dawn* 2013

Dawn January 07, 2013 published a story on front page headlined "Tarbela desilting to be costlier than new dam". It criticizes the governments for non-construction of water reservoirs with citation i.e "To the utter failure of planners and governments it could not take up even a single dam in more than four decades after completion of Tarbela." Praising a water project, the news reads, "It was such an economically viable project that it would be completed in four years, accrue annual benefits of about Rs30bn and pay back its cost in three years". There is no citation.

Dawn January 21, 2013 published a story on front page headlined "PML-N seeks electoral alliance only in provinces". It gives observations while analyzing political situation that "It is believed that PML-N may not be interested in a grand electoral alliance at the national level". Who believed, not mentioned. While anything can be expected and happen in politics.

Dawn February 14, 2013 published a story on front page headlined "Stage set for thorough vetting of candidates". Opinions are given without proper citation of analysts i.e. "Analysts are of the opinion that the mechanism being evolved for this first exercise in the country's electoral history will seek to filter out people who use the cover of their dependants to avoid disqualification."

Dawn March 07, 2013 published a story on front page headlined "Taliban's release put on hold". In the report, editorial analysis and opinions are made. It states, "The release of Taliban prisoners by Pakistan, once seen as a critical move to bolster peace process, has come across a temporary halt due to renewed distrust between Islamabad and Kabul".

Dawn March 07, 2013 published a story on back page headlined "Regularization policy: ECP query makes Punjab 'ill at ease'". The story contains content that makes opinion while quoting sources. It states, "the authorities concerned were thinking how to justify that the move was a routine step and was not aimed at influencing public opinion in favour of the ruling PML-N". It states further, "the Punjab government had a long time ago decided to regularize the services of the contract employees. And many had been regularized ever since."

Dawn March 28, 2013 published a story on front page headlined "Interior ministry's assessment: Militants determined to sabotage elections". The story makes such un-cited observations which puts responsibility of ensuring security on provinces i.e "It was noted that maintaining law and order was basically the responsibility of the provinces."

Dawn April 28, 2013 published a story on front page headlined "Teachers refuse to perform poll duty". The story was about the concerns of teachers regarding security and other matters and they were not willing to do election duties. This news bears content having opinion and analysis while elaborating the threats given be terrorists and created a sense of fear and supported the demand of the teachers. It states "Over the past fortnight, militant outfits have repeatedly threatened to attack offices of political parties and polling stations." It continues to state "And they have been true to their word on more than one occasion".

Dawn May 14, 2013 published a story on front page headlined "PkMAP, PML-N and NP set to rule Balochistan". It analyzes the political situation i.e. "The strength of PML N may further increase as some of the independent members are likely to join" without reference.

Content Analysis of *The News*

The News January 07, 2013 published a story on front page headlined "The options MQM has for its political drone attack". There are opinions and discussions without citing any references. There is analysis in *the news* while the analysts remain unknown i.e. "analysts have started looking at the options that he has to create a situation or make a decision that could be a game changer". It continues to state, "But analysts said the MQM chief has just a few limited options and given his active and resolute participation in the long march of Dr Qadri, these options can be further reduced to two or three at the most". Without mentioning the "seasoned analyst", the report content reads, "Whatever drone attack he is planning, it has to match with the declared goals and objectives of the long march. It states further, "As anything which militates against or creates doubts about the Jan 14 March would be counter-productive," a seasoned analyst said".

The News January 07, 2013 published a story on back page headlined "ECP senior officials jockey for extension". The story establishes good will of Chief Election Commissioner and his praise is not cited. It states, "However, it remains to be seen if Chief Election Commissioner Justice (r) Fakhruddin G Ibrahim, known for his credibility and adherence to constitution and Supreme Court judgment and orders, would 'favour' the aspirants." Has there not been any person or document in Pakistan who could praise or be cited for such a 'credible' person?

The News February 28, 2013 published a story on back page headlined "4 MPs in NA committee have unverified degrees". *The news* gives analysis on the matter related to degrees of parliamentarian i.e "now to protect the interest of 233 MPs the whole parliament stands united against the ECP". It states further that "Many of these 233 MPs are believed to have genuine degrees but have made this an issue of their ego".

The News March 07, 2013 published a story on back page headlined "Education Minister rejects propaganda report". *The news* begins with "And this, too, can happen only in Pakistan," which is an editorial analysis. *The News* item is basically a clarification from the minister. The introductory paragraph

does not clarify that whether it is a clarification or a serial of allegations with the words like, "The journalism-made-easy formula recently imported from Brunei, Darussalam, was readily executed soon after receiving a bunch of stale sheets from his political opponents".

The News March 28, 2013 published a story on front page headlined "Musharraf seeks MQM support for NA-250". *The News* gives analysis in the name of experts but experts' and "quarters concerned" names are not mentioned. It states, "Experts are also of the opinion that Musharraf's landing at the Karachi airport was not without the MQM's support – though it did not welcome him."

The News April 07, 2013 published a story on back page headlined "Scrutiny gets messy and complicated". The introductory paragraphs of the news do not mention that where the voices or concerns related to scrutiny of candidates' nomination papers were raised. It also gives suggestions and recommendations. The story mentions apprehensions regarding delay in electoral process and role of returning officers without citing any person, document etc. The story creates doubts and gives answers that how those doubts can be cleared on its own. The story did not cite any particular legal expert but mentioned legal opinion in many cases. The story contains editorial judgment i.e. "But there is a visible lack of will and to do this to ensure transparency" and this sentence is without any citation. Opinions, analysis and observations are made. (Indicator no 2, 4, 8)

The News on May 21, 2013 published a story on front page headlined "NAB chief will have to go as Nawaz takes over". The headline itself is suggestive and opinionated. *The News* judges, "NAB Chief Fasih Bokhari would not be acceptable to the upcoming PML-N government" without any citation. The news gives analysis, "however, it is not yet clear on part of PML-N whether it would turn a blind eye to the record-breaking corruption of the last government or would catch the corrupt and recover the looted money," hence attempts to prove previous government corrupt. All is without any citation. *The report* bears many suggestions, discusses options i.e. "In this situation, Bokhari has got two options". Mr Bokhari might have three or more! With analysis, it tries to make this an important thing that people wants to know how the government would handle the "corrupt persons" of the previous government. Analysis has also been done by citing reports. The news item bears suggestions, opinions, apprehensions, observations, contains material forming opinion and tries to establish that the previous government was corrupt and the upcoming must take action against the corrupt practices of the past.

Conclusion

The study results have fully supported both hypotheses: H1: "Dawn and The News published opinions and analysis in news items without relevant attributions" and H2: "The News published more number of opinions and analyses in news reports on front and back pages as compared to Dawn". The study found that *Dawn* published 25 news reports on front and back pages during the year 2013 making propaganda in news items on multiple issues mostly political developments. On the other hand, *The News* published 42 news reports, identified as propaganda based gauzed on the nine-point propaganda filters used for this study's analysis. In most cases, *The News* reporters and editors made propaganda in support of PML-N. Here, it is noteworthy that on May 21, 2013, *The News* published a report about NAB while suggesting and trying to establish that the previous government of PPP was corrupt and the upcoming must take action against the corrupt practices of the past regime. Both the newspapers, included opinion and predicted future without citing any statement or attribution to their claims, however, *The News,* did so more as compared to *Dawn* during the year 2013.

Recommendations

The study recommends that policy makers and journalistic organizations must come forward with some concrete steps in order to take measures to not allow opinion or prediction with attribution in news reports. There must be a clear distinction between the news report and opinion.

Ethical Considerations

taken from any organization/agency for this research. The research instrument was approved by the Departmental Doctoral Programme Committee (DDPC) of the School of Communication Studies as well the Advance Studies and Research Board (ASRB), University of the Punjab, Lahore.

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