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The Coverage of Terrorism-Related Incidents in Urdu Press of Pakistan: A Comparative Content Analysis of Daily Express and Daily Mashriq

Nasira Parveen

Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Journalism & Mass Communication, University of Peshawar

nasirap@gmail.com

Shahab Ali

Lecturer, Department of Media Studies & Mass Communication, Iqra National University, Peshawar

Shahzad Ali

MS (Media Studies), Senior Producer, PTV News

Nazia Ashraf

Independent Researcher, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the Urdu-language press of Pakistan in order to find out how these newspapers report terrorism-related news. The study is significant because Pakistan is the most affected country by extremism and terrorism, and news media plays a vital role in determining public opinion. The data was collected from two Urdu-language newspapers, i.e., daily Express and daily Mashriq, from 1 January 2014 to 31 March 2014 for their content analysis. Total 576 stories have been collected for analysis. The criterion for selecting terrorism related news involved severity and scale. Events involving significant loss of life, damage to public property and destruction are prioritized. Terrorists attacks that impacted large populations or significant infrastructures are often deemed newsworthy. Based on our findings, we argue that the newspapers' reporting on terrorism-related incidents tended to sow confusion and disorder rather than promote awareness among the readers.

Keywords: Terrorism, Coverage, Urdu Press, Daily Express, Daily Mashriq, Pakistan.

1. Introduction

Media has been an important information and entertainment tool, and it is hard to live without newspapers, radio, television, or social media. People worldwide have been using different media for receiving and disseminating information. Bushman and Huesmann (2010) estimate that at the beginning of the 21st century, the number of electronic media sets exceeded the number of telephones and toilets. With the proliferation of media, especially in the 21st century when the Internet became almost main stream, there has been competition to attract maximum media consumers with varied interests. These interests include economic, political, and ideological.

When it comes to sensationalism, newspapers are dominant tools for shaping how the public perceives an event. Through crafty headlines, sleek editorial choices, and smart selection of images, they can influence how content is perceived and interpreted. For example, the way a violent scene or a brutal incident is presented can significantly alter its emotional impact on readers. Sensational news mostly relies on emotional triggers to capture the attention of

readers. Through careful framing, often emphasize dramatic elements of a story (such as violence or spicy details) to evoke strong emotions like fear, anger, or excitement. This emotional appeal drives greater engagement and increases circulation. Such stories typically generate more interest, leading to higher readership. Newspapers, especially those in competitive markets, often use sensationalism as a strategy to boost sales. The more compelling or shocking the news, the more likely it is to attract attention and be shared, benefiting both circulation and advertisement revenue.

Also, another aspect to deliberate upon is that newspapers not only report / cover the sensational stories but can also shape the public agenda by choosing which stories to emphasize. By framing certain events in a specific way, newspapers can guide public discourse, influence political outcomes, or sway public opinion on a particular issue. This gives them a substantial degree of power in shaping societal views.

Sensational stories have broad appeal, transcending demographic and cultural boundaries. Newspapers, particularly those with mass appeal, use sensationalism to ensure they capture the attention of a wide range of readers. This can result in widespread discussion and even drive social movements, as sensational news often stimulates conversation and debate.

While creating a sense of urgency, newspapers often present sensational stories as urgent or breaking news, creating a sense of immediacy. This sense of urgency encourages readers to stay informed, reinforcing the role of newspapers as primary sources of up-to-the-minute news.

As a matter of fact, while newspapers can effectively frame sensational news to captivate an audience, it raises questions about journalistic ethics. The line between responsible reporting and sensationalism can be thin, and when crossed, it can lead to misinformation or the spread of fear. Ethical journalism calls for balancing attention-grabbing stories with accuracy and fairness, yet some newspapers may prioritize sensationalism over factual reporting to gain an edge.

In Pakistan, to attract maximum readership, newspapers publish sensational stuff, including gruesome pictures after a terrorist incident. There is a disregard for the fact that broadcasting images of dead bodies, injured persons in pain, and the helplessness of affected families aid terrorists in instilling fear and insecurity in the population.

Most scholars have recognized the global significance of media. According to Thussu (2006), in developing countries, media serves as a primary means of providing entertainment and information to the public. Print media plays a critical part in delivering both information and entertainment and is an essential part of human life for many. Across the globe, people rely on various forms of media for disseminating information. Print media has emerged as a key platform for marketing and promoting consumer products. Advertisements in newspapers are instrumental in capturing consumers' attention and are indispensable for promoting new products. Media significantly contributes to the successful introduction and popularity of newly developed products. Newspapers serve as conduits for information dissemination and as transmitters for state narratives, aligning with governmental agendas.

A research by the Pew Research Center (2021) in the USA found that audiences generally trust print journalism more than online sources. This credibility makes print media valuable for building trust and conveying authority in strategic communication efforts. The strategic use of print media enables the state to frame issues, manage crises, and cultivate national

identity, thereby reinforcing its legitimacy and authority. Despite the risks involved, Pakistani media and media outlets have been criticized for sensationalizing violence-based attacks and glorifying terrorists. The electronic media, in particular, has been accused of irresponsible behavior in its coverage of these attacks. In response, in 2009, the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) and media professionals from various organizations came together to create a code of conduct for reporting on violence-based attacks.

1.1. The rationale of the Study

For this study, the researcher selected Urdu print media to examine terrorism-related incidents in the country. In the same context, the Framing theory is the significant theories of mass communication, which suggests that media instills the people a choice to realize some news or issue as the most central issue of the time, incorporating all the priorities that constitute their own agendas. Media highlights what is occurring in the world and what others want to see and believe. The other dimension is how media significantly frames these issues in the public's perception. This study is about conveying the media message to the public and making the general public formulate an opinion (Servin and Tenkard, 1992).

1.2. Significance of the Period of Study

The selected period of study, January 1, 2014, to March 31, 2014, is important due to emergence of global events, political dynamics, and shifting patterns in the geopolitical landscape. Amidst the initial months of 2014, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) was rapidly gaining power and territory in Middle East. ISIS declared-caliphate became the epitome of strength for Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) who began to draw inspiration and adopted ISIS's models to brew terrorism. Consequently, there were substantial terrorism-related incidents in Pakistan during this time frame. Mainstream media covered the issue, and every political party talked about the terrorism-related incidents.

1.3. Objectives of the Study

- To examine how terrorism-related incidents are reported by the Urdu-language newspapers of Pakistan.
- To evaluate the treatment (comparison) of terrorism-related incidents in the selected newspapers.

2. Literature Review

Media has been a very important means of entertainment and information. Print media in Pakistan is a leading communication medium among the educated class. Though, in various surveys conducted across the provinces of Pakistan, people predominantly used television compared to radio and newspapers. However, studies also suggest that print materials are more likely to be retained and revisited by audiences owing to its ingress and dominance among the literate class. In the context of sensationalism in press, irrefutably, the extent of publicity a terrorist operation receives determines its success. Terrorists worldwide maintain close ties with journalists and media organizations to ensure the glorification of their acts. The association between media and terrorism is symbiotic, as terrorists exploit media for their advantage. For today's media, violent acts are more captivating and sensational for their round-the-clock broadcasts. Renowned terrorism expert Laqueur (1999) states in his book **The New Terrorism** that journalists are the best friends of terrorists, eager to offer utmost exposure to any terrorist event. This does not imply that journalists are sympathetic to terrorists; rather, for them, violence is more newsworthy than peace and tranquility.

Freedman and Thussu, in their book **Dynamics of Media and Terrorism** (2012), noted that the media has become more proactive. Its role is no longer limited to informing the public about terrorists; it has become more dynamic in glamorizing terrorist incidents. Moreover, the actions of terrorists provide the media with compelling materials such as drama, shock, heartbreak, and sorrow, which are vital components of every human-interest story. In return, terrorists gain increased exposure and the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to strike anywhere and stand against the powerful. Both sides nourish one another and thus maintain a mutual relationship. Terrorists carry out their violent acts for specific media-driven purposes, such as:

- a. Terrorists want to inform the maximum number of people, both locally and internationally.
- b. Terrorists want people to recognize their cause.
- c. They want the support of the people for whom they are fighting.
- d. They want due status and the same coverage in the media as politicians.

Terrorist groups regularly use media to spread their message of fear and create terror among the people whom they know would be easily influenced by the narratives. Terrorists also use media to declare their plans or compel the government to make certain compromises (Freedman & Thussu, 2011). Further, Nacos (1994) noted that by utilizing the mass media, terrorists approach a maximum number of people and decision-makers in the target society. A free press is the key to connecting terrorists, people, and decision-makers. Acts of violence could only help terrorists in making progress towards their target in case these are reported on a large scale. Due to this reason, the press has alleged to provide fresh blood or oxygen to terrorists in the form of publicity.

3. Theoretical Foundation

3.1. Framing Theory

The theory of framing helps us understand how an event is portrayed in a particular story or article. The framing appears to be the significant one in mass communication theorization and research. Gitlin (1980) defines media frames as “persistent patterns of cognition interpretation and presentation of selection, emphasize, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organized discourse, whether verbal or visual.” He says that framing an issue is influenced by which of many bits of information are included in or excluded from a story. He further says: “Media are mobile spotlights, not passive mirrors of the society; selectivity is the instrument of their action. A news story adopts a certain frame and rejects or downplays discrepant material. A story is a choice, a way of seeing and event that also amounts to screening from the side.” The twin’s elements of selection and salience are instrumental to the concept of framing, as Entman later details. Producers select the frame (often called the angle, theme, perspective, or slant) for the text, and then the attribute of the subject within that frame becomes more salient than objects outside the frame. Academically, media frames are constructed from and personified in the keywords, metaphors, concepts, symbols, and visual images emphasized in media content. But through repetition, placement, and reinforcing association, the words and images comprising the frame render basic interpretation more readily discernible, comprehensible, and memorable than others. Ideology provides the framework through which events are presented (Hackett, 2006).

In other words, the framing concept is connected to the agenda-setting but expands the research by emphasizing the crux of the issues at hand. The basis of framing theory is that the media focuses on certain events and then places them within a field of meaning. Framing is an important topic since it can have a big influence; therefore, the concept of framing has also expanded to organizations.

4. Methodology

A comparative analysis of two national dailies and the coverage or space produced in terrorism-related stories. Therefore, a content analysis of newspapers was carried out. This content analysis research identified the space and number of stories reported. Daily *Express* and Daily *Mashriq* newspapers for three months have been analyzed. In this study, a systematic sample procedure has been used, through which odd numbers (i.e., 1, 3, 5, 7, and so on) were selected. The front and back pages of both newspapers for three months (1 Jan-31 March 2014) have been selected as the time period of study. Using this procedure, out of 180, 90 newspapers were finally selected for data collection. This study considers the news stories (headlines and overall contents) of *Express* and *Mashriq* from January 1, 2014, to March 31, 2014, as Unit of Analysis. The contents were classified into three categories, i.e., favorable/unfavorable (to security forces) and neutral.

The coders read the material once, and the researchers read the material twice to reduce and avoid the biases of the content approach and made three directions: favorable, unfavorable, and neutral. The data has been amply verified through inter-coder reliability. The data was analyzed using frequency distribution and comparison.

4.1. Operational Definitions

- 4.1.1. **Favorable to Security Forces:** For the purpose of this research, the word favorable, wherever used in this dissertation, will refer to substantial support and advocacy in generating public opinion against the activities of terrorists and in favor of the Army. Any story that does not cause a stirring effect or panic in the masses by undermining security forces' achievements will be considered favorable. This means that whoever goes through the word favorable will constitute a positive tone that leads to hope and a positive impact on the masses. Phrases like "Security Forces vowed to eradicate terrorism" Security Forces will protect its people, and the terror bid foiled by Security Forces will be considered favorable.
- 4.1.2. **Unfavorable:** For the purpose of this research, the word unfavorable, wherever used in this dissertation, will refer to substantial opposition and resistance while creating uncertainty and panic. This means that whoever goes through the word unfavorable will constitute a negative tone that leads to disappointment and mistrust in the masses. For example, Phrases like "TTP accepted the responsibility of the attack, Taliban vowed to carry out more terrorist acts and other provoking / intimidating statements with the same stirring effects.
- 4.1.3. **Neutral:** For the purpose of this study, the word neutral, wherever used in this dissertation, will refer to neither the opinion which can neither be categorized under favorable (as mentioned above) nor the unfavorable (as mentioned above). This means that it will constitute a balanced trend of opinions.

5. Findings and Results

Table 1. Month-wise comparison of the Daily *Mashriq* and Daily *Express*

<i>Mashriq</i>			<i>Express</i>		
Variables	F	%	Variables	F	%
January	136	30.4	January	54	41.9
February	184	41.2	February	37	28.7
March	127	28.4	March	38	29.5
Total	447	100.0	Total	129	100.0

The results of Table 1 demonstrate the month-wise comparison of both newspapers, with *Mashriq* publishing 447 news stories daily and Daily *Express* publishing 129 in the three months of 2014. The table also shows that daily *Mashriq* reported 41.2% of stories in February, whereas Daily *Express* reported 41.9% in January. It has been inferred that Daily *Mashriq* has provided more coverage than Daily *Express*.

Table 2. Page-wise comparison of the Daily *Mashriq* and Daily *Express*

<i>Mashriq</i>			<i>Express</i>		
Variables	F	%	Variables	F	%
Front page	304	68.0	Front page	100	77.5
Back page	143	32.0	Back page	29	22.5
Total	447	100.0	Total	129	100.0

Table 3 shows the page-wise comparison of the Daily *Mashriq* and Daily, which illustrates that mostly 68% of news stories were published by Daily *Mashriq* on the front page, while the Daily *Express* also published 77.5% of news on the front page. It concludes that both newspapers have given more coverage on the front page.

Table 3. Treatment-wise comparison of the Daily *Mashriq* and Daily *Express*

<i>Mashriq</i>			<i>Express</i>		
Variables	F	%	Variables	F	%
Favorable	168	37.6	Favorable	41	31.8
Unfavorable	216	48.3	Unfavorable	80	62.0
Neutral	63	14.1	Neutral	8	6.2
Total	447	100.0	Total	129	100.0

Table 4 findings demonstrate the treatment-wise comparison of both newspapers. Daily *Mashriq* covered 48.3% of unfavorable news, while Daily *Express* published 62% of stories unfavorably. It concludes that both newspapers did not try to undermine the activities of terrorists but rather created panic and uncertainty among readers.

Table 4. Quantity-wise comparison of the Daily *Mashriq* and Daily *Express*

<i>Mashriq</i>			<i>Express</i>		
Variables	F	%	Variables	F	%
1-2 columns	374	83.7	1-2 columns	70	54.3
3-4 columns	62	13.9	3-4 columns	28	21.7
Above	11	2.5	Above	31	24.0
Total	447	100.0	Total	129	100.0

Table 5 exemplifies the quantity-wise comparison of both newspapers. Daily Mashriq published 83.7% of news stories that were 1-2 columns, while Daily Express published 54.3% of news of 1-2 columns, which shows that more space was provided for commercial and political news rather than terrorism.

Table 5. Nature-wise comparison of the Daily Mashriq and Daily Express

<i>Mashriq</i>			<i>Express</i>		
<i>Variables</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Variables</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Violence</i>	195	43.8	<i>Violence</i>	64	49.6
<i>Harassment</i>	5	1.1	<i>Harassment</i>	0	00.0
<i>Threats</i>	71	15.9	<i>Threats</i>	7	5.4
<i>Torture</i>	57	12.8	<i>Torture</i>	9	7.0
<i>Others</i>	118	26.4	<i>others</i>	49	38.0
<i>Total</i>	447	100	<i>Total</i>	129	100.0

The result of Table 6 illustrates the nature of the news that both newspapers presented in three months of 2014. Daily *Mashriq* published 43.8% regarding violence, whereas Daily Express covered 49.6% of news about violence. It shows that both newspapers have covered violence-related news, and Daily Mashriq has presented more news than Daily Express.

Table 6. Chi-square test for the association of newspaper and page presentation of the issue

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Chi-square</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Conclusion</i>
<i>Pearson chi-square</i>	.087	.000	Significant
<i>N</i>	576	-	-

Table 7 shows the chi-square test results regarding the association between newspaper and page presentation of the issue. The data analyzed through chi-square produced a statistically significant association between newspapers and the issuer presentation on the page, including the front and back pages. It is concluded that front-page and back-page presentations are more significant for the newspaper to present an issue.

Table 7 - Chi-square test for the association of News treatment and News quantity

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Chi-square</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Conclusion</i>
<i>Pearson chi-square</i>	-.055	.000	Insignificant
<i>N</i>	576	-	-

The chi-square test results show the association between news treatment and news stories about the issue. The data interpreted by the chi-square created a statistically insignificant association between news treatment and the quantity of news stories on the issue. It is concluded that the quantity of news treatment and stories doesn't matter in the issue's sensitivity.

Table 8- Chi-square test for the association of new treatment and nature of news

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Chi-square</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>Conclusion</i>
<i>Pearson chi-square</i>	-.307	.000	Significant
<i>N</i>	576	-	-

Table 9 illustrates the chi-square test results about the association between news treatment and the nature of news of the issue. The data evaluated employing chi-square shaped statistically significant association between news treatment and the nature of news of the issue. It is concluded that objective news treatment is more effective for highlighting any natural issue in the country.

Table 9- Chi-square test for the association of Newspaper and nature of News

Variables	Chi-square	p-value	Conclusion
<i>Pearson chi-square</i>	-.016	.706	Insignificant
<i>N</i>	576	-	-

The chi-square test results relate to the association between newspapers and the nature of news stories. The data inferred by chi-square produced a statistically insignificant association between newspapers and the nature of news stories on the issue. It is concluded that newspaper and news treatment doesn't matter in the issue's significance.

6. Discussion

The results of the study have approved some objectives. The research outcome has also justified some of the developed research questions. The following explanation provides details of the justifications.

Objectives' Justification

The study's results justified the objective "To explore the role of Urdu media in *reporting*" that Urdu newspapers have reported. They highlighted the terrorism issue in the context of the stories, treatment, page specification and nature. The study's results also justified the objective "To evaluate the treatment of the terrorism-related incidents in the news stories." The objective was also approved: 52% of unfavorable news was published, 36% was favorable, and 12% was published neutrally in the three months of 2014 by both newspapers. Additionally, the research outcomes verified the objective "To find out which terrorism issue is more discussed" and that the issue of terrorism was more discussed than any other issue. Similarly, the study's results justified the objective of "analyzing which newspaper has given more coverage to terrorism issues." It was also confirmed that Daily Mashriq covered 78% of the terrorism issue, while Daily Express covered 22%. The outcomes of the research supported the objective of "measuring the news coverage of both newspapers regarding terrorism," revealing that 77.1% of news stories were 1-2 columns, 15.6% were 3-4 columns, and 7.3% were more than four columns. This concludes that more coverage was given in 1-2 columns. Moreover, the study's objective to explore the targeted objects of terrorism in the news stories" was justified by its results, which showed that Mashriq reported 187 news stories daily out of 447. At the same time, the Daily Express filed 43 news stories out of 129 regarding security forces that targeted militants or other non-state actors in the country. The study outcomes also revealed that Mashriq Daily published 261 news articles out of 447. Meanwhile, Daily Express reported 86 news stories out of 129 about militants targeting civilians or other forces in the country. The study's findings also confirmed the objective "To evaluate the nature of news regarding terrorism," indicating that approximately 45% of news coverage was about violence, with 1% about harassment, 14% about threats, 11% about torture, and 29% covering other activities in the country.

7. Research Questions with Findings

R 1: Which newspaper has given more media coverage to the terrorism related incidents in terms of no of stories?

Ans Results showed that 447 news stories were published by daily Mashriq while the daily Express published 129 news stories regarding terrorism.

R 2: How many stories have been appeared on the front and back pages of the mentioned newspapers?

Ans Results showed that Mashriq newspapers have covered 70.1 % news stories on the front page while 29.9 % stories have been printed on the back page of the newspapers.

R3: Which space has been allocated to the news items by the selected newspapers i.e. column wise?

Ans Both newspapers have covered the issue extensively. However results revealed that more 1-2 column space was devoted to terrorism incidents. 77.1 % news were of 1-2 columns, 15.6 % were of 3-4 columns while 7.3% were above 4 columns.

R4: Which newspaper publishes more favorable and unfavorable stories?

Ans Daily Mashriq published the news 37.6% favorably and 48.3% unfavorably while daily Express published 31.8% favorably and 62% unfavorably, while both the newspaper presented the issue negatively.

R5: Which newspaper has given more media coverage in terms of columns and details of victims?

Ans Daily Mashriq published 83.7% news stories of 1-2 columns while Express published 54.3% news of 1-2 columns. It is revealed that both newspapers devoted the space to other areas of general interest.

Association between Variables

The study's results proved the association between newspaper and page presentation of the issue, which shows a significant relationship between newspapers and page presentation. The chi-square results confirmed the "Association of News Treatment and News Quantity," which shows an insignificant association between these two variables.

Additionally, the "Association of News Treatment and Nature of News" has verified the research findings, indicating a significant relationship between news treatment and the nature of news. The study's results also refuted the "Association of Newspaper and Nature of News," demonstrating that there is no relationship between the two variables according to the chi-square results.

The results of Table 4 support the hypothesis that the Urdu Press of Pakistan does not provide favorable coverage in support of Security Forces over terrorism, as daily Mashriq reported 48.3% unfavorable news. In comparison, daily Express published 62% of stories unfavorably. This indicates that both newspapers did not attempt to downplay the activities of terrorists, instead instilled panic and insecurity among readers. The Chi-Square results also demonstrate a connection between news treatment and the nature of the news reported. The analysis utilizing the chi-square revealed a statistically significant association between news treatment and the nature of the reported issues. It can be concluded that objective news treatment is the only effective way in highlighting any crisis situation in the country.

8. Summary and Recommendations

This study analyzes Urdu newspaper content related to the coverage of terrorism in the country. To achieve this, the researcher selected two mainstream Urdu newspapers: Daily Mashriq and Daily Express. A content analysis methodology was employed to evaluate the issue, and a coding sheet was utilized for data collection. Data was gathered from January to March of 2014 using the purposive sampling technique. The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

It is concluded that both Urdu newspapers reported on the issue of terrorism, demonstrating the country's sensitivity to it. It is also noted that most of the news coverage related to terrorism was portrayed negatively, undermining the efforts of security agencies and instilling fear and lack of purpose throughout the country. The study's findings revealed that the majority of terrorism-related news was covered by the newspapers during the selected month in 2014, indicating that militant activities were at their peak during that time frame.

The research results also revealed that the Daily Mashriq provided more coverage of the issue than the Daily Express. It was also concluded that both newspapers presented the issue unfavorably. Additionally, the study found that most stories were placed in 1-2 columns rather than 3-4. Based on these results, it is summarized that there has been more coverage of attacks on security forces by militants.

The results of the chi-square test regarding the association between newspaper format and the presentation of issues demonstrated a statistically significant link between newspapers and their presentation on both the front and back pages. It concludes that front and back page presentations are more effective for newspapers when addressing national issues. The chi-square analysis indicated a statistically insignificant association between news treatment and the quantity of news stories on the issue, concluding that the quantity of news treatment and stories does not significantly influence issue presentation. The evaluation of the data using a chi-square test revealed a statistically significant association between news treatment and the nature of the news. It is concluded that objective or neutral news treatment is more effective in emphasizing any crucial issue in the country. It's the only way forward.

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