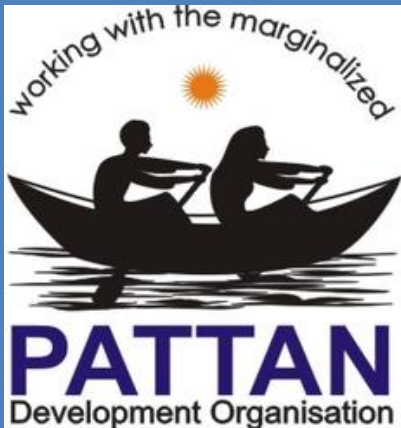


CONTENT ANALYSIS OF OP-ED
ARTICLES PUBLISHED BY
ENGLISH AND URDU
NEWSPAPERS IN THE WAKE OF
COVID19 OUTBREAK, 2020.



PATTAN DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report on the content analysis of five newspapers is a description of the proceedings and findings of the project which is a pilot study for formulating procedures to be used in the major study which is to be conducted during the next year.

The study has two objectives: Its primary objective is to prepare a methodology for an in depth study of Newspapers in Pakistan that can be used to develop an insight into the nature and functions media as an organ of Pakistan's civil society. The second objective is to find general characteristics of the two major language newspapers in their editorial policy and presentation. It is hoped that in this exercise, a preliminary line of enquiry will emerge that can be developed by anyone who wants to relate to the ideas and perspectives that dominate the mainstream of the Pakistani press.

Three English and two Urdu Newspapers were studied by a team of five researchers, three male and two female, based in Multan. The project was supervised by a retired professor from the BZU Multan and the research group was chosen from among the M. Phil & Ph. D. students of the BZU History Department. The exercise involved three stages on the part of the research team: collection of list of articles; preparations of synopsis of a select number; and analysis of ten articles.

Our key findings were:

- The civil society concerns in the two languages are expressed quite differently.
- The English press is generally more matter of fact compared to an embellished and colorful style and content in the Urdu dailies.
- In the English dailies, there is a wider range of perspectives on development, governance, gender and marginalized communities and space for current and topical issues.
- The editorial policy of the Dawn is more conservative in the British tradition, the Express Tribune is rather Americanized in its treatment while the News has a distinctly local flavor.
- In a comparison of the Jang and News, both products of the same network, the difference of style due to both readership and language independently, is quite obvious. It is also clear that the choice of language also enforces the exclusion of certain types of readers and as a result the content and style change, creating space for another category of readers.
- In all cases, the content of newspapers is overshadowed by national politics and the issues of International affairs that impact national policy, even in the editorial section.

BACKGROUND & INTRODUCTION

In accordance with the Vision of Pattan Development Organization {PDT} the search for a just and democratic society, and its mission to “mainstream” marginalized communities, it has always looked for indicators of the role of Civil Society in the achievement of these tasks. The media, like the politicians are the most visible, articulate and exposed elements of society. Since the stance of a politician is subject to political considerations, media is the only organ with a consistent form of interest aggregation and articulation of a particular social interest. Newspaper op. ed. pieces, being the oldest and well regulated organ of the media in this context, thus form the focus of our project.

The project was first presented to FES some time back but due to the Corona Virus and other such logistic and practical issues, could not be stated before September 2020. Naturally our interest tend to focus on social issues of marginalized and disadvantaged citizens of Pakistan. Laborers, farmers, women and children are in the spotlight. In issues of governance, also, the same concerns become prominent in the vision of our organization. Economy and security have always been the forefront of issues for such people; the current problem of Corona looms large as a threat on all fronts. It is also of special interest to Pattan due to its concern with disaster in the national context. Since this has an impact on education, especially for the poor in the “online” education format, that also was of importance for our selection of the articles to be studied and the topics that mattered now.

METHODOLOGY

This report on the content analysis of five newspapers is a description of the proceedings and findings of the project which is a pilot study for formulating procedures to be used in the major study which is to be conducted during the next year.

The study has two objectives. Its primary objective is to prepare a methodology for an in depth study of Newspapers in Pakistan that can be used to develop an insight into the nature and functions media as an organ of Pakistan’s civil society. Since Pakistan is a multi-ethnic nation with several large linguistic demographic units and several socio-cultural communities it has a very wide range of newspapers catering to its communal watersheds in addition to Central and Provincial Capitals where newspapers cover the range of interests within those administrative units. Therefore, the larger project would need representatives of each category apart from the common areas which are likely to be of interest to all. However, even in matters like the budget and covid or inflation, there is likely to be a great deal of variation in the extended project when undertaken.

The second objective is to find general characteristics of the two major language newspapers in their editorial policy and presentation. It is hoped that in this exercise, a preliminary line of enquiry will emerge that can be developed by anyone who wants to relate to the ideas and perspectives that dominate the mainstream of the Pakistani press. The presentation of this report will deal mainly with this aspect as it is the output of this project which is of immediate practical use. Our primary objective, however, will be dealt with in a succinct manner in the concluding part of the report.

In order to perform these two tasks, the selection of newspapers had to include at least the major languages of the press. Unfortunately, the local and provincial language dailies could not be taken into the equation. It was, however, hoped that the diverse communities which read the newspapers selected by us would give an idea of the kind of adjustments that need to be made in the analysis of newspapers in English and those in one of the languages of the people of Pakistan. The number of English dailies was larger than the Urdu ones due to the fact that the more prominent authors either contributed to both languages [like Mr. Ghazi Salahuddin] or preferred to write in English in the hope that they would have access to foreign readers in addition to Pakistani bureaucrats and politicians. Of the two Urdu dailies, the counterpart of one [the Jung] was also chosen for the English list [the News] so that a comparison could be made of the difference of treatment in the two languages due to the difference of readership and of their cultural moorings.

For the present study a preliminary scheme has been adopted for the analysis section to indicate its weaknesses in the context of each newspaper. These problems have been addressed below.

SCHEME FOR ANALYSIS

The scheme for analysis of articles assigned to the researchers required them to submit a draft with the following requirements were to be fulfilled *without giving headlines* but according to the sequence given below in a para format.

1. Profile of the author
2. Profile of the newspaper
3. Issue(s) covered by the author [unless there is a need for change of style, the ‘synopsis’ of the paper provided may be given as it is] covering the general interests articulated and the specific angle or direction of thought taken by the author in the article.
4. A comment on style of the author [conversational, satirical, lighthearted, extremely serious, dogmatic, rising questions, teaching style, involving the reader in the discourse] as a whole
5. If the article relates to an ongoing debate in the media, like face to face teaching or work during the pandemic or governance or women’s [marginalized people’s] rights, what is the position of the author in the various positions of the debate in society/the media.
6. Is there a public response to the author [ref. social media, letters to the editor, comments by the author or others on emails and responses received before or after publication.
7. The reviewer’s personal impressions regarding the article.

FINDINGS

GENERAL SURVEY OF NEWSPAPERS

Being a pilot, its scope is limited to only three issues: Governance, Covid and Social issues. The first glaring reality that emerged from the list of op-ed. Articles of five daily newspapers was that the main thrust of all of them was politics. However, in the case of three newspapers, this was not merely the main thrust it constituted an overwhelming portion of all the issues addressed in these papers. Jang and Express Tribune being the ones where it became almost impossible to find a satisfactory sample for analysis. In the News and the Dawn, the ratio of governance and social issues was rather more balanced which suggested that they are more in tune with Civil Society.

Naturally one expects that the news items will be topical and current but the expectation from the editorial page is that it will have a slightly longer shelf life than the one day of the publication of the paper. The Covid issue, being concurrent and continuous over a significant period merited a place on both counts but even there, it seems that a certain community had exhausted its attention span during the ‘second wave’. Governance as a function of politics too had a greater share in the editorial page than the issues of deeper problems in the structure of governance. Social issues in the strictest sense seem to have lost the interest of the intellectual community at large.

The study was conducted in three phases before the selection of the articles which seemed to merit a deeper analysis. The first question to be addressed was choice of newspapers. A representative set of the Pakistani press would have had to include at least the local newspapers in some of the major cities and some papers representing the press in regional/provincial languages. This was not a realistic proposition for the pilot study as that aimed to assess tools for the extended research and only expected to provide a preliminary analysis of the nature of the intellectual concerns of the social fabric. Even in this, it is meant to guide the formulation of objectives for the main analysis. As a result we decided to select three English and two Urdu daily newspapers. The larger proportion of English dailies was taken because there is more variety in the articles in English.

Naturally the first task was to list the op. ed. articles of newspapers from March to November 2020 for News, Dawn, Express Tribune, Jang and Dunya news because of their wider circulation. On completion, this list was scrutinized to select a sub-group of thirty articles from each which the researchers [one assigned to each newspaper] were required to read and submit a synopsis of the article in question. This set of synopsis was again scrutinized to shortlist them for analysis. A set of ten articles was thus chosen from the entire output of each newspaper for analysis. The essence of the current report is the content analysis of these fifty articles. However, the report first gives a description of the entire range of issues addressed in each newspaper and discusses the issues which form the bulk of a particular author’s output to assess the main thrust of their vision.

Content analysis – General:

The articles of thirty-two op. ed. authors who contributed to Dawn newspaper were chosen for our first list of nearly four hundred pieces. These were then shortlisted to a manageable number [30] from which the representative sample of ten was to be chosen for the content analysis. Although some authors were more regular than others, the list of thirty did not exclude authors who were irregular. Not even those who had only contributed two or three articles were ignored. The criterion for selection of articles was not regularity of inclusion on the editorial page but rather the focus of the article. So long as an author contributed to the debate relating to social issues, especially in the context of Corona but also on issues of particular interest to the Civil Society. Governance issues were also considered as essential for this pilot study; consequently we ended up selecting articles from ten authors for the purpose of assessing the most suitable ones for analysis.

Although a number of social issues were addressed by various authors, only a small number could be included due to the large number of contributions which were being considered. Most of those who were not included wrote exclusively on politics and international relations but those who had confined their attention to economic issues and processes or addressed matters primarily related to education as an activity were also not considered for the analysis because of the technical nature of their discourse unless their contribution also related to covid, governance or other social issues.

Like the News, the Express Tribune had a large number of articles, however there were certain distinct features. The first striking fact of course was the sheer variety of contributors. There were just over fifty authors whose pieces were included on the editorial page. Strangely enough those who contributed also had a larger number of articles per person than the News. The bulk of them had contributed twenty articles each and only a very slightly lower number had nearly forty, with one going to 44 and a few stopping short at about five or ten each. Perhaps about ten authors had only one or two articles to add to the mix. A third mentionable peculiarity was the fact that most of the authors had a specific field of interest and a particular angle or perspective which was quite discernable. In other newspapers one was more likely to find that “current issues” or topical social interests overshadowed the editorial page and many authors liked to address a variety of issues from among the interests that had been promoted by the media or given extra importance by the readers of the paper. In some cases national politics and international issues were paramount. In the Express Tribune, however, authors concentrated on a field and issues of longer duration were as much part of the content as topical and current interest on a daily basis.

An interesting example can be found in the writings of Ms. Aneela Shehzad for example. The lady is generally interested in international political issues; her contribution to Covid is a case in point. Instead of focusing on the pandemic as such, the lady contributed an article on “Corona and the world’s biggest prison Apr 17, 2020” which focused on the Palestine region in the time of the virus. Naturally, with nearly thirty five specialized and regular contributors, the total number of articles is enormous [about 800] and the selected articles for our analysis on the basis of the small number of issues which we had decided to cover only a few authors have been taken for analysis.

The two Urdu newspapers shared one basic characteristic; the articles in both depicted a greater interest in psycho-social or cultural reactions to news items and social issues in place of the more stark and “matter of fact” or “businesslike” treatment in the English language newspapers. There did, however, seem to be less “spice” in the pieces produced in the Dunya paper compared to the Jang. Even the titles of the articles were less catchy in the former, compared to the latter. On the whole it was more difficult to compose the list of articles for the limited variety of issues that we had decided to address in this pilot. The majority of articles in both papers were political or had a political stance. The social issues too were mostly micro level and topical. Even the pandemic did not capture the interest of these papers in quite the same flood as English language dailies. Perhaps the fact that the common man was less interested in the moment to moment developments had an influence on this. In all probability, having realized that there was some problem which needed a degree of care, the ongoing saga of its casualties was ignored due to day to day problems of life.

The number of authors was significantly less than the two English dailies mentioned above [only 18 in the case of Dunya News] while the total number of articles was 22 from 11 contributors, 2 of them contributed 231 leaving others with 77, 57, 9, 10 & 14 for the remaining five contributors. The total tally of articles of the News and Dunya were compatible but the contributors were half. In the case of the Jang, the editorial pages were quite regular in carrying seven articles a day with twenty-nine contributors. Ata-ul-Haq Qasmi contributed a humungous 96 articles but other major participants had somewhere between 30 and fifty articles. Twenty of the contributors, however, seem to have provided something between ten and thirty articles a piece.

Among the English Dailies, the Dawn had only 28 contributors to the editorial page just a little more than half the number for the Express Tribune. The large contributors here also provided 80 or more articles, some contributed about forty and some as little as one or two. In all about 650 articles were assessed and, as in other cases, thirty were selected. In one sense this was a difficult paper to choose from because without the differentiated and specialist approach among authors, the list of titles and the issues covered were more focused on governance, social issues and covid or other such specific problems with a longer shelf life than in other papers. Consequently, a larger proportion of “articles of interest” had to be excluded from the analysis of specific articles because

This has highlighted the realization that, while adequate [even desirable] for the pilot, the number of papers from each paper should not be equal in the case of the follow-up which we hope will take place next year. In that study, should it be approved and undertaken, the practice should be to first select papers on *specific topics* from each paper and to conduct the study based on samples that indicate the subject-wise proportion in the paper itself and on the basis of total number of op. ed. articles in each paper during the specified period. Other such considerations would also have to be worked out for the methodology used in that analysis.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL PAPERS

DAWN

The Dawn carried an evenly balanced number of articles on Pakistani politics and International Relations. Social and Legal concerns came next, with a greater emphasis on social matters than on the legal issues. Administration, particularly in a Pandemic context was next in importance, while Gender and Marginalized communities preceded other topical issues like the air crash. In terms of percentage of the total number of articles on the editorial page, we estimate 23% to political issues of national concern and 19% for International relations, 18% and 11% to Social and Legal, 10% for Corona out of the 15% for Administrative issues; 10% for marginalized communities and Gender and the remaining 4% for other topical issues.

The ten articles chosen for analysis from the large variety that was available, belonged largely to the areas which were not major contributors to the opinion pieces of the paper. Although, politics, administration, international relations and vital concerns, the position of most papers on these are well known and have therefore not been included in the pilot study. We thus chose three articles relate to gender, one each to health, minorities in the Pakistani identity, underdevelopment issues of Baluchistan, education as affected by Corona, shrinking spaces for civil society initiatives, the crying need for reconstruction of our cultural fabric and one on urbanization.

Of the three articles on women, two of where concerned with the problems of women in the times of Corona. The first, entitled ‘Women in the Informal Sector’, related to conditions during the virus outbreak. Problems of 1100 women working from home, domestics, beauticians, agricultural workers, teachers, and owners of micro-enterprises have been discussed on the basis of a survey. The second paper related to women, takes a different perspective to Gender in the virus situation. Entitled “Gender Inequalities”, it points out that even if women are less prone to the virus, their lives are as deeply affected by it as that of the men, because of social conditions of women. The third article entitled “Women workers” addresses a more general and consistent social concern, the increase in the “Female Labour Force Participation” of Pakistan

While the political and administrative concerns of society are often of temporary interest or relate to day to day developments in an ongoing saga, the social concerns addressed in the Dawn tended to have more abiding issues in focus. The problems of health care in general with special focus on the current political and administrative dispensation form the core of the article on “Lessons for Healthcare”. A similar spotlight is turned on to the matter of Pakistani minorities in the sensitive piece entitled “Under One Flag”. A similar sensitivity to the conditions of Pakistan’s weakest provincial economy, Baluchistan in the article focusing on the need of “Compensation for Neglect” in the Baluchistan Diary. The article on the education sector is predictably sensitive to gender and income issues. “Shrinking Spaces” and “A case for cultural Reconstruction” are both Civil Society concerns for the survival of their “modernist” agenda of promoting a liberal democracies. Finally, the paper on “Contradictory Urbanization” has taken up the lack of urban infrastructure in the mad rush to urbanize that has taken the Pakistani society by storm.

EXPRESS TRIBUNE

For The Express Tribune, we shortlisted 24 authors from the large variety available because they had articles of interest within the concerns which we wished to address in this pilot study. Some of them had only contributed one or two articles but seemed promising. Since only ten had to be chosen for the pilot study, not all these authors could find a place in those chosen for the content analysis. Some of the promising authors were not even shortlisted in the first selection.

From the thirty articles selected from the contributions of the 24 authors, we had a very difficult time of selecting ten articles by ten authors. “The state of Higher Education and Universities” by Akhtar Ali Shah, Need for Citizen led Accountability by Shakeel Ahmed Shah, “The Problem with neo-Liberal Feminism” by Syed Muhammad Ali, “Covid-19: Schools or no schools” Dr. Rana Jawad Akhtar, “A Woman’s Independent Identity” by Durdana Najam, Could Covid-19 become Pakistan’s White Swan Event” by Bilal Lakhani, “The Rise of anti-Intellectualism by Muhammad Hamid Zaman, “Coronavirus in a lesser Governed State” by Shahzad Chaudhury, “Neo-Liberal Manipulations by M. Ziauddin, and finally, “The Significance of Gender Responsive policies” by Sana Malik. As may be seen from the selection, the range of articles from this newspaper is as varied as the number of contributors and the sheer numerical weight of articles.

This paper also carried an evenly balanced number of articles on national politics and International Relations, perhaps 26 or 27% of the lot. Social concerns came next, with 20% articles. Covid-19 also had a large space with 11% of the pie. Gender and Marginalized communities preceded other topical issues like the air crash in this paper as well but claimed only 9% with the remainder going to other topical issues. The more interesting statistic in this case is that the authors whose articles were chosen had collectively contributed barely 200 pieces to the staggering tally [1/4 of the lot] and even among them, four contributed nearly 145 articles three had about 55 and three shared the remainder. Consequently, the selection here was more skewed than for the Dawn.

The selection in the case of this paper, however, covered more areas of interest. The focus of the articles was also less pointed than in the case of the Dawn. The article related to education was not very different from the many that bemoan the quality of higher education, nor was the need for a more pro-active role by the HEC and the government a major shift from the common theme of educated commentators on the financial and policy structures of the government. However, the concerns for citizen led accountability does take into account the need for grounding such activities in our own society, a slight variation on the current mantra of the Civil Society.

The article on neo-liberal feminism, is also a fresh slant as it advocates a nexus between capitalist oriented multinationals and socialist oriented feminism. On the other hand, the article on schools in the context of Corona is very much a standard chant of one of the perspectives that dominate the debate on schools and sending children out in this climate of illness. The piece on Women’s independent legal identity is similarly a theme that has been rather well discussed by now.

The “opportunity” potential in the prevalent crisis is an emerging discourse and brings a real “feel good factor” into the jaded atmosphere that Pakistan’s intelligentsia subsist in. The contrast is near at hand with the article on “anti-intellectualism” while the assessment of “Coronavirus in a lesser governed state” lies in an intermediate zone between pragmatism and hope. The articles by Ziauddin and Sana Malik are predictable and merely display the part that is consistent in the op. ed. material appearing in the paper. However, the preceding images illustrate that the Express Tribune is less committed to a single intellectual stream or a dominant editorial paradigm.

THE NEWS

In the case of the News, seven authors were selected in all. We chose two articles each from three of their contributions to the paper and one each from the remaining four. The selection was made on the basis of topical interest primarily but two of the authors were also of special interest. Ghazi Salahuddin because he is a bilingual author and Mosharraf Zaidi as a man who has enjoyed power and wears many hats from time to time. Khalid Bhatti, the third author with two articles in the mix, is a bureaucrat of wide experience in political matters in parliamentary conduct. His interest in the problems of the laboring class also mitigated in favour of including two articles by him.

Mr. Salahuddin generally brings an assortment of issues into the ambit of his article; and no matter which issue he is concerned with, some of his pet themes often resurface in his thought stream. The treatment of the plight of women is a case in point. His other article on the “Pandemic Wasted” is in the same vein as the “White Swan” idea in the Express but his treatment is far more prosaic and predictable. The political slant and pro-education theses are interwoven here.

Mosharraf Zaidi, the Development practitioner, one time policy advisor and employee of USAID addressed the issue of Covid-19 and the matter of logistics. Back in March 2020, he has a rather bleak outlook, by August, he had become somewhat more optimistic. This author is more inclined to topical responses and impressions of the moment. When he was writing about Income Support, a day before his non-optimistic musings of the supply chain, his advice for the government was a more proactive one than when he became depressed by the logistic problems.

Ayesha Razaque, as a specialist of the field of education presents one of the patented perspectives in the debate, that distance learning materials are partial and piecemeal modes in the teacher’s scheme of communication. The inhibitions, of those who have a ‘traditional’ perspective to the art of teaching, aside; learning and preparation may surmount some of the difficulties but perhaps not all of them. However, those who grow up in this distance scheme of learning are also likely to find it a problem to get used to the communication of a face to face situation.

Covid-19 and the Economy, was a natural choice as it united two issues of interest. However, as the author was committed to a political affiliation, the article can also be treated as a representative of the constant political slant in the policy of some newspapers. By contrast, the article by Kamila Hayat had a catchy title for other reasons. “Boys in the age of Feminism” would have been of

interest for its own sake also, but the connection with education was a bonus. However, it is not a fresh approach to the problem of social responses to feminism in Pakistan.

The articles by Khalid Bhatti are also in the general direction of the ongoing problem of lip-service to labour problems which has not yet yielded satisfactory results. Another standard Civil Society issue which was included in our shortlisted set was the issue of advocacy and development. This author, being an experienced development practitioner has identified a key concern for the next decade, to align our policies with global goals. Though not original, it is a much needed reminder.

JANG

The selection of articles from the Express Tribune and Dawn were problematic for reasons that were entirely different from those which we experienced in the Urdu dailies. In the first instance, the titles of articles were more allegorical and it often needed a cursory glance through the contents before we could ascertain the subject to which a particular piece belonged unless it was political or administrative in some sense. It is for this reason that we have not given any percentage of the topical division of the Urdu dailies; determining the ratio of Covid-19 to gender to politics ratio in comparison with social issues alone would have meant many more days of work.

The Jung frequently included seven articles on its editorial page and sometimes more than one by the same author. Even though we have noted that the News and Dawn did not have such specialized contributors as in the case of the Express Tribune; in comparison with the Jung, their authors were quite selective in their choice of topics. In the case of the Jang, authors who wrote several articles like Khalil Ahmad and Hamid Mir were willing to comment on virtually every topic possible.

As a result of the multiple problems of making a targeted selection from issues of interest to the Civil Society resulted in a very lop-sided selection in the case of both Urdu dailies and the nature of the material also was rather unsatisfactory. The only area where a great commonality of interests was to be found was in the national calamity of Coronavirus. Consequently half or the articles that we chose from the Jung were related to Covid-19. The national day for women, the ban on cultural programs in educational institutions, with good governance versus public service, activism in labor movement and the legislation against rapists provided other topics of concerns for the civil society. The choice of contributors however was not limited in this area and a large number of authors who had contributed articles were included, only two being authored by the same individual.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The preliminary study [pilot project] of the newspapers in Pakistan proved to be a fruitful exercised in terms of its goal of providing vital information and understanding of the way in which we should follow up on the findings of this study. However, as an independent analysis of some of the issues of prime interest to the research institutions involved, the study only provided some basic markers

for the national perspectives on governance, the pandemic, disaster management, marginalized and disadvantaged people and social issues in Pakistan.

The most significant conclusion, and the primary recommendation of this pilot study is that a new set of instruments should be developed for the content analysis of the Pakistani press, across the board, from this experience. A differentiated list of topics and a separate mechanism for selection should be adopted for each language that is included in the range of papers selected.

Similarly, the selection of papers on the basis of location [federal and provincial capitals, important cities in each province etc.] should include some representative papers from at least three languages if they are available [English, Urdu and the local language dailies].

There is, however, no doubt that the variety of opinions and perspectives in Pakistani society and politics need to be explored and there is no medium which is more appropriate for this task than the press and daily newspapers. It is quite evident from even this cursory pilot study that there is a clearly emerging social dialogue which is well represented in our media even though it also shows that there is a disconnect between at least four classes of the elite: the establishment, the politicians, the spiritual leadership and the civil society. This, perhaps is where we must probe urgently.