Do International News Agencies Set the Agenda of Pakistani English Newspapers? A Critical Analysis of Three English Dailies of Pakistan

Lubna Shaheen *  Muhammad Naseem Anwar †  Rashid Ishaq ‡

Abstract: The aim of this study is to measure the reliance of the Pakistani English press on international news agencies. Quantitative content analysis was done to see the level of reliance. A ten-year period has been selected for analysis starting from 9/11. International pages of three English newspapers were selected. The results indicated that there is very small contribution of the newspapers in the case of international news content, they mostly rely on foreign content and publish the same. Pakistani newspapers hardly try to appoint their correspondents and resultantly they have to copy the same content available by international news agencies e.g., AP, AFP & Reuter. The study considered the theory of media imperialism and the results endorse the age-old central verses peripheral relationship with developed countries and the developing nations which still persist.

Key Words: Developed Countries, Developing Nations, Foreign Content, Media Imperialism, Peripheral

Introduction

South Asian nations cover a good part of the globe; that is why happenings and events occurring across the Muslim world catch attention from media across the globe. In an overtly uni-polar world, centering the US, the global media follows a different trend in their portrayal of news stories. The free flow of information and the advancements in

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communication technologies are the dominant doctrines of today’s life. The global press contributes toward internationalization and constructs influential global news agenda. Global media provide information that enables the national media to think globally. Many people in developing countries think that the foreign press defines globalization as westernization by setting western ideologies as to be taken as norms by the national news providers (Boyd-Barrett, 2000). Though there are hundreds of globally influential media outlets, yet the most powerful and visible out-lets are located in the United States. The most prominent among them are Washington Post, Los Angeles Times, and Christian Monitor etc. These newspapers services are also used by the national print media of Pakistan.

The global press holds a monopoly over news production; the major news content is provided by the transnational news-press. This content is most of the times published without any changes in the text in the national press of developing countries (Arya, 2011). Different researchers called and named this type of news material as “secondhand news” (Xie & Cooper-Chen, 2008), “journalistic plagiarism” (Lewis et al., 2008), “copied material” (Arya, 2011), “recycled news” (Frijters & Velamuri, 2009), “news borrowing” (Xie & cooper-Chen, 2008) and “ready-made news” (Bredemeier-Garson, 2008).

“Churnalism” a term introduced by Davis (2008), presents kind journalism in which news stories are taken from news agencies and published in newspapers of recipient nations without further research or contribution. In short, the kind of journalism that presents news stores taken from foreign media to its own newspapers without altering it. Hence the newspapers’ staff does not contribute anything to the development of news (Johnston, 2011).

This reliance on the foreign press is overwhelming as Paterson (2005) noted that online news is the “de facto duopoly of Associated Press and Reuters”. Arya (2011) concluded that “Times of India and Hindustan Times having a near-total dependence on international news agencies”. Lewis (2008) found that “UK media are highly dependent on national and international news agencies for news contents”. Shaheen (2014) concluded in the study on the news published on international pages of three newspapers are near complete replication of the original stories taken from the news feed of international news wires, with a very minimal original contribution by the most highly acclaimed newspapers of Pakistan. Johnston & Forde says that “this phenomenon of borrowed news leading to an even greater reliance on news agency copy than perhaps at any other time in news media history”. “Breaking news in online newspapers is synonymous with wire service copy” (Johnston & Forde, 2009). Transnational news wires set the agenda through the selection of stories and the amount of visual they present to the recipient of both press and electronic media (Paterson, 2007).

Such kind of excessive copied and syndicated news influence and affect the national media as noted by Johnston; it is argued that the influence comes at two levels, first with regard to the choice of news stories and their different slant by the global press and second with regard to the selection of stories by their clients, i.e., media groups in terms of “follow up, reproduce with limited follow up or replicate word to word without the
contribution of their own journalists” (2011). Besova quoted Lippmann that the only connection with the outer world is the media, we don’t experience reality, and we rely on media for the construction of reality (2006). It is the media that provide us with the information about the war on terror and other events which happen in the outer world (Besova, 2006). Paterson noted that discourses on international events are determined by two transnational agencies, i.e., Reuters and AP (2007). The CEO associated press Thomas Curley called these news agencies as ‘unseen players of world landscape’ (Johnston & Forde, 2011).

Few media out-lets have their own network of correspondents, and this is the main reason news agencies made their contribution as providers of news content to the national media news agencies have the edge of deciding which issues to be selected and how they will be portrayed. They have the opportunity to build media agenda (Giffard & Leuven, 2008). Thussu and Boyd-Barrett found from the literature on news wires that there are different types of bias that can affect their coverage; the main is qualitative, which includes a political, social and foreign policy of the country in which the news wires operate, and the other is quantitative which means the selection of certain issues ignoring the others.

**Literature Review**

The paper by Nossek (2004) was based on the basic assumptions of the theoretical perspective that how the international foreign media portray others versus ours. The journalists’ loyalty and disloyalty matter in covering the issues. The research argues that to the issues to which journalists are loyal, they forget journalistic values and become ‘subordinate’ to their interests. The paper concludes that journalists also show disloyalty towards a few international issues.

Mitra (2015) studied the news routines and dependence of Indian newspapers on international news agencies, mainly AFP, AP & Reuters. He applied content analysis on foreign pages of ‘The Times of India’, the major English published from Hyderabad. The universe of the study was one month from 1st to 30th Sep 2014, when India was going through major political and economic change. The main concern of the study was to see the newspaper’s selection criteria of news, the number of news covered by each news wire and which country was covered by which news agency. The study found that the news flow is unequal, mainly from developed to underdeveloped countries, which gives an advantage to the western states to control and set the news agenda for the remaining world. “The increasing commodification of news implies that the news created by the first world is sold to content starved markets in the developing world increasing their dependency, handicapping their economies, and influencing public opinions”.

As effectively examined earlier, Reuters, Associated Press (AP), and Agence France-Presse (AFP) are the major three offices of the world press. They manage the news stream in their household markets, as well as the world over. Almost all developing nations are reliant on them for the supply of world news. The frameworks in these international news offices are exceptionally productive in news assembling and additionally presentation of news, and this has given them an edge to
combine their business sector positions in and around the 3rd world (Harad, 2012).

Earlier studies have shown that universal news is appropriated generally by Western news organizations. A study by Djosef & Huisman (2011) suggests that these discoveries that Reuters, AP, AFP and Bloomberg were and still are the real news organizations/providers utilized by major papers for content and pictures. The expanded pattern of utilization of transnational news offices is straightforwardly joined with the money related circumstance of newspaper organizations in the creating scene. The supply of global news from transnational news organizations liberates them of their need to contract outside reporters. Despite the fact that it has got to be simpler and less expensive for these papers to print outside news, it additionally implies that the force of the Western news offices has gotten to be stronger and persuasive. Further, the news which is introduced appears to be from the west and about the west for the most part, with numerous parts of the world explicitly overlooked.

**Agenda Building**

Foreign press highlights the salience and importance of particular news or event; since the press has power and tremendous outreach, the news is highlighted as a “significant event”. Keeping in view the international significance of the event, the gatekeepers (editors of local newspapers) immediately take notice of the news and accommodate it in their own newspaper, without considering that the news has some sense or similarity for the local readers.

The following figures further explain the importance of agenda building in the present study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors/salience</th>
<th>Attributes/effects</th>
<th>Second level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foreign press</td>
<td>Gate-keepers/decision makers</td>
<td>National Newspapers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 1:** Agenda Building Model: The news routines portrayal at each of the two levels of Agenda Building.

The model shows the two different levels of agenda building. At the first level, the factors which influence the editors’ choices and make the news content becomes important for them. At the second level, the portrayal of news content is the reflection of the first level of agenda building.

**Figure 2**
Do International News Agencies Set the Agenda of Pakistani English Newspapers? A Critical Analysis of Three English Dailies of Pakistan

The two levels of agenda building are applied in this study. At the first level, the input is the salience/factors that influence/effect the choices of the gatekeepers and at the second level, the output is the themes and factors derived from the news stories of the newspapers that are selected for analysis. Themes are the effect on the second level of agenda building. Themes are, in fact, attributes that cause effects. Attributes are measured through themes and direction of the content.

Methodology
This study selected a time frame of ten years from post 9/11/2001 to 2011, i.e., (the death of Osama Bin Laden in the hands of the US forces). The underhand issue was also important to be researched in Pakistan that the death occurred in Pakistani territory, and the foreign press during the time period remained very active regarding the news supplies to Pakistan. It was selected for being the focus of massive media coverage worldwide as the first reaction was the deceleration of the War against Terror by the US. The context allows a simultaneous exploration of both global dynamics of news reporting and local coverage.

Research Questions
RQ 1: What sources of information (frequency of global sources) are used by the three leading Pakistani national English newspapers, i.e., Dawn, The News, &The Nation?

RQ 2: Which of the three Pakistani national newspapers, Dawn, The News, & The Nation, has greater reliance over global news agencies in covering global issues, i.e., the global press considered more reliable?

RQ 3: Which category was given more coverage among all the selected categories in the English national press of Pakistan?

Table 1. Categories are Defined by Foreign Press Through Pakistani National Press (News Stories)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Afghanistan War</th>
<th>Positive portrayal</th>
<th>Neutral portrayal</th>
<th>Negative portrayal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Aid and Humanitarian efforts by the US in Afghanistan

Afghan Government

Al-Qaeda

Aid and Humanitarian efforts by the US in Afghanistan

Afghan Government

Al-Qaeda

Aid and Humanitarian efforts by the US in Afghanistan

Afghan Government

Al-Qaeda

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Afghan Government

Al-Qaeda

Aid and Humanitarian efforts by the US in Afghanistan

Afghan Government

Al-Qaeda

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Afghan Government

Al-Qaeda

Aid and Humanitarian efforts by the US in Afghanistan

Afghan Government

Al-Qaeda

Table 2. Categories are Defined by Foreign Press Through Pakistani National Press

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Iraq War</th>
<th>Negative Category</th>
<th>Neutral category</th>
<th>Positive Category</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>IrIraq to help inspectors iron out problems</strong> (26 Feb 2003, The Nation, AFP)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>UN key players closer to the accord. (9 Oct 2002, The Nation, AFP)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Humanitarian efforts by the US
(Winter 2004, the Nation, AFP)

US officials expect two million refugees (26 Feb 2003, the Nation, AFP)

Poor Iraqis crushed in war's aftermath (11 April 2007, Dawn, AFP)

Analysis

RQ 1: What sources of information (frequency of global sources) are used by the three leading Pakistani national English newspapers, i.e., Dawn, The News, & The Nation?

Table 3. Frequency of News on Foreign Pages during Sep, 2001- Sep, 2011 by Dawn

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>News Sources</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
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Table 4. Frequency of News on Foreign Pages during Sep, 2001- Sep, 2011 by The News

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<td>41</td>
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Table 5. Frequency of News on Foreign Pages during Sep, 2001- Sep, 2011 by The Nation

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</table>

RQ 2: Which amongst the three Pakistani national newspapers; Dawn, The News, & The Nation has greater reliance over global news agencies in covering global issues i.e., the global press considered more reliable?

Figure 3: Number of news stories covered by special correspondents of newspapers The News 2001-2011

Figure 4: Number of News Stories Covered by Special Correspondents of Newspapers the Nation
Do International News Agencies Set the Agenda of Pakistani English Newspapers? A Critical Analysis of Three English Dailies of Pakistan

Figure 5: Number of News Stories between 2011-2011

Figure 6: Number of News Stories Covered by Special Correspondents of Newspapers the Nation

RQ 3: Which Category was given more coverage among all the selected Categories in the National English Press of Pakistan?

Table 6. Sub-Categories of Afghanistan Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other than Afghanistan</td>
<td>1088</td>
<td>62.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taliban, US and Afghanistan, War on Terror, Osama, Mulla Omar</td>
<td>361</td>
<td>20.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISAF, NATO, Allies</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aid, Citizens, Refugees</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afghan Government</td>
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<td>5.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al-Qaeda</td>
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<td>3.60</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>100.00</td>
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Table 7. Sub-Categories of Iraq Category

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Other than Iraq</td>
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<tr>
<td>WMD, US Invasion, Inspectors</td>
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</tr>
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<td>7.90</td>
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<td>US and UN</td>
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<td>Humanitarian efforts</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
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Table 8. Frequency of News Stories for Iran Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Other than Iran</td>
<td>1428</td>
<td>81.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuclear Enrichment, Sanctions</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>14.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World powers</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>1.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAEA</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1755</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

With the concept of “media power”, the study answers the questions as to what sources of information were used by three leading English dailies of Pakistan, i.e., Dawn, The News, and The Nation. This study investigated the level of dependence of the Pakistani English press on the global press and the effects of this dependence. For these purposes, three core issues of Post 9/11 era, i.e., the Afghan war, the Iraq war and Iran’s nuclear program, have been taken. Based on quantitative data, the study offers the following conclusions. The research showed that the top English Newspapers in Pakistan depend more than 90 percent upon foreign news source. There are certain reasons behind such dependency, which include; inadequate financial resources, lack of human resource, and lack of coverage outreach. Additionally, the minimal number of foreign correspondents results in the dependence of the national press on the global press. The findings suggested that during the taken period of time, the national press of Pakistan played a role of facilitators in promoting a western view of the world issues.
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