

Editorial Treatment of Burhan Wani Killing: A Comparative Analysis of Pakistan and India Press

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Abstract: This study examines coverage patterns of the killing of Burhan Muzaffar Wani in two leading English dailies of Pakistan and India from July 2016 to December 2016. The killing of Wani, a commander of Hizbul Mujahideen, in an encounter by the Indian security forces on July 8, 2016, led to large-scale protests in the Indian-held Kashmir and military confrontations over the line of control between the two nuclear-armed South Asian neighbors and claims of surgical strikes against Pakistan by India. The theoretical framework for this research was determined by framing theory, while the sample was selected by applying census sampling. The findings, based on a quantitative content analysis of selected editorials of The Times of India and The News International, show that the two newspapers did not present the ground reality as it is, but reconstructed it according to their agendas and represented it by framing events. The patriotic and hostile attitude of the media of both countries results in the obstruction of peace process and endorses a wave of tension, which often leads to heightened tension and war hysteria between the two countries. Consistent with the existing scholarship on peace journalism, the findings of this study also show how the news media surrender impartiality and cover the events in view of their country's national interests and foreign policy.

Keywords: Framing, conflict communication, Kashmir dispute, Burhan Wani, Kashmir freedom movement, crisis communication.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study is designed to examine the difference between the editorial treatment of the killing of Burhan Wani in two leading English newspapers of India and Pakistan. More specifically, this study explored whether Wani was portrayed as a terrorist or as a freedom fighter, whether his killing was explained with additional background information and proper contextualization of the Kashmir dispute, and whether evaluation of the problem justified or unjustified his killing when their own countries are involved in the conflict. Robert Entman (1993) [1] model of framing theory is applied to analyze the editorials. This case study will help examine the stance and coverage patterns of Pakistani and Indian newspapers following the killing of Burhan Wani and show the extent to which their reporting follow the official line of their respective governments. It will help contribute to the existing body of knowledge on framing and conflict communication, as well as serve as a reference point for future studies in the fields of war and peace journalism, conflict communication and framing.

OVERVIEW OF INDO-PAK CONFLICTS

Since their inspection as two independent states in 1947, both Pakistan and India have been having hostile relations and have fought four wars in 1947-48, 1965, 1971 and 1999 [2]. Soon after the partition of India,

violence erupted that led to an estimated loss of life varying between several hundred thousand and two million on both sides of the border [3]. The two countries have a long list of unresolved disputes, including the core dispute over Kashmir. The Kashmir dispute, since its origin was mishandled by Great Britain, who failed to manage a peaceful resolution that would have been politically acceptable to Pakistan, India and the people of Kashmir.

The first war between Pakistan and India started in 1947 when armies of the two newly-born countries, including tribal lashkar of Waziristan, fought over Jammu and Kashmir. The war lasted for more than one year, resulting to Pakistan taking control of approximately one-third of Kashmir, also known as Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). The war ended with a ceasefire agreement in 1948 between the two nations at the United Nations [4]. The Indian government offered to hold a UN-administered plebiscite in Kashmir to decide final status of Kashmir. The United Nations Security Council on August 1948 adopted another resolution that gives the self-determination right to Kashmiris people. However, India never acted upon these resolutions and Kashmir remains the unresolved dispute between the two nations.

Pakistan reiterates that Kashmir is its "jugular vein" and considers it an unresolved international dispute, while India considers Kashmir as its "integral part" and accuses Pakistan of interfering in the internal affairs of India. In addition to the four wars, both Pakistan and India also charge each other of ceasefire violations on

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the line of control and working boundary, as well as make accusations of proxy wars, and funding and supporting acts of terrorism on their soil. Over the years, thousands of people have lost their lives in these four wars and skirmishes, despite the fact that the two countries had held several rounds of talks and even reached agreements to resolve their issues bilaterally through dialogue as well as through their commitments at the United Nations levels. The two sides are still are not at peace with one another [5].

Pakistan supports the right of self-determination for Kashmiri citizens, whereas India denies Kashmiris of such right and blames Pakistan for waging a proxy war in Kashmir through arming and training freedom-seeking militants [6]. Pakistan rejects the Indian allegations, considers them baseless and contends it is only providing diplomatic and political support to Kashmiri people. Analysts of both countries as well the international community suggest that if the Kashmir issue is resolved, the other conflicts between the two nations will also disappear, as the Kashmir dispute is the root-cause of all tensions between the two neighbors and which directly affects the peace in the South Asian region [7].

BURHAN WANI

Burhan Muzaffar Wani was a 22 year old commander of a militant organization, Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), who was fighting for freedom in Indian Occupied Kashmir. In 2011, he joined HuM but unlike other militants, he was a skillful handler of social media like WhatsApp and Facebook, which he utilized for spreading the message of freedom from the Indian occupation. Although he has not been directly traced in attacks on Indian forces but he was believed to be the mastermind of many of them and had inspired several Kashmiri citizens to join militant insurgency against the Indian forces. Indian and Pakistani analysts marked the killing of Wani to be a bitter victory for India, although the Indian forces considered it a huge victory against the armed rebellion of Kashmiris.

On 8th July 2016 Burhan Wani along with his two other militants were traced and surrounded in Bundoora Village of Anantnag District, in a joint operation carried out by Indian Army and Police. Burhan Wani along with his companions was killed in a hiding house after a two-hour encounter with Indian Army. His funeral was attended in several places in the Kashmir valley and AJK while Huriyyat Leader, Syed Ali Geelani and Chairman Jammu and Kashmir

Liberation Front (JKLF), called for Kashmiri People to protest against Indian forces for the martyrdom of Burhan Wani. In order to minimize crowds everywhere in Kashmir, The Indian Government imposed curfew in the South Kashmir while in some areas the internet services were suspended.

Pakistan and India possess a totally distinct stance on Burhan Wani as per their respective foreign policies. For instance, Pakistan acknowledges Burhan Wani to be a freedom fighter while India declares him as a terrorist who was being supported by Pakistan. Nawaz Sharif, then the prime minister of Pakistan, expressed a deep sorrow on Burhan Wani's killing and considered it an undue and illegitimate use of force against civilians while the Indian government officials warned Pakistan to stop interfering in the internal matters of India in the Kashmir valley. Thereby, the media of Pakistan and India, while following their respective foreign policies, also depict a distinct stance on Burhan Wani and Kashmir issue.

NEWS MEDIA AND CONFLICTS

News is not simply a reflection of reality, but also is reflective of compromises on part of those who construct and report it. The notion that the media depict events as they unfold is not accurate. Gitlin (1980) was among the first who suggested that mass media frame narratives, which organize the world both for journalists and audiences who rely on their reporting to make sense of the events [8]. For Entman (1997), "bias defines a tendency to frame different actors events and issues in the same way, to select and highlight the same sort of selective realities, thus crafting a similar tale across a range of potential news stories" [9]. Taking into account the impact of biases on news, Rodgers (2003) argues that it becomes "virtually meaningless" that news media follow objectivity, neutrality or impartiality [10]. This choice of a specific perspective, or "framing" of news, prompts the masses to relay an event in a particular manner.

In times of conflicts, news media can either follow a destructive approach in which they become a party to the conflict and contribute to the escalation of the issue, or adopt a more constructive approach in which they stay independent in their reporting of the events and thus, contribute to the de-escalation of the issue. Numerous instances have pointed to media's inability to remain independent and objective given their close relationship to the state and its institutions [11]. This means that regardless of mass media's support or

opposition to a given conflict, news media serve as a mean by which modern-day conflicts are literally played out and experienced by the audiences.

The existing scholarship on conflict communication shows that journalists abandon their professional and ethical responsibilities in favor of patriotism, nationalism and national interest during times of wars, especially when their own country is involved [12], [13]. The existing literature on the scholarship also reveals that news media escalate the level of tension during conflict situations by stimulating and supporting disappointment with peace process. Prior studies on Indo-Pak conflicts show that news media on both sides exhibit patriotism and nationalism, with journalists uncritically supporting their countries' national and foreign policy interests instead of being objective, fair, rational and critical [14].

Moreover, journalists also serve as gatekeepers on both individual and organizational levels, especially when their own country is at war. This is often due to the fact that if some issues are objectively reported and if context and background information are provided to the public, it can go against the national interests and can be used as a confessional proof by the enemy state. However, Ross (2003) contends that journalists are not the only ones to be blamed for subjectivity and biasness in conflict and war situations during which times structural and organizational pressures also come into play. Such factors influence the treatment and interpretation of certain events. For example, Ross' analysis found that the U.S. media portray the Israeli actions and militarism as a reaction to Palestinians' actions and thus legitimize the atrocities and oppression of the Palestinians [15].

Critical studies on conflicts coverage also show that journalists intentionally link one issue with another, although the linkage may be irrelevant, to divert focus from the real issue and change the context of a conflicted reality. In his analysis of the Indian media's coverage of the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, Creech (2014) found that the Indian media linked the attack with the interests of major global powers in a passive tone and represented the Mumbai city as being symbolically relating to 9/11 attacks in New York. Creech also discovered that the Indian media unduly humanized the attacks with sensational headlines to promote national interests and gain commercial benefits [16].

In context of the literature review and the demand of patriotism from national media, the present study was

designed to analyze the editorial treatment of the killing of Burhan Wani in two leading English newspapers of India and Pakistan. The researchers also wanted to examine whether Wani was portrayed as a terrorist or as a freedom fighter, whether the papers discussed the issue in context of the Kashmir dispute, and whether the evaluation of the problem justified or unjustified his killing when their own countries were involved in the conflict.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: How did The News International and The Times of India define Burhan Wani's killing?

RQ2: How did The News International and The Times of India explain Burhan Wani's killing in the Kashmir conflict?

RQ3: What moral judgments did The News International and The Times of India attribute to the killing of Burhan Wani's in the Kashmir conflict?

METHODOLOGY

The researchers applied quantitative content analysis of selected editorials published in *The News International* and *The Times of India* on Wani's killing and the violence that erupted in the Indian-occupied Kashmir following his killing from July 2016 to December 2016. The study used census sampling method to select editorials for analysis. The newspapers were selected based on their circulation and influence in the government circles. The editorials of newspaper reflect the policy and agenda of a newspaper as they are written by the editorial board and the newspaper holds its responsibility. The unit of analysis is each paragraph of the editorials of *The News* and *The Times of India*.

RESULTS

RQ-1: How did The News and Times of India define Burhan Wani's killing?

Table 1 shows that *The News* published 44 paragraphs in editorials (100%) depicting Burhan Wani to be a freedom fighter, while *The Times of India* did not publish a single paragraph where the newspaper framed Wani as a freedom fighter. On the other hand,

The News published 0 paragraphs (0%) referring Wani to be a terrorist, while *The Times of India*

mentioned Wani to be a terrorist in its 59 paragraphs (100%).

Table 1: Problem Definition

Frames	The News	Times of India
Freedom Fighter	44 --- (100%)	0 --- (0.00%)
Terrorist	0 --- (0.00%)	59 --- (100%)
Total	44 --- (100%)	59 --- (100%)

RQ-2: How did *The News International* and *The Times of India* explain Burhan Wani's killing in the Kashmir conflict?

As shown in Table 2, *The News* published 22 paragraphs (40%), which de-contextualize the killing of Wani and describes only the events relating to the conflict, while *The Times of India* published 58 Paragraphs (76.31%) in which the issue was de-contextualized. *The News* published 33 paragraphs (60%) in which the context of the conflict was mentioned by digging out causes and factors that lead to the conflict while *The Times of India* published 18 paragraphs (23.68%) on contextualizing the conflict.

Table 2: Explanation of the Problem

Frames	The News	Times of India
Contextualized	33 (60%)	18 (23.68%)
De-contextualized	22 (40%)	58 (76.31%)
Total	55 (100%)	76 (100%)

RQ-3: What moral judgments did *The News International* and *The Times of India* attribute to the killing of Burhan Wani's in the Kashmir conflict?

Table 3 shows that *The News* published 0 paragraphs (0%) which present the demands of the Kashmiri people to be unjustified. *The News* did not publish a single paragraph in its editorials justifying the demands and protests of Kashmiri people on Wani's killing, while *The Times of India*, in its 61 paragraphs (95.31%), presented the freedom movement of Burhan Wani and others alike to be unjustified, immoral and outlawed. *The News* justified the movement and protests relating to Burhan Wani and Kashmir in its 54 paragraphs (100%) while *The Times of India* published only 3 paragraphs (4.68%) of its total paragraphs justifying demands of the Kashmiri people.

Table 3: Submission of Moral Judgments

Frames	The News	Times of India
Justified	54 --- (100%)	03 --- (4.68%)
Unjustified	0 --- (0.00%)	61 --- (95.31%)
Total	54 --- (100%)	64 --- (100%)

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the selected editorials published in the two leading English dailies of India and Pakistan shows that the two newspapers supported the official narrative and foreign policy of their respective governments on the Kashmir issue. *The News International* and *The Times of India* had a distinct approach on killing of Burhan Wani and the Kashmir freedom movement. When it comes to disputes and skirmishes along the line of control (LoC) and Kashmir, the media of Pakistan and India do not accept each other's positions and simply follow their nationalistic discourses [17]. In case of hot conflict situations, media of Pakistan and India supported stances of their respective armed forces and also kept involved the civilians and connected to their government's decisions [18].

As shown in the findings section, the Pakistani media represented Burhan Wani as a freedom fighter in its editorials and while Indian Media never called him Freedom Fighter but terrorist in all of its news reports. Pakistani Media frequently provided the context of unrest and popular uprisings in Kashmir valley, ranging from freedom movement to rights of Kashmiri People and their demands, and reported background information and context in majority of reports. A small number of events were reported without contextual information due to the journalistic professional demands. On the other hand, *The Times of India* provided contextual information in just few reports and the majority of editorials reported the events and the skirmishes between the two groups. Pakistani media did not consider the demands of Kashmiri people as unjustified while Indian Media commented on their demands to be unjustified and illegal.

Likewise, Indian Media showed a very less sympathy towards Kashmiri people and predominantly framed their demands unjustified and popular uprising illegal. These findings support the existing literature that media usually follow the considerations of foreign policy and can hardly be objective and neutral towards

its foreign policy when their own country is at war. News media are heavily interested in conflict reporting given the fact that news related to conflicts and wars travels fast and generates economic benefits, compared to news of peace. For example, a man walking on a foot path is not news until he is hit by a vehicle. The media would only create a peaceful environment in the south Asian region if it develops favorable environment through peace-promotion rather than aggressive, argumentative and confrontational attitude.

LIMITATIONS

The researchers acknowledges that the case examined in this study does not provide a sufficient ground for determining whether the media treatment of the Burhan Wani killing is common to other conflicts in different parts of the world. Therefore, the researchers recommend that more research work is needed to investigate other conflicts for an extended time period to draw more generalizable and comprehensive conclusions.

For all its contributions as an exploratory study, the present effort has some limitations as follows:

- This study was confined only to two English dailies from Pakistan and India and it did not cover all leading national newspapers and electronic news media due to shortage of time and lack of resources.
- Likewise, the study did not cover all the pages of newspapers for content analysis and primarily focused on editorial pages.
- The study solely was based on the content published from July 2016 to December 2016. A longer time span could have given better insight into the coverage of the Kashmir conflict, particularly during the peace times. Further, a longer time period could help draw more generalizable and holistic conclusions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Further studies related to the news coverage of the Kashmir conflict can be conducted in multiple ways:

- National and international news media content can be analyzed to examine the framing of the Kashmiris freedom movement pre-9/11 period and post-9/11 period.

- Electronic news media coverage can be analyzed to explore the coverage pattern of the Kashmir dispute after the Mumbai attacks, Pathankot attack and the killing of Burhan Wani.
- A comparative study can also be conducted to analyze the electronic and print news media content from peace and war journalism perspectives by the Indian and Pakistani media.
- Journalists on both sides of the India-Pakistan border can play a constructive role in de-escalating the tension between the two nations by avoiding subjectivity and adopting objectivity in reporting.
- It would be possible through communication and linkages between journalists' forums, i.e., All Pakistan Newspapers' Society (APNS), Council of Pakistan Newspaper Editors (CPNE), Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) and Indian journalists' organizations, i.e., Indian Newspaper Society and other journalists' forums.
- Media organizations and journalists of both countries can interact with each other to find common grounds on the conflicts and promote peace dialogues between the two nuclear-armed neighbors.

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