

## **Impact of Media Literacy and Media Technology on Agenda-Setting A Case Study of Broadcast Media in Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

Four major issues Pak-US relations, Energy crises, Law and order and National reconciliation ordinance were studied on two mainstream channels, Express and Geo News to explore media public association in the light of media literacy and media technology. Randomly selected bulletins and commentary talk shows for one year have been examined to gauge the role of media education and media technologies on media agenda while a survey to 500 cable television viewers of two news channels has been conducted separately to check the audience's agenda on these issues. Overall, 156 news bulletins and the same number of prime time talk shows were analyzed in the light of agenda setting and media literacy models. Results have confirmed the strong connections between media's issues salience and audience's issue priorities on four understudied issues. Correlations were measured from  $>0.67$  to  $>0.92$  with p value less than .001. The study has further discussed and explored the role and impact of media technologies on the part of media channels while audiences' level of awareness and understanding on the issues will be analyzed in the light of media literacy and media education.

**Keywords:** audience agenda, broadcast media, correlations,  
media agenda, media literacy

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## Introduction

Today, the digitized and technologically sophisticated media has empowered journalism industry to change the information manufacturing and consumption patterns in today's contemporary society. After arrival of cable channels in country's media landscape, there has been significant change in peoples' access to informational stuff with great diversification in opinion and feedback at the same time. The time has reduced to a great extent between news event happening and news deliverance to the people with the present age of informational technologies sophistication. The uncooked idea of having private news cable channels to counter media war of the Indian cable channels at regional and international forums became materialize in 2002 during and post Kargill conflict 1999.

In the early days of the proposal the mainstream print publishing media groups were took much active role in getting this opening to be actualized. This way the cross-media ownership practices have been continued in Pakistani media landscape during that decade. However, instead taking over the newly emerged cable news network of media publishing groups like The Geo and Jang and Nawai- e-Waqt, no significant change was observed in the running practices of the print content generation in social front in general and particularly on political. Critics viewed that these private channels have been creating social and political awareness and guidance among silent masses. After extending the opportunity to establishment of private channels by the government, the option to have reasonably fair news information have been increased manifolds.

Some significant events which extensively covered by these channels were Earthquake 2005, Mukhtaran Mai rape case 2002, Red-Mosque military action 2007, Lawyers movement 2007, Swat operation 2009, US marine attacks on Bin Laden's compound Abbottabad 2011, Salala military check post incident 2011, general election 2013, internal operations and law and order situation. Michael (2011) observed that "during 1970's, a number of studies have been documented that verified the mass communication has the powerful force of media effects." McCombs & Shah, (1972, 1976) viewed, "people are always learn from media to what and how the significant issues are." In a short history of broadcast private media in Pakistan, people reasonably got more options to interact, discuss on new developments in taking decisions on political and social issues. No doubt, it has become possible due to the influx of developments and establishments in the field of

information that viewers of state-run television have become able to replace the old and slow system of information channels. With the development and growth of these private cable channels, people got understanding media as watch dog and its importance in drawing attention to corruption, embezzlement, abuse of power etc.

The present study will focus on some basic theoretical cores of the models of media effect theory of agenda-setting function to explore that how media agenda could become public agenda. By examining four extensively covered national issues: Pak- US relations, Law and order, Energy crises and National reconciliation ordinance in two leading private media outlets Express and Geo News. The study will further discuss and explore the role and impact of media technologies on the part of media channels while audience's level of awareness and understanding on the issues will be analyzed in the light of media literacy and media education models.

### **Literature Review**

Since the first utilization of the theory of agenda setting by McCombs & Shaw in 1972, it is noted that the theory has been believed to be one of the most exploited theories in political and non-political setups. McCombs and Shaw (1968) observed up to >.97 almost perfect correlation between media salience and voters' beliefs on the priorities to the same prioritized campaign issues. Cohen (1963) observed that "the media cannot always be successful in suggesting people what to think, but it is gorgeously can be successful by telling its audiences what to think about." During his stay and working in UCLA, McCombs exposed to Cohen's studies and showed great interest that how do media effect and alter public opinion? McCombs and Shaw investigated and proved during US presidential election a strong association between media outlet's agenda and public's agenda (Rogers, 1993). Media Do not Reflect Reality In a common practice there are two basic suppositions are the key: (i) "media do not reflect reality rather it filter and shape it; (ii) media focus on a few stories that direct the people to take those issues as more important" (Dearing & Rogers, 1988).

Lyengar, & Kinder 1987 & Lyengar, 1993, viewed that "agenda setting occurs through accessibility and accessibility refers that more the press covers news item more that news item becomes more accessible in the minds of the audiences. For example, in a study conducted by Rogers & Dearing (1988) by asking the public what the most

important issues facing the nation and they replied with most covered and most prominent issues stored in their memory”, (Rogers & Dearing, 1988) People normally are dependent on second-hand reality to construct perceptions in relation to the world around them. Due to the media dependence, one is supposed to be a media reliant. In this way, the people delegate power to media for turning ‘agenda setter’ for audiences (Michael, 2011). The successful transfer of issue salience is not supposed to be an outcome of the few media messages but a result of a series of consistent messages like a campaign (Rogers & Dearing, 1988). The study on measuring media effects in German TV by Brosius & Kepplinger conducted in 1990. A survey to TV audiences and a content analysis of particular media established influenced on four issues out of 16 issues. They further observed that intensive and sudden media coverage of news issues reasoned public consciousness about a problem. Social scientists found significant correlation between media presentations and audience’s preferences painted in programs. It was revealed that the intensity of effects might vary depending upon exposure, individual’s interest and contingencies (Werner & Tankard, 1997).

Erbring et.al. (1980) have examined that public who greatly depend on media for having news about new issues are more vulnerable to agenda-setting manipulations as contrast to the people who is not much reliant on media rather they relate with friends and family and other channels of social and political communication, (Huckins, 1999). Interpersonal Communication and Objectives Since, today’s bulk of news production is comprised on political news a huge fraction of coverage is based on un-obtrusive issues. Therefore, for being more media reliance, the transfer of salience has been a successful exercise. While interpersonal communication has been main source of news information in obtrusive issues with family, friends, and colleagues. In an un-obtrusive issue, agenda-setting function of salience looks rather less-successful as the audiences are vigilant and well informed to resist against any attempt of transferring artificial or manufactured agenda.

“The mass media divert attention to few issues. It can build public images for political discourse. The media outlets are, persistently, presented bits and pieces suggesting: what and how media people should think about” (McCombs& Shah, 1972). “The media, at times, through out of proportion coverage remain successful in enforcing media salience in public’s mind.” Raza (2014). Need for Orientation of Individual Interest Weaver (1977) adapted the idea that “individual’s need for orientation defined as regards to relevance and uncertainty of the

information”. Lynger & Kinder (1987) quoted Bower, (1985), “by a wide margin, they think that TV, not print media, not radio supply the most credible and unbiased coverage of public interests”. “Most of the research in this area shows that frequency of issues telecast have profound effects on the preferences of the audiences” (Tim, 2018). Balmas and Sheafer (2010) described that “first level of agenda-setting has been shifted from “what to think about” to “how to think about”. McCombs & Evatt (1995) told that “agenda of attributes significantly affects the public opinion”. It looks, more or less, an activity of retrieving the earlier stored thoughts and beliefs of the viewers to the current problem. McCombs and few other eminent communication scholars regarded all four media effect theories at the same core group. Conversely, framing can be used to forecast that how the public may form their opinions. McCombs (1972) was of the view that political campaigns do hold the proclamation that interpersonal aspects were imperative predictors in agenda-setting effects. The desired information is transferred not only via media presentations and personal experiences but available networks of social interaction. Through this process, desired salience is transferred and this conscious and unconscious activity never ends since communication is an unending, dynamic and ongoing process.

### **Distance Education and Media Technology**

Srinivas (2007) of the view that the term “distance Learning’ has been applied to a great variety of programs, audiences, and media”. Distance learning is without a doubt, in the present age of information, directly linked to media sophistication. Through the exercise of media at faster pace has entirely changed the conventional patterns in distance education. “One of the highest strength of distance Learning has been its capability to develop the most recent technologies to reach to the unreached through exploiting media technologies” Solomon (2013). He further pointed out that “distance learning organizations have fulfilled distance that made education more reachable”. However, every type of mass media has its own pros and cons having different strengths and weaknesses at the same time. Among basic factors that manage these mass media technologies, generally, are (i) how mass medium is being utilized (ii) what particular technologies are being selected. (iii) A particular media agenda (iv) what framework are being used for distance education learner. However, adaptability and use of these digital media

technologies in distance education could be used in the light of media literacy for better insights and training of the audiences, Solomon (2013).

### **Adoption of Technology**

Srinivas (2007) described the awareness of technology could ultimately lead to the implementation of same. Once reaction of people is shaped then gradually the audiences and media users and community does try to transform their society with latest and sophisticated technology, however, the media outlet priorities have basic implications. Training of the instructions or media people are of prime nature to exploit of new technologies for better insights of the target people (Srinivas, 2007).

### **Media Literacy as a Resistance to Media Manipulation**

Literacy constitute having the skills, and knowledge to read, understand, interpret as well as have the capacity to yield specific kind of artifacts and texts and possess intellectual tools and to entirely participate in one's culture and society (Entman, 2007). However, the central aspect is the fact that the news, as a commodity has a missing specificity in other types of merchandise, as its placement can cause injury to persons, institutions, social groups and societies (pp.163). The rationale for this is that as it has (the news) the power of the limit, manufacture and distort images and releases about events and phenomena simultaneously to their function to inform (Ryabova, 2013, p.32). These troubles have damaged the soul of journalism in a variety of ways. Various things can be done to ease the effects that agenda setting has on the soul of journalism (Cacciatore et.al, 2016).

News givers may be refrain from making unwarranted conclusions that are mostly reached upon through joining bits, and this can be misleading (p.9). It means that media effects theories especially agenda-setting presents a leeway for journalists to add, omit or twist the facts with different technological manipulations that give a story the direction of their choice. During the process of presenting the news stories reporters, especially those responsible for transmitting sensitive and insightful news, have responsibility to follow some ethical principles to report real happenings in the light of on hand facts without any manipulation (Chong & Druckman, 2007). However, the consequence of messages on the people often has resulted produced results in both the 'strong effects' and 'weak effects' (Hargreaves, 2014, p.14). Social

perception and attitude may be considerably affected by the messages, but this pressure can be moderated by the consent of individuals, their style of explanation of reality and other distinctiveness of the person and their social environment. In this way any conflicting information to a story presented by the media, individuals tend to see it as real. Based on earlier research and research review the following three hypotheses are posed to verify the phenomenon in question:

- H1. Broadcast media agenda will affect the audiences' agenda.
- H2. Express News and Geo News will successfully transfer the salience into public priorities on national issues.
- H3. Media literacy & Technology will resist against media manipulations and agenda-setting.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The major theory of this research project was agenda-setting. However, keeping in mind the complementary role of other media effects theories to agenda setting effects, priming, framing and gatekeeping were utilized too. Further the study will try to find the connection between media- literacy and agenda- setting in the light of media literacy theory. McCombs (2004) of the view that, "Agenda-setting is a robust and widespread effect of mass communication, an effect that results from specific content in the mass media."

### **Methodology**

Operational Definitions:

Variables for Content Analysis: (i) Frequency of news item: The news item in bulletins and talk shows that lasted for at least 45 seconds was selected for data analysis, (ii) Slant of news item: The news item on aired will investigate favourably and unfavourably towards government, (iii) Frame of news item: To know the stories will pro or anti-government, (iv) Placement of Story: In this research study, there have been three categories in news stories, opening slot, middle slot and end slot to measure the placement for salience purpose. Survey Research About five hundred viewers of these channels located in capital city Islamabad were approached separately. Though, this survey was limited to capital city but it is represented the audiences' television viewing practices of whole country.

**Operational Definitions:**

Variables for Survey Ranking order: An ordinal scale will be designed to examine salience of news by extending a list to viewers to assign a rank order.

(i) Opinion Building: Valance for particular news story will examine through survey questions, (ii) Discussions with Family & Friends: To check viewer’s interpersonal communication channels will be investigated for issue salience.

**Data Collection**

The data on news stories were downloaded for one year to gauge media agenda. Bulletins and news shows were the two separate samples. For correlation purposes, method of counting news stories was selected. Two News shows “Aaj Kamran Khan Kay Saath” of Geo and “Kal Tak” by Express News were chosen. A questionnaire was delivered to have responses in an interview like situation to measure the public agenda.

**Findings and Analysis**

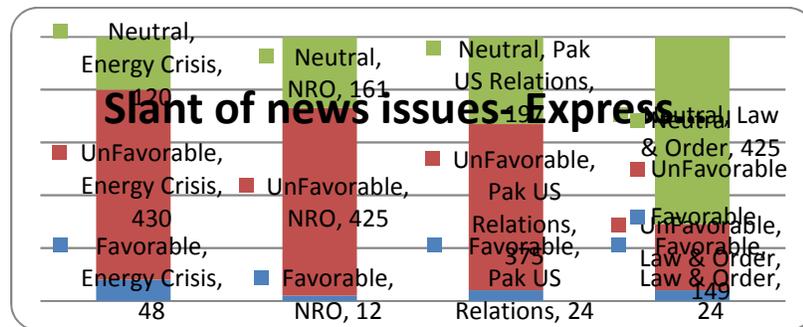


Figure 1: *Slant of News Issues by Express News*

Law and order got maximum coverage of four issues in both channels. The second most covered issue was Pak-US relations. Energy Crises was placed at number three while fourth issue at Geo and Express was NRO. It is explored that almost equal coverage of all the four issues on both the channels. Regarding slants, figures 1 and 2 illustrate both Express and Geo News were broadcast a huge number of news issues

covered unfavourably. The public opinion has become more hostile and unfavourable towards USA in the strenuous context of marine action against Chief of Al-Qaida on May 2nd 2011. Pak-US relations cited above, got 54% unfavourable slant at Geo News. Express News has also remained more critical by putting 63% unfavourably. The issue load shedding of electricity has been terrible and vulnerable with every passing day.

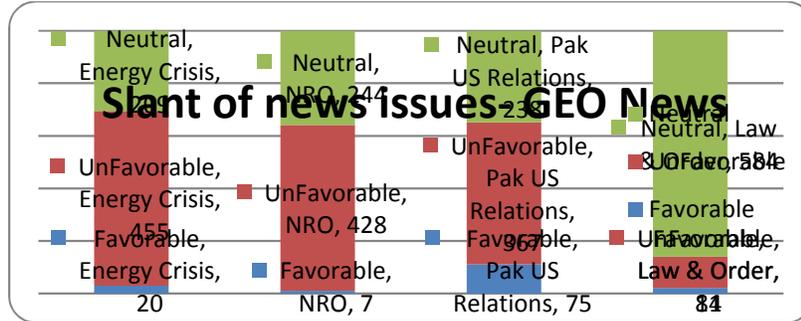


Figure 2: Slant of News Issues by Geo News

Geo has given 67% stories unfavourably while Express News gave major share by giving 72% coverage unfavourably to energy crises. Express News has extended 7% unfavourable slant while Geo News gave 63% news stories unfavourably on NRO. Law and order has been regarded as most covered topic since the war on terror started in the country. Coming to the neutrality, it was observed that the channel was remained neutral while Express News was unfavourable in their presentations.

Table 1

*Framing of Issues*

Issue	Express News		Geo News	
	Pro-govt.	Anti-govt.	Pro-govt.	Anti-govt.
Energy Crisis	20%	75%	15%	81%
NRO	17%	80%	2%	84%
Pak US relations	20%	78%	18%	73%
Law & Order	3%	27%	3%	16%

### **Framing of the Issues**

As shown in the above Table frames of news items were also examined for pro and anti- government stands. The frames those have used for government are regarded as the same for Pak- US relations. The coverage news issues by both channels show a very apparent line of anti-government. The Express gave 78% while Geo News gave 73% in an anti-government frames to of Pak-US relations respectively. Both Express and Geo telecast 81% and 75% respectively in an anti-government tone and frame on energy crisis. Geo News has given anti-government frame (84%) to NRO while Express News was also close to Geo News as it framed 80% news stories in the same lines as shown above. On the same pattern, the issue of law and order have been remained in an anti-government frame on both the channels. As for as placement of the news issues are concerned it has been noticed that Express News positioned 91% stories on Pakistan-US relations in opening stories of news programs. Geo News managed the same issue all-around by remaining even handed in its three slots. Further it tells that Express and Geo News placed 50% of their stories on energy crisis in the middle slots in bulletins and news shows. The issue of law- n -order was remained in the opening slots of both the channels.

### **Discussions of News Stories by Viewers**

Audiences of both the news outlets were remained consistent in their interpersonal communication discourses in all the four issues of the study. Outlook of the outcomes generally gives light to these issues as a positive relationship between the media effects and communication habits of interpersonal discourses of the viewers. Majority of the audiences of both the media outlets discussed energy crises and law-n-order very frequently. It has established from results drawn interpersonal communication activities have their impact to reinforce and exert the media's agenda. Audiences receive new information, show their interest, become the carriers consciously and sometimes unconsciously and forward the information.

Table 2  
*Relationship between Express News and Geo News*

Correlation Measurement		
Issue	Express News	Geo News
Law and Order	>.90	>.92
Pak-US Relations	>.78	>.86
Energy Crises	>.75	>.67
NRO	>.67	>.70

Table above shows perfect correlation >.86 on Pakistan-US relations has been calculated on Pak- US relations. There has strong relationship been investigated in terms of salience on the issue by respective media and priorities given by the audiences. Viewers of Geo News have diagnosed a well observed correspondence between news exposure of Energy Crises and ranking given by the viewers. A significant correlation of >.67 was observed. As evident in above Table 2, there was a perfect association of >.70 examined on National Reconciliation Ordinance. As shown above a perfect correlation >.92 is calculated on law and order. Again a perfect correlation >.78 on the issue was examined between audiences of the channel and coverage by the channel. A major correlations >.75 has been calculated between coverage and rankings allotted by audiences of Express on the issue of Energy Crises. As indicates in labove table, a perfect correlation >.90 was explored between coverage and viewers' priority on Express News. A significant correlation >.67 is discovered between coverage of national reconciliation ordinance and priority of viewers to the issue.

## Discussion

The core objectives of the research study were to measure the relationship between coverage of news stories by media and rank order of the news issues by the audiences of the two leading news channels: The Express and Geo. Four independent variables slant, frame, placement and frequency were key methods to explore media-agenda through content deliberations. On the other hand, a survey was designed to get the priorities of the viewers to inquire the public agenda through putting four factors like ranking, discussion, standpoint and opinion on these issues. Two research hypotheses were set to inquire the queries of

the study. The study has further discussed and explored the role and impact of media technologies on the part of media channels while audiences' level of awareness and understanding on the issues will be analyzed in the light of media literacy and media education. Since the initiation of war-on-terror in South East Asian region and especially in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the people have been experiencing some obtrusive issues. Pak-US relations and its consequences of war-on-terror are affecting the people indirectly due to the stance and policies and measures taken against war on terror. To cover law and order for media has ever been a hard area to deal with; therefore, common citizen's life is at stake and danger due to ongoing activities of extremists in the country.

Due to prevailing situation in the country, the economy gets its worse level. Law and order has been remained the most telecast issue on both outlets during the study period of one year. There was a perfect correlation noted between audience's ranking and Geo and Express News salience explored with  $>.92$  and  $>.90$  respectively with  $p$  value  $<.001$ . Energy crisis, has been remained the second obtrusive news item and viewers were experienced it in their daily routine. People did not only depend on coverage of the issue rather they did discuss it through interpersonal and social communication channels, (Zucker,1978).

Outcomes of the study signify strong relationships between media and public- agenda on all issues on both the news channels. A significant correlation  $>.86$  on Pak-US relations was calculated on Geo News. By contrast to this  $>.78$  have been examined with  $p$  value  $<.001$  on Express News. The outcome has been verified the exertion of media salience to the public priorities on the issue by both the broadcasters. There has been a strong alignment observed between slant to reinforce the salience and the standpoint of the viewers. Slant has been remained a very central ingredient of research project in hand. Through this media teams generally strengthen their viewpoint and agenda through slanting news issues and try to transfer attributes through framing technique. This support is not a conscious effort all the time instead this depends on few other uncontrollable variables. It is noted in this study that media agenda have been successfully make mind and influenced the viewer's choices with tilting and angling to news issues. The 'news story' that is presented with slant does have some different results than that the story without slant. The same outcomes have been achieved in case of Pak-US relations. The media has remained critical and unfavourable toward policies and stance of the government in their stories. Higher correspondence in opinions of the viewers and media presentations is found in both the news channels.

Since war-on-terror a very burning issue in the mainstream world's media during the last decades, therefore, it has been extensively discussed and was remained alive in the newsrooms. Regarding viewer's interpersonal discussion on the issue, it has been explored that audiences of both channels did discuss this issue very frequently since these channels have given most coverage to this issue. In this way, there has been an alignment observed in the coverage by the channels and interpersonal discussions on topics of the study. Both media outlets telecast all four issues in anti-government frame. The channels have not been used pro- government frame in all the issues. Prominence or placement is one of the important variables in media effects models. The story that is published in the opening slots or front page will definitely get significant attention of the receivers than the story in end slots or back page. In this research designed, there have been three slots designed to evaluate the importance and prominence given by the media. Energy crises was also one of the frequently covered topic on these channels with 17% of the total coverage among four issues. On the same pattern, audiences also ranked Energy Crises as the second most important news item. A considerable relationship was found in media's coverage and public's priorities on this issue. Almost perfect  $>.75$  has been discovered on Express News. A moderate correlation  $>.67$  was found between coverage by Geo and rank order given by the audience on the issue. The channels primed the issue in opening and middle slots. Since, the issue is an obtrusive; therefore, viewers were well conscious and well experienced. Both Geo and Express News have been critical toward government and they have given 67% and 72% unfavourable slant. As a result, the viewpoint and opinion of the viewers become associated with slant of the media. Anti- government frames were used for the issue. Due to obtrusive nature, audiences did not rely only on media to have new information. The role and strength of interpersonal communication in exerting the media salience to viewers' priorities has been established. Audiences of Express and Geo News were discussed energy crises frequently.

It has been established from outcome of the study that interpersonal communication has great impact to reinforce the agenda of news media on public agenda. As evident above almost perfect correlation  $>.70$  on National reconciliation ordinance while significant correlation  $>.66$  were investigated on Geo and Express News respectively. It has been observed that both the channels gave anti-government frames to all the issues. The majority of the viewers discussed with their family and colleagues frequently and resultantly they become carriers of set desires of media to

their family members and friends, however this is not always a conscious use. The study explored that both the channels hardly covered educational and health issues of the country. They more or less focused on political and soft issue. However, the results of the study showed that media technology and media literacy have some resistance effects to each other agendas.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The results of the research project on four issues show the moderate and perfect association. To determine and reinforce public agenda, these media outlets have manipulated content variables i.e. frequency and slant on the news programs. Strong correspondence between opinion of viewers and slant of news issues has been observed. There was a strong correspondence between slants allotted and opinion placed by the viewers. Research project shows that both the news outlets framed the news in an anti- government frame and they rarely chose pro-government frame. Resultantly, strong effects of the coverage can be seen in shape of public priorities. Mass media in general while technologically advanced broadcast media in particular is capable to set and effect the public opinion in a democratic and non-democratic societies.

Theoretical assumptions of this research study have been settled. The outcomes of the research project have significantly supported H1; broadcasters will convert media into public agenda on obtrusive and non-obtrusive issues. H2; Express and Geo News will be successfully capable to exert salience for public priorities on Pak-US relations, energy crises, and national reconciliation ordinance and law- n- order. Regarding H3 media literacy & technology will resist against media manipulations and agenda-setting, it has been clearly matched with the outcomes of the study that media education and media technology has its deeper impact on the understanding and insight on the issue in every field.

There is a dire need of media education in the country for better and useful contributions at school and college level. Media literacy has been one of very hot topics in developed and developing countries in recent decades for efficient political and democratic role of the citizens. Through media education the people will be in a better position to read and understand the hidden agenda and priorities of the media and can be able to filter the news which is irrelevant or manipulated. Social media

could be used to get the education and media on the same page for getting deeper insights on the issues confronting the society instead wasting energies and resources for only to safeguard the interests of the upper and influential class.

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