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Article:	Coverage of Protest Stories in Tweets of International News Agencies: A comparative Analysis on Kashmir and Hong Kong Protests
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Abstract

In April 2019 Hong Kong government introduced an extradition bill that would allow extraditions to mainland China. The introduction of the extradition bill resulted in an eruption of mass level peaceful protests across Hong Kong, which turned out to be more violent later on. On the other side, the protests in Kashmir erupted out after the Modi led Indian government revoked the special autonomous status of Kashmir on the 5th of August, 2019. A sudden and momentous decision to eliminate article 370 enrage the Kashmiri people being deprived of their rights resulting in massive protest across the valley. In the context of modern information and communication systems, the present study is designed to examine the protest paradigm in the international news coverage of Kashmir and Hong Kong's recent protests in tweets of international news agencies. Theoretically, the study takes roots from protest paradigm and international news flow. Methodologically, we employed content analysis method. Firstly, content analysis of purposively selected tweets of four international news agencies, AFP, AP, Reuters, and Xinhua, was performed. Secondly, we used visualization technique to examine the framing of international protests by employing news framing, and protest paradigm. Findings reveal that Protest paradigm is supported in context of international disputes due to the vested interests of global powers as well as the dominated agenda of international news agencies.

Keywords: International News Flow, Protest Paradigm, Information Sources, International Disputes, News Tweets

Introduction

Despite certain similarities among the regions of Hong Kong and Kashmir, there are some striking differences regarding social and demographic settings of both the areas. The region of Hong Kong, after serving as a British colony for more than 150 years, was handed over to China in 1997 under condition to ensure its autonomy except in external affairs and defense under the "one country two system" arrangements. In April 2019 Hong Kong government introduced the extradition bill that would allow extraditions to mainland China. The introduction of the extradition bill resulted in an eruption of mass level peaceful protests across Hong Kong, which turned out to be more violent later on.

Kashmir, on the other hand, was a princely state at the time of independence of the subcontinent in 1947. The freedom of the subcontinent from British rule led to the emergence of two nation-states i.e., India & Pakistan. The Kashmir was a princely state, and the British government was clear in its mind that all the native sovereign states should merge with either India or Pakistan. The state of Kashmir is geographically contiguous with both India and Pakistan, and more than 70 percent of the population was Muslims while the ruler was Hindu who signed the instrument to accession with India under guarantee to maintain the autonomy of the region which was later on added to the Indian constitution as Article 370.

On the 5th of August, the Modi led Indian government revoked the special status of Kashmir, and since then, the state is in lockdown. A sudden and momentous decision to revoke article 370 enrage the Kashmiri people being deprived of their rights. India imposed curfew in Kashmir and all the prominent politicians, lawyers, doctors, and journalists put under arrest with complete communication blackout. Two former chief ministers of J&K i.e., Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti, were also placed under house arrest ahead ([Srivastava, 2019](#)). India has deployed tens of thousands of troops across the Kashmir valley in anticipation of a backlash of the revoke. Indian authorities banned public movements, shut down schools and colleges indefinitely. Under this critical situation, the Kashmiris started state-wide protests against Indian oppression to regain autonomy for their homeland.

Framing and Protest Paradigm

The development of Framing as an analytical technique was introduced by [Goffman \(1974\)](#) a renowned social psychologists, [Entman \(1991\)](#) and [Gitlin \(1980\)](#) with the aim to elucidate the mass media's role in defining public issues. With the development of the mass communication as an independent field of study, "framing" is now considered as an established concept in the field of mass communication yet there is no universally accepted definition of the framing available. According to [Entman \(1993\)](#),

"To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described" (p. 52).

[McLeod \(2007\)](#) defines protest paradigm as a "set of news coverage patterns that typifies mainstream media coverage". This paradigm includes; framing of news, reliance on official sources and official definitions, influence on public opinion, delegitimization and demonization. To assess the difference in communication patterns across news coverage of protests by international news agencies, the protest paradigm is being employed to study the framing of protests in Kashmir and Hong Kong. [Weaver and Scacco \(2013\)](#) argued that the core of a theorized "protest paradigm," demonstrates that protests threatening the status quo tend to be marginalized in the press.

[Spyridou \(2015\)](#) conducted study on Cyprus media and found that media supports protest paradigm during Cypriot protests. The author argued that political orientations of media also affect the coverage of protests. [Papaioannou \(2015\)](#) investigated whether and how the protest paradigm was incorporated in the portrayal of the 2013 Cypriot protests in international online news media. They examined the possibility of international news media conditionally was moving away from the protest paradigm towards multi-perspective approaches, permitting a more credible discourse to emerge from social conflicts.

[Haynes \(2019\)](#) examined news coverage of racially charged protests surrounding the controversial judicial ruling regarding the death of Trayvon Martin. He found that news articles varied with respect to their coverage of the events, consistent with framing theory, and as a result revealed several dominant themes within their comment sections. [Tan \(2016\)](#) investigated the scope and applicability of the protest paradigm to Singapore's mainstream news media coverage of protests at the Speakers' Corner from 2000 to 2015. The researcher found, although protest paradigm was supported in the context of Singapore, yet overall, adherence to the protest paradigm was weak and there were indications of further weakening over time. [Kilgo and Harlow \(2019\)](#) also argues that news coverage is fundamental to a protest's viability, but research suggests media negatively portray protests and protesters that challenge the status quo (a pattern known as the protest paradigm). [Brasted \(2005\)](#) analysis of the framing of the student movement and protests of the 1968 Chicago Democratic Convention found that a protest paradigm was used to construct the stories. As a result, the dominant narrative structure was of a battle or conflict, official sources were relied on, public opinion was used, and the movement was delegitimized through various framing techniques. In previous studies, most of the work was conducted on protest paradigm within local or national media outlets. In present study we extend the effort to study and compare the protests of international disputes in the news coverage of international news agencies.

The cultural, social and geographical differences and disputes contributes towards coverage of international news ([Galtung & Vincent, 1992](#)) as the Journalists got influenced by the complex socio-political and cultural environment ([Ball-Rokeach & Cantor, 1986](#); [D. Hallin, 2005](#)). According to [D. C. Hallin and Gitlin \(1994\)](#) a journalist cannot be free from its social-political whereabouts" (p.7). The social location of journalists has significant impact on the reporting of news having different political, social, economic, and cultural settings. News organizations operates within certain political, economic and social systems which impose additional constraints on the journalists ([Cohen & Young, 1981](#); [Turow, 1997](#)) hence affects news selection and content ([Epstein, 1973](#); [Tuchman, 1978](#)).

Information Sources and International News Coverage

In his excellent work on international communication, [Chang \(1998\)](#) studied the coverage of world countries in the news of Reuters. He found that core nations are prominent in the coverage of international news agencies. However, semi-peripheral and peripheral nations have to pass through different filters, including determining events, context, internal attributes, and global interaction to become prominent in the news coverage of international news. His presented model describes the world-system position and determining events as the primary filters for international news coverage. Similarly, [Wu \(2000\)](#) found in spite of some variation, trade volume, and presence of international news agencies were found to be the two primary predictors of the amount of news coverage. In this way, we can argue that trade and economy is one of the main determinants of international news.

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While reporting international issues those sources are being considered which support a specific stance. Official sources are deemed to be credible hence considered as an important factor in news making ([Donsbach, 2004](#); [Dunwoody, 2015](#); [Friedman, 2015](#); [Shoemaker & Reese, 1996](#)). [Iyengar and Simon \(1993\)](#) analyzed news reports on Gulf War and discovered that more than 50% of news reports originated from official sources. Reliance on official sources although seems credible yet it might result in ignoring the other side of the picture as [Kothari \(2010\)](#) concluded that dependency on officials sources for news and information might resulted in endorsement of their stance and hence ignoring other viewpoints.

In the arena of international communication, the selection of sources is a key contributing factor of news framing. The selection of specific news sources plays significant role in framing of an event ([Carpenter, 2007](#)). Those sources are selected which supports a specific stance as [Lee \(2004\)](#) provided empirical evidence by comparatively analyzing the New York Times, the Arab News, and the Middle East Times related to U.S war with Iraq that those sources were quoted by the US newspapers that exhibit congruence to their perspective Iraq war. According to [Gans \(1979\)](#) as quoted in [Strömbäck et al. \(2013\)](#) “while sources attempt to ‘manage’ the news, putting the best light on themselves, journalists concurrently ‘manage’ the sources in order to extract the information they want.” Sources and Journalists have binding relationship as each part needs the other one. However, at the same time, they often have conflicting interests hence develop strategies that will enable them to exercise as much control as possible over, while avoiding being controlled by, the other ([Strömbäck et al., 2013](#)).

Research Questions

RQ 1: To what extent international news agencies are covering protests in Hong Kong and Kashmir?

RQ 2: How the international news agencies are framing protests in Hong Kong and Kashmir?

RQ 3: to what extent, protest paradigm is supported in global coverage of international disputes?

Method

In the context of modern information and communication systems, the present study is designed to examine the information and communication imbalances among coverage given by the international news agencies to Kashmir and Hong Kong protests. This study examines framing similarities and differences in the tweets of the international news agencies about coverage related to Hong Kong, and Kashmir protests erupted against axing the autonomy of Hong Kong and Kashmir by China and India, respectively in 2019. By employing content analysis, we elaborated the significant issues and differences discussed in connection with the protests. We selected 537 news tweets of international news agencies from January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019. Tweets were selected from the official twitter accounts of AP, AFP, Reuters and Xinhua. AP is an American based news agency, AFP is France based, Reuters is British and Xinhua is China based international news agency. These news agencies have global impact in defining the structures of international news on twitter ([Saeed & Hassan, 2020](#)). We selected only English language tweets from these accounts mentioning the Kashmir or Hong Kong during selected time period.

Coding Procedures

We collected tweets from the API of Twitter during Feb, 2020. We used the conceptual framework of [Brasted \(2005\)](#) for developing coding categories. We developed following categories to code the content of news tweets.

Battle or Conflict frame

This theme was coded when the conflict situation was reported in the content. Conflict between security agencies or government machinery and the protesters. If a story build the narrative that protestors are the rivals of government and they are making violence, creating civil unrest, disrupting peace, and security forces are trying them to control and maintain law and order then the story was coded into this theme.

Public Opinion

It was coded in news tweets, when the content of the news reflects the interests, versions, narratives or stance of the protestors. It reflects the narrative opposite to the government.

Status Quo

If news tweet content reflects the official spokespersons of Government, politicians of Government, narrative and stance of the Government then it was coded in this theme.

Official Sources

We coded the sources of information which were used in news tweets. If the source is governmental organization, or public office holders then it was coded as official sources.

Journalistic Sources

Other than state or governmental sources, if the information is attributed to the independent sources, protestors, international organizations reports, international politicians' statements, then it was coded into journalistic sources.

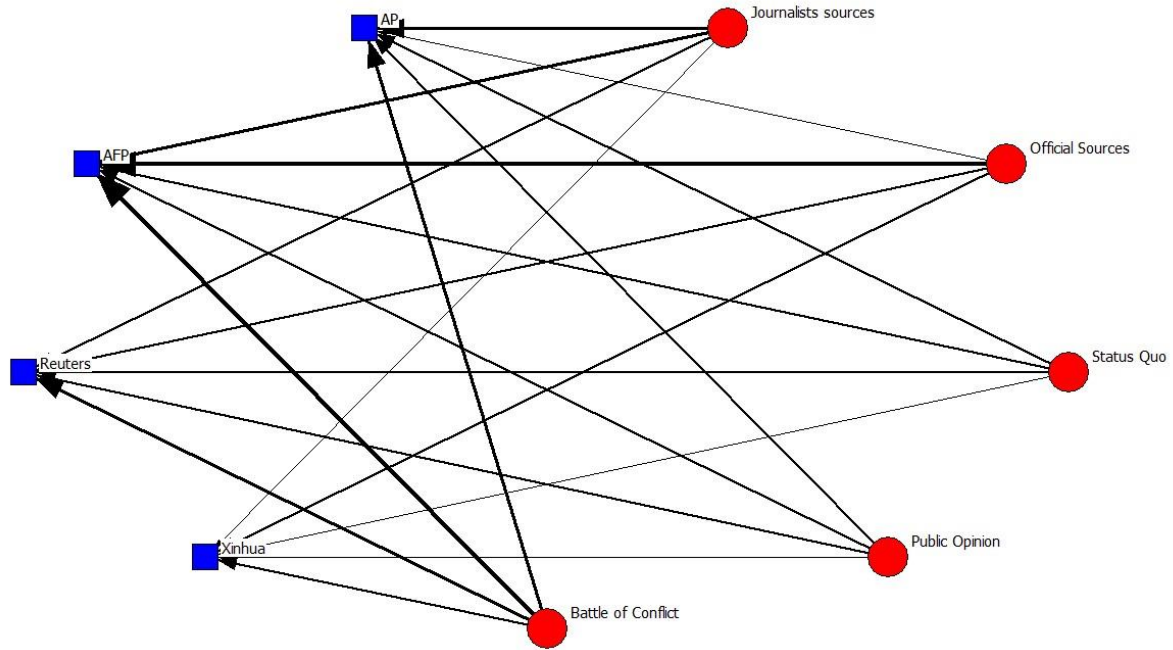
Findings

Table 1: Framing of Kashmir Protest in Tweets of International News Agencies (N=209)

	AP (N=53)	AFP (N=89)	Reuters (N=46)	Xinhua (N=21)
Battle of Conflict	26	36	26	8
Public Opinion	10	16	10	1
Status Quo	14	10	16	4
Official Sources	4	40	8	12
Journalists sources	24	22	16	1

Table 1 and Figure 1 indicate that AFP, AP and Reuters use most of the time battle frame to cover Kashmir protest. AFP gave more coverage to Kashmir conflict as compare to other three news agencies. Xinhua covers less and comparatively different from other three news agencies. Reuters prominent frame of Status quo in coverage of Kashmir conflict. On the other side, AFP used official sources to cover Kashmir conflict. Xinhua also cover Kashmir with official sources. AP cover Kashmir with journalistic sources.

Figure 1: Framing of Kashmir Protest in Tweets of International News Agencies (N=209)



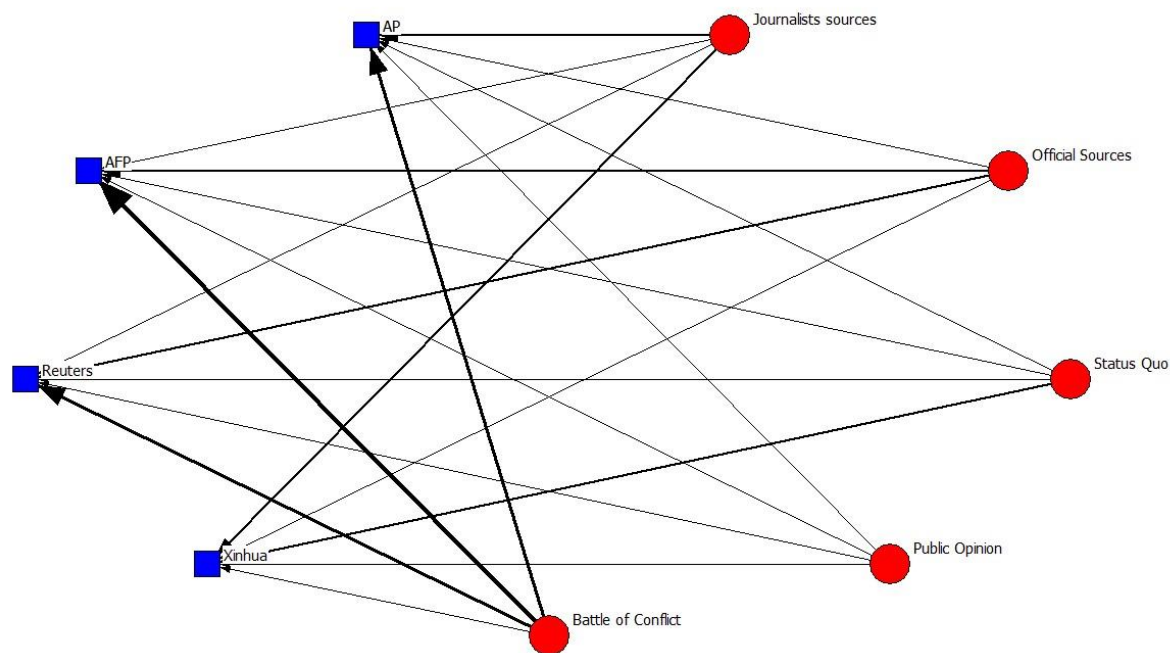
Note: Thickness of lines shows the linkage between news agencies and frames of Kashmir Coverage.

Table 2: Framing of Hong Kong Protest in Tweets of International News Agencies (N=528)

	AP (N=122)	AFP (N=178)	Reuters (N=134)	Xinhua (N=94)
Battle of Conflict	80	145	105	25
Public Opinion	5	20	10	10
Status Quo	2	2	3	35
Official Sources	25	50	51	15
Journalists sources	50	25	25	65

Table 2 and Figure 2 indicate that AFP, AP and Reuters use most of the time battle frame to cover Hong Kong protests. AFP gave more coverage to Hong Kong conflict as compare to other three news agencies. Xinhua covers less and comparatively different from other three news agencies. Reuters prominent frame of Status quo in coverage of Hong Kong conflict. Moreover, AFP and Reuters mostly used official sources to cover Hong Kong conflict. On the other hand, Xinhua and AP cover Hong Kong with journalistic sources.

Figure 2: Framing of Hong Kong Protests in Tweets of International News Agencies (N=528)



Note: Thickness of lines shows the linkage between news agencies and frames of Hong Kong Coverage.

Conclusion

Findings 1:

Hong Kong protests are covered more as compare to Kashmir protests. AFP covers Kashmir and Hong Kong protests more than other three news agencies.

Finding 2:

In the coverage of Kashmir, official sources and Battle or Conflict frame is more focused by international news agencies. On the other hand, in the coverage of Hong Kong, Battle or Conflict is the most dominant frame.

Finding 3:

Protest paradigm is supported in the coverage of both; Kashmir and Hong Kong protests. However, Xinhua coverage of Hong Kong reflects mixed perspective. It considers the protest as conflict or violence but also it gave representation to independent journalistic sources.

The coverage of international issues in international media has a crucial role in defining the world's economic and strategic relations. Therefore, it is essential to study the information flow and communication imbalances among the nations in the international news. In this study, we investigated the global news flow and communication imbalances regarding coverage of protests in Kashmir and Hong Kong in international news agencies. The Kashmir crisis is far more critical than Hong Kong in terms of human rights violation and humanitarian crisis where Indian government deployed more than 7 lac military troops to suppress 8 million population of Kashmir. The analysis of the collected data reveals that there is quantitatively more coverage has been given to Hong Kong as compared to Kashmir.

Hong Kong's protests are directly associated with China, and international media is considering these protests in terms of China's internal political setup while in Kashmir, the movement of Kashmiris is not given that kind of coverage. It has been observed that digital platforms also have same news flow patterns of traditional media. Traditional world hierarchies are being considered while dissemination of international news. So we may conclude that social media is not contributing towards or not as effective as assumed in changing the structures and patterns of international news distribution.

Interestingly, we found that followers of the international news agencies on twitter are also disseminating inequality and imbalances among the developed and under developed

countries. Here is this case, we found that despite of human right violation and subjugation of basic human rights, the coverage given to Kashmir is far low than Hong Kong as observed by [Semetko and Valkenburg \(2000\)](#) who analyzed more than 4,000 Dutch national television news stories and founded that the economic consequences and conflict frames were abundant while presenting economic and political stories. Moreover the findings revealed that in terms of international news flow the issues related to those countries got more coverage which has prominent standing in terms of economy, international politics, trade volume, political ideology and international relations in international arena as suggested by [Hall and King \(2005\)](#).

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