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Article:	Conflict, Media, and Peace Journalism in Pakistan
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ABSTRACT

The news media performs a dual purpose during times of conflict. The conflict is either escalating or de-escalating. This study employs a quantitative content analysis technique to analyze into how Pakistani media cover the conflict between the PDM and the PTI government, alongside the similarities and contrasts in how the conflict is covered in two popular English-language Pakistani newspapers. The duration of the research was one month, from 16 October 2020 to 15 November 2021. The findings of this study revealed that the PDM conflict was primarily discussed in escalatory terms in Pakistani print media. Moreover, the media disseminated false or misleading information about certain government and political candidates, inciting outrage among their supporters, and the conflict is depicted from a political standpoint. It also encouraged hate speech to be spread on its platforms, escalating the conflict. These findings support prior research that found a significant prevalence of conflict escalatory indicators in Pakistani news outlets. Hence, the coverage of the Nation was conflict escalation-oriented reporting, while Dawn's coverage was de-escalation-oriented.

Keywords: Conflict escalation, Conflict de-escalating, Peace Journalism, Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), quantitative content analysis

Introduction:

In times of conflict, the news media serves a dual purpose. It's either escalating or de-escalating the conflict. Conflict representation patterns can be better understood by analyzing the implicit and explicit content of conflict news. Pakistan's history has been marked with a number of security and political conflict that have gotten worse over time. While there is widespread worry about these violent confrontations at home and abroad, the Pakistani media thrives on them. Many mass communication researchers argue that individuals become more dependent on the media during times of war, resulting in greater media effects on audiences (Iqbal & Hussain, 2017).

In the modern political system, during wars and conflicts, conventional media becomes nationalistic, propagandistic, escalatory, and elite-oriented (Hussain & Inamullah, 2020). Moreover, the vast amount of literature on the media-conflict nexus has substantially aided in identifying a wide range of elements such as strategic goals, patriotism, and elite discourse supremacy, which causes the media to become instruments of war rather than reporting conflicts objectively (Allan and Zelizer, 2004; Galtung, 2006).

In recent decades, Peace journalism has begun to establish as an analytically viable paradigm to conflict journalism. However, peace journalism scholarship is strongly westernized, according to a few studies conducted in Asian settings (Lee & Maslog, 2005; Hussain, 2017). In addition, present conflict communication research in Pakistan and outside falls short of illuminating the intricate dynamic that constitutes the war-media the junction and proposing peace-oriented media solutions (Mitra, 2016; Blasi, 2004).

Mass communication scholars feel that people become more reliant on the media during times of war, resulting in higher media effects on audiences. This study primarily intends to investigate how leading newspapers in Pakistan report on the conflict between the Pakistan Democratic Movement and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government through the perspective of peace journalism.

It is necessary to provide a brief overview of the conflict before analyzing the existing research. Therefore, this study tries to emphasize the main stakeholders and their concerns.

Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM)

In September of 2020, 11 political parties in Pakistan came together to form the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM). In three significant cities, it has organized major protests (FP, 2020). However, it does have 11 political parties, essentially covering the whole political spectrum in Pakistan. It has united Nawaz Sharif's exiled Pakistan Muslim League (PML), now led by his daughter Maryam, and Bilawal Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) (Saran, 2020).

A Discourse on the conflicts, media, and Peacejournalism

Conflicts are inherent and unavoidable when humans interact, according to Lynch and McGoldrick (2005). Galtung (2002) believes that understanding how disputes are handled is vital because both violent and peaceful methods are used. Securitization theory is new to media studies, but it's also new to security studies. In the sphere of securitization, media, according to Dolinec (2010), operate as mediators of communication because the media plays such an essential role in defining public discourse, especially in the case of securitization, the security discourse, by deciding which speech act will be represented for the audience.

Similarly, in three US newspapers, Vultee (2010) explored the portrayal of the "war on terrorism" to show how a securitization frame can be invoked or contested and how it evolves. Finally, in a study of the American press, Elison & O'Reilly (2008) contends that the Iraq War was an example of securitization.

Through the lens of securitization, Allawi and Aliyev (2018) examined media coverage of terror events in the United States, France, Germany, Belgium, Uganda, Kenya, Somalia, and the United Kingdom. Researchers discovered evidence for the prevalence of securitization frames in media coverage and the possibility that the media may play a crucial part in the securitization process, making it an effective instrument, as in other studies.

Lynch (2005) discovered that war journalism dominated coverage of the Iranian nuclear problem in the UK news media. Usually, western newswires (Reuters, AP, AFP) are dominated by war frames (Fahmy, 2009). Still, strangely, when covering the Sri Lankan civil war, pictures with peace frames were also present in the reporting.

Kempf (2007) studied conflict coverage and developed conflict escalation and de-escalation models. He argued that the media play an essential part in the social formation of reality and are prone to escalation or de-escalation. However, as the original war/peace journalism framework was developed primarily in Western contexts, it ignores aspects of journalistic traditions in non-westernized environments. As a result, Iqbal and Hussain (2017) modified the Galtung model to make it more suitable for Asian settings.

The media, according to peace scholars (Lynch and McGoldrick, 2005; Ottosen, 2008), can play a significant role in society by detecting structural and cultural forms of violence and encouraging critical opinion that values equality, freedom, and peace.

Over the years, the peace journalism approach has drawn a lot of criticism. It received criticism for its advocacy (Hanitzsch, 2004) as well as for ignoring journalistic norms (Lyon, 2007). Most of these difficulties have been addressed by peace journalism experts in recent works, and there is no international agreement among opponents and advocates of this method (Lynch, McGoldrick and Heathers 2015, Tenenboim- Weinblatt, Hanitzsch & Nagar, 2015; Hoxha and Hanitzsch, 2018).

Developing, revising, alongside inventing effective conflict resolution solutions is essential for international peace and security in today's globalized society, in which conflicts and wars in one region of the world impact the rest of the globe. We must seek out mediation techniques and procedures that can assist us in gaining a deeper comprehension of the problem and thereby minimizing its impact (Shiner, 2007). How media can be utilized to prevent and deescalate conflict is the focus of media and peace research (Luostarinen, 2002).

According to media scholars (Galtung & Ruge, 1973; Allen & Seaton, 1999; Lee & Maslog, 2005) in war coverage, conflict is considered a news value. This treatment forces sensationalist and commercial reportage. Many journalists regard sensationalism and commercialism to be contradictory to journalistic professionalism and quality. These shifts, particularly in journalistic coverage of violent events like conflicts and insurgencies, prompted experts in communication to suggest the theories of war/peace journalism (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Lynch & McGoldrick, 1997; Galtung, 1998).

According to Galtung (1998), mainstream media coverage of war presents the conflict as if it were a competition between two opposing sides, with a clear victor and loser. On the other hand, peace journalism could shift focus away from a win-lose scenario. It would look

into making the problem affect more than just two people, as well as possible solutions to the problem.

Likewise, Peace journalism Rather than the conflict and violence of war on the surface, Focusing on the attitudes, behaviours, and contradictions that contribute to conflict, as well as the underlying structural and cultural violence, is the main focus of this approach (Hackett, 2007). Consequently, according to Lynch and McGoldrick (2005), reporters and editors in peace journalism provide readers with the opportunity to contemplate nonviolent conflict resolution. In addition, they considered that "news is about change" and that journalists who understand conflict terms will be more equipped to report on conflict issues and will learn to view conflicts in a more positive light.

According to Kempf (2002), journalists' proclivity for violence as a measure of escalation, their coverage of conflicts in a win-lose paradigm, and their access to elite sources could drive news organizations to use their reporting to fuel conflict escalation. He also suggested "de-escalation-oriented conflict reportage" as an interim stage in the transition away from propaganda and toward peace journalism. With de-escalation-oriented reporting, journalists would ignore simplistic good-vs-evil type dichotomies in the news.

Thiel and Kempf (2014) analyzed how German readers would react to escalation or de-escalation-oriented framing by presenting them with articles about a Palestinian suicide bomb attack or an Israeli military operation, and discovered a media bias toward escalation.

In light of this discussion over the role of the media in conflicts, researchers have tended to focus on international conflicts while overlooking the reporting of national conflicts. As a result, the purpose of this research is to analyze the reporting of a national conflict, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM).

Using peace journalism as a theoretical framework, this study is primarily intended to examine how leading newspapers in Pakistan report on the PDM conflict in terms of being escalatory or de-escalatory. The main objective of this research is to analyze how the conflicts are reported and which themes are emphasized.

Theoretical Framework

By conducting a media analysis through the lenses of Peace Journalism and applying peace journalism as a theoretical framework, this study is primarily designed to analyze how leading newspapers in Pakistan report on conflicts

Escalation and de-escalation are two of the most important stages of a conflict that are commonly divided into stages, usually on a curve, to get a theoretical understanding of it. According to Pruitt (2001) when the parties to a conflict start using increasingly aggressive argumentative methods, the conflict escalates (Pruitt, 2001). He went on to say that escalation may be defined as one party's reactions triggered by another's repeated displeasure.

Escalation is focused on aggressive behaviour reciprocity, which means that if one actor acts aggressively, the other will reciprocates. While escalation refers to the conflict parties' adoption of more severe measures, de-escalation refers to the stage where tensions are reduced. De-escalation, according to Kriesberg (1987), is a multidimensional phenomena that reduces the severity of a conflict in one or more dimensions. It could also be a lessening in the scope of the conflict, including a reduction in the number of conflict participants, as well as a general shift toward a resolution. Because journalists have easy access to the conflict site, they can undertake background study on the conflict, the actors' driving factors, and the decision-making

process. Both the escalation and de-escalation procedures can benefit from them. This depicts the face of peace journalism, which emphasizes democracy and participation (Carruthers, 2000; Dor, 2001; Peleg, 2007).

Research Questions

In light of the relevant existing literature, the study's primary research question is as outlined below:

RQ1: How did the *Dawn* and *The Nation* Newspapers report the PDM conflict?

Research Methodology

This study employs quantitative content analysis to examine how Pakistani media portray the conflict between the PDM and PTI governments. Using the model of conflict escalation and de-escalation, the researchers conducted a content analysis of the country's two most prominent English-language newspapers (Dawn and Nation). The duration of the research was one month, from 16 October 2020 to 15 November 2021. The period was significant because the PDM staged its first anti-government demonstration; after that, the movement reached its zenith and media coverage increased. To understand the frequency of conflict escalation and de-escalation in The Nation and Dawn's coverage, this study uses a content analysis technique. According to Lynch (2014) and Youngblood (2012), content analysis is the most commonly used approach for assessing content characteristics in peace journalism research. In mass communication research, the content analysis attempts to establish who says what to whom, how, and with what effect (Lasswell, 1971; Stempel, 2003).

The study used the entire news story as a unit of analysis. To obtain a sample from the study's universe, a systematic sampling technique was used. To analyze the data, a total of 53 news stories from both newspapers were selected.

The Model of Conflict Escalation and De-Escalation (*shabbir & Haseeb, 2015*)

Conflict Escalating Reporting	Conflict De-Escalating Reporting
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Politicization 2. Securitization 3. Otherization 4. Incompatibility 5. Sensationalism 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. De-politicization 2. Humanization 3. We'ness 4. Compatibility 5. Responsibility

Findings and Discussion

The research question for this study was formulated to analyze how both newspapers covered indicators of conflict escalation and de-escalation in order to see if their coverage over the chosen time period was escalation or de-escalation oriented. The findings in the table below have provided the answer to the question.

Table 1: Comparison of *Dawn* and *the Nation* in terms of conflict escalation indicators

Dawn Conflict Escalation		The Nation Conflict Escalation	
	Freq.		Freq.
Politicization	10	Politicization	16
Securitization	7	Securitization	10
Otherization	9	Otherization	16
Incompatibility	10	Incompatibility	15
Sensationalism	11	Sensationalism	17
Total	47	Total	74

Table 2: Comparison of *Dawn* and *the Nation* in terms of de-escalation indicators

The Nation Conflict De-Escalation		Dawn Conflict De-Escalation	
De-politicization	7	De-politicization	5
Humanization	6	Humanization	4
We'ness	6	We'ness	4
Compatibility	6	Compatibility	5
Responsibility	10	Responsibility	6
Total	35	Total	24

The researcher analyzed the coverage of Pakistan's democratic movement in the Nation and Dawn newspapers for a period of one month. To operationalize the categories, the data was gathered using a conflict escalation and de-escalation approach. The main findings, which address the core research topic, are presented below. The current study examines the quantitative characteristics of escalation and de-escalation in news stories published in two popular English-language Pakistani newspapers.

As indicated in the tables above, Pakistani print media mainly focused on the PDM conflict in escalatory terms. These findings support prior research that found a significant prevalence of conflict escalatory indicators in Pakistani news outlets.

Sensationalism was the most prevalent conflict escalation oriented indicator in the coverage with the frequency of 17 in *the Nation* and 11 in *Dawn*. Reporting was dramatized and sensationalized, with emphasis on drama and furious outbursts. The key discourses in which the opposing group is criticized and challenged are the arguments and counter-arguments of PDM leaders and government officials. The future was anticipated to be more violent and dismal, and peace approaches seemed impossible.

Moreover, the Pakistani media primarily portrays the PDM conflict as a politicized issue. Hence politicization was the second most prevalent conflict escalation indicator in the coverage with a frequency of 16 in *the Nation* and 10 in *Dawn*. This type of story demonized the government officials as a fringe group incapable of advancing Pakistan's development. Ethnic and sectarian affiliations are politicized, ordinary people are barely mentioned, and political squabbling is emphasized.

Incompatibility was another most common indicator in coverage of both the newspapers, with a frequency of 15 in *the Nation* and 9 in *Dawn*. The opposition sides reflect conflicting interests, each determined to triumph over the other. Where a zero-sum mentality dominates, the opposing parties represent starkly opposed ideals. According to Galtung (1986), this type of reporting simply generates trauma in the audience. This dependence excluded ordinary people who were affected, as well as alternate perspectives from the other side, resulting in one-sided.

Furthermore, the media's focus has shifted to the rising conflicting political landscape, where the only news seems to be political remarks and controversies. The newspapers were always quick to point the finger at others, producing chaos, while political parties' vested interests were ignored. This means that the media typically reports on conflicts from a single point of view. Finally, the conflict is depicted from a political standpoint, with political opponents stated as having competing interests and no possibility of reaching an agreement with other key perspectives that receive less attention.

Responsibility was the most common conflict de-escalating reporting indicator with the frequency of 10 in *Dawn* and 6 in *the Nation* newspaper. Instead of emphasizing the conflict's visible effects, *Dawn's* reporters felt a responsibility to society, and to some extent, the outcomes of unfolding conflicts were predicted, damage to Pakistan was described and re-described, caution was advised, and reporting was free of sensationalism. The benefits and drawbacks of conflict were discussed, as well as possibilities for peace. The conflict's contexts, origins, and core reasons are described, along with suggestions for a peaceful resolution.

Similarly, another significant indicator of conflict de-escalation reporting was de-politicization, which concentrated on non-political components of the dispute between the PDM and the PTI administration, avoiding associations like politics, ethnicity, religion, and other factors. Conflicts' social, cultural, and economic repercussions were underlined. Politicians' created walls between opposing camps were evaluated, politicians' ambitions and interests were exposed, and political manipulations and conspiracies were portrayed in non-political and less dramatic tones. The importance of using peaceful measures to resolve the problem was emphasized.

Hence, the analysis of this study revealed that the coverage of *the Nation* was conflict escalation-oriented reporting with a total frequency of 74 while *Dawn's* coverage was conflict de-escalation-oriented reporting with the frequency of 35 of its contents falling in that

category. Comparatively, *Dawn* provided the least amount of conflict escalation reporting.

Conclusion

This study examined how the PDM conflict was covered in Pakistan's two most widely circulated newspapers to see if the reporting was escalatory or de-escalatory. For this, a one-month content analysis of the conflict was conducted. The findings of this study revealed that while covering this conflict, the two newspapers primarily used a conflict-escalatory approach. These findings are not astonishing, given the abundance of examples in the literature where traditional media has primarily focused on conflict escalation. Gadi Wolsfeld sums up this Conflict and Peace Journalism debate of the media's predilection towards conflicts by stating that war tales are good news stories, whereas peace stories seldom qualify as news stories in today's commercial media.

Notably, however, other researchers have observed conflict de-escalation patterns in conflict reporting, notably in Asian settings. Significantly, if there is elite dissension and journalistic judgments lean toward the peaceful resolution of issues to ensure national harmony, De-escalatory expressions are more likely to be used to characterize a conflict. According to the literature on framing studies, when reporting on a subject, the media usually assumes a specific perspective.

Hence, the findings on the role of the media in the escalation and de-escalation of PDM in Pakistan demonstrate that the media escalated the conflict through its reporting. The media spread incorrect or misleading information about certain government and political candidates, causing their supporters to become enraged. It also encouraged the dissemination of hate speech on its platforms, exacerbating the confrontation. Depending on how it reports on issues that can provoke violence, it has the capacity to escalate or de-escalate the conflict (Awobamise, Jarrar & Owade, 2020).

The implication for academia and policymaking is that the media in Pakistan must recognize their power and recognize that they have a responsibility to their audiences and country to ensure that they report sensitive matters more responsibly. Future studies should investigate how other factors, such as demographics, socioeconomics, and government meddling, might lessen the impact of the media on conflict.

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