

Escalation in Kashmir Conflict after Burhan Wani's Killing: A Comparative Study of the Coverage by Pakistani and Indian Press

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Abstract

The study aims at analyzing the conflict coverage of Kashmir in the mainstream English press of India and Pakistan and draws its theoretical support from Galtung's ideas of peace and war journalism. The main concern of the study is to test the hypothesis that war frames are given prominence over peace frames while covering the case of Burhan Wani in the Indian and Pakistani press. The coverage was analyzed through the content analysis of news stories and columns which were published on the national, international, and opinion pages of The Daily Dawn and The Daily Times of India from July 8, 2016, to Oct 8, 2016. A total of 121 stories were randomly selected from a total sample frame of 242 items for content analysis. To add a qualitative perspective to the study, in-depth interviews of 12 purposively selected Indian and Pakistani journalists who had covered Kashmir Conflict were also conducted. The statistical analysis of the content of selected dailies supports the hypothesis. Consequently, the coverage given to the Kashmir Conflict by Indian and Pakistani press contributed to escalating the conflict instead of deescalating it.

Keywords: War Journalism, Peace Journalism, Kashmir, Indian Press, The Pakistani Press

Introduction

The violent conflict brewing in the Valley of Jammu and Kashmir has repeatedly played the decisive role of defining the diplomatic relations between geographically bound traditional rivals, India and Pakistan. The magnitude of the conflict has evolved from a regional conflict to an international conflict as it enjoys the capability of drawing India and Pakistan towards a nuclear war (Nixon, 1992). The recent escalation in the conflict has been widely credited to the unnecessary use of brutal force by the India Occupational Forces in the valley.

The year 2016 witnessed an intense violent atmosphere in the valley. Shortly after the formation of Mehbooba Mufti's government in Jammu and Kashmir, a 21-year-old separatist fighter from Hizbul Mujahideen, Burhan Wani was gunned down along with his two associates by the Indian forces on July 8, 2016 (Dasgupta, 2016). Burhan Wani represented the fifth generation of resistance against the Indian policies in Jammu and Kashmir. He transformed the predictable form of protests by innovatively employing social media platforms. He also created a Twitter handle @Gazi_Burhan2 in 2012 and used it to disseminate pictures of atrocities carried out by the Indian forces (Pandit & Singh, 2016). Wani's social media outreach created a stir both in the youth of Kashmir, which makes around 60% of the valley's population and in the Indian and Pakistani press. He was referred to as the poster boy of Kashmir and had a bounty of one million rupees on his arrest (Rao, 2016). Killing of Burhan Wani had an intense impact on the Valley's political, economic and security situation in terms of demonstrations by Kashmiris and longest imposed curfew by the Indian security forces. Wani relished impressive amount of support from Kashmiris both in his life and death because of four major reasons (i) armed rebels like Wani did not target civilians; (ii) they functioned independently without seeking foreign support; (iii) they choose a moderate path through welcoming Hindu pilgrims and favoring the

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return of migrant Kashmiri Pandits to their homes; (iv) their rebelliousness had a symbolic significance for the Kashmiri population (Geelani, 2016).

Burhan Wani's death was followed by anti-Indian riots in all districts of the valley which intensified the conflict. Curfew was forced in all districts of the valley on 15th July 2016 which continued for 53 consecutive days and was lifted on 31st August but was re-imposed the next day (Khurshid, 2017). During the curfew mobile and internet services were also shut down. Clashes between protestors and Indian Occupational Forces (IOF) resulted in the death of more than 150 people, injuring more than 16000 and blinding more than 150 (Khurshid, 2016). Wani aftermath brought life for the Kashmiris to the worst brink that they had witnessed during the last two decades. Routine in the valley was severely hampered as the business, transport, and education were shut down for the longest period. Funerals of the killed Kashmiris lead to further clashes between the forces and protestors. The use of pellet guns by the security forces caused serious injuries to the protestors. The photographs of pellet ridden children and women stimulated an international reaction against the atrocities of the Indian government in Kashmir as over 1000 people sustained eye injuries ("Jammu and Kashmir: Three months, 1,000 eye injuries by pellets", 2016). According to the Standard Operating Procedure legs are targeted in acute volatile conditions but in case of rallies held in Kashmir more than 90% received injuries above the waist (Sultan, 2016).

Given the wide influence which Wani's case attracted, the study intended to analyze the coverage of Kashmir Conflict in the mainstream English press of India and Pakistan to figure out the differences in the coverage pattern along with comprehending the influence of coverage on escalating or de-escalating the intensity of the conflict.

Literature Review

A substantive amount of literature was available regarding the coverage of recent Kashmir Conflict in Indian and Pakistani media. The media coverage especially concerning press was significant because of the role which it played in both conflict escalation and de-escalation. The study drew its theoretical support from the ideas of war and peace journalism whose founding father was a Norwegian Sociologist Johan Galtung. Peace Journalism promoted reliance on subjective insights of journalists in comparison to sticking to normative ideas of objectivity (Wolfe & Johnson, 1990). It can be taken as a specialized form of socially responsible journalism which played an active part in the peace process (Hanitzsch 2004, p. 484). Peace Journalism supported the advantages of peace; downplayed religious and ethnic rifts, tried to de-escalate conflict by promoting conflict resolution (Galtung, 2004, 2002, 2000, 1998, 1986). To elaborate his view Galtung compared conventional war journalism to sports journalism in which one side has to be on the winning side and the other at the losing end. Peace Journalism, on the other hand, is much similar to health journalism in which along with the causes of ailment and dilemma of the patient, possible medications and precautionary methods are also discussed.

Galtung's classification of conflict reporting into war and peace journalism has been divided into four major types concerning peace and linguistics. War journalism relies on apparent effects of conflict, is propaganda-oriented concerning exposing others' lies and concealing ours', presents voices of the elite, and depicts victory over the enemy as the outcome of the conflict. Peace journalism, on the other hand, is expected to be peace-oriented concerning identifying conflict construction and preventing conflict, truth-oriented concerning exposing lies of all sides, people-oriented concerning covering people as peacemakers and solution-oriented concerning highlighting peace and solution initiatives (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005).

Lynch & McGoldrick presented peace journalism as a larger, more rational, and precise method of covering conflicts (Maslog et al, 2006). Peace journalism is largely dependent on reporters and editors' choices regarding selection and reporting of stories which in turn develop prospects for society to reflect on non-violent reactions to conflict. According to Lynch & McGoldrick (2005, p.5), peace journalism can be interpreted as a way of conceptual and practical apparatuses envisioned to train journalists; as reporters can become an element of conflict resolution (Siddiqua,2018).

McGoldrick and Lynch (2000) classified Galtung's ideas into 17 practices of peace journalism. The practices included a focus on presenting solutions, reporting on lasting effects, angling people in news stories, searching mutual grounds for resolution, reporting on all possible sides of the story, and using accurate language.

Agenda setting has provided great theoretical support to war and peace journalism and

effects studies. Framing which is seen as second level of agenda-setting refers to the procedure of consolidating a news story thematically and accurately to convey the main agenda of the story (Maslog et al, 2006). Entman (1993) defined framing as the selection and projection of certain aspects of the perceived reality which in turn helps in making specific causal interpretations of the reality more dominant and popular. Tankard (1991) also focused on media frames and defined them as the dominant organizing idea for content which provides a context through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion and elaboration. Frames consist of main ideas, stock phrases and different visuals to facilitate a specific analysis. It is the recurrence and prominence of the texts and images within a frame which makes the dominant interpretation more acceptable than other available options (ibid). Framing of news stories also influence audience members' perceptions of the social reality (Khan & Yousafzai, 2005).

A study based on the content analysis of 1,338 stories from 10 newspapers concluded that news stories related to India and Pakistan conflict are dominated by war framing (Khan, 2019), similarly using Galtung's theory Balochistan conflict is mostly framed in violence frames than peace frames in leading newspapers of Pakistan (Tarique & Shaheen, 2019). Therefore it is suggested that Johan Galtung's theory on peace journalism can serve as a fruitful foundation to theory-building in the field of war and peace journalism, and can critically review the scholarly debate on peace journalism (Ottosen, 2010).

A similar study found that the Indian newspaper coverage of Kashmir conflict was dominated by war frames, news stories (hard news) were published more as compared to other types of news items (Siddiqua, 2019). Media by default cover conflicts in war approaches, creating hype and focusing on the visible effects. Therefore, the potential of Galtung's PJ Model encourages and provides guidelines to use peace-oriented approaches in the coverage of conflicts. The coverage of the Kashmir conflict contained more war hysteria and spiting of hate. The hateful speeches and words of the leaders of India and Pakistan were made headlines of the stories. Peaceful narratives were less prioritized and the voices for peace were suffocated or almost ignored. Analysis and opinion writers of DAWN newspapers were more concentrated on war rather than peace narration, as their commentary regarding the Kashmir conflict contained more war orientation compare to peace (Khan, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

John Galtung's theory on Peace Journalism was employed in this study. Galtung has published various researches on the ideology of war and peace throughout 1964-1971. Originally introduced in the 1960s by Johan Galtung the theory stayed in a period of transition. Peace refers to the absence of direct and structural violence; violence refers to influence on human beings in a way that their mental and somatic realizations are below their potential realizations (Galtung, 1969). However, these concepts of peace and violence have been expanded and reformulated as a response of criticism with the new ideas of negative and positive peace (Grewal, 2003). According to Galtung (1964), positive peace is the integration of human society and in his latest work, he opines that violence breeds violence but sadly nonviolence does not breed nonviolence (Galtung, 2019). Peace is termed as a heroic quest for this millennium for survival (Webel & Galtung, 2007). Therefore, the ideology of peace journalism through conflict transformation has been proposed (Galtung, 2003).

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

- To analyze the war and peace coverage of the Kashmir Conflict in the English press of India and Pakistan with reference to the killing of Burhan Wani and the chaotic aftermath which intensified the conflict.
- To analyze the differences of war, peace, and neutral coverage in Indian and Pakistani press along with comprehending the extent to which coverage can influence the conflict escalation and de-escalation.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

The following research questions and hypothesis were designed to investigate the issue:

R.Q.1. How the case of Burhan Wani was framed by the Indian and Pakistani press?

R.Q.2. How the war and peace coverage of Indian newspapers is different from Pakistani newspapers?

R.Q.3. To what extent the press coverage of the Kashmir Conflict influenced the conflict escalation and de-escalation process?

Hypothesis 1: War Coverage of Wani’s killing is more dominant in Indian and Pakistani Press in comparison to peace and neutral coverage

Hypothesis 2: Coverage of Kashmir Conflict in the Indian press is more dominated by war frames in comparison to Pakistani press

Methodology

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods for the purpose of investigation. The Daily Dawn, a highly circulated English newspaper of Pakistan and The Daily Times of India, a highly circulated English newspaper of India was selected for analyzing the content. Research questions 1 and 2 were analyzed through quantitative method of content analysis. News stories and columns regarding Kashmir Conflict which were published on the national, international and opinion pages of The Daily Dawn and The Daily Times of India from July 8, 2016 to Oct 8, 2016 were randomly selected from a total sample frame of 242 items for the purpose of content analysis. The time period was significant because of the major developments which took place including the killing of Burhan Wani and the longest imposed curfew followed by the deteriorating human rights conditions in the valley. A total of 121 stories were selected for content analysis (N=121) of which 69 were taken from The Daily Dawn and 52 from The Times of India. A coding sheet was developed for the purpose of the content analysis which incorporated the Operationalization of War and Peace frames mentioned in Figure-01.

Among the 69 stories of Dawn, a total of 621 frames were analyzed whereas in Times of India a total of 468 frames were studied. The third research question was investigated through qualitative in-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted by purposively selecting a total of 12 Indian and Pakistani Journalists who had expertise in conflict reporting and who had also closely followed the recent wave of Kashmir conflict. A detailed questionnaire was developed for the in-depth interviews.

Based on the available literature the peace and war frames for the current study are operationalized in Figure-01.

Figure-01

Operationalization of War, Peace and Neutral Frames

Peace frames	War frames
Peace oriented: violent facts of the story are not presented as the only facts; condemns acts of violence and aggression	Violence oriented: violent features of the story are highlighted in comparison to other less violent features of the story; lacks condemnation of acts of violence and aggression
Reconciliatory language-oriented: the language of the story is not used to escalate the intensity of conflict by presenting the information in a manner which discourages racial, ethnic and national differences	Inflammatory language-oriented: the language of the story is used to escalate the intensity of conflict by presenting the information in a manner which encourages racial, ethnic and national differences
Non-victimization oriented: the story avoids the use of poignant and victimizing adjectives like devastated, defenseless, and tragic.	Victimization-oriented: the story employs poignant and victimizing words like genocide, massacre, and terrorist.
Solution-oriented: the story presents peaceful options for conflict resolution	Zero-sum oriented: the story presents stakeholders at the categorical winning or losing end
Dialogue-oriented: the story suggests a dialogue between parties with opposing interests; underlying interests of conflict actors are brought to the surface	Confrontation-oriented: the story discourages or underrates the importance of dialogue in conflict resolution; ignores or downplay underlying interests of conflict actors
Invisible effects oriented: the story focuses on invisible effects of conflict including emotional, financial and social losses of the stakeholders including effects of conflict on women and children	Visible effects oriented: the story focuses only on visible effects of conflict including killings, arrests and protests
Context-oriented: the story includes the background and context of events	Now-oriented: the story lacks discourse on context and background rather focuses only on the apparent situation
Multiple-source oriented: story also includes independent sources of information other than state	Elite-source oriented: story relies only on elite sources of information like state and military sources

and military sources of information

Other-oriented: the opinion of parties/groups with competing interest is also incorporated in the story **Us-oriented:** opinion of one party or group is presented as the only justified position in the story

Neutral Frames: Stories falling neither under war nor under peace frames were counted as neutral frames.

Results and Discussion

R.Q.1.How the case of Burhan Wani was framed by the Indian and Pakistani press?

Table 1

Distribution of Peace, War and Neutral frames in Pakistani and Indian Press

Newspapers	Peace N (%)	War N (%)	Neutral N (%)	Total N (%)
Dawn	137 (22.06%)	466 (75.04%)	18 (2.89%)	621 (100%)
Times of India	36 (7.69%)	432(92.30%)	0	468(100%)

War Coverage at 75.04% was the most frequently recorded coverage pattern in The Daily Dawn which is a highly circulated Pakistani English newspaper. War coverage was followed by patterns of peace coverage which were recorded at 22.06%. The least recorded coverage pattern in Dawn was neutral coverage which was recorded at 2.89%. The same coverage pattern was recorded in The Daily Times of India which is a highly circulated newspaper of India. War coverage was most dominant at 92.30% followed by peace coverage at 7.69%. There was no occurrence of neutral coverage in the Times of India.

Hypothesis 1: War Coverage of Wani’s killing is more dominant in Indian and Pakistani Press in comparison to peace and neutral coverage

Table 2

Cross Tabulation of Peace, War and Neutral Coverage in Pakistani and Indian Press

	Dawn N (%)	Times of India N (%)	Chi-square (df=8)	P
Peace	137 (22.06%)	36 (7.69%)	18.384	<0.05
War	466 (75.04%)	432(92.30%)	19.516	<0.05
Neutral	18(2.9%)	0	0.778	>0.05

To check the statistical differences between war coverage in Dawn and Times of India Chi-square test was conducted on the frequencies which yielded a result of 19.516 (df=8) with p<0.05 which reflects a significant difference in war coverage . The results also reflect the coverage of both Indian and Pakistani press was dominated by patterns of war coverage. Thus the null hypothesis 1 is rejected. The statistical differences between peace coverage in Dawn and Times of India yielded a chi-square result of 18.384 (df=8) with p<0.05 which reflects a significant difference in the peace coverage of the two press. However there was no significant difference in neutral coverage of the press of two countries with a chi-square result of 0.778 and p>0.05.

R.Q.2.How the war and peace coverage of Indian newspapers is different from Pakistani newspapers?

Table 3

Difference of War Coverage in Indian and Pakistani press

War Frames	Dawn	Times of India
Violence Oriented	54(11.58%)	50(11.57%)
Inflammatory language oriented	52(11.16%)	46(10.65%)
Victimization Oriented	60(12.88%)	50(11.57%)
Zero Sum Oriented	48 (10.30%)	46(10.65%)
Confrontation Oriented	48(10.30%)	48(11.11%)
Visible Effects Oriented	52 (11.15%)	46 (10.65%)
Now Oriented	38 (8.15%)	48 (11.11%)
Elite Source Oriented	52 (11.16%)	48(11.11%)
Us Oriented	62(13.30%)	50(11.57%)
Total N (%)	466 (75.04%)	432(92.30%)

Note. Chi square= 19.516; df=8; p<0.05

Descriptive results in Table 3 show that war coverage in Times of India exceeds in comparison to Dawn. The percentage of war coverage in Times of India was 92.30% whereas in Dawn it was 75.04%.

Hypothesis 2: Coverage of Kashmir Conflict in the Indian press is more dominated by war frames in comparison to Pakistani press

To check the statistical differences of war coverage between Indian and Pakistani newspapers chi-square test was conducted on the frequencies which generated a result of 19.516 (df=8) with a significance value of <0.05. The magnitude of the difference of war coverage in Indian and Pakistani newspapers was significant with Indian newspapers taking a lead in war framing of Kashmir Conflict. Thus the null hypothesis 2 stands rejected.

Table 4
Difference of peace Coverage in Indian and Pakistani press

Peace Frames	Dawn	Times of India
Peace Oriented	12 (8.76%)	2(5.56%)
Reconciliatory language oriented	14(10.22%)	6(16.67%)
Non-Victimization Oriented	6 (4.37%)	2(5.56%)
Solution Oriented	18 (13.14%)	6(16.67%)
Dialogue Oriented	27(19.71%)	4(11.11%)
Invisible Effects Oriented	14 (10.22%)	6(16.67%)
Context Oriented	28(20.44%)	4(11.11%)
Multiple Source Oriented	14(10.22%)	4(11.11%)
Other Oriented	4(2.92%)	2(5.56%)
Total N (%)	137 (22.06%)	36 (7.69%)

Note. Chi square= 18.384; df=8; $p < 0.05$

Descriptive statistics of Table 4 represent that peace coverage is more dominant in Dawn in comparison to Times of India. The statistical differences between peace coverage in Dawn and Times of India yielded a Chi-square result of 18.384 (df=8) with $p < 0.05$ which reflects a significant difference in the peace coverage of the two press.

R.Q.3. To what extent the press coverage of the Kashmir Conflict influenced the conflict escalation and de-escalation process?

The coverage of Kashmir Conflict in Indian and Pakistani press had a considerable influence on the conflict escalation process in the view of the journalists who were interviewed. Sammar Abbas, an Islamabad based journalist remarked that “Wani was hailed as a hero in Pakistani media but at the same time he was portrayed as a terrorist in the Indian media” (personal communication, Jan 27, 2018). Amber Shamsi , a Pakistan based international journalist recalled a statement from Pakistani press which stated that “On the streets, squares, walls, buildings, roads, everywhere the name Burhan Wani resonates with the sentiment of dissent against India” (personal communication Jan 28, 2018). She further stated that Indian media especially press had convicted Pakistan of fanning discontent in Kashmir whereas Pakistani media had portrayed Wani as a freedom fighter fighting for a just cause, resultantly the news coverage has contributed towards escalating the conflict.

Joti Malhotra, a Delhi based Journalist asserted that the coverage of Burhan Wani’s life and death at the hands of security forces in Kashmir is a case in point of the widely divergent coverage of the same story. Wani, in her opinion lived by the gun and died by the gun and his death raised turmoil in the valley. “Wani was misunderstood by both mainstream Indian and Pakistani press rather his portrayal as a deeply empathetic but equally misguided young man by the Kashmiri press had more logic to it”(J. Malhotra, personal communication Feb 9, 2018) . Gohar Gillani, a Srinagar based journalist said that there is a new face of resistance in Jammu and Kashmir which was supported by Burhan Wani as it is expressed through “songwriting, poetry, graffiti, drawing cartoons, films and books but it receives less focus by the mainstream press” (personal communication August 26, 2018).

The study strengthened Galtung’s (2004, 2002, 2000, 1998, 1986) classification of conflict reporting in to war and peace journalism. Results of content analysis supported the assumption that war coverage was the most highly recorded coverage pattern in both Indian and Pakistani press. Quantitative analysis further supported Lynch & McGoldrick’s (2005) explanation of war journalism with respect to revealing facts and truths related to others’ and covering up ours’ as majority of the analyzed stories were US oriented. Presenting the opinions and views of elite and reporting conflict as a zero-sum entity were also among the frequently reported patterns of press coverage with respect to

Burhan Wani's case. The literature on peace journalism was also considerably supported as it focused on highlighting solutions, focusing on invisible effects of the conflict and covering all possible aspects of the story among other major practices (McGoldrick and Lynch 2000). Literature on framing was also rationalized by the study as media frames provided central ideas for analyzing the content by selecting, emphasizing and elaborating certain details in a contextual manner (Tankard, 1991).

The study supported the hypothesis that war frames were given dominance over peace frames in the coverage of Burhan Wani's case by the Indian and Pakistani press. The results also revealed that war coverage of Kashmir Conflict was more dominant in Indian press in comparison to Pakistani press. There was a low occurrence of neutral coverage in Pakistani press in comparison to Indian press where there was no recorded instance of neutral coverage with respect to Burhan Wani case. Qualitative interviews although limited in number, also supported the view that excessive and dominant war coverage of Kashmir conflict helped in escalating the conflict instead of de-escalating it.

It is concluded that war coverage was mostly given to Burhan Wani case in Pakistani Press. Similarly, war coverage was also dominant in the Indian Press in this regard. War coverage exceeded in Indian Press as compared to Pakistani Press. As far as peace coverage is concerned, it was far more in Pakistani press than that of the Indians. While Indian press gave more prominence to the war coverage. The excessive war coverage of Kashmir conflict in Pakistani and Indian Press had considerable influence on Kashmir conflict escalation process instead of de-escalation.

Limitations

The limitations of the study included a small sample size especially with reference to qualitative analysis. Another related limitation was the restricted access available to data in terms of content, in-depth views and organizational policies. Lack of focus on the longitudinal effects of the conflict was another major limitation of the study.

Recommendations

1. The canvas of the investigation can be expanded to other leading events of Kashmir Conflict
2. A three-fold study with respect to Pakistani, Indian and Kashmiri media can also be conducted by future researchers.
3. New dimensions can be explored if a more detailed qualitative study is conducted from the journalists' point of view.
4. Liaison between Indian and Pakistani press and media managers needs to be expanded.

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