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Framing the Narrative: Unravelling Perspectives of Print Media on Burhan Wani's Killing

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Abstract:

The research aims to conduct a cross-border examination of news framing in well-read and specific Indian and Pakistani newspapers following the killing of Burhan Wani. Focusing on how media narratives contribute to shaping public perceptions and biases, the study seeks to uncover the nuances and divergences in the framing of this pivotal event. By employing the Framing Analysis approach of Erving Goffman, the research aims to unravel the underlying influences of print media that shape the narratives of both nations.

Keywords: Kashmir, Dawn, Times of India, Pakistan, Burhan Wani, Framing

Introduction:

News outlets play an integral part in framing current events as of general or specific interests. General consensus is built around the idea that newspapers are never objective, impartial or unbiased. They serve a certain ideology; this ideology can be either of the press, the state, or the state subjects. The News articles, editorials, op-eds are a helping hand for a newspaper to serve that particular ideology or narrative. The phenomenon goes both ways. Likewise, Ideology also exerts a discernible influence on the content and perspectives presented in newspapers. The editorial choices and framing of news stories are inevitably shaped by the prevailing ideological orientation, exerted through political and public institutions, shapes the overall character and slant of the publication. Thus, by having a symbiotic relationship, state ideology and newspapers influence each other to create an equally advantageous narrative.

Building on the discussion and considering the strained ties between the two states, it is not a farfetched notion that news and media outlets of Pakistan and India serve opposite ideological narrative. Divided by territorial boundaries, these two states have long and deeply embedded cultural and historical convergences. To weaken these convergences, both nations have developed divergent ideologies. These ideologies are encouraged through several channels. The print media is an integral part of these channels.

Kashmir, since independence, has been an important matter of foreign policy for both countries. Kashmir stands as an exposed wound for both countries, serving as a focal point for their ideological stances. Consequently, each nation endeavors to assert its claim over the region, leading to a distinct and often divergent framing of news related to Kashmir. The Burhan Wani case serves as a compelling case study, illustrating the nuanced perspectives and narratives that unfold as both countries navigate their complex relationship with this contentious territory. Burhan Wani was a commander of Hizbul Mujahideen, an Islamist militant organization and insurgent group of the Kashmir conflict. As a widely popular militant, especially among the

young rebels, Wani was actively sought out by the Indian security forces. On 8th of July 2016, Wani was located in a remote village in the Anantnag district of Jammu and Kashmir and was subsequently killed in a firefight with the Indian Forces. The killing of Burhan Wani not only had immediate political repercussions but also sparked widespread protests and unrest in the Kashmir valley, igniting the worst span of unrest in the region since the 2010 unrest. The protests brought about complex dynamics and long-standing issues in the region. The Indian Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir was placed under 53 days of consecutive days of curfew, which was fully lifted by 31st of August 2016. The protests that followed Wani's killings resulted in the deaths of more than 96 people, injuries to 15,000 civilians and 4,000 Indian security personnels. This research aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the newspaper reporting on the incident focusing on how media narratives in India and Pakistan influenced the discourse surrounding the event.

Literature Review:

Media plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions, particularly in the active conflict zones like Kashmir. The significant literature for this research could be divided into two categories. Primarily, the data will be collected from the archives of well-read Pakistani Newspaper, "Dawn" (2016) and well-read Indian Newspaper, "The Times of India" (2016). News framing in both newspapers offers insights into how the Kashmir conflict is portrayed by major news outlets of the respective countries directly involved in the dispute. Erving Goffman's work in Frame Analysis: An essay on the organization of experience provides a dynamic approach. Erving Goffman (Goffman, 1974, p.25) argues that the media focuses on certain themes, language and events and places them within a field of meaning. By constructing a 'Frame', the media can influence how and what people perceive and remember from a certain event. In the context of Kashmir, Goffman's perspective prompts an examination of how media acts as a stage for the presentation of national narratives, political agendas, and cultural identities. Both newspapers can be analyzed through the lens of Goffman's Frame Analysis to unveil and understand the performative aspects of the reporting that contributes to the larger theatrical production of the Kashmir conflict.

Supplementing the newspapers, the literature review draws on existing research on media reporting, particularly in the context of Kashmir Conflict. Ali and Perveen (2015) provide an excellent work on the Representation of Kashmir issue in print media. Using The Tribune, India and Dawn, Pakistan, the authors apply Media Conformity theory to analyze how print media outlets set an agenda on Kashmir. By analyzing 138 editorials and articles, the authors conclude that both media outlets work with the goal of showing their respective country's foreign policy, regarding Kashmir, in a positive light. Their results also indicate that the media coverage of Kashmir issues is also a reflection of broader national ideology and identity. The study actively supports the hypothesis of the current study in question, and uses a similar medium, i.e., newspapers, to prove its point.

Focusing exclusively on Indian and Kashmiri journalism, Showkat (2017) is of the view that the functioning, growth, and freedom of Kashmiri press is heavily affected by the state policies and limitations. In his work, "Kashmir in media: An overview", the author invites reader to discern the connections between the past and present of the Kashmiri press through nuanced historical references. In a tactful nod to the annals of the Kashmiri press, from *the Inqalab, Zamindar, Siyasat, Alfaaz and Lahore Chronicle*, the author discusses the 'Muslim Press' that

was subsequently overpowered by the 'Hindu Press' namely *Tribune, Pratap, Milap, Amar* and *Guru Ghantaal*. The historical evolution of the press is especially relevant for this study to build on the background of Kashmiri Press and its relationship with the Indian National Press. Building around the same narrative, Nabi (2017) is also pointing out to something he calls "Partial Journalism" explaining how Indian national media prefers to favor the official narrative and ignores the voice of "dissent" from Kashmir. The author discusses how the protest strikes observed in Kashmir have been downplayed or left unpublished by the Indian media.

The research on Editorial Coverage of Kashmir Conflict in Pakistani Media by Zaheer (n.d.) is another important work to consult. The author analyses four mainstream national newspapers- two of Urdu and two of English- as primary focus of the study. Lubna Zaheer concludes that all newspapers have visible inclination towards war-oriented journalism. However, the Urdu newspapers carried higher degree of indicators as compared to the English newspapers. This research employs two distinct frameworks, one of which aligns with the theoretical framework intended to use in my study. Along with the theory of Peace Journalism by Johan Galtung, the author also utilizes the Frame Analysis of Erving Goffman as a lens to examine the content of these newspapers. This provides a helpful guide in applying the theoretical framework to my study and thus, is considered an important piece of literature.

Latif et al. (2020) specifically works on Burhan Wani's killing and draw a comparative study of the Coverage by Pakistani and Indian Press through a similar theoretical framework as Lubna Zaheer uses in her study. Through content analysis of stories and columns for four months (July 2016 to October 2016), and in-depth interviews of twelve Pakistani and Indian journalists, the article supports the hypothesis that war frames are given more importance and prominence over peace frames. Thus, instead of de-escalating the conflict, the media reporting actively sought to escalate it through reports, editorials and stories.

Existing scholarly literature has extensively discussed topics related to my research area. However, the novelty of my study lies in its specific focus on the case of Burhan Wani within the broader framework of framing theory. While previous research has addressed overachieving themes, my investigation focuses on the intricate details and implication of media framing surrounding the Burhan Wani incident. By narrowing the scope of the research, the research can contribute to a comprehensive analysis that goes beyond the generalized discussions, discussed under other frameworks, found in the broader literature.

Hypothesis:

It is hypothesized that reporting of the Burhan Wali's killing will significantly differ in in terms of framing, language use, and emphasis on key themes.

Research Questions:

1. How do Pakistani and Indian newspapers frame the narrative surrounding Burhan Wani's killing?
2. What key themes and frames emerge in the reporting of this event?
3. How do these themes contribute to the construction of different narratives?
4. To what extend do historical, political, and cultural factors influence the framing of Burhan Wani's killing in Pakistani and Indian newspapers?

Research Methodology:

The research will employ a qualitative framing analysis approach. Well read English newspapers from both countries, namely "Dawn" and "The Times of India" would be consulted to draw that analysis. The time frame is set for ten days following Burhan Wani's killing i.e., July 8th- July 17th, 2016. A qualitative content analysis of articles and editorials related to Burhan Wani Case would be conducted. 12 articles, 1 editorial, 2 opinions and 1 letter to the editor in Dawn related to Burhan Wani killing. Times of India published 24 articles, 2 editorials during this time frame. With the help of Framing Theory, the coverage across Indian and Pakistani newspaper would be compared to highlight convergences and divergences in reporting of the same events. This methodology would help explore how different narratives may have contributed to shaping public opinions in each region. The data analysis will be conducted in two phases. First, a comparative analysis of specific data in both newspapers will be performed to identify differences and similarities in reporting on similar events. In the second phase, the study will focus on individual data from both newspapers to understand the overall narrative constructed by each publication.

Data Analysis:

This specific research emphasizes the ideological representation of Kashmir issue in both newspapers. To better understand the framing of articles and editorials by both newspapers, one can borrow the cues of framing by Erving Goffman's work. Goffman (1974, p. 22) discusses the natural and Social Framework as the primary frameworks of news framing. Explaining the difference between the two, the natural framework is undirected, unoriented and unguided. It is void of any willful agency or any intentional interference. An ordinary example of such a framework can be reporting of weather in an area. The Social framework on the other hand deals with deeds, not mere events (Goffman, 1974, p. 23). Social framework provides background understandings and guides the narrative through coaxing, flattering, affronting, predicting and threatening. This kind of framework is "guided doings"; it pertains to the patent manipulation of the natural world in accordance with the special constraints the natural occurring imposes (Goffman, 1974, p. 23).

Building on the Framing theory of Goffman, R.M. Entman's work explains how one does not understand the frames unless the frames are compared. To compare the frames, he devises five basic cues that can help identify the primary frameworks and comparative frameworks of an article.

"Unless the narratives are compared, frames are difficult to detect fully and reliably, because many of the framing devices can appear as "natural," unremarkable choices of words or images, (Entman, 1991, p. 6)"

These five frameworks are:

1. Prioritizing conflict between parties over the actual decision made.
2. Human personality is promoted through presenting story with a human face over other important aspects.

3. The consequences can be wide-ranging. Implementing a particular policy may prove imprudent in terms of maintaining cohesion within a party or coalition, as well as impacting the standing of a nation on the global stage.
4. Media coverage moralizes incidents, actions and actors.
5. Employs responsibility on the state or state subjects, either for a cause or a solution.

In a nutshell, the five cues of frameworks are *Conflict, Human Personalization, Consequence, Morality* and *Responsibility*.

By analyzing the newspaper articles, one can understand whether the newspapers have employed natural or social framework for the reporting. Using a top-down approach, the headlines of the newspapers need to be consulted first. Headlines capture the attention of the audience and generate a bias in the head of the reader.

Times of India (2016a) reported the death of Burhan Wani as follows,

"Violence erupts in Kashmir after death of Hizbul Mujahideen terrorist Burhan Wani, 3 killed."

Dawn (2016a) published an article that informed about the death of Burhan Wani with the following headline,

"Indian troops clash with Kashmiri protesters as top rebel commander killed."

In both headlines, the cues are visible. The focus on War journalism in form of conflict reporting is visible in the sentence structure and framing of the news headlines. Words like "Clash" and "Violence" used in the start of the headline reflect such connotations. However, it is also important to notice that the nature of the news required using such words. Yet, the human personalization differs in both headlines. While Dawn expresses Burhan Wani as a "top rebel commander", it initially implies the popularity and relevance of Burhan Wani. The term "rebel commander" typically refers to an individual who holds a leadership position within a rebel or insurgent group. This person is often responsible for overseeing military operations, making strategic decisions, and leading the group in the opposition of established authorities or governments. The term implies a role of authority and influence within an insurgent faction. In favorable undertones, rebel commander is seen as a courageous or visionary leader fighting for a just cause, advocating for change and resisting repression. In such context, Burhan Wani is shown as someone with determination, commitment and bravery. On the other hand, Times of India called Burhan Wani as a "Hizbul Mujahideen terrorist". The term implies that Hizbul Mujahideen is recognized as a terrorist organization by various countries and entities. It also suggests that the group is associated with militant activities, particularly in the context of the Kashmir region, and is considered a threat due to its involvement in armed conflicts with the aim of establishing the terrorist rule in the area. Thus, in the eyes of a *Times of India* reader, Burhan Wani is a terrorist who is involved in the use of violence, intimidation, or other harmful actions to instill fear, coerce, or intimidate a population, typically for political, religious, or ideological purposes. The label "terrorist" is often applied to those who use violence against civilians or non-combatants as a means to achieve their goals.

To further understand the general cues another set of headlines can be compared. Both of these news articles explain the general response of representatives of both countries.

Times of Indiareported an article with the following headline,

Hira Zia

"Hizbul poster boy Burhan Wani killing a bonus: Sleuths"(Jain, 2016a)

Dawn reported the reaction of Pakistan in the following words on 10th of July 2016.

"Pakistan condemns India's killing of Hizbul Mujahideen militant commander" (Haider, 2016)

Both of these headlines can be analyzed for the news framing cue of 'morality'. The first headline from Times of India implies that the Indian intelligence agencies show no remorse on killing of the Hizbul Mujahideen commander, Burhan Wani, rather call it a 'bonus'. Usage of the word 'bonus' suggests that the death of Burhan Wani, who was considered a prominent 'poster boy' for the militant group Hizbul Mujahideen, is seen as a positive development by intelligence agents or investigators ("sleuths"). The use of the term "bonus" also implies that Wani's killing is viewed as an additional advantage or unexpected gain in the efforts against the activities associated with Hizbul Mujahideen. Although, moral stances and ethical considerations are complex and multifaceted aspect that involves broader understanding of their actions, motivations and adherence to ethical principles, one can still assume that the killing of Burhan Wani is not regretted by the Indian intelligence agencies, rather seen as an unforeseen advantage. On the other hand, Dawn reports the condemning of the killing by Pakistan. The report uses generic tone; it suggests that the whole country is denunciating and disapproving the killing of the military commander. This sets the tone of generality and universality of Pakistan's state and subjects over the death of the leader and thus brings a moral responsibility over the people of Pakistan to connect to the 'common sense of the era' and the hegemonic opinion over the death of Burhan Wani. The tone used for Burhan Wani, as a person, is congruent to the previous examples.

Another example that hits the cues of morality and responsibility is a comparison between the reporting of the encounter between Indian police and Kashmiri demonstrators. Dawn (2016b) reported it on 12th of July as,

"*Police shelling leaves Kashmiri youth blind in one eye, medics claim*"

Times of India published an article with the following headline on 13th of July 2016,

"Kashmir violence: Protesters snatch 70 police guns, build armoury" (Chauhan, 2016)

The news report of *Dawn* suggests that as a result of police shelling in Kashmir, a young individual from Kashmir has experienced a severe injury that has left them blind in one eye. The phrase "medics' claim" indicates that medical professionals or healthcare workers are asserting this information. The report implies a potential concern or condemnation of the use of force by the police, raising awareness about the impact of such actions on individuals in the region. It also suggests a need for investigation or discussion regarding the consequences of law enforcement measures in Kashmir. Moreover, it clearly distinguishes between the aggressor and the defender. An aggressor is someone who initiates or engages in aggressive actions, while a defender is someone who protects or resists such actions. The structure of the sentence makes it seem that the Indian troops are being aggressive, barbaric and ruthless. The news report from the Times of India portrays a completely different image than that of *Dawn*. The statement "Kashmir violence: Protesters snatch 70 police guns, build armory" implies that there is ongoing violence in Kashmir, with protesters taking a significant number of firearms from the law enforcement, showing a dominant, proactive and aggressive stance of the protestors. Additionally, the mention

of building armory suggests that the protesters are not only acquiring weapons but are also storing and organizing them for a bigger cause; probably building a radical group. This information conveys a concerning escalation in the conflict, indicating a situation where protesters have gained access to a substantial number of weapons, potentially intensifying the level of violence in the region. It completely shifts the perspective of violence onto the Kashmiri protestors, implying that they are the aggressors attempting to terrorize the region. Both of these statements not only moralize the whole incident of clash between the two parties, but it also expresses a weak need for external involvement in the affair.

Along the same lines, the official stances of both countries over the death and portrayal of Burhan Wani's death are reported as

Times of India used the following words on 14th of July 2016,

"India may summon Pakistan envoy, show him proof of Burhan's terror acts" (Jain, 2016b)

Reported by Dawn on 15th of July 2016,

"Cabinet meeting condemns Indian govt for calling Burhan Wani a terrorist" (Gabol, 2016)

By taking these headlines as an example, one can clearly notice the way both newspapers are providing diverging narratives for similar events.

For the death of Burhan Wani, the news coverage in Dawn adopts an afflicted, pained, and oppressednotion for the protesters and portrays Wani as a rebel and a hero. This narrative is also supported by Pakistan. Published in Dawn Opinions, Noorani (2016) builds the narrative of Burhan Wani as an oppressed and harassed young boy who had lost his brother to the Indian forces. Using this setting to describe his childhood and young adulthood, a reader is bound to see a rebellious hero rather than a terrorist. Moreover, another Opinion published in Dawn, it is interesting to observe how Qandeel Baloch, a Pakistani actress who was murdered by her brother for honor, is compared to Burhan Wani in the following words,

"Qandeel, like Burhan, was on a collision course with primeval society's full might." (Naqvi, 2016)

Such comparisons keep both names alive in the heads of the reader. In an editorial published by Dawn, Burhan Wani is described as a "young separatist militant" and a "martyr" ("Kashmir Unrest," 2016). The editorial also condemns the policy of BJP in this region. It goes a step further and criticizes the 'unseriousness' of Pakistani political parties regarding these issues who are busy 'electioneering'. Across all articles, the words used to describe the situations are "clashes", "protestors", "Indian atrocities", "Indian held Kashmir" ("FO Terms Wani's Killing, Protesters' Death Extrajudicial," 2016), ("11 Protesters Killed in Held Kashmir," 2016), ("P5 Asked to Take Note of Indian Atrocities in Held Kashmir," 2016).

Whereas *Times of India* published double the number of articles during the set time frame over the Kashmir issue with a special focus on using words like "terrorist" and "militant" to describe Wani ("Violence erupts in Kashmir", 2016a), ("JNU's Umar Khalid Equates Slain Hizbul Militant with Che Guevara", 2016). The articles heavily use the word "mob" to describe the observants ("Kashmir violence: Policeman killed by mob", 2016b), ("Mob sets ablaze house", 2016c).

Implying that it is a consequence of their own action, the Editorial by Gupta (2016) calls for a comparison between the militancy culture in Kashmir, and Ireland, Spain and Quebec. Building on different international examples, Gupta asserts that,

"Unhappy militants are usually unhappy in the same way. What connects, for example, the Northern Irish and the Basque Spanish, of the past, with today's Kashmiris and Palestinians is that they would rather crawl on broken glass than give up their activism."

Here, the author blames the 'inherent militant culture' of Kashmiris for the violence in the region, completely avoiding the actions of the Indian troops. In another editorial, the strategy of Narender Modi regarding the ongoing protests is deemed as a "Healing Touch" where Modi is focusing on negotiating with the Hurriyat leaders (TOI Editorials, 2016). Interestingly, the editorial also discusses how 'militants' have scored a 'psychological victory' by shutting down cinemas. It claims that such move increases traffic on social media platforms where 'extremist narratives flourish and graphic Islamic State propaganda is available' (TOI Editorials, 2016).

To understand the impact of such framing, one needs to question the objectives of news framing. By framing the news through the cues, it establishes a cognitive shortcut for the readers regarding certain news. Furthermore, a quantitative assessment of how the presentation of news has changed over time and across different platforms has shown a shift from more-objective event- and context-based reporting to a heavier reliance on argumentation and advocacy, as well as increased emotional appeals (Kavanagh, Marcellino, Blake, Smith, Davenport, & Tebeka, 2019).

Conclusion:

The reporting of Burhan Wani's killing and protest in Dawn and Times of India showing divergent reporting due to different political and ideological backgrounds a clear example of how linguistic choices play a fundamental role in the propagation and perpetuation of implicit and dominant ideologies in newspaper reporting (Matu & Lubbe, 2007). Writers and editors are very particular in selecting words, phrases and expressions. The sequencing, focusing, sentence structures are not random; instead, they are intentional decisions that reject the other ways of presenting information, event and news. By doing so, the overall meaning of the content and the influence it will have on its reader is in the control of the writer. Thus, linguistic choices made in newspaper articles carry ideological meaning and imply the rejection of alternative choices, thereby shaping the meaning of the content (Fairclough, 1995). The broad conception of ideology as fundamental or commonsensical beliefs related to social reality reinforces the idea that newspaper articles are inherently ideological in nature (Verschueren, 1999).

As proven in the paper, the reporting of Burhan Wani's killing and protest in Dawn and Times of India showing divergent reporting due to different political and ideological backgrounds is a clear example of how linguistic choices play a fundamental role in the propagation and perpetuation of implicit and dominant ideologies in newspaper reporting. The differences in reporting across different newspapers reflect the complex interplay between media, ideology, and societal realities. The differences in reporting in various newspapers are to be expected, even if the same events are covered, as newspaper articles are a matter of choice and ideology, and they are both constituted by and constitutive of social reality (Matu & Lubbe, 2007). The angle of reporting is often searched so that foreign news can be rooted into the readers' background knowledge or anchored into a familiar frame of interpretation. This is why a

newspaper report typically takes one or a few limited perspectives to an event, while other aspects of reality are obscured, underexposed, or missed (Lee, Chan, Pan, & So, 2000).

The observation that the same event may be given distinct media representations by various nations through the prisms of their dominant ideologies (Lee et al., 2000) highlights the influence of power structures, cultural repertoires, and politico-economic interests on the reporting of events. This underscores the interconnectedness of media, ideology, and national interests, which can contribute to the divergence in reporting across different newspapers.

The understanding that news articles are constructed based on choices and ideological perspectives, and that individuals gravitate towards outlets that align with their views, is supported by scholarly research and real-world observations. The impact of bias in the newsroom, the ways in which news audiences have become more polarized over time, and the quantitative assessment of changes in the presentation of news content across platforms all contribute to the substantiation of these claims.

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