



CONCERNS OF INTELLIGENTSIA IN PAKISTAN: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF NEWSPAPERS

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A content analysis of a sample of daily newspapers in Pakistan reveals that they devote extensive space to international news. Domestic news is usually entirely confined to the statements of politicians and political parties with very little space given to economic issues or court proceedings.¹

Modern-day society relies on the media, an important component of which is newspapers, to disseminate information. In order to perform this role well, the media has to be comprehensive in its coverage. It has to inform the citizenry efficiently on the diverse matters that affect Pakistani society. Modern scientific, economic, and social development depends to a large extent on such diffusion of knowledge by means of the media. Such an argument is often cited in support of the drive for mass literacy in many planning and intellectual circles.

Although the media comprises radio, television, and newspapers, there are two reasons why we have chosen to concentrate this study on newspapers only. First, like many other developing economies and emerging democracies like Pakistan, the audio-visual media, radio, and TV, are controlled by the government. Consequently, like most public sector-owned enterprises, one cannot take this section of the media to be operating according to well-defined market principles. To the extent that they are being run on non-market lines, market preferences cannot be deduced by means of content analysis. Second, all academic jobs as well as academic journals too, are in the public sector. Moreover, these journals tend to be very specialised and do not encourage academic debate. As a result, most Pakistani academics publish in newspapers and the few monthly and weekly magazines. The content analysis,

especially of the editorial/opinion page, therefore, reflects, in some sense, the opinions of the intelligentsia. The debates and opinions expressed on these pages are important to study as they eventually shape the country's policy agenda. Syllabi of elite training institutes such as the civil service academy, where senior civil servants are trained, draw upon the writings on the opinion pages of newspapers. The columnists and writers of these columns are often the main lecturers at such places. It is, therefore, important to determine the areas that this intellectual elite considers worthy of attention.

This paper attempts to determine, albeit a little crudely, the extent to which newspapers fulfill their role as informants of society and watchdogs for the interests of the people. For this purpose, we attempt to develop some quantification of the coverage of newspapers. Such quantification is an important source for discovering and informing the newspaper readership on editorial preferences and decisions. If enough such information is made available, perhaps the readers and editorial interests will be better mediated. It is, therefore, hoped that this line of research will be pursued by others and perhaps even on a continuous basis to keep everyone on their toes.

Unfortunately, because of the lack of resources, our research had to be quite restricted. We were, however, able to cover six major newspapers, four English and two Urdu, but were unable to undertake a study of the news magazines.

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For the selected papers, we covered only the more important sections such as the main headline, the opinion page, the editorials, and the letters to the editor. Our intention was to classify the news, opinion, and analysis appearing in newspapers into categories that are meaningful. The primary intent of this research was to determine the priority that editors and opinion-writers give to international versus domestic issues. Furthermore, within domestic issues, what weights do they lay on economic, social, and court-related issues.

Bearing these considerations in mind, we attempted a classification into five main categories: international news, current political situation, social news, economic news, and court-related news. International news represents views and events on issues such as Bosnia, Kashmir, Afghanistan, the new world order, central Asia, etc. All political statements and announcements of the politicians in the government as well as in the opposition, including rallies and press conferences of all prominent political parties and leaders, are classified in the category of political pronouncement. The conjecture is that statements by these leaders are only made for the promotion of their own careers. Within court decisions too, a distinction was made between those of an economic and a political nature. Since religion remains an important item for discussion in Pakistan, a classification for pieces that focused on religion was also maintained. In ideal circumstances of well-funded research, perhaps all the sections of the newspaper would be classified on a daily basis in terms of the actual space that was devoted to each category. Such research would be able to develop many more categories and could even assign pieces to multiple categories.

Within these main categories, we attempted some form of quality judgment. In the social and economic categories, we attempted to define three sub-classifications. In the course of the analysis, it appeared that there were too many pieces that were quite full of platitudes like 'Pakistan as an Islamic State', 'declining moral values', 'corruption', 'lament on poverty or illiteracy', 'exhorting self-reliance', etc. We termed such pieces 'conventional wisdom/dogma'.

The quality pieces that we were looking for were either investigative pieces on any current economic or social phenomenon, or an interesting facet of government policy or administration as it affected those areas, or analytical informative pieces in the economic and social areas. Pieces that fell into this category were classified into a category termed as 'investigative or report of public complaint'. Consequently, factual reporting of an event such as a seminar or a government policy

announcement was termed just that, 'Factual reporting of a significant event'.

We have randomly selected about 156 newspapers (from January to October 1992) for data collection. As mentioned above, our analysis included four English newspapers (i.e., The Nation, The News, Frontier Post, Dawn) and two Urdu newspapers (Jang and Nawa-i-Waqt). The attempt was to draw randomly about 25 issues from each of these newspapers from the 10-month period, January to October 1992. Even for a limited exercise such as this, the sampling ratio is not bad. We were able to sample about 8 percent of the population which, by most standards, is quite reasonable.

Because of resource constraints, no attempt was made to cover the entire newspaper. Instead, four areas that are probably the most important in the paper were covered: (i) the main headline, which reports what the editor considers most important; (ii) the editorials, which present the views of the editor on issues that the editor considers important; (iii) the opinion page, which reflects the views of the elite, columnists, thinkers, and the well-known; and (iv) letters to the editor, which reflect the concerns of the ordinary reader. We are therefore able to contrast the views of three important actors in this business: the editors, the intellectual elite, and the ordinary reader.

MAIN HEADLINE

The most important part of a newspaper is the main headline. The main headline is what is printed in the boldest and largest letters. It is what the street hawkers used to shout out in bygone days to attract buyers. The achievement of a headline story remains the dream of many a reporter and the stuff of which many Humphrey Bogart, Jimmy Cagney, and Edward Robinson films were made. Headline and headline stories also reflect the preferences of editors and/or owners of newspapers, and many an owner like the famous William Randolph Hearst used them to considerable political advantage. Crusader-editors have been known to use headlines for their favourite cause.

Unfortunately, third-world governments have learnt this lesson well and have attempted directly, as well as indirectly, to control the headline in favour of the incumbent regime. Editors are persuaded by many means, which include both the carrot and the stick, to favour the incumbent for headline space.

Our analysis of the newspapers in Pakistan focused on the headline in view of its importance to public

perceptions. We analysed all the stories in the main headline and categorized them according to their content as discussed above. Table I presents the results. Evidence suggests that the editor's favourite topics for headline news are international topics and political pronouncements of our politicians. They devote roughly 35 percent of all headline space to international events and some 33 percent to political pronouncements. Although data on newspapers from other countries were not immediately available to us, our hypothesis would be that our newspapers are perhaps more international than they need to be. Moreover, given the attention that political pronouncements receive, newspapers seem to be either under the influence of the government, or remain in anticipation of some benefit from politicians. Some factual reporting of some social event or happening is what can be termed the third favourite, receiving about 27 percent of the total headline space. However, judging from the evidence of the content analysis, the economy or court-related stories are certainly not what headlines are made of in Pakistan.

As per our findings, there is a clear divide in the treatment of issues between English and Urdu newspapers. Perhaps in keeping with the desires of their Oxbridge-educated and influenced audience, English newspapers devote a lot of their headline space to reporting international events. Of the total English-newspaper headlines sampled, about 52 percent related to some international event. In contrast, Urdu newspapers devoted only 19 percent of their headline space to international news. The largest category to which headline space was devoted in Urdu newspapers was 'political announcements'. About 42 percent of sampled headline space was given to the reporting of announcements, press conferences, etc. of political figures from both sides of the spectrum. This was the second largest category for the English newspapers, using up about 23 percent of total headline space.

The next most important contender for headline space is the category of factual reporting of an event of a social or political character. This is the second-most important category that editors of Urdu newspapers like to use for a headline. About 33 percent of headline space in Urdu newspapers is devoted to it. English editors, however, are not so generous in their assessment of this category and give it only 21 percent of their headline space. For them, this is third in importance after international news and politicians' announcements.

Interestingly enough, both economic matters and news related to court proceedings receive more attention in Urdu papers than English newspapers. Whilst Urdu newspapers devote about 3 percent of their headline space to economic matters, English newspapers allow only 2 percent of their space to be used for economic affairs. Similarly, Urdu newspapers and English newspapers devote 3 percent and about 1 percent respectively to court-related matters.

Perhaps reflecting the desires of their editors, there appear to be significant differences amongst individual newspapers. For example, Dawn seems to concentrate far more on international events, devoting some 79 percent of headline space to this category. Of the English newspapers, The Nation devotes the least space to international events but gives the largest weight to political pronouncements. The analysis also suggests that The Frontier Post devotes more headline space to economic news than all other newspapers. The News gives court-related news the most coverage out of English newspapers. Whilst the favourite subject of both Urdu newspapers is political pronouncements, the second favourite topic for Nawa-i-Waqt appears to be international news, whilst for Jang, it is social events. Interestingly, in the weighting scheme of Nawa-i-Waqt, economic matters receive a higher priority, whereas in that of Jang, court proceedings receive more attention.

Table I. What the Front Page Headline Covers (As percent of all headlines sampled for the concerned newspaper)

	International	Political Announcements: Both Government and Opposition	Social		Economic		Court Proceeding	
			Factual or Coverage of Significant Event	Investigative or a Report of Public Complaint	Factual or Coverage of Significant Event	Investigative or a Report of Public Complaint	Political	Economic/Social
The News (26)	44.83	20.69	31.03	0	0	0	1.72	1.72
The Nation (27)	36.6	32.68	27.45	0	1.96	0	0.65	0.65
The Frontier Post (25)	43.4	25.47	25.47	0	4.72	0	0.94	0
The Dawn (26)	78.57	12.86	7.14	0	0.71	0	0.71	0
Nawa-i- Waqt (25)	29.72	40.57	2358	0.47	3.77	0.47	1.42	0
Jung (26)	10.34	42.53	41	0	1.53	0.38	3.45	0.77
English newspapers (104)	52.08	23.41	21.23	0	1.97	0	0.88	0.44
Urdu newspapers (51)	19.03	41.65	33.19	0.21	2.54	0.42	2.54	0.42
All newspapers (155)	35.27	32.69	27.31	0.11	2.26	0.22	1.72	3.43

EDITORIALS

The editorials convey more directly than any other segment of the newspaper the views of the editor. The editorials are supposed to be directly written by the editor on subjects of his choice. Though based on fact, the editorial is not supposed to be factual and informative. By intention, they represent the views and opinions of the editor. Editors use the editorials for issues of common weal and public interest. By means of 'editorialising', the editor attempts to influence public opinion and policy. The subjects that editors pick for editorials, therefore, reflect very clearly the orientation of the newspaper. Table 2 presents the results of the content analysis of the editorials for the four major English newspapers and two Urdu newspapers. Interestingly enough, as in the main headline, the favourite topic of editors of English newspapers and the second most frequent topic for editorials in Urdu newspapers is international events. Court-related matters continue to be the least topic of interest for editorials.

In all, about a third of all editorials are written on international news. English newspapers are devoting about 32 percent of their editorials to international events, whilst Urdu newspapers commit 24 percent to this category. Surprisingly, whilst The Frontier Post was devoting the least amount of headline space to international events, it takes the lead in terms of editorials on international news. For Urdu newspapers, the category of conventional wisdom or dogma is the most important category for which editorials are written. Indeed, this is the second most important category for all newspapers, with about 21 percent of all sampled newspaper editorials being devoted to it. Amongst the Urdu newspapers, Jang gives the highest weightage to editorialising on subjects that can be interpreted as conventional wisdom. However, even in this category, the received wisdom in economics receives less attention than in the social area.

The current political situation is surprisingly the subject of only 8 percent of all editorials. The Frontier Post and The Nation write the most editorials on the current political situation, with about 13 percent of each of their editorials being written on this subject. Public complaints or investigations of some social or economic phenomenon are also made subjects of editorials. Urdu newspapers are more concerned about social events, whilst the English editorials are treating more economic complaints and investigations. Whilst religion appears to be editorialised about 4 percent of the time, Nawa-i-Waqt takes it up as an editorial subject more often than Jang. Amongst English newspapers, The Frontier Post is writing most editorials concerning religion. Perhaps a fair conjecture would be that the Nawa-i-Waqt editorials are probably more pro-Islamisation, whilst The Frontier Post represents the opposing viewpoint.

THE OPINION PAGE

In many ways, the opinion page is the most interesting aspect of a newspaper. The opinion page represents informed opinion on important subjects. This is an area that allows newspapers to move away from the daily grind to strike a chord on longer-term issues. The opinion page is occupied mostly by the glitterati: well-known people from all walks of life including famous columnists. In that sense, the opinion page represents the views of the elite of its audience. Newspapers seek to distinguish themselves by means of their opinion pages. Of course, the editor chooses what to put on the opinion page. The editor, therefore, has the final choice of the themes on the opinion page. Thus, this page reveals information on the themes that are important to the informed readership of the concerned paper as well as the editor. The opinion pages in Pakistani newspapers appear to concentrate on international events and on delivering homilies on platitudes or what we term as conventional wisdom/dogma.

Table 2. Editorials and their Content, 1992 (As percent of total coverage on this page)

	Social						Economic			Court Proceeding	
	International	Current Political Situation	Religion	Conventional Wisdom/Dogma	Factual or Coverage of Significant Event	Investigative or a Report of Public Complaint	Conventional Wisdom/Dogma	Factual or Coverage of Significant Event	Investigative or a Report of Public Complaint	Political	Economic/Social
The News (26)	23.08	5.73	0	23.08	28.21	2.56	5.13	10.26	0	2.56	0
The Nation (27)	30.95	13.1	2.38	11.9	9.52	1.19	17.86	4.76	8.33	0	0
The Frontier Post (25)	39.47	13.16	11.84	9.21	7.89	7.89	7.32	2.63	6.58	0	0
The Dawn (26)	34	0	2	20	16	8	4	8	8	0	0
Nawa-i-Waqt (25)	28.57	5.88	5.04	20.17	4.2	12.61	11.76	3.36	7.56	0	0.84
Jung (26)	20.18	11.01	2.75	39.45	13.76	2.75	3.67	3.67	0	1.83	0.92
English Newspapers (104)	31.88	7.85	4.06	16.05	15.41	4.91	7.08	6.41	5.73	0.64	0
Urdu Newspapers (51)	24.38	8.45	3.9	29.81	8.98	7.68	7.72	3.52	3.78	0.92	0.88
All Newspapers (155)	29.38	8.05	4	20.63	13.26	5.83	7.29	5.45	5.08	0.13	0.29

As before, opinion pieces in English newspapers concentrate on international news, whilst Urdu newspapers are more 'preachy'. Amongst the English newspapers, Dawn and The News carry more articles on international events than others, whilst Amongst Urdu papers, Jang likes to preach more. Within the category of conventional wisdom/dogma, all newspapers favour social and political themes more than economic. Economic issues, in general, receive little attention. The Frontier Post and The Nation devote the largest space to economic issues on the opinion page. The Frontier Post leads in carrying more analytical and investigative pieces on economic issues on the opinion page. Most newspapers, however, are disappointing when it comes to their economic coverage. For both Urdu and English newspapers, religious themes tend to be more important. For both Urdu and English newspapers, religious themes tend to be more important than the current political situation. There is hardly any comment on the opinion pages on court decisions or court proceedings to the extent that the matter is not sub judice.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The 'Letters to the Editor' section of a newspaper is the opinion page of the ordinary reader. These are written by the common people who are not well-known and who have a viewpoint but do not wish to write lengthy pieces to air their viewpoint. The views range from grandiose thoughts about the destiny of the country to complaints about the everyday problems of ordinary people. For example, all of us are familiar with the perennial plea in the letters to the editor section regarding government overbilling for services such as electricity or telephone, or the pleas for postponement of examinations. Given the lack of an efficient system of justice and the consequent reliance on bureaucratic arbitrariness for redress, writing a letter to the editor remains an important means for attempting to seek justice.

As a result, it would be an important area for future research to study this section of the newspaper in some detail. For example, the editorial selection process could be studied or the follow-up, if any, could be investigated. The attitudes of the bureaucracy to the complaints that are voiced by this means should be examined.

Despite the editorial selection that takes place in determining what gets printed in this column, this section perhaps reflects best the concerns of the ordinary reader. In that sense, content analysis of this section should provide an interesting contrast to the opinion page dominated by the intellectual, social, and economic elite, and the editorial page which is purely at the discretion of the editor. Such a comparison would serve to illustrate how well the editors are complying with the needs of their readership.

The results show that the writers of these letters do not share the internationalist perspective of editors and their elite clientele. Only about 6 percent of all the letters covered in our total sample from all newspapers are related to some international event. Of these, the English letter-writers tend to have a more internationalist perspective than Urdu writers. International perspectives constitute about 7 percent of all English letters and only about 1 percent of all Urdu letters.

It seems the letter writers in Pakistan are quite fond of pontification. About 34 percent of all letters, 43 percent of Urdu letters, and 32 percent of English letters are focusing on some platitude, which is what we call conventional wisdom or dogma. Much of this pontification is of a socio-political nature. Economic pontification constitutes only about 6 percent of all letters, 4 percent of Urdu letters, and 6 percent of English letters.

Table 3. Opinion Page (As percent of total news on the page)

	International	Current Political Situation	Social				Economic			Court Proceeding	
			Religion	Conventional Wisdom/Dogma	Factual or Coverage of Significant Event	Investigative or a Report of Public Complaint	Conventional Wisdom/Dogma	Factual or Coverage of Significant Event	Investigative or a Report of Public Complaint	Political	Economic/Social
The News (26)	43.18	2.27	4.55	22.73	21.59	0	1.14	2.27	2.27	0	0
The Nation (27)	28.57	6.12	6.12	23.47	8.16	7.14	8.16	3.06	9.18	0	0
The Frontier Post (25)	35.06	3.9	14.29	16.88	9.09	7.79	1.3	0	11.69	0	0
The Dawn (26)	41.77	6.33	10.13	20.25	11.39	5.06	1.27	1.27	1.27	0	1.27
Nawa-i-Waqat (25)	21.62	6.76	8.11	51.35	5.41	2.7	1.35	1.35	1.35	0	0
Jung (26)	15.38	3.08	5.38	63.08	3.85	2.31	3.85	2.31	0.77	0	0
English Newspapers (104)	37.15	4.66	8.77	20.83	12.56	5	2.97	1.65	6.1	0	0.32
Urdu Newspapers (51)	18.5	4.92	6.75	57.21	4.63	2.51	2.6	1.83	105	0	0
All newspapers (155)	27.83	4.79	7.76	39.02	8.59	3.75	2.78	1.74	3.58	0	0.16

Furthermore, Urdu writers are more concerned with economic issues or complaints since 14 percent of their letters are concerned with economic issues, whereas the comparable figure for English newspapers is only 6 percent.

An element of editorial discretion is also worth commenting on. It seems that The Frontier Post is a newspaper that clearly appears to favour the publication of letters that relate to investigating, analysing, or complaining about economic, social, or political issues. Dawn appears to favour economic pontification, whilst the Nawa-i-Waqt appears to have a strong bias for publishing letters related to the complaints of, or analytical issues relating to, the economy.

Our simple content analysis has yielded some interesting conclusions

- Newspaper editors as well as elite columnists and opinion page writers are very internationalist in their perspectives. It would be interesting to make an international comparison to see if our hypothesis is borne out that we devote an inordinately large amount of newspaper space to international issues.
- The easiest approach to journalism appears to be to follow politicians for statements. A large fraction of the newspaper space is made available to political newsmakers and their various press conferences and rallies.
- Opinion seems to be quite cliché-ridden with very little informative or analytical content. Most of the writers in the country appear to be comfortable in their notions. There is little that is written that challenges the priors of society.
- Very little attention is paid to economic issues or court-related proceedings. Hardly any reporting of these serious issues in the main pages takes place.

Some newspapers have business pages and even a weekly legal page. However, given the gravity of economic and judicial matters, there is no reason to not give them a larger space in the more important areas of the paper that we have analysed.

- Hardly any analytical or investigative work is printed. Issues of public concern or public maladministration do not receive the attention that they merit.
- As evidenced by the letters to editor, it would seem that the ordinary reading public does not share the views of the editors. Very little is written on international matters and on politicians. The people appear to be more concerned with airing their views and voicing their complaints in the vain hope that they will be heard.

Why is it that the newspapers in Pakistan reflect these biases that alienate them from their readers? Certainly, they are not irrational and are responding to certain incentives. Three hypotheses can be suggested as possible explanations:

1. Perhaps the easiest course is to print international wire services and politicians' statements.
2. It is more profitable to print this innocuous international material and that related to press conferences and rallies of politicians. The bulk of the advertisement is that of the government as well as the bulk of the subscription. Moreover, most economic favours such as plot licenses and preferential credit are also doled out by the government. Thus, why reflect socio-economic concerns and perhaps incur the wrath of the most important patron.

Table 4. Analysis of Letters to Editor Columns (As percent of the total number of letters sampled)

	Social						Economic			Court Proceeding	
	International	Current Political Situation	Religion	Conventional Wisdom/Dogma	Factual or Coverage of Significant Event	Investigative or a Report of Public Complaint	Conventional Wisdom/Dogma	Factual or Coverage of Significant Event	Investigative or a Report of Public Complaint	Political	Economic/Social
News (26)	7.38	1.64	9.84	31.15	27.05	13.93	3.28	4.1	0.82	0	0.82
The Nation (27)	3.28	1.64	6.56	38.52	10.66	22.13	7.38	3.28	5.74	0	0.82
The Frontier Post (25)	10.78	3.92	4.9	26.47	11.76	24.51	2.94	1.96	12.75	0	0
The Dawn (26)	6.59	2.4	5.39	31.74	15.57	17.96	10.78	5.99	3.59	0	0
Nawa-i-Waqt (25)	1.27	0	6.33	43.04	12.66	16.46	3.8	2.53	13.92	0	0
English Newspapers (104)	7.01	2.4	6.67	31.97	16.26	19.63	6.09	3.83	5.72	0	0.41
Urdu Newspapers (51)	1.27	0	6.33	43.04	12.66	16.46	3.8	2.53	13.92	0	0
All Newspapers (155)	5.86	1.92	6.6	34.18	15.54	19	5.63	3.57	7.36	0	0.33

3. The old McCaulay tradition of creating men of letters of us colonial gentlemen has left a deep-rooted mark on the Pakistani intellectual. These intellectuals are now more internationalist in perspective. Their love for the aesthetic and the more poetic makes them romantic and fond of truisms. Certainly, as a society, we have placed no premium on the development of analytical or investigative skills. Consequently, it is not surprising that newspapers in Pakistan do not reflect any such skill.

We have been able to develop a simple but meaningful classification for categorising news, opinion, and analysis appearing in newspapers. In ideal circumstances of well-funded research, perhaps all the sections of the newspaper would be classified on a daily basis in terms of the actual space that was devoted to each category.

Such research would be able to develop many more categories and could even assign pieces to multiple categories. The database that would be developed in this manner would, with the help of personal computers and sophisticated statistical packages, allow many interesting trends in newspapers to be analysed.

Perhaps if someone is able to develop this database on a continuing basis, we could play watchdog on the newspapers in Pakistan. Maybe by exercises such as this, it will be possible to reorient the journalistic community from their currently excessive global or internationalist perspective to a keener interest for domestic concerns. In the same manner, such quantification might help to show that hard information, evidence, and analysis of society and its problems are needed for developing ideas for social change. In that sense, opinion and cliché cannot be expected to substitute for hard work.

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