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Visual Content Analysis of Victimhood in Conflicts in Kashmir and Yemen

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Abstract: *This study examines 141 photographs of conflict victims in Kashmir and Yemen from two Pakistani English newspapers, "Dawn" and "The Express Tribune," during 2019. The analysis found that Kashmiri victims were more frequently humanized in the photographs compared to Yemeni victims, with a greater use of close-up and medium shots. Meanwhile, Yemeni victims were more often depicted through long shots, which suggests dehumanization. Additionally, the study found that men received more coverage in the Yemen conflict, while women were portrayed more often in the Kashmir conflict to generate audience sympathy. Violent events were the most commonly reported topic in both newspapers.*

Key Words: Victims; Conflicts in Kashmir and Yemen; Pakistani Press; Friends vs Foes; Humanization

Introduction

Though many researchers have analyzed media texts for the reporting of victims in conflicts, visual analysis have not been frequently utilized. Scholars on the other hand, have emphasized to study the visual portrayal of conflict situations as well as the images of victims depicted in media. Studies have shown that media consider certain news values for selecting worthy and unworthy images for the depiction of victims in any conflict. When victims are visually reported, they are humanized or dehumanized. Either the victims are being utilized to gain certain jingoistic purposes, or they are actually portrayed in a way that can lead to the resolution of the conflict. Keeping this perspective in mind, in this study, we analyze visual reporting of victims in two conflicts: Kashmir conflict and Yemen conflict. Pakistan has conflicting relations with the two aggressors in these conflict—India is a declared enemy and contrastingly Saudi Arabia is a friend. The primary goal of this research is to critically analyse the essential elements of victim reporting in visual form and to compare and contrast victim

reporting in the two conflicts as well as in the selected newspapers.

Since India's freedom, Kashmir has become a source of tension between Pakistan and India. Three wars between the two nations—in 1948, 1965, and the 1999 Kargil War—have taken place. According to different estimates, more than 40,000 have been killed in the region. Similarly, the Yemen conflict started in 2015 and has been a result of the discord between an international coalition of Arabian Gulf escorted by Saudi Arabia, and Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi led Houthi movement. It has become turmoil at humanitarian basis which is felt globally, as approximately 10 million Yemenis have severely suffered this crisis. There have been innumerable reports regarding human rights violation, where women and children undergo relentless traumas (Al Naami & Moodley, 2017). In this civil war, Saudi-led coalition has been killing thousands of inhabitants with inconsistent airstrikes and has been involved in structural damage against the war laws, under the support of U.S.A, U.K and other governments (Holt, 2020).

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Literature Review: Visual Reporting of Conflicts

Conflicts are the outcome of the negation of the fundamental human necessities regarding existence, health, recognition and liberty of life. Violence originates from conflict, but instead of controlling violence, to achieve harmony, it is crucial to understand what causes conflicts in the first place (Hussain, 2017). Bratić (2006) believes that when there is a conflict, the perspective of the people changes according to the depiction of that conflict in media. Media manipulates the receiver's mind when it comes to the either advocating war or disinformation. According to (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, 2011), conventional media has interests in inciting the conflicts because of financial gains. The decision makers tend to promote a political cause by the use of media to get civilian favor and dissuading rivals, while media conglomerates manipulate information through media for financial gains as well as for journalistic stance of shedding more light on newsworthiness of the conflict. Papadopoulos (2008) is of the view contrary to the idea that images of war are merely used as "markers or cues" to enhance the narratives, that photographs express themselves in their own unique manner.

According to Berinsky and Kinder, "Framing" refers to the careful selection of information by the aristocracy for the general public to ingest through media (Berinsky & Kinder, 2006). Entman (1991) discusses how images and photographs might be used in the media to emphasise or minimise the victims or any particular group. Images reflect societal truths, but because they can imitate reality, they can also be used to manipulate people and serve as a tool for framing. (Messaris & Abraham, 2001) claim that viewers have a propensity to accept the mediated world depicted in images despite being completely unaware of the impact of visual framing. This media strategy has particular importance because of this.

Shahira Fahmy mentioned the "visual gatekeeping" technique, which entails selecting a few images from a large collection of photographs based on their ability to convey an alluring story (Fahmy 2005). The "power of images" in relation to a violent fight in a political context was another topic Mitchell covered. According to media researchers and theorists who study art, there is always a reflection of society, mindset, self-awareness, and views that are "framed" and "re-framed" by media organisations and policy makers (Mitchell, 1995).

The shared, consistent collection of beliefs that constitute the "visual frames" of a community shape that society and its system (Messaris, 2001). Shahira Fahmy explains the specialisation of visuals in which she focuses on some potent visual devices like "social semiotics," "iconicity," and "indexicality" that are used for framing. Images presented with the aid of these tools can effectively communicate a philosophy intended for the audience, which, if expressed in words, could cause a controversy (Fahmy, 2010).

Entman adds that the audience's interpretations can either be persuaded or dissuaded in one way or the other, by the use of specific selected pictures and verbal expressions (Entman, 1993). Susan Sontag, a philosopher, is of the opinion that words can arouse annoyance and rage, but that the visual context also affects perception. This is according to Judith Butler. It can forcibly produce a representation that elicits rage and fear in reaction to the suffering depicted (Butler, 2007). Another study by James N. Druckman found that images in media are portrayed in specific ways to convey conflict situations. These images include photographs as well as verbal symbols and expressions (Druckman, 2001).

There is no denying the power of media pictures, according to (Fahmy & Neumann, 2012). Unlike words, which cannot have such an influence on the audience's memory, it does (Paivio & Csapo, 1973). Photographs can stimulate a more heightened form of cognition (Lynn, Shavitt, & Ostrom, 1985). When it comes to the selection of information, it is mainly the idea of adding or omitting the news that needs to be framed (Cartwright, J., 2006). A study was done by Shahira Fahmy where Iraq war was studied from the angle of visual analysis, in New York Times and the Guardian, and there was a contrast between the two newspapers in depicting and framing the same conflict (Fahmy, 2010)

(Tsakiris et al 2019) talk about the use of certain visual frames in depicting the humans in dehumanized manner. They studied the portrayal of refugees in media and how they are framed as unworthy victims in certain images. Some researchers and theorists are also of the same view. In another study, (Kempf, 1997) highlights that the policy makers decide and select the images to be framed in media according to the nationalistic stance. There were just a few images that depicted the contradictory visual frames in conflict situations.

According to Judith Butler, audience is bound to interpret the information disseminated by media

through the coercive frame designed by it. It transmits a learned behavior to the people that restrict them from having a perspective out of that particular frame. In the war or conflict situation, media has the power to “thematize” the idea and controls the sensory reactions of the audience. It can include cultures that dehumanise people. Butler adds that “visual interpretation” occasionally does not condense the frame of reference where pictures can be critically analysed, and a photograph is analysed from various angles. (Butler, 2007).

Images are used for framing because they can reflect life’s realities, but they are always portrayed subjectively, claim Messaris and Abraham (2001). They have the ability to persuade an audience to accept the way a news story is presented and to view the story from a specific perspective (Wilmott, 2017). Due to the lifelike nature of the images, people are unaware of the visual framing and are therefore more likely to be told about the verbal framing of news. (Mandell & Shaw, 1973).

Research Questions

- RQ 1: How the victims in the selected conflicts in Kashmir and Yemen are framed?
- RQ 2: What are the differences between the two conflicts in terms of reporting gender of the victims?
- RQ 3: How are the victims visually portrayed through camera angles in terms of nationality?
- RQ 4: What are the major topics through which the selected newspapers are reporting the two conflicts?

- RQ 5: Is there a difference of the graphic depiction of the victims in selected conflicts in Kashmir and Yemen?

Method

In this research, we looked at images of victims in the chosen conflicts using visual content analysis. The images were retrieved from web editions of *The Express Tribune* and *Dawn*. Census Approach was used for the sampling procedure where the whole population was the sample. The time duration for the study was from January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019. As far as these two conflicts are concerned, this time frame was chosen because it saw a number of significant events.

Findings

Out of 141 images analyzed, 88 images were from “Dawn” newspaper and 53 images were from “The Express Tribune” newspaper. The coding sheet was designed and prepared according to the variables and the collected data was analyzed through SPSS software. Other than searching news trends for the images on both the newspaper websites, there were search terms like “Yemen conflict”, “Yemen crisis”, “Yemen victims”, “Kashmir conflict”, “Kashmir unrest”, “LOC attacks”, “Kashmir victims” etc. Below are the results of the study.

- RQ1: How the victims in the selected conflicts in Kashmir and Yemen are framed?

Table 1. Images Depicting the Victims in Conflicts in Kashmir and Yemen

Conflicts	Frames		Total	Chi square
	Worthy/ Humanized	Unworthy/ Dehumanized		
Kashmir	108 (94.7%)	6 (5.3%)	114	85.35 p value .000
Yemen	4 (14.8%)	23 (85.2%)	27	
Total	112	29	141	

Table 1 depicts the images were coded depicting the framing of victims in conflict, where the visual narratives of the two newspapers were analyzed as well as compared. In this table, the frequency and

percentages of images depicting the conflicts in Kashmir and Yemen showing Nationality and Frames were analyzed. Statistically this data is significant as it shows the tilt towards 108 (94.7%)

humanized Kashmiri victims and this sample can be applied to the whole population, still we believe we will be having this difference. Notwithstanding how much stories and pictures we actually select, Kashmiris would be predominantly humanized as compared to the Yemenis. The the low p value for chi square suggests that the difference between the two categories is significant. The Kashmiri nationals are humanized where the results show that 108

(94.7%) victims out of 114 were portrayed as worthy, whereas Yemeni nationals are dehumanized as the results show that 23 (85.2%) out of 27 victims were portrayed as unworthy.

RQ 2: How are the victims visually portrayed through camera angles in terms of their nationality?

Table 2. Nationality-wise distribution of Camera Angles

Camera Angle	Nationality		Total	Chi square
	Kashmir	Yemen		
Close-up (Intimate)	43 (95.5%)	2 (4.4%)	45	54.6 p value .000
Medium (Social)	58 (92.1%)	5 (7.9%)	63	
Long Shot (Stranger)	12 (42.8%)	16 (57.1%)	28	
High Angle	0 (0%)	4 (100%)	4	
Low Angle	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1	
Total	114	27	141	

Table 2 depicts the analysis of the camera angles where it was found that the visual aspect and emphasis has a significant role in framing and representing victims in media. (Fahmy, 2004). The results depict the clear relation of the two conflicts with camera angles, where it is significantly illustrating the difference of victims’ portrayal in terms of nationality.

Cross tabulation was administered to analyze the connection between Nationality and Camera angles, where noteworthy difference was depicted regarding the Close-up shot. 43 (95.5%) Kashmiri victims were portrayed through close-up shot, whereas the same angle was used to depict only 2 (4.4%) images of Yemeni victims. While analyzing Medium shot it was noticed that 58 (92.1%) images

of Kashmiri victims were portrayed through this camera angle, while only 5 (7.9%) Yemeni victims were depicted through this shot. For Long shot it was found that 12 (42.8%) images of Kashmiri victims were shown through the long shot camera angle, while 16 (57.1%) images of Yemeni victims were shown through the same angle.

The Chi-Square value shows 54.633, $p < 0.001$, which signifies that there is some relation between the Nationality and Camera angle when it comes to analysis of victimhood in conflicts.

RQ 3: What are the major topics through which the selected newspapers are reporting the two conflicts?

Table 3. The Selection of the Topics by the Two Newspapers

Type of Newspaper	Topics					Total	Chi square
	Violent Events	Protests	Warnings (Curfew)	Economy	Not Specified /Unclear		
Dawn	54 (61.4%)	15 (17.04%)	15 (17.04%)	3 (3.4%)	1 (1.13%)	88	8.40 p value .054
The Express Tribune	24 (45.3%)	16 (30.2%)	10 (18.9%)	0 (0%)	3 (5.7%)	53	
Total	78	31	25	3	4	141	

Table 3 shows that when it comes to analysis of the two newspapers, there were certain topics that were found common between the two. The difference

among these topics and newspapers was found significant after the analysis of images regarding victims in conflict was administered. The cross

tabulation operated between these two variables resulted in depicting specific topics that were portrayed more as compared to the others. For example, Violent Events were the most depicted among the topics through the images in the two newspapers. Out of 88, "Dawn" portrayed 54 (61.4%) Violent Events, whereas "The Express Tribune" portrayed 24 (45.3%) images regarding Violent Events, out of 53. Followed by these were the topics like Protests (31 images), Warnings/Curfew (25 images) and Economy (3 images) in total. The Chi-Square value shows 8.400, $p < 0.054$, which demonstrate a significance between the relation of Topics and Type of Newspaper.

Discussion and Conclusion

This research examines how the victims of the conflicts in Yemen and Kashmir are portrayed in the two chosen newspapers, Dawn and The Express Tribune. Shahira Fahmy's model for Visual Content Analysis has been used where the variables were analyzed accordingly, while some variables were inspired by Wilmott's research on visual analysis of photographs.

The study found that there are certain variables that predominantly affected the framing of the images. The statistical data was analyzed and the significant results were related to the correlation of the variables like frames, type of newspaper, conflicts, camera angle and topics. We found that majority of the images were predominantly humanizing the Kashmiri victims in both the newspapers as compared to the Yemeni victims. It was concluded through the data analysis that notwithstanding how much stories and pictures were actually selected in the Pakistani Press, Kashmiris would be predominantly humanized as compared to the Yemenis.

Other researches also suggest that media constructs and frames reality for the audience, so in the victimhood narratives like Kashmir conflict, Indians are visually depicted through demonic frame while Kashmiri victims are portrayed as victims of violence. The purpose of using these visuals is to gain sympathies for the oppressed. According to (Vis, 2016), Yemen is portrayed through a rationalized frame having a perceived reality, and the news media builds a narrative to justify its portrayal of a conflict in a particular manner.

This is one of the key findings that support the concept discussed in the literature review, as (Herman & Chomsky, 1988; Kempf, 1997) describe

that some "subjects" are given more coverage and considered "worthy", while others are given less importance by media and categorized as "unworthy". In a violent conflict whether national or transnational, the victims can be dehumanized and objectified as enemies through media framing, and in contrast the humanized victims draws sympathies. Media has the power to deprive the individuals of the human characteristics and visually frame them as justifiably less worthy (Bahador, 2011), which further makes the division between the ones being worthy of gaining sympathies while excluding the others being able to gain one. This portrays the "visual politics" practiced by the the media agencies (Chouliaraki et al, 2019).

Another key finding which leads to supporting some of the researches discussed in the literature review regarding nationality. According to Ramsay (2016), when news media dehumanizes, it deprives people of human characteristics and assign them inhuman traits. Bandura states that a dehumanized person is considered feeling less and senseless which explains the reason behind all the violence. (Maoz & McCauley, 2008) says that this kind of frame is used by media agencies in a violent conflict situation, which aggravates the hateful inclination of audience towards the dehumanized.

Fahmy (2004) in her research on "Picturing Afghan Women" talks about gendering, framing, humanizing and dehumanizing the victims through visual portrayals. Media manipulates the viewer's perception to create a connection with the humanized, as was done with Afghan women. Their images consisted of emotions generating sympathy. Louw adds further that when women are dehumanized, media intends to depict and support the Western point of view for Afghan women. (Iqbal & Hussain, 2017) also proposes Johan Galtung's view of humanization, where he says that common human sufferings get more coverage and pain of vulnerable groups like women and children is accentuated.

The results of this research indicate a relationship between nationality and the camera angles used by news media to depict victims of conflict. The findings show a definite relationship between camera angles and the depiction of victims in the conflicts in Yemen and Kashmir. Table 5.3 shows that Close-up shot was used for the portrayal of 43 (95.5%) Kashmiri victims, while it was used for only 2 (4.4%) images of Yemeni victims. While analyzing Medium shot it was studied that 58 (92.1%) images of Kashmiri victims were depicted

through this camera angle, while only 5 (7.9%) Yemeni victims were portrayed through this shot. It was also found that 12 (42.8%) images of Kashmiri victims were shown through the long shot camera angle, while 16 (57.1%) images of Yemeni victims were shown through the same angle.

According to this key finding, there is a significance of camera angles used by news media for framing victims in conflict. This view is also supported by some noteworthy literature, as (Rodriguez & Dimitrova, [2011](#)) discussed in his research “The levels of visual framing” that Burger points out camera angles and their significance where the use of long shot implies surrounding environment of the subject as well as distance. This is an indication of media framing as (Chouliaraki, [2006](#)) proposed that it is media’s “choice” (Ali & Mahmood, 2013) to choose a visual angle. He points out that if the victim’s gaze is captured then media gives a voice to that sufferer and humanizes it, while choosing a long shot estranges the victims thus dehumanizing them.

Shahira Fahmy also points out the significance of media framing through camera angles and portrayal of victims. She suggests that where close-up shot depicts intimate connection between victim and audience, long shot implies indifference. She highlights Goffman’s view about significance of visual framing that shapes the viewer’s perception for the subject and the narrative. (Fahmy, [2004](#)).

Carpenter ([2005](#)) asserts that the news media picks out the most susceptible victims in war or other

violent conflict situations and implies that they are “weak” victims (Rohwerder, [2017](#)). On the other hand, according to the victim’s face, the camera angle can also convey feelings of attachment or indifference (Jewitt & Leeuwen, [2001](#)). So if a sufferer is gazing at camera, shows misery or contentment depicts a complete narrative.

The analysis on the correlation between the two variables, “type of newspaper” and “topics”, shows significance through the chi square value. It was found that the two newspapers, “Dawn” and “The Express Tribune” are almost on the same page in the selection of topics for the depiction of conflicts. These two variables resulted in depicting specific topics that were portrayed more as compared to the others. “Violent Events” was one of the most depicted topics through the photographs visually framed in both the newspapers.

Like all other human endeavors, this study suffers from a number of limitations. One of the limitations was the sample size, due to the variation of reporting by both the newspapers and repetition of images, the sample size was 141 images which was smaller than expected. Second limitation is inbuilt in any content analysis that it is hard to attach the hidden aim of the creator, which in terms of images taken by the variety of photojournalists and then selected for newspapers by different editors. We believe a mixed-method approach would better analyze visual reporting of conflicts in terms of their potential to war and peace as well as from political communication perspective.

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