



Comparative Study of Democratic Performance of News Media in Pakistan: Analysis of Framing Theory

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Abstract- Mass media plays an important role in any democratic system. Literature identified many functions of media towards citizen in a democratic setup. The major functions include coverage on socio-political issues and events, give diverse opinion, give platform for constructive debates, holding people in power accountable and involving general public to political process. These functions vary with the different forms of democracy like from direct to representative and pure to fragile form of democracy. This study offers an insight into the democratic role performance of Pakistani media. While borrowing the democratic role performance criteria from the relevant scholarship, the researchers contently analyzed news stories relating to the General Elections 2018 in Dawn, Jang and Express News channels. The findings reveal that Pakistani media mainly report the events in sensationalistic manner in which qualitative debates on democracy are compromised over drama, superficiality and subjectivity. The researchers call for a more pluralistic and robust media approach to democratic practices to produce more enlightened citizenry in Pakistan.

Keywords: Media; democratic role performance, political apathy; sensationalism; Pakistan; critical self-awareness

I. INTRODUCTION:

Mass Media is an important part of democratic setup. Study of this important institution is largely ignore by the major democratization studies in spite of the fact that its performance is has not only strong impact on function of other democratic institution but democratic process itself. Democracy theory expects media to serve public by providing them information about political actors and interpretations of the actions of political actors. Researchers have found that increase in news supply has decreased the quality of news, which has a negative impact on political life of a society. For example, sensationalized news often has negative impact on the audiences' perception about the political actors (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Others have found the over emphasis on the political events over the process have left people less democratic in attitude and hence intolerant towards opposite perspectives (Kellner, 2004; McQuail, 1993; Skogerbø, 1996).

While there is no dearth of studies on the democratic role of media in Western countries, to our knowledge, there is no major studies in the Pakistani settings. This study intends to examine the news primarily related to elections, political controversies among parties, institutional activism, civil-military relations, foreign policy and national security through the democratic perspective. For this purpose, we have adopted the five democratic role performance indicators as suggested by the relevant literature to evaluate Pakistan's news media performance i.e. Strategic vs. Game Framing, Interpretative Reporting vs. Objective Reporting, Personalization vs. Institutionalization, Political Balance vs. Political Imbalance and Negativity vs. Positivity (Vreese, Esser & Hopmann, 2017).

II. MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

Mass media is considered as vital part of democracy. Media in political process supplies news and information regarding political process and actors to general public. They highlight and identify problems in society and serve as medium of deliberation. Mass media also serves as watchdog, which uncovers the misconduct of people in power (Kellner, 2004).

Gurevitch and Blumler (1990) listed down few functions of media towards society. These functions are reportage on socio-political issues and events, give diverse opinion, give platform for constructive debates, holding people in power accountable and involving general public to political process. However, there is growing concern that mass media is not properly fulfilling these functions. Critics argue media is currently operating as mass markets for the support status quo (Herman & Chomsky, 1988), news is not information but is a source of entertainment (McChesney, 1999). Political news is mostly about political personalities (Fog, 2013) and serious media debates on politics are missing (Barnett, 2002).

Scholars argued that mass media is not properly serving the society on above mentioned grounds. Media is operating under the umbrella of media market where conglomerates have prominent position to alter the news and information in favor or against the status quo (Kellner, 2004). In its current form, there is no information in the news but news is a source of entertainment as it supplies gossips, scandals and violence. Political news is most of the time consist of information about political actors, their party and affiliations. Fog (2013) argued that media is providing meaningless information to public about politics where serious media debates are missing (as cited in Bagdikian, 1983; Fallows, 1996; Capella & Jamieson, 1997; Bennett & Entman, 2001; Barnett, 2002).

Media as democratic institution is called as “Marketplace of ideas” (Voltmer, 2006, p. 4). It provides information, enlighten citizenry, act as watchdog, make power elites accountable, safeguard the rights of government and citizens (Voltmer, 2006). The influence of news coming to public with what effect is difficult to understand. The ordinary person is convinced by the news if they feel it as more appealing. They are not aware of the consequences and subjectivity of news (Fog, 2014).

According to Cappella and Jamieson (1997) the quality of political news is decreasing with the passage of time as a result it has negative impact on political life. Media is providing little amount of serious or hard news (Patterson, 2003). Poor media content, lack of factual and good journalism, misinterpretation of public opinion polls and other bad practices are losing public interest towards politics (Albeak, 2014).

Over the time news media is driven by the needs of consumer not by the need and want of politicians. It gave birth to populist media culture. When media is given authority to decide themselves what to cover and what not to leads to simplification, negative and dramatized representation of political news (Esser & Matthes, 2013). Furthermore it is argued that politics is personalized in nature where media focuses more on political personalities as compared to issues and events.

The way politics is represented in media poses challenge to functions of democracy in any country. The negative coverage about the institution and political actors rapidly influence their attitude towards political institutions and political actors. Dissatisfaction with political actors leads to less engagement of citizens in political process. Negative media coverage about politicians not only effect the credibility of politicians but also effect credibility of news itself (Esser & Matthes, 2013).

Normative theories argue that mass media in a democratic countries have to provide information to citizenry about politics, social affairs, information to elect the representatives and communication of citizen’s opinion to power elites. In a broader term these functions are watchdog function, provide platform for public debates, issues and problems of citizenry must be the part of media contents.

1: Functioning as Watchdog

Media is the central part of politics. It is called as “fourth estate” (Voltmer, 2006, p. 6) or “fourth power” (Ripolles et. al., 2014, p. 26). Scholars call media as a stage where politics is represented. It is the source of information for citizen as they are active participants of political process (Ripolles et. al., 2014). Voltmer (2016) argued that media in a democratic setup act as watchdog of society. This role of media is more important than any other role. As it protects the rights of citizenry so it is called as control function of media. The task of mass media is to monitor the activities of government and political elites, look at injustices, abuse of power and identify the errors which are being exercised by them. Media also alerts citizenry about the misconducts of those in power, defend the rights of public. It reveals hidden agenda of power elites and political leaders (Ripolles et. al., 2014). This role empowers mass media. Obiora and Chukwuma (2017) studied Nigerian press and quoted the clause from constitution which focuses the accountability of government as major function of mass media.

“The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of government to the people” (Obiora and Chukwuma, 2017, p. 128)

Furthermore, authors explained that media is expected to uncover the cases of corruption and wrong doings of executive, legislature and judiciary (three estates). It monitors the governance and hold three estates accountable to the public (as cited in Akinfeleye, 2003).

According to Voltmer (2006) the major function of democratization to hold governed, responsive and accountable to the people. The relationship between media and government is complex in newly established democracies. In newly established democracies there are economic problems, newly established institutions, including mass media and they cannot fully operate without government support. So the watchdog role of media depends upon the level of democracy which is being exercise in particular country. Nai (2019) explained that watchdog role of media is to highlight malpractices of power elites in

front of public. Author listed down three influences which hinders the watchdog role of media. First influence is external pressure from social and political structure of the society. When mass media is willing to be the critical voice of public is directly related to media freedom in the country. Government can also influence the content of media by enforcing different rules and regulations which in some cases discourages the watchdog role of media. According to Nai, the second influence is marketization. On the one hand it increase the competition, on the other hand it reduces the time and budget for news content production which leads to less investigative report over the media. In market oriented media profit is important as compared to newsworthiness. Third influence is pressure to create “information with entertainment values” (Nai, 2019, p. 5).

“In recent decades a shift toward “infotainment journalism,” “soft news,” and a preference for “hype” over substance, leading “to the news becoming entertainment programs” (Nai, 2019, p. 5).

Negativity in political news coverage increased in recent times (as cited in Lengauer, Esser, & Berganza, 2012) at the same time personalization has also increased: it focuses on individual candidates while ignoring the party politics. Watchdog role is not every time right but it works sometime (Nai, 2019).

2. Information and Debate

Media is vital source of information for citizens. It provides them information about news and current affairs. There are three sources of information for any of the citizen, first one is own experience, second one is interpersonal communication and third one is media (Shehata & Strömbäck, 2014). Mass media is considered as a public sphere. In this sphere public use to communicate their messages to policy makers and politicians with the help of media programs like talk shows, road shows and news. McNair (2009) explained that in contemporary world of modern media, media allows citizenry to communicate their views via letters, emails and social media. Media is a kind of public spheres where views of public are discussed and communicated to those in power.

Media supplies information on various topics. It benefits citizens to acquire in many aspects of political life. Studies have been conducted to analyze the awareness of citizens about political issues and events. Media provides access to citizenry on national and international politics (as cited in Shehata & Strömbäck, 2014). Shahid called mass media as “day-to-day parliament of the people” and author considers it as more powerful than parliament itself. It provide platform for public debates about politics and policies of government. In this scenario mass media act as opposition for power holders. Many times those in power and opposition use to ignore the media and don't communicate their messages, because they have fear of losing their voters, so in certain situations media debates provide useful information for political decision making of public (Shahid, 2009).

Dumitrescu and Mughan (2010) argues that in democratic settings main function of mass media is to provide necessary information to citizens. Media must provide contrasting views about politics to allow citizen to choose their representatives. Author argues that there are two ways of information “first is media pluralism and second is non-partisan news coverage” (Dumitrescu and Mughan , 2010, p. 478). Media pluralism deals with plural sources of information for public and on the other hand non-partisan media deals with free and fair information: citizens must be introduced to every side of political issues and events for fair selection of representatives. Strömbäck and Van Aelst (2013) argued that in times of election mass media is used by political leaders as publicity agent, they maximizes the positive coverage of political party for getting large number of votes and minimize the negative coverage about political parties. In parliamentary settings political actors use mass media to strengthen their position in parliament. Political parties use mass media and adapt their logic so that internal conflict of parties cannot be communicated to general public. The information provided to public formulate public opinion accordingly. The negative coverage create mistrust to politicians and political system (Barnett, 2002).

Livingstone and Lunt (1994) provide critical arguments on their study of media and democracy. According to the authors mass media is a forum provided for critical debates of public, but it can only happens when there is some institutional support to these forums. Media supports the voice of general public but the principal of argumentation and dialogue has changes to some extent. So it must be analyzed that to how well mass media expresses the plural arguments of public.

3. Voice of the people

Ismaeli (2015) argued that media use to communicate the viewpoints of politicians to public but it is also the prime responsibility of media to communicate the public messages for the effectiveness of democracy in the respective country. Media and journalists plays a role of mediator between citizen and those in power. In democratic system media has to give voice to marginalized group of the society which are otherwise not considered as powerful members of the society. Furthermore, McNair (2011) explained that in a democratic country government must be supervised by people in a way that media give citizenry access to public sphere where debates are generated and consensus is build, than is communicated to government elites (as cited in Ismaeli, 2015).

Welzel and Inglehart (2008) argues that in a narrow form of democracy masses are not considered as part of democracy. Elites viewpoints matter and they don't believe that policies of masses can influence the effectiveness of democracy and democratic process. In the electoral democracy ordinary citizens play important role. Author explained that in a democratization process of electoral democracy power is sifted from those who govern to ordinary citizens. The policies formulated reflect public opinion. Voltmer (2010) discussed government accountability and citizen's engagement, explored that democratic government exists in a web of interconnected institutions and public is of the most important element of democratic system. Voltmer identified few elements of political culture in any country i.e. government has interest in public life and affairs, public willingness to participate in political process, cognitive mobilization and support of public for the democracy either in existed form or ideal one. If the citizens are not interested to participate in democratic process than it will have serious risks for democracy.

Soler and Marce (2018) explored that many times mainstream media cannot reflect the voice of people. In contemporary world of globalization and networking, citizenry have alternate options to express their viewpoint. The concept of citizen journalism added life to it. Ismaeli (2015) is of the similar views of Soler and Marce argues that the countries having diverse political parties and diverse public opinion, explored the new ways to communicate their voices to government via internet and modern technologies. So the new media give voice to voiceless and the important aspect is there is no restriction of opinion expression.

Balanced coverage of political controversies is not the main focus of commercial media organizations. Citizen's consume and prefer the viewpoints they are agreed with. Therefore, it is difficult for media outlets to cover controversial issues from both sides and present alternate side of the issue (Fog, 2013). Media use to take side in a controversy; later on when evidences provided requires the coverage of opposing view point, they likely to keep complete silence about the matter rather than losing their real face in front to public. Furthermore, when mass media create consensus about any controversy through biased coverage resultantly opponents will face difficult to get their voice hear in media (Ericson et. al., 1989).

3. Democratic role performed by news media

News media performance is grounded in the notion that media have different functions to perform depending upon the requirements of the society. Scholars suggest that news media should provide information, analysis and context for scrutiny of power holders (McQuail, 1992). Mass media is considered as link between political parties, government, voters and candidates etc. It gives an opportunity to government and citizen for direct communication because both of them are limited to scope and scale of reach. Mass media are not channels for communicating messages they are active participants of political process (Cook, 1998). Sometimes, even media is not creator or originator of the messages but political messages are omitted, reconstructed, restructured as media sets the agenda of the political debates (Dearing & Rogers 1996; McCombs et. al., 1997).

It is equally important to consider that how political matters are presented in media. Personalization, sensationalization, dramatization and eye catching visuals are some examples, journalists regard them as important elements for good news story. Politics has little importance in front public, they want easy to consume and low salience news (Neuman, 1992). Many times the coverage of politics blurs the boundary between information and entertainment. To justify the matter mass media takes side of political actors in a way that they hide their own view point and form alliances with political actors to support their argument. In this situation mass media exchange loyalty to some political parties for more exclusive access to news sources.

It is of the great debate that whether media logic is more compatible with democratic norms of new or established democracies. It can be argued that democratic benefits evolves from professional reporting of news which are considered as by product of it (Voltmer, 2006). Critics fear that mix of political news reporting and entertainment are responsible for decrease in interest of public towards news (Putnam, 1995). Petterson (1998) furthermore, argued that elections are covered in confrontational style which gives an image of game show, where rational policy debates are not focused.

In contrast the voice of public is not heard via media until and unless they organize themselves and take collective action like mega public demonstration or citizen's movement. Public is at receiving end of the political information and messages rather involved in creation of the message. Hence, the essential question is whether political information or messages encourages citizenry to participate in political process (Voltmer, 2006).

The democratic performance of mass media is often criticized as erroneous and is considered as threat to democracy. Gunther and Mughan (2000), the role of media in democratizing process is not consistent,

sometimes it promotes democracy to the transition countries and sometimes don't play any role to promote and enhance qualities of democracy in mature countries. Scholars explained that political news is covered as sensationalized events, scandals, personalization and privatization. They also focuses on composition, conflict and strategies of political parties (Gunther & Mughan, 2000; Rhee, 1997). Even when media covers substantive issues, they are report in episodic style, in which contextualization and social context is not present (Iyengar, 1994). All of the above arguments provide evidence that mass media is not fulfilling their democratic duties. Resultantly, the political coverage of media foster mistrust, public disengagement and crisis of political legitimacy (Semetko & Vreese, 2004). Keeping in view the above discussion in mind, the following research questions have been posted in the study.

4. Pakistani Perspective:

Pakistan is a country having mix form of government. It is called as fragile form of democracy. Since its independence in 1947, there had been transition from democracy to dictatorship and vice versa. Before 2002 mass media was under the state control and there was only a single state owned channel which was sole source of information for the public. In 2002 General Musharraf's dictatorial regime opens the avenues for market oriented media channels and it was the period of mushroomed growth of media organization. The growth of market oriented news organization give birth to critical media debates. Once the Musharraf left the power, media use to grow with same notion. After Musharraf's regime till date Pakistan is experiencing the democratic government (Gul, Obaid & Ali, 2017; Pintak, Bowe & Nazir, 2016). Volmer (2013) argued that media of Pakistan was a mouthpiece of government and is now converted to more mature form (as cited in Pintak, Bowe & Nazir, 2016).

The media in Pakistan has never been absolutely free because the government censorship had always been there to restrict the critical voice of journalists and citizenry. Waqas and Khattak (2017) identified few challenges of democracy in Pakistan. Scholars argued that media of Pakistan failed to produce informed society because there are several reasons like unawareness regarding form of democracy, distorted political culture and legal pluralism. Furthermore, it is explained that democracy in Pakistan is a combination of two different systems one is Secularism and other is Islamist system. It is a country having multiple ideologies. Democracy is a form of government gives equal opportunity for diverse ideologies to participate in voting process and elect the true representative. Due to the unawareness of true form of democracy they are not able to select the true representative. Waqas and Khattak (2017) explained another reason of fragile democracy in Pakistan is distorted political culture. Authors explained that Pakistan is a segmented society and every segment of community have their own political leaders and they wish them to be elected without knowing the working of that political leaders. Democracy is having rule of law. In Pakistan according to Waqas and Khattak there is different legal system for those in power and public. This legal pluralism halted the real practices of democracy in Pakistan.

Heil (2008) quoted the interview of one of the journalist Aasma Sherazi 'free media emerges out of democracy, but here, in Pakistan, democracy is emerging out of free media' (as cited in Khan, 2009). In contemporary times media is changing its role in to dynamic one. Khan argues that media in Pakistan was not autonomous and was considered as maintainer of status quo in democratic regimes. As there were only two political parties PPPP and PMLN, attained power on alternate basis. So media under these regimes were suppressed to many extent (Khan, 2009).

The long march of 2014 was staged by two political party leaders Imran Khan and Tahir-ul-Qadri. Media played a vital role for the success of this long march. This protest was staged after 12 years of establishment of market oriented media of Pakistan. The protest was supported by live coverage, talk show discussions and news packages were formulated. While covering protest media "simplifying, polarizing, personalizing, intensifying, concretizing and accentuating the political crisis" (Abbas, 2017, p.49). Qadeer, Shehzad and Chishti (2017) argues that discourses in print media of Pakistan indicates that media many time personalized the coverage of political leaders and distort their real image to the keys of public. It is analyzed that media follow their own perspective about the political event and issues to change the minds of reader accordingly.

Siraj and Hussain (2017) critically evaluated the autonomy of journalists in Pakistan. The main argument of the study supported the view that journalists in Pakistan are unable to exercise the autonomy to select the news and information. In case the news is sensitive the decision of news selection and broadcasting lies on the hands of editorial management. Contemporary media in Pakistan is dependent upon advertising revenue, as a result gatekeepers are working and serving those in power. So journalistic autonomy is restricted by political, social, economic and concentrated ownership.

Studies conducted on democracy and media in Pakistan has limited approach. Mainly studies conducted in the area of political communication are based on framing (Qadeer, Shehzad & Chishti, 2017) of the event

like long march 2014 (Abbas, 2017), Panama scandal (Siraj & Waheed, 2019). The studies of democracy and media are from the new media's perspective (Eijaz, 2013; Mangi & Soomro, 2018; Michaelsen, 2011; Sadiq, Mohd, Zain & Ajis, 2018) and few are conducted on the fragile democracy of Pakistan (Pintak, Bowe & Nazir, 2016). Moreover the studies are also conducted from journalist's perspective, influence on news and influence on citizenry (Hanan, Saleem, Ali & Mukhtar, 2016; Memon, 2014; Ashraf, 2013). Few studies are also conducted about challenges and problem of democracy in Pakistan (Gul, Obaid, & Ali, 2017; Waqas & Khattak, 2017).

Researcher has not found any landmark study conducted on democratic role performance of news media of Pakistan. Current study under investigation, is inspired by the work of Vreese, Esser and Hopmann (2017). They developed the standardization of the main variables of political communication like personalization, negativity, strategy and game framing, hard and soft news, and institutionalization. Along with these variables the current study uses public representation, contextualization and abstraction in news. Through all these variables the role news media in Pakistan is paying is analyzed. It is also analyzed through these variables that how Pakistan's news media is reporting on politics either the reporting supports the ideal democratic role of news media Pakistan or not.

Research Questions

RQ1: Judging by the democratic performance criteria, how do the Pakistan's news media frame politics in general elections?

RQ2: Is there any effect of medium of the framing of politics?

RQ3: What are the most recurrent frames of news media in Pakistan?

III. METHODOLOGY

The study analyzed three media outlets including one Television channel i.e. Express news and two newspapers i.e. Dawn and Jang. The content of these media outlets were selected because all of them have different political leaning. To get the wider perspective it was agreed to have media outlets with different political leaning. Furthermore, Dawn and Jang are leading newspapers whereas Express media groups is considered as one of the strongest media group of Pakistan.

The study focused on general elections of Pakistan because the study aimed to analyse the media in times of special event. So, the general elections of Pakistan was the event where the performance of the media was analysed. The data was collected from July 2018 to October 2018. The time period includes both the election and performance of newly elected government in Pakistan. Systematic sampling was used in this study. Through this sampling method every 3rd day was selected for both print and electronic media. As far as newspapers are concerned front and back pages were considered for analysis because mostly these pages include political news stories which is the main focus of the study. In case of television 9pm telecast was analyzed because prime time news has all the news happenings of the day.

The study used framing theory as theoretical foundation. All the variables identified are borrowed from literature and applied to Pakistan's perspective (Vreese, Esser & Hopmann (2017)). The variables were coded from 0 to 1 range. 0 here indicates complete presence of the variable in the news story while 1 indicates absence (Salgado & Strömbäck, 2012). Once the data was coded according to the 0 to 1 range through SPSS frequencies were obtained.

Two coders were trained to code the data. Two coders were selected to get the better reliability index. So, the training session was supervised by the researcher, after that pilot study was conducted for the better understanding of the data by coders. The reliability index Cronbach alpha for this study was 0.70.

Conceptual definitions of variables

1. Strategic vs. Game Framing

Game framing is when media covers politics as a game: one loses and other win. In this type of framing they used sports language like political leaders are referred to as Captains etc. while strategy frame is macro level frame discusses other aspects of event like strategies of political parties to win election, their manifesto etc. (Aalberg, Vreese & Stromback, 2012).

2. Interpretative Reporting vs. Objective Reporting

Interpretative journalism is more when journalist has great control over news. Journalist's analysis is presented as main news. This type of journalist is more descriptive, not fact focused and is most of the time

value laden (Skovsgaard, Albæk, Bro & de Vreese, 2013). While Objective reporting is less descriptive, fact focus and is not value laden.

3. Negativity vs. Positivity

Negativity in news is defined as news is overloaded with politician's misconduct, political failures, allegations etc. (Esser, Engesser, Matthes & Berganza, 2017). Negativity in news will be analyzed by overall tone and language used in news stories. While on the other hand positivity in news is when politician's positive points are highlighted in news like news related to development etc. or it is also related to highlighting positive points about institutions of Pakistan.

4. Political Balance vs. Political Imbalance

Political balance is when all the political parties are given equal coverage (Hopmann, Aelst, Salgado & Legnante, 2012) While political imbalance news is when one party is given more coverage than others.

5. Personalization vs. Institutionalization

Personalization is when politicians are presented as individual actors. It is more individualized coverage of event or issue (Aelst, et. al., 2017). Institutionalization is opposite of personalization. It focuses on more on performance of institution rather than individual actors.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

For this study total data was collected from July 01, 2018 to October 31, 2018. For 04 months the major media outlets were analyzed. A total of 1621 news stories were collected including 520 news stories were from Dawn, 559 news stories from Jang and 542 news stories were telecasted on Express news.

Table 1: Distribution of news stories in terms of democratic performance

S. No.	Frames	Total No. of Stories	Percentage	No. of stories in Dawn	No. of stories in Daily Jang	No. of stories in Express TV
1	Game Framing	58	3.6%	8	20	30
2	Strategic Framing	46	2.8%	34	11	1
3	Interpretative Reporting	327	20.1%	89	112	126
4	Objective Reporting	177	11.0%	57	59	61
5	Political Balance	30	1.8%	8	14	8
6	Political Imbalance	38	2.3%	11	21	6
7	Personalization	470	29.0%	159	141	170
8	Institutionalization	317	19.6%	104	99	114
9	Negativity	97	6%	42	36	19
10	Positivity	61	3.8%	8	46	7
	Total	1,621	100%	520	559	542

As shown in the above table, the events surrounding the 2018 elections in Pakistan are mainly reported in negative approach. Out of the total indicators to measure the democratic performance, the personalization variable got the highest amount of coverage. As many as 29 percent news stories fall in this category. Media coverage in this variable treated the general elections 2018 as a battle between the leaders of three major political parties—Imran Khan, Nawaz Sharif and Asif Ali Zardari. While the personal characteristic of these leaders likes scandals, corruption, morality and families lives were discussed at greater length, the institutional factors like their parties manifestoes, plans for correcting the economic, foreign and domestic uplift of the country were largely ignored. They were pitted against each other and evidences from their past were presented to defile them.

The second most recurrent theme was the emphasis on the interpretative style of reporting. As many as 20 percent stories about the elections 2018 were reported in this way. The journalists ignored the professional ethos of objectivity and adopted the role of interpretivists. The events were reported from very subjective perspective where opinions and viewpoints of PTI were promoted at the cost of other political parties. Such a perspective deprive common people of listening to all the perspectives which often lead to lopsided opinions.

The third most recurrent frame was institutionalization. Media covered 19 percent of the stories under this frame. It happened because before and after the election Judiciary was more active and the newscasts were full of the news of chief justice of Pakistan that's why this theme got more importance. For the covering news related to Judiciary is difficult because it requires more objectivity and authenticity.

Another recurrent theme about the reporting of general elections 2018 is the negative approach through which the events are reported. As many as six percent stories fall in this category. Negative stories were mainly related to crime, murder, theft etc. Positive stories like the democratic transition, public trust, high turnout were mainly ignored by the selected media in this study.

In terms of the preferences of the selected media in this study (Dawn, Jang and Express News TV), there were no significant differences among them. Since these three media outlets represent three dominant media houses in Pakistan that set the agenda for rest of the media in Pakistan, one can say with some confidence that media in Pakistan in general adopt similar line while reporting on political events when measured through criteria of democratic performance. As shown in the table 1, one would expect the quality newspaper Dawn to act more responsibly but the findings reveal except from the theme positivity, it did not differ much from other media.

V. CONCLUSION:

In this study, the researchers investigated the coverage of elections 2018 in three leading media outlets including Dawn, Jang and Express News Channel through the perspective of democratic role performance. Very much in line with the existing literature, it was found that notwithstanding the theoretical importance of media for democracy, in practical world, media are becoming handicap to constructive democracy. While we expect media to produce a healthy public sphere by shedding light on all the important issues that a country faces, in actuality media just focus on fewer perspectives. The lack of multi-perspectivity deprive people of getting access to all possible accounts.

Likewise, as shown in this study, the media reduces complex democratic practices to simplified personalized narrations. Most of the coverage of 2018 elections relied on the personal characteristics of politicians where they are shown as involved in a tug of war. Debates over the policy making process, issues and problems that Pakistan face and how to resolve these issues were either ignored or superficially presented thus denying public the opportunity to understand these issues more thoroughly.

As discussed in the literature review part of this study, the Pakistani media in particular and elsewhere in general need to produce politically balanced and objective reporting. This would involve taking a holistic approach where issues are explained in entirety. Media need to shun political affiliations and produce more serious debates on the national issues through a solution-oriented approach. While this may seem a too idealistic claim but evidence from the developed world shows that it is possible if all the important stakeholders sit together and devise workable strategies in this regard.

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