

Visual Content Analysis of Victimhood in Conflicts in Kashmir and Yemen

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Abstract:

This study investigates the portrayal of victims in Indian held Kashmir and Yemen conflict in Pakistani Press. For this purpose, content analysis of 141 photographs was conducted. These photographs were selected from two Pakistani English Newspapers, *daily Dawn* and *daily The Express Tribune* from January 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019. The study found that Kashmiri victims are predominantly humanized as compared to Yemeni victims in the Pakistani newspapers. While in terms of camera angles, the Kashmiri victims received more close-up and medium shots, which implies humanization, the Yemeni victims on the other hand, received more dehumanizing frames. In terms of gender, male victims received more coverage in the Yemen conflict than in Kashmir conflicts. Pictures of males symbolize active war between groups whereas females symbolize grief and gain audience's sympathies. One common feature of the coverage in both newspapers was the focus on violent events compared to other happenings in the region.

Keywords: Kashmir, Yemen, victims, conflicts, Pakistani press, friends, foes, humanization

INTRODUCTION

Though many researchers have analyzed media texts to report victims in conflicts, visual analysis has not been frequently utilized. On the other hand, scholars have emphasized studying the visual portrayal of conflict situations as well as the images of victims depicted in media. Studies have shown that media consider specific 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 utilized to gain certain jingoistic purposes, or they are portrayed to lead to the resolution of the conflict. Keeping this perspective in mind, in this study, visual reporting of victims in two conflicts: Kashmir conflict and Yemen conflict is analyzed. Pakistan and India have hostile relations whereas Pakistan enjoys friendly relations with Saudi Arabia. Pakistan is a party to Kashmir conflict whereas it is neutral in case of Yemen conflict. The study's main objective is to critically analyze the key features of the visual reporting of victims and examine the similarities and differences of the victim reporting between the two conflicts between the selected newspapers.

Kashmir became a bone of contention for Pakistan and India since independence. The two countries have been involved in war on three different occasions in 1948, 1965 and 1999 Kargil war. According to different estimates, more than 40,000 have been killed in the region. Similarly, the Yemen conflict started in 2015 and resulted after rebel Houthi led by Hussein Badreddin al-Houthi and supported by Iran ousted elected President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi from power. This civil war

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led to an intervention by a Saudi-led coalition. Its airstrikes caused casualties and human sufferings at large scale (Naami & Moodley, 2017; Holt, 2020).

LITERATURE REVIEW

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, it is essential to recognize the root cause of conflict in order to attain peace (Hussain & Munawar, 2017). Bratić (2006) believes that when there is a conflict, the people's perspective changes according to the depiction of the conflict in media. Media manipulates the receiver's mind when it comes to the either advocating war or disinformation. According to Rodriguez and Dimitrova (2011) conventional media has interests in inciting conflicts because of financial gains. The decision-makers tend to promote a political cause by using media to get civilian favour and dissuading rivals. In contrast, media conglomerates manipulate information through media for financial gains and journalistic stance of shedding more light on the newsworthiness of the conflict. Anden-Papadopoulos (2008) believes that photographs express themselves in their own way while opposes the concept of war images used as bare "markers or cues" added to the narratives.

Berinsky and Kinder (2006) define "Framing" as a careful selection of information by the aristocracy for the ordinary people to be consumed by way of media. Entman (1991) highlight the possible use of visuals and photographs in media to intensify or underplay the victims or any specific organization. Images mirror society's truths, but they can also be exploited due to their capacity to mimic reality and thus be used as an instrument for framing. According to Messaris and Abraham (2001) audience tend to believe in the mediated reality presented through images, whereas they are oblivious of the effect of visual framing. That is why this media technique has particular significance.

Fahmy (2005) mentioned the technique of "visual gatekeeping," which involves the channeling of some images that are picked out of a ton of photographs, based on their capacity to portray an attractive narrative (Fahmy, 2005). Mitchell also discussed "power of images" when it comes to a violent conflict in a political scenario. Media researchers and theorists regarding the study of art acknowledge that there is always a reflection of culture, mindset, self-recognition and perspectives, which are "framed" as well as "re-framed" depending on the media agencies and policymakers (Mitchell, 1995).

Messaris and Abraham (2001) explained that a Society is shaped by the consistent set of shared beliefs, which define the "visual frames" of that society. The specialty of visuals is explained by Shahira Fahmy, where she highlights some powerful visual devices like "social semiotics," "iconicity" and the "indexicality," that are used for framing. Images portrayed with these devices' help can effectively convey an ideology designed for the audience, which can otherwise provoke a controversy if depicted in words (Fahmy, 2010).

Entman (1993) adds that the audience's interpretations can either be persuaded or dissuaded in one way or another, using specific selected pictures and verbal expressions. According to Judith Butler, a philosopher Susan Sontag believes that words that express the images can incite anger and be irksome, but along with this, the visual frame also has an impact on perception. It can forcefully

create a depiction that incites fury and fear towards the suffering portrayed (Butler, 2007). In another research done by James N. Druckman, it was concluded that optical frames in media consist of photographs, verbal symbols, and expressions depicted individually to communicate a conflict situation (Druckman, 2001).

The impact of images in media is undeniable; (Neumann & Fahmy, 2012). It has a long-lasting effect on the memory of the audience, while the words cannot create this impact (Paivio & Csapo, 1973). Photographs can trigger a more amplified form of thought process (Lynn, Shavitt, & Ostrom, 1985). When it comes to selecting information, it is mainly the idea of adding or omitting the news that needs to be framed (Cartwright, 2006). A study was done by Shahira Fahmy where the 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).

Azevedo, De-Beukelaer, Jones, Safra, & Tsakiris (2020) talk about using individual visual frames to depict the humans in dehumanized manner. They studied the portrayal of refugees in media and framed them as unworthy victims in individual images. Some researchers and theorists are also of the same view. In another study Kempf (1997) highlights that the policymakers 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, the audience is bound to interpret the information disseminated by media through the coercive frame designed by it. It transmits a learned behaviour to the people that restrict them from having a perspective out of that particular frame. In the war or conflict situation, the media can “thematize” the idea and control the audience’s sensory reactions. Dehumanizing culture can be a part of it. Butler adds that “visual interpretation” sometimes does not narrow down the frame of perspective where images can be interpreted through critical analysis, and a photograph is analyzed from different perspectives (Butler, 2007).

According to Messaris and Abraham (2001), images are used for framing because they can mirror the realities of life, but they are always subjectively depicted. They have a persuasive power to make the audience believe in the portrayal of a news story and look at the narrative through a particular frame (Wilmott, 2017). People are ignorant of the visual framing because of the real nature of the images, and so they are relatively more likely informed 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: How are the victims visually portrayed through camera angles in terms of nationality?

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

METHOD

In this study, researchers conducted visual content analysis to examine images of victims in the selected conflicts. The images were retrieved from web editions of *daily The Express Tribune* and *daily 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. The reason for selecting this period was that many important events happened during this period when it comes to these two conflicts.

Variables

For this study, different variables have been incorporated with Shahira Fahmy's model of Visual Content Analysis. The following variables were observed:

Nationality: The two types of nationalities in the visual frame: a. Kashmiri, b. Yemeni

Age: The dominant age group in a visual frame: a. children b. adolescents c. adult

Gender: The gender that was prominently shown in a visual frame: a. males b. females

Location/Setting: The area or place where the action is shown in the image. A. battlefield b. hospital or ambulance c. school d. houses e. street or car f. religious building g. cemetery h. government building j. not specified

Physical harm: The level of severity shown regarding any physical: a. harm b. not severe c. severe d. most severe e. no physical harm.

Emotions: The intensity of emotions of person(s) shown in the visual frame: a. "emotion", "emotions were not highlighted even though the People were visible," b. "no emotion" c. dominant emotions d. anger/frustration, e. desperation/sadness/being pathetic/demoralization f. mourning, pain/fear, g. hope/optimism/confidence/courage, redemption/happiness/delight/pleasure, empathy, contemplating

Frames: "worthy/ humanized victims," and "unworthy/ dehumanized victims."

Destruction: How the level of destruction shown: a. portrayal of death b. suffering c. material destruction d. no destruction

The Graphic Device: a. graphic b. very graphic

Several people shown in single/individual, dyad, small group (3-5), group/multiple (more than 5), none.

Camera Angle: a. close-up (intimate) b. medium (social) c. long shot (stranger) d. high angle e. low angle

Topics: a. violent events b. visits by elites c. protests d. warnings e. curfew f. economy g. sports i. not specified/unclear

FINDINGS

The total number of images were 141 from the selected newspapers. Out of 141 images analyzed, 88 images were from daily *Dawn* and 53 images were from daily *The Express Tribune*. 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?

Conflicts	Frames		Total	Chi square
	Worthy/ Humanized	Unworthy/ Dehumanized		
Kashmir	108 (94.7%)	6 (5.3%)	114	85.35 p value
Yemen	4 (14.8%)	23 (85.2%)	27	.000
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 Kashmir and Yemen's conflicts 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 it is believed that there will be this difference. Notwithstanding how much stories and pictures are selected, Kashmiris would be predominantly humanized as compared to the Yemenis. 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?

Camera Angle	Nationality		Total	Chi square
	Kashmir	Yemen		
Close-up (Intimate)	43 (95.5%)	2 (4.4%)	45	54.6 p value
Medium (Social)	58 (92.1%)	5 (7.9%)	63	
Long Shot (Stranger)	12 (42.8%)	16 (57.1%)	28	.000
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 have 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 a

noteworthy difference was depicted regarding the close-up shot. 43 (95.5%) Kashmiri victims were portrayed through the 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 the 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 while analyzing 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	Topic					Total	Chi square
	Violent Events	Protests	Warnings (Curfew)	Economy	Not Specific/Unclear		
<i>Dawn</i>	54 (61.4%)	15 (17.04%)	15 (17.04%)	3 (3.4%)	1 (1.13%)	88	8.40 p value
<i>The Express Tribune</i>	24 (45.3%)	16 (30.2%)	10 (18.9%)	0 (0%)	3 (5.7%)	53	.054
Total	78	31	25	3	4	141	

Table 3 shows that when it comes to analysis of the two newspapers, there were specific 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 than the others. For example, violent events were the most depicted among the topics through the images in the two newspapers. Out of 88, daily *Dawn* portrayed 54 (61.4%) violent events, whereas daily *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 demonstrates a significance between the relation of topics and type of newspaper.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study explores the visual frames used in the two selected newspapers, *Dawn* and *The Express Tribune*, to portray victims in Kashmir and Yemen conflicts. Shahira Fahmy's model for Visual Content Analysis has been used to analyze the variables, while some variables were inspired by Wilmott's research (2017) 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. It was found that most of the images were predominantly humanizing the Kashmiri victims in both the newspapers compared to the Yemeni victims. It was concluded through the data analysis that notwithstanding how many stories and pictures were selected in the Pakistani press. Kashmiris would be predominantly humanized as compared to the Yemenis.

While several researchers also suggest that media constructs and frames reality for the audience, in the victimhood narratives like the Kashmir conflict, Indians are visually depicted through the demonic frame while Kashmiri victims are portrayed as victims of violence. The purpose of using these visuals is to gain sympathy 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 draw sympathies. Media can deprive the individuals of the human characteristics and visually frame them as justifiably less worthy (Bahador, 2011), which further divides the ones being worthy of gaining sympathies while excluding the others being able to gain one. This portrays the “visual politics” (Chouliaraki, Orwicz, & Greeley, 2019).

Another key finding which leads to supporting some of the researchers discussed in the literature review is nationality. According to Ramsay (2016), when news media dehumanizes, it deprives people of human characteristics and assigns them inhuman traits. Bandura states that a dehumanized person is considered to feel less and senseless, which explains all the violence. Maoz & McCauley (2008) argue that media agencies use this kind of frame in a violent conflict situation, which aggravates the evil inclination of the 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 Afghan Women’s Western point of view. While 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 findings of this study suggest that nationality correlates with the camera angles used by news media in the visual portrayal of victims in conflict. The results depict camera angles’ clear connection with the visual portrayal of victims in the Kashmir and Yemen conflict. Table 5.3 shows that a close-up shot was used to portray 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 and 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 proposed that it is the media’s “choice” to choose a visual angle (Chouliaraki, 2006). He points out that if the victim’s gaze is captured, then the 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 the portrayal of victims. She suggests that where a close-up shot depicts intimate connection between victim and audience, a long shot implies indifference. She highlights Goffman’s view about the significance of visual framing that shapes the viewer’s perception of the subject and the narrative (Fahmy, 2004).

When it comes to framing victims in a war or violent conflict situation (Carpenter, 2005) found that news media select vulnerable victims and also imply that they are considered “weak” (Rohwerder, 2017). On the other hand, Jewitt & Van-Leeuwen (2001) point out that the camera angle chosen can also signify the feeling of attachment or indifference depending victims’ expression. So if a sufferer is gazing at camera, it shows misery or contentment depicts a complete narrative. 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 others, this study also suffers from several 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. The second limitation is inbuilt in any content analysis that it is hard to attach the creator’s hidden aim, which in terms of images taken by a 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 and political communication perspective. Since this study has analyzed the print media, it is suggested that the coverage of these conflicts by the broadcast media should also be studied.

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