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Cultural continuity and mass media: An analysis of leading English online newspapers of

Pakistan

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Abstract

Cultural continuity has been identified as one of the primary functions of mass media (McQuail, 1983). This paper has investigated leading Pakistani online English newspapers to assess their role in transmission of cultural images. The population of this paper comprised of lifestyle pages of online English dailies. The lifestyle pages are considered as showcase of cultural selection of a newspaper, have been quantitatively analyzed. The three hundred cultural images have been analyzed for this study. The study found that 71% images on the pages were representing foreign culture while 9% of them were portrayal of mixed culture. On the other hand only 24% of the analyzed images were representation of Pakistani culture which means that leading Pakistani online English newspapers are publishing such cultural images which do not belong to Pakistani society.

Keywords: cultural continuity, social responsibility, online newspapers, cultural identity, cultural maintenance, cultural transformation

I- Introduction

It is generally believed that Pakistanis seek their cultural identity from Persia and Middle East, who ruled India for centuries (Malik, 2006). However, Paracha (2015) is of the opinion that Pakistani culture has never been clearly defined since its independence in 1947, adding that country's culture is product of several other cultures is mainly of South Asian region and very little of Middle East European invaders. Meanwhile records confirm that most of the cultural values of Pakistan still maintain their originality as of centuries ago with several religious influences (Maron, 1957). Local population mainly follow the national dress, Shalwar Kamiz, with little modifications. As Koerner and Ian Russell (1988) noted that Pakistan's cultural dress, which is sewed from non-see through cloth, is rooted in Sindh's 5,000 year old culture with minor changes.

Cultural Continuity and Mass Media:

Cultural Continuity means the transfer of certain cultural related values to the newer generations. The process continues automatically to ensure that culture of societies is preserved and the upcoming offspring learn the lifestyle of their ancestors. All this process is completed by the process of communication, especially in the developing societies where the members have very limited direct interaction; mass media plays a role for the transmission of these values from one generation to another.

According to Spencer-Oatey (2012) culture of a place should be uniform, practical,

socially acceptable, traditional, learnt by individuals and continuous. Members of the societies represent its culture through their lifestyles, literature, food habits, wears and others, while the newer generations learn culture through observation. But in today's societies mass media is a place where children spend most of their time, therefore mass media is one of the major elements that influence the process of cultural learning (Soomro, 2015). Media have been representing local social norms and values through content, hence not only exhibiting the culture of societies but also defining social values. In other words mass media is a source to transmit the culture of certain society to its new generations, under a process called cultural continuity (McQuail, 1983).

However the cultural continuity does not mean that there is total absence of addition of new values or social change, which also continues at the same time. This process might be resistant towards disowning its historical values but it does allow the situations to redefine or renovate the beliefs so that they can last for longer time fighting the challenges of new times.

When mass media messages are produced according to the cultural values of some other societies and the messages are actually broadcasted to a different social setup, the content transforms the culture of the society on receptors end. Moreover one culture may get mixed with the values from other cultures, which eventually becomes a source of cultural hybridity.

This situation allows the mass media organizations to become a strong tool of promotion of transcultural values. The factor gets even more intensified in the developing societies where the masses have limited direct communication and they depend on media to learn about their lifestyles (Schiller, 1976). In this way mass media which is obligated to function for cultural continuity purposes becomes a source for cultural change and brings cultural erosion and identity crisis.

Online Media and Cultural Identity:

Pakistan's 14% of the top websites are distributing news content as their primary activity (Alexa, 2015). The website that manages the records of worldwide online activities further reveals that majority (more than 60%) of the readers of these news websites belong to Pakistan (Annexure-I).

Mass communication scholars such as Lasswell (1948) agreed that it was one of the primary functions of mass media to represent the culture and social norms of a society where mass media operates. However with the advent of new communication tools mass media got a chance to present its content across the cultures. Moreover the phenomena of globalization and glocalization grant more freedom to the mass media to communicate with consumers of different identities, cultural background and moralities. To earn more business by engaging the users from across the cultures, the question of cultural continuity becomes more important. The mass media organizations which operate online produce the content that represents the cross cultural values, and while publishing the content that satisfies users/readers/viewers from multicultural backgrounds the publishers often fail to perform the function of cultural continuity in the context of the local society in which they operate.

Cultural Transformation and Cultural Hybridity:

Cultural Transformation is a dynamic process which allows the dominating cultural groups to persuade the other the lifestyles of other groups. Primarily the concept of Cultural Hybridity means to manifold the multiple cultural values in the range of literature, interactions and lifestyle, as a result of discussions and presentation of model modified behaviors (Raab and Butler, 2015).

The advent of modern technologies and tools of mass communication, especially internet, allows the people from different cultures to exchange views, ideas, literature and other

cultural values to form a new transformed culture of the societies (Albrow, Martin and King, 1990). The formation of hybrid cultures associate the members of societies to the set of values that directly control the factors related to individual cultures and identities (Jonathan, Rosaldo and Renato, 2002).

The research work is an attempt to investigate the role of Pakistani online newspapers in promotion of national and international cultures.

Hypothesis:

H1: Pakistani online newspapers publish international cultural images more than the national cultural images.

H2: Pakistani online newspapers publish more mixed cultural images as compared to national and foreign cultural images.

II- Literature Review

Media messages are believed to be part of a social structure which comprise of some information in the form of texts, photos, moving images or voice that is largely concerned with the cultural aspects of a specific social system. (McQuail, 2005, p. 78). While posing a responsibility to media Preston (2005) adds that the process of social and cultural continuity is also a chance for the individual habits to get communicated to others with in a culture or across the cultures. Curran and Morley (2006, p. 124) said the quality of passive learning further allows mass media to cultivate the new cultural ideas in the minds of the readers. This is the reason the one way communication process intensifies the impact of mass media.

Shabir and Nadeem (2014) concluded that foreign culture was being given more coverage by the print media as compared to Pakistani culture. The qualitative analysis confirmed that most of the space was given to news items portraying the foreign cultural values

in the form of lifestyle and fashion news. Likewise Khan A., Bhatti A. & Shehzadi I. (2011) also found that Indian culture was being introduced to Pakistanis through advertisements in magazines especially the periodicals published in English language (p. 406-414).

Sabir and researchers (2014) inferred that cross-border coverage of Indian content has influenced new Pakistani generation to adopt the Indian cultural values. They also generated a correlation between low literacy rate and weak family system in Pakistan with the increasing impact of Indian culture (p. 50-58).

Menhas (2014) also found using survey technique that Pakistani women were adopting western lifestyle especially dressing habits with a great speed after the advent of modern communication tools.

III- Theoretical Framework and Methodology

For this study the theory of Social Responsibility is selected to analyze the role of online newspapers for cultural continuity in Pakistani society.

Social Responsibility Theory emphasizes that not only every members of the society should openly discuss the mass media content and express his opinion over media content to enhance the affectivity of professional code of ethics but also the mass media should undertake its duty to transfer local social and cultural values from one generation to other. McQuail (2005) concluded that any mass media organization functioning inside a society should take the responsibility to transfer its cultural values from one generation to the next.

Moreover sociologists argued that social learning of young generation is necessary for preparing them to take over their roles in social participation. Anthropologists coined a term enculturation to refer to the specific system that enables new members of a society to learn the general lifestyle, tradition and linguistic practices.

Methodology:

The method of Content Analysis has been used as a technique to test the hypothesis, as it appears to be most feasible, easy to be carried and reliable while dealing with assessment of mass media content.

Population and Sampling:

The study remains population is the Lifestyle pages of leading online newspapers of Pakistan (Dawn, Express Tribune and The Nation) while systematic sampling has been opted under a schematic design. According to which sample includes all news stories that are published on every Sunday (24 hours) of all the weeks on all three news portals Dawn, The Nation and Express Tribune. The sample would begin from 12:01 AM and last till 11:59 PM of every Sunday to ensure that all the content published in 24 hours is analyzed.

In this way if 24 hours of publication of a single newspaper is subjected to analysis, for the publication of three newspapers it means an analysis of 72 hours per week (24 Hours X 3 Newspapers). The duration of study would mean 648 hours of publication has been analyze i.e. 24 Hours times Three Newspapers times 9 Sundays of two months is equal to 648 Hours.

Unit of Analysis:

For the study researcher has selected the individual image appearing on lifestyle page of leading online newspaper.

Categorization

The researchers designed three categories to carry out the study

National cultural images:

Operational Definition: Any image appearing on life style pages of online newspapers which has female object(s) wearing Shalwar and Kamiz and Shawl, male object (s) wearing

Shlawar and Kamiz, local traditional festivals; historical illustrations, historic cinema records and scene from routine life.

International cultural images:

Operational Definition: Any image that appeared on lifestyle/entertainment pages of online newspapers that has male/female object (s) wearing pants, jeans, t-shirt, shorts, modern dresses which reveal extra body flesh, cinema records of Hollywood and Bollywood and any scene of routine life from countries other than Pakistan.

Mixed cultural Images:

Operational Definition: Any images published on lifestyle page of online newspapers, carrying a male object wearing Kamiz and Jeans; females wearing Sleeveless Kamiz, short length Kamiz along with Shalwar and Shawl with Jeans or short shirt.

IV- Results and Discussion

On the basis of the shared results calculated by the descriptive statistical operations (frequency distribution, percentage and central tendency) it can be said that international cultural images were found in considerable majority over National or Mixed cultural images. Furthermore the little presence of Mixed images (7%) also asserts that Pakistani online news media industry has been publishing most of the images that depict foreign culture in one or the other way.

The frequency distribution of the data clearly showed that International cultural images category stood dominant against other two as most of the data was found to be lying under this category.

Newspaper	National	International	Mixed
dawn.com	28	51	5

tribune.com.pk	28	52	12
nation.com.pk	4	73	0
Overall Frequency	60	176	17

Frequency (Table-I)

Based on another descriptive statistical tool, percentage, the results again confirmed that International cultural images and Mixed cultural categories carry around 2/3rd portion of the analyzed data.

Newspapers	National	International	Mixed
dawn.com	33.33%	60.71%	5.90%
tribune.com.pk	30.43%	56.52%	13.04%
nation.com.pk	3.89%	96.10%	0.00%
Overall Percentage	24%	69%	7%

Percentage (Table-II)

The central tendency (Mode) of the analyzed data also depicted that the International cultural images category is the most recurring category.

Categories	No. of occurrences
National Cultural Images	60
International Cultural Images	176
Mixed Cultural Images	17

Central Tendency (Table-III)

As the researcher proposed in the first hypothesis that leading online English newspapers of Pakistan (Dawn, Express Tribune and Nation) publish more images that represent International culture, and the assumption has been proven to be true. As the collected data when described statistically strongly supports it as 69% of the images were found to be portraying the images that fell under this category.

Moreover around 7% images from the pool were also modified form of the Pakistani culture, which are said to be another way to promote the foreign cultural values in Pakistani society. Whereas only 20% images published in online newspapers were truly representing local culture/lifestyle, which might be playing cultural continuity role at a very smaller level, which in the presence of other 76% images almost become in-effective.

There could be a number of reasons behind this grave difference in the mass media content in terms of cultural classification. One of these could be that most of the news sources that are used by these online newspapers do not reside in Pakistan, and the news that originate from other societies carries the characteristics of international cultures. The reliance on foreign sources and decreased coverage of local events/lifestyle is, however, resulting in the diminishing transfer of Pakistani culture from one generation to other.

In the presence of modern technologies like internet, the cross cultural exposure has decreased but simultaneously the lesser space allocated to local cultural images will further speed up the process of cultural transformation. This would in other words cast hurdles on the process of cultural continuity.

As per the researchers laid down second hypothesis for the study which says that leading English online newspapers (Dawn, Express Tribune and Nation) are publishing cultural appears to be not vindicated. Because the statistical analysis of the collected data from Pakistani online newspapers shows that around 6% of the online published images at lifestyle page were actually Mixed cultural images.

the presence of mixed images up to 7% of overall data does further strengthen the idea that Pakistani online newspapers are more prioritizing the International cultural images as compared to National cultural images because the papers resorted to use Mixed images (that are

product of National and International) instead of Pakistani cultural images means that online newspapers in Pakistan do not prefer the use of those pictures which can play a role cultural continuity in the society.

V- Conclusion

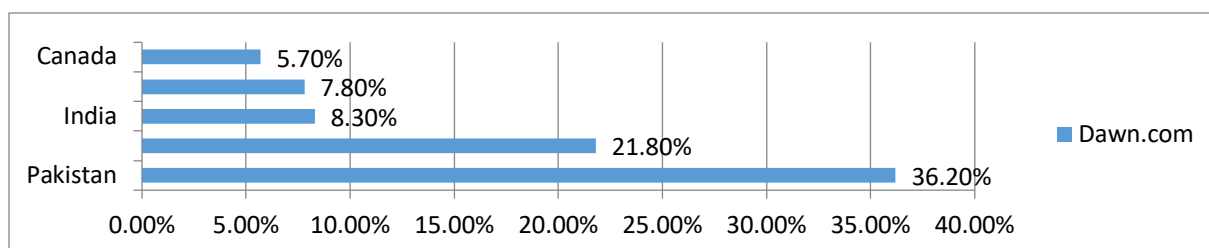
The particular research study aimed to assess the online Pakistani newspapers in terms of cultural continuity role of mass media. The content analysis methodology and application of descriptive statistical operations at the data lead the researchers towards a finding that Pakistani online newspapers are not playing the cultural continuity role of mass media as per suggested by the theorists of the field.

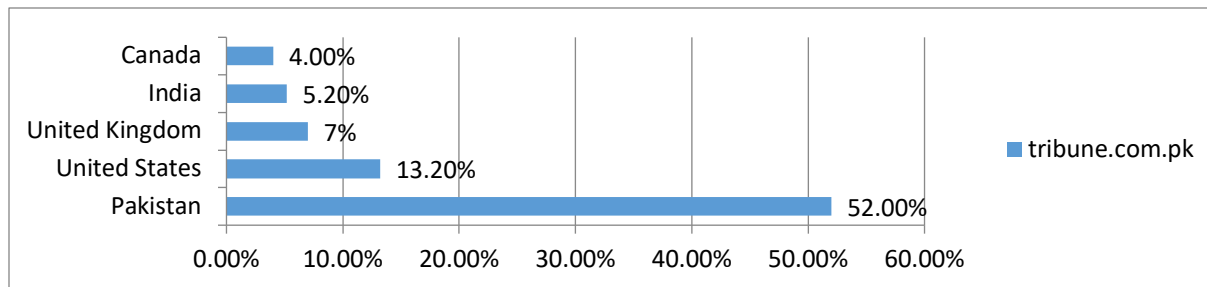
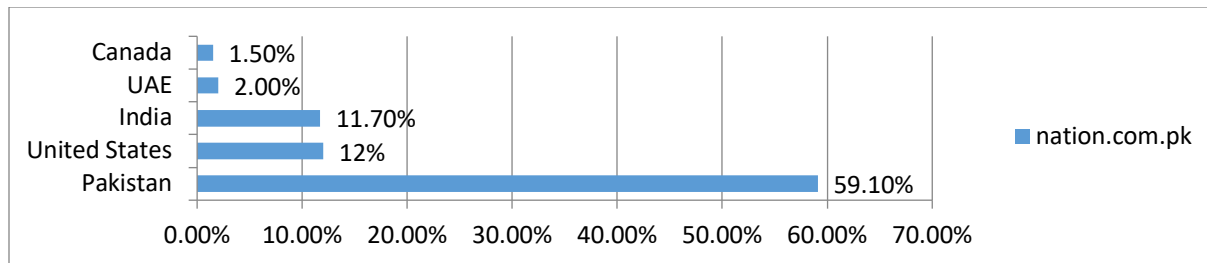
Limitations and Recommendations:

The study followed the methodology of content analysis in quantitative way, hence the results only represent the analyzed content and the analysis of some other portion from the population may not produce the same results. The results cannot be generalized for other mass media sources like television and radio etc. as the researcher only focused on online newspapers. And in the final argument the study does not involve any findings about the origin of sources of these online newspapers.

The other researchers interested to explore the online newspapers of Pakistan may further try to look into the origin of news sources. Furthermore the distribution of readership which explores different news stories on online newspapers could also be interesting for some researchers. The replication of the same study using a qualitative methodology like experimental design could further produce some interesting and more solid results.

Annexure-I





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