

FOURTH ESTATE FRAMING OF MUSLIMS IN 21ST CENTURY: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF FOUR LEADING INDIAN NEWSPAPERS DURING CONGRESS AND BJP REGIMES

Mujeeb Liyakat

*Assistant Professor, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Islamic University of Science and
Technology, Awantipora, Kashmir, India*

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ABSTRACT

Napoleon Bonaparte once said that four hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets. There is no denying the fact that newspapers are the schoolmasters of the common man. Once appeared in Fourth Estate, it gives credence to what is being portrayed. The image of anything depends to a great extent on how it is being framed by the Fourth Estate. The fourth Estate might have a bias that favors using one frame over another. It gives priority to one kind of story. This is what we called Framing. Images appearing on Fourth Estate create stereotypes and communities hold this prism in their minds and view everything accordingly. It is pertinent to know that what type of frames Fourth Estate gave to Muslims because Fourth Estate has the ability to control, interpret and filter information. Fourth Estate has the potency to choose very selectively what world should and should not know about any happening. The broad objective was to investigate the quantum and characterization of Muslims and Muslim related issues and concomitantly the image of Muslim community in the mainstream English dailies of India during the BJP and Congress regimes in the 21st century.

The study adopted content analysis as the research methodology to study the framing of Muslims in mainstream English dailies of India. When Muslim related content was analyzed during Congress and BJP regimes, it was found that all the selected newspapers consistently in two different periods of times were statistically significant, means they gave more negative coverage to Muslim related news as compared to positive coverage. It was also found that press during BJP Regime was more statistically significant than press during Congress Regime. The researcher suggests here a theory Savior theory of Fourth Estate. There is no denying the fact that a number of theories proved that media has the power to do miracles. Now the researcher propounds this theory to request media to take charge of saving the minorities of India especially Muslim minority, which is the victim of intolerance. So that people get rid of the hatred against the Muslim minority.

KEYWORDS: *Media, Muslims, India, Framing, and Content-Analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Muslims are the second largest constituent of humanity. Islam, the religion of Muslims is the second largest religion in India with 14.2 % of the country's total population. (Census, 2011).

The current census population of Muslims is more than the 21st century's first census that witnessed the Muslims are India's largest religious minority with officially constituting 13.4% of the country's population. (Census, 2001).

The 2001 census is reinforced by the Sachar (2006). He states that in India, Muslims constituting the second largest religious group and thus there is no denying the fact that they are the largest religious minority.

In contemporary times, the world is engulfed by hard media determinism and no discussion on the Jurgen Habermas's public sphere is complete unless it taking into account the role of media in framing concerns of the citizens.

In the present study, an attempt has been made to study the **“Fourth Estate Framing of Muslims in 21st Century: A Critical Analysis of four leading Indian Newspapers during Congress and BJP Regimes”**.

The broad categories examined were: news content, photographs, editorials, articles/features and letters to the editor, appearing in four leading English newspapers of India from first June 2004 to 31st December 2007 (Congress regime) and from first June 2014 to 31st December 2017(BJP regime).

The researcher has already done his doctorate on this topic. The sample period of study then was 1997, 2002 and 2007. Now the researcher wants to take into account the 7 months of 2014, whole 2015, 2016 and 2017 to investigate the portrayal of Muslims in contemporary times when the power is in the hands of BJP and compare it with 7 months of 2004, whole 2005, 2006 and 2007 when the power was in the hands of Congress.

Congress governments and BJP governments Prime Ministers take charge in May 2004 and May 2014. The month was same. So, the researcher starts his research w.e.f. first June 2004 and first June 2014.

The fourth Estate might have a bias that gives preference of using one frame over another. It has the potency to give priority to one kind of story. (Huang, 2005).

Rationale

Before Godhra Carnage Year, India was on 80th rank on Press Freedom Index and post Godhra, it was on 128. From that very day, it never comes with two digits. In 2005, India was on 106th rank and now in 2017, it gets 136th rank. India slipped three places in the 2017 World Press Freedom rankings to 136th among 180 countries. The dismal performance blamed on Modi's nationalism and growing self-censorship in the mainstream media. (Jyoti, 2017).

So the researchers take the Press framing Muslims during BJP regime into account and compare it with the Press framing Muslims during Congress regime to see the variation.

Srivastava (1991) cites the Henry Ward Beecher's famous statement on newspapers that “they are the schoolmasters of the common man. So the researcher took into account the newspapers, which are considered as the school teachers for a common man.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Varadarajan (2010) argue that “in the English print media, bias against Muslims exists as a result of concerned efforts of the RSS as well as because of residual biases journalists may bring with themselves. Some newspapers were funded by the BJP during its rule, and many journalists officially joined the party, so their bias can be understood. Because of stereotypical images, the coverage is certainly anti-Muslim at times. It is also true that the English media does

not always pursue and investigate most cases related to Muslims. He added that during the riots in Delhi 1984, if the English leading newspapers had reported the matter objectively and published the truth about political complicity on the first or the second day on their front pages, maybe the Congress would have changed course much earlier and the brutality may have been stopped”(p.110).

Varadarajan (ibid) added that “newspapers are run on market principles. That is definitely a constraint” (p.112).

Krishnamoorthy (2002) argued that what is new today is the affiliation of the media to a new philosophy of religious conflict, which is a negation of the basic tenets of journalism-objectivity and impartiality. Any erosion of these two values will affect the quality of media content, leading to further conflicts and unrest. He further added that when the mobs in Godhra set fire to a train carrying Karsevaks, reporters of the leading Press were not sure who the arsonists were and therefore called them “a group of persons,’ ‘a mob,’ and ‘unidentified persons.’ USA Today carried this banner headline: 57 Killed as Muslim Mob Torches Train of Hindus in Gujarat.

Said (1981) state that Fourth Estate has the ability to control, interpret and filter information. It acts as an invisible screen releasing what it wants the common man to know and blacking out what it does not want them to know. He added that the Fourth Estate determines very selectively what people should and should not know about Muslims. Fourth Estate portrays it as oppressive means they always show Muslim women in hijab. They portray it as outmoded means they always show that Muslims are engaged in hanging, beheading and stoning to death. They portray them anti-intellectualist as showing an involvement of Muslims in book-burning. They portray them as showing them restrictive means they discourage extra-marital affairs, gambling, and alcohol. Then they portray them as extremists, backward, the cause of worldwide conflict and dangerous. He slams Western media’s ability for not wanting people to know that in Islam both men and women are equal, Islam is tough on crime, Islam stands for equality, and brotherhood, unity, justice, fairness. Said claims that untruth and falsehood about Islam are consistently propagated in the media, in the name of objectivity, liberalism, freedom, democracy, and progress.

Objectives

The broad objective was to investigate the quantum and characterization of Muslims and Muslim related issues and concomitantly the image of Muslim community in the mainstream English dailies of India.

The specific objective is to measure Muslims image in leading dailies in proportion to overall space of the dailies during the sample period.

The second specific objective is to study the tone of Muslim-centred content in mainstream English dailies of India during the BJP and Congress regimes in the 21st century.

Hypotheses

In order to verify these objectives, hypothetical statements were developed. (To honor the objectivity, which is the pure soul of research, the researcher after reviewing available literature drafts these hypotheses). In choosing these hypotheses, a literature review is an inspiration.

They were: **H1**- Indian mainstream English dailies consistently during both Congress regime & BJP regime gave more negative coverage to Muslim-related content, as compared to positive coverage.

H2- During the sample period of current BJP regime, Indian dailies gave Muslim related topics a sufficient space in a negative tone as compared to the decade ago sample period during Congress regime.

Research Methodology

The amount and kind of information presented in the media is a decisive factor that ultimately has an impact on the image of a community or a group perceived by the society. Therefore it was logical to adopt content analysis as the research methodology to study the framing of Muslims in mainstream English dailies of India.

According to Wimmer and Dominick (1983), research dealing with newspapers is one of the first areas of mass communication research to be developed. The initial interest in such research came from colleges and universities. The first issue of the Journalism Bulletin (published in 1924) carried an article by William Bleyer, entitled “Research Problems and Newspaper Analysis.” It presented a list of possible research topics in journalism. Among them were: (1)-the effects of form and typography on the ease and rapidity of newspaper reading; (2)- the effects of newspaper content on circulation; and (3)- analysis of newspaper content.

Keeping in mind the nature of the topic, the researcher has applied the methodology of content analysis in order to track down the coverage of Muslim news in mainstream English dailies of India.

Now it is clear that methodologically the study is conducted as per the principles of content analysis. Units were decided; well-defined categories were systematically selected for inclusion, and coded for data analysis. The four selected newspapers were analyzed to quantify the content related to the Muslim community during the sample periods.

The content analysis is one of the most authentic ways to quantify and investigate the content of the print media, hence it is widely in use for carrying image related analysis. It is essentially an organized and systematic procedure and according to Walizer and Wiener (1978), it is systematic procedure design to examine the content of recorded information. In line with the just mentioned description, four mainstream newspapers were selected and analyzed to quantify the content related to the Muslim community during the sample periods.

Berelson (1952) said that there are two categories of content analysis- *What is said? And How it is said?*

The researcher has examined broadly “What is said,” in terms of space covered in the presentation of Muslim related content and “How it is said” in terms of what type of tone, the mainstream English dailies of India adopted in covering Muslim related issues.

The coding is done by the 5 research experts from Sociology, Psychology, Political Science, Mass Communication and Linguistic departments of AMU.

The study made use of the quantitative method of content analysis and analyzed the nature of content on three broad qualitative dimensions i.e. positive, negative and neutral.

Positive Stories: The stories in which the issues related to Muslims affairs were projected in a positive way. The stories/coverages of Muslims which depict development and positive changes in their political, economic and social sector, promotion of peace and harmony, involvement in the accords/agreement leading to peace and prosperity with other religious communities were coded as positive.

Negative Stories: Stories related to Muslims which reflect social strife, natural and human steered deaths and destruction, political instability, catastrophic, chaos and anarchy, shabby living conditions, criminal and immoral acts, and political, economic and social intrastate and interstate conflicts and disputes were coded as negative.

Neutral Stories: The stories that carry no emphasis on either positive or negative aspects of the Muslims economic, political and social life were coded as neutral. The natural category is not included in the test of significance in the present study, because neutral coverage does not clearly mention the emphasis on the Muslims image.

The tone of the Muslim-related content covered in the newspapers was categorized into three above well-defined parameters. They were **positive, negative and neutral**. As a first step, the space covered was measured in square centimetre (not mentioned in the paper because of the word limit boundations), and then the categorization of the data was evolved, followed by its analysis into these categories using the simple but effective statistical tool of percentage. The data so collected was presented using tables in percentage form. The tone and representation of the news in terms of its response evoking quality were examined for the quantitative analysis.

The Selected Newspapers and Sample Size

The four mainstream English dailies of India selected for the study were- The Times of India, Hindustan Times, The Hindu and The Indian Express. Also, the secondary sources-official Government data, reports and literature review were included to support the study.

The study under investigation has taken following years into account viz. Seven months of 2004 and 2014 w.e.f. June, the full years 2005, 2006,2007, 2015, 2016 and 2017.

English daily newspapers were taken as the universe for the present study because of the fact that the English newspapers in India were growing both in influence and popularity. The distinguishing feature of the leading English newspapers is their “serious” aspect. The English newspapers in India were also well established and produced both in technical competence and editorial performance and they stand comparison with the best of the newspapers in the world. (Murthy, 2000).

The present study has taken only Delhi editions as the sample because of ease and access to these newspapers. Every issue of The Times of India, Hindustan Times, The Hindu and The Indian Express published in the sample period was taken for close scrutiny with the help of census inquiry.

Every printed material that falls under the designated categories related to Muslims published in the form of news stories, photographs, editorials, articles/features and letters to the editor was identified, categorized and included for analysis. The length and breadth of the column were measured for the quantitative analysis.

The total area covered under the selected defined categories and measured as part of the quantitative analysis. For the present study, the researcher uses the formula total Muslim related issues divided by total area of newspaper multiplied by hundred. The researcher has avoided number wise count of news, photographs, editorials, articles/features and letters to the editor, because the size of these categories varies and there was no fixed space allotted to any of the mentioned categories that is why the researcher took item based area wise measurement.

Test of Significance

In the present study, z-test was applied to find out the significant differences. Z-test was preferred because the sample size was more than 30. (University of Leicester,2000).

The researcher used three levels of significance- significant, highly significant and insignificant.

Significant: When the negative projection of Muslims was greater than greater than positive projection. In a statistical test, when z-calculated was more than z-tabulated value i.e. 1.64.

Insignificant: When the difference between negative and positive attribute was same, or a minor difference found, but this difference was seen to be statistically not significant. In the statistical test, when z-calculated was less than z-tabulated value i.e. 1.64.

Highly Significant: When the extreme projection of Muslims was found in the mainstream English dailies of India when the z-calculated value exceeds 8.

OBSERVATIONS

Table 1: Image of Muslims in Four Mainstream English Newspapers of India During the Sample Period Including News, Photographs, Letters to Editor, Articles/Features and Editorials

Newspapers	From First June, 2004 to 31 st December, 2007				From First June, 2014 to 31 st December, 2017			
	+	-	N	T	+	-	N	T
TOI	0.5	1.6	0.4	2.5	0.5	3.2	0.2	3.9
HT	0.5	1.9	0.5	2.9	0.6	3.1	0.4	4.1
TH	0.8	1.8	0.4	3.0	0.7	2.6	0.5	3.8
IE	0.8	1.4	0.5	2.7	0.8	2.1	0.3	3.2

(Statistical Technique = Percentage)

+ = Positive coverage of Muslims

- = Negative coverage of Muslims

N = Neutral Coverage of Muslims

T = Total Coverage of Muslims

TOI = The Times of India

HT = Hindustan Times

TH = The Hindu

IE = The Indian Express

The table-1 represents the coverage of Muslims in four mainstream English dailies of India: The Times of India (TOI), Hindustan Times (HT), The Hindu (TH) and The Indian Express (IE). The data in the table-1 indicates the total coverage (T), positive coverage (+), negative coverage (-) and the neutral coverage (N) of Muslims as revealed when the data was analysed from 1st June 2004 to 31st December 2007 and 1st June 2014 to 31st December, 2017 of all the four selected newspapers.

It is pertinent to point out here that the total coverage related to Muslim issues and consequently their image projection was being calculated by measuring all the news in the selected newspapers, using the formula-total Muslim-related news, photographs, editorials, articles/features and letters to editor, divided by total news, photographs, editorials, articles/features and letters to the editor, published in the newspapers, multiplied by hundred.

Table 2: Significance Level of Overall Image of Muslims in Four Mainstream English Dailies of India During the Sample Years Including News, Photographs, Letters to Editor, Articles/Features and Editorials

Periods	P1	P2	Z-cal	Z-tab	Significance
Congress Regime	0.60	0.23	6.16	1.64	Significant
BJP Regime	0.73	0.17	10.00	1.64	Highly Significant

P1= Proportion of Negative image of Muslims

P2= Proportion of positive image of Muslims

Z-cal= Calculated value of Test of Significance for difference of Proportions

Z-tab= Tabulated value from the standard normal table at 5% level of Significance

Are 1.64 for one-tailed z-test.

Significant= Negative projection of Muslims was greater than Positive projection.

Highly Significant= Extreme negative projection of Muslims was found in mainstream English dailies of India because it exceeds 8.

With the application of z-test, the following result has emerged. To describe results from the table-2, in the Congress regime, the Z-calculated value was 6.16, it was more than the Z-tabulated value that is 1.64. So, it was significant. This means that negative projection of Muslim related issues in four mainstream English dailies of India during Congress regime was more than the positive projection. It was also clear from the table-2 that the negative tone towards the Muslims image was 0.60, more than the positive image 0.23. The analysis of the data reveals that the alternative hypothesis ‘H1’ was true, in case of projection of negative dimension related to Muslim issues in the selected mainstream English newspapers.

The table-2 also reveals that during the BJP regime, the image of Muslims was highly significant (Z-calculated value was 10.00), it means that the issues related to Muslims were more in a negative tone. The table-2 also reveals that the negative tone towards the Muslim image was 0.73, more than the positive image which was 0.17. Here again, alternative hypothesis ‘H1’ was accepted.

This means that first hypothesis ‘H1’ i.e. “Indian mainstream English dailies consistently over two different periods of times gave more negative coverage to Muslim-related issues as compared to positive coverage” was completely accepted.

It was also verified from the table-2, that during BJP regime, Indian mainstream English dailies gave more space to Muslim-related topics in a negative tone as compared to Congress regime..Hence, alternative hypothesis ‘H2’ i.e. “during BJP Regime, Indian mainstream English dailies gave Muslim-related topics a sufficient space in a negative tone as compared to a decade ago during Congress Regime” was accepted.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study reflects some glaring facts about the media portrayal of Muslims in India. When Muslim related content was analyzed during Congress and BJP regimes, it was found that all the selected newspapers consistently in two different periods of times were statistically significant, means they gave more negative coverage to Muslim related news as

compared to positive coverage. It was also found that press during BJP Regime was more statistically significant than press during Congress Regime.

These four sample newspapers are believed to influence the thinking of both the common man and the ruling elite. These newspapers stand out as India's quality press, having a wide appeal, particularly among the educated and the young. The data analyzed point out clearly that these four sample newspapers gave extreme negative projection to Muslim-related content.

PROPOUNDMENT OF THEORY

The researcher suggests here a theory *Savior theory of Fourth Estate*. There is no denying the fact that a number of theories proved that media has the power to do miracles. Now the researcher propounds this theory to request media to take charge of saving the minorities of India especially Muslim minority, which is the victim of intolerance. So that people get rid of the hatred against the Muslim minority.

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