

Analyzing the News Coverage of the Marginalized Group of Transgender People in Pakistani Media

Jamaluddin¹, Qabil Shah², Mahboob Ali³ and Rafi Ullah⁴

<https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2024.13.1.9>

Abstract

The researchers analyzed how Pakistani media report issues relating to transgender people in their routine news coverage. After selecting the reputed English-language newspapers Dawn and The News, the researchers employed content analysis to examine the media approach toward transgender people thoroughly. The findings of the study revealed a 'soft approach' of media toward this marginalized group, as both newspapers highlighted their issue more favorably, supporting the stances of transgender people, especially regarding the security or threats being faced by them. According to Gillig et al. (2018), watching stories about transgender people decreased the [negative] impact of political ideology on the opinions of viewers. As a result, the main findings of this study reflect the supportive attitude toward transgender people in Pakistani media. This approach of media in Pakistan will help to reduce negative perceptions about transgender people because more conservative viewers' perceptions have changed as a result of seeing more positive media representations of these individuals. Nonetheless, there is a need for more positive news coverage because transgender-related issues received a minimal amount of coverage—106 news stories over a year in both of the selected newspapers—which appears to be an insufficient amount of coverage of this population.

Keywords: Transgender, Issue of Identity, Representation, Misperception, Print Media.

Introduction

Transgender people, who are viewed as a minority in society, can mainly be defined in terms of assigned sex and gender expression, excluding the concept of gender identity. While definitions that reference the changing sex or gender [may] relate to more negative attitudes toward transgender individuals, on the other hand, taking gender identity into account when defining transgender people may be related to more positive attitudes toward transgender people (Buck, 2016). Scholarly works in this area emphasize the importance of defining and comprehending the term "transgender," as there may be differences in attitudes toward transgender people between those who are familiar with the term and those who are not.

Researchers such as Reiman et al. (2023) found that participants who identified gender identity as a central component of the definition of transgender endorsed more positive attitudes, while those who do not know about the term 'transgender' and the issue of identity may report their attitudes toward transgender people [stereotypically]. Thus, the relationship between attitudes toward transgender people and definitions of transgender people is an essential element that determines the public perceptions about transgender people. In this context, the study of

¹Assistant Professor, Media and Communication Studies, University of Swat. Email: jamaluddin@uswat.edu.pk

²Research Scholar, Media and Communication Studies, University of Swat.

³International Islamic University, Islamabad. Email: mehboob22@hotmail.com

⁴Lecturer, Media and Communication Studies, University of Swat. Email: rafiullah@uswat.edu.pk



Anderson (2022) shows that people's perceptions of transgender identities can reflect their attitudes—whether favorable or unfavorable—about transgender persons.

Issues pertaining to transgender individuals and other marginalized groups in society receive significant attention in media content in the digital age. Because of this, a lot of researchers have looked at how entertainment narratives can shape people's attitudes and behaviors. However, fewer have looked at how TV portrayals of marginalized groups affect people's attitudes toward those groups. For example, research by Gillig et al. (2018) found that watching stories about transgender people lowered the impact of political ideology on the opinions of the viewers as more conservative viewers saw more positive portrayals of transgender people in the media, and their attitudes toward these people were also cultivated. Their findings show how entertainment narratives have the power to shape perceptions about marginalized groups and emphasize the significance of emotion when discussing contentious issues. For instance, normative beliefs influence shaping the media coverage of the issue of transgender people.

The findings of Lampe et al. (2019) highlighted how social authorities can modify gendered frames in order to accommodate societal changes while simultaneously upholding normative beliefs. Within these novel frames, normative beliefs continue to support societal patterns of gender inequality. The predominant practice in society shapes the coverage of the transgender community in mainstream newspapers, which is remarkably restricted and heavily reductive in tone. In light of the above discussion, the researchers designed this study to investigate how Pakistani media covers transgender-related issues, particularly in the context of marginalized groups. This is because a large body of western nature scholarship views transgender people as a marginalized group, and they have been documented to receive little media coverage of issues pertaining to this social group.

Literature Review

Transgender people and other oppressed groups need positive role models, especially in the media, but they are not given the opportunity (Bird et al., 2012). The enhanced visibility, embodiment, identity, and social interaction that the media can provide for transgender people can be highly beneficial. But the reality is far different. A study on transgender news sources found that in addition to being underrepresented, transgender people are stereotyped, and their voice is limited in both qualitative and quantitative ways (Cappuza & Spencer, 2017).

Numerous studies have examined the transgender community in society. Nonetheless, transgender people's "T" symbol was still generally ignored. It has been observed that stereotypes and marginalized ideas are used to represent the transgender community when discussing how they are portrayed or treated in the media. In almost every society, they usually depict victims of social injustice going through an identity crisis and losing their place in respectable and influential spheres like politics and government.

According to a study by Parveen (2018) on how the media cover the transgender community, the majority of the chosen media outlets underrepresent and ignore them as regular members of society in modern societies. The study also showed that when the government took a position on improving the transgender community's status in one way or another, the opinion and editorial pages of the newspapers covered the related issues. Similar findings are found in another study, which shows that the transgender community is underrepresented in the media and that its problems are rarely discussed in the general public. It also becomes clear that the mainstream media favors the stereotypical portrayal of transgender people, which is biased against this community (Awan, 2018). The transgender community has not received enough representation in the press; the leading and most important source of information is state officials. The study's conclusions show that the number of news articles appearing in newspapers has generally increased, especially in English-language journals. 474 (61.5%) of

the 770 news items that were analyzed for the study were published in English newspapers, which have a discourse that is more global than national or cultural (Awan, 2018).

Thus, it has been noted that the majority of media content refers to them using derogatory and discriminatory terms such as "Khusra and hijra," etc. ignoring the objective and widely recognized terms for the community, such as "transgender" or "third sex." News stories, news articles, and editorial content frequently use these derogatory and colloquial terms. Their portrayal as criminal agents in society portrayed them as biased members of society. The transgender population has been characterized as pickpockets, drug addicts, human traffickers, and prostitutes. Hence, the transgender people who have been highlighted in the media have been connected to illegal activities. Out of all the criminal categories included in the research study, prostitution received the highest percentage (41%). Comparably, drug addiction came in second place with 10.5%, and human trafficking came in third place with 6%.

Negative media portrayals of transgender people in Pakistan are just one of the many forms of prejudice that these people regularly encounter. Transgender people are often portrayed in Pakistani media in highly constructed and essentialist ways. They face a great deal of discrimination in society at large, and the way transgender people are currently portrayed in the media only serves to perpetuate the long history of negative stereotypes. The way transgender people are shown in the media has an impact on how the general public views this community and how its members live their lives (Bocking, 2015). A study of Pakistani English newspapers found that misgendering and marginalization are standard features of how transgender people are portrayed in mainstream media. This suggests that the transgender community is not being fairly and accurately represented (Khalil, 2020).

An analysis of English-language newspapers published in Pakistan, including the Express Tribune and Daily Dawn, revealed that transgender marginalization and misgendering were prevalent in their depictions, pointing to a lack of accurate and respectable portrayals of the transgender community. This distortion and marginalization in media portrayals fuels negative perceptions and the marginalization of the transgender community in Pakistani culture. Furthermore, a study carried out in Pakistan between 2010 and 2018 indicated improvements in the nation's portrayal of the transgender population following the passage of transgender legislation in 2009 (Arsalan et al., 2023).

Framing Theory: A Theoretical Perspective

In order to better assess how Pakistani media handles transgender people, the researchers used the framing theory to analyze how the country's media covers and frames issues pertaining to transgender people. According to Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), agenda-setting theory was a component of framing theory. Goffman (1974) defined framing theory as;

"The organizational policies that regulate our subject's involvement in events, particularly social ones." People use this "schemata of interpretation" to help them "locate, perceive, identify, and label" everyday events. The process through which people reframe an issue or come up with a specific conceptualization of it is referred to as framing. Put differently, framing describes how the media produces and presents information to the general public. The central tenet of framing theory, according to Chong and Druckman (2007), is that a problem can be seen from several angles and be understood to have consequences for a number of values or factors.

The framing theory, according to Buckley et al. (2013), is predicated on the following four main ideas:

1. By choosing and excluding specific topics to cover and presenting them to a broader audience, journalists have the power to shape readers' perceptions of the issues at hand.
2. The audience makes sense of the information within their frameworks. The media's and the audience's frames of reference may coincide or contradict one another.

3. A-frame is reinforced whenever it is used, whether in a good or negative way.
4. The process of building a frame is a systematic procedure and takes a lot of time.

Framing Theory and Media

A group of ideas and theories with different perspectives and meanings is called framing. How individuals, communities, and societies interpret, organize, and discuss the state of the world today determines how vibrant it is (Werner & Cornelissen, 2014). The social construction of an event or occurrence that has had, or will have, a profound effect on people's hearts and minds is known as framing. Mass media outlets and occasionally political and social movements are used to carry out this social construction. Leaders in politics and organizations that either cause or encourage this phenomenon will also make their voices heard. The chosen effects that will be applied to people's perceptions will inevitably influence the process of media framing. Research is being done on the effects of framing in mass communication, both good and bad.

The audience, the kind of information provided by the media, and the manner in which it is presented all play a significant role. If the audience needs help understanding the information medium, it will be of no use. The framing theory thus clarifies how viewers are informed about specific facts by the media. "The scheme of interpretation that enables individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label occurrences or life experiences" is how Goffman defines framing (Cissel, 2012). To conduct this study, while applying the framing theory, the researchers formulated the following research questions and hypothesis;

RQ1. What is the dominant frame that shaped a significant amount of news coverage on the issues of transgender people in selected press?

RQ2. Which of the selected frames produced highly supportive coverage of the issues relating to transgender people?

H1. Selected newspapers likely give marginalized coverage to the issue of transgender people.

Research Methodology

The researchers conducted a content analysis of Dawn and The News, two prestigious English-language newspapers, to look into how the media covers transgender people's issues. In addition to having a sizeable national readership, these newspapers have proven their legitimacy (Ali et al., 2017). The timeframe set for the study consists of one year- from July 01, 2021, to June 30, 2022. The researchers collected a total of 106 news stories, considering the marginalized coverage of transgender people in Pakistani media over an extended period. After the collection of news stories, the researchers carefully examined 20 of the entire news stories and determined 4 representative frames: social, political, religious, and security or threat. Based on the frameworks above, 106 news articles that were gathered from the front and rear pages of the chosen newspapers were assessed. Researchers employed slants to ascertain the type of media coverage (Entman, 2007) and frames to obtain a concise and clear picture of the issues (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989) when analyzing the media's coverage of transgender people's problems.

A coding sheet was created to assist researchers in analyzing the type of media coverage and, consequently, identifying the media's stance on issues pertaining to transgender people. The researchers trained two independent coders—one of the co-authors and a graduate student from the University of Swat's Department of Media and Communication Studies—and assigned them the task of coding 20 news stories—from all the news stories that had been gathered—in order to gauge the degree of agreement on the coding process. The principal author coded the same news stories. The inter-coder reliability was measured following two attempts by the author and independent coders, yielding Cronbach's alpha values of $\alpha = 0.89$ for frames categories and $\alpha = 0.78$ for slant categories.

Findings and Discussion

After analyzing the collected from the selective newspapers- daily Dawn and The News, about how Pakistani media cover the issues relating to transgender people, the following findings were obtained. These findings are presented in the tables below and are explained in light of research questions and hypotheses.

Table 1: Cross-tabulation of newspapers on the basis of slants

| Newspapers | Nature of media coverage (N%) | | | |
|-------------|-------------------------------|------------|--------------|------------|
| | Supportive | Neutral | Oppositional | Total |
| Dawn | 37 | 17 | 2 | 56 |
| The News | 16 | 29 | 5 | 50 |
| Grand Total | 53 (50%) | 46 (43.4%) | 7 (6.60%) | 106 (100%) |

$X^2(2, N=106) = 12.44, p=0.002$

The above table shows the overall coverage given by the selected newspapers to the issues relating to transgender people in the Pakistani context. The data reveals that the chosen newspapers, Dawn and The News, gave relatively high supportive coverage (50%) collectively, reflecting the positive tendencies of the media toward transgender people in society. Transgender people are primarily seen as a marginalized group worldwide. Hence, the media's approach toward them suggests that Pakistani media intends to cover the issues relating to transgender people in a more favorable tone. The neutral coverage was reported in 43.40% of the total 106 news stories being published on different topics pertaining to transgender people. In comparison, a minimal amount of negative or oppositional coverage was found in 6.60% of news stories in both the selected newspapers. The statistical findings, i.e., $X^2(2, N=106) = 12.44, p=0.002$, indicate that the nature of media coverage and its relationship with the selected newspapers of this study.

RQ1. What is the dominant frame that shaped a significant amount of news coverage on the issues of transgender people in the selected press?

Table 2: Cross-tabulation of newspapers on the basis of frames

| Newspapers | News stories on the basis of frames (N%) | | | | |
|-------------|--|----------|-----------|-----------|------------|
| | Security/Threat | Social | Political | Religious | Total |
| Dawn | 28 | 12 | 10 | 6 | 56 |
| The News | 22 | 18 | 8 | 2 | 50 |
| Grand Total | 50 (47%) | 30 (28%) | 18 (17%) | 8 (8%) | 106 (100%) |

$X^2(3, N=106) = 14.39, p<0.01$

Table above displays the frame-by-frame media coverage of transgender-related issues in Pakistan's chosen newspapers. The results show that the transgender community's problems were primarily framed by both newspapers in terms of security or threat (47%), social issues (28%), political issues (17%), and religious issues (8%). As a result, throughout the study period, a large portion of the coverage was shaped by the dominant frame of security or threat. The statistical findings i.e., $X^2(3, N=106) = 14.39, p<0.01$, indicate that how frames produced the news coverage on the transgenders' issues in the selected newspapers of Pakistan.

RQ2. Which of the selected frames produced highly supportive coverage on the issues relating to transgenders?

Table 3: Cross-tabulation of slants on the basis of frames

| Frames | Nature of media coverage on the basis of frames (N%) | | | |
|-----------------|--|-----------|--------------|------------|
| | Supportive | Neutral | Oppositional | Total |
| Security/Threat | 27(51) | 23 (50) | 0 (00) | 50 (47) |
| Social | 13(24) | 14 (30) | 3 (43) | 30 (28) |
| Political | 11(21) | 07 (15) | 0 (00) | 18 (17) |
| Religious | 2(04) | 02 (05) | 4 (57) | 08 (08) |
| Grant Total | 53(100%) | 46 (100%) | 7 (100%) | 106 (100%) |

$X^2(2, N=106) = 33.36, p=0.0001$

The relationship between the study's frames and the type of media coverage is depicted in table no. 3 above, which shows how the selected frames influenced the media's portrayal of transgender issues. According to the results, the security/threat frame dominated the neutral and supportive categories by 50% and 51%, respectively. However, the oppositional category was dominated by the social frame, which indicates that transgender people faced significant discrimination due to social norms. In summary, it can be claimed that the security or threat frame was very supportive, whereas the social frame led to more critical media coverage of the problems pertaining to transgender individuals in Pakistan. The statistical findings i.e., $X^2(2, N=106) = 33.36, p=0.0001$, indicate a significant relationship between the selected frames and the nature of media coverage on the issues relating to transgender people.

H1. It is likely that selected newspapers give marginalized coverage to the issue of transgenders.

Table 4: Cross-tabulation of newspapers on the basis of years

| Newspapers | News coverage on the basis of years* | | |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|----------|------------|
| | 2021 | 2022 | Total |
| Dawn | 08 | 48 | 56 |
| The News | 19 | 31 | 50 |
| Grant Total | 27 (25%) | 79 (75%) | 106 (100%) |

$X^2(1, N=106) = 7.83, p<0.01$

The above table no. 4 shows time-wise media coverage on the issues of transgenders in the selected newspapers, whereas both the newspapers- Dawn and The News collectively published 27 news stories during the last six months of the year 2021 while 79 news were reported during the first six months of the year 2022 i.e. 75% of the total 106 news stories being published during one-year timeframe of this study. The statistical findings i.e., $X^2(1, N=106) = 7.83, p<0.01$, indicate a significant relationship between the timeframe and the approach of the selected newspapers toward the issues relating to transgender people.

Table 5: Cross-tabulation of slants on the basis of year

| Years | Nature of coverage on the basis of timeframe (N%) | | | |
|-------------|---|-----------|--------------|------------|
| | Supportive | Neutral | Oppositional | Total |
| 2021 | 19 (36) | 05 (11) | 3 (43) | 27 (25) |
| 2022 | 34 (64) | 41(89) | 4 (57) | 79 (75) |
| Grant Total | 53 (100%) | 46 (100%) | 7 (100%) | 106 (100%) |

$X^2(2, N=106) = 09.29, p<0.01$

The relationship between the years and media coverage of transgender issues in Dawn and The News, two particular newspapers, is displayed in table no. 5 above. The results show that most stories about transgender people were published in the first half of 2022; as a result, all slant categories—supportive, neutral, and oppositional—were dominated by stories from this half of the year. The statistical findings, i.e., $X^2(2, N=106) = 09.29, p < 0.01$, indicate a significant relationship between the timeframe and the nature of media coverage in the selected newspapers on the issues relating to transgender people.

Conclusion

The study, after examining the Pakistani media approach toward transgender people in the context of new coverage, found that there exists a soft corner about the transgender group as a significant amount of news coverage, i.e., 50% falls in support of transgender people, highlighted their issues favorably. While over 43% of the overall media coverage reflects the neutral stance of the media regarding transgender people, the selected newspapers carried a balanced approach in their coverage of transgender people's related issues. This overall positive approach of the Pakistani press will help in reducing negative perceptions about transgender people, as Gillig et al. (2018) found that watching stories about transgender people lowered the impact of political ideology on the opinions of the viewers. As more conservative viewers saw more positive portrayals of transgender people in the media, their attitudes toward these people were also cultivated positively. Similarly, the finding, in the context of Pakistan, revealed that the security threat, or in other words, the insecurity being faced by transgender people, shaped a significant amount of news coverage favorably, which was also found in a study carried out in the context of Pakistan, which indicated improvements in the nation's portrayal of the transgender population between the years of 2010 and 2018, following the passage of transgender legislation in 2009 (Arsalan et al., 2023).

The key findings of this study reflect the supportive attitude toward transgender people in Pakistani media, which will help to reduce negative perceptions about transgender people; however, transgender-related issues received less attention from media as 106 news stories over a year in both of the selected newspapers were published on matters relating to this population, which seems to be an inadequate amount of coverage. Thus, this study suggests a need for more positive news coverage.

Summing up the above findings and discussion, the researchers recommend that further studies be conducted to scholarly examine the role of media in minimizing misperceptions about transgender people in society. In this regard, researchers, as well as students of journalism schools, may conduct their research studies in this area both qualitatively and quantitatively while applying discourse analysis, content analysis, thematic analysis, and other techniques to explain better the media approach toward marginalized groups in society, including transgender people.

References

- Ali, H., Hussain, T., Ali, S., Jumani, N. M., Li, B., & Zhang, G. (2017). Coverage of Educational Issues in Pakistan by Daily Dawn and The News: September 2015-December 2015. *Sci. Int. (Lahore)*, 29(5), 1069-1072.
- Anderson, V. N. (2022). What does transgender mean to you? Transgender definitions and attitudes toward trans people. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*.
- Arslan, M. Q., Ali, N., & Rasool, M. G. (2023). Transgender Representation in Politics: Paving the Way for Inclusion and Equality in Pakistan. *Pakistan Social Sciences Review*, 7(3), 186-192.

- Awan, M. A. (2018). *Stereotypes and Stigmas in the News: A Critical Discourse Analysis of News Reports on Khawajasiras in Pakistan's Newspapers*. (Doctoral Dissertation Lahore School of Economics).
- Billard, T. J. (2016). Writing in the margins: Mainstream news media representations of transgenderism. *International journal of communication*, 10, 4193-4218.
- Bird, J. D., Kuhns, L., & Garofalo, R. (2012). The impact of role models on health outcomes for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 50(4), pp.353-357.
- Bockting, W. (2015). Internalized transphobia. *The international encyclopedia of human sexuality*.
- Buck, D. M. (2016). Defining transgender: What do lay definitions say about prejudice?. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 3(4), 465.
- Buckley-Zistel, S., Beck, T. K., Braun, C., & Mieth, F. (2013). Transitional justice theories: An introduction. In *Transitional justice theories* (pp. 1-16). Routledge.
- Capuzza, J. C., & Spencer, L. G. (2017). Regressing, Progressing, or Transgressing on the Small Screen? Transgender Characters on US Scripted Television Series. *Communication Quarterly*, 65(2), pp.214-230.
- Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). Framing public opinion in competitive democracies. *American Political Science Review*, 101(4), 637-655
- Cissel, M. (2012). Media Framing: a comparative content analysis on mainstream and alternative news coverage of Occupy Wall Street. *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications*, 3(1), 67-77.
- Entman RM (2007) Framing bias: Media in the distribution of power. *Journal of Communication* 57(1), 163–173.
- Gamson WA and Modigliani A (1989) Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: A constructionist approach. *American Journal of Sociology* 95(1), 1–37.
- Gillig, T. K., Rosenthal, E. L., Murphy, S. T., & Folb, K. L. (2018). More than a media moment: The influence of televised storylines on viewers' attitudes toward transgender people and policies. *Sex Roles*, 78, 515-527.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame Analysis*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Khalil, H. (2020). Representation of Transgender Community in Pakistani English Newspapers: A Comparative Analysis of Daily Dawn & Express Tribune. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 17(6), 121-132.
- Lampe, N. M., Carter, S. K., & Sumerau, J. E. (2019). Continuity and change in gender frames: The case of transgender reproduction. *Gender & Society*, 33(6), 865-887.
- Parveen, K., & Sadiq, S. (2018). Representation of Transgender In Print Media: A Study Of Op-Ed Pages Of Four Dailies Of Pakistan. *ICHRCP*.
- Reiman, A. K., Ocasio, T. S., & Mezzapelle, J. L. (2023). How cisgender people define "transgender" is associated with attitudes toward transgender people. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 52(3), 991-1007.
- Semetko, H. A., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2000). Framing European politics: A content analysis of press and television news. *Journal of communication*, 50(2), 93-109.
- Werner, M. D., & Cornelissen, J. P. (2014). Framing the change: Switching and blending frames and their role in instigating institutional change. *Organization Studies*, 35(10), 1449-1472.