A Critical Discourse Analysis of News in Media about Rape Victims in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the discourse in news coverage, specifically focusing on the reporting of rape cases, with a particular focus on victim blaming and fact-hiding in the Pakistani media discourse. Drawing on the Van Dijk model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the study intends to unveil biases or power inequalities deep rooted in the structure and management of news reporting discourse. The research seeks to ascertain whether media outlets employ deceptive language to conceal the reality in reporting on rape cases, the influence of victim blaming on readers' perception, and how the news media copes with the reporting of rape incidents. Data collection involves analysis of news articles from five well-known Pakistani publications: The Dawn News, ARY News, Dunya News, Geo News, and the Express Tribune particularly focusing on the "Zainab's Murder and Rape Case." The analysis highlights instances of deletion, word choice, hiding identity, and lack of mention of police action, which contribute to the manipulation of information in news reports. The results of the study shed light on the biased description of rape incidents in the Pakistani media, fanning victim blame and rape lores. The study stresses the need for unbiased and truthful reporting of sexual assault incidents, ensuring that the experiences of victims are accurately portrayed. By uncovering the manipulation and biases in the Pakistani news media, this research contributes to a better understanding of the discourse patterns surrounding rape cases and the potential impact on public attitudes towards victims.

Keywords: CDA, Media Discourse, Rape Cases, Media Manipulation, Victim Blaming

1. Introduction

Being part of the dominant group that runs the society, the mass media is a potent tool (Van Dijk, 1993). It cannot be overstated how the media can influence public opinion through text and speech (Van Dijk, 1995b). In Pakistan, the media behave frequently as though they have the authority to decide what is good or bad for society. They play a vital role in determining political and social goals because they make the fourth pillar of society after the judiciary, the legislature, and the executive. However, they are unyielding to criticism and notorious for reporting on violent and pointless events rather than tackling the underlying issues of poverty, opportunity gaps, and political exploitation. Additionally, they frequently disregard outside interference, especially that of strong entities (Bilal et al., 2012).

Undoubtedly, the media is a lucrative enterprise with a focus on profit rather than accurately portraying society and its many social classes (Burke et al. 2014). Even while the media is a reflection of society and that both have an impact on one another, it is also strongly related to social and political issues. The freedom of speech granted to the media by the Pakistani government comes with a number of obligations and limitations. However, the Pakistani media has abused their influence rather than using it to change the moral framework of society (Huda & Kamal, 2017).

Aside from a general evaluation of the media, there is cause for concern regarding their attitude and role in delicate crimes, particularly rape cases. The majority of individuals are skeptical of the way the media portrays reports of sexual assault. The media's propensity to blame rape victims rather than the offenders fuels an increase in rape incidences and puts women at risk. This is a result of their victim-blaming and manipulative actions in rape cases. Examining how the media affects society's perception of rape victims and the legal system is critical to resolving this issue. The legal system must also take media coverage into consideration, as it may undermine trials and set up dangerous precedents for rape in the future. Future public attitudes towards rape victims could be influenced by the overall effect of media on how they are treated.

Sexual assault is a widespread problem having harmful effects on one's body, mind, ability to reproduce, and sexual health. It needs support from a range of industries, including the media, academics, decision-makers, activists, and organisations. The way the media exposes these tragedies raises concerns for society since it may affect how these horrible actions are viewed and dealt with. The media must treat stories about sexual assault sensitively and truthfully portray the experiences of the victims.

Rape is a horrifying act of violence and intimidation that is frequently committed by a person who is mentally ill (Nagira, 1995). The victim may live with the terror and trauma of the incident for the rest of their lives (Mgoqi-Mbalo, Zhang, & Ntuli, 2017). Sadly, the reaction of society and the media frequently makes the victim's suffering worse, with 40% of rape victims placing the blame on themselves and 14% on others (Vaara, 2002). One popular strategy is to cast doubt on the victim's trustworthiness by pointing out things like their tardy reporting

or late-night interactions with male friends (Vaara, 2002). The frequency of rape has increased in Pakistan, and men are frequently shown in the media as being innately violent while the victims are frequently blamed for the crime (Hussain, 2011). This encourages the offenders and worsens the situation.

1.1 Aim of the Study

This study aims to analyse the discourse in news coverage, especially when it comes to delicate subjects like rape cases. The Van Dijk model of CDA has been used for the purpose. Given that CDA research has focused on this topic extensively and that it has a well-developed theoretical foundation, the study aims to comprehend the structure and management of news reporting discourse. The objective is to better comprehend the discourse patterns inherent in such reports and to spot any biases or power imbalances that may exist.

1.2 Research Questions

- To what extent do media outlets employ deceptive language in their reporting on rape cases with the intention of obscuring the truth?
- What effect does victim blaming have on the reader's perspective in news reports?
- How is the reporting of rape cases handled by the news media?

2. Literature Review

Sexual violence, a problem that has been reported globally and has adverse mental, physical, reproductive and sexual effects. It is an issue that is seeking attention of not only media but of scholars, influencers, social media activist and various organizations. People in the society are more concerned that how these heinous acts, which are already violent actions, being presented and negotiated by News Media. Is media presenting these just as an act of violence? The incidents that were being reported by the victims, how media is handling those sensitive reports?

2.1 Media and Society

In sexual assault reports, Rape has become a serious matter of concern. Nagira (1995) defined rape as a terrifying act that is performed by a mentally sick person to keep a woman in a state of fear and intimidation. The fear follows the women her whole life (Mgoqi-Mbalo, Zhang, &Ntuli, 2017). The worst part of these incidents is the reaction of the society and the role of media and justice towards the victim. According to a study, 40% of the victims were self-blamed in rape incidents and 14% were blamed in sexual assault. The most common rhetorical devices used to portray the victim as responsible is to accuse her for delayed reporting or not providing enough information to proceed the case. The next is to bring in the deinking behavior of the victim. The most convenient way for victim blaming is to question her credibility and asking questions regarding her late-night hangout with her male friends (Vaara, 2002).

In Pakistan, the graph of crime reports has gone up. The most reported cases were of rape victims that has become a major social issue. Sadly, media presented these incidents as the fault of women and portray men as naturally violent. The most rape cases in Punjab were being reported in Lahore. The most depressing aspect right now is that the children are the main target in these incidents. The reason behind worsening of the situation is the inability of the police forces as they never take necessary actions on time otherwise the victims could have been saved (Hussain, 2011). The other reason behind the rise in these cases is the victim blaming that not only encourage the culprit but gives him courage to carry on the brutal process. There is need to bring awareness regarding rape crimes to control the situation (Ali, 2015).

2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

Discourse can be defined as a specific perspective and understanding of a particular aspect of our world (WintherJrgensen& Phillips, 2000). Conducting a discourse analysis is a technique used to examine how we discuss a specific phenomenon, encompassing its social or criminal dimensions. It also helps investigate which discourses dominate in specific contexts (Cukier, 2009).

CDA is employed to examine the role of media in influencing societal perspectives and anticipating future events (Ramanathan &Hoon, 2015). It is a contemporary methodology that enables critical evaluation and assessment of language for more accurate description. According to Van Dijk (2006), researchers utilize CDA to comprehend social issues. The goal of CDA is to examine how power, ideology, and the societal-shaping effects of justice, education, politics, and culture.

2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis Highlighting Media Manipulation

Using the CDA strategy, it is clear that there are many ways to manipulate the media, including selective reporting, spin, sensationalism, and factual misrepresentation. Instead of faithfully carrying out their duties, several media outlets have been charged with political prejudice and involvement in particular political agendas. The media now has a significant impact on society (Kress, 1990).

Investigating the ways in which language and discourse are used by the media to sway people's ideas and beliefs is one of CDA's goals in uncovering media manipulation. The CDA reveals the biassed presentation of particular opinions by media organisations through the examination of news structure, content, and contextual elements in news stories. It exposes the media's deceptive language use (Bouvier, 2018).

Media literacy is promoted and awareness of media manipulation is raised through CDA. As a result, people are better equipped to comprehend and assess the information they learn through the media. As a result, CDA encourages the development of a more informed and democratic society by empowering people to make well-informed decisions based on a variety of viewpoints and reliable information (Phelan, 2017).

2.4 Control Opinions and Sentiments

It goes without saying that many means of communication, including news broadcasts, ads, religious sermons, political propaganda, and academic research, have a considerable impact on the viewpoints and thinking of their target communities (Buijs, 2005). Academic studies, news reporting, advertisements, political propaganda, and the media all contribute to the formation of societal opinions (Buijs, 2005). In an effort to change attitudes, they disseminate information and opinions (Buijs, 2005). There are restrictions that place limits on this freedom, such as the speaker's credibility and standing, even though some recipients may reject or oppose the objectives of influential speakers or

communicators and have the freedom to interpret and analyse conversation for hidden motives. Additionally, it may be challenging for people to see deception and form opposing viewpoints due to a lack of adequate sources and knowledge of the logic and language underlying critical discourse (Mar, 2010). The speaker's trustworthiness and the accessibility of competing sources can have an impact on spotting manipulation and developing counterarguments (Mar, 2010). As seen in the media coverage of rape cases, where the victim frequently receives more attention than the offender, CDA analyses the ways in which the media and other powerful sources impact and shape social and moral behaviour (Lee, 2010). In summary, powerful speakers and influential sources possess strategies to manipulate and control the sentiments of individuals, and CDA investigates the methods by which media and such influencers shape the social and moral ethics of a society (Merrill, 2003). It elucidates how media and influential sources control language, both in written and oral forms, and exert influence on the minds of recipients according to their own agenda. This is evident in cases of rape, where headlines often focus on the victim while concealing the identity of the criminal (Lee, 2010).

Previous studies have consistently demonstrated biased presentations of rape cases by the media, perpetuating victim blaming and rape myths. For example, Almasy (2013) described a case in which a young person was drugged and sexually assaulted by two classmates but faced interrogation due to her intoxication. O'Hara (2012) analyzed news media coverage of three rape cases and found that the media frequently disregards the impact of the assault on the victim. A CDA of US news stories by Pekkarinen (2016) indicated that the reporting of sexual assault is inappropriate and does not accurately reflect the abuse that occurs. According to Ashraf et al. (2019), political language is used in Pakistani English publications to portray the beliefs that the media favours. In a content analysis of news reports on rape and sexual assault, Layman (2020) found that victim blaming has increased over time, underscoring the impact of media framing on the public's beliefs and concerns. Additionally, Tylstedt (2021) carried out a feminist CDA of Swedish mainstream media and discovered instances of rape victim defamation and the privilege-giving of men while demoralising women.

3. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to investigate how victim blaming and fact-coverup are manipulated in the news media. Using a qualitative study methodology, this occurrence was looked into. In-depth analysis of the psychology and behavioural expectations of the intended audience is made possible by qualitative research, which also offers insights into the profound meanings and experiences that form people's social existence (Fossey et al., 2002; Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004). Because it offers a framework for comprehending how media affects the audience through the use of text and language, the CDA technique was chosen. This study aims to identify the techniques used by the media to sway audience opinions regarding victim blaming and fact-hiding by examining media discourse, including news reports and related information.

3.1 Data Collection

The analysis of victim blaming and fact-hiding in the news media used information acquired from online sources. The study evaluated five news items from five renowned publications: The Dawn News, ARY News, Dunya News, Geo News, and the Express Tribune. The study was centred on a single incident, the "Zainab's Murder and Rape Case." The popularity of these magazines and their reputation for providing readers with up-to-date information were factors in their selection. The murder of Zainab was used as the example to show how victim blaming and information manipulation by the media work. Discourse analysis of many quotes from news sources demonstrates how society is ruthless and how the police responded to this horrible crime in an inhumane manner. Additionally, this case sheds light on the fact that the increase in such incidents is due to the poor law and security system, which media tries to conceal using discourse markers in their reports (Adil, 2020).

Table 1. Newspapers Selected for the Analysis

Selected Newspapers	Number of News Reports
Dawn News	1
ARY News	1
Geo News	1
Dunya News	1
Express Tribune	1
Total	**5**

3.2 Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected for this study was analyzed using the macrostructure of deletion from the Van Dijk Model. Manual analysis was conducted to interpret the collected data through textual analysis. The macrostructure refers to a thematic analysis approach that emphasizes the importance of the themes and issues present in the data. This analysis was performed to gain an understanding of the manipulation present in the news media sector. It is important to acknowledge that the media sector is significantly influenced by financial considerations and competition, which often impacts fact-checking practices.

Table 1. Results of Deletion Aspect across Pakistani English Newspapers

Newspaper	Deletion aspect	Description
Dawn News	Murder only mentioned	Police statement only focuses on the murder and not the kidnapping and rape.
	Word choice	Instead of using the word "rape," the writer used "heinous crime."
	Hiding identity	Substitute words used instead of mentioning the rapist's name.
	No mention of police action	The news report did not mention any quick actions taken by the police.
ARY	Word choice	The reporter referred to the attacker as "the criminal" instead of specifying the crime committed.

Express Tribune	N/A	Not mentioned
Dunya News	Seven-year-old Zainab's rape, murder in Kasur shocks Pakistan	Deletion of information, including the name and age of the rapist, and portraying the crime as murder instead of rape
Dunya News	The enraged locals take to the street against the brutal murder of a seven-year-old girl after rape	Deletion of information about the rapist
Dunya News	Zainab was kidnapped and found dead	Deletion of information about the cause of death (rape) and the behavior of police towards the case
Dunya News	A shutter down strike observed in the city against the killing	Deletion of information about the police's effort to find the child and the reason for the strike
Geo News	Zainab murder case: Confessional video of accused emerges	Deletion of the word "rape" and manipulation of the case as a murder case only

4. Results and Discussion

The goal of the current study was to look into the manipulation of rape cases in news reporting with a focus on the murder of Zainab. The investigation entailed using the macrostructure of the Van Dijk model to analyse five different newspaper articles. The research found that the deletion technique was frequently used by media outlets to omit important information and shape their audience's perceptions through deceptive remarks.

In one incident, the girl's kidnapping and savage rape were not reported; just that she had been killed a few days previously was noted in the Dawn News statement. The reporter skillfully concealed the true nature of the crime by using terms like "heinous crime" to describe the incident rather than the explicit term "rape." In addition, the offenders' names were masked by referring to them as "two people." In a similar vein, the perpetrator of the attempted murder and rape of Zainab was merely referred to as "the criminal," which further masked the precise nature of the crimes committed.

Additionally, the reporter failed to highlight the insensitive behavior of the police department and their delayed response in finding and rescuing the child. Important questions regarding the police's handling of the case and the reasons behind the strike were omitted, further contributing to the deletion of accurate information. These findings clearly indicate the use of deceptive language by the media to conceal facts.

The analysis revealed that Dawn News, in particular, displayed manipulative tendencies by employing the deletion process in their coverage of the Zainab murder case. Such manipulation undermines the role of news media as a reliable source of facts. Descriptions of rape cases and their severity play a significant role in shaping societal sexual behavior and social practices (Lindqvist, 2018). Therefore, it is essential for news outlets to accurately depict rape cases, providing a truthful account of the events to help shape societal attitudes and behaviors.

The examination of data from multiple news sources demonstrated the extensive application of the deletion process in the reports. Many reports failed to name the perpetrators, instead focusing on the victim and diverting attention from the criminal. The language used in these reports was often sexual and insensitive towards women, contributing to victim-blaming and detracting from the core issue at hand. Some reports even portrayed the case solely as a murder, omitting the rape aspect altogether, thereby perpetuating manipulation.

By indulging in victim-blaming, media outlets create doubt regarding the victim's credibility and moral character. This shift in focus from the perpetrator to the victim can lead readers to question whether the victim somehow contributed to or deserved the crime committed against them. The newspapers' choice of language, often sexual and unconcerned when discussing women, further perpetuates victim-blaming and hides the true nature of men's actions in certain situations. Such reporting undermines the truth and fails to highlight the necessary information for responsible reporting (Pekkarinen, 2016). Accurate and sensitive reporting is crucial in delivering justice promptly and preventing further crimes in society.

This study aligns with previous research highlighting the manipulative role played by media in rape cases and their contribution to delayed justice. When it comes to rape cases and providing justice for the vulnerable, media outlets often prioritize preserving their reputation rather than fulfilling their responsibility. By portraying women as responsible for such cruelty, the media plays a significant role in shaping societal ideologies.

This study supports other studies on the media's deceitful behaviour in rape cases and how it affects the pace of justice. It is clear that the media frequently puts maintaining its reputation ahead of doing its duty when it comes to discussing rape cases and fighting for justice for the weak. Unfortunately, the way in which women are portrayed in the media in these situations feeds the false belief that they are somehow to blame for these cruel deeds. The media has a duty to offer a fair and honest portrayal of such instances because it has a big impact on societal views.

5. Conclusion

This study's findings emphasise the crucial role that the media plays in influencing how the general public views and feels about rape victims. The way that these victims are portrayed in the media is crucial in deciding how society reacts to rape attacks. Unfortunately, the findings point to a worrying pattern: rather than prioritising its own reputation and self-interest, the media routinely fails in its duty to pursue justice for rape victims.

The media's representation of rape victims is further complicated by societal biases and expectations towards them, including those related to age, purity, fragility, and social standing. Victims who do not fit these strict criteria frequently experience victim-blaming and reduced empathy. This reinforces negative preconceptions and creates substantial obstacles to securing justice for all survivors.

Additionally, attempts to confront the genuine nature of these crimes are undermined by the media's propensity to distort the facts and manipulate information. The media obscures the realities of rape cases and contributes to delayed or denied justice by emphasising

sensationalised elements or deflecting attention from the criminals. This willful falsification of the truth and unwillingness to face the more sinister sides of power and law enforcement are reoccurring themes in the research.

It is crucial that media organisations respect ethical standards when reporting on rape cases in order to address these urgent challenges. It is crucial that responsible media puts accuracy, empathy, and the rights of survivors first. In order to report on the sensitive subject of sexual violence while ensuring that victims' voices are heard, their experiences are respected, and the truth is communicated, journalists need get proper training and direction.

To effect significant change, advocacy organisations, government, and the media must work together. A stimulus for ethical journalism could be the creation and application of rules and regulations encouraging responsible reporting on sexual abuse. A culture that challenges false narratives and helps survivors must also promote media literacy and critical thinking among the general population.

Holding the media responsible and working towards a more sympathetic and truthful representation of rape cases can help us create a society that values survivor-centric strategies, rejects victim-blaming, and seeks justice proactively. We can only prevent sexual abuse effectively by working together to establish an environment where survivors are empowered, their rights are upheld, and meaningful progress is made.

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