



A Discourse Analysis of the Manipulation of Pakistani News Media through the Deletion of Information in Reports of Rape Cases in Pakistan

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Publication details:

Received: February 10, 2023

Accepted: March 05, 2023

Published: March 30, 2023

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 (Winther Jrgensen & 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. CDA aims to study power, ideologies, and the transformative role of justice, education, politics, and culture in shaping society and addressing social issues.

2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis Highlighting Media Manipulation

Using the technique of CDA, it is evident that media manipulation can be accomplished through various methods such as selective reporting, spin, sensationalism, and distortion of facts. Certain media organizations, instead of fulfilling their duty diligently, have been accused of having political biases and being involved in specific political agendas. Media has acquired power and influence in society (Kress, 1990).

The objective of CDA in exposing media manipulation is to investigate how the media utilizes language and discourse to shape public opinions and beliefs. Through the analysis of news structure, content, and contextual factors in news reports, CDA uncovers the biased presentation of certain perspectives by media organizations. It reveals the manipulative use of language by the media (Bouvier, 2018).

CDA serves as a means to raise awareness about media manipulation and promote media literacy. This empowers individuals to better understand and critically evaluate the information they receive from the media. Consequently, CDA fosters a more informed and democratic society, enabling individuals to make well-informed decisions based on a diverse range of perspectives and accurate information (Phelan, 2017).

2.4 Control Opinions and Sentiments

There is no doubt that various forms of communication, such as news reports, advertisements, religious sermons, political propaganda, and scholarly research, significantly influence the perspectives and mindset of their target societies (Buijs, 2005). Media, news reporting, commercials, political propaganda, and academic studies all play a role in shaping societal views and viewpoints (Buijs, 2005). They convey opinions and knowledge with the intention of altering attitudes (Buijs, 2005). While some recipients may reject or oppose the intentions of powerful speakers or communicators and have the freedom to interpret and analyze discourse for hidden agendas, there are other constraints that limit this freedom, such as the credibility and status of the speaker. Additionally, individuals may lack sufficient sources or understanding

of the logic and grammar behind critical discourse, making it difficult to identify manipulation, lies, and develop counter opinions (Mar, 2010). Recognizing manipulation and formulating counterarguments can be affected by factors like the credibility of the speaker and the availability of alternative sources (Mar, 2010). CDA examines the ways in which the media and other influential sources impact and shape social and moral behavior, as evident in the coverage of rape cases where the victim often receives more attention than the perpetrator (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. Pekkarinen (2016) conducted a CDA of US news articles and revealed that reports on sexual violence are inappropriate and fail to portray the reality of the abuse. Ashraf et al. (2019) discovered that Pakistani English newspapers use political language to present ideologies favored by the media. Layman (2020) conducted a content analysis of news coverage on rape and sexual assault and observed an increase in victim blaming over time, highlighting the influence of media framing on public beliefs and concerns. Furthermore, Tylstedt (2021) conducted a feminist CDA of Swedish mass media and found instances of defamation against rape victims and the granting of privileges to men while demoralizing women.

3. Methodology

This study aims to explore the manipulation of victim blaming and fact-hiding in news media. A qualitative research methodology was employed to investigate this phenomenon. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth examination of the psychology and behavioral expectations of the targeted audience, providing insights into the profound meanings and experiences that shape individuals' social existence (Fossey et al., 2002; Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004). The CDA technique was chosen as it provides a framework for understanding how media influences the audience through the use of text and language. By analyzing media discourse, including news reports and related content, this study seeks to uncover the strategies employed by the media to manipulate audience perceptions regarding victim blaming and fact-hiding.

3.1 Data Collection

Data was gathered from online sources for the examination of victim blaming and fact-hiding in the news media. The study focused on a single incident, the "Zainab's Murder and Rape Case," and examined five news articles from five well-known publications: The Dawn News, ARY News, Dunya News, Geo News, and the Express Tribune. These publications were picked because of how well-liked they are and because of their track record of giving readers up-to-date information. 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 present study aimed to investigate the manipulation of rape cases in news reporting, specifically focusing on the Zainab murder case. The analysis involved examining five different newspaper reports using the macrostructure of the Van Dijk model. The findings revealed a prevalent use of the deletion process, whereby the media outlets diverted attention from crucial details and controlled the perspective of their audience through manipulative statements.

One instance of deletion was observed in a statement by Dawn News, where the report mentioned that the girl had been killed several days earlier but omitted any reference to her kidnapping and brutal rape. Instead of using the explicit term "rape," the reporter used phrases like "heinous crime" to describe the incident, effectively hiding the true nature of the crime. Furthermore, the identities of the perpetrators were concealed by referring to them as "two people." Similarly, the individual who attempted the murder and rape of Zainab was simply referred to as "the criminal," which further obscured the specific 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 aligns with previous research on the manipulative role played by the media in rape cases and its contribution to delayed justice. It is evident that when it comes to addressing rape cases and advocating for justice for the vulnerable, the media often prioritizes protecting its reputation rather than fulfilling its responsibility. Unfortunately, the media's portrayal of women in such cases perpetuates the misguided notion that they are somehow responsible for these acts of cruelty. As a significant influencer of societal ideologies, the media bears the responsibility of presenting a fair and accurate representation of such cases.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the critical influence of media in shaping public perceptions and attitudes towards rape victims. The portrayal of these victims in the media plays a pivotal role in determining societal responses to rape incidents. Unfortunately, the findings reveal a concerning pattern: the media frequently falls short of its responsibility when it comes to seeking justice for rape victims, instead prioritizing its own reputation and self-interest.

Society's expectations and biases regarding rape victims, such as age, purity, vulnerability, and social status, further complicate the media's portrayal. Victims who do not conform to these narrow expectations often face victim-blaming and diminished empathy. This perpetuates harmful stereotypes and poses significant barriers to achieving justice for all survivors.

Moreover, the media's tendency to manipulate information and conceal the truth undermines efforts to address the true nature of these crimes. By focusing on sensationalized elements or diverting attention from the perpetrators, the media obfuscates the reality of rape cases and contributes to delayed or denied justice. This deliberate distortion of facts and reluctance to confront the darker aspects of power and law enforcement is a recurring theme in the study.

To address these pressing issues, it is imperative that media organizations uphold ethical standards in reporting on rape cases. Responsible journalism that prioritizes accuracy, empathy, and the rights of survivors is paramount. Journalists should receive adequate training and guidance to navigate the sensitive terrain of sexual violence reporting, ensuring that victims' voices are heard, their experiences are respected, and the truth is conveyed.

Collective action involving media outlets, advocacy groups, and policymakers is necessary to bring about meaningful change. The development and implementation of guidelines and regulations promoting responsible reporting on sexual violence can serve as a catalyst for ethical journalism. Furthermore, fostering media literacy and critical thinking among the public is crucial to fostering a society that challenges manipulative narratives and supports survivors.

By holding the media accountable and striving for a more compassionate and accurate portrayal of rape cases, we can contribute to a society that embraces survivor-centric approaches, challenges victim-blaming, and actively pursues justice. Only through concerted efforts can we create an environment where survivors are empowered, their rights are safeguarded, and significant progress is achieved in combating sexual violence.

Funding: This study was not funded in any shape or form by any party.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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