



RESEARCH PAPER

**Print Media Framing of Coronavirus: Probing the Second Wave of COVID-19 in Leading Newspapers of Pakistan**

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PAPER INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Received:</b> June 15, 2021</p> <p><b>Accepted:</b> August 22, 2021</p> <p><b>Online:</b> August 25, 2021</p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Covid-19 Pandemic, Media Framing, Misinformation, Role of Media, Second Wave</p> <p><b>*Corresponding Author:</b></p> <p>wajeeha_khawaja@live.com</p>	<p>The outbreak of novel coronavirus pandemic originated from the Wuhan city of China in January, 2020 raised many questions on the extent of health communication crisis. Within few weeks, a massive transmission of virus across the world drew attention of international media. Due to which almost every country around the globe got affected. In that situation, role of media becomes a challenge as majority of people are dependent on media to get information about the disease. Various media intellectuals often criticize media for framing, spreading misinformation and creating panic. Contrarily, many scholars have admired the role of media in disseminating relevant information and educating the public during health crisis. For this study, content analysis under umbrella of framing theory is done to examine the media coverage of the pandemic during second wave of coronavirus in Pakistan. To achieve the objective, two leading Urdu Dailies of Pakistan i.e., Jang and Nawa-i-Waqt are selected for the period of two months. This study adds a value to discourse of mass media practice and implication of different research paradigms in studying media frames critically during the time of crisis.</p>

**Introduction**

Pakistan, since Coronavirus a recent pandemic has adversely affected the world. On Oct 28, 2020, Government of Pakistan announced second spell of coronavirus, when infected cases increased from 400 to 750 per day within a week. Due to which a sudden increase in active cases crossed 11,000 mark among which nearly 2000 were critical (Junaidi, 2020). In addition, this infectious spread was observed in many parts of the world i.e., China, United Kingdom, United States, Australia, Japan, Malaysia, India, France and Italy (Menon, 2020). Coronavirus contagious transmission has partially paralyzed the world as well as produced a major health crisis that has had a powerful impact on how we understand the world and everyday life. By considering the coronavirus an outbreak, World health organization (WHO), Governments and Public health officials communicated protective measures to avoid massive transmission among public (Mutua & Ong'ong'a, 2020). For effective communication with the public, they utilized various mediums of

mass media including print, television and social media. Among the various sources of mass communication, print media is the oldest one as individuals from Pakistan still found the recognized print media outlets as reliable and trustworthy source of information as compared to television and social media (Shahid, Istimraj & Nawaz, 2020). Additionally, it is found that media organizations played a pro-active role in disseminating the information during major health crisis (Arif, Mahmood & Mughal Anwar, 2020). Media outlets determine the news content as well as the scale of priority which is given to particular aspect of the story (Arif & Hassan, 2020). Along with potential role of media, it is found that factors such as social, political and economic situation of a country also provided context for news framing in choosing that which aspect of the story is to highlight and which ones to exclude (Mutua & Ong'ong'a, 2020). There are evidences suggesting that during major health crisis, news framing become a prominent aspect as particular news frames not only effects the public discourse but also helps in communicating the interventions effectively (Gislason, 2013; Shahid et al., 2020). These media frames were introduced by Neuman Russel and his colleagues that are economic, conflict, powerlessness, human interest, attribution of responsibility and moral values. (Neuman, Just and Crigler, 1992). Later, Valkenburg and Sematko (1999) employed Neuman et al. frames and they were also able to form a scale to evaluate the frames of attribution of responsibility, conflict, morality, economic consequence and human interest. Among these frames most suitable ones are used for the paper, that are discussed later in this study.

By considering the effective role of media, it is found that media played a key role during first wave of covid-19 pandemic in Pakistan. Various government and health officials utilized media vehicles i.e., print, tv and social media to communicate with the public that helped them in better understanding the pandemic and reacts accordingly. Additionally, many studies reported the potential of news media framing during major disease outbreak (Idoiaga Mondragon et al., 2017; Morissan, Abdul Wahab, Siang & Cahyowati, 2020). For instance, during coronavirus outbreak in Nigeria, the continuous reporting on the disease resulted in creating effective awareness that helped the public in adopting the preventive measures. (Nwakpu, Ezema & Ogbodo, 2020). Therefore, considering its importance, the study in hand is designed under the principles of media framing theory and frames of economic factor, human interest, attribution of responsibility. It also includes a frame of health severity which is developed in the study of Mutua & Ong'ong'a (2020). Further, this study analyzes the news stories by leading newspapers of Urdu press of Pakistan i.e., Jang and Nawa-i-waqt from 1<sup>st</sup> Nov 2020 to 1<sup>st</sup> Jan, 2021. The choice of these newspapers is based on their popularity as well as the fact that majority people of Pakistan prefer Urdu press over English. Further, it aims to examine the front-page news stories as it is considered the most readable page of any newspaper.

### **Role of media communication during major health crisis**

A number of researches have been conducted on vital role of media in communicating the health crisis. Particularly, it was found that media has potentially contributed in epidemic disease outbreaks in 21<sup>st</sup> century. As this was observed during major infectious disease outbreaks i.e, Ebola, Zika, H1N1, Severe respiratory syndrome (SARS), Middle east respiratory syndrome (MERS), and now global pandemic covid-19

(Mutua & Ong'ong'a, 2020; Arif et al., 2020). News content about infectious disease outbreaks demands attention and it was found that information about those disease outbreaks brought adverse economic, psychological, social and physical impact (Ophir, 2019). It was also observed that international media played a condemnatory role in informing public as well as addressing the people's concerns regarding the Ebola disease outbreak. However, few studies found the media's role positive. They argued that regular coverage might create anxiety and panic as it could be studied from the past record of media exaggeration (Ungar 1998; Washer, 2006; Lewison, 2008).

Communication becomes a challenge in such situations as Public depends on media to gain relevant information to behave accordingly. Thus, any mishandled or misleading information in form of high mortality rate and creating economic crisis could result in public loss of trust and reputation towards an organization. It is also found that media not only highlights the economic crisis but also provide a direction for the political and public debate in handling the crisis (Ophir, 2019).

During emerging health crisis, mass media has remained the primary source of information for individuals. It becomes an elementary tool in guiding the public to tackle the disease accordingly. Thus, the credibility and accuracy of information is important as incorrect or fabricated information might lead to create panic and chaos among public (Kilgo, Yoo & Johnson, 2019; Ophir, 2019; Arif et al., 2020). Similarly, during SARS outbreak in 2003, it became a challenge for global media to play their role and it was found that SARS was poorly handled by majority of media organizations as they highlighted false information about the disease. The failure of mishandling the health crisis was later claimed as the poor performance of governments in communicating the cause (Lee, Ju & You, 2020).

### **Media Framing of Pandemics**

From decades, mass media has been playing a key role during unforeseeable times of major health crisis. It is found that during such crisis, media gets a greater attention as it sets the agenda for public debate as well as helping them by creating the awareness about risk related to the disease (Siddiqua, Shabir, Ashraf & Khaliq, 2020). Thus, public dependence on media increased in time of pandemics and the role of media cannot be neglected. Along with public dependence on media, it was observed that WHO was also dependent on the information provided by various media vehicles and official communication sources (Siddiqua et al., 2020).

With the evolution of time, media reliance increased, due to which research on media coverage of pandemics have adopted innovative ways of data gathering and analysis. That is why it became important due to ability to guide in case of failure of formal support system as well as to communicate health related messages to various segments of the society. Each media vehicle has different pattern for covering the pandemic. Luther & Zhou (2005) conducted a research on media framing of SARS virus by US and Chinese newspapers. They found the frames used for covering the disease were Human interest, Conflict, Economic impact, leadership and responsibility. Here, it is pertinent to mention that social media has a vital hold but traditional media still played an effective role in shaping the public decision on matters related to health issues. Thus, a

connection has been established between health communication and mass media which is often studied with the help of framing.

News framing can be referred as the news is presented in a way that have an impact on how is it perceived by the public (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2006; Abreu,2015). Media not only tells us what to think but also tells the public what to think about, that is why the stories that receive more coverage are considered more important by audiences (Entmann, 1993). Further, these frames were divided into categories on basis of their function. It is a thought process by which media attract the audience attention towards certain issues. The framing concept has been widely utilized by mass media researchers under a wide range of categories. Frames can also be defined as a series of cognitive schemas that allow individuals to use the perceived information to form their own impression of the world(Abreu,2015). In addition, these set patterns of schemas help audiences in organizing and prioritizing the certain issues (Pieri, 2019). Neuman et al., (1993) identified four types of frames that are often used in news stories. These were economic impact, Human impact, moral and conflict frames. Later on, Valkenburg and his colleagues made an addition to these factors i.e., responsibility and human interest (Valkenburg, Semetko & De Vreese, 1999). For present study, we have borrowed the frames from both neuman and Valkenburg that are appropriate in probing the COVID-19 in leading newspapers of Pakistan.

### **Economic Impact**

In the time of major crisis, business, trade, employment and investments are often economically affected. These affects could be positive for some businesses that generate comparatively better revenues than others i.e., e-commerce. Financial impact during such situations often referred as economic framing (Iyengar, 1990). During this time of crisis, ban on travelling and tourism adversely affects the economy. Although, lift on tourism give a minute relief to economy but focus is on health-related stories.

### **Human Interest**

Throughout the history of disease outbreaks, media has always been committed to provide stories related to human interest (Iyengar, 1990). It includes stories about the people who are directly or indirectly affected. It is found that use of this frame by giving it an emotional angle allows the public to relate the story to themselves (Beaudoin, 2007). That is why this frame is considered as valuable in news as well as it enhances the credibility of the news.

### **Attribution of Responsibility**

It is a routine practice in media that whenever something happens, there is a possibility of it being relate to a certain situation, an individual or something that has been suspicious during that time. This practice remained same during health crisis. However, it is a responsibility of media to get the complete detail of pandemic before reporting it publicly. It is found that effective communication during such time helps in better understanding the outbreak as well as reducing the fear and uncertainty (Iyengar, 1990). Consequently, it led to create a mutual understanding to minimize spread of the outbreak.

Therefore, it is observed that newsworthiness of story should not be limited to emotional appeal, sensationalism and prominence standards rather the significance of attribution should relate to mysterious nature of the news as well as the cause of higher mortality rate(Iyengar, 1990; Pieri, 2019; Mutua & Ong'ong'a, 2020).

### **Health Severity Frame**

This frame involves the magnitude of risk information in a numeric form (Dan & Raupp, 2018). Health diseases such as SARS, MERS, Ebola and Coronavirus have the potential of spreading rapidly across the world. Due to this, it affects more than expected numbers of people in a population (Iyengar, 1990; Pieri, 2019).The massive transmission poses a threat at both levels i.e., national and international spheres. Meanwhile, media takes a chance of minimizing uncertainty of the outbreak and information-management related to such disease requires a well-coordinated effort from various stakeholders (Neuman et al., 1992). For this purpose, it is found that timely and factual based information helps in reducing the risk of misinformation (Iyengar, 1990) as well as beneficial for better disease prevention (Iyengar, 1990; Neuman et al., 1992; Pieri, 2019).Ong'ong'a & Mutua(2020) have used similar frame to study initial phase of COVID-19. Similarly, the current study is employing this frame in analyzing the second wave of coronavirus in Pakistan, as it seems the most relevant frame in studying COVID-19 pandemic.

By considering the existing literature, the study in hand is exploratory as not much synchronized data was available about the framing of pandemics, particularly COVID-19 framing.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1. How did Jang and Nawa-i-waqt newspapers set the tone of news stories during the second wave of COVID-19?

RQ2. What were the major frames used by these two newspapers while reporting the second wave of COVID-19?

### **Material and Methods**

The methodology used in this study is content analysis technique. This method is extensively used in communication related researches and is distinctly popular in media (Allen, 2017).It is a systematized way to describe a communicative message in a quantifiable manner. In other words, content analysis method is a descriptive way to comprehend communication phenomenon that includes text, definitions and ideas etc.

For the current study, front pages of two Pakistani Urdu daily newspapers (Jang and Nawa-i-waqt) were studied for the period of two months i.e., Nov, 01.2020 to Jan, 01. 2021. This time period was chosen because of its significance regarding the second wave of COVID-19 in Pakistan. The unit of analysis was individual stories. On each newspaper, COVID-19 related news were studied and documented. In order to evaluate the tone of news stories regarding second wave of COVID-19, the newsare categorized into positive, negative and neutral stories. Any positive information regarding COVID-19 fell under

category of positive that includes general information for creating awareness, information regarding Standard operating procedures (SOPs), positive steps taken by the government in fighting against coronavirus, positive information regarding vaccination i.e., how soon is vaccine reaching to public and effectiveness of the vaccine etc. On contrary, any negative information i.e., increased number of deaths due to the disease, rising number of COVID-19 affectees, economic stagnancy etc, fell under negative category. Whereas, any news that is neither positive nor negative fell under the category of neutral. However, the major frames that are used in this study have been taken from the Neuman et al. and Valkenburg work. These frames were deemed most suitable for study of second wave of COVID-19 in Pakistan.

## Results and Discussion

The findings revealed that total of 154 news stories were written on coronavirus by both newspapers during the presented period of time. This shows that 24% of coverage was given to COVID-19 related news in the said time period by both newspapers as shown in table no 1. Though, it can be observed that during the second wave of COVID-19, 59% of negative news stories were published and the number of positive stories were 16.8% and the neutral news stories were 24%.

Daily Nawa-i-waqt gave more coverage to corona related news than Daily Jang during the second spell of coronavirus i.e., 57% and 42.8% respectively. However, Jang Published more negative news stories i.e., 60% as compare to Nawa-i-waqt i.e., 57.9%. Although the number of news stories published on the disease by Jang is 40 and Nawa-i-waqt published 51 news stories. Also, Nawa-i-waqt published the higher number of positive news than Jang regarding coronavirus during this time i.e., 20.4% and 12.1% respectively. The number of neutral news stories by both newspapers (Jang and Nawa-i-Waqt) are 27.2% and 21.5% respectively. Therefore, the findings showed that tone of the news stories during second wave of corona virus was mostly negative.

**Table no 1**  
**Tone of news stories regarding second wave of coronavirus**

Newspapers		Positive news	Negative news	Neutral	Total
Jang	count	8	40	18	66
	%	12.1%	60%	27.2%	42.8%
Nawa-i-waqt	count	18	51	19	88
	%	20.4%	57.9%	21.5%	57.1%
Total	count	26	91	37	154
	%	16.8%	59%	24%	24%

The news stories were studied under the four frames i.e., economic frame, human interest frame, attribution of responsibility and health severity frame. The data suggests that both newspapers i.e., Jang and Nawa-i-waqt published 12.7% news stories under the category of economic frame. While, 18.1% news stories were published under the category of human-interest frame. Attribution of responsibility includes 25% while health severity frame includes 43.6% of news stories. On the other hand, it is explored that both newspapers published most news stories related to health severity as shown in the Table no 2. Although the number of news stories may vary but the difference of the percentage is so less that it can be neglected. Additionally, it was also analyzed that both newspapers published news stories in a responsible manner. Jang and Nawa-i-waqt published 24% and 26.5% news stories under attribution of responsibility frame. However, least number of stories fell under the economic frame i.e., Jang published 15.4% and Nawa-i-Waqt published 10.6%. Similarly, 18.3% stories from Jang and 18.0% stories by Nawa-i-Waqt comes under the economic frame. Therefore, it is deduced that both newspapers emphasized on the severity of the disease in a responsible manner. The results show that both newspapers were aware of their responsibility and the impact that news stories will have on people. Hence, both newspapers spread COVID-19 related information while holding themselves accountable for their impact.

**Table no 2**  
**Major frames used by newspapers regarding second wave of COVID-19**

Newspaper		Economic	Human interest	Attribution of responsibility	Health severity
Jang	Count	11	13	17	30
	%	15.4%	18.3%	24%	42.2%
Nawa-i-waqt	Count	10	17	25	42
	%	10.6 %	18.0%	26.5%	44.4%
Total	Count	21	30	42	72
	%	12.7%	18.1%	25%	43.6%

## Discussion

The study in hand focuses on the role of media during second wave of COVID-19 pandemic. In order to understand its role, news stories from two popular Urdu dailies were studied and their tones were also observed. Under the principles of framing theory, the obtained data was analyzed. Though, there is a lot of speculation regarding coronavirus and its origin. Bolsen, Palm & Kingsland (2020) suggested that framed messages may have impact on people beliefs regarding the origin of coronavirus. That is why the current study aimed to find out the major frames used during the second wave of coronavirus in Pakistan. Hence, the news stories were examined under the four frames

i.e., Economic consequence, human interest, attribution of responsibility frame and health severity frames.

The tone of the news stories was evaluated under three-point Likert scale and is categorized as positive, negative and neutral news stories. Moreover, content analysis of two popular URDU newspapers i.e., Jang and Nawa-i-waqt was done for the two months i.e., Nov, 01. 2020. to Jan, 01. 2021. The findings suggest that during the second wave of coronavirus in Pakistan, the tone of both newspapers was negative. Both published corona related news stories with negative tones. However, the number of positive or neutral news stories were significantly less as shown in table no 1.

On the other hand, the frames that were majorly used during the second spell of coronavirus were health severity and attribution of responsibility frames as shown in table no 2. Thus, the higher use of these frames indicates that media played in a responsible manner while disseminating information regarding coronavirus outbreak during its second spell. Furthermore, it was also revealed that print media helped in informing the masses regarding the severity and seriousness of the disease. Nevertheless, the use of economic consequence and human-interest frames seemed relevant while examining the role of media during second wave of the pandemic. The results suggest that both frames were minimally prevalent, only few news stories framed under these two frames. Hence, data shows that most of the news stories were regarding coronavirus, its spread and the information that focuses on the virus instead of its economic or human affect. Additionally, results explored that responsible framing was done by media in propagation of the negative toned news stories. According to Guenduez *et al*, (2016) attribution of responsibility frame is usually associated with negative tone and its absence is associated with neutral tone. Hence, the use of responsibility frame may have contributed to the negative tonality of the news stories.

## **Conclusion**

The main objective of the study was to analyze the role of media during the second wave of COVID-19 in Pakistan. The contagious virus has affected people all over the world and its economic, political, health implications have been severe. Pakistan has also been hit hard by this deadly virus. Therefore, the study aimed to understand the media and its role in this pandemic and also the utility of media in future pandemics. Though, the role played by media in Pakistan is commendable. The results showed that media acted itself responsibly in propagation of the corona related news. The study has its limitations as it did not measure the framing affects on masses. Therefore, the study opens new doors for the researchers to understand the role of media during such pandemics and its effect on people.



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