

ANALYZING CRISIS COMMUNICATION IN MEDIA & RESEARCH: EXPLORING APPROACHES OF AGENDA SETTING, FRAMING, AND EXEMPLIFICATION

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Abstract:

In recent decades, media and conflict studies have gained momentum in the educational sphere as the role played by media platforms in conflicts around the world is developing as an important part of academic concern and intervention. Theoretical aspects viz a viz media and crisis communication help to develop an in-depth understanding of the media's roles in conflict situations. The researcher in this study tries to understand various media theories in the context of conflict reporting. Understanding the importance of theory and research helps the researcher to facilitate the selection and use of an appropriate framework in crisis communication. Building on a study of theoretical frameworks to examine the intersection between media and conflict, the categorization will further generate a central argument about the problem under study.

Keywords: *Crisis communication, Conflict reportage, Theories of conflicts, Media Theories, Media & Research*

Introduction:

Since the 1920s and 1930s Hypodermic Needle and Magic Bullet theories were considered the main theoretical background in understanding media effects but, later in the 1970s to 90s new media theories were propounded either, to sum up, the established theories or to introduce new concepts. In this context McQuail, 2005 suggest that the field passed through a series of paradigm shift in the 20th century with new concepts replacing the previous ones. However, it is a fact that media does influence audiences at all levels, now there is a debate to understand the extent of the influence and counter influence with the reversal of roles from content users to generators and distributors. The exact association between media and its audiences is altogether a different subject of much debate as there are various dimensions to look at the media-audience relationship in terms of what media do to audiences and how audiences respond to media content.

All forms of mass media that we use and are available in society, bring forth information and messages that are analyzed and interpreted by audiences, whether consciously or inadvertently. And in relation to media and conflict framework, many theories tried to address the phenomena. Some of these theories have focused on media frames while others highlighted the effects of media in a particular situation. Hence keeping in view above mentioned arguments, the researcher in this paper has selected three main theories to decode the various concepts. Importantly all the concepts have been identified by researchers to understand the media treatment of crisis in a more comprehensive way for a deeper perspective of discourse and portrayal of media content.

According to Parsons (1938), the theory is a statement consisting of an explanation of facts and phenomena, logically interrelated and empirically verifiable set of propositions. Shendurnikar (2014) in his study states that theory facilitates the prediction of natural and social phenomena and helps explain patterns of relationship among observed phenomena. The author further reveals that explanation, prediction, description, control, and interpretation are functions of theory. A theory can be understood in various dimensions by a different school of thought, hence making the job of a researcher more challenging and equally important one to discuss theories in the process of his/her research. Theory setting and theory building are two major preoccupations of research as researchers mainly use theory either to test the hypothesis or to generate theory in their research work.

AGENDA SETTING- What to think.

This significant role of media was put forward by McDonald & Shaw in their book *Emergence of American Political Issue* (1972). They conducted empirical studies to highlight how the media and the public's agenda work during elections. They revealed that the media draws public attention to a few key issues and leaves a significant impact on its audience. According to this theory, the media can transfer their agenda to people and make it a public agenda. Cohen (1963) describes agenda-setting as the ability of media to tell its audiences "what to think about". In other words, the media sets an agenda around which the public forms an opinion i.e., the media sets the public agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Graber, 1980; 70, Peters & Kinder, 1982).

In the context of media and conflict reporting, the theory is of the most importance. It describes the influence of media reporting on recent issues of crisis communication like the war in Ukraine, the Rohingya conflict, and political tension in Palestine among other contemporary conflict situations around the world, and their media treatment. Media by its ability to highlight what issues are important in the public domain. Agenda setting is carried out by media gatekeepers like editors, managers, and public relations professionals among others who decide what media should report and what it should not. Moreover, there are also various external influencers like the government, people in power, elites, and business houses so on. Thus media-conflict relationship in the background of agenda-setting is significant because certain conflicts remain in media fame, whereas others don't because of only the media treatment through a certain frame of agenda.

The principal outline of agenda-setting was sketched by Walter Lippmann in his 1922's classic, *Public Opinion*. It began with a chapter titled "The World Outside and the Pictures in our Heads." As Lippmann noted, the media are a primary source of the pictures in the audience's heads about the larger world of public affairs – a world that for most citizens is "out of reach, out of sight, out of mind." Thus under the agenda-setting concept, it can be argued that the media issues are made a part of the public agenda by the placement of the stories, wherein an issue reported with prominence is placed higher on the agenda of the audience; on the contrary, an issue reported with lesser prominence does not become a part of the audience's agenda. For example, the socio-political tension between India and Pakistan over Kashmir has always formed a dominant part of the media discourse at the International, National, and Local level. In a conflict, situation media sets the agenda for audiences by prioritizing one particular issue over another. Within the

framework of agenda-setting theory what is placed higher in the agenda of audiences is made accessible to them by its placement, space, and visibility. While on the other hand what is considered a less important issue, finds less prominent space in the media limelight. Hence in the backdrop of media and its crisis communication, the content that has been used there is a need to understand the portrayal of communication.

The process of agenda-setting comprises three main stages of agenda starting from the media agenda to the public agenda and the policy agenda at the last. Further, it also consists of two levels of agenda- one salience of objects and another salience of the characteristics. In the present world, most of the information received whether intentionally or unintentionally reaches us by different means of media. Thus, most of our perceptions about the different phenomena of the world is a second-hand realities as presented and interpreted by media. Broadly some of the basic assumptions regarding the theory are as under: -

- Media does not shape reality; media filter the news and then shape it accordingly.
- During reporting media concentrate on some issues/event/stories more than others which ultimately lead the audiences to discuss only those than various others.
- Since there are several media platforms, thus each of them has its own agenda policy.
- Time-frame is one of the most important aspects of the agenda-setting process.

This paper is to be seen as an extension of media & agenda-setting, as the amount of news coverage any conflict receives, the more audiences discuss that situation. Thus, with the above-mentioned argument, it can be said that the media agenda becomes the people's agenda through news reports to transform its agenda into a public agenda. However, it cannot be also ruled out that agenda setting does not give mass media all power to influence what audiences think about, but it just gives mass media an edge to determine what issues are important to audiences to be thinking about more important in such crises when masses rely heavily on the different media platforms for their information. Media importance to studies like various contemporary conflicts takes place through space, type, and amount of coverage given by the selected media sources and then generating the discourse among people to talk about this unrest through its agenda-setting function.

Since conflicts across the world receive a lot of media attention to discuss various socio-political issues, hence it is very important to understand them from agenda setting perspective to understand media agenda how topped the narrative during the conflicts. Agenda-setting theory allows different processes to work in a synergic effect to create an impact on the viewer/reader. The effect is further reinforced by the core agenda being set up by a particular media portrayal within a dominant frame.

FRAMING- How to think.

The genesis of Framing-theory can be outlined in the field of sociology and psychology (Pan & Kosicki, 1993). Goffmann (1974) argued that to process new information efficiently, people apply interpretive schemas or "primary frameworks" to organize information and interpret it meaningfully. Framing is altogether a different concept and differs totally from agenda-setting and priming effects models. It can be easily understood as how any particular issue is

characterized/framed in a news story and how that frame may have an influence on the audience. In media language, it simply means the process by which media professionals present news and other information to the public. It focuses on some perspectives while presenting a version of the story within in a particular frame.

Gamson and Modigliani (1987) found that the creation of frames involves three processes: cultural resonance, sponsor activity, and media practice. Entman (1993), argues that media shapes public opinion by framing events and issues in a particular manner. Media not only determines which issues are important but also how these issues should be presented to audiences. By way of media portrayal, media has the potential to frames an issue, an event, a person or a group in a certain context. These frames may be positive, negative, neutral, biased, slanted, etc. Framing has multiple meaning; it is characterized as different patterns of reportage with the representation of various media terminologies that organize the discourse. According to Lee, Maslog, and Kim (2006), framing is the process of organizing a news story thematically, stylistically, and factually to convey a specific storyline.

Framing is also referred to as second-level Agenda Setting (McCombs 1994, McCombs & Bell 1996), while Agenda Setting tells people what to think about; framing gives them an idea of how to think about the issue. McCombs et al (1997) argue that the concepts of agenda-setting and framing are not diverse rather; framing is an extension of agenda-setting. The concept of framing appears to be emerging as researchers, and academicians around the world use it to understand how media frames issues and how it impacts on audience perceptions and identity. For instance, the invasion of Afghanistan has been examined through frames of 'freedom versus terror', 'humanitarian intervention versus imperialism', and 'democracy versus authoritarianism.

Pertaining to media conflict reporting, the researchers find it important to put forth that media-frames play an important role in the media coverage of the crisis. The framework of the mentioned theory gives a more detailed concept apart from agenda setting on how media coverage of conflicts has been described, explained, and interpreted with the usage of different frames. The media frames used by the various media sources over the period of a certain crisis give an overall perspective of the slant of the news organization towards the issue. Framing by the mass media is an essential part of the construction of social reality. It is considered an important tool to identify frames related to what exists, what happens, and what matters for a media organization in a certain crisis.

Further from the methodology perspective, Yang& Ishak (2012) stated the views of Weaver (2007) that media frames in systematic content give a perspective of more interpretive textual content. He also mentioned that framing is not concentrated on how issues or other objects like people, groups, organizations, or countries are depicted in the media rather it identifies their prominence of them in the media.

Framing influences the way an issue is understood by the audience. Framing is also viewed as a closely linked concept in disciplines like Psychology and Sociology. In this context, Pan and Kosicki (1993) argue that framing as a concept defining the effects of content is often traced back to its roots in both psychology and sociology. Kahneman and Tversky (1984) studied how different

presentations of essentially identical decision-making scenarios influence people's evaluation of the various options available to them. Since a very limited amount of time and space is available to journalists to describe various conflict situations, hence during reporting certain media-frames are being used to simplify the conflict events keeping in view the audience's interest. In this context Framing, as Entman (1993) sees it, has four steps: the reporter, the text, the audience, and society.

Regarding conflict frames, Stawicki(2009) put forward views of the Israeli researcher Wolfsfeld (1993) states: 'the essence of any conflict centres on the struggle over interpretive frames: Two or more antagonists develop a dispute over 'what's going on,' and they typically attempt to promote their definition to third parties.' He also mentions that there has been a tendency of media to find a narrative fit between incoming information and existing media frames. Wolfsfeld, Khouri, and Peri (2002) after studying coverage of the Israeli-Jordanian peace process, remark that "the news media are much better suited for the conduct of war than the pursuit of peace" (Stawicki, 2009).

Moreover, whenever there is conflict, there is also competition among media houses to highlight one's own media frames to achieve their political influence and to mobilize public support for the conflict. This model of communication can be seen in conflict places where media is the central arena of attention and information for political conflicts. The theory explains how writers frame a story or certain issue and then place it within a field of meaning. It is therefore clear that whether practiced by media as a necessity or out of prejudice; framing lends a slant to the way issues are reported to the audiences by media. The content produced by the media viz a viz conflict reporting follows the same patterns. It highlights a few incidents and anecdotes regarding certain issues by analysing the media frames used over the years in the larger discourse.

The presentation of media content plays a significant role in impacting its audience and in this paradigm media frames serve as an important document in the background of crisis communication. This concept of media framing is further substantiated by the concepts and text used within a particular frame by media text. The context within which a particular frame is constructed explains the diversity of media content.

EXEMPLIFICATION- To Attract Attention

Exemplification is defined as a ubiquitous phenomenon in communication, in which journalists often use different types of media terminologies to describe a particular problem under study. The basis of the theory is on the principle that while reporting media uses certain examples and characteristics, which are considered as informational items relating to the topic used in the news. Within exemplification theory, Zillmann (2000) revealed the concept of exemplars, as being selected, subjective narratives used in the process of communication of an incident. In the sphere of media, exemplars are often used during reportage to describe a situation by using specific key sentences and catchphrases to define a news incident. In this context, Gibson & Zillmann (1994) stated that, in news reports, exemplars are often added to provide a description of an event being discussed within a report and are chosen for their entertaining qualities. Thus, exemplars (also

called examples) are fundamental means of an issue/event through which audiences understand the phenomena.

As in media coverage of a certain issue, the use of exemplars and their placement in news stories have an influence on the audience's decision making i.e., how they as news consumers think about a particular issue and the judgment they make about that issue. According to Brosius (2003), journalists durably affect the perception of an issue or the population's opinions through the choice and/or distribution of exemplars, thus the study of exemplification is an important subject of media effects research. When an exemplar is used in the news, it often is to make the story more interesting or to provide an example for the audience members (Arpan, 2009). Exemplars are typically employed to bring a human element or personal angle to the story, to provide vividness or color, and ultimately to attract attention to the story (Brosius, 2003; D'Alessio, 2003; Zillmann & Brosius, 2000).

The origins of the academic development of exemplification as a communication theory can be linked back to Brosius and Bathelt's (1994) study examining the use of exemplars in persuasion. The authors in their study conducted a series of experiments alternately examining the impact of visual vs. textual responses, relative vs. absolute base-rate information, the ratio of consistent and representative exemplars vs. inconsistent and misrepresentative exemplars, different media channels, and repetition of base-rate information to better understand persuasion and subsequent opinions about the reality of the presented problem in the community. In their study, the researchers identified two types of information: base-rate information and exemplars. Authors identified base-rate information as "general statements about the range of importance of a problem" but contrasted those exemplars are "illustrative cases that are less valid but more pallid". They recognized that base rate information is consistent with more thematic frames, and exemplars are representative of episodic frames. In terms of Iyengar & Kinder, 1987 framing studies, exemplars help to make episodic frames, whereas base rate information aids in the formation of thematic frames. In order to begin to test this phenomenon within mass communications, Brosius & Bathelt (1994) conducted five separate experiments where they varied the number of exemplars used, the distribution of exemplars used representing the majority or minority, the vividness of the exemplars (specifically through the language used), the precision of the base-rate information (absolute vs. relative), and the medium of presentation (radio vs. print). The findings provide considerable evidence of the extent to which exemplars have the ability to persuade individual perceptions of reality. As results reveal that the perception of public opinion was directly related to the percentage of exemplars representing each side of an issue.

Thus, based on the mentioned discussion it can be said that in media treatment of conflict situations exemplification theory plays a critical role in the language used. The basis of the exemplification concept can be identified and examined in terms of keywords, metaphors, major headlines, etc. used by the selected media sources to understand the impact of media coverage on audience identity and perception from the socio-cultural and political atmosphere.

Exemplification refers to enhancing the influence of media by relating a particular situation with certain examples, jargon, etc. that will be used to interpret subsequent communication. Thus,

it can be argued that this theory will help in identifying specific media vocabulary used over the period by certain media outlets to report a certain conflict. This approach also gives an idea to understand, whether the specific media terminology (if any) has been used repeatedly or not by selected media in their media treatment.

Conclusion:

For the present study, the researcher has used three different theoretical frameworks to obtain explanations regarding the media's role and influence in conflict situations. In a study like this, a diverse theoretical approach needs to be implemented where the media's multiple roles are examined in the context of different crisis events. Above mentioned theories were included as they majorly fit within the context of the theoretical framework of research in accordance with the nature & implications of the study, media conflict relations.

In media and conflict reporting both Agenda Setting and Framing theories help the researchers of the subject to understand how an idea reported by the media leads to the creation of opinions and responses in society. While on the other hand exemplification theory will facilitate the examination of the media, and terminology used by the media sources during their reportage on unrest. By studying exemplars in terms of keywords, phrases, etc. used to evaluate the media influence among audiences regarding the media portrayal of conflicts and thus made to understand the use of media agenda and media frames.

Media and conflicts have always been changing with the various socio-political happenings. However, at the outbreak of these situations, a lot of space and coverage was provided by the media, thus setting an agenda for public debate and discussion. Moreover, in the construction of this conflict, media plays a vital role in news and information. It extends its reach beyond information to the extent of questioning or criticizing, hence generating discourses that affect the existence and outcome of the conflicts. However, whether this media influence is positive or negative or not at all is mainly understood by the nature of the media treatment provided to the conflict situations, hence shaping the political agenda of the conflict. So, in this context, the above-mentioned theoretical frameworks of mass communication are important to study the media treatment of crisis communication. This study, therefore, touches upon Agenda Setting, Framing, and Exemplification for a deeper understanding of the research phenomena under study.

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