Impact of the Pakistani Media in Shaping Public View: A Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis

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Abstract:

The current paper attempts to contextualize Jurgen Habermas' theory of public sphere to the presentation of Imran Khan's third wedding news through Pakistani media. The purpose of the current study is to see how the media presents the news in order to indoctrinate the public opinion and then directs it to formulate a specific approach on particular news. Furthermore, it highlights the strategies including lexical choices, use of pictures, and framing, which helps shaping the public opinion. The data for the present study consists of the news published in Pakistani leading Urdu newspapers of 20th February 2018 as well as the political cartoons shared on social media. For data analysis the study has its roots in Habermasian notion of "public sphere" particularly the role of media in re/shaping public opinion. In addition to this Kress & Van Leeuwen's critical multimodal discourse analysis and Van Dijk's textual model is used to analyze data. An open-ended questionnaire is also administered to seek people's opinion on media's role in maneuvering public opinion. The results indicate that the Habermas' idea of public sphere has been reshaped by the media which presents the news in such a way that it changes public opinion about a political leader.

Keywords: *Critical Multimodal Discourse Analysis, identity construction, public opinion, public sphere, Social media*

INTRODUCTION

The study seeks to analyse the media discourse, formulated and spread through various means i.e. social and print media e.g. Twitter, WhatsApp, Facebook, blogs, chatrooms, newspapers and magazines etc., to construct Imran Khan's (a political leader and the current Prime Minister of Pakistan)[1] identity. The media has always performed a key role in legitimating various social, cultural and religious rituals (Hess & Gutsche, 2017) and then using their power to influence public opinion (Qazi & Shah, 2017). Although media is believed to have neutral stance on various news items, Kellner (1995), Hess (2017) as well as Sidiropoulou (2018), argue that media manufactures and reshapes the news, in intended ways, to transform or construct the identities of the targeted celebrities. Until the 1990s the media was confined to print media and to some extent electronic media to disperse the information (Blumler & Kavanagh, 1999). However, with the proliferation of internet in everyday lives of common people, media have also changed their shape. Instead of acting as means of generating news they act as a platform where general public share their opinion on any current topic of socio-political import (Hess & Gutsche, 2017; Holton, Lewis & Coddington, 2016) and shape the public interaction (Blumler, 2013 & 2015) thus forming a digital public sphere where all the participants follow the norms (Rasmussen, 2014).

Public sphere is a place where "private people come together as a public" to discuss the current issues and build arguments with critical rationale. Thus public sphere provides equal opportunities to all participants and easy access to the information Habermas (1989 & 1991). The current study takes social media sites including, Twitter, WhatsApp and Facebook, as platforms, organized in such a way that they meet the requirement of the public sphere (Sørensen, 2016; Kruse, Norris & Flinchum, 2017; Loader & Mercea, 2011; Fuchs, 2012; Jenkins, 2006; Shirky, 2008; Papacharissi, 2010). In addition to this anyone can access and distribute information without any outside influence (Flinchum, 2017; Loader & Mercea, 2011; Fuchs, 2012; Jenkins, 2006; Dean, 2003; Shirky, 2008; Van Dijk, 2012). However, with the advent of mass media, the public sphere has drastically changed from homogeneous to heterogeneous, further permutating into complex public spheres (Rasmussen, 2014; Cela, 2015). Habermas himself is aware of the socio cultural challenges of the digital public sphere. He believes that in such heterogeneous groups that have diversity of interests it would be difficult for people to constitute single focal point, therefore mass communication divides the public spheres into minority experts

and journalists or the media people both to keep the conversation going and control the communication (Habermas, 2009). These media forces not only keep constant check on public spheres and give them the access to the content that benefits them (Fisk, 2014; Staples, 2014; Owen, 2013 Marwick, 2012; Trottier, 2011; Westcott) but also allow the algorithms (computer programme at the backend of social networking sites) to reveal the constrained information (Loader & Mercea, 2011; Oremus, 2016; Trottier, 2011) hence shaping and influencing the public sphere and subsequently opinion.

Structural transformation is the key to Habermas's model, which the rational-critical public sphere of the eighteenth-century civic societies and coffeehouses underwent as it became the mediatised public sphere of the early and mid-twentieth century (Bruns, 2018). In this process, the opportunities for direct participation by the general public in political and societal deliberation diminished, while new civic, state, and commercial institutions emerged to represent diverse societal groups in mediated public debate. Habermas recognised this in a 2006 updated public sphere theory, which acknowledges that public "attitudes are influenced by everyday talk in the informal settings or episodic publics of everyday society at least as much as they are by paying attention to print or electronic media" (2006, p. 416). Habermas (2006) further affirms that the mass media "select and process politically relevant content and thus intervene in both the formation of public opinions and the distribution of influential interests" (2006, p. 419). Social media sites are riddled with institutional influence in the presence of corporate interests largely controlling the information presented and shaping the public opinion about politicians.

With the objective of scrutinizing the role of media in the refuedalization of public sphere in terms of re/shaping public views about the politicians, the present study collects the data from the social media i.e. Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp, as well as print media i.e. newspapers. The newspapers wield power, in the shape of lexical choices and cartoonised images, to shape and influence the public opinion. The portrayal of individuals in the media discourse influences both social and personal identities (Johnson, David, & Huey, 2003). The current study further focuses on the discourse formation in the Pakistani media for identity construction of Imran Khan, who has been taken as a neutral case study without any bias for or against. It argues that the socially and politically constructed identities are not fixed but fluid (Brubaker & Cooper 2000) much in line with Baudrillard's theoretical assertions. Castells (2004) argues that the identities are socially constructed and influenced by power relations. This paper attempts to explore how Pakistani media manipulates the thoughts of people by using verbal (text) and non-verbal (visual) genre

including news items from newspapers, cartoons and symbolic images of one of the Pakistani political leaders. The research seeks to get the answers of three research questions:

1. What linguistic features does the print media use to maneuver the public opinion?
2. How does the social media use the images to reconstruct the political identities?
3. How through the parodied projection/ cartoons the public sphere is recontextualized or miscontextualized?

Objectives:

The objective of the current study is to see the role of the media in the refeudalization of the public sphere in terms of re/shaping public views about the politicians. Furthermore, it seeks to see the impact of the media (textual & visual) in terms of how public views are reformulated about Imran Khan after his third marriage and lastly to investigate whether "seeing is believing" is a topical reality.

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA):

Multimodal studies bring forth a new paradigm to discourse analysis that pertains to the investigation of phenomenon through analysis that is carried out by the cooperation of different modes such as gesture, sound, and action along with language used in an event. MCDA incorporates a range of multimodal phenomena (resources, modes, modalities) to discover the meanings of the communication, interaction or representation with an aim of semantic expansion of an artifact. Human discourse stems out from multiple resources that are disseminated through various mediums. In order to interpret the message, it is necessary for the analysts to look beyond the language. Moreover, as far as multimodal digital technology is concerned, it is imperative to analyze new meanings of semiotic resources from different modes especially when the technology has become quite affordable. These new discourses are quite different in their presentation and hence are interpreted in different ways in comparison with mono-modal discourse analysis. Taking up this view, Jewitt (2013) maintains that the importance of digital environment in multimodality cannot be neglected because it is through digital technologies such as films, hypertext, online newspapers, video games and many others that multifarious modes combine and provide the possibilities of meaning potential of an event.

Being an interdisciplinary approach, discourse analysts from distinct disciplines seek to examine the required phenomenon with multimodal lens (O'Halloran, 2011). Thus, all these provisions accentuate the dawn of multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) which is still growing as a field

of research across various disciplines. Since the acknowledgment of various theorists about the association between verbal and non-verbal, many research works have been conducted with regard to multimodality that includes visual and spatial analysis. Many theorists (Baldry, 2000; Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001; O'Halloran, 2004; O'Toole, 1994) across the boundaries of linguistics have examined the discourse with the lens of "multimodality" for the dynamics involved in meaning making that emerge from the combination of modalities.

Language of Media:

We are living in a global village where fast and easy communication is in everyone's approach. Here celebrities' personal life events become public, through various means of communication, in no time. Media plays pivotal role in making an event a news by manipulating, manufacturing and making it a reality (Tuchman, 1976; Cohen & Young 1973; Schudson, 1989; Taiwo, 2007 and Sajjad, 2013). News reporters use various linguistic features such as the use of passivization, nominalization, transitivity, gimmicks, idioms, metaphors and codeswitching, to manipulate the news and construct a different identity of a celebrity from what s/he may have imagined. Apart from linguistic constructs, the information is shared with the public through images and cartoons as well.

Media discourse is not a simple text which can be comprehended easily; rather apparently simple text carries very complicated meanings especially in the case of print media. The analysis of news text has been an important practice in the studies of discourse analysis. Van Dijk (1991) analyzed newspaper reports in order to figure out the significance of their roles in developing ethnic relations. According to Giltin (2003) mass media produces ideology through pictures, symbols and rhetoric. The stories in the newspapers are constructed in a different way than other forms of writing (Conboy, 2007). The vocabulary used in the headlines in particular make them more enduring to the memory. They have short and different syntactic and linguistic style (Richardson ,2007; Van Dijk, 1980; Conboy, 2007; van Leeuwen, 2013 & Machin and Mayr, 2012) which aim to grab the attention of the readers.

Method & Methodology:

This paper uses refeudelized form of Habermas' public sphere as the foundation of its framework. It evaluates the way public sphere is created and controlled by the media which constructs and manufactures news through text and images. van Dijk's framework for textual analysis (2009) along with linguistic features proposed by Ingrid Mardh (1980) is used to analyse the text. In addition, Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996 & 2006) critical multimodal discourse analysis will be used for the semiotic analysis.

Data Collection:

The textual data for the present study consists of news reported by various Urdu national newspapers of 20th February 2018, about Imran Khan's third wedding. In addition to this, the images about the same news are collected from the social media including Twitter, Facebook and WhatsApp.

To minimize the subjective interpretation about the media's role in constructing the news and politicians' identities the data is collected from 40 participants (20 males and 20 females). The demographics of the participants are as follows: Gender, Educational Background, Designation, and total job experience.

The data was collected from one of the top universities of Lahore, Pakistan as per convenient sampling. Prior to the data collection it was ensured that the participants are or were affiliated with or supporters of Pakistan Tehreek-e- Insaf (PTI), a political party led by Imran Khan. Furthermore, their eligibility to vote was set as criterion to respond to the open-ended questionnaire. The data collected through questionnaire was analysed on the basis of themes as they emerged from the participants' responses.

Textual Data:

The textual data collected from national Urdu newspapers' headlines is analysed according to van Dijk's (2009) framework for textual analysis. van Dijk's (2009) framework proposes analysis at micro and macro levels using various features. However, for the present study the data will be analysed at the micro level with selective features only since not all are used by the editors of the selected news item.

- **Passivization:**

Passivization is a unique style of presenting news. According to passivization the agent is intentionally deleted to hide the agency, or the patients are turned into the subjects to create the curiosity and suspense among the readers. In addition to this the meaning of the news is kept open for the subjective and biased interpretation of the reader.

- **Nominalization:**

Nominalization is another linguistic but manipulative style used in the newspapers. The agents as well as the patients are kept hidden to conceal the information.

- **Transitivity:**

According to Halliday (1973, p. 134), "Transitivity is the set of options whereby the speaker encodes his experience of the process of the external world, and of the internal world of his own consciousness, together with the

participants in these processes and their attendant circumstances" (1973, p. 134). It is a tool used by the newspapers to portray their ideology both in terms of agents and the patients.

- **Selection of Words:**

The choice of words is very purposeful and meaningful in news and media. However the question arises why does the media use such lexical items. Van Dijk (1988) is of the view that the selection of particular words may indicate the degree of formality, speech partners, the group centered or institutional embedding of discourse, attitudes and hence the ideologies of the speaker.

- **Framing:**

Framing is a media technique used to present the news in an intended way (Terkildsen & Schnell, 1997) thus forming a window to the news (Tuchman, 1978).

Visual Data:

The framework for analysis of multimodal texts is based on Halliday's systemic functional linguistics (1978). Halliday's framework suggests three metafunctions; namely, *ideational* (language representing ideas, experiences)*, interpersonal* (language as a mean to establish relation between sender and receiver) *and textual* (the way language functions). Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996 & 2006) adopted this framework to analyze other semiotic resources besides language, and renamed these metafuntions as *representational* (Representation of events, experiences, ideas and actions)*, interactional* (Relationship between producer and viewer of the visuals), and *compositional* (Organization of all semiotic resources into a coherent whole). The multimodal framework proposed by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996 & 2006) is adapted to analyse the visual data. The data of the present study will be analysed at the representational level only because of the static nature of the images.

Representational Level:

In visual analysis, the representational metafunction is concerned with the depiction of some event, aspect or experience of the world. It primarily deals with the representation of the participants and objects in an artifact. It also encompasses all the other semiotic materials such as posture, clothing, expressions etc. that enhance the meanings of the represented aspects. It helps the viewer in interpreting character's personality by his/her actions and disposition along with the setting that assist in inferring the symbolic meanings of the narrative (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) categorize two major processes in representational metafunction; namely,

Narrative and *Conceptual*.

   Narrative processes are represented through vectors and underscore the "unfolding actions and events" in the visual. Vectors are vertical or diagonal lines that are depicted via human bodies or tools in action which assist in determining the meaning of the represented concept. These processes are further categorized into *action*, *reaction, and circumstances.* **Action** pertains to the representation of an action between the participants. It can be *transactional* where two or more participants are involved or *non-transactional* where only one participant is represented in the narrative. Transactional action includes an *actor* who directs the action towards something or someone called *goal* while in non-transactional action, there is no goal but only actor. Meanings in *action processes* are realized through vertical/diagonal vectors that are projected from actor towards a goal along with the "psychological salience" such as expressions of the represented participants (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 64). **Reaction** in narrative process pertains to the reaction of the participant towards an action which is often depicted through *gaze* of the participant, usually the reactor. The crucial aspect to analyze the meaning in reactional process is that the reactor must portray his/her reaction via facial expressions. The direction of the gaze from the reactor forms the vector towards the phenomenon- the participant towards whom the reaction is directed (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 64). **Circumstances** refer to the participants or minor character and objects that assist in understanding the whole representation. They hold importance because omission of such objects from analysis could result in the loss of information (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 71). Circumstances may be categorized into three main divisions namely *locative, means* and *accompaniment*. *Locative* pertains to the setting and location of the communication that encompasses props and music. Music or sound is essential in understanding the setting of the scene as it calls attention to the representation of events or underscores the relationship between characters (van Leeuwen & Boeriis, 2017). *Means* refers to tools with which the action is carried out (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 71). *Accompaniment* adds meaning to the circumstances and enhance meaning along with locative and means.

   Conceptual processes, on the other hand, are non-narrative in nature and pertain to the representation where participants are depicted in general and stable terms such as " class, or structure, or meaning" (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 79). This process represents "what they are, how they are classified" and what they exhibit through their manners (Serafini, 2014). These representations are not defined by vectors but are understood merely through context of the visuals. *Conceptual* representation encapsulates *symbolic*,

classification and *analytical* processes. Besides the last two i.e. *classification and analytical*, the first one is relevant to the study. *Symbolic process* pertains to the symbolic objects that impart the message of the representation. This process assists in comprehending the mood and meaning of the narrative by emphasizing certain aspects in the scene through the use of props such as lighting.

Ethical consideration:

The data for the present study was collected from the public, in the form of questionnaire, as well as the internet, e-newspapers and social media. The participants of the study were informed about the objective of the study and were ensured that their responses will be kept confidential and will not be shared with any other party. On the other hand, data collected from internet was publicly available for the researchers and did not have copy rights. Spicker (2007) affirms that the publicly available data does not require the individual's consent. Therefore, although the data was collected without prior consent, the source of data was acknowledged.

Data Analysis:

The data of the present study was divided into three parts: First part comprised textual data collected from the newspapers, second part was based on visuals and the third part was based on the questionnaire.

Textual Analysis:

The news items, of Imran Khan's third wedding, from the national Urdu newspapers including: *Jang, 92 news, Nai baat, Naya Ikhbar,* and *Khabrain,* were chosen for the data analysis.

Text 1: *"66 years old Imran Khan has married his spiritual leader (peerni)".*

The media has projected and framed the news item to convey its intended meaning to the audience. The choice of the lexical items such as *66 years, peerni (spiritual leader)* deteriorates the image of Imran Khan. The newspaper editor has tactfully chosen the words to negatively portray the politician's public image. Firstly, the news starts ironically with the number 66 because it is beyond the age of retirement in Pakistan; however, Imran Khan claims that he is the representative of the youth and ironically gets married at the same age. This phenomenon has local significance since in Pakistani society, the age of marriage is socially constructed. Secondly, the word "*peerni*" is equally focused. In the Pakistani context much respect is given to the spiritual leaders and people do not expect such relationships between the spiritual leaders and their followers.

Text 2: "*Abi to main jawan hu*" (I am still young)

In the second news item the editor has ironically used the verse of a Pakistani song, originally sung by Malika Pukhraj, stating 'I am still young' which gives one the license to do anything one desires. This implied sarcasm on the aging politician is used to demean his integrity.

Text 3: "*Imran Khan nay shadio(n) key hattrick mukamal kar le*" (Imran Khan has completed the hat trick of marriages)

The cricket jargon, "hat trick" is ironically used for Khan's three marriages. In cricket the bowler who takes three consecutive wickets is appreciated and admired. However, the jargon is used here to highlight Khan's accomplishment but not in cricket for whom he is also famous for.

Text 4: "*Shadi ho nahi rahi shadi ho gai hay*" ({I am} not getting married but have got married)

The text in another Pakistani national Urdu newspapers refers to Khan's political slogan which states, "*Tabdeeli aa nahi rahi, tabdeeli aa gai hay*" (Change is not coming but has already come). The statement has implied meaning and uses intertextuality because Imran Khan had denied his wedding news in the beginning, however when it was revealed people came to know that he was not planning to get married but had already married.

Text 5: *"Sita White. Jamaima, Reham aur ub Pinki"* (Sita White. Jamaima, Reham and now Pinki)

Although apparently these are the names of Khan's assumed girlfriend and three wives respectively however the way the media has framed the news it aims to damage his public self-image. This particular news item does not state anything further and the editor completes the news with these nouns, names of the four ladies, and leaves the meaning to be understood by the readers.

Thus, it seems that the words used in media discourse play very important role in influencing the minds of the people. However, such vocabulary reveals the agenda of the editors who play with the emotions of the public. According to Cook (2008), the use of language manipulates our feelings and thoughts though in ways which we are willing, even, eager to accept it. Further he states that other uses of language are less benign, seeking to control and influence ideas in the service of some vested political or commercial interest. However, the selection of such word order hooks the readers while also damaging the public image of the subject of the news.

Visual Analysis:

Representational analysis of Image 1

Image 1: Narrative, Process, Actional, Reactional, Transaction & Non-Transactional; Conceptual, Symbolic

The visual data is analysed according to Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996 & 2006) multimodal framework. The selected image 1 shows the expectations of Pakistani public from Khan. They expect him to focus on election campaign; while his interest in getting married appears to have affected them. In the given image the two most prominent figures are "Imran Khan" agent 1, and "Elections" agent 2, however "Shadi" agent 3 has been blurred. The narration of the picture starts with the formation of non-transactional or uni-directional vector with "shadi". Agent 1's (Imran Khan's) facial expressions are symbolically shown to reflect his flirtatious nature. The second important figure in the picture is "elections" which forms reactional but non-transactional vector, in the shape of gaze, with the agent. The elections expect Khan to focus on them but they are getting less attention therefore the surprise on the face of elections is conspicuous. On the other hand, the agent 3 "shadi" has been given red colour which symbolizes the eve of happiness in general and marriage in particular in the Pakistani context. On the body of this figure the text has been made more prominent than the figure itself, which has been blurred, which shows the importance of marriage for the agent 1.

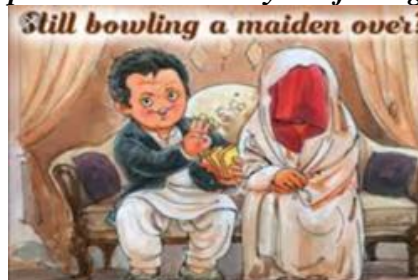*Representational analysis of Image 2*

Image 2: Representation, narrative, circumstances, locative, means; conceptual, symbolic

The second image is an ironic representation of Khan's third marriage. It is analysed on textual as well as visual basis. Each word in the sentence carries

a significant meaning e.g. "maiden" which from cricket point of view is an over that gives no run, implies that he is going to have another marriage without getting anything out of it. At the same time "maiden" is used for the women with single status. "Over", moreover, may sarcastically lead towards the last "over" of third marriage. Although the rumour of break up was being spread about the differences between Khan and Bushra Bibi, yet they remained unconfirmed.

At the visual level, the image is represented in the setting of a marriage. The meaning of the picture is created through Khan's fingers which conveys the message of his third wedding. Similarly, three slices of bread indicate necessities of life which shows that getting married is as important for him as having bread to live on. Secondly, the circumstances of location i.e. the overall setting and mood of the picture including the bride and the groom sitting on the sofa, groom's outfit and bride's hijab adds meaning to the wedding scene. In addition to this the colours of the picture including red of the bride's head scarf, the yellow curtains and Khan's dress all symbolize the setting of a marriage.

Representational analysis of Image 3

Image 3: Representation, narrative, circumstances, locative, accompaniment; conceptual, symbolic

The third selected image in the context of Khan's marriage is a political satire. Although it seems as if he is getting married with Bushra Bibi yet he might have engaged himself in a deal with Nawaz Sharif, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan, because Khan's ultimate goal is to become a prime minister. This is quite evident from the election results of 2013 and senate elections of 2018 in which Imran Khan did not succeed in getting strong position in the parliament. Therefore, the only way to prime minister house can be an unholy alliance with Nawaz Sharif.

The image 3 creates meaning through circumstances of locative, means and accompaniment. The locative, overall setting of the picture reflects the wedding scene. The meaning is enhanced through accompaniment of minor characters and the guests participating in the wedding. The colours used in the picture also symbolize the wedding scene or the celebrations.

Data analysis of the questionnaire:

The data was collected from 40 people working in a semi government university at Lahore, Pakistan. 20 males and 20 females, holding at least BS degree and maximum PhD degree, were selected as per convenience to respond to the questionnaire. The respondents were asked five questions about the reason/s of supporting Khan. Responding to the first item, 'why do you support Imran Khan?', the participants gave various reasons including Khan's sincerity and loyalty to the country, the best available choice and less corrupt politician etc. In response to the second and the third question which was about the projection of Imran Khan's third marriage by the media and its influence on them (participants) respectively, around 40% of the respondents, including 10 females and 6 males, said that they had withdrawn their support after the projection of his third marriage. When they were asked the reason/s of changing their opinion they gave various reasons including Imran Khan's lack of consistency and focus, immature approach towards political and personal matters, and flirtatious and playboy nature. Furthermore, one of the respondents was of the view that Imran Khan's decisions are led by emotions rather than the rationale and he frequently changes his mind that is why he/she does not support him anymore.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the present study reveal the real life linguistic manipulation and framing of the news. The results show how the media uses the linguistic features to construct the intended realities of the celebrities. Sidiropoulou (2018) argues the presence of media between the public and the news event itself and explains how it is constructed for the public. It further indicates how media controls the activities of public sphere by refeudalizing it and giving it a desired world view. Filardo (2015) affirms that the media discourse constructs the world view and what reaches us is the manufactured and so-called reality. Peters and Broersma (2017) are also of the opinion that the conventional public sphere does not exist anymore. The basic requirement for an unbiased public sphere is its democratic constitution which cannot be met in the presence of media which suppress the participants of the sphere. The findings of the questionnaire also affirm that the people still believe in what they see. Ignorant of the media effects they believe in the realities constructed for them. This stance that "seeing is believing" is confirmed by around 40 % of the participants whose opinion about Khan has changed.

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