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Electronic Media and Interpersonal Discourse: Mediation in Crises

ABSTRACT

This paper envisages how electronic media portrays the most sensitive issue of militant insurgency in the country and subsequently mediated through interpersonal discourse to develop their social consensus. The uses and gratifications theory addresses an individuals' social integrative needs through interpersonal interaction, within a social network as conversational currency. The media, exclusively electronic media provide a common ground for social integration among individuals and provide an opportunity to pent-up their catharsis regarding militant uprising through interpersonal communication to build up their social harmony. This study investigates the extent to which exposure of television news is leading to the acceptance of violence and the level of emotional empathy, pro-violence attitude and compassion fatigue towards war on terror among television news viewers. Therefore, effect of television news regarding coverage of assassination attempt on Malala Yousafzai, frequency of interpersonal discourse through social networks of the university students was examined through quantitative research technique. Subsequently, participation of interpersonal interaction, willingness to share this tragedy with their family members was measured just after this incident while using a 5-point Likert scale survey instrument. The study empirically supported that young generation have an emotional attachment to such sensitive issues which is further mediated through family members.

Keywords: *Electronic Media, Mediation, Interpersonal Discourse, Emotional Empathy, and Uses & Gratification.*

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Introduction

The nature of communication discourse provides opportunity to hoist larger related issues about human learning, exchange of information with same group or with diverse socio-cultural background and avoid such conflicts. For many years, war on terror has been a burning issue that has preoccupied academics, media professionals and people throughout the world. Terrorism itself is a contested concept and different societies have had different experiences with it. Therefore, the war and its aftermath has been a most significant concern of scholars in all ages but recently it has turn into modern warfare while involving civilians as a manpower and helpless target of hostile actions and using it a weapon towards its economic and social outcome. Such developing trends require the mobilization of the society through involvement of mass media to influence public opinion as result.

This paper envisages how electronic media portrays the most sensitive issue of militant insurgency in a country and subsequently mediated through interpersonal discourse to develop their social consensus. The uses and gratifications theory addresses individuals' social integrative needs through interpersonal interaction within social network as conversational currency. The media specifically electronic media provide a common ground for social integration among individuals. To investigate the extent to which exposure to news on war on terror in television is leading to acceptance of violence. To find out the level of emotional empathy, pro-violence attitude and compassion fatigue towards war on terror among television news viewers. To examine how television provides opportunity to the viewers to pent-up their catharsis regarding militant uprising through interpersonal communication to build up their social harmony.

Literature Review

Uses and gratification theory is not only addresses the media contents used as source of information of the people but it also concerns to the factors compel individuals to use it. Therefore, all individuals have exclusive reasons of its use and what they get out of it. Uses and gratification theory provides an opportunity of social interaction and subsequently bring forth social integration in the society. Media provide an opportunity to the individuals to share about the most recent issue with their close friends, colleagues and family members in a very cordial atmosphere. Such opportunity provides insight into circumstance of others through conversation and social interaction which leads to social empathy. Therefore, we have to look at the media effect not in its tradition way of its 'hypodermic' view but one step further 'what people do with the media' while shaping media users

expectations as social integration in the society. The uses and gratifications theory addresses individuals' social integrative needs through interpersonal interaction within social network as conversational currency. The media specifically electronic media provide a common ground for social integration among individuals (McQuail & Denis 1987).

Scholars of communication (especially from the field of mass media) like Bartels (1993), Dalton, Beck, & Huckfeldt (1998), and Zaller (1996) argue that despite the stability of existing political opinions, general public vastly uses information given by media to form and determine the direction of their political attitudes (as cited in Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2006, p.19). Hence, mass media plays a very critical role in shaping up political opinions and attitudes. In this paper Vreese and Boomgaarden (2006) investigated the varying exposure and attention given to news and interpersonal communication along with their affects on shaping up public opinion. The affects of mass communication were observed under two conditions; one sided message flow and two sided message flow. Vreese & Boomgaarden (2006) based their hypothesis on John Zaller's theory (1992) which says, "The reception and acceptance of new information is contingent on an individuals' level of political awareness: The higher a person's level of political awareness, the greater the likelihood that the individual receives new messages, for example from the news" (p.20). Hence, the researchers expected that media will have impact on public opinion if there will be one sided message flow (first condition of the study). Vreese & Boomgaarden (2006) then conducted two wave panel surveys and analyzed media content; television news and national newspapers (p.24). The results confirmed the assumption based on John Zaller's (1992) theory that politically less aware people are influenced by mass media given the condition that message flow is one sided (p.28). Hence, this study reasserted that mass media is directly involved in forming, changing, and shaping up public opinions.

Vreese & Boomgaarden (2006) investigated the level of intimacy and self-disclosure between two individuals and how these disclosures differ, depending upon text-based computer-mediated communication (CMC) and face-2-face communication (FtF). Researchers emphasize the fact that due to the availability of multiple interactive channels over internet i.e. face book, twitter, my space etc, the usage of internet is increasing rapidly. People use internet to maintain relationships, these associations may vary from supportive relationships to romantic partners. In this article researchers move away from the theoretical debate i.e. whether people can be interpersonal or intimate on the internet and shed light on the behavioral and cognitive components responsible for such intimacies over computer-mediated communication. As Archer (1980) points out that, self-disclosure is the act of revealing personal information to other people. So, the intimacy level

between two people can increase as self-disclosure between them increases. Research shows that during computer-mediated communication, high self-disclosure is seen as an act of friendship or association. Altman & Taylor (1973) stated that, self-disclosure facilitate liking, understanding and reciprocation between dyads. Furthermore, they mentioned that “It is due to the reciprocity factor that non-intimate exchanges turn themselves into highly-intimate and detailed conversations”.

Research findings show that majority of the computer-mediated interactions are more intimate than face to face communications. Hyper-personal model explains that due to the absence of non-verbal cues on computer-mediated communication, people rely on selective information sharing. These exchanges then allow the interact-ants to form a superficial or stereotypical image of one another (Walther & Parks, 2007). It is also believed that perceptions of receiver contribute to the level of intimacy, they tend to over-interpret the limited communication cues (social and emotional) which can lead to intensive impression formations

The empirical study was restricted to analyze the role of self-disclosure and intimacy over CMC and FtF communication. The hypothesis aims to prove that high self-disclosure leads more intimacy in CMC than FtF interactions.

Eighty-five participants were recruited from communication and psychology courses to participate in an experiment. During the experimentation participants were randomly exposed to face to face and computer mediated communication with a confederate, whose job was to make either low or high intimacy level self-disclosures. Results demonstrate that the disclosure–intimacy link is intensified in CMC relative to FtF, even when self-disclosures are equivalent across media. Furthermore, the results also indicate an intensified intimacy in CMC that can be driven by changes in the receiver’s perception, rather than only in changes in a sender’s disclosure behaviors.

The present research offers an understanding of interpersonal communication in CMC. First, drawing on hyper-personal model, this study is the first to demonstrate the intensification of the disclosure–intimacy link in CMC (Jiang, Bazarova & Hancock 2010).

Media’s role in reporting terrorism took a new direction when the terror attacks started rising, especially, when the American soil was attacked first time on 9/11 decades after the Pearl Harbor attack. This time the incident took place what is known to be the hub of international media, the Manhattan. The incident was reported and telecasted live with real images. This particular incident and many other incidents in general, brought the members of media in a dysfunctional state relative to terrorism. One end they must report the actual and real events as soon as they happen while on the other hand they themselves are considered to be its reason (Bongar & Zimbardo, 2007). Hence

for the media industry, few serious questions have been raised with respect to the ethics, code of conduct and rules of reporting terrorism.

Another issue that stems from the above discussion is the argument between the terrorism experts and critics of media reporting. Terrorism experts argue that over the time the novelty of terrorism reporting is being reduced. Terrorism coverage is being desensitized and the reports that need to find a place on the front page in newspapers or top story in the news headlines, is not being rated so. On the other hand, proponents of the culture argue that terrorism reporting by media is being sensationalized day by day. In the race of getting higher ratings and in the race of generating lead headlines, reporters have increased the ration of these reports which in return is situating harmful effects on the society (Hoffman & Jengelley, 2007). They further argue that Terrorism is an increasingly prominent media story because, it has the capability of to sell itself and in today extensive competitive environment of generating the ratings, shocking headlines will always dominate. So, which is it? Has the media become desensitized to terrorist violence or has it started moving towards sensationalism? Hoffman & Jengelley (2007) conducted a study in United States of America and tried to find out the answer. The authors conducted an extensive study of the trends in media coverage of terrorism by examining over 1300 Washington Post articles from 1977 -2004. Hoffman & Jengelley (2007) hypothesized that television reporting typically depends on the newspaper reporting, therefore it is safe to consider print media as the “base of the information pyramid in the modern media age” (Underwood 1998: 175). The study found approximately almost 18000 articles averaging 50 articles each year. The study found a distribution of 272 articles in 1979 to the high of 5438 articles in 2002 related to terrorism. The results suggest that concerns about media desensitization/sensationalism may not be plaguing the reporting of terrorism as many fear. Also the preliminary results suggest that the media coverage of terrorism has not changed appreciably over time.

In order to provide a broader understanding of the issue, some studies have also analyzed the effects of broadcasted contention the society. In one of the study Potter & Stacy (2000) argue that generally very high graphic exposures of violence lead to fear and negative consequences in the short term and to desensitization over long term. Graphic exposures or graphic portrayals in a television means to bring viewers so close to the action that they feel it to be real and shocking (Weaver & Wilson (2009). From the industry point of view, if viewers are not indulged in the scenes, even if highest graphic portrayal is employed, task is not done. On the other hand, extreme violence in programs and live reporting of bloody scenes leaves a negative effect on the viewers. Potter & Stacy (2000) further explain that effect of graphical portrayals on viewers can be better explained as a process

which moves from content through viewer perceptions of the content to effects. The last two steps of the process are largely influenced by the particular context in which viewer interprets the content. The contextual factors act as cues for the viewer to interpret the content and consequently these contextual characteristics can lead to such negative effects as fear, desensitization, and dis-inhibition. In case of media reporting the terror activities, graphicness plays a major role. The way news-reporting channels use the law of proximity, reality and framing techniques for presenting terrorism reports, negative consequences are a natural result for a normal human being. Hence Literature suggests that the contextual factors must be catered for before broadcasting violent reports.

In another study, Hamblen (1995) analyzed the effects of media coverage of Terrorist attacks on viewers. It is interesting to note that this study was connected way back in 1995 when September 11, London bombings and violent activities in Asia were not known. Even at that point in time, literature found a positive relation between watching media coverage of terrorist attacks and stress symptoms. Study found that many people are unable to resist news coverage of terrorist attacks. One argument is, they want to sensitize to these reports so that they are not caught by surprise when they again hear such news. Others argue that it's the way these reports are dramatized by media that one cannot to avoid looking at them. Hamblen (1995) parallels the idea that graphic portrayals of television violence lead to disastrous results. This study covered multiple events and concluded such kind of media reports lead to individual and collective stress. The following lines document and discuss the literature as it pertains to the surveys conducted to strengthen the relation between violence reporting by media and rise of stress level in viewers.

Schuster, Marshall & Elliott (2001) conducted a national survey of U.S. adults, 3-5 days after the September 11th, 2001 attacks. The study found that people were observed to watch news channels on an average of 8 hours daily. These individuals were identified to have substantial amount of stress compared to those who did not watch news channels. In another study Tucker, Pfefferbaum & Dickson (2000) carried out a survey after the Oklahoma City Bombing in 1995. The study found that Two-thirds of a large group of school children who watched the city bombings were reported to have more stress symptoms than the children who did not watch as much bomb related material on media.

Israel has been effected by the terrorist attacks many times. This study of the literature found an important contribution on the topic by Sloan (2000). The author conducted a study on Two hundred thirty-seven Israeli adults who were divided into two groups. One group was intentionally exposed to extensive terrorism reporting and TV clips, while the other group was shown

the news clips not directly related to national threat. The group which was exposed to terrorism clips was found to be more tensed and reported more anxiety than those who watched clips without having terrorism related material.

A famous Psychiatrist McFarlane (1986) wrote a letter to the Medical Journal of Australia narrating the effects of violent content being broadcasted by media on trauma victims. He wrote, "media exposure following a trauma may reinforce the victims' feelings of vulnerability and fixate their images of death and destruction. Media exposure also may increase the risk of the development and maintenance of chronic Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following a trauma".

In nutshell, it is a known fact that in case of violent act, it's the responsibility of media to provide the details of the incidents guide the listeners, rescuers and keep up to date. However, cautious effort is required when violent images, video, clips and reports are being published or broadcasted.

Objectives

The following objectives have been drawn in the light of literature view:

- *To investigate the extent to which exposure to television news on war on terror leads toward emotional empathy.*
- *To examine how electronic media portrays the most sensitive issue of militant insurgency in the country and subsequently mediated through interpersonal discourse to develop their social consensus, and*
- *To find out the difference among young television viewers in term of their mediation with their family members.*

A number of research on children's emotional response has been conducted a part of fiction and in their real-life violence in television news as well. Most of the studies investigated media coverage of unusual events can lead to lasting fear retort in children. Besides a number of research activities have also focused relationships between the amount of news coverage and the strength of fright reaction to the event. (Schuster et al., 2001; Wilson et al., 1987).

Another research it has been empirically tested that youth become frightened by media content while instigating direct fear while becoming frightened by danger in their real life by watching the emotional responses and surviving relatives of victims (Cantor, 2002)

Though, the news items related to different aspects of the assassination that relate to the fears of young children of different ages, whereas more

specifically, the explicit reporting of the murder relate to the fears of older children. (Hoffman, 2000; Walma van der Molen et al., 2002), whereas the more abstract discussions of its societal and political consequences affect the emotions of mucholder children (Wilson et al., 1987). Thought the empirical evidence provide enough support to conceptualize emotional aspect of the variable, however the present study intends to focus on youth generation of the society considering the nature of the news which not only related to their age group but it was relevant to the political situation of the country. Therefore, the first aim of this study was to investigate the emotional responses of undergraduate students of the university. Moreover, in the back drop of some more studies suggest that, besides direct fear, emotional responses can also be apart of worry, anger and sadness (Walma van der Molen& Bushman, 2006;). Therefore, we conceptualize the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: The television news viewers are more influenced to the news about Malala's assassination attempt give more emotional response. (emotional fear, worry, anger, and sadness) than these who are less exposed to the news.

Next objective of the study was to investigate the level of involvement of the family during their mediation and influence of electronic media (television) regarding militant insurgency in the country and how it is mediated though interpersonal discourse.

Mostly young individuals watch television in a family along with their peers which provides them an opportunity to share emotional responses to the news as most effective tool in the management of television's influence on the youth (Buerkel-Rothfuss & Buerkel, 2001). Family members involvement in interpersonal discourse involve three strategies the parents can apply to modify media effects: active mediation, restrictive mediation and social interaction though discourse (Valkenburg, Krcmar, Peeters, & Marseille, 1999). Though most mediation studies have focused on children's media-induced aggression but finding of co-viewing showed that the nature of the mediation is only influential if the discourse among it participant have intention and involve active participation of members of the family (Austin, 2001).

As a matter of fact, that by reducing children's news exposure, restrictive mediation effectively modifies children's emotional responses, studies on restrictive mediation have repeatedly shown that rule making is often insufficient in reducing children's media exposure (see Austin, 2001). However, literature related to children's real-life fears, active Family involvement dealing with children's fears are considered more effective than

denying or ignoring these fears (Sarafino, 1986). Therefore, the following hypothesis is conceptualized.

Hypothesis 2: Active involvement of family members, (parents, siblings, friends, and peers) in mediation approaches are more effective than limited mediation approaches in reducing the relation between television news viewers to their emotional responses.

Subsequently the study also focused on the effectiveness and restrictive mediation approached among young one and old one students as we conceived that age difference is one of the reason of declining role of parents in our society (Austin, 2001). Moreover, the older students are also vulnerable to media outside the family environment and they prefer to watch television program preferably in privacy, therefore we assume:

Hypothesis 3: The young television news viewers benefit more from family members mediation than older television viewers.

Methodology

A quantitative instrument comprising variables to testify the hypotheses of the study was administered during the last week of October 2012 just after one week of Malala's assassination attempt. The opinion survey was distributed among 250 university students of Islamabad, capital of the country and only 200 complete and correct one questionnaires were included in the data analysis.

The questionnaire consisted items related to the study variables beside demographic characteristics was administered among randomly selected students of undergraduate program on the campus after briefing about the nature of the survey and initially they were asked about their television news viewing frequency which was categorized into heavy and light news viewer and their level of empathy in term of viewers concern to toward assassination attempt on Malala. The variable emotional attachment to the event was quantified in term of viewers' fear, worry, anger, and sadness. The instrument was properly pre-tested to ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument which was determined through Alpha Cronbatch.

The main variable of the study was empathic concern of the students towards the tragic incident which carried four questions focusing students' concern to the victim and her family. These questions were adapted on previous research by Strayer (1989). These adapted questions were (a) "Do you feel sorry for Malala Yousafzai?" (b) "Do you feel sorry for Malala's friends and family?" (c) "Do you feel pity for Malala?" and (d) "Do you feel pity for Malala's friends and family?"

Whereas emotional response of the students was measured to the news of Malala assassination attempt. The measurement of variables of the study comprises: compassion for victim and her family, fright responses, worry

responses, anger scale and sadness scale which were validated through statistical analysis.

Results

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations of Measures

Measure	M	SD
Independent variable		
Television News exposure	1.24	0.69
Dependent variables		
Fear	1.63	0.63
Worry	2.13	0.69
Anger	3.22	0.79
Sadness	2.79	0.64
Control variables		
Sex*		
Empathy	4.13	0.73
Moderator variables		
Active mediation	3.23	0.93
Restrictive mediation	1.15	0.66

* 80 boys (40%), 120 girls (60%).

Table 1 shows means and deviation measures of the study revealing independent variable television news exposure to the students, emotional attachment to the event as dependent variables and moderate variables (active and restrictive moderation) and in term of its means and standard deviation.

Table 2
Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analyses for Variables Predicting Towards Students' Emotional Responses to Malala Assassination Attempt

	Fear β	Worry β	Anger β	Sadness β
Step 1				
Age				
Sex ^a	.23**	.15**	.03	.11**
Empathy	.27***	.41***	.52***	.43***
R ²	.14	.21	.23	.21
Step 2				
News exposure	.30***	.23***	.26***	.23***
R ² change	.09***	.05***	.06***	.04***
Total R ²	.27	.30	.32	.29

a. 0 = male, 1 = female.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

their responses of fear ($\hat{\alpha} = .30, p < .001$), worry ($\hat{\alpha} = .23, p < .001$), anger ($\hat{\alpha} = .26, p < .001$), and sadness ($\hat{\alpha} = .23, p < .001$).

Whereas table 2 exhibit a precise summary of the hierarchical regression predictions for all four emotional responses. Students under teens age were negatively related to their emotional responses, even though the relations for fear and worry were not significant. Girls tended to report more intense feelings of fear, worry, and sadness, but feelings of anger were similar among boys and girls. Finally, students' empathic concerns were positively related to each of the four emotions. In above table, values of each cell were standardized multiple regression weights. Whereas Betas used at the second step exhibit a relation between the independent the dependent variables while controlling for all of the variables entered in the first step.

Another important purpose of the study was to examine that how vigorous and restraining involvement of the parents was there as mediation strategy to reshape their relations. In this case their emotional responses (about fear, worry, anger, and sadness) were testified as a part of hypotheses of the study as followed by Aiken and West, (1991). While following set of regression analysis with the students' emotional responses as the dependent variable. Initially a set of analysis, students' news exposure, and active mediation and subsequently restrictive mediation were tested.

Table 3
Relations Between Exposure to the News and Emotional Responses as Conditional Regression Analyses

	Fear β	Worry β	Anger β	Sadness β
Junior Students				
Active mediation				
News exposure	.41***	.24***	.21***	.09
Active mediation	.07	.34***	.20**	.36***
News \times Active Mediation	-.17**	-.14*	-.13*	-.04
Restrictive mediation				
News exposure	.39***	.27***	.28***	.18*
Restrictive mediation	.04	-.02	.09	.04
News \times Restrictive Mediation	.21**	.18**	-.13	-.01
Senior Students				
Active mediation				
News exposure	.27***	.18***	.27***	.30***
Active mediation	.21**	.37***	.26***	.22***
News \times Active Mediation	-.02	-.01	-.03	-.01
Restrictive mediation				

News exposure	.39***	.33***	.37***	.39***
Restrictive mediation	.09	-.01	-.09	.08
News × Restrictive Mediation	.07	.05	.07	-.07

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

Conclusion

The present study reveals that the relationship between television news exposures with emotional responses of the respondents were strong among those students who got high level of restrictive mediation. In case of Malala's extremely catastrophic event such information cannot be ignored.

As hypnotized the television news viewers are more influenced to the news about Malala's assassination attempt induce more emotional response through there was a slight variation of such emotional responses such as fear, worry, anger, and sadness. In Malala's catastrophe case such heart touching information cannot be ignored even in normal situation, however, it is empirically approved that audience particularly young one has emotional attachment to such issues.

In agreement to our assumptions active involvement with family members (parents, siblings, friends, and peers) as mediation are more effective rather than limited mediation approach that causes in reducing the relationship between television viewers to their emotional responses. The data also supported that the young television viewers get more benefits from family members during mediation than the older one.

Furthermore, our finding that parental restrictive behavior increases children's emotional responses by enhancing their degree of vigilance and negative expectations about situation is also in line with Busselle, (2003). However, the result of present study is in contradiction to previous mediation research that concluded the extent to which parents apply restrictive mediation is negatively related to general family relations, (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2005; Fujioka & Austin, 2002).

As a conclusion our study recommends that some students, reducing their exposure time to television may sometime be the only effective way to counteract negative effects. It can be assumed that restrictive mediation may be more effective when accompanied by parental involvement (Austin, 2001). But not necessarily in all situations as it depends upon the nature of the news and its intensity as in present study it has proved the in present scenario of the study. In such special circumstances active mediation is become one of the very crucial factor to initiate interpersonal discourse with the family members.

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