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National Media Discourse on Foreign Visits in Pakistan: Implications for Public Diplomacy

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Abstract
Using media framing theory and drawing on the lines of public diplomacy, the current study aims to examine how the news media in Pakistan framed and judged the visits of officials of Pakistan to the United States and China. As a public diplomacy instruments, official visits of political leaders highly rely on the news media coverage for their public legitimacy. Using the inductive framing as theoretical and qualitative discourse analysis as methodological approach, it examined the editorial framing of the Pakistani officials' visits to China and the United States in the English press namely *The News International* and *The Nation* of Pakistan from 2008 to 2015. Findings reveal that the elite press framed the visits to US and China in strikingly differential frames. The visits to the US were predominantly constructed employing a *security frame* with an overwhelmingly negative tone towards the United States. In contrast, the visits to China were overwhelmingly framed using *development frame* with an overall favorable stance towards China. The findings are elaborated for their implications pertinent to public diplomacy of China and US towards Pakistan.

Keywords: Media framing, China, US, Pakistan, Elite Press, Editorials, Inductive framing

Introduction

State visits by officials have become an important strategic instrument of public and foreign policy goals in the arena of modern state system. There

are various instruments practiced in the realms of public diplomacy head of state visits to other counties are arguably the most important political ventures practiced by states in building relationships and improving their images abroad. As Wang and Chang (2004) have noted that head of the state visits by political elites of one country to another are tools and instruments for states or governments to achieve the goals of political advocacy and cultural communication and that as such are thus essentially mediated and media-driven events. These official visit by head of government and head of states are valuable ventures of public diplomacy and are designed to manage and improve ties and images of a nation among the oversea public through various means of diplomacy including ceremonial and cultural events, exhibitions photo sessions and more importantly the media coverage of these visits. The press coverage of the foreign visits by the state officials could influence the public perceptions of nation's image and could dispel mistrust and miscommunication between nations and publics (Manheim, 1994). Gilboa (2000) while pointing to the significance of media coverage of foreign visits argues that the news media coverage of such official visits by head of states has in fact "become a significant feature of the visits and sometimes determines its success" (p. 296). However, news media coverage could also delegitimize and spoil such visits by framing them in negative and unfavorable way.

From the very beginning, Pakistan has had initiated diplomatic ties with the communities of various nations. Since 1947 to present, a number of state visits have been made by both the elected and non-elected leaders of Pakistan to various nations abroad. No academic scholarship exists to guide how the news media in Pakistan represent such visits. As powerful social and political institutions, the news media have power in modern times in constructing reality and images about the social world, their coverage of foreign visits of the state officials of Pakistan is pivotal in shaping the public opinions and public legitimacy. This study attempts to examine the prime ministerial and presidential visits of Pakistan to two strategically important countries with which Pakistan has had long diplomatic ties namely China and the United States. Both the selected countries have central importance pertinent to the foreign policy of Pakistan and Pakistani's official's visits to these two countries have always remained important both in the media and public spheres of Pakistan. China and the United State are two important economic and political powers with whom Pakistan attaches great strategic importance since the beginning of diplomatic ties in 1950s and about which much political and public rhetoric goes on in the sociopolitical settings of Pakistan. Although much scholarship is available in the fields of political science and international relation vis-à-vis Pakistan's ties with the United States and China, little academic attention has been given to unravel the framing of media in Pakistan about the Pakistani authority's official visits to China and the US. As Saleem

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(2007) has argued that regardless of the modern technology and communication transportation, the vast majority of the common masses are dependent on the media to know about the images of other countries and thus media do play a crucial role in portraying other countries and their images in a striking way. Examining the media coverage of the state visits of Pakistan to these two global players namely China and the US is of pivotal significance because the public legitimacy shaped by the media about political events can have serious consequences and implications for the state relation and could influence the public opinion. To that end, the current article dwells on to examines how the national media of Pakistan cover and frame the state visits of Pakistani officials to China and the United States as the news framing can have public diplomacy implications for the selected countries in particular and the Sino-Pak and US-Pak ties in general.

Theoretical Background

This section gives a brief overview of the two theoretical streams the study employs to frame the research questions, namely public diplomacy and news framing theory. Both these theoretical frameworks are discussed below.

Public diplomacy and news media

One of the important tools through which the states practice public diplomacy is the news media. Public diplomacy broadly speaking refers to "a governments process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and policies" (Tuch, 1990, p.3). According to Gilboa (2001) "public diplomacy refers to the extensive use of the media as a major instrument of foreign policy where state and non-state actors use the media and other channels of communication to influence public opinion in foreign societies" (p. 4). Noting the significance of public diplomacy Entman (2008) states that it could be conceived and designed ultimately to shape elite opinions and mediated narratives in the overseas media.

Public diplomacy has now emerged as an indisputable vehicle in the modern international relations and is essentially international public relations conducted through arts, cultural and educational exchanges, and news media and broadcasting. Gilboa (2000) argues that news media and TV broadcasting have emerged as important vehicles for conducting public diplomacy lately through which the state representatives and other global actors including the elected leaders express and define their interests, clarify their positions and convince states and other actors to support their positions. Given the increasing role of media in international affairs in the post-Cold War era, leaders are extensively using the global means of communication to advance negotiation

and public mobilization for foreign policy agendas. Recent studies have shown that the political leaders frequently use the news media channels rather than the traditional means of public diplomacy to deliver the messages intended to influence the public perceptions abroad favorably specially when there are no direct channels of communication between the various actors or parties involved (Seo, 2011) and in a situation where conducting formal negotiation is not possible or desirable for varied reasons (Spare, 2001).

Gilboa (2002) further explicates that leaders in the modern public diplomacy efforts use the press particularly the elite press to obtain information and insights about other countries and international affairs and that the modern news and communication coverage have replaced foreign policy making officials as legitimate sources of important information about the happenings occurring in the world. Nevertheless, public diplomacy is a challenging task and may not be as successful as desired by the state and political elites for various reasons. First, the intended message may be interpreted differently in the targeted countries and nations. For instance, after the 9/11, the United States public diplomacy efforts failed to change the hostile image of the US in the Arab countries (Cincotta, 2004). Various factors including the political and cultural proximity, diplomatic relations between the states, religions, political systems and historical contexts are important for the success of mediated diplomacy (Storie et al., 2014). Ideology, cultural and social values, ethnocentric tendencies could influence the framing of state visits of leaders (see Xie, 2008).

Framing Theory

The failure or success of the public diplomacy efforts is directly related to the news media framing as the public is highly depended on news media coverage about the affairs occurring beyond their direct personal experience. As has been noted by Storie et al. (2014) that how the public make sense of the public diplomacy efforts depends on how the media present the public diplomacy efforts like state visits. Framing theory is a highly employed framework in news media research in explicating how the media frame events and issue. A frame is "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events" (Tewksbury & Scheufele, 2009). Reese (2001) has defined news frames as "organizing principles that are socially shared and persistent over time, that work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world" (p.9). Framing theory in fact recognizes the power of the news media in constructing the social reality by selecting some aspects of a perceived reality and makes them more salient in a communication text (Entman, 1993) that may lead to different construction of reality. This process of media framing could have implications for the audiences as it limits the range

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of possible interpretations of the event or issue covered (Entman, 2003). Neuman *et al.* (1992, p.60) note that news frames are "conceptual tools which media and individuals rely on to convey, interpret and evaluate information". Gitlin (1980, p.7) notes that frames are "persistent selection, emphasis and exclusion" and set the parameters in which public discuss events (Tuchman, 1978). Based on the preceding discussion, the study aims to examine the following research questions:

RQ1: How did the media frame the state visits of Pakistan's political leaders to China?

RQ2: How did the media frame the state visits of Pakistan's political leaders to the US?

RQ3: What are the implications for the public policy towards China and the US in the press of Pakistan?

Methodology

This study employs qualitative content analysis to explore how the news media framed the prime ministerial and presidential visits of Pakistan to China and the United States and what are the implications of such coverage for public diplomacy. Qualitative content analysis is a useful method to identify, analyze, and reporting significant patterns or themes within data and to report and interpret the data in rich details (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Boyatzis, 1998). It emphasizes on interpretation over numerical measurements of social phenomena (Gunter, 2000) and is highly desirable for small size data to examine it in more detail (Storie et al., 2014). Golan & Carroll (2012) have noted the significance of qualitative textual analysis and argued that the approach is pertinent for understanding and analyzing the news media content about the media framing of international affairs. The next step in the framing analysis is deciding to use the deductive or inductive framing analysis. This study employs inductive framing analysis or also called 'bottom up' approach which means the themes identified are strongly linked to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Inductive frame analysis involves analyzing the news content or discourse with a flexible and open view to reveal the layers of possible frames in the text, generally with prior defined notions of frames (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; see also Papacharissi & Oliveria, 2008; Reese & Lewis, 2009; Golan & Lukito, 2015; de Souza, 2010 among others). Two English newspapers namely *The News* and *The Nation* were selected to examine how they framed the visits of Pakistan's political authority to China and United States. Both *The News* and *The Nation* are leading dailies in the English media landscape of Pakistan (Riaz, 2007; Onyebadi, 2016). All the editorials appeared in the selected dailies on the visits were collected from the archives of the newspapers from 2008 to 2015. Editorials are important news genres as they

are widely read by the readers to know about important national and international affairs and reflect the organizational stances on various issues. Previous studies have noted the significance of the newspaper editorials about important issues (Onyebadi, 2016; Lee & Lin, 2006). Once all the concerned editorials were collected, they were read multiple times to understand the frames and recurring patterns and themes in the editorial discourse on the visits to the chosen countries. Special attention was paid to the overall sense of the data, the keywords, phrases, metaphors and the tone of the editorials about the visits to China and the United States. Notes as a rule of qualitative analysis were also taken regarding the language use, the tone, metaphors, catch phrases and exemplars, focus of the editorial genres and differences and similarities in the editorial discourse about the visits of the selected countries.

Findings and Analysis

The qualitative content analysis reveals that there were significant meaningful differences in the framing of Pakistani officials' visit to China and the United States with a highly positive portrayal of visits to China and negative depictions of the visits to the US. Two dominant frames were used by the elite press covering the visits to China and the US. The US visits were predominantly framed using the *security frame* with uncertainty about the success of the visits and often terming the US as an unreliable ally. In contrast, the visits to China were framed using the *development frame* with highly successful outcomes implying China as an economic and strategic partner. These frames are further discussed below.

Covering the visits to China

Both the selected newspapers namely *The News* and *The Nation*, framed the visits to China using the lenses of development, economic cooperation and regional integration and trade with highly positive language about China and its role for the development of Pakistan. The visits were discussed in multiple dimensions including trade, investment, MOUs, regional security, infrastructure development in Pakistan. The headlines depicted the visits in highly positive way like 'Road to China', 'Chinese Chances', 'Golden Opportunity', 'PMs Crucial China visit', 'China's firm assurance', 'a successful mission', and ' Xiexie, China!'. All these headlines suggest a highly positive depiction of the prime ministerial and presidential visits to China and the Sino-Pak relations. The predominant narrative in the news discourse was that these visits to China are not 'mere visits' but visits with a purpose. For instance, when President Zardari had chosen to visit China as his first overseas visits, *The News* appreciated the president for 'sticking to tradition' and termed the visit more than just a 'customary visits'. As the following excerpt echoes:

> *Sticking to tradition, President Asif Ali Zardari has chosen China for his first visit overseas as head of state. But the trip is far more significant than a customary 'good will' visit to a friendly country. Pakistan is urgently seeking*

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assistance to help it tide over a crippling financial crisis. ("Road to China", The News, Oct 15, 2008)

In a similar vein, when PM Gilani was scheduled to visit China in 2011, *The Nation* termed it a 'golden opportunity' for Pakistan especially when Pakistan was under immense pressure after the killing of Osama bin Laden. In one such editorial *The Nation* writes:

Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani will undertake a four-day visit to Peoples Republic of China..the visit would be an important occasion to review the progress in bilateral relations achieved and plan to meet challenges facing both nations. ..these ties , based on sincerity, have stood the test of time in the real sense of the word; the six past decades had not lessened their mutual understanding, cordiality, and friendship, rather moved from strength to strength….Islamabad could proudly claim that Pakistan-China relations are their highest level. ("Golden Opportunity", The Nation, May 12, 2011)

Both the selected newspapers were appreciative of the development China has made over the years and that Pakistan must learn from China. The ties, and visits to China were depicted using strong epithets like 'our friend China', 'a sincere friend China' and often expressing the rhetoric about Pak-China relations as "higher than the Himalayas, deeper than the ocean, and sweeter than the honey" ("Signs of getting closer", *The Nation,* July 6, 2013). The language used was highly positive in tone in describing the visits to China using the adjectives as 'gracious hosts', 'steady friend', and 'our war ties with Beijing'. Often the editorials mentioned the growing sour with the United States in narrating the visits to China implying how the visits to China are important given the growing tense ties with the United States and the West. *The Nation* often framed the visits and ties to China in relation to Pakistan's deteriorating ties with the US in an attempt to narrate that only China is a 'natural ally' of Pakistan and thus the visits to China are of pivotal significance. While discussing China in the editorial discourse, the newspaper depicted the US and its actions highly negatively as 'aggression against Pakistan' and the United States is seeking containment of a rising China. As the following excerpt narrates:

It is but natural for close friends to visit each other as frequently as they can and certainly, when either is in trouble. Although Prime Minister Gilani's visit to China had been scheduled much earlier than the May 2 'kill Osama operation clandestinely carried out by the US, leaders of the two countries would, during the course of their interaction, be inevitably discussing the situation and the apprehensions that the raid has given to. And in this particular

case, the blatantly aggressive act in China's neighborhood by the US, which is sworn to inhibit the spread of its influence, Beijing, inevitably gets dragged in. Thus the first day of Mr.Gilani's visit i.e. Tuesday elicited a strong reaffirmation of Beijing's stand that it unwaveringly supports Pakistan in its efforts to counterterrorism. ("PM's Crucial China Visit", The Nation, May 19, 2011).

The editorial discourse predominantly framed the visits to China in the post-visits editorials as highly successful, development focused and trade-oriented that goes beyond the security relations. Both the newspapers often echoed the development projects, MOUs signed, trade and investment between China and Pakistan. Thus the visits were more thematic in nature than episodic (Iyengar, 1999) discussing the visits in more details and analytical in nature putting them in a broader local and global context. Often the newspapers mentioned the visits as 'successful' and mutually beneficial. As the following excerpts show:

President Zardari has completed a successful visit to China, with the two sides signing 12 agreements. The focus is enhancing economic and trade cooperation between the two countries. The Pakistani president also made it a point during his visit to encourage investment, offering preferred treatment to Chinese firms. He spoke also of the opportunities Pakistan offered in various sectors given its strategic geographic location and the presence within the country of many resources. ..it demonstrates the value of Pakistan's warm ties with Beijing and also the success of President Zardari's first overseas trip. ("Visit to China", The News, Oct 17, 2008).

Friday, the third day of Prime Minister Mian Sahrif's visit to China when he held talks with Premier Li Keqiang, witnessed the signing of eight MoUs centered on Pakistan's economic recovery and strategic cooperation between the two countries…there are immense prospects of mutual cooperation, which if exploited, could tie Pakistan and China into a strong force working for peace and prosperity in the region. ("Signs of getting closer", The Nation, July 06, 2013)

The editorial discourse often echoed that the visits to China are on behalf of the whole nation sharing collective feelings and joy with China. Often the editorials used the collective nouns 'our',' us', ' we' to put China into an intergroup identity and that the visits are not just between individuals rather representing the feelings and sentiments of the whole nation of Pakistan. As one such excerpt from an editorial on PM's visit to China narrates:
Returning with $42bn worthy of investment from China, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif will be mighty pleased with himself.…China has been a steady friend, but is also a clear headed and unemotional business partner. Time and again

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Chinese help for Pakistan has been offered and gratefully received. ..we can only hope the PM knows how to say thank you in Chinese. ("Xiexie, China!",*The Nation*, Nov 10, 2014)

Space constraints to further discuss the framing of China visits. Notwithstanding, the excerpts and the surrounding editorial discourse as discussed in the preceding paragraphs suggest that the visit to China were framed as successful and the ties with China were portrayed using positive language and often depicting the emotional affection the newspapers toward China and Chinese. In an editorial *The Nation* termed China as "the only pillar on which we can lean and effectively deal with the isolation which the US is pushing US" ('Golden opportunity', May 12, 2011). The editorial framing of the visits to the US differed strikingly from that of China as will be discussed in the subsequent section.

Covering the Visits to the US

In contrast to the visits to China, both the selected newspapers framed US visits predominantly using the security lenses which we have conceptualized as *security frame.* The whole editorial discourse focused on the themes of security, war on terror and 'do more' mantra from the US. The relations between the US and Pakistan were often mentioned as transactional-give and take dichotomy. The language was not as positive as it was used for the China visits and often the newspapers used highly emotive language like an 'unreliable partner'. The elite press often propounded to revisit the existing relations with the US to make them more transparent. Nothing beyond the war on terror was made part of the editorial discussions like trade and investment. This could be due to the nature of the relations between the two countries namely Pakistan and the United States which are more security-oriented. When former President Zardari met George W Bush, the newspapers termed the outcomes of the meeting as 'mundane' and 'routine'. As the excerpt shows:

President Asif Ali Zardari and Geroge W Bush met in New York on Tuesday and the latter more or less said the what he has been saying all along in public –that his government would respect sovereignty of Pakistan. ("Bush-Zardari Summit", The News, Sep 24, 2008). We feel the US has a history of betraying us and acting unilaterally in certain matters. But the Americans are also as reliant on our help as we are on their aid so this relationship, fraught with doubts and difficult though it may be, will endure for time being and should yield results in the future. ("America and the Army", The News, Nov 24, 2014).

The linguistic choices employed to explicate the visits and the ties with US retained highly emotive with an overall all negative tone and connotation. *The Nation,* in one such editorial while discussing PM Sharif's visit to China in 2015, called the Americans as 'notorious for sugar coating'. It further mentioned that asking Pakistan to end terrorism and to 'do more' is almost like asking the US to "do more" to get rid of hate crimes against African Americans and Muslims' ("Positive Spin", Oct 26, 2015). Here the editorial does not limit to dwell on the visit, rather brings the internal issues of the US to depict it in a highly negative way as 'racist' society. The editorial went on to narrate that the US ways of fighting terrorism is flawed and will hardly produce results. As the following paragraph depicts:

The Americans are notorious for sugar coating their demands. The PM visit to trip to the US is being looked at in a somewhat flattering light in the media, but the demands are the same and so is the stance of US on terrorism…terrorism is not going to end, especially in the way the US wants it to, and so Pakistan will continue to be a problem child for the US. ("Positive Spin", The Nation, Oct 26, 2015).

Often the visits to US were framed as 'personal' and for the fulfillment of the US interests. There was hardly any mention of economic, trade and investment brought into the discourse while covering the visits to the US, neither there was a single mention of the people of both countries into the discourse; thus portraying the visits between the governments and nothing to do with the people of Pakistan. Even the US aid to Pakistan was framed as 'more in rhetoric than delivery' and if there is any substantial US aid it goes to "Pakistani establishment in continuing to support the ill-famed war on terror" (*The Nation,* Oct 22, 2015). Comparing to *The News, The Nation* used highly negative and biased language in the editorial discourses on the Pakistani official's visits to US and its policies. Often the newspaper was critical toward the Pakistani government and officials for asking favors from the US as they [US] will never deliver as seen below:

The much hyped and much awaited US trip by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has come to a closely admittedly there were some positive achievements, yet the statement did not cover much ground –at its simplest the joint statement is nothing more than a collective pat on the back…the key issues remain just as stagnant. ("A Pat On the Back", *The Nation,* Oct 24, 2015).

In a hard hitting editorial on Obama and Gilani meeting, *The Nation* was very critical about the Pakistani officials for demanding favors of nuclear deal from the United States as the US will never accept such demands. It termed such demands 'national humiliation' on the part of Pakistani leaders as the US has

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already declined such demands. It further argued that the US wants to support India as a strategic partner in the region and demanding favors from the US was futile. As the below editorial excerpt explicates:

True to form, the Pakistani leadership has once again demonstrated its degrading tendency to lean against the US, asking it for favors that it is disinclined to grant…. humiliating both for him and the nation as a whole…the US has made strategic decision to strengthen India to serve as a watchdog of its interest in the region …Islamabad must get out its fascination of the US and the West and see the where the country's interest lie. ("Gilani- Obama talks", The Nation, April 14, 2010).

The editorial excerpts suggest that the discourse toward the US visit was highly critical and focused on the security, terrorism and regional issues. Nothing beyond the security prism was included in the framing of the US visits. Moreover, the language was highly negative and ideologically-driven in tone depicting the US in highly negative portrayal. The visits were often look at with suspicions about their success and frequently echoed the uncertainty of the success of the issues discussed often delinking them from the Pakistani public and presenting them as state to state relations that have nothing to do with the public. The frames the press used to make sense and meaning of the two visits differed from each other. The critical textual choices the newspaper used to frame the visits to the two countries reveal the differences in the framing as Entman (1992, p.7) states without comparing the narratives; frames remain undetected fully and reliably in the text, because framing devices often can appear as 'natural' to the analyzers. News frames are Entman further notes are hidden in the key catchphrases; words, metaphors and symbols.
Study Implications for the public diplomacy.

Conclusions and Implications

This study examined the news media framing of Pakistan's officials' visits to two strategically important countries with which Pakistan has had complex relations employing the theoretical framework of framing theory and public diplomacy. Media framing on international affairs is a complex process influenced by the interplay of political, economic, diplomatic and ideological factors. These factors seemed to influence how the press in Pakistan framed the visits of Pakistani leaders to the global powers namely US and China. The visits to China and the Sino-Pak ties were framed positively in the two English dailies of Pakistan. In contrast, as the findings and analysis suggest that the official trips to the US and US-Pak ties were not framed favorably in the chosen

newspapers. The findings suggest that the US has to invest a lot in its public diplomacy towards Pakistan to mold the prevalent negative image of US in the discursive domains of Pakistan. Persistent negative US image in the press of Pakistan could further deteriorate the sour relations between the US and Pakistan. What are the implications of the findings of the study vis-à-vis US and China diplomacy in Pakistan? As the findings and analysis reveal that the image of China and Pakistan's ties with China are portrayed in highly positive depiction. Thus if the public diplomacy is concerned with how to earn a good image in the overseas public, China is a victor as for as Pakistan is concerned for its overwhelming positive image in the elite press. In contrast to China, the US visits and surrounding discourse is framed in negative ways with ambivalence and secrecy prevailing about the US and its intentions toward Pakistan. Thus as the findings suggest the US depiction in the Pakistani press has critical implication for the US public diplomacy in Pakistan. Many factors could explain these strikingly different framing of China and US. First, as has been stated by scholars that national interests and political and economic relations between states can influence their image in the news media framing (Peng, 2004). Thus given the nature of diplomatic relations between China and Pakistan, the presidential and prime ministerial visits were framed favorably. The US-Pakis ties have remained complex over the years for a variety of reasons that could have impacts on a less favorable image of US in Pakistani press. Public sentiments, the dominant ideology of the society in which the news media operate are also argued to impact the news media framing of international affairs. As Ravi (2005) has concluded that national interest, sentiment and cultural values shape the coverage of international affairs. Finally, As Entman (2008) notes that anti- Americanism is prevalent in much of the world, the unfavorable framing of US in Pakistan suggest another evidence of an unfavorable US image overseas. The US seems to be a loser vis-à-vis its public diplomacy in the Pakistani elite press framing which could have consequences for the relations between the two countries and their efforts against the war on terror.

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