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Impact of Electronic Media on International Image of Pakistan: An Extensive Review of Literature

Abstract: *Pakistan has been the frontline ally of United States in war on terror sacrificing seventy-five thousand lives and suffering an economic loss of 123 billion US Dollars. Even then the US led war on terror has impacted the global image of Pakistan. It has been portrayed in the international media as a state that supports terrorism, and is rife with religious and secular extremism – all of this making it a country that is extremely dangerous to visit. The country's global image has constantly deteriorated since 2001 and until this very day, it has increased challenges to redeem itself to its former glory. This depiction of Pakistan, in the international media, as a state that is constantly undergoing political turmoil, unchecked violence and economic instability has resulted in strenuous trade, economics and diplomatic relations with many developed and developing countries in the world.*

Key Words: Impact, Electronic Media, International Image, Pakistan

Introduction

This study tends to explore the impact electronic media has on Pakistan's global image through the theoretical lens of mediatization, which theorizes that media plays a great role not only in shaping and framing the discourse and conversations that take place within a society but the new-media has always been impacting the global image of a state. In the backdrop of this, this study will also attempt to highlight the question of Pakistan's global image through various international media channels and Pakistan's own electronic media. Through analyzing challenges to Pakistan's global image posed by new-media, this study highlights possible solutions that how Pakistan can restore its progressive global image through optimistic media portrayal at national and international level. This paper concludes that Pakistan now has several new options to rectify the pessimistic global image it has had for so long. (1)

Ever since the attack on the Twin Towers in New York, the ill-fated September 11th, 2001, a number of countries have constantly been in the

global spotlight as being very closely affiliated with terrorism. Among these countries is Pakistan. The fact that Pakistan shares borders with Afghanistan, was a part of United States of America's war on terror and was often times, rumored to have allegedly provided a safe haven to terrorist – all this resulted in Pakistan's name becoming synonymous with terrorism in the global sphere. (2)

Even in 2018, according to the World Economic Forum, Pakistan ranks number 4 as the most dangerous country in the world and most countries warn the ire citizens against going to Pakistan for tourism purposes. The impact of all this is that Pakistan continues to be an extremely misunderstood country. The international media constantly focuses on negative images and aspects of Pakistan and the lack of awareness regarding Pakistan results in an extremely negative, backward and dangerous image of Pakistan in the global scenario. Most people from other countries are

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completely unaware of what Pakistan is truly like and affiliate the name with a war zone. (3)

Statement of the Problem

Pakistan's image, for three decades, in the international media has constantly been portrayed as an insecure country harboring terrorists and, slowly, becoming a hub for terrorism itself. Such a misrepresentation reflects poorly and greatly affects Pakistan's position as a sovereign state in the international community. It further makes it difficult for Pakistan to carry out certain economic, social, political and foreign activities which would, otherwise, have been easier. It is, therefore, essential to focus upon the challenges caused by this negative image for Pakistan and possible solutions to help shift the narrative.

Hypothesis

Electronic media being the most influential and effective tool of communication impacted Pakistan's image worldwide, mostly negatively since 9/11.

Novelty and Significance of Study

After the developments in FATF this study becomes more significant because it reflects upon an important issue which directly affects Pakistan as a state in the international community. This study is also significant because it reflects upon an important issue which directly affects Pakistan as a state in the international community. Media has become the most important source of information for people around the world and it is essential to observe how a negative impact, consequently, affects the way the state is seen by those within the international community. Although, many researches have been done on the way Pakistan is represented in the international media, very few focus on the affects it has on Pakistan as a state. This study not only highlights the impact and challenges of electronic media for Pakistan's global image but proposes possible solutions to reverse the situation in the favor of Pakistan.

Research Methodology

Electronic media contents have been analyzed in this qualitative study. Contents from BBC, CNN, Indian DD National and Private TV channels, PTV and Private TV channels of Pakistan have been studied for this research. The relevant data has also been collected from social media applications operated through electronic gadgets of UK, USA, India and

Pakistan. In this backdrop the study has been concluded with the help of primary and secondary sources. Furthermore, this study has made use of previous studies conducted on similar topics in order to make use of those findings and build upon it with the latest findings regarding misrepresentation of Pakistan worldwide and its subsequent effects.

An Extensive Review of Existing Literature

The literature available on the current topic is somewhat scattered and dispersed therefore the researcher had to put great effort to collect and gather this data. The relevant literature is collected from articles, journals, news sources, TV shows, movies, book manuscripts and other sources, in order to reach valid findings and details. However, the detailed literature is given as under.

Pervez Musharraf wrote in his book, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir*, it is unfortunate that Pakistan's image abroad has been so tarnished that the world associates it only with terrorism and extremism. Particularly in chapter 31 in which he talks about the 'soft image' of Pakistan, he refers to the close association of Pakistan with terrorism and extremism and how this association impacts the global image of Pakistan. The discussion of Pakistan's soft image is essential in analyzing the various aspects that deteriorate this image further and, thus, become a basis for this research paper. (4)

The question, however, arises as to why this has become the case. What has caused Pakistan's image to become tarnished to the extent that it is only associated with terrorism and extremism, even in Hollywood movies and TV shows. The very first aspect here is that before September 11th, most of the world was ignorant towards the existence of Pakistan. Slowly, with the events of September 11th opening up, Pakistan's name started being used alongside Afghanistan. To a population that knows little to nothing about either of these countries, the two instantly became synonymous with terrorism. Regardless of the fact that Pakistan actually helped the United States of America in the "War against Terror", by lending our Air Base to their army, this was not given the same coverage in the Media and was never as popular a "feature" as Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan. A few years ago, Osama Bin Laden was, allegedly, found in Abbottabad which is a city in Pakistan and this led to a complete undoing of the minimal efforts which had been made to fix Pakistan's image in the international media. In fact, the international media

made a big deal out of the fact that Pakistan knowingly or intentionally hid Osama Bin Laden for years. A.R. (2011) writes: "Mr. Obama may now feel pressure from American voters to demand that Pakistan's military men start co-operating much more: having described Pakistan as being home to the "cancer" of terrorism." With this description of Pakistan, as being the home of the "cancer" of terrorism, the global image of Pakistan completely plunged and became nearly impossible to revive. (5)

Islamophobia also plays a major role in this negative image of Pakistan. By definition, Islamophobia is the dislike of, or prejudice against Islam and/or Muslims. The All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims put out a report titled "Islamophobia Defined" (2018), which states the following regarding Islamophobia, "Islamophobia is rooted in racism and is a type of racism that targets expressions of Muslimness and perceived Muslimness" The report further establishes, based on surveys, that around 46% of those interviewed were of the opinion that there is a fundamental clash between the values taught by Islam and the values of the British community. While this basically points towards the extent of Islamophobia that exists in Britain, it also represents the fact that the majority of the international community has no idea what Islam really is and their idea of the religion and of Muslims is based on whatever they have understood from the media. This greatly impacts the global image that a country such as Pakistan, which is predominantly Muslim, has in the world. (6)

It was put forth by Noor (2007) that the Muslim identity and concerns of Muslims are constantly being seen as an oppositional argument which puts the Muslims and Islam on one side, against the rest of the world. He claims that Islamophobia has become the mainstream media discourse "where images of Muslims as murderous fanatics abound in movies, videos and computer games." (7)

This is exactly the case when it comes to the International media, Muslims are shown as "the bad guys" and it is often a group of Muslims who plan to blow up a school, or some building as their revenge against the "West". Many times, these cold hearted terrorists are shown to have ties with agencies or madrassas in Pakistan. Other times, the name of Pakistan is so closely affiliated with Arab countries that much of the world is under the impression that Pakistan is also an Arab country. All of this is quite apparent from the literature that is being reviewed in this part of the paper, and later

on, throughout the course of this discussion. The aim of discussing these popular narratives which are shown through movies, games, TV shows, online newspapers and eBooks is that other than the news media, these sources also have a significant impact on Pakistan's image in the international world. While these may only be fiction and cannot be considered the "truth", they reach a wider audience, most of whom are ignorant towards the reality of Pakistan or Islam or the difference between Pakistan and Afghanistan. All these factors combined together result in an average person in the West being deadly afraid of Pakistan and Pakistanis. (8)

In the international sphere, electronic media that holds most power. It is deemed the ultimate authority in all matters beyond borders and is, in retrospect, the gospel of what is going on elsewhere in the world. According to Dana Ott (1998): "However, interactive telecommunications now make it possible for tens of millions of widely dispersed citizens to receive the information." Due to this reason, the international media can make or break the image of whichever country it chooses. It is a well-established fact that out of the thousands of pieces of news and other sources of electronic media that build the international image of Pakistan, most of it is predominantly extremely negative and reflects a country and a society that is seeped with terrorism, extremism and xenophobia. (9)

Barnett Rubins, who happens to be an expert on Afghanistan, has written in a journal of *Foreign Affairs* stating that "the main center of terrorism to global reach, is in Pakistan." He goes on to write regarding the involvement of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) in actively aiding Taliban to run their operations from Quetta, which is in Pakistan. In his opinion, Pakistan's behavior after 9/11 definitely changed but not in a manner that would benefit Pakistan in any way.

Another extremely renowned *Financial Time's* correspondent, Christina Lamb, wrote the book *waiting for Allah: Pakistan's Struggle for Democracy*. In a Youtube video from the *Asia House Bagri Foundation Literature Festival 2017*, she talks a little bit about this book as well as several other books she has written throughout her career as a journalist, especially a journalist in war-torn areas. Although Pakistan is not exactly a war-torn area, a great part of country has been greatly affected by war. While the book is written with an extreme biasness against Pakistan, it covers a variety of aspects such as the economic disparity, the treatment and position of women in the country, the

political situation and patronage, the tribal system as well as the drug barons and their influence over other members of the community. She also reflects upon the strained relationship of Pakistan with both India and Afghanistan. All in all, most of her book is filled with a stereotypical outlook towards Pakistan after which she concludes that the country has a very bleak future ahead. (10)

A book by Emma Duncan called *Breaking the Curfew: A Political Journey Through Pakistan* further explores the extremely dark aspects of the Pakistani state and nation such as the power of the military, the rampant drug trafficking, the arms dealing and smuggling, and the extreme violation of civil and human rights as well as innumerable corruption which exists within the authorities and institutions.

Another extremely surprising story came to the surface while researching for this topic. A man by name of "Afzal Kohistani" was apparently found and shot dead after he went into hiding. The matter behind this "honour" killing rampage, of which he was the last member, was a mere "grainy cellphone video" which showed 5 girls and three boys clapping to some music, in some area of Kohistan. What is surprising about this entire situation is not that an honour killing was carried out. Being residents living in Pakistan, we are all well aware that honour killings are a normal part of many societies and a tradition that will take several years to uproot. The video in which Afzal Kohistani talked about the incident and several other incidents similar to this one which are extremely unfair, was uploaded on YouTube and several other channels around the world. This particular video was shot by *Vice Asia* and it was viewed by people all over the world. (11)

This led to another uproar in the international media, a BBC news article (2019) commented on this incident in the following words: "Afzal Kohistani's decision to break the traditional codes - Kohistan is one of the most conservative and inaccessible parts of Pakistan - sparked a feud between his family and that of the women." (12)

While using a social media application *Quora* (2017) the admin asks to comment on "Why do people always think negative about Pakistan?" One of the first comments is by a user named Jagdish Shetty, who replied in the following manner, "Part ignorance, and part propaganda and part actual truth." While this answer is not by any scholarly source, whatsoever, it is still of immense importance here because the topic under discussion is the global image of Pakistan. The most accurate manner in

which to understand what the true global image actually is, is to analyze how ordinary people view Pakistan. For this very reason, the beginning of this paper is from looking at an ordinary response to such a question on Quora. The response given by Jagdish Shetty is perhaps the most adequate response to such a question because when it comes to the image and portrayal of Pakistan in the international media, all these three aspects are a key feature. While most people, from around the world, are completely ignorant regarding Pakistan and the news is, quite literally, their only source of information. The International news and media, of course, tends to focus more on the negative depiction of Pakistan rather than attempting to present a balanced perspective, which is why many think of this as "propaganda". Yet, there is little doubt that some of the negative depiction of Pakistan is actually true because there are certain unfavorable events that constantly occur in our country. (13)

Pakistan in Hollywood

The word "Pakistan" has been a part of Hollywood movies and TV shows several times but it has almost never been in a positive light either. The following are some of the examples of how Hollywood, as an industry, contributes to portraying a negative image of Pakistan and further deteriorating Pakistan's international image.

The movie *Rambo III* consisted of a series of scenes where the main character, Rambo, flew down to Peshawar in order to deal with an Arms dealer. Other than the fact that the city is shown as a place that is flooded with ignorance, unrest and drugs, it also fails to show Peshawar as one of the major cities of Pakistan and it only shows the city as an underdeveloped city that is crawling with criminals. (14)

In another famous Hollywood movie, *Mission Impossible: Fallout*, the main character along with his team find themselves in some camps in Northern Pakistan where they must stop a powerful bomb from exploding and wiping out the entire country. Although this is fiction, the constant portrayal of Pakistan alongside bombs, drugs and wrongful treatment of people reflects negatively on the image of Pakistan as a state and as a nation, in the international community.

When it comes to the infamous *Iron Man* movies, surprisingly all three of the movies mention Pakistan in extremely negative contexts. In the first movie, a Pakistani terrorist is shown which is pretty

bad a portrayal itself. However, it only gets worse – in the second *Iron Man* movie, nuclear technology is sold to Pakistan and in the third one, and a Pakistani sweatshop is shown. All in all, the movies further portray Pakistan as a country that is only interested in terrorism, drug trafficking and child labor. (15)

In the Oscar nominated film, *Zero Dark Thirty*, the city of Abbottabad is shown as a desolate, rural waste land which is filled with garbage and drugged people. In reality, Abbottabad is an extremely developed city which consists of some of the country's biggest university campuses and is as green as a city can get. The beauty of the city is astounding, and anyone who has actually visited the city is well aware of this.

These are just some of the many examples in which Pakistan is grossly misrepresented on film and in print.

Pakistan in International News

Since the news constitute an elemental part of the electronic media, it is important to analyze how Pakistan is portrayed in the international news. The following section comprises solely of news articles and pieces taken from the internet, and hence, falls directly under the definition of electronic media. (16)

As a quick experiment, the word “Pakistan” was typed in the search bar of the *New York Times* website. The articles which showed up consisted of headlines such as “Terrorism Watchdog Castigates Pakistan over Aid to Militants”, “5 Children Die of Food Poisoning in Pakistan...”, “Iran Says Suicide Bomber Who Hit Revolutionary Guards was Pakistani”, “An 18-Month Old Victim in a Very Old Fight”, “They Once Danced For Royalty, Now it is Mostly for Leering Men”.

As for the news, it is most important to analyze the language which is being used for a particular group or country. It is that which plays the most part in showing the direction of the story. In journalism, language makes all the difference. That is why it is important to look at the language being used in these news stories. (17)

A news article in *The Economist*, from November 30, 2017 uses the following words: “Armed and obstreperous, Pakistan’s army is once again undermining the civilian government.” The article goes on to use words such as “It ignored an order to help disperse Islamist protesters”. The rest of the article goes on to portray the majority of Pakistanis as rebellious protesters who adhere to the most extreme form of Islam and do not have any discipline as a nation.

Another article from *The Economist*, published on October 13, 2017 has the following headline “More Blinkered than Blind: Pakistan is “mainstreaming” misogynist tribal justice”. The story talks about the Jirga, which is a tribal system of justice still used in some rural areas of Pakistan. The use of the words “barbarism”, “traditional form of justice” and “Islamic customs” reflects extremely negatively on Pakistan as a country. While it is true, the Jirga system exists in the country and is still used in some parts, it is not an acceptable practice in most parts of the country. It is most definitely not welcomed as a means of justice by most of the members of Pakistan. (18)

Pakistan is also mentioned several times, rather negatively, in international TV talk shows. The following is a list of popular TV talk shows. The following table enlists shows from highest viewership and popularity.

S. No	Name of TV Show	Aired from (Country)
1	BBC(British Broadcasting Corporation)	Great Britain
2	Fox News	United States of America
3	CNN	United States of America
4	Sky News	Great Britain
5	MSNBC	United States of America
6	Al Arabiya	United Arab Emirates
7	Al Jazeera	Qatar
8	Euro News	France
9	NDTV India	India
10	Geo News	Pakistan

Pakistan's Media

However, it is not only outside sources, authors and directors that have played a negative role in portraying Pakistan as a hub of extremism and terrorism. Some of Pakistan's very own people have worked on films and books that focus on the religious extremism in Pakistan. The first example is the documentary by Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy in her documentary named *Re-inventing the Taliban* (2003), greatly focuses on how the Taliban have been allowed a place to re-ignite their ideology and terror in the Northern areas of Pakistan, particularly, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwan. The documentary not only mentions the problem of religious extremism which has found a fertile ground in Pakistan, but also contains footage of Taliban burning down Cassettes, spraying black ink over paintings and being unjust towards women living there, in that area. A stance such as this coming from a Pakistani is even more of a problem in portraying an image of Pakistan in the international media. The fact that this is propagated by a Pakistani instantly adds weight to the entire conversation and there is a much lesser chance of biasness being accounted for. (19)

She is not the only one, however – not by a long shot. Another author, Ahmad Rashid, has a book named *Pakistan on the Brink: the Future of America, Pakistan and Afghanistan*. In this book, he actually goes a step further than Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy and claims that the Haqqani network, which is widespread in Pakistan, is supported by the ISI. The ISI is the intelligence agency of Pakistan, similar to the CIA in America. According to his book, the ISI is not only fully aware of the existence of Taliban in Pakistan but has actually, actively provided them with safe places to stay and has provided the network with the arms, financial assistance and intelligence needed to carry out each attack in Pakistan, or outside of Pakistan. Again, such a statement reflects extremely negatively on the already damaging image of Pakistan as this opinion is being projected by a Pakistani himself. (20)

It is important to take in to account the literature that is written by Pakistanis as it has played a significant role in dismantling the image of Pakistan in the international media. Since it is used by many as a valid source of the underpinnings of the Pakistani society, it is able to cause more significant damage than literature by outside or foreign sources.

Another major example of this is Husain Haqqani's (2010) take on the Pakistani politics,

outlined in his book *Pakistan: Between Mosque and Military*. In this book, he focuses on the pact between the extremist groups in Pakistan and the military faction of the country. As much as the West believes this, the author reiterates the view that the military of Pakistan is, indeed, the support behind all the extremist activities and groups in the country. He clearly mentions that the entire future of the country and the way this war of terror can go depends upon the fact that how far the military is willing to take this "alliance" with the extremists and terrorists. Haqqani is one of the most quoted sources when it comes to discussion regarding Pakistan's political involvement with terrorism and extremism. Haqqani later discussed a part of this book in an interview with *ABC News* in May of 2011. The main discussion of the interview revolved around the strained relationship between the United States of America and Pakistan after Osama Bin Laden was found in Pakistan. (21)

Yet again, it is important to take in to account that the only matter which Pakistan is criticized for in the international media is not the terrorism. There are several other accounts of human rights and civil rights where Pakistan seems to be failing and this is raised in the media, time and again.

Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy's other documentary titled *A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness* (2015) has nothing to do with terrorism. Instead, it talks about the story of a woman who falls in love with a man from her village and wants to marry him. Instead, she gets sentenced to death by the Jirga for having an illegal affair with the man. The entire documentary follows the story of this woman and her fight for her life as she takes a stand against the system and the society. This documentary focused on the trials and tribulations women have to face in the Pakistani society, often unfairly, at the hand of men and the system. Since it was nominated for an Academy Award, it got a lot of international coverage and further deteriorated the image of Pakistan in the international media. (22)

Similarly, *Saving Face* (2002), was the documentary which actually gave rise to Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy. And brought her to the forefront, both as a Pakistani and a producer. This documentary of hers was about the women who had been victims of acid attacks in Pakistan, which is actually an alarming and serious issue in the country. The documentary focused on the stories of the women, explored the reasons for their sufferings and

why they had to go through unfair treatments, the justification of those who perpetrated the attacks and the lack of attention given to those victims by the authorities of the country. This was one of the first documentaries that really brought Pakistan under the attention of the international media as a place that is simply unsafe for women. The treatment that these women underwent for extremely minor reasons such as rejecting a certain man for marriage, and the valance with which the men were protected by the authorities and the umbrella of society added to the already prevailing idea of Pakistan being an extremely backward country where the issue of human rights is simply non-existent. (23)

Conclusion

This generalization, in itself, is incorrect, it is important that we understand as Pakistanis the fact that there is a reason Pakistan is so easily manipulated in the international media. According to a Pakistani scholar, the reason Pakistan's image is portrayed so negatively in the international media is because we have not given them anything positive to look at. We've simply given them no reason to believe anything other than exactly what they hear and see about our country. There may be a number of positive things taking place inside the country, small aspects of the society which have changed and adapted to more liberal mindsets and more tolerating behavior. There are government institutions that have made progress over the years. However, none of the positive aspects is given any coverage in the international, electronic media. Only recently, with the advent of Pakistani bloggers, vloggers and Youtubers, has our society started getting some recognition other than the barbaric, unjust,

inhumane, extremist and terrorist nation we were always seen as – especially since September 11, 2002. It is essential to mention the role of social media in playing some kind of a positive role in Pakistan's international image due to the fact that the social media has now become a very important part of our daily lives and a very essential aspect of how the world is viewed by other people. This paper mainly focused on the manner in which the current literature affects, or has affected, the image of Pakistan in the international electronic media and what can be done to change this image from a severely negative one in to some degree of positivity.

While there is a chance for Pakistan to finally get out of FATF's 'grey list', it is interesting to note that the national media is aware of how Pakistan's fate hangs in the balance. The decision which is to be made in September will be final and there may be no coming back from it. However, the national media has failed to try and present a positive picture of Pakistan even at such a trying time. It continues to show Pakistan as a country knee-deep in corruption, money laundering, terrorism and all the other things which landed us in the 'Grey List' in the first place. Due to non-stop, poor portrayal of our country by means of our very own country wide media, the international media in addition portrays the same image to the rest of the world in a far extra, negative way. While it is true that there has not been extensive improvement in Pakistan, financially or economically, things have gotten better over the past few years and the nation has grown more responsible. As such, it is incumbent upon the national media to show this as well.

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