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Ideology Trudges on Tabula-Rasa: A Semiotic Analysis of Selected Political Cartoons in Pakistani Newspapers

Abstract

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Contents

Abstract

Media has become an inevitable source of information in this era of consumerism where the commodity sells as well as is sold through the discursive devices-both verbal as well as visual. This study explores how perception of socio-political reality is (re/de)constructed through media discourses with ideological underpinning-potent of both face saving and face exploitation. To cope with the research objective, a represented sample comprising political cartoons has been selected from two Pakistani newspapers-Dawn and The Nation, and mixed method is employed to analyse the sample semiotically as well as critically. For this purpose, Kress and Leeuwen's Model (2006), Fairclough's Tridimensional Model (1995) and Van Dijk's model (1995, 2006) have been employed to prove media discourse-a discursive and an ideological construct. The interpretation and integration of findings confirm that the discourses reveal representations of representation instead of reality and which (re/de) construct the perception of indigenous socio-political events.

Keywords:

Political Cartoon, Indigenous Socio-political events, Ideology, Semiotic Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, Focus Group

Introduction

It is an undeniable fact that the age we are living in is an age of media where media has become a dominant and prominent medium of communication, which charms the audience effectively. It serves not just as a channel of information but as a tool for creating a perception of the masses by carefully expressing thoughts and ideas on/about a socio-political event from a specific point of view. This productive feature of media and discourse has made it an effective research field, and over the decades, linguists have been investigating how language is precisely used differently in a variety of genres to cope with respective communicative tasks. A close understanding of multiple approaches to language along with its relation to media can facilitate us to surface and appreciate how inexplicably language is

used for communicative purposes which include 'dissemination of facts, a sense of shared understanding of/about social, economic, political and other related issues that lay the foundation of people's perception about/of life and pave the way for the intended outcome among masses. Caricatures are a form of social artifact (Giarelli and Tulman, 2003) that are used to manifest latent tactics similar to the way a language is purposefully used to disclose social and political realities in a speech community.

Political cartoons, as communicative artifacts, are manually made graphic illustrations drawn on a single frame, usually accompanied by written texts or thought bubbles in the form of dialogue, and are published on the editorial page of a newspaper or magazine. Hence, a caricature comprises both linguistic (verbal) and para-linguistic (graphic/nonverbal) elements. These political cartoons, with the help of linguistic and nonlinguistic devices, provide a channel for the communication of messages, reflecting prevailing sensitive issues that people are much concerned with and think about, through which socio-political agendas are set for a better understanding of linguistic terminologies used in the cartoons (Greenberg, 2002). Political cartoons function as communicative tools in society, and they form a distinctive genre with its own unique history, specific styles and conventions, and purposes (El Refaie, 2009).

Therefore, it has become pertinent that media discourses are not always as neutral as they seem to be, for they carry certain ideologies endorsed along with them, explicitly or implicitly. The media discourses, like individual discourses, have some degree of leaning towards a certain ideology. The editor or cartoonist takes a certain ideological position and preserves it by propagating it through discourses, i.e., verbal and/or graphic devices. Using these media discourses as sources to appeal attention and interests of the audience, journalists particularly cartoonists yoke both linguistic and nonlinguistic details skillfully and persuasively to generate literary or dramatic passion and to evoke an exclusive response from readers e.g. "Cartoons are likely dynamic caps. They look harmless. But they are extremely dangerous when purposely set off" (Ward, 1969). These linguistic as well as graphic devices are consciously and cautiously employed to interact with the masses and to encourage them towards considering a particular point of view in order to (re)structure their comprehension of socio-political reality.

In the past few decades, scholars have concentrated their attention on scrutinizing the nature and function of political cartoons, and to do so, they have employed various frameworks to discover the under-recognized motif behind them. The frameworks used by the researchers include Critical Discourse Analysis, Semiotic Analysis, and CDA hermeneutics.

Literature Review

Semiotics- the study of signs and the way they communicate has a long history i.e. dating back to medieval philosophers such as John Locke, 1990 but modern semiotics can be associated with two men; Swiss linguist- Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and American philosopher- Charles Sanders Pierce (1839-1914) and term semiotics was coined by latter one. Though there have been certain significant differences in the work of both linguists, they have been concerned with the study of the signs. Saussure, in his book A Course in General Linguistics (1915), suggested the prospect of semiotic analysis and dealt with many theories to study the text system of signs (Saussure cited in Berger, 2004) posited, "The linguistic sign unites not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image.... I call the combination of a concept and a sound-image a sign, but in current usage the term generally designates only a sound-image" (pp. 66–67). He bifurcated the sign into the signifier (sound-image) and the signified (mental-image/concept) and postulated that the relation between them is arbitrary. In response to Saussarian postulation, Pierce has segmented a sign into three parts instead of two i.e. representmen, interpretant, and object, and highlighted sign in its iconic, indexical and symbolic aspects and believed that a sign is "something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity" (cited in Berger, 2004) which refers to the notion that the relation is not arbitrary in its own.

Roman Jakobson, 1990 in his earlier works, has been a proponent of Saussure's bipartite notion of sign and supported the intrinsic nature of the relation between the two segments of a sign, but he criticized his analytical methodology and said that

meaning or the referent can be slippery (Jakobson, 1949a, p. 50; 1949b, p. 396). This binary notion of the sign was criticized by a French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, 2020 who rejected this one-to-one notion of the relation between the signifier and the signified but suggested a one-to-many kind of relation instead. Valentin Voloshinov (1973), a Marxist commentator on Saussure's model, rejected the non-material view of the sign-splits that had been prevalent from Plato to Levi-Strauss. Chandler (2007) and Sturrock (1986) objected to the non-materiality of the constituents of the sign and said that reality is perceived through language instead of vice versa. A Post-structuralist- Jacques Derrida (1981), like Lacan, also advocated the post-caesarian view of the sign and claimed that there is no intrinsic static relation between the signifier and signified, and furthermore posited that in some cases even the former element becomes transparent (p. 22). Post-modernists like Ronald Barthes (1957, 1987) with the concept of mythologies, Mikhail Bakhtin (1965, 1984) with the concepts of dialogism and, carnivalesque, Jean Baudrillard (1988) with his theory of simulacra and Michel Foucault (1979) with his archeological evaluation of discourse and conception of epistemic regimes (and epistemic breaks over time) also supported the non-linear and non-intrinsic nature Because this world encompasses limitless signs, semiotics has become an undetachable phenomena of life. Therefore, semioticians esteem "semiotics as the queen of the interpretive sciences, the key that unlocks the meanings of all things great and small" (Berger, 2004). J. R. Firth (1935) - a sociolinguist, as well as his disciple, Michel Halliday, 1978 in his book Language as Social Semiotic (1978), studied the sign in its social context and claimed that these semiotic carts are shaped and endorsed with meaning potential in order to cope with the intention (meta-function) of the producer or consumer of them.

In this study, the focus is on semiotic as well as critical discourse approaches, which have been used to expose the veiled ideologies behind the cartoons. One of the aims of this scrutiny is to demystify discourses by deciphering the undeciphered ideologies (Fairclough, 1995). Therefore, through demystification of ideology-laden discourses, we can learn (as Fairclough and Wodak (1997) pointed out) "How power relations are exercised and negotiated in discourse", that language is used as an effective medium to echo and (re)create power relations in the community (p. 272). The CDA of the multimodal discourse, i.e., political cartoons, in this research has been concerned with both the explicit and implicit discursive tools that have been ideologically chosen and set at play in these cartoons to (re) create and (re)structure the perception of the people. Linguistic and semiotic analyses are employed to investigate the meanings rooted in the visual and linguistic details of the cartoons. It is worth noting that multimodal critical discourse analyses are carried out to discover the way individual components in images, such as participants, settings, objects, etc., depict discourses in a manner that might not be very clear to the viewers/readers. Machin and Mayr (2012) described that multimodal critical discourse analysis takes other means of communication as a source of social construction and hence is not interested in the semiotic choices in the images alone, but also in the way they play a part in the communication and comprehension of power relations (p.10). Therefore, multimodal critical discourse analyses (MCDA) have been conducted in the present study that provides tools to examine the verbal and/or visual communicative resources in order to trace out a specific set of ideologies.

During the past few decades, researchers have been analyzing and interpreting cartoons across various disciplines such as cinema, education, psychology, sociology, pragmatics, media, mass communication studies, etc., which makes it a potent interdisciplinary research field. The increasing interest affirms that political comic strips have been turned into a reputable genre in media studies, i.e., a medium of practical criticism and provides political commentary with the objective of restructuring the perception and opinion of the audience. In history, Benjamin Franklin is credited with initiating this cartoonish illustration of events or thoughts by publishing an editorial cartoon strip in an American newspaper. He painted an image of a snake cut up and labeled with various colonies' names with a renowned caption, "Join or Die" (Burns, 2007 p. 526).

Different research scholars have focused on diverse variables from multiple angles. For instance, Steuter et al. (2008) investigated the process of making up caricatures to discuss the part they play in public. Lamb (2004) cogitated political

strips as 'critical artifacts' used as a means to satirize political leaders as well as their policies. While Medhurst and De Sousa (1981) in their research studied and stressed the nature of cartoons and found four representative themes: 1) personal character traits, 2) political commonplaces, 3) literary/cultural allusions, and 4) situational themes (cited in Sani et al., 2012). Farwell (1989) also believes that ―cartoons are "a genre of comic art whose stock in trade is distortions and exaggerations that characteristically puncture pretension or single out vulnerable features in a target" (p. 9). Cartoon strips are usually sarcastic and their radical effects are just as effective as an arsenal used for attacks on political figures and their democratic practices (Morris, 1992).

Another study (Benoit et al., 2001) focused on the investigations, accusations, and trials of President Clinton concerning the Clinton-Lewinsky Starr Affair and analyzed 2000 political cartoons. The analytical framework used for the analysis was a fantasy theme analysis of political cartoons using symbolic convergence theory. Thus, it is a tool for assessing rhetorical discourse with emphasis on the visual message that provides the basis for the analysis of imaginative language and imagery usually embedded in cartoons.

Media and the respective discourses have the power of face-saving as well as exploitation by means of cartoonish representation and satirical address. For example, political cartoons are also used to promote candidates' reputations through positive representations, as, for instance, Conners (2005) highlighted political drawings and pop culture in the 2004 American presidential campaigns as tools for manipulating voters' opinions. On the other hand, Eko (2007) conducted research to explore how African media dehumanized and reterritorialized four African political leaders in the post-Cold War era and found that, as graphic illustrations, political cartoons function as political satire (Townsend et al., 2008). Basically, the success of a caricature hinges on the interplay between verbal and visual elements. In a study, Tsakona (2009) examined language and communication through cartoons, using a multimodal theory of humor as an analytical framework. He indicated that cartoon humor is a complex procedure that implicates

different strategies of language interplay between verbal and nonverbal devices such as exaggeration, paradox, and metaphor. This fact stresses the need for audiences to take both verbal and visual details, contained in each cartoon, into consideration in order to comprehend its meaning in its entirety, including overt and inherent agendas.

In 2015, Abbas conducted research on political cartoons (taken from Urdu newspapers), stressing the role of visual communication in shaping the public understanding of governance and corruption. In his study, he examined dominant themes, i.e., terrorism, inflation, and civil-military conflict, which were steering the perceptions of the public implicitly. However it was concerned with content analysis rather than with semiotic theory, and hence the study lacked involvement of any theoretical models of deconstruction of signs, which is why it could not encompass the interpretive depth of findings.

Khan and Riaz (2018) also analyzed cartoons (in Dawn and The News) through the lens of socio-political communication while concentrating on the process of visual recreation and representation of political crises and conflicts. Their scrutiny surfaced consistent depictions of an imbalance of civil-military cooperation, exploitation, and interference in the judiciary. But, like Abbas, their study also missed a semiotic lens as they focused on descriptive analysis of themes instead of deciphering visual constructs for the meaning-making process.

Ali and Farooq (2020) highlighted the effect of visual political caricatures on the perception **of the** public in order to reveal that readers comprehend such cartoons as critical remarks on real socio-political proceedings. Their research failed to give an in-depth understanding of the semiotic (de) construction because it was mainly an audience-centered approach to making meaning from satirical and metaphoric visual expressions. Bhatti (2021) applied semiotic principles to memes, advertisements, and television graphics while using Barthes and Saussure's frameworks to highlight cultural operations and oppression (symbolic and ideological) in visual communication in Pakistan. Raza & Yousaf (2022) examined editorial cartoons in Dawn and Jang newspapers while using Barthes' models of connotations and denotations for semiotic readings of the representation of political

figures, events, and ideologies. Hassan and Haq, 2023 also conducted a study on political cartoons, selected from Urdu newspapers (Jang and Nawa-e-Waqt), to explore how religious and cultural signs and symbols are used to propagate nationalists' behaviors and discourses.

In spite of the growing interest in media discourses and the study of visual communication in Pakistan, a noticeable gap continues to exist regarding the application of systematic semiotic frameworks to analyze socio-political caricatures in mainstream newspapers of Pakistan. Most of the existing body of literature is either journalistic, thematic, or rhetorical, overlooking the eminence of the inclusion of both denotative and connotative meanings, implicitly as well as explicitly. With a view to filling that gap, this study endeavors to conduct a multimodal analysis of both linguistic and graphic codes qualitatively as well as quantitatively. The data has to be analyzed qualitatively on textual, contextual, and inter-(con)textual grounds, respectively. The findings of this examination are to be quantified and further scrutinized through focus group discussions in order to yield more authentic and valid responses to extrapolate how discourses are designed to propagate and interfere with the public perception of socio-political events happening around them for face-saving of the US and face exploitation of THEM.

Research Methodology

In this inquiry, mixed methodology has been employed to analyze ideological representation in caricatures addressing intra-national political events of Pakistan in national newspapers. It is a way of integrating the best of both qualitative and quantitative methods in the same study in order to yield productive results and twofold reliability and validity in the findings. The investigation was carried out using exploratory sequential mixed (Tashakkori & Teddile, 2003, 2009, and 2010 cited in Creswell, 2014) methodology, where qualitative and quantitative analyses were done respectively. For qualitative analyses of selected political cartoons, Kress and Leuween's Model of Semiotic Analysis (2006), Fairclough's Tridimensional Model (1995), and van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Model (1995, 2006) have been used, the findings of which are quantified later. Along with these frameworks, the

research questions and hypotheses have been explored through a focus group, which was consciously and cautiously endorsed in the research.

Framework

In this evaluation of political comic strips, Kress and Leuween's Model (2006) is used as a framework to provide a toolkit to trace out and weigh not just the semiotic resources availed by cartoon producers and approved by the editors but also the plausible reason behind those selections among available unlimited resources, the intended outcomes of those choices and the unfathomable interwoven connotations of power and status between the producer/s and the consumer/s. After surfacing the deeply endorsed narrative, Fairclough's Tridimensional Model (1995) and Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Model (1995, 2006) are used for the archeology of ideology to highlight the meaning potential of the (multimodal) text.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) emphasize that graphic details are as structured and rule-bound as verbal language is. In accordance with Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, they suggest three meta-functions to examine the meaning-making process of an image, i.e., ideational (the representation of reality), interpersonal (the relationship between the image and viewer), and textual (the arrangement and coherence of visual elements). This framework is pre-eminently apt for multimodal texts comprising images, words, and spatial details to (re/de) construct socio-political realities. In the context of indigenous newspapers of Pakistan, this model helps to decipher systematically constructed political cartoons and deconstruction how the producers encode graphic details and endorse the ideologies, criticize the power and authority, and shape viewers' perceptions and interpretations through semiotic resources.

Norman Fairclough's Tridimensional Model (1995) enables further investigation of how ideologies are embedded in discourses. This model paves the way for a systematic analysis of how linguistic and visual elements of a text operate within the boundaries of social and institutional context. The textual analysis is focused on linguistic and semiotic choices made by the cartoonist, the discursive practice is concerned with the

production and consumption of the content, while social practice examines the play of power, ideology, and cultural codes. The implementation of this framework in the current study is going to play a significant role in the layered analysis of the selected political cartoons and in deciphering the process by which these discourses interfere with public perception and interpretation of the socio-political events through linguistic and semiotic choices.

Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Model (1995, 2006) amalgamates text, discourse, as well as thought to expound how ideologies are (re) created, dispersed, and (de) constructed by virtue of discourse. It proposes that discourse is predisposed by cognitive frameworks (commonly held beliefs and stereotypes), and then the power (socio-political) and authority are exercised through the mental constructs. Application of this model to the study under focus is going to cater to the research objective for comprehending the process by which visual discourse, along with the linguistic tag, stimulates collective memory, strengthens socio-political ideologies, and/or perpetuates the bias among the audience in their meaning-making process.

Research Objective

In this study, under the influence of post-structuralist notion, it has been theorized that reality or perception of reality, individually as well as collectively, is not an absolute, static, and neutral phenomenon but rather can be constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed, and (ideology laden) media discourses can play a major role in structuring or restructuring the reality itself or perception of (social, political...) reality around us. The target of the research was to prove, through semiotic analysis of selected political cartoons, that the minds of readers are like tabula-rasa- blank slate, which could be affected and manipulated by

multimodal discourse by the use of linguistic and graphic devices that were chosen from semiotic resource and employed consciously and cautiously by the cartoonists and approved by the editors.

The data has been selected and collected, as a representative sample, from two Pakistani English newspapers, Dawn and The Nation (published from 1 August 2019 to 31 December 2019), and these newspapers were selected as a sample for the following reasons:

- Widely celebrated circulated newspapers
- Maximum readership
- Well-reputed
- Publish a political cartoon daily

Research Questions

1. What are Pakistan's major intra-national socio-political issues, and how are they being represented through the cartoonish manifestation in Newspapers?
2. How do Cartoonists/newspaper editors in Pakistan subtly project and propagate their political and ideological attitudes?
3. How do these cartoons, carrying political ideologies, influence the perception of readers?

Analysis

In order to achieve the aim of the investigation, the selected cartoons have been analysed at various levels with the objective of achieving coherence and transparency in the findings. The data has been analyzed qualitatively at three levels: textual, contextual, and inter (con) textual, using the aforementioned frameworks. The findings of qualitative scrutiny have been quantified and verified by the focus group (in-depth) discussions and a mini-scale survey with both qualitative and quantitative details.

Textual Analysis

Figure 1

*taken from the Daily Dawn (Dated: October 15, 2019)*
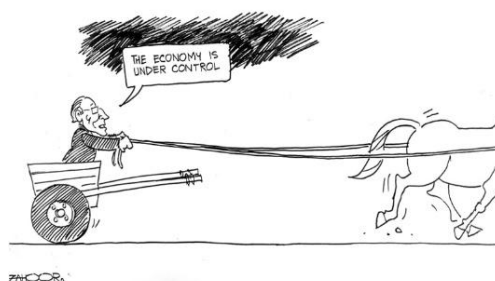
The narrative process- an agentive projective process, being painted in this image, depicts an edgy situation. This denaturalized image lacks an accentuated background, which adds to the salience of the meaning potential of the foregrounded semiotic details. There is a single participant-sayer, in the frontal frame of the image, who is sitting on the cart, but the horse has left him and the cart far behind him. The leaned position he is sitting in and the look this man is bearing on his face foreshadow the inability to control the horse and the situation but the speech bubble appearing above his head is saying, "THE ECONOMY IS UNDER CONTROL" which is just the opposite of the semiotic details that are echoing in the silence.

The dark line surrounding the speech bubble has heightened the deteriorating control over not only the phenomenon alone but also the sayer's own position at risk. Though he might have been trying to have a grip on the phenomenon horse, there is just a little fragment of the bridle left in his hand, and he has given up hope because he is not pulling it back and is leaning towards the horse. On the other side, just behind the phenomenon-horse, is shown in the frame that refers to the unuttered hopelessness and helplessness prevailing in the picture. Furthermore, this image is an offer as the represented participant is avoiding eye contact with the audience, and this strengthens the pessimism.

Figure 2

taken from the daily The Nation (Dated October 28, 2019
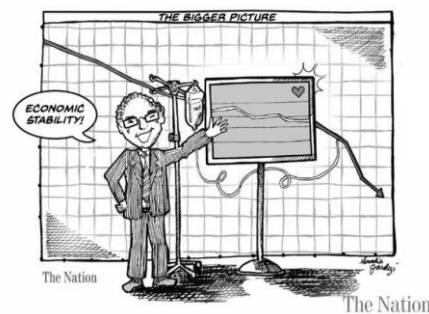
The caricature manifests an ambiguous situation through the imagery of the analyst and the analytical report. There is a participant standing near a screen, which he is pointing to, while the background comprises THE BIGGER PICTURE with a graph (on a grid line base giving an impact of tangle) which represents the gradual decline.

The foregrounded semiotic elements narrate a projective verbal process where the represented participant-sayer is facing the audience with an eclectic, crafty smile on his face while pointing toward the screen to let them see ECONOMIC STABILITY! The phenomenon in this circumstance is the graph of economic stability, and there are three parts of it, i.e., left, middle, and right, which

refer to abrupt decline, slow deterioration, and again hasty fall of the economy, respectively. The right corner of the graph of the economy is being supplied by the IMF, but despite this supply, it is deteriorating continuously as if the IMF has hastened this decay. The middle portion is manipulated in order to claim success in achieving stability, which is not the reality because THE BIGGER PICTURE reciprocates the claim. Moreover, though the posture the sayer is standing in indicates his confidence, his closed eyes refer to the fact that he is not making eye contact with the audience, which makes this offered image a demanding image in disguise with a camouflaged representation of reality.

Figure 3

taken from Daily The Nation (Dated: September 24, 2019)

This image caricatures a circumstance of shock through the imagery of transactional reaction. In the forefront of the frame, there are two represented participants; one is a reactor-man while the other is the phenomenon-woman. The female character phenomenon is a symbolic representation of a newly-wed bride, and she is wearing a nose pin, dark lips, and henna on the outer side of her hand, which she is holding in the traditional manner to greet the groom while taking off her veil. The female imagery carries a denaturalized crafty look on her face; frightening, squeezed-in eyes and vampiric, pointed teeth, which is characterized as 1ST YEAR OF THE GOVT. The groom-reactor is traumatized after looking at the real, unveiled beauty that he had been dreaming about. The groom's reaction, i.e., bulging eyes, chopping of his fingers, and paralyzed left hand, makes it obvious that frightening and terrifying her true face is true. Furthermore, the reactor is wearing shabby, ragged, shaded clothes as if he has lost all of his assets to have her and is not just bankrupt but is about to lose his life out of haplessness, while she is wearing light-colored clothes with dark dots on the shirt connotating as if she were not trustworthy enough. The dark interwoven lines in the background heighten the loud, unsaid despair of the situation.

Contextual Analysis

After the elections of 2018, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) won the show (with 157 seats) and took charge of the establishment, and Imran Khan Niazi, a former cricketer and chairperson, became the 22nd Prime Minister of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The political parties with lesser representation in the government, i.e., Pakistan Peoples' Party (54 seats), Pakistan Muslim League-N (with 84 seats), and Jamiat-e-Ulma-e-Islam Fazal (16 seats), were also at paws with the central government because of their agendas, particularly anti-corruption. Therefore, from the very beginning, the PTI government has been alleged as the SELECTED GOVERNMENT and has been continuously criticized by the opposition individually as well as collectively by making an alliance, e.g., Long March/Dharna, Pakistan Democratic Movements, etc. On the other side, in response to all the allegations, the center has been trying to cope with voters' expectations, but could not do so satisfactorily. Not just the political parties but media agencies too have been making alliances with or against the government, and the only difference is that the former expressed it explicitly, but the latter kept it ambiguous.

The government has been criticized on various grounds for multiple policies, but the economy and inflation have been major issues. The economy is the gear for any state in the world, which involves multiple sectors of the state related to forecasting, manufacturing, dissemination, and consumption of resources to gauge and engage the country on the trajectory of success. With respect to economic yardsticks, Pakistan, being the 23rd biggest purchasing power and 42nd on the subject of domestic raw products, has many challenges to cope with the prevailing instability. The central government (PTI) painted an ideal picture of NAYA PAKISTAN and challenged the status quo of the state on multiple grounds, but could not turn those dreams of their voters and supporters into reality. As per their promised key policies, the lower poor

class was to be provided with relief, but the economic instability made their bad situation worse, partly by the policies of the center and partly by the peripheries. To make amends, the ministers and ministries have been changed, e.g., Abdul Hafeez replaced Finance Minister Asad Umar, but there has been no progress in the state of the situation. It was not the ministry, maybe, but the miscalculation of the government in planning as well as the execution of the measures, and also the opponent parties and their well-calculated interference that kept the have-nots to own nothing but nothing itself. Whatever the reason is, either the former or the latter or both, the economy does not seem to sprout yet, and the cost of all this has been paid by the poor who are driven to the brink of bankruptcy further, due to inflation.

Inter (con) Textual Analysis

In the first picture, the narrative being projected through semiotic resources is represented by participant- Abdul Hafeez who is striving to control the phenomenon-economic affairs but is unable to do so as he is about to lose the bridle. He is not trying to have a grip on it for he is leaning forward not backward as if he were aware of his haplessness in and over the situation and has given up resistance. The phenomenon, on the other side of the frame, has gone too far from the cart as well as from the carter because only the rear of the horse symbolizes the economic issues. These subtle details point out and highlight the stance that the character has been chosen mistakenly and is not fit for the task he has been assigned. This is not an attack on the finance minister but rather on the one who has appointed him for this office, and the Prime Minister is being blamed for all of the inconceivable failures, indirectly. So far as the linguistic element of the image, THE ECONOMY IS UNDER CONTROL, is concerned, it is just the opposite of the semiotic details, which is kind of an ironic account of the situation, because there is no clue of control in the image, and the dark lines drawn over and around the statement affirm the pessimistic truth. This is an offer image-lacking direct gaze, which is a tool to implicitly project the interest to promote the intended ideology, which, here, is against the central government.

In the second caricature, there are two narratives being painted parallel, i.e., labeled THE BIGGER PICTURE and an unlabeled smaller picture. The smaller consists of an analytical report about ECONOMIC STABILITY! The former picture contains the World Bank's report on Pakistan's economy. The represented participant, Abdul Hafeez, the finance minister, is standing by the smaller picture with an expression of confidence about the stability of the economy brought about by the IMF supply on the surface. But the picture draws attention to the bigger picture, which gives an impression of a net on which the gradually deteriorating trajectory of the economic route has been shown. The bigger picture discloses that the manipulative use of the economic reality on the smaller screen is misleading the audience with the intention of face-saving. The image appears to be a demand image, but is an offer image, as Mr. Hafeez is avoiding direct eye contact with the audience. What is implicitly being offered to the audience is the flip side of the reality, i.e., economic instability, and that IMF supply is not lifting the graph but lowering it, causing a rapid downfall, which is kept a secret, and the audience is totally unaware of it.

The next image is the finest shot to criticize the captainship of Imran Khan and his performance. There are two represented participants, where a bridal character symbolizes the central (PTI) government, and the wrecked picture of the groom symbolizes the condition of the common people. These two pictures contrast the two classes of Pakistan, i.e., the ruling and the one being ruled, respectively. The former is just like LA Belle Dame Sans Mercy (The Beautiful Lady without Mercy), where the latter is the victim who has been stripped of everything, even his senses, for the real face of the government has shocked the masses to almost death. The irony being made here is evident by the contrast of the semiotic narrative and the linguistic element, i.e., ıst YEAR OF THE GOVT, which means that within a year, the masses have come to the point where they are left with nothing, not even their consciousness. During the election campaign, the lower class has been promised a better future where all of their dreams, which they may not have seen, will be fulfilled. However, those promises and dreams have turned into reality, which have never been dreamt of.

Focus Group

In this study, in order to cope with the research

objective and bring twofold credibility to the results, responses have been collected from a sampled group. The focus group was made out of purposive non-probability sampling and is not representative enough to be general, but still, it yields authentic, in-depth responses (Lederman, cited in Thomas et al, 1995). This group comprised those who had knowledge of the study area, were concerned with it, and had been divided into two groups, i.e., A and B. Group A, with 20 respondents, was used as a miniature version of the survey, where respondents were asked to fill out the response sheet (with five questions structured on a Likert scale format in Table 1), and the responses were quantified (as shown in fig. 1).
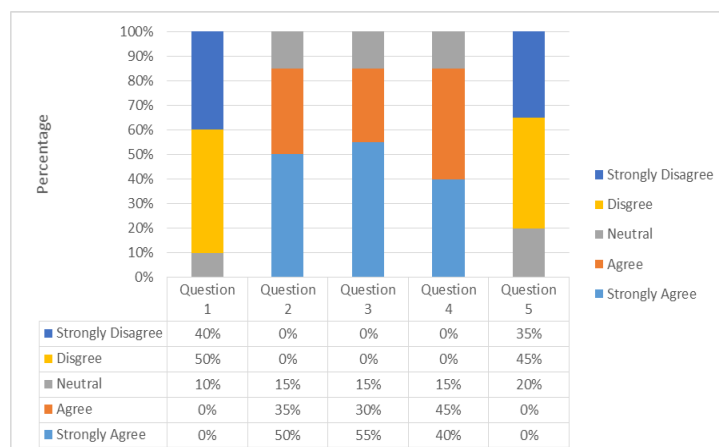
Table. 1

	Questions	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	The newspapers disclose the news in a neutral manner	1	2	3	4	5
2	Discourse makers have ideological leanings.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Discourse can influence our perception	1	2	3	4	5
4	Discourses have vested interests to protect	1	2	3	4	5
5	The reader knows the ideological underpinnings	1	2	3	4	5

In response to statement number 1, only 10% had a neutral opinion, while 40 % strongly disagreed and 50% disagreed about the neutrality of the news discourses, which refers to the notion that the majority believes that news discourses are not neutral. In response to the statement about ideological leaning, 50% of the participants strongly agreed, 35% agreed, and only 15% were neutral. In reaction to a statement about the projection of interest through the course of news discourse, 40% of participants strongly agreed, 45% agreed, and 15% were neutral, while no one disagreed. When the respondents were asked about the influence of these discourses on the perception of readers, 55% of the respondents strongly agreed and 30% agreed about the manipulative role, while 15% held a neutral view. In response to the question of whether the audience is aware of the play behind the display? 35% strongly disagreed with responses and 45% disagreed with responses referring to the notion that people are unaware of this while 20% of them held a neutral opinion. The majority of the participants, with varying degrees of conviction, do believe that the news is structured carefully while choosing and using linguistic as well as nonlinguistic elements that fit best for the dissemination of the entrusted interests.

Figure.4

	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5
Strongly Disagree	40%	0%	0%	0%	35%
Disgree	50%	0%	0%	0%	45%
Neutral	10%	15%	15%	15%	20%
Agree	0%	35%	30%	45%	0%
Strongly Agree	0%	50%	55%	40%	0%

Group B, with 5 participants and the moderator, had been asked to participate in an in-depth discussion where the researcher played a moderator controlling the semi-structured group interviews. Among five participants, three (60%) were quite in favor of the view and two (20%)

gradually came up to the point that news discourses are not neutral and discursively disclose the socio-political reality through ideology-laden discourses which interferes with public perception of the socio-political reality in order to serve the powerful bourgeoisie while the proletariat is consciously and cautiously kept unaware of the manipulation. Here the bourgeoisie is not the whole elite class but the powerful among them whose end re being safeguarded at the hands of content producers and/or the editors of the news agency. Moreover, the central government is the one being criticized the most.

Conclusion

The objective of this scrutiny has been to test the hypothesis and explore the fact the news discourses are not as neutral as they appear to be and can manipulate the masses' perception in favor of the vested ends of the content political cartoons, producers/editors who serve as a pawn in the hands of powerful and protect their interests. The selected political cartoons covering indigenous socio-political issues have been carried out both qualitatively as well as quantitatively. The results have been further explored through the focus group with the objective of bringing twice credibility and validity.

The results of the analyses of the selected political cartoons highlighted the implicitly endorsed ideologies that serve to criticize the PTI government for its incompetence. To achieve the objective, content designers utilize specific and specified semiotic and linguistic resources that can bear the desired fruit in manipulating the common perception of the event or the agency being discursively represented through political cartoons. Though both newspapers, i.e., Dawn and The Nation, cover similar intra-national events, the latter gives a more subjective and pessimistic image of the issue through overdetermined semiotic circumstances, while the former gives an apparently objective image through an oversimplified semiotic spectrum. But both of them paint a negative image of Imran Khan, his representatives, and their performance.

These negative characterizations and representations serve as a lens for the audience to see the darkly subjugated image of Imran Khan and his cabinet. These abstractions further promote the ideologies fabricating the mistrust and hatred among the audience for leaders who have been entrusted and empowered by them to the extent that they may start thinking about the misfortune brought to them and the reversal of it into fortune by dethroning him.

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