

Media Presentation of Political Participation of Transgender Community in Pakistan

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Abstract

Transgender people are the most overlooked and deprived communities globally, especially in a conservative society like Pakistan. Although the government of Pakistan has passed specific laws to impart equal rights to transgender community, peoples; conceptions about transgender remain unchanged. The literature shows much less attention has been provided to transgender participation and media representation in the political affairs of democratic Pakistan.

The purpose of this study is to explore the media presentation of the political involvement of transgender community in Pakistani political sphere. Using news stories data of the daily Dawn (elite English Liberal newspaper) and the daily Jung (elite Urdu newspaper) from January to July 2018 and applying content analysis applying the lens of framing theory, the authors empirically investigate transgender community's political representation in the elite print media of Pakistan. The authors find that the media treatment of transgender people profoundly influences peoples' thoughts and perceptions about them.

Media treat transgender people as abnormal with no space to become equal citizens with usual participation in every walk of life especially the political life and participation in political affairs of the country. The paper fills the gap in the research literature by providing insight on the social and political status of transgender in Pakistani media which is fairly marginalized. Media in Pakistan is adding to the marginalization of the vulnerable transgender community. This work would also guide Pakistani media to improve reporting quality for transgender community of Pakistan.

Keywords: *Transgender, Media representation, Political participation, Underrepresentation, Equal rights, Pakistan*

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INTRODUCTION

Media is potent to create perceptions and mould realities. At the same time, it serves as the voice of the voiceless. Although specific laws are passed by the Pakistani government promising equal

rights for transgender, people's conceptions remain unchanged. Since there is a wide gap between state and society in Pakistan, mere formulation of laws is not the solution. However, media can play its part in this regard. The way transgender people get treatment in media profoundly influences people's thoughts and perceptions about them ([Jones et al. 2018](#), [Goldman et al. 2017](#)). In Pakistan, the transgender community undergoes multiple problems. Some of the issues are familiar and common, while others are such hitches that negatively impact the overall transgender community. The way transgender people get media coverage has a lot to do with the community's perception of ordinary people. Negative representation is among the many forms of challenges endured by transgender people across the globe ([Hughto et al. 2021](#)).

Pakistan is among those very first countries in the world that recognized third-gender legally. In 2009, Pakistan became one of those countries that have legally identified the transgender community and gave them the right to obtain identity cards ([Shaikh and Tunio, 2018](#)). Multiple studies and calculations show that the populace belonging to the transgender community is very low; about 0.5 million people represent them in a country. But despite the limited number, their role in different important sectors has not been witnessed. Their representation in political institutions and many other walks of life do not get attention due to their limited number and fewer employment opportunities. Sadly, most transgender community members make their living through beggary or dancing ([Khan, 2017](#), [Sultana and Kalyani 2012](#), [Shah et al. 2018](#)).

Transgender community is one of the most vulnerable communities in the world facing massive discrimination yet in South Asian countries, these discriminatory practices have been more frequent and prevalent ([Ramay 2017](#), [Billard 2016](#)).

Transgender is one of the most vulnerable communities in the world facing massive discrimination. In South Asian countries, these discriminatory practices have been more frequent and prevalent. The Apex courts of both India and Pakistan have recognized "third sex" in a historic ruling ([Ramay 2017](#), [Redding 2019](#), [Fazi and Bibi 2020](#)). Supreme Court of Pakistan, in a verdict in 2012, calls them "equal citizens" of Pakistan, protecting their social and legal rights at the same time refers them as a community with psychological "disorder"; such a decision earned both appreciation and condemnation, giving hype to the nationwide discussion on the identity of the third gender community in the country ([Ramay 2017](#)).

The role of media is significant in any society. The content of media that represents the identity of transgender is crucial to pay attention to. Healthy media content has a beneficial impact on the collective psychology of community, whereas harmful content troubles societies by encouraging discrimination for the minorities, ethnicities, races, and identity of the gender ([Mal 2015](#)). Media portrayal of transgender is responsible for identifying and recognizing the trans community as an equal society member in a society. As media ingress the masses, it influences its content consumers. The media's treatment of the transgender community molds the way people behave and act towards them. Mainly, news and information media contribute to creating awareness, acceptability, and recognition of transgender members in society (Shaw, 2010).

During the last few years, media coverage of transgender including LGBT, has increased ([Pham et al. 2020](#)). This trend has endorsed specific social changes. In Pakistan, such a shift in media trend is more prevalent after the year 2009. At the same time, media in Pakistan portray gender concerning the population ratio in the country. However, male-oriented culture dominates media culture in Pakistan. Thus coverage of the minorities and transgender community in media is minimal ([Silva de Assis, 2014](#)).

Taking account of the presence of the transgender community in the political and media sphere is unique. Both electronic and print media gave coverage to transgender candidates in their election

campaigns at the national and international levels. However, in the general election of 2018, transgender candidates from other constituencies and NA-53 and NA-124 got coverage in a discouraging way. Many polling stations were out of access to the people with disabilities, thus placing transgender people as the special members with "disabilities" ([Awan, 2018](#)).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To gauge the frequency of media coverage given to the transgender community in mainstream Pakistani newspapers.
- To explore the political sphere of the transgender community in Pakistani print media.
- To reach the scope of the transgender community in the media content of Pakistani newspapers
- To analyze the representation of the transgender community during election campaigns in Pakistani media.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research answers the following research questions:

- What is the frequency of media coverage of the transgender community in Pakistani media?
- How much space does the transgender community get in the mainstream Pakistani print media?
- Do Pakistani newspapers cover the transgender community during election campaigns in Pakistan?

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Media is the watchdog of society; hence it plays a significant role in the wellbeing of society. Media can introduce new trends in society. Media makes people's minds by creating perceptions, affecting behaviors, teaching communities, and persuading institutions. The role of media becomes more significant when it gives voice to the voiceless. The same is the case with the transgender community in the world, a vulnerable group of people. In a country like Pakistan, where discrimination against minorities and special social groups is prevalent, media can play a vital role in protecting their rights and identities. Unfortunately, the transgender community gets very little focus in media. Researchers have studied their portrayal in general, but no heed has been shown to their scope in media while covering them in political spheres. Thus this study helps to fill this research gap and tries to locate transgender in media while practicing politics in the country.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multiple studies have covered the LGBT community in society. But still, transgender denoted by "T" went ignored in broader aspects. While discussing the transgender community with particular reference to their media portrayal or treatment, it has come under observation that the community gets depiction under marginalized and stereotypical conceptions. In most cases, they represent victims of social discrimination facing an identity crisis in almost every society, ignoring their role in responsible and empowered spheres like politics and government.

A study conducted on the media coverage of the transgender community shows that most of the selected media outlets underrepresented and disregarded them from being regular social members in contemporary societies. The study also revealed that opinion and editorial pages of the newspapers covered the related issues of the transgender community when the government gave a particular stance on the improvement of their status in one respect or the other ([Parveen, 2018](#)).

Similarly, another study notes that media coverage of the transgender community is insufficient and lacks in many respects as issues and problems faced by them get the minor content in the

media discourse. Moreover, it also comes to notice that most media has representation bias towards the transgender community, focusing on promoting their stereotypical image ([Awan, 2018](#)).

Likewise, [Billard \(2016\)](#) and [Arune \(2006\)](#) observe that media portray transgender people as criminals or the individuals of the society that are more active in certain crimes like drug circulation and addiction, sex work, human trafficking, and prostitution. Among the criminal categories under which the transgender community discussed, the highest figure of 40.5 % was noted under the prohibited category prostitution ([Asghar, 2018](#)). It comes under observation that in most of the media content, they get name called with offensive and discriminatory words like "Khusra and hijra," etc. while neglecting the unbiased and accepted term for the community "transgender" or "third sex." These discriminatory and slang terms are prevalent in news reports, news articles, and editorial content. Their representation as the criminal agents in society represented them as prejudiced social members. ([Asghar & Shahzad, 2018](#)).

This notion also gets support from another study. The survey results show that about 80% of the participants agree that the treatment of the transgender community in media is inappropriate. In contrast, others believed that media was the source of mockery for the community ([Kermode, 2010](#)). The respondents also held that in most of the cases, media use third genders for entertaining purposes. Moreover, media does not give equal representation to all members of the third gender community; instead, it focuses more on "Trans males" while ignoring "Trans females".

In another survey ([McInroy, 2015](#)) the study respondents opine that traditional media outlets are more reliable in covering third genders compared to the new media. At the same time, online media sources are more expressive and freedom-oriented while dealing with the identity of the transgender community in a particular social sphere. Similarly, online media is more informative for giving views about the process and experience of changing gender.

[Ryan \(2009\)](#), in many of the comprehensive studies of trans people representation in media to this day, met with four periodic stereotypes in trans-representation for history – Transgender Monster, Transgender Deceiver, the Transgender Mammy, and Transgender Revolutionary as an emergent, more advanced image through the latest documentary. Additionally, she highlights a historical tendency to pay attention on the sensational particulars of the lives of transgender people, rather than on the socio-cultural context in which people have been working to enunciate their identities and ask for their guarded rights.

[Philips \(2006\)](#) identifies a similar junction when he highlights that transgender identity in film highlights a "normativity that is invariably coming along with a prurient fascination." As [Heyes \(2003\)](#) describes in short, "Until now, the public trans person was the most usually manipulated as a sexual fetish, a talk-show gimmick, or inform all sensationalist.

Indubitably, media are not singled in trying with new methods to talk of gender(s). As feminist critics have mostly pointed out the manners in which our culture and language are essentially gendered, how much that gendering prohibits what it is possible to think, to utter or to be ([Fausto-Sterling 2000; Irigaray 1993](#)).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Framing theory provides the theoretical base of the study. Framing theory explains the way media presents certain information to consumers. Goffman defines framing as "the scheme of interpretation that enables individuals to locate, perceive, identify and label occurrences or life experiences" ([Cissel, 2012](#)).

Framing has its concept related to agenda setting, also called 2nd step agenda-setting. As observed by most communication researchers, framing is an extension of agenda-setting, extending the

notion of "what to think (agenda setting)" to "what to think about (framing)" ([Baran & Davis, 2016](#)).

Framing theory explains that how media create a perception about specific issues. As for the transgender community, the way they get framed and covered in media makes certain perceptions about them among the media consumers. Thus, news framing of the issues related to third genders has a lot to do with the way people perceive this community in our society. In this context, framing theory can help understand certain media outlets' frames to cover a particular issue.

METHODOLOGY

Researchers employ a quantitative content analysis approach to analyze the data.

CONTENT ANALYSIS

It was noted, "Content Analysis is used to identify, enumerate, and analyze occurrences of specific messages and message characteristics embedded in texts and content of communication" (Neuman, 2011).

THE POPULATION OF THE STUDY

English daily Dawn and Urdu newspaper Daily Jang published from January 2018 to July 2018 were analyzed.

SAMPLE OF THE STUDY

While applying systematic random sampling, the study sample includes news items, articles, and editorials covering the transgender community in the general election 2018. The total sample consists of 73 newspaper items published during the defined period.

VARIABLES OF THE STUDY

The researchers in the given study defined dependent and independent variables.

INDEPENDENT VARIABLE

Selected media outlets Dawn and Jang are independent variables.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Representation of the third gender (transgender) is a dependent variable.

RESULTS/FINDINGS

The findings are shown numerically in tables, placing those under three categories, i.e., Negative and Neutral. The focus of the analysis is to dissect the frequency, space, and political sphere in which transgender community is reported in the selected newspapers. The main purpose of the analysis is to give quantitative stance to the number of news items, news articles and editorials published in defined newspapers regarding transgender community in Pakistan.

Table 1. Total frequency of the news items, articles and editorials

Newspapers	News items	News articles	Editorials
Dawn	08	05	04
Jang	12	08	03
Total	20	13	07

Table 1 shows the frequency of the total media content, news items, news articles, and editorials published in Dawn and Jang during the given period from January 2018 to July 2018. The results show that Dawn newspaper publishes 08 news items, 05 news articles, and 04 editorials. While

during the given period, Jang publishes 12 news items, 08 news articles, and 03 editorials regarding the political participation of the transgender community.

Table 2. Space is given to the media content (news items, news articles, and editorials)

Media content	Front page	Editorial page	Back page
Dawn	03	04	10
Jang	07	03	12
Total	10	07	22

Findings in Table 2 show that Dawn published 03 media content on the front page, 04 on the editorial page, and ten on the back page. While in Daily Jang, 07 stories were published on the front page, 03 on the editorial page, and 12 on the back page. Thus, ten articles were published on the front page, seven on the editorial page, and 22 on the back page in both newspapers.

Table 3. Total categories published in the newspapers

Newspapers	Positive	Negative	Neutral/Balanced
Dawn	02	11	04
Jang	10	08	05
Total	12	19	09

Findings in Table 3 show that during the defined period, in Dawn, 02 media items (news articles, news items, and editorials) fall under the positive category, 11 negative, and 04 neutral categories. While in the case of Jang, the figures for the positive, negative, and neutral types are 10, 08, and 05, respectively.

Table 4. Political participation

Newspapers	Transgender Candidates	Transgender voters
Dawn	03	02
Jang	10	04
Total	13	06

The findings in Table 4 show in Dawn newspaper 03 news items published about the transgender candidates who participated in the general election of 2018 and 02 news items for the transgender voters. While Jang published 10 and 04 news items for candidate category voter category respectively. Thus total 13 news items were published in Dawn and 06 published in Jang.

DISCUSSION

This study focuses on the media presentation of political participation of the transgender community in mainstream Pakistani English and Urdu newspapers. The study's findings show that the transgender community gets minimal representation in Pakistani mainstream print media. The study discovers that the third gender gets minimum coverage with particular reference to the political participation in general elections 2018. The study's findings get support by previous similar studies focusing transgender community and its coverage in media. The frequency of the total media content, news items, news articles, and editorials published in Dawn and Jang during the given period from January 2018 to July 2018 show that in Dawn newspaper total of 08 news items, 05 news articles, and 04 editorials were published. While during the given period, Jang published 12 news items, 08 news articles, and 03 editorials regarding the political participation of the transgender community. Space is given to this content also faced discrimination with less coverage on the front and editorial pages and more on the selected newspapers' back pages. Similarly, prominent figures of the negative coverage and low value for the positive and neutral categories also support the concept that the transgender community is a marginalized part of society.

CONCLUSION

This study dissects the media presentation of the political participation of the transgender community in Pakistan. Two leading dailies of Pakistan, i.e., Daily Dawn and Daily Jang, were selected for comparative analysis to meet this purpose. While analyzing both the Urdu and English press of the country, it comes to notice that the transgender community is underrepresented in the media discourses of Pakistan. Editorial is an integral part of any newspaper considered the voice of the newspaper's policy, but the political participation of the transgender community gets minimal editorial coverage. Thus, the reality is that the transgender community is being further marginalized with the least coverage in the media outlets. Placement and space of the related content in the defined newspapers also support this bias against them.

Limitations of the Study

The results of this study do not reflect necessarily the role of other newspapers of Pakistan in transgender community's representation.

Recommendations

The researchers suggest the following recommendation in the light of the study conducted.

- As both media outlets Dawn and Jang, have a large circulation in the country, they can improve the quality of news to mend the perception of third genders in the public sphere.
- Media as the voice of the voiceless can play an integral part in improving the community's perception in broader aspects.
- In the future, employing qualitative methods like discourse analysis, semiotics analysis, etc., to get a clear stance of the media handling of the transgender community.

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Authors Contribution

- The main idea of this research work and related literature were devised and reviewed respectively by Memoona Ilyas. Although the theory portion was dealt by Dr. Awais H. Gillani, the method, analysis and conclusion were verified and done with by Ali Khan Ghumro. At last, Rameez Ali Mahesar did introduction, designed the abstract and structured the references accordingly.

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- Media Presentation of Political Participation of Transgender Community in Pakistan
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