

Research Article

**'Seeking Safe Haven' - Plight of World Refugees and Media Voicing: Glimpses of American and Pakistani Media**

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**Abstract**

Security threats due to ongoing civil wars and persecution in different parts of the world have forced millions of people to evacuate their homes, rendering them vulnerable. Most of them are fated to take dangerous voyages to seek a safe place in other countries. Being voiceless in their miseries, the media can play a greater part in highlighting the unheard plight of refugees. This study focuses on the depiction of world refugees and the role of the media in this regard. The news items from American (The New York Times, The Washington Post) and Pakistani (Dawn and The News) newspapers have been studied over a stretch of 12 months during 2017-2018. Findings of the content analysis reveal that both Pakistani and American newspapers give positive coverage of refugees. The Pakistani press has been more frequent in portraying refugees under the positive (+) category. However, American newspapers give more diverse but less positive and impartial coverage of the issue when compared with Pakistani media outlets. All the news items used credible sources, including UNHCR..

**Keywords:** *Refugees, UNHCR, Safe haven, Plight, Media voicing.*

**Introduction**

The refugee disaster in Syria has been delineated as "the greatest humanitarian crisis in a generation". The shocking conflict, which started in 2011, stretched all across the country as a protracted, multifarious, and multidimensional confrontation. It has been characterized by acute viciousness (DPI, 2016). Recently, Syria is undergoing the most serious refugee emergency worldwide. The United Nations Refugee Agency, UNHCR, reported that about

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4.8 million refugees from Syria are living in bordering countries, and many others have crossed the Mediterranean Sea to seek refuge in Europe (UN General Assembly, 2016).

UNHCR (2009) reported that the interim government under Supreme Court ruling formalized the position of the 150,000 stateless Bihari population in the country who were children during the independence war of Bangladesh and those who were born in the country since the war and granted effective citizenship with the right to vote. Moreover, UNHCR was also allowed by the government to issue identity cards to all refugees individually residing in refugee camps as well as urban areas. Despite the court ruling declaring that Bihari's were entitled to be registered to vote in the Bangladesh election of December 2008, the election commission sized its rolls, leaving them without being enrolled to vote. In India, the UN Refugee Agency is taking care of about 11,000 refugees, mainly from Afghanistan and Myanmar (UNHCR , 2009).

Brandon and Dunaway (2008) in their study noted that terrestrial proximity proves to be an undeniable element in determining media patterns of immigration and refugees. Media organizations closer to the border cover refugees and immigration more frequently but with a negative portrayal, while media with less proximity to the border report relatively less about the issue but with comparatively positive impressions (Branton & Dunaway, 2008).

Refugee camps alongside border areas amount to crisis communication and, as such, it is the ethical responsibility of the media to cover these events in a more appropriate manner. Another study revealed that reporting crises is always done in an irresponsible manner. Despite uninterrupted coverage, the media usually fails to report the required information about the victims. In an interview, Nabil Al Khatib, the executive editor of 'Al Arabiya', noted that the stories of victims in conflicts are taken as inferior to those of daily routine-based ones. Crises reporting is mostly done in a general way with no particular concern, leading towards the least public interest in the story. Crises such as in Palestine, Syria, Iraq, and many others need to be covered in a unique way with a humanitarian stance to maximize public interest. The media covers dead bodies but never the families of the deceased. It covers militants, not civilians, and never covers the number of Syrians left in Syria needing refuge (Centre for international media assistance, 2016).

Another study noted that various events from 2000 to 2009 played a dominant role in deciding media discourse on refugees and asylum seekers. For example, taking the Iraq war of 2003 into account, asylum and immigration associated with Islam and terrorism became a dominant trend in British print and electronic media. The discussions in the media regarding immigrants are more often harsh, framing them as threats to state welfare, criminals, deviants from ethnic and cultural context, and security compromise. Although there were also positive narratives in both electronic and print media, on some occasions, there could be negative and positive news on the same day's coverage (Threadgold, 2009).

The media has an important role to play in such humanitarian crisis situations, one that does not simply go for documentation of a disaster, but plays a pivotal role in this regard. When victims of humanitarian calamities are struggling for basic needs and rights, the media is the only source which can provide a basic fundamental resource, i.e., information. This very crucial resource strives to save lives, improve humanitarian effectiveness, help manage community expectations, give affected populations a voice and can fulfill people's right to know. The media also provides vital psychosocial support. For example, the Eastern Chad

Humanitarian Information Service provided an important space for female victims of sexual violence to highlight their trauma in a culturally accepted way, along with the broadcast of information that corrected misconceptions and rumors (Internews, 2014).

Studies have shown that countries of origin represented more of the suffering and issues faced by their citizens as refugees than any other media. Supporting this concept, a study noted that social justice activists and the media represented refugees as compulsive sufferers to attract funding and to publicize a particular agenda. Media coverage of the inhumane treatment of Sudanese in Israel was the same everywhere. Sudanese electronic web-journals were frequent to update issues like human rights abuses against Sudanese refugees, criticize the cruel political system in Sudan against its own citizens, and the disappointment on the part of human rights organizations to protect the weak. Other than that, Sudanese online media also posted Australian media reports showing how Sudanese refugees have been deprived of jobs and services due to projected racism against Muslim blacks. For example, the news that a 28-year-old Southern Sudanese man had four children was beaten to death by a 16-year-old boy five months after his arrival, was posted by Sudanese online media (Fadlalla, 2009).

Press in Costa Rica on the status of Nicaraguan refugees during the 1980s presented them negatively; only a few articles portrayed the issue positively. As the numbers grew, images and perceptions of refugees predominantly became more and more negative. They were no longer considered victims of violence, persecution, and war. Rather, they were held responsible for violence and instability in the host countries. Certain themes took hold in news reports about the refugees, such as "panics", "threat", "social burden", "masses" and "destabilizing". Most journalists did not want them to enter the country (Larson, 1995).

A study, which analyzed Hungarian newspapers, considered the issue of refugees and asylum seekers as an "official" one. The theme of law and political concern about the status of refugees was also prevalent. Although the themes of crime and violence were also found. There were some articles and reports covering disputes between refugees and the police, as well as between immigrants and residents. Overall, little coverage was given by the Hungarian newspapers to the topics related to refugees (Vicsek, Keszi, & Markus, 2008).

## **Research Objectives**

- To find the frequency of media coverage in American and Pakistani newspapers regarding refugees
- To present a comparative analysis of American and Pakistani newspapers regarding refugees

## **Research questions**

- RQ1. Do American and Pakistani print media give frequent coverage to refugees?  
RQ2. Do American and Pakistani print media give equal coverage to refugees?

## **Hypothesis**

- H1:** American and Pakistani newspapers give biased coverage to refugees.

## Literature review

Social media, being a routine habit of people, has become more prevalent than the print or broadcast media while creating awareness about any issue. Ayvaz and Nazan (2018) analyzed public opinion and sentiments regarding Syrian refugees. It was noted that there was a difference between Turkish and English tweets regarding the issue. Currently, Turkey is hosting the world's largest refugee community. Turkish tweets were more positive than negative and balanced. Conversely, the English tweets evenly covered all three categories. In comparison of positive tweets, English tweets were less positive than the others (Ozturka & Ayvazb, 2018).

Similarly, Steimel (2009) in a study revealed that American newspapers in human-interest stories covered refugees as victims. For example, young Somali refugees were described as targets for terrorist organizations' recruitment. Moreover, refugees are victims of America's economic crisis. As a consequence, they are unable to get proper jobs. The importance of education for refugees to integrate into American society was also one of the topics in human interest stories (Steimel, 2010).

The research conducted by employing critical discourse analysis on the refugee's portrayal through conservative and liberal media sources in the UK and US revealed that no major differences were found between conservative and liberal media sources, but conservative media presented refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers in a slightly negative way. It was also noted that American media sources drew more sympathy and concern from the public regarding refugees and asylum seekers than British ones, which proved to be more negative portraying them with CDA categories like law; damage to national law, countries of refuge, identification; country they belong to and numbers; crowds passing through Europe (Boev, 2016).

The media's choices of frames and themes serve their profit margin. Like sympathy, misery, sorrow, and grief in the news seek more attention from the public. In a study, it was noted that coverage in newspapers based on a particular slant is to maximize their profit margin. The newspapers choose angles of news with multiple variations in accordance with the interest level of their readers. The slant which matches the potential readers is preferred. (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010).

Similarly, along with frames, themes, and linguistic discourses, the most important element is the place given to news stories in the newspaper. A study in support of the concept noted that news of the Jewish holocaust during World War II was either not published in most newspapers in the US or was given the least noticeable place in the newspaper. For instance, the news about the killing of two million Jews in June 1942 was placed at the bottom of page 6 of the *Chicago Tribune*. The story was treated similarly by other major papers. Many readers could not notice the story. While those who did see it had an excuse to question its credibility for being on the inner pages of the newspapers. Similarly, in mid-1943, the news of the persecution of Jews was also not given any importance. In July, an article on the front page of the *Times* covered the governor of New York giving up tennis and donating his playing shoes. At the same time, a story about the massive killing of Jews was placed on page 6. (Wieser, 1995).

Another research revealed that English-language newspapers are more negative than Spanish-language newspapers while covering the phenomenon of immigration. The reason might be the fact that English-language newspapers have a larger scope in the international media market with a large readership as compared to the others, as well as English-language newspapers undergo a more competitive environment as compared to Spanish-language newspapers. Negative news can attract more readership than positive news (Branton & Dunaway, 2008).

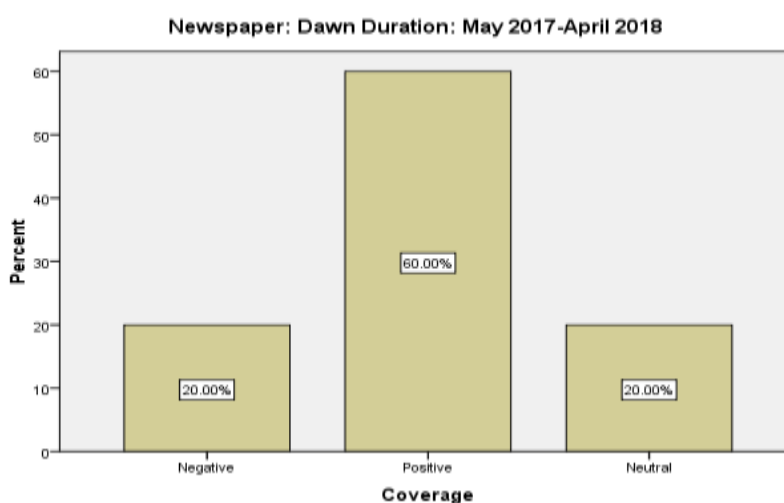
### Methodology

While implying framing theory, this study used quantitative content analysis as a research method to conduct this research. A systematic random sampling technique has been used to draw a sample from a given population.

### Findings

The findings of content analysis have been presented in the form of graphs and tabulated form.

**Figure 1. Portrayal of refugee crisis in Dawn during one year from May 2017 to April 2018.**



**Table 1**

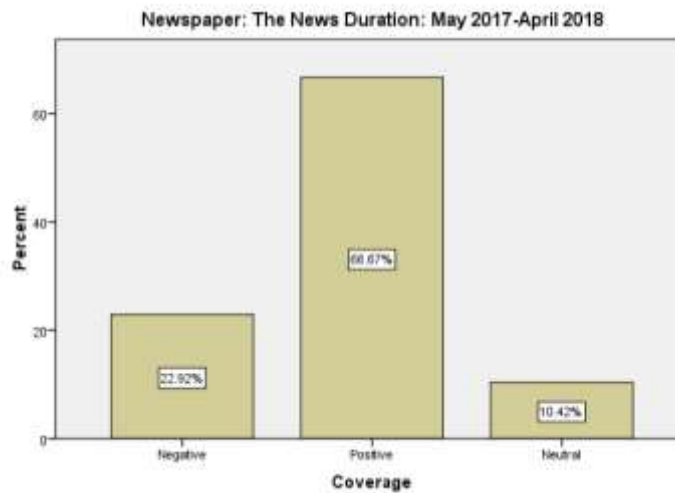
*Newspaper: Dawn Duration May 2017-April 2018*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Negative	7	20.0	20.0	20.0
	Positive	21	60.0	60.0	80.0
	Neutral	7	20.0	20.0	100.0
<b>Total</b>		35	100.0	100.0	

Figure 1, table 1 show the frequency of news items and editorials published in Dawn during one year from May 2017 to April 2018. Values in the graph depict that 60% of the coverage is for positive (+) category while negative (-) and neutral (0) categories comprise of 20% of the coverage for each. It shows that Dawn mostly portrayed refugee crisis positively

in its news discourse during defined period of time while equally portrayed this issue negatively and neutrally.

**Figure 2. Portrayal of refugee crisis in The News during one year from May 2017 to April 2018.**



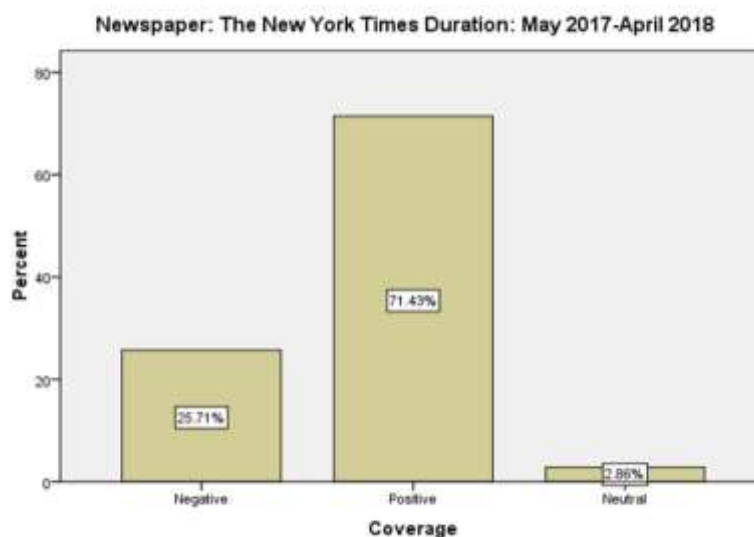
**Table**

*Newspaper: The News Duration: May 2017-April 2018*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Negative	11	22.9	22.9	22.9
Positive	32	66.7	66.7	89.6
Neutral	5	10.4	10.4	100.0
Total	48	100.0	100.0	

Figure 2, table 2 mention the frequency of news items and editorials published in The News International during one year from May 2017 to April 2018. Readings in graph show the highest coverage of 66.67 % for positive (+) category while 22.92% for Negative category (-) and 10.42 % for neutral (0) category. It shows that more than 65 percent of coverage in The News portrayed refugee crisis positively while less coverage comprised of negative category during selected period of time. Moreover newspaper showed least coverage for neutral category regarding refugee crisis.

**Figure 3. Portrayal of refugee crisis in The New York Times during one year from May 2017 to April 2018.**



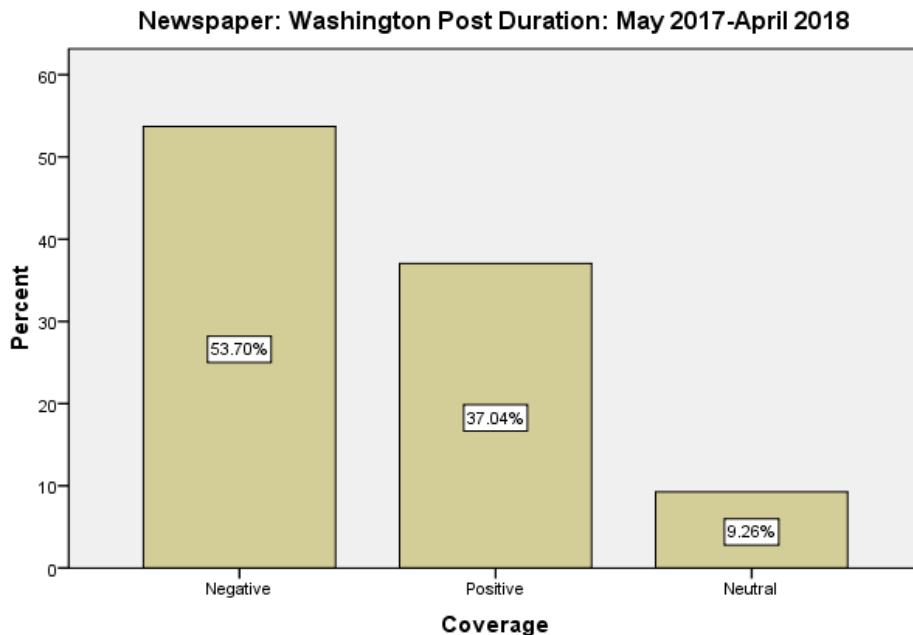
**Table 3**

*Newspaper: The New York Times Duration: May 2017-April 2018*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Negative	9	25.7	25.7	25.7
	Positive	25	71.4	71.4	97.1
	Neutral	1	2.9	2.9	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	35	100.0	100.0	

Figure 3, table 3 show the frequency of news items published in The New York Times during on year from May 2017 to April 2018. Values in graph depict the highest value of 71.43 % for positive (+) category while 25.71% for negative (-) category and 2.86% for neutral category. Values show that more than 70 % of the total coverage of The New York Times regarding refugee crisis is positive and comparatively small coverage comprises of negative category. Moreover very small value of neutral coverage can be noticed in the newspaper during defined period of time.

**Figure 4. Portrayal of refugee crisis in The Washington Post during one year from May 2017 to April 2018.**



**Table**

*Newspaper: Washington Post Duration: May 2017-April 2018*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Negative	29	53.7	53.7	53.7
	Positive	20	37.0	37.0	90.7
	Neutral	5	9.3	9.3	100.0

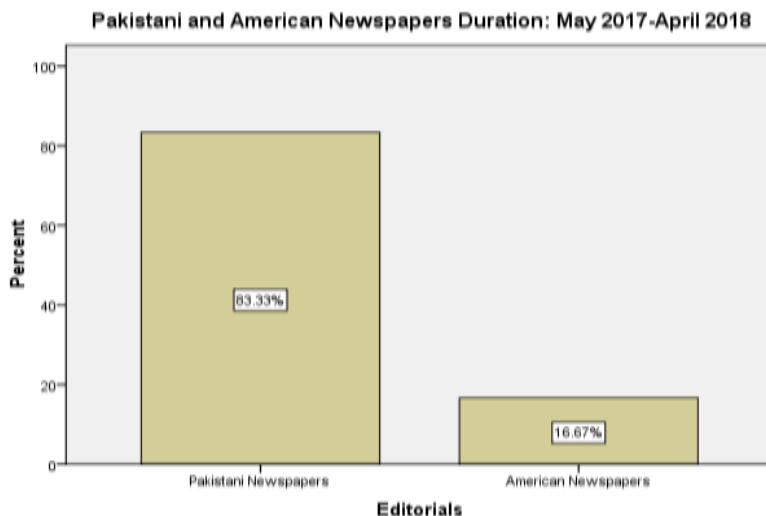
*Newspaper: Washington Post Duration: May 2017-April 2018*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Negative	29	53.7	53.7	53.7
	Positive	20	37.0	37.0	90.7
	Neutral	5	9.3	9.3	100.0
<b>Total</b>		54	100.0	100.0	

Figure 4, table 4 show the frequency of news items and editorials published in The Washington Post during one year from May 2017 to April 2018. Readings in graph depict the highest value of 53.70% for negative (-) category while 37.04% for positive (+) and 9.26% for neutral (0) category. The values show that more than 50 percent of the coverage in Washington Post portrayed refugee crisis negatively while least coverage portrayed issue neutrally. Less than 40 percent coverage of the total coverage portrayed refugee crisis positively.



**Figure 5. Portrayal of refugee crisis in editorials published in American and Pakistani newspapers during May 2017 to April 2018.**



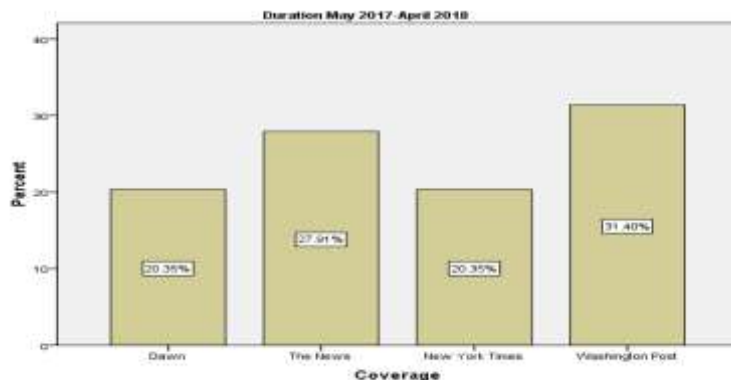
**Table 5**

*Editorials*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Pakistani Newspapers	5	83.3	83.3	83.3
American Newspapers	1	16.7	16.7	100.0
<b>Total</b>	6	100.0	100.0	

Figure 5, table 5 show the frequency of editorials published in American and Pakistani newspapers during one year from May 2017 to April 2018. The values in the graph depict the higher value of 83.33% for Pakistani newspapers while 16.67% for American newspapers. Which means Pakistani newspaper published higher number of editorials than American newspapers regarding refugee crisis.

**Figure 6. Total frequency of news items and editorials published in selected newspapers during May 2017 to April 2018.**



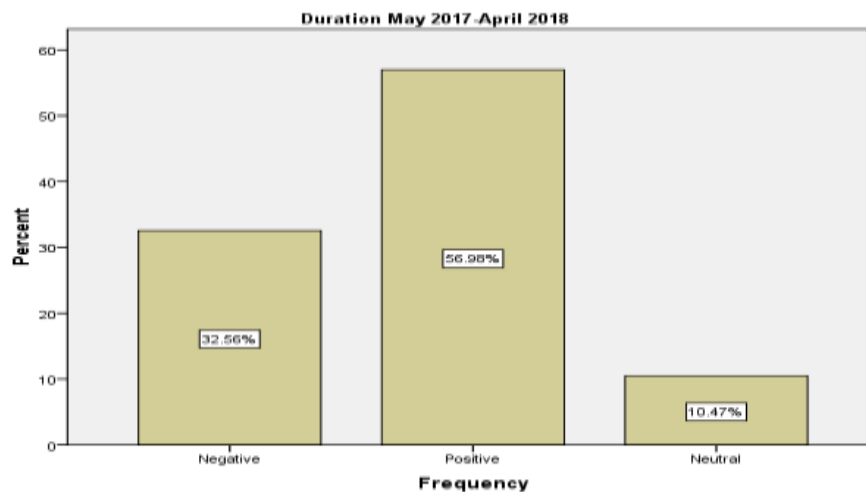
**Table 6**

*Coverage*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Dawn	35	20.3	20.3	20.3
	The News	48	27.9	27.9	48.3
	New York Times	35	20.3	20.3	68.6
	Washington Post	54	31.4	31.4	100.0
	Total	172	100.0	100.0	

Figure 6, table 6 show the maximum value of 31.40% for Washington Post and 27.91% for The News International while 20.35% for each Dawn and The New York Times. It means that among the selected Pakistani and American newspapers Washington Post gave maximum coverage to refugee crisis during selected period of time. The News showed second highest value for coverage of the refugee crisis while Dawn and The New York Times showed equal coverage to the issue.

**Figure 7. Total frequency of categories (positive, negative and neutral) published in American and Pakistani newspapers during May 2017 to April 2018.**

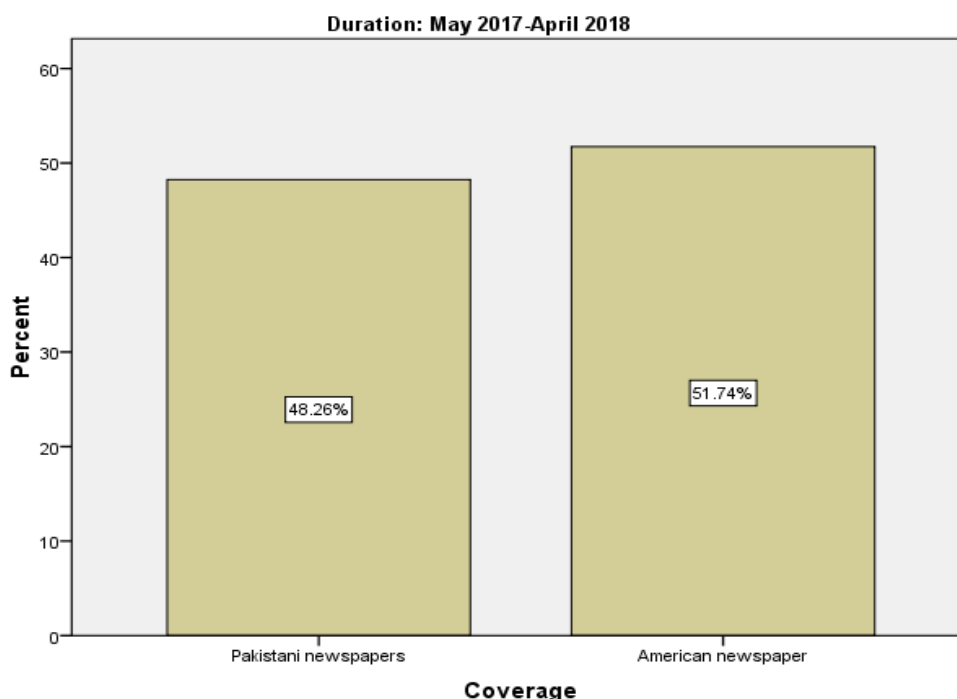


**Table 7**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Negative	56	32.6	32.6	32.6
	Positive	98	57.0	57.0	89.5
	Neutral	18	10.5	10.5	100.0
	Total	172	100.0	100.0	

Figure 7, table 7 reveal the highest value of 56.58% for positive category, 32.56% for negative category and 10.47% for neutral category. It means that more than 50 percent of the total coverage of refugee crisis was positive in selected American and Pakistani newspapers during defined period of time. Least value for neutral category shows that few neutral news items and editorials were published in the selected newspapers while negative coverage was higher than neutral but less than positive category.

**Figure 8. Frequency of news items and editorials published in Pakistani and American newspapers regarding refugee crisis during defined period of time.**



**Table 8**

*Total coverage in Pakistani and American newspapers*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Pakistan	83	48.3	48.3	48.3
	America	89	51.7	51.7	100.0
	Total	172	100.0	100.0	

Figure 8, table 8 show that American newspapers The New York Times and The Washington Post covered refugee crisis more frequently as compared to Pakistani newspapers The News and Dawn. Values in the graph depicts 51.74% coverage attributed to American print media while 48.26% for Pakistani print media.

**Figure 9. Frequency of news items and editorials published in Pakistani newspapers regarding refugee crisis during one year from May 2017 to April 2018.**



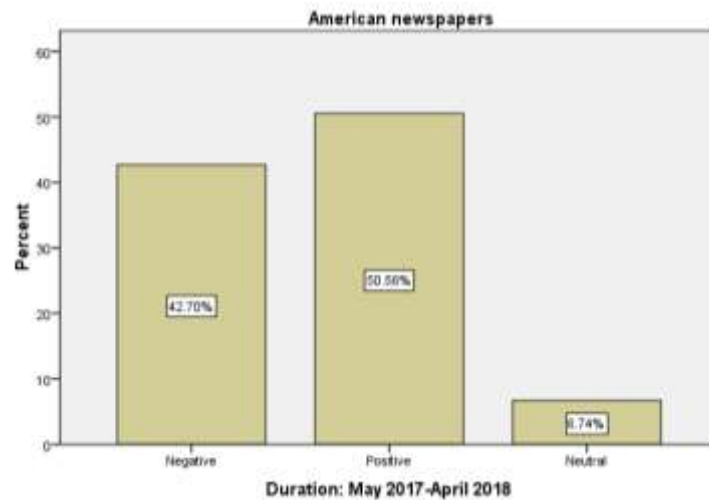
**Table 9**

*Pakistani newspapers*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Negative	18	21.7	21.7	21.7
	Positive	53	63.9	63.9	85.5
	Neutral	12	14.5	14.5	100.0
	Total	83	100.0	100.0	

Figure 9, table 9 demonstrate the highest value of positive (+) value of 63.86% for the news and editorial publications in Pakistani newspapers regarding refugee crisis during selected period of time. Comparatively highly smaller value for the negative (-) category was observed as 21.69%. Similarly neutral (0) news and editorial content was noted with the least value of 14.46%.

**Figure 10. Portrayal of refugee crisis in editorials and news items published in American newspapers during May 2017 to April 2018.**



**Table 10**

*American newspapers*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Negative	38	42.7	42.7	42.7
	Positive	45	50.6	50.6	93.3
	Neutral	6	6.7	6.7	100.0
Total		89	100.0	100.0	

Figure 10, table 10 show that American newspapers demonstrated positive (+) news and editorial coverage regarding refugee crisis during given period of time. Positive (+) category was marked with the value of 50.56% while negative (-) category depicted 42.70% of the coverage. Moreover smallest value of 6.74% was observed for the neutral (0) category.

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>	<b>Valid Percent</b>	<b>Cumulative Percent</b>
Dawn				
Total	35	100	100	
Positive	21	60.0	60.0	80.0
Negative	07	20.0	20.0	20.0
Neutral	07	20.0	20.0	100.0
The News				
Total	48			
Positive	32	66.7	66.7	89.6
Negative	11	22.9	22.9	22.9
Neutral	05	10.4	10.4	100.0
New York Times				
Total	35			
Positive	25	71.4	71.4	97.1
Negative	09	25.7	25.7	25.7
Neutral	01	02.9	02.9	100.0
Washington Post				
Total	54			
Positive	20	37.0	37.0	90.7
Negative	29	53.7	53.7	53.7
Neutral	05	09.3	09.3	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>172</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

**Table 11**

Cumulative frequency table

**Hypothesis testing**

This research work focused on the portrayal of refugee crisis in American and Pakistani mainstream newspapers. Total four newspapers were chosen for this study comprising of two America newspapers (The New York Times and The Washington Post) and two Pakistani (Dawn and The News International).

**Categories \* Newspaper Cross tabulation**

Count

	Newspaper	Total
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		Dawn	The News	Washington Post	New York Times	
Categories	positive	21	32	20	25	98
	negative	7	11	29	9	56
	neutral	7	5	5	1	18
Total		35	48	54	35	172

### **H1.American and Pakistani newspapers give biased coverage to refugees.**

Thus the values in given table shows that H1 is rejected as the frequency of positive news items and editorials published in Pakistani and American newspapers regarding refugees is the highest than the other two categories whereas null hypothesis is accepted.

### **Relationship between portrayal of refugee crisis and Pakistani and American newspapers in case of news items and editorials.**

#### **Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.935 <sup>a</sup>	6	.001
Likelihood Ratio	21.729	6	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	.686	1	.408
N of Valid Cases	172		

Values in the given table show that by applying Chi-Square test relationship between portrayal of refugee crisis and Pakistani and American newspapers in case of news items and editorials is statistically insignificant ( $p\text{-value} > 0.05$ ). Thus it can be deduced that American and Pakistani newspapers do not give biased coverage to refugees.

### **Conclusion**

The defined print media of this study demonstrated a key role in portraying the ongoing refugee crisis globally, a consequence of war and persecution in particular countries. Findings of the content analysis show that the selected newspapers overall portrayed the issue positively. Meanwhile, the frequency of news content and editorials published regarding refugees, during a given period of time, was higher in American newspapers than in Pakistani newspapers. Collectively, both the media placed refugees as sufferers of human rights abuses. The analysis of individual newspapers revealed that Pakistani newspapers Dawn and the News portrayed the refugee crisis more positively with 53 positive publications out of a total of 83, as compared to American newspapers with 45 positive publications out of a total of 89 publications based on refugees. Furthermore, among two Pakistani newspapers, The News was more positive towards the issue with 32 positive publications than Dawn with 21 positive publications. At the same time, in the case of American dailies, The New York Times

positioned the refugee crisis more positively with 25 positive content out of a total of 35, as compared to The Washington Post with the least positive content of 20 publications out of a total of 54. Among all newspapers, The Washington Post was observed to have the most negative portrayal of the refugee crisis in its news and editorial publications, with the number reaching 29. The overall findings demonstrated that the under-consideration media portrayed the refugee crisis positively in its publications. A total of 172 publications were published in American and Pakistani newspapers during the defined one year, out of which 98 publications were positive (+), 56 were negative (-), while 18 were neutral (0).

Therefore, it can be concluded that the media serves as a supervisory body in society. At times, its partial portrayal of the issue causes prejudiced perceptions among consumers regarding a particular issue, but at the same time, factual coverage and reality-based media content have related effects on people's discernment of the issue.

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