

Representation of Kashmir Issue in the Mainstream Newspapers of Pakistan and India: A Test of Media Conformity Theory

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Abstract

National issues always occupy prominent space and air time in national mainstream media and generally the foreign policy of the country. So same is the case, by and large, with mainstream media of Pakistan and India, while covering disputed issues by observing the principles of foreign policies of their respective countries. Of all contentious issues, the dispute over Kashmir was and still remains as a bone of contention between Pakistan and India. This research article focuses on editorial representation of the Kashmir issue in the most popular and prestigious newspapers—Dawn and The Tribune—of Pakistan and India, respectively in the mirror of media conformity theory. In this connection, the method of content analysis was applied on the 76 and 62 leading articles of The Tribune and Dawn, respectively. Primarily, it was a census study, as entire coverage on Kashmir issue was taken as sample. The overall analysis of 138 editorials and articles endorsed

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premise of media conformity theory as both the selected newspapers of both countries setting the agenda on Kashmir issue positively in the light of foreign policy of their respective country. Likewise, it explores the selected print media of both the countries considering national interest as a supreme priority instead of universal professional canons of journalism. The results also indicate that media coverage of the issue was the reflection of realizing national responsibility, projection of national propaganda instead of cynical and critical stance towards their respective regimes.

Introduction

The power of media has a political support. The elementary function of media is to provide guidance and information to the masses. At present, media conformity to fulfil official expectations is more commonly seen as compared to the explicit censorship by political leadership and military *quasi* regimes. Although, traditionally, media flourished with the rise of democratic practices, but this does not provide the guarantee that mass media essentially backs democracy.¹

Usually, the media organizations inclined to catalogue the facts or reality in several layouts in a differing framework which moreover obscures the type of the argument and the mode of its projection. Hence, it can be said the makeup provided to the conflicts is mainly an imitative of the aspects like power politics, particular national interests and the prominence of the issue to the stakeholders who regulate the information from being disseminated at global level. Therefore, Kashmir conflict can be understood via three types of media coverage. One is projection through influential media at international level (mainly involves western sources). The other two are the national media of Pakistan and India. For instance, fresh aspect is that of the Kashmiri language's pronunciation of their interests.²

1 Noeline Gannaway, "Mind Control and the Media" Converge.org. November 15, 2008. Accessed February 26, 2010. http://www.converge.org.nz/pirm/mind_con.htm

2 Wilbur Schramm, *Circulation of News in the Third World: A Study of Asia* (Chinese University Press, 1995).

Today, the Kashmir issue is viewed as the oldest international conflict which is still waiting to be resolved. It is considered as a bone of contention between Pakistan and India. International community also accepts this fact and says that unless and until Kashmir dispute is not resolved there cannot be peaceful relations between Pakistan and India. India is not ready to accept this fact, therefore, the Indian security forces are practicing an unparalleled primacy of terror in Occupied Kashmir that is also being widely reported all over the world. Indian government neither wants to resolve the issue through international mediation, nor is it willing to do it via mutual negotiations with Pakistan. Till to date, India has fought two wars with Pakistan because of the same dispute and violation at LOC is a routine matter now.³

Indian viewpoint expressed in media, declares Kashmir as a 'jugular vein of Pakistan.' It accuses Pakistan while mentioning that; the way military and those who play part in the making of policies repel the input of civilians over Kashmir policy; they also play with both print and electronic media in order to alter local opinion on the said policy. The independent print media also reflects this gesture. Indian press tycoons always hesitate to criticize Kashmir Policy because of their dependence on government funding via advertisements.⁴

During the peace time, the media sounds quite impartial and unprejudiced regarding coverage on internal expansions in Jammu and Kashmir. Due sensitivities of the conflict, that has supreme importance, media cannot stop following official stance especially at the time of war. As an outcome of the projection of official stance in media, the public opinion on the issue is created accordingly. Likewise, three main players; military, media and bureaucracy jointly play their

3 MoniBasu, "Kashmir: India and Pakistan's Bitter Dispute" CNN, . September 26, 2010. Accessed October 12, 2010. <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/09/25/india.kashmir.explainer/>

4 ICG Asia Report, "Kashmir: View from Islamabad," Associated Press of Pakistan, December 4, 2003. Accessed October 18, 2008. <https://www.ciaonet.org/attachments/4115/uploads>

role in determining Indian government's policy on the issue of Kashmir. Whole responsibility lies with these three stakeholders for being rigid and less innovative in designing India's Kashmir policy.⁵

Regional organizations are busy in bridging the gaps between Pakistan and India, in order to establish peace in the region. The national level non-governmental organizations remained unsuccessful in establishing good relations among both and bringing about change in the policies of each. For the sake of diffusing tensions between India and Pakistan, South Asians for Human Rights, asked Pakistan to stop combativeness and questioned India on the issue of Human Rights in Kashmir.⁶

Both Pakistani and Indian national media project the policies of government positively, especially the issues of strategic and national importance like Kashmir Conflict. In comparison with electronic media, print media is considered as more independent especially in Pakistan as government doesn't own any newspaper; therefore, most of the newspapers work according to their own policies and agenda. In print media, the elite newspapers project the national issues as per government policies.⁷

A comparative study has been conducted to analyze the fact that the two rival countries having a bilateral issue on Kashmir, whether their leading newspapers speak what their foreign policy says on the issue or they depict something else and which newspaper took lead in following its country's foreign policy on Kashmir issue.

5 ICG Asia Report, "Kashmir: View from Islamabad."

6 UN Press Release, "Commission on Human Rights Hears from NGOs Charging Violations around World." April 3, 2003, Accessed June 16, 2008. <http://www.un.org/press/en/2003/hrcn1017.doc.htm>

7 "India-Pakistan Relations and Kashmir: Steps toward Peace", *International Crisis Group Report*. June 24, 2004, Accessed September 11, 2008. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/india-non-kashmir/india-pakistan-relations-and-kashmir-steps-toward-peace>

Historical Background of the Kashmir Conflict

The State of Jammu and Kashmir has a long history of 5000 years BC. Since creation of Pakistan in 1947, Kashmir conflict remained boiling point, pivotal contention and above all the origin of disgruntlement among both neighbouring countries.⁸

British Raj ended on August 14, 1947 and according to the rules defined for partition by the British government either Kashmir had to be part of Pakistan or India.⁹ There was a political upheaval by people of Poonch against Maharaja of Kashmir (Just before 3rd June plan). This confrontation was spread like wildfire everywhere from Poonch to Mirpur and in some area of Jammu emerging towards Azad Kashmir. Soon the confrontation followed by a forceful revolt. Maharaja made an attempt to end the drive regarding the association of the region with Pakistan.¹⁰ The ceasefire line between both countries is called Line of Control (LOC) and both have fought several wars at LOC.¹¹

Today, Pakistan and India are sticking to their versions about Kashmir; India claims that whole Kashmir region is part of India whereas Pakistan reiterates that it's a disputed territory which can only be resolved if there is a UN sponsored referendum. Moreover it says that *status quo* is no solution.¹²

Foreign Policies of Pakistan and India on Kashmir

The media and foreign policy decision-making both are affiliated to each other and in this regard there are two related theories i.e. "So called-CNN Effect" and

8 Abdul Sattar, *Fifty Years of the Kashmir Dispute: Diplomatic Aspects in Fifty Years of the Kashmir Dispute* (Muzaffarabad: University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, 1998).

9 Robert G. Wiring, *India, Pakistan and the Kashmir Dispute on Regional Conflict and Its Resolution* (Australia: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

10 *Sipri Yearbook, The Kashmir Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

11 *Sipri Yearbook, The Kashmir Conflict*.

12 Peter R. Lavoy, "Pakistan's Kashmir Policy after the Bush Visit to South Asia," *Strategic Insights* 5, no. 4 (April, 2006).

“Manufacturing Consent”. Both the theories are in contradiction to each other, so to have a consensus on this point that mass media have direct impact on masses still needs to be determined. The foreign proceedings are dispensed by the media through coverage and by foreign policy makers through the formation, alteration and execution of policies.¹³

Jammu and Kashmir is an ambivalent land, as both stakeholders, Pakistan and India, have equivalent standing, similar rights and commitments in Kashmir. Indians have occupied Jammu and Kashmir since the accession of the state. In compliance with the UN resolutions, Kashmiris have every reason to decide their future by complying via free and unbiased referendum, either with India or Pakistan.¹⁴ Pakistani authorities constantly defined it as ‘the core issue of Kashmir’ said to prevent alone the normalization of bilateral relations.¹⁵

Indian government admits that there exists an “issue” in Kashmir but they do not call it a “problem”. India even does not call it territorial dispute because as per Indian point of view, the Kashmir was legally made part of India at the time of independence in 1947.¹⁶ India, by maintaining the present *status quo*, considers it as the best solution of the issue.¹⁷

This study focuses the coverage and portrayal of Kashmir issue in editorial pages of the mainstream leading newspapers i.e. *Dawn* and *The Tribune* of Pakistan and

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- 13 Mónica Pena, “News Media and the Foreign Policy Decision-making Process, CNN or Washington?” *Razonypalabra*, Accessed April 5, 2009. <http://www.razonypalabra.org.mx/antiores/n32/mpena.htm>
- 14 Tahir Amin, *Mass Resistance in Kashmir, Origins, Evolution, Options* (Islamabad: Pakistan: Institute of Policy Studies, 1995).
- 15 Jean-Luc Racine, “Pakistan and ‘India Syndrome’: Between Kashmir and the Nuclear Predicament”, in Christophe Jaffrelot, ed., *Pakistan: Nationalism without a Nation?* (New Dehli: Maohar, 2002), 195-227.
- 16 ICG, Associated Press of Pakistan, Peshawar, Retrieved from: http://www1.infopak.gov.pk/public/news/news2003/appnews2003/app19_june.htm
- 17 “India ‘welcomes’ Ceasefire Offer,” BBC News, 2003. Accessed September 3, 2008. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/world/south_asia/3232468.stm

India, respectively. The cumulative coverage during the two selected years comprised leading editorials and opinion articles on Kashmir issue in the both selected newspapers have been analyzed in the mirror of media conformity theory and the foreign policy on Kashmir was considered as the yardstick of investigation for the published contents in terms of positive, negative and neutral representation.

Rationale of the Study

Kashmir issue is one of the chronic disputes between Pakistan and India and is still unresolved. Different studies have been conducted in this regard but very less work has been done from the perspective of communication studies and media effects. The reason for being specific to print media is that the editorial page of the newspapers plays very important role in agenda setting and projecting any stance concerning national issues. The conceptual framework of the study defines that at certain national levels, foreign policy concerning matters media conforms the official stance of political and military establishment.

Hypotheses

This study has been designed to test the following four hypotheses, developed with the help of the literature review and the pilot study.

- *The Tribune* would likely to treat Kashmir issue while supporting Indian government stance more in comparison to the Pakistani point of view.
- Media coverage on Kashmir issue in the *Dawn* would be more supporting the official position of Pakistan than India.
- The pro-Indian foreign policy content on Kashmir will occupy more space in *The Tribune* as compared to pro-Pakistani foreign policy on Kashmir in the *Dawn*.
- *The Tribune* would likely to give quantity wise less unfavourable coverage to Kashmir issue than *Dawn* in light of the respective foreign policy of both the countries.

Research Design

The representation of Kashmir issue in *TheTribune* and the *Dawn* would be investigated qualitatively with the help of content analysis, during the specific time period. In order to analyze the portrayal of Kashmir issue in the leading newspapers of Pakistan and India, the two years published contents about the issue in the form of editorials and columns appeared in, *Dawn* and *TheTribune* from January 2006 to December 2007 have been selected for this study. The logic behind selection of this specific era is, in this time frame second round of Indo-Pak peace talks started and this period was crucial with respect to recent developments on the issue. Both dailies are considered as rational and independent newspaper whereas *TheTribune* states its policy as "Voice of the People" that aims at projecting the unbiased public opinions.

It is a census study as all published contents about Kashmir was taken as a sample for the purpose of analysis. All the articles relevant to the topic (concerning the peace process between India and Pakistan in context with foreign policy on Kashmir) published during the selected time period were analyzed and investigated.

The Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis in the study was each single paragraph comprised four to five sentences of the published articles and leading editorials. Editorial page of the newspapers (excluding letters to the editor and cartoons) that included editorials and opinions were taken as population of the study.

Data Analysis

The collected data about the coverage and representation of Kashmir issue in the selected newspapers of Pakistan and India have been analyzed with the help of the software SPSS. The overall findings have been explained via descriptive statistics, frequencies, graphs and percentile etc.

Extract of Positive Paragraph from *The Tribune*

Paragraphs which speak of respective government's stance on Kashmir, propagate own government's foreign policy on Kashmir, support own national interest and project/highlight the negative aspects of conflict partners would be coded as positive.

"Intentions of current Pak military junta become important. In the long run, unless Pakistan renounces its irredentist claim on Kashmir, it makes little difference whether Musharraf is sincere or only playing games" (Positive for India).¹⁸

Extract of Positive Paragraph from *Dawn*

"The European leaders should be aware.... Pakistani leadership has courageously offered to consider alternatives to a plebiscite; the Indian side refuses to change its mind on any territorial readjustment" (Positive for Pakistan).¹⁹

Extract of Negative Paragraph from *The Tribune*

The paragraph which highlights the rejection of government's policies and criticizes the steps taken by the government regarding Kashmir conflict resolution and supporting the agenda of opposite party by revealing the positive impacts of their policies on Kashmir will be coded as negative stance.

Manmohan Singh also appears to have decided that while he will speak of "misguided elements" in our neighbours sponsoring terrorism, he will not blame General Musharraf or the ISI for such act (Negative for India).²⁰

Extract of Negative Paragraph from *Dawn*

"One must accept, however, that unlike our leaders, Manmohan Singh at least has been faithful to his constitutional oath and

18 Sushant Sareen, "End-game in Kashmir Uncertain," *The Tribune*, January 7, 2006. Accessed April 10, 2008. <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20060107/edit.htm>

19 Khalid Jawed Khan, "Assault on the Judiciary," *Dawn*, March 16, 2007. Accessed January 11, 2008. <http://www.dawn.com/news/1069926>.

20 G Parthasarathy, "Are We Fighting Terrorism?" *The Tribune*, November 30, 2006. Accessed March 9, 2007. <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2006/20061130/edit.htm>

democratic pluralistic system. He is not taking the decisions all alone..." (Negative for Pakistan).²¹

Neutral Paragraphs

Paragraphs that simply narrate the situation in an unbiased manner, without supporting any specific point of view would be treated as neutral.

Findings

Table 1: CUMULATIVE PORTRAYAL OF KASHMIR ISSUE FROM FOREIGN POLICY PERSPECTIVE BY DAILY *DAWN* FOR THE PERIOD OF TWO YEARS (2006 – 2007)

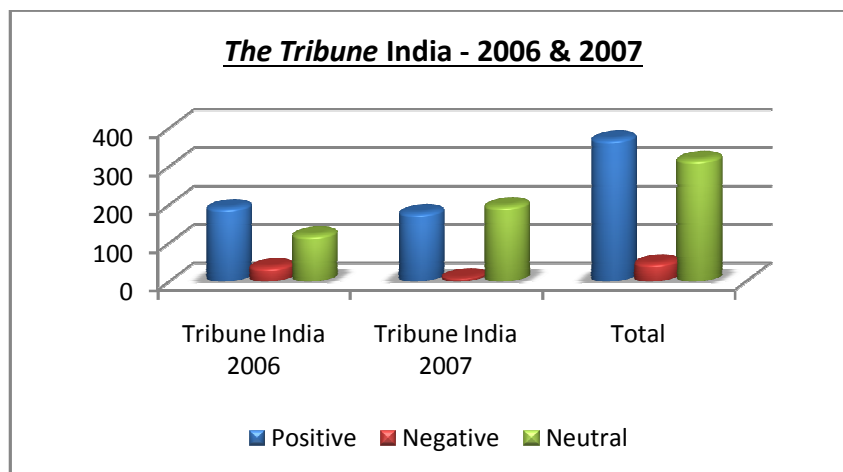
Daily Dawn	Total No of Articles	Total No of Paragraphs	Positive Paragraphs	Negative Paragraphs	Neutral Paragraphs
2006	35	349	172	23	154
2007	27	416	171	64	181
Total	62	765	343	87	335

Total 62 articles of the *Dawn* comprised 765 paragraphs were analyzed in which 335 (43.7%) paragraphs were neutral 87 (11.3%) negative and 343 (44.8%) paragraphs were positive. The findings of the Table 1 indicate that the ratio of positive coverage of Kashmir policy was greater than the negative and neutral. In short it can be said, in convenient manner that the daily *Dawn* portrayed Kashmir policy in positive manner while projecting the Government stance on Kashmir.

Table 2: CUMULATIVE PORTRAYAL OF KASHMIR ISSUE FROM FOREIGN POLICY PERSPECTIVE BY DAILY *THE TRIBUNE* FOR THE PERIOD OF TWO YEARS (2006 – 2007)

Daily The Tribune	Total No of Articles	Total No of Paragraphs	Positive Paragraphs	Negative Paragraphs	Neutral Paragraphs
2006	35	351	192	38	121
2007	41	386	179	10	197
Total	76	737	371	48	318

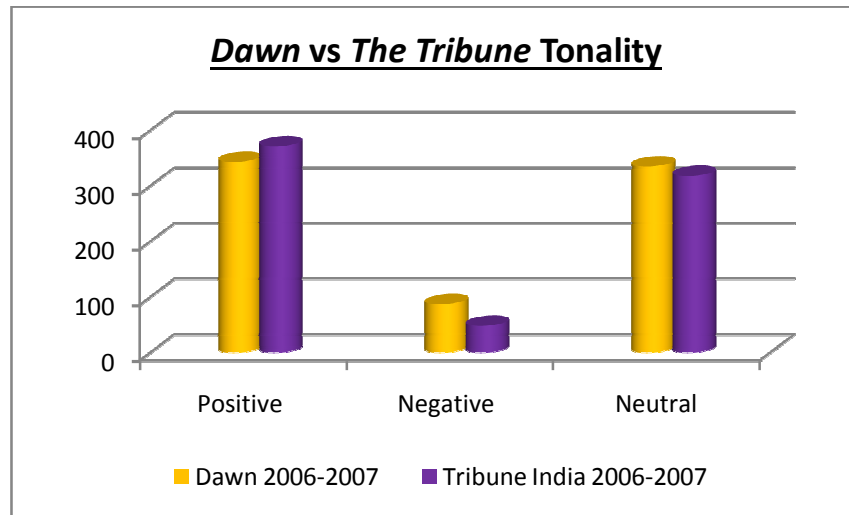
21 Shamshad Ahmad, "Wishful' Claims of Progress." *Dawn*, May 3, 2007. Accessed December 11, 2007. <http://www.dawn.com/news/1070070>



Total 76 articles of *TheTribune* comprised 737 paragraphs were analyzed out of which 371 (50.3%) paragraphs were positive 318 (43.1%) neutral and 48 (6%) paragraphs were negative. The findings of the Table 2 indicate that positive coverage of Kashmir policy was greater than the negative and neutral. In short it can be said, in convenient manner that *The Tribune* portrayed Kashmir policy in positive manner while projecting the government's stance on Kashmir. The percentage of negative coverage was significantly less.

Table 3: CUMULATIVE PORTRAYAL OF KASHMIR ISSUE FROM FOREIGN POLICY PERSPECTIVE BY *THE TRIBUNE* AND *DAWN* FOR THE SELECTED PERIOD OF THE TWO YEARS

Newspaper	Total No of Articles	Total No of Paragraphs	Positive Paragraphs	Negative Paragraphs	Neutral Paragraphs
<i>Dawn</i> 2006-2007	62	765	343	87	335
<i>TheTribune</i> 2006-2007	76	737	371	48	318
Total	138	1502	714	135	653



The result from Table 3 indicates that the positive coverage of Kashmir issue was greater as compared to the negative and neutral coverage in both papers. It also shows significant difference in terms of portrayal of Kashmir issue from foreign policy perspective by *The Tribune* and *Dawn's* articles for years 2006 and 2007. All the articles published in both *Dawn* and *TheTribune* have obtained 714 (47%) positive paragraphs, 135 (8%) negative and 653 (43%) neutral paragraphs concerning Kashmir Policy, that is quite significant. The comparison of coverage in both papers reflects that negative portrayal of Kashmir policy remained 6percent in *TheTribune* where as 11percent in *Dawn* which means *TheTribune* covers negative content on Kashmir lesser than *Dawn*.

Conclusion and Discussion

The cumulative findings communicate that on the whole 1502 paragraphs in 138 issues about the conflict of Kashmir were published in both the newspapers i.e. *TheTribune* and *Dawn* during the selected time period of two years as mentioned earlier. Likewise the proportion of coverage was explored greater during 2007 in both Pakistani and Indian newspapers. Similarly the ratio of negative paragraphs about Kashmir issue was found lesser in *TheTribune* of India in

comparison to *Dawn*. The overall coverage of issue of Kashmir in *Dawn* was comprised 62 articles, 35 and 27 each in the year 2006 and 2007 respectively whereas 765 paragraphs about the issue appeared in the *Dawn* were analyzed. It was found that out of 765 paragraphs the ratio of positive paragraphs was 335 whereas negative paragraphs were just 87. The overall coverage of Kashmir issue in *The Tribune* was comprised 76 articles, 35 and 41 each in the year 2006 and 2007 respectively whereas 737 paragraphs about the issue appeared in the Indian newspaper were analyzed. It was found that out of 737 paragraphs the ratio of positive paragraphs was 371 whereas negative paragraphs were just 48.

The first hypothesis predicted that *The Tribune* would likely to treat Kashmir issue while supporting Indian government stance more in comparison to the Pakistani point of view.

This prediction was strongly supported by the gathered data as the proportion of positive coverage 371(50.34%) was found greater than the neutral 318(43.15%) and negative 48(6.51%). According to the second hypothesis, media coverage on Kashmir issue in the *Dawn* would be more supporting to the official position of Pakistan than India.

This statement was also supportive because the unfavourable coverage of *Dawn* was less 87(11.36%) than the favourable coverage. According to the third hypothesis, the pro-Indian foreign policy content on Kashmir will occupy more space in *The Tribune* as compared to pro-Pakistani foreign policy on Kashmir in the *Dawn*. This assumption was strongly supported by the analyzed data i.e. 50.34percent positive in *The Tribune* and 44.78percent positive in *Dawn*. *The Tribune* would be likely to give quantity wise less unfavourable coverage to Kashmir issue than *Dawn* in light of the respective foreign policy of both the countries. This hypothesis was supported by the high ratio of negative coverage of Pakistani viewpoint on Kashmir as compared to positive and objective coverage i.e. 50.34percent negative

as compared to 43.15percent neutral and 6.15percent positive for Pakistan.

Overall the impression of maximum coverage and the portrayal of Kashmir issue in both Indian and Pakistani newspapers from the perspective of their foreign policies on Kashmir remained positive which was 47.50percent. So the press of both countries considered their responsibility and gave priority to the national interest by portraying countries foreign policy positively in their articles. This study also supported the general trend of public opinion of both countries. This research was theoretically based on media conformity theory. Previously many studies had been conducted on the basis of this theory which mainly determined the probability of obeying foreign policy by US media on international issues. Contrary to US media, till now very limited studies have been carried out in order to test media conformity theory from Pakistani and Indian print media perspective. Therefore, this study was conducted as an attempt to explore the media perspectives of two nuclear states on the issue of an unresolved conflict. A similar work majorly focused on Galtung's critique covering both the aspects i.e. peace journalism with special reference to Kashmir conflict as well as media role in reiterating foreign policy instead of objective reporting, study carried out by Futehally & Shahe has been analyzed and already mentioned in this research. The findings of these relevant studies are supported by conclusions drawn in this research. All three reveal the similar results which depicts that both countries (India and Pakistan) positively project official viewpoint of their political and military leadership. This study would be beneficial in evaluating the behaviour of subcontinent media towards approval and disapproval of foreign policy on issue of international importance. Its results may help future researchers to carry out study on similar subject.

The present study supported the media conformity theory as media of both Pakistan and India confirms the foreign policy on Kashmir by projecting government's view

point positively. The elite and the powerful elements in any country take advantage of hegemonic factor as media works like mouth-organs of government.

There are lesser chances of media biasness over those issues upon which a national level consensus has been developed and public as well as media displays similar behaviour on that. Kashmir issue is such sort of matter upon which a sort of understanding is already developed in both the countries and its positive presentation has become second nature of nation and media. Media may get dictation from government officials and policy-makers or at its own conforms to the foreign policy on Kashmir conflict. Such propositions about issue of War on Terror, as the issue widely emerged after 9/11, at the time when media had become more responsive, open and independent. Divergent opinions and perceptions were made on media which did let the public develop a consensus and as results of confusion and mixed stances reduced the chances for acceptance of foreign policy on Pak-US ties with regard to War on Terror. Therefore, it would be right to mention that the conformation of foreign policy on such issue is less likely to happen. The nature of issues, clarity of foreign policy on such subjects can affect the results if media conformity theory is tested.