



**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF NATURAL DISASTERS NEWS COVERAGE IN PAKISTAN BY DAWN & THE NEWS  
(THE CASE OF EARTHQUAKE 2005, & FLOODS 2010)**

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**ABSTRACT**

This study is a comparative study of Earthquake 2005 and Floods 2010 by Selected Press. To assess the difference between the practices and trends of news coverage, a comprehensive category system is designed in the light of existing literature and on the conceptual groundings of Social Responsibility Theory of Media and Chaos Theory of Natural Disasters. Through Quantitative and Qualitative Content Analysis technique, study has investigated the complimentary and contrasting role of media with other institutes of society. The study has shown differences and similarities in the patterns of coverage between two different disasters, news organizations, years and two different political systems. Results have suggested that equal importance have been given to disaster awareness by selected press in whereas the role of state actors has been more appreciated during Earthquake 2005. The News has raised more criticism on government during disaster and violated more ethical standards of coverage. The differences have also been noted in covering the role of armed forces, conducting need assessment and monitoring the flow of donations.

**INTRODUCTION**

Communications is a key to the success of disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. Accurate information disseminated to the general public, to elected officials and community leaders, and to the media reduces risk, saves lives and property, and speeds recovery. The ability to communicate is no longer an afterthought or a luxury; timely communication is now as important as logistics or the predeployment of materials. Planning and controlling the flow of information before, during and after a disaster will define media organization's credibility, trustworthiness, authority, and effectiveness (Haddow, 2008). Disaster Coverage comprises of different aspects and dimensions. Natural disasters deal in three different phases; generally anticipatory/warning phase before the disaster in which media and other sources warn the people of vulnerable area about the possible catastrophe. Second phase is communicating in disaster in which along with the disaster awareness, media organizations are expected to inform about the human loss, property damage, perceived risks and threats, relief activities and donation details. In relief and rehabilitation phase media work on aftermath of disasters by communicating excessive emotional appeals convincing both national and international donors to help affected people, bring in different institutes and organizations to light who take welfare initiative and fulfill their social responsibility. The most important role of media regarding natural disasters is to act as "Watch Dog", to keep a strict eye on the aids, donations and funds received from local, national and international organizations and their fair utility.

Along with basic role of media to disseminate information and assess the roles of state actors in disasters, media should also impose some ethical limitations on themselves. Ethics in disasters are of considerable importance, especially after the emergence of private media in Pakistan and increasing disasters. There is a need to redress media ethics in terms of responsibility and level of involvement journalists should have while covering conflict and sensitive situations. This eliminates different ethical violations, issues and considerations that arose during disaster coverage. The likely consequences and concerns of ethical violations may have an impact, which is hugely psychological and damaging. The most obvious considerations can be strategies to deal with victims, supporting emergency services, reporting appropriate figures of damage, what should be the limitations of photographs and graphic representation of victims, to what extent the event coverage should be intensified, stating important warnings and indications during coverage, at what angle the sufferings should be reported. All these concerns can be tested through content analysis of news coverage of natural disasters. Key ethical issues and concerns can be identified and solutions would be proposed in their light, it will also help to understand the role of media as one of the major stakeholders in disaster management.

**METHODS & PROCEDURES**

In this study researcher is practicing triangulation. Triangulation of method means mixing quantitative and qualitative styles of research method and data most of the researchers develop expertise in one style, but the two methods or styles have different, complementary strengths; therefore, a study using both in more comprehensive way (Neumann, 2000, p.125). For each disaster, researcher has purposively selected one month's consistent coverage by both Dawn & The News, rationale behind the sampling technique is the "time period" news coverage is at the peak for a month immediately after catastrophe happens. "News items" is the unit of analysis.

**Research Questions & Hypothesis**

Research Questions and Hypotheses are designed on the basis on categories given below:

A: Civic Engagement & Social Utility ( A1: Disaster Awareness, A2: Information about Affected People, A3: Information about Affected Area, A4: Contributions of Other State Actors, A5: Social Reconstruction after Disaster, A6: Survivor Stories and Eye Witness Accounts) B: Rescue & Relief Operation/Efforts(B1: Operations by Government, B2: Operations by Armed Forces, B3: NGOs & Volunteers, B4: International Organizations, B5: Other C: Need Assessment (C1: Food, C2: Shelter, C3: Cloths, C4: Medicines & Medical Facilities, C5: Requisition for Rehabilitation D: Donation, Aid & Funds (D1: Appeals for Help and Support, D2: Aid Announced/Pledged , D3: Aid received, D4: Rehabilitation Efforts) E: Accountability of Donation & Disaster (E1: Trust Deficit, E2: In efficient utility of Aid & Corruption, E3: Questioning the People in Power, E4: Mismanagement & Feeble Response, F: Media Ethics in Covering Disasters (F1: Victim Oriented Approach, F2: Privacy Invasion, F3: Risk Amplification, F4: Enflaming tone & terminologies, F5: Negative Impact on Donors/ Victims).

Following are research questions of study: RQ1: Which sub category of Category A (A1, A2, A3, A4, A5 and A6) received more coverage during Earthquake 2005 & Floods 2010 by selected press? RQ2: Which sub category of Category B (B1, B2, B3, B4 and B5) received more coverage during Earthquake 2005 & Floods 2010 by selected press? RQ3: Which sub category of Category C (C1, C2, C3, C4 and C5) received more coverage during Earthquake 2005 & Floods 2010 by selected press? RQ4: Which sub category of Category D (D1, D2, D3 and D4) received more coverage during Earthquake 2005 & Floods 2010 by selected press? RQ5: Which sub category of Category E (E1, E2, E3 and E4) received more coverage during Earthquake 2005 & Floods 2010 by selected press? RQ6: Which sub category of Category F (F1, F2, F3, F4 and F5) received more coverage during Earthquake 2005 & Floods 2010 by selected press?

Following are the hypotheses of the study: H1: There was more criticism on the government regarding "Disaster & Donation Accountability" during Floods 2010 than Earthquake 2005 by selected press. H2: The role of armed forces in rescue and relief efforts has received more coverage and prominence during Earthquake 2005 than floods 2010 by selected press. H3: "The News" had given more coverage to "LOC issue over relief movement" than Dawn during Earthquake 2005. H4: "Dawn" had given more coverage to "US concerns over security of foreign rescue workers" in flood hit areas than The News during Floods 2010? H5: Contributions of other state actors



receive more coverage and appreciation during Earthquake than Floods 2010 by selected press. H6: Rehabilitation and Reconstruction efforts had given more importance during Floods 2010 than Earthquake 2005 by selected Press.

**Tables & Key Findings**

**Earth Quake Coverage, 2005 (October 9November 9) and Floods Coverage, 2010 (July 29Augusts 29) Newspaper: Dawn & The News**

**Table 1**

Category	Total news items in directions of Sub Categories
<b>A: Civic Engagement &amp; Social Utility</b>	<b>Earthquake, 2005</b> High level of involvement of media (+): 172 Dawn High level of involvement of media (+): 61 The News <b>Floods, 2010</b> High level of involvement of media (+):151 Dawn High level of involvement of media (+): 161 The News
<b>Sub Category</b> A1: Disaster Awareness A2: Information about affected people A3: Information about affected area A4: Information of other state actors A5: Social reconstruction after disaster A6: Survivor stories & Eye witness accounts	<b>Earthquake, 2005</b> Low level of involvement of media (): 41 Dawn Low level of involvement of media (): 38 The News <b>Floods, 2010</b> Low level of involvement of media (): 17 Dawn Low level of involvement of media (): 38 The News
	<b>Earthquake, 2005</b> Moderate level of involvement of media (o): 64 Dawn Moderate level of involvement of media (o): 88 The News <b>Floods, 2010</b> Moderate level of involvement of media (o): 94 Dawn Moderate level of involvement of media (o): 72 The News

**Table 2**

Category	Total news items in directions of Sub Categories
<b>B: Rescue &amp; Relief Operations</b>	<b>Earthquake, 2005</b> Motivated by Govt. : ( + ) 83 Dawn Motivated by the Govt.: 33 The News <b>Floods, 2010</b> Motivated by the Govt.: 25 Dawn Motivated by the Govt.: 28 The News
<b>Sub Category</b> B1: Operations by government B2: operations by armed forces B3: Volunteers & NGOs B4: International Organizations B5: Others: India Pakistan Perspective	<b>Earthquake, 2005</b> Self Motivated: ( ) 126 Dawn Self motivated: ( ): 136 The News <b>Floods, 2010</b> Self motivated: ( ) 70 Dawn Self motivated: ( ) 58 The News
	<b>Earthquake, 2005</b> Neutral: (o) 0 Dawn Neutral: (o) 4 The News <b>Floods, 2010</b> Neutral: (o) 0 Dawn Neutral: (o) 12 The News

**Table 3**

Category	Total in directions of Sub Categories
<b>C: Need Assessment</b>	<b>Earthquake, 2005</b> High need assessment: (+) 97 Dawn High need assessment : ( + ) 57 The News <b>Floods, 2010</b> High need assessment : ( + ) 41 Dawn High need assessment : ( + ) 46 The News
<b>Sub Category</b> C1: Food C2: Shelter C3: Cloths C4: Medicines and Medical facilities C5: Requisition for Rehabilitation	<b>Earthquake, 2005</b> Low need assessment : ( ) 34 Dawn Low need assessment : ( ) 5 The News <b>Floods, 2010</b> Low need assessment : ( ) 8 Dawn Low need assessment : ( ) 8 The News
	<b>Earthquake, 2005</b> Moderate need assessment : (o) 43 Dawn Moderate need assessment: (o) 8 The News <b>Floods, 2010</b> Moderate need assessment: (o) 8 Dawn Moderate need assessment: (o) 9 The News



**Table 4**

Category	Total news items in directions of Sub Categories
<b>D: Donation, Aid &amp; Funds</b> D1: Appeals for help/Support D2:Aid announced D3: Aid Received D4: Rehabilitation Effort	Earthquake, 2005 International (+): 132 Dawn International (+): 42 The News Floods, 2010 International (+): 36 International (+): 54 The News
	Earthquake, 2005 National () : 30 Dawn National () : 25 The News Floods, 2010 National () :11 Dawn National () : 39 The News
	Earthquake, 2005 Regional (o): 5 Dawn Regional (o): 6 The News Floods, 2010 Regional (o): 8 Dawn Regional (o): 7 The News

**Table 5**

Category	Total news items in Direction of Sub Categories
<b>E: Accountability of Donation &amp; Disaster Sub Categories</b> E1: Trust Deficit E2: In efficient Utility of Aids & corruption E3:Questioning the people in power E4: Mismanagement & Feeble response	Earthquake, 2005 Favorable (+) 9 Dawn Favorable (+) 11 The News Floods, 2010 Favorable (+): 1 Dawn Favorable (+): 0 The News
	Earthquake, 2005 Against () 97 Dawn Against () 44 The News Floods, 2010 Against (): 56 Dawn Against (): 122 The News
	Earthquake, 2005 Neutral (o) 2 Dawn Neutral (o) 1 The News Floods, 2010 Neutral (o): 0 Dawn Neutral (o): 0 The News

**Table 6**

Category	Total news items in Direction of Sub Categories
<b>F: Media Ethics Sub Categories:</b> F1: Victim oriented approach F2: Privacy invasion F3: Risk amplification F4:Enflaming tone & terminologies F5: Negative impact on donors/victims	Earthquake, 2005 Ethical: (+) 45 Dawn Ethical: (+) 6 The News Floods, 2010 Ethical: (+) 51 Dawn Ethical: (+) 4 The News
	Earthquake, 2005 Unethical: () 84 Dawn Unethical: () 100 The News Floods, 2010 Unethical: () 84 Dawn Unethical: ()112 The News
	Earthquake, 2005 Neutral: (o) 17 Dawn Neutral: (o) 5 The News Floods, 2010 Neutral: (o) 26 Dawn Neutral: (o)25 The News

**DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS**

The study in hand focuses on the comparison of two English National Dailies, Dawn & The News, and their respective role in covering two major natural disasters, Earthquake 2005 & Floods 2010, in Pakistan. A categorization scheme was developed to study the natural disaster news coverage in Pakistan, the scheme was based on six major categories and each category was divided in to further categories.

Results of the study have suggested that Media's emphasis is on civic engagement and social utility during disaster. This category has received the highest coverage especially disaster awareness, each day after disaster brings the updates regarding warnings, alerts, evacuations and other details that spread the awareness regarding disaster among affected people and other public. Media also build



a bridge of communication and emotion between victims, survivors, general public and donors by bringing the news about affected people to the general masses and national international donors and covering the role and contribution of general masses, effective state actors and donors for affected people.

Results of the second category suggest that most of rescue and relief activities during natural disasters are self motivated. Major stakeholders are government, armed forces, volunteers, NGOs and international organizations who carry out rescue activities and provide relief on immediate basis.

Need assessment is also a major dimension during disaster; media help both affectees and donors by mobilizing and prioritizing need of different goods and facilities in affected areas. Media effectively assess the need of goods; results suggested that in both disasters "Medicines and Medical facilities" has been a top priority and continuous appeals and messages has been communicated by the selected press regarding medical facilities in grief stricken areas.

Monitoring donations, aids, appeals and funds is also an important task for media during disaster. Result of this category show that most of the aid is announced from international organizations however, there has been significant difference in announcement and reception of aid. News regarding the announcement of aid is way more than news regarding aid received. Role of the regional authorities in aid contribution was comparatively less than national and international organizations and authorities. Apart from monitoring the flow of donations and funds the role of media is even crucial with respect to accountability of aid utility, results have confirmed that there was lot of criticism on the government regarding mismanagement and feeble response of the governing bodies. Collectively most of the criticism was regarding mismanagement during disasters.

Media ethics have also been examined in the study comparison has shown that The News has violated more ethical standards as compared to Dawn. Ethical issues included using enflaming tone & terminologies which leaves a negative impact on the donors and victims, communicating excessive emotional appeals through message and pictures of disaster. Comparative study of both newspapers has suggested that there are certain similarities and certain variations in the coverage practices of selected press. Both newspapers have emphasized the importance of disaster awareness and criticized the government for feeble response during disasters equally whereas there were significant difference have been seen in reporting need assessment, role of armed forces and other state actors, monitoring the flow of donation and ethical standards.

#### CONCLUSION & FUTURE AGENDA

Media play a very positive and constructive role in promoting social solidarity before, during and after disaster. According to the basic postulates of social responsibility theory, Media has certain obligations toward society these obligations also include the role of media as a "watch guard" to keep an eye on the working and efficiency of all other institutes of society. Media is expected to inform citizens with accurate and true information and must provide an effective forum for the citizens to initiate exchange of comments, constructive criticism and discourses for public good. Researcher seeks to expand the sample of the study in future for more comprehensive qualitative research particularly in the area of rehabilitation and social reconstruction phase of disaster to provide better understanding that how media deal with post immediate and long term rehabilitation plans in a national development perspective. Every aspect conceptualized and operationalized to study overall disaster coverage has a potential to be developed into an individual research study. Current research can facilitate a number of research studies in future some of the suggestions regarding future agendas are given below:

- A qualitative analysis of journalists' ethics in covering disasters in Pakistan
- A semiotic analysis of Photojournalism in covering disasters in Pakistan
- Role of social media and civic journalism in meeting challenges of natural disasters

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