

Visuals and Ethics: Framing the Karachi Airport Attack

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ABSTRACT:

Pakistani media has come under severe criticism for its immaturity in reporting, oversimplification, lack of investigative reporting, and sensationalism. Thus criticism extends particularly to the unfolding events of terrorism as well. This paper will see if this criticism has any shred of truth to it by doing the visual and content analysis of the electronic media during the Karachi airport attack. The paper argues that the media coverage of the tragic terror incident was unethical, unprofessional and helped terrorists in creating fear and terror.

Keywords: Agenda setting, framing, terrorism, discourse, Karachi Airport attack, journalism

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Introduction

Pakistan is fighting its war on terror since 2002, the same year when it opened its airspace for private electronic media. Thus, the discourse about Pakistan's war on terror could not be monopolized by the government as these independent electronic media channels also entertained alternative discourses. Thus, the government did not always find support for its narrative. Pakistani media has, thus, been blamed for immaturity, lack of ethics and professionalism and even harming the core national interests especially vis-à-vis its coverage of the war on terror.

This paper is an attempt to find out whether the electronic media has been up to its professional and ethical standards, neutrality and responsibility while doing its duty of watchdog. However, this paper in no way suggests any curbs on the media and the researchers firmly believe in the freedom of the media for the growth of a healthy society. However, by identifying the problem areas it would suggest introspection for the media houses.

To analyze the electronic media, the researchers have opted for the event of Karachi Airport attack by terrorists on June 8, 2014. The Jinnah International Airport was cleared after five hours of operation by the Army, Rangers, Police and Airport Security Force (ASF). The attack brought a major question on the media's responsibility as well. The Karachi incident was one of the most criticized media coverage, where media overstepped its line of duty. Unfortunately, no serious research has been conducted so far on the topic. That was the prime motivation for the researchers of this paper to properly investigate this incident with proper research tools.

For the study, the live coverage of the incident was thoroughly observed. Most repeated tickers as breaking news, exclusiveness claims, tone of the anchor and the reporters, most repeated words, supporting visual, information delivered about several terrorists, casualties and the fire in planes was taken as frames for the study for ARY News, Dawn News, Dunya TV, and Samma TV. The information provided by the channels throughout that night will be analyzed to find different frames.

Research Questions & Hypothesis

The paper would seek to answer the following research questions:

1. How did the electronic media respond to the Karachi airport attack?
2. What frames were used for the coverage?
3. Did the media show professionalism and observed journalistic ethics?
4. What was the fallout of the coverage?

After the preliminary observation of the news coverage, the researchers deduced the following hypothesis which this paper will try to prove.

“The extensive coverage by the electronic media of the Karachi Airport attack trumped the ethics of journalism and professionalism and thus created confusion, terror and fear in the audience helping the agenda and propaganda of terrorists.”

Theory and Method

The analysis of media coverage is best explained within the theoretical framework of the Agenda Setting. The theory has been developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw.¹⁴⁰ This theory espouses that the media is the power to set the agenda of the news for public discussion. It not only tells the audience what to think about but also how to think about it. This provides the news media with huge political power. Within this theoretical approach, Framing is of the utmost importance when the news is portrayed, reported or chiseled before targeting the audience. This theory was first presented by Goffman, under the title of Frame Analysis.¹⁴¹ According to theory, the media sets the agenda for public discussion. In essence, framing theory suggests how some information is presented to the audience in the form of influences the choices people make about how to process that information. Frames are abstractions that work to organize or structure message meaning.

Fairhurst and Sarr defined that the following techniques of framing possibly can be used by media. They can be in the form of metaphors, stories, traditions, rituals, and ceremonies, slogans, jargon, contrast and the last but not least by spinning.¹⁴² Spinning means presenting a concept to convey a value judgment both positive and negative that might not be immediately apparent just to create an inherent bias by definition.

Framing is in many ways very close to the Agenda Setting theory. For instance, both focus on how media draws the public's eye to specific topics – in this way they set the agenda. But Framing takes this a step further in the way in which the news is presented creates a frame for that information. This is usually a conscious choice by journalists – in this case, a frame refers to the way media as gatekeepers organize and present the ideas, events, and topics they cover.

The proper tool to study frames is the use of visual and content analysis. Having set the theoretical foundation of the study, this paper, thus, would make use of the content analysis method and would find different frames in the coverage of electronic media. The electronic media content will be discussed on its breaking news race, tickers phenomenon, live coverage of terrorist attacks, live coverage of Karachi airport attack, tone of the anchor and reporters, promotion of terrorists, lack of authenticity and other factors from 11:25 pm June 8 to 05:00 am June 9. The selected TV channels are Dunya News, Dawn News, Samma TV, and ARY News. Although the event was covered by other channels as well, yet the researcher found it hard to get the visuals of the event of other channels. Plus, these channels are widely watched.

Findings

Dunya News Reporting

Tickers flashed from 11:30 PM to 4:30 AM

¹⁴⁰McCombs, M.E, &Shaw, D.L The Agenda-Setting Function of mass media.Public opinion quarterly, 36, (1986), 178-187.

¹⁴¹ Goffman Ervin. Frame Analysis: an essay on the organization of experience, Boston MA Northeastern university press 1986, 21-39.

¹⁴² Fairhurst, G. & Sarr, R.The art of Framing. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 1996. 19, 59.

1. *Karachi airport k qareeb dhamaka* (Blast near Karachi airport).
2. *Jinnah terminal pr hamla, shadeed firing, hand grenade bhi phainaka gya* (Attack on Jinnah terminal, severe firing, hand grenade fired).
3. *Old terminal par jane wale raste band* (Road to old terminal blocked).
4. *Terrorists Fokker gate se dakhil hue* (Terrorists entered from Fokkar gate).
5. *Hamla awron ki tadad panch se che he* (Terrorists are five or six in number).
6. *Hamla awron aur forces ke darmiyan firing ka tabadla jari.* (Firing continues between forces and terrorists).
7. *Tamam airports par red alert* (Red alert on airport).
8. *Aik dehshat gard mara gya* (One terrorist killed).
9. *Dakhili aur kharji raston par Ranjers depute* (Rangers deputed on entrance and exit).
10. *Musalsal dhmake, Isfahani hanger aur custom clearing gate par musalsal dhmake* (Blasts continue unabated, continuous firing on Isfahani hanger and custom clearing gate).
11. *Karachi airport par hamla, manazir sirf dunya channel par* (Karachi airport attack, exclusive visuals on Dunya News).
12. *Security ehalkaron ki mazeed nafri mangwa li gyi* (More security personals called).
13. *Runway par aath(8) dehshatgard hone ki itla* (Rumors about presence of 8 terrorists on runway).
14. *ASF ke 4 ehalkar Shaheed* (four ASF security personals were martyred).
15. *Airport par waqfe waqfe se dhmake* (Blasts on airport with intervals).
16. *Aath (8) dhmake sune gye* (8 blasts heard).
17. *Commandoes gate number 4 se airport me dakhil* (Commandoes entering from gate No. 4).
18. *Malir cantt se Pak foj ke daste airport ki taraf rawana* (Pak army troops left from Malir for airport).
19. *Baktar band gariyan airport mei dakhil* (Police vans entering in airport).
20. *Aik tyare (plane) ko aag lag gyi he* (One plane got fire).
21. *Teen tyaron ko goliyan mari gyien, 5 ko juzwi nuqsan pohcha* (Bullets fired at five planes, three got partly damaged).
22. *Pak Foj ki daste airport pohch gye* (Army troops reached airport).
23. *Army chief ka DG Rangers aur Corps Commander se rabta* (Army chief in contact with DG Rangers and Cops Commander).
24. *Jinnah hasptal me paanch lashen layi gyien* (Five bodies brought to Jinnah Hospital).
25. *Jinnah hasptal me aik aur lash* (One more body brought to Jinnah Hospital).
26. *2 tyaron ko aag lag gyi he* (Two planes got fire).
27. *Aik tyare ko hijake krne ki itla* (News of a plane being hijacked).
28. *Pak foj k mazeed daste airport talab* (More troops of Pak Army called).

Last 20-minutes coverage:

1. *Kisi tayare ko nuqsan pohcha na koi musafir zakhmi hua (ISPR).* (None of the plane got damaged, nor any passenger got injured-ISPR).
2. *Koi tyara hijack nahi hua (ISPR).* (None of the planes were hijacked-ISPR).
3. *10 dhehshtgardo ko mar diya gya he (ISPR).* (Ten terrorists killed-ISPR).

4. *Tamam dehshatgard mar diye gye hen (ISPR)*. (All of the terrorists killed-ISPR).
5. *Pak Foj ne dehshatgardon ke azzaim khak me mila diye*. (Pak army crushed notorious plans of terrorists).
6. *Dehshatgard RPG, Rockets aur bhari asle se laise the (ISPR)*. (Killed Terrorists were loaded with RPGs, Rockets and heavy weapons-ISPR).
7. *Dehshatgard Uzbek the (ISPR)*. (Terrorists were Uzbek-ISPR).
8. *Dehshatgardon ko dou ilaqon me mehsoor kar ke mara gya*. (Terrorists were killed by entrapping them in two places).

Dawn TV News Coverage

Tickers flashed from 11:30 PM to 4:30 AM

1. *Karachi airport hajj terminal par dehshatgardon ka hamla* (Karachi airport's Hajj terminal attacked by terrorists).
2. *Karachi airport ke kareeb shadeed firing*. (Heavy firing near Karachi Airport).
3. *Karachi airport par hamle ki itla, police, Ranjers moqa par pohncch gaye*. (News about Karachi airport attack, police and Rangers arrived at the sight).
4. *Karachi airport, shadeed firing aur dhamake*. (Karachi airport, heavy firing and blasts).
5. *2 ASF ehalkar zakhmi*. (Two ASF personnel injured).
6. *Char ASF ehalkar zakhmi*. (Four ASF personnel wounded).
7. *Old terminal ke aane jane wale raste band*. (Entrance and exit to old terminal sealed).
8. *Amad o raft muatal*. (All type of traffic stopped).
9. *Karachi airport seal*. (Karachi Airport sealed).
10. *Dehshatgard bamon se lace*. (Terrorists loaded with bombs).
11. *Char ASF ehalkar Shaheed*. (Four ASF workers martyred).
12. *Karachi airport se dhuan uth rha he*. (Smoke emerging from Karachi airport).
13. *Taftan me khudkush hamla, 6 zaireen Shaheed*. (Suicide attack in Taftan, 6 pilgrims martyred).
14. *6 dehshatgard VIP gate se dakhil hue*. (Six terrorists entered from VIP gate).
15. *Aik dehshatgard halaq hon ki itla*. (One terrorist killed).
16. *Dehshatgardon ki umren 20 se 22 saal ke darmiyan hen*. (All terrorists are 20 to 22 years old).
17. *Andha dhund firing ka silsila jari*. (Continuous heavy firing witnessed).
18. *Malir cantt se Pak Foj ke daste rwana*. (Pak army troops left for airport from Malir.).
19. *Dehshatgard tyare ke andr se firing kar rahe hein*. (Terrorists firing from inside the plane).
20. *2 dhshatgard tayare me dakhil hone me kamyab*. (Two terrorists succeeded to entre in a plane).
21. *ASF ke 6 ehalkar Shaheed*. (Six ASF personals martyred).
22. *PIA, AIR Blue aur international jahaz ko nuqsan pohnccha he*. (Planes of PIA, Air Blue and international company are damaged).
23. *3 se 4 dehshatgard airport ke andr mojood hein*. (Three to four terrorists are present inside airport).
24. *Dehshatgardon ke hamle se 3 jahazon ko nuqsan pohcha*. (Three planes damaged in terrorist attack).

25. *Air port par firing ka tabadla.* (Fire exchange at airport).
26. *Pak foj ne runway clear karwa liya.* (Pak army clears runway).
27. *Karachi airport par 7 se 8 dehshatgard mojud hein.* (Eight to nine terrorists present inside Karachi airport).
28. *Jinnah hospital me 5 lashen muntaqil kar di gyien.* (Five dead bodies brought to Jinnah hospital).
29. *Taftan hamla, 23 zaireen janbahq.* (Taftan suicide attack, 23 pilgrims died).

4:30am- 4:50 am June 9, coverage:

1. *Karachi airport ka 90 % hisa clear karwa liya gya.* (90% Karachi airport cleared).
2. *Koi tayara hijack hua na kisi tyare ko nuqsan hua* (ISPR). (None of the plane hijacked, nor damaged-ISPR).
3. *Dehshatgardon ke khilaf operation aakhri marahil me* (ISPR). (Operation against terrorists proceeding to logical end successfully-ISPR).
4. *SSG ka dasta airport me dakhil*(ISPR). (SSG troops enters the airport-ISPR).
5. *Tamam 10 dehshatgardon ko halaq kr diya gya*(ISPR). (All terrorists killed-ISPR).
6. *Tamam ehm asase mehfooz hen*(ISPR). (All important assets are secured).
7. *Karachi airport par searching ka aml jari.* (Search operation at Karachi airport is underway).
8. *Aag tyare me nahi amarat me lagi thi* (ISPR). (Fire was in the building, not in plane-ISPR).
9. *Dehshatgardon se RPG, Rocket baramad.* (RPG and rockets recovered from terrorists).
10. *Dehshatgardon ko dou ilaqon me mehdood kr ke mara gya.* (Terrorists were trapped in two places and then killed).

SAMMA TV News Coverage

11:30 to 1:30 tickers:

1. *Karachi airport ke qareeb firing.* (Firing near Karachi airport).
2. *Airport ke isfahani hanger par dehshatgardon ka hamla.* (Attack on Isphahani hanger of Karachi airport).
3. *12 se 15 dehshatgard hein.* (Terrorists are 12 to 15 in number).
4. *ASF ke 4 ehalkar zakhmi.* (Four ASF personals got wounds).
5. *Dehshatgardon ne dasti bomb bhi phainke.* (Terrorists also attacked with hand grenades).
6. *Police aur RRF ki mazed nafri talab.* (More troops of policy and RFF called for help).
7. *Karachi airport aur runway ki tamam lights ko band kar diya gya.* (All lights at the airport and runway switched off).
8. *Flight operation muatal.* (Flight operations stopped).
9. *Dou maqamat par aag bharak uthi he.* (Fire flames emerging from two points).
10. *Shadeed firing ka tabadla ho rha he.* (Heavy cross fires).
11. *Fuel ke zakheeron ke kreeb larai jari.* (Fight near fuel reserves).
12. *Dou tyaron me aag lag gyi he.* (Two planes caught fire).

13. *Army chief ka DG rangers aur corps commander Karachi ko phone.* (Army chief calls DG Rangers and Corps Commander).
14. *Aik dehshatgard halaq.* (One terrorist killed).
15. *Dehshatgard gari smait runway me ghus gye.* (Terrorists entered runway in their car).
16. *Karachi airport par flight operation rok diya gya.* (Flight operation suspended at Karachi airport).
17. *Dehshatgard 20 se ziada maloom hote hen.* (Terrorists probably are more than twenty in number).
18. *Karwayi me char dehshatgard mare gaye.* (Four terrorists killed in operation).
19. *Dehshatgardon aur forces me firing jari.* (Continuous heavy crossfires at Karachi airport).
20. *Chaghi, Taftan me dehshatgardon ka hmala , 30 halaq.* (Terrorist attack in Taftan, 30 killed).
21. *Pak foj ki response force ko bhi bula liya gya.* (Pak army response force called too).
22. *Samma exclusive: Dusra hamla custom clearing gate pe hua.* (The second attack came from custom clearing gate).
23. *Pehla hamla isfahani hanger aur dusra custom clearing gate pe hua.* (First attack was on Isphahani hanger and second, was on custom clearing gate).
24. *Aath dehshatgard high roof gari me sawar ho kar aaye aur andha dhund firing kar di.* (Eight terrorist came in high roof jeep and opened indiscriminate fire).

Tickers during 4:30-4:50 AM:

1. *Security forces ki karwayi se aath dehshatgard halaq.* (Eight terrorists killed in operation by Pak forces).
2. *Corps commander aur DG rangers bhi jawano k sath mojud hein.* (DG rangers and Corps Commander along with troops at airport).
3. *Teen se char dehshatgardon ki talash jari he.* (Search underway for three to four terrorists).
4. *Tamam area clear karwa liya gya he.* (All area has been cleared).
5. *Hamle me kisi jahaz ko koi nuqsan nhi pohcha.* (None of the plane damaged in the attack).
6. *Aag tyare me nhi amarat me lagi hui thi.* (Fire flames were rising from a building in airport, not from plane).
7. *Tamam ehm asase mehfooz hein.* (All valuable assets are safe).
8. *Dehshatgardon ko dou ilaqaon tak mehdood kar ke mara gya.* (Terrorists were trapped in two places and killed).
9. *Operation 5 ghanton me complete.* (Operation completed in five hours).
10. *Azan fajr k sath hi dehshatgardon ka khatma.* (Terrorists killed at the time of Fajar prayer's call).
11. *Pak foj ka kamyabi ka elan.* (Pak army announces victory).

ARY News Coverage

(11:30PM-1:30AM):

1. *Karachi airport terminal one par firing.* (Firing at Karachi airport's terminal one).
2. *Musalah afrac ne firing ki, dasti bomb bhi phanka.* (Armed people opened fire, attacked with hand grenades as well).

3. *Hamle me ASF k edou ehalkar zakhmi.* (Two ASF personals got wounds in the attack).
4. *Airport jane wale tamam raste band.* (All roads leading to airport blocked).
5. *Karachi airport se aag ke shole aur dhuen k badal uth rhe hen.* (Heavy smoke and huge fire flames rising from Karachi airport).
6. *Tamam perwazen rok di gyi hen.* (Flight operation suspended at Karachi airport).
7. *Hamla karne wale naqab posh hen.* (Attackers have covered faces).
8. *Parking me khare jahazon ko aag lagne ka khadsha.* (Planes in parking may catch fire).
9. *Jahazon ki parking ke ilaqe se musalsal firing ki awazen.* (Continuous fire sounds from planes' parking area).
10. *Jahazon ki parking ke area me aag lagi he, fire brigade na pohncch saka.* (Fire in planes parking area, fire brigade could not reach).
11. *Hamla awar firing karte hue airport me dakhil hue.* (Terrorists entered airport while firing).
12. *Firing ka silsila 45 minut se jari.* (Continuous firing for the last 45 minutes).
13. *Char ASF ehalkar zakhmi.* (Four ASF personals got injuries).
14. *Hamla awron ki tayare me dakhil hone ki itla.* (News of attackers entering the plane).
15. *Jahaz ki parking ke ilaqe se musalsal firing ki awazen.* (Continuous fire sounds from plane parking area).
16. *Fokker gate se firing hui, golian andr aa kar gir rahi hein.* (Firing started from Fokker gate while bullets are landing inside).
17. *Karachi airport tamam parwazon ko rok diya gya.* (Flight operation suspended at Karachi airport).
18. *ASF ke 4 ehalkar Shaheed.* (Four ASF personals martyred).
19. *Aik tyare ke tabah hone ki itla.* (News of one plane being destroyed).
20. *4 lashen aur aik zakhmi hospital laye gye hein.* (Four dead bodies and one injured are brought to hospital).
21. *Airport ke mukhtalif hison se firing ki awazen.* (Firing sounds from different parts of airport).
22. *10 se 15 afracd dewar tor ke ander dakhil hue.* (Ten to fifteen terrorists entered in airport by breaking the wall).
23. *Aik waqt aye ga ke dehshatgar ham par qabiz hon ge: Rehman Malik.* (One day terrorists will conquer us: Rehman Malik).
24. *Dehshatgard main runway par pohncch gaye.* (Terrorists reached main runway).
25. *Tayara jalne ke live manazir. ARY exclusive.* (Live visual of plane on fire: ARY exclusive).
26. *Aag ne 2 tayaron ko lapait me le liya.* (Two planes caught fire).
27. *Firing se mutasir tayara ghair mulki kargo he.* (The plane damaged with fire belongs to international cargo).
28. *Dehshatgardon ne shadeed firing ki jis ki waja se bhagdar mach gyi.* (Heavy firing from terrorists created stampede).
29. *Corps commander Karachi operation ki nigrani kar rahe hein.* (Corps Commander Karachi monitoring operation).
30. *Pak foj ke jawano ne positionen smbhal leen.* (Pak forces troops took positions).
31. *Security forces ki karwayi se aik dehshatgard halak.* (One terrorist killed in operation).

Tickers from 4:30AM-4:50AM:

1. *SSG ne airport par hatmi operation shuru kr diya.* (SSG launched final operation in airport).
2. *Baktar band gariyon ne tayaron ko ghere me liya hua he.* (Armored vehicles encircled planes).
3. *Pak foj nay runway ka control sanbhal leya.* (Pak army took over runway control).
4. *SSG ka commando elaeka key talashe la raha hain.* (SSG commandoes searching area).
5. *Runway per kharay jhazon key talashi li ja rahe ha.* (Planes on runway are being searched).
6. *Maray gae dhasdgurdon key tadad 10 ho gae.* (Ten terrorists being killed).
7. *Kisi tayara ko nuksan nahe phoncha.* (None of the plane is damaged).
8. *Taswer may nazar aana wale aag tayara may nahe aamarat may ha.* (The fire in visual was in building, not in plane).
9. *Dhashadgadon sa asla aur roket mela.* (Rockets and weapons were recovered from terrorists).
10. *Dhashatgadon sa khajor aur dry fruit mela hey.* (Dry fruits and dates were recovered from terrorists).
11. *Dhashatghard airport ka aqbi rasta key dewar gira kar andar dakhel hoe.* (Terrorists entered airport by breaking back gate).
12. *PIA ka mulazmen ko police na tahvel may la leya.* (PIA employees being taken by police).

Supporting Visuals

Some of the common features of visuals presented on all of the TV channels had following mentionable features:

- Most of the visuals on all channels were of the night and there was hardly anything visible. Bullets and blast sounds were complementing darkness to create more terror.
- Updated scenes: hotel outside the terminal entrance, empty chairs by ARY News.
- Blast sounds and fire visuals. Four blasts repeated eleven times, reporter shouting in panic “blasts”.
- Plane on fire, high flames, anchor confirmed the news on ARY as well.
- Dark smoke rising from the terminal.

Repeated Frames

Most repeated words used by all channels as frames include:

- *Dehshatgard* (Terrorists)
- *Khof o hiras* (Fear and terror)
- *Muslasal firing* (Continuous firing)
- *Shadeed firing* (Heavy firing)
- *Firing ka tabadla jari* (Cross firing continues)
- *Dubara firing shuru.* (Firing started again)
- *Waqfa waqfa se firing* (Firing continues with intervals)
- *Ghumsan ki jang* (furious battle)
- *Dhamakon ki awazen* (Blasts' sound)

- *Zordar dhmake* (Heavy blasts)
- *Kale dhuen k badil* (Thick smoke clouds)

Unanimity of News

On ARY News, one ticker flashed 31 times in first ten minutes of the attack alternating with Breaking News flash: “*Karachi airport terminal one par firing, Dasti bomb hamla*”(Firing at Karachi airport terminal one, hand grenade attack). Tone of the anchor person was fast, hasty, scared, creating sensation and they were repeatedly saying the same sentence flashing in ticker.

- The anchor repeated sentence “*Abhi confirm nahi ho ska he*” (No confirmed yet) five times.
- Four reporters were taken on telephone beeper. Same questions asked and the same answers received because all were reporting from the same point just to fill airtime.
- Reporter Shah Nawaz Shah reported quoting “unreliable sources informed”.¹⁴³
- A possibility is that airplanes can get fire.
- After the terrorist attack on the airport terminal, the anchor took a witness live and asked the questions as to how many people were they and were they armed or not?
- Additional forces called, which roads are being blocked, which forces to be deployed for the operation,
- “*Police ne shayed kisi suspected ko pakra he*” (Police probably have arrested a suspect).
- From 12 O’clock onward, The Dawn, ARY News were reporting two planes had been damaged and were on fire.
- Every channel reported a different number of terrorists involved in the attack: ARY reported a large number of terrorists, ten to fifteen; Dawn News reporter told six entered from VIP gate and fifteen entered from the backside to give them cover. Dawn, however, sensibly reported that the whole siege was going on the old airport while the international airport was all safe.¹⁴⁴
- A terrorist would be happy to see Dawn News screen showing upper flash Taftan suicide bomb attack killing pilgrims, lower slot Karachi airport terminal one under attack, severe firing exchange continuously witnessed, and the middles screen showing terrorists attack on Karachi airport, four ASF people killed, reporters telling there is a threat to airplanes.¹⁴⁵
- Samma TV was the most curious channel throughout the coverage. They discovered the attack on the airport was on two sides from Isfahani hanger and Fokker gate. Interviews of the survivors of the attack were also shown who were still in shock.

Discussion and Analysis

As opinionated by media analysts, “media in Pakistan is hormonally-driven, youthful and real time-pressured and is struggling to control its primal urges to over-simplify, over-exaggerate,

¹⁴³Karachi operation ARY News 8th June 2014 11:26 pm -11:36 pm

¹⁴⁴ The Dawn News, 9th June 2014, live coverage, 12:10 am.

¹⁴⁵ The Dawn News, 9th June 2014 Karachi airport attack, live coverage 12:06 am.

under-analyze and under-contextualize everything resulting in chaos.”¹⁴⁶ The coverage of Karachi Airport was a big question on media professionalism and ethics which were nowhere to be seen. Considering the reporting crews channels parked themselves within a few minutes of the news of the attack outside the airport. For hours the only “information” in general that most of them peddled were rumors that kept being converted into news items in their hourly bulletins apart from live opinions repeated. Barely anyone offered confirmed information or identified sources. Most sourced their information to be “reliable” but unidentified sources, or to plain “unconfirmed sources”. Some even kept offering declared unconfirmed information. It was not only unreasonable but also unprofessional. When the reporter himself says information he has is unconfirmed or without a good source, it is against journalistic principles to share it with citizens who take it as truth, especially when it is about an unfolding terror event of visibly significant proportions.

As soon as there was even a rumor of airport attack all channels started "breaking news" flash with airport attack possibility. Anchorperson on ARY News was fighting with her nerves while reporting the attack. She was continuously repeating airport attack single sentence which was on screen as breaking news and running as ticker as well. And sources were nowhere to be quoted, neither any news was confirmed. The characteristics of the coverage are discussed in detail below.

Violation of Ethics

Five to six-hour live coverage of the terrorist attack on Karachi airport Isphahani hanger followed by security forces operation was like a full show of sensation, valor and well planning of well-equipped terrorists. The security forces were appreciated in the last twenty to thirty minutes of the coverage when the operation was complete and the airport was declared clear by ISPR. Initial two-hour information delivered by all news channels under observation was the attack on airport, fierce and extensive firing, the number of attackers which were altogether different on all channels, deaths of ASF soldiers. There was a rush noticed on all channels. People sitting at their homes could feel the attack on their home. The way reporters on the spot were reporting and the anchorpersons were questioning was all just magnifying the terror. Secondly, some of the channels were even reporting entrance of security forces from specific gates to counter terrorists. As per their routine, the reporters converged on the scene and started transmitting amateur footage with the watermark of it being exclusive. How can a public event being covered by dozens of channels be exclusive is a mystery as usual.

The live coverage of the Karachi incident just like the attack on Mehran base and many other examples highlighted the ugly side of Pakistani broadcast media when it comes to reporting unfolding terrorist attacks: it was also hysterical, was not focused, not based on facts, highly opinionated. It also offered supposition and assumption as fact (way before basic facts can be available) and, of course, sensationalism to attract the audience and keep them captivated. The reporters rarely stopped to think and analyze before passing on raw information at least during the first two-three hours of live coverage. The incident was big and of course, needed to be reported.

¹⁴⁶Adnan Rehmat 2010, “Reporting conflict: media’s primal urge”

<http://www.viewpointonline.net/component/content/article?id=124:reporting-conflict-medias-primal-urge>.

Accessed: Sep 30, 2014.

But at the same time, there was an attack on the pilgrim's bus at Taftan and many killings happen. That ticker flashed twice or thrice on all TV channels and the news was conveyed just because there were no media in Taftan to create all the mess and terror.

Unauthentic Reports

All of the four channels had no reliable or confirmed sources to quote. For filling airtime, which seems a big challenge for the electronic media there were just statements. There was information about the number of terrorists and the number was different in all channels, for instance, Dunya TV reported 8, Dawn News 6, 7 and 81, SAMMA TV reported 12 to 15 terrorists and ARY reported 10 to fifteen terrorists. Apart from that, the reporters who were covering the incident were more than one in number with all channels and everyone had a different point of view about the attack and attackers at the same time. If one reported that a plane was on fire, the other denied saying it cannot be said till now.

The second issue was about the burning of planes. At least one thing was unanimous about all channels. All reported that fire has caught planes in the parking area of the airport. Number of the planes, however, was again different. If one reported two planes other reported five or three. So again and the main reason was again reliability of sources. There was no confirming source of news while reporting the Karachi airport attack,

Compromising the Operation

- *Commandoes gate number 4 se airport me dakhil.* (Commandoes entering from gate number 4).
- *Malir cant se Pak foj k daste airport ki taraf rawana* (Forces left for airport from malir).
- *Dakhili aur kharji raston pr ranjers depute.* (Rangers deputed on exit and entry points).

This information in tickers of Dunya TV was not for the general public at least. Neither anyone needed to know. If the reporter on duty is delivering everything whatever is coming to him. Then there should have been some editorial policy, some filter, check on the news to be broadcasted. But there was nothing to see. That night witnessed all possible non-professionalism and the complete absence of something can be called a sense of nationalism. The information in these two tickers was useful of course for the attackers and those who were watching TV to further guide them in the direction of security forces entrance.

Focus on Hospital

It has become general practice in the media to rush to the hospitals whenever there is some terrorist activity. And generally, the hospital environment is spoiled by bringing cameras, and so many irrelevant people. The same was the case in Jinnah hospital during the live coverage of Karachi airport attack. Media flooded hospital to win the race of breaking news by giving the number of dead bodies and wounded in the hospital. That was also unethical. The whole scene of hand grenade sounds, blasts, bullets firing, dead bodies, ambulances, deaths of ASF security personals was quite enough to make people awake and caught by TV screens all night.

Race for Exclusive Footage

There was a clear race among all channels for exclusiveness as ever. There are two noticeable coverage incidents from Dunya News and Samma TV. Dunya News cameraman entered into the inner clearance area where terrorists killed security personals to enter into the parking area of the airport. And the news channel took pride in showing that visual on TV screens exclusively. There could be a life threat for the cameraman. But that was neither policy of channels nor there was training. That is the reason all the media experts are emphasizing more and more towards the ethical reporting and safety of journalists at the same time. The second was Samma TV reporter who broke the news that the attack was from two sides. First terrorists attacked the custom clearing gate and then went on the opposite side at Isfahaini hanger. Apart from these two incidents, every channel was exclusively showing the same dark visuals with thick smoke rising to the sky and some fire which was said to be burning planes in the parking or some building behind that.

Information Required to Be Reported

1. *Kisi tayare ko nuqsan pohcha na koi musafir zakhmi hua (ISPR)*. (None of the planes is damaged).
2. *Koi tyara hijake nhi hua (ISPR)*, (No plane was hijacked)
3. *10 dheishtgardo ko mar diya gya he (ISPR)* (Ten terrorists killed)
4. *Tamam dehshatgard mar diye gye hen (ISPR)*. (All terrorist killed in operation).
5. *Pak Foj ne dehshatgardon k azzaim khak me mila diye*. (Pak army defeated terrorists).
6. *Dehshatgard RBG, Rokets aur bhari asle se lace the (ISPR)*. (Terrorists equipped with heavy ammunition).
7. *Dehshatgard UZBEK the (ISPR)*. (Terrorists were Uzbeks).
8. *Dehshatgadon ko dou ilaqon me mehsoor kr k mara gya*. (Terrorists were trapped from two sides).

Having a quick look at the tickers of the last twenty minutes of operation coverage, the following information can be observed that security forces have cleared the area from terrorists and all state property including buildings, planes and passengers were safe. There were ten terrorists and the arms and ammunition they had were Indian made. The terrorists were Uzbek. And every ticker had a confirmed source which was ISPR. So the long stories of the burning of planes all night, planes being hijacked, the airport are in terrorist control, theories about numbers of the terrorist were gone with the wind at the end of the live broadcast saga.

Now the question the simple argument is what was required and what was reported by the media. What does a concerned citizen needed to know when some airport is under attack? First, about the safety of passengers, second about the diversion of flights and third about the diversion of routs going towards airport are required information. That can follow the successful operation and further details which all channels gave during last twenty minutes of coverage. The remaining four hours of media coverage of the Karachi airport operation seemed to fulfill three main purposes. Firstly, it was encouraging the promotion of political gains of terrorists; secondly, it was as usual fodder for channels; and thirdly, for TRPs and the business of the media.

The coverage of the operation was extensive. It gave more time to the terrorists. Discussing their count, their good planning, their hold on the airport, setting planes on fire, their ages, get-ups,

blasts, firing, etc. and that was not the limit. When the operation was completed and all area was declared clear by the security forces and it was told through media that the terrorists were Uzbeks, the arms they had were Indian made, the media left these two things on the side and all TV channels broadcasted special reports on the claims of responsibility for the attack by TTP¹⁴⁷. A photograph was used by all channels repeatedly in which a group of terrorist was standing. It was also reported that TTP had claimed responsibility for the airport attack as the revenge of a drone attack on its leader Hakeemullah Mehsood.

Conclusion

The visual and content analysis of the news coverage of the Karachi airport attack by four Pakistani channels: Dunya News, ARY News, Dawn News, and Samma TV, reveal a dreary picture of journalism. It was found in the study that the live coverage of the incident for 5-6 hours overstepped the journalistic ethics and professional standards. The news was unauthentic, oversimplified, exaggerated and based on unreliable and unconfirmed sources. The visuals were gloomy and the whole coverage created a farce of lies and melodrama of terrorist act. There was neither editorial check nor any self-regulation. The coverage was so immature that the journalists could not grasp that they were fulfilling the agenda of the terrorists by creating panic and spreading the terror to every house of the country. Some of the information like the details of the troops' movement could have even helped the terrorists. In the end, in the last twenty minutes of the coverage only confirmed news emerged. And the channels repudiated themselves by showing this new information. It can be safely said that immature media has a lot to learn and observe professional journalist ethics.

¹Dominant ethnic group in Pakistan which controls the army.

²Pakistan Army and the paramilitary Frontier Constabulary.

³ Research and Analysis Wing (Indian Army).

⁴ National Directorate of Security, the Afghan intelligence agency.

⁵ Gwadar is the southernmost district of Balochistan and the terminus for CPEC that widens into the Arabian Sea via the deep-sea Gwadar Port.

⁶Interview with a resident of DeraBugti, Balochistan, May 2017.

⁷ can be defined as a space that is trying to find it's meaning in resistance.

⁸ After this incident the Chinese were provided military/paramilitary escorts to travel in Balochistan.

⁹ Fragility: Periods when states or institutions lack the capacity, accountability, or legitimacy to mediate relations between citizen groups and between citizens and the state, making them vulnerable to violence (World Bank, 2011).

¹⁰Interview with a resident of DeraBugti, Balochistan, May 2017.

¹¹Interview with a resident of DeraBugti.

¹² Western Alignment is the offshoot road of OBOR-CPEC that passes through Balochistan and ends in Gwadar.

¹⁴⁷ "TTP Claims attack on Karachi Airport", <http://www.dawn.com/news/1111397>, updated on 9th June 2014. Accessed on September 30, 2014.