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Abstract

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Keywords: Women Empowerment, Pakistani newspapers, Agenda Setting, Political Empowerment, Social Empowerment, Women in Print Media

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Coverage of Women's Empowerment Issue in Pakistani Newspapers: An Agenda-Setting Perspective

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Abstract

In the current research, a quantitative content analysis of four leading newspapers Dawn, Daily Times, Nawa-i-waqt, and Daily Jang was conducted to investigate the patterns of coverage of women empowerment. The time period for this study consisted of November 2023 to April 2024. The results showed that Urdu newspapers gave more coverage to the issue at hand as compared to English newspapers and Nawa-i-waqt gave the maximum amount of news regarding women empowerment as compared to other newspapers. The outcome of this research revealed that Pakistani Urdu newspapers give suitable coverage to women empowerment-related news, although different newspapers use different agendas to portray news related to women empowerment, such as political empowerment, social empowerment, economic empowerment, and education empowerment. The results showed that more importance was given to political and social empowerment and the common agenda of these four newspapers was social and political empowerment.

Keywords: [Women Empowerment](#), [Pakistani Newspapers](#), [Agenda Setting](#), [Political Empowerment](#), [Social Empowerment](#), [Women in Print Media](#)

Introduction

In contemporary society, the statement or any matter concerning women's rights and women's abuse has received much attention in the recent past. There is evidence on how media has a central

role in influencing the perception that the public has towards any issue as well as the direction that the discourse of such issues is bound to take. Regarding women's rights and violence cases, the Pakistani print media has a very central role in setting social understanding and attitude. Scholars



have also looked into the ways by which the print media of Pakistan contributes to the agenda-building and setting of these issues. According to their findings, newspapers are especially concerned with negative images of women as targets of victimization. In the context of Pakistani newspapers, several researches have already been done on the portrayal of women.

The objective of the present research is not to just investigate the portrayal of women but to provide deeper insights into how the newspapers in Pakistan cover women's emancipation from an agenda-setting perspective. Scholars positing agenda-setting theory propose that by focusing on certain issues and how they are portrayed, the media has developed the ability to shape public opinion (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). That is why this study seeks to take a closer look at how Pakistani newspapers influence the public agenda regarding women and support or oppose the patriarchal culture and female oppression by paying attention to the disposition, focus, and language that those newspapers use when reporting women's rights and violence against women.

Mandal (2013) in his study also highlighted the agenda-setting role of Pakistani newspapers for women's issues. The findings established that newspapers were influential in shaping the visibility and importance given to women's rights and violence issues. It underlined that there should be changes in the portrayal of women in the media in pursuit of the promotion of empowered and more positive role models.

In this study, the researcher will try to explore the agenda-setting theory used by print media of both English and Urdu newspapers in Pakistan i.e Daily Dawn, Daily Times, Daily Jung, and Daily Nawa-i-waqt while covering the news stories related to women of Pakistani society. This could help in better understanding the current direction of the Pakistani press towards the portrayal of women empowerment in print media. This study would also testify to some of the mindset regarding the inclination of Urdu and English journalism in Pakistan.

As this study analyzes coverage of women empowerment in Daily Dawn, Daily Times, Daily Jung, and Nawa-i-waqt, it could help identify the policy of newspapers towards coverage of women empowerment in print media. Particularly, this

study will focus on the coverage of women empowerment in Pakistan during 2023 to understand which newspapers give particular coverage to news about women empowerment.

This study aims to explore the representation of women empowerment in the leading Urdu and English newspapers i.e the Daily Dawn, Nawa-i-waqt, Daily Times, and Daily Jung, during the year 2023. The reason for the selection of this study is that there has been a lot of research on the portrayal of women in advertisements, dramas, and films but less on the topic of to what degree the Pakistani newspapers cover women empowerment-related news. The purpose of the study is to explore the agenda of print media behind the selection of news about women's empowerment. It is important to learn what is agenda of media is behind coverage because media plays an important role in influencing the perception of the public about women's empowerment.

A study by Jonah & Nnanyelugo (2020) explored the representation of Nigerian women in media, the results of the research showed that entertainment news about women and the portrayal of women as beauty products appeared more than other categories of news related to women like their role in politics, education, the economy, health, and the environment. Also, the style or tone of the newspaper's representation of women is mostly negative. They observed that women are never considered key players in media issues and are excluded and marginalized. The print media exclude the voice of women or represent women as objects who do not have opinions or women are only fit or suitable to be seen as advertising models.

A study conducted in 2019 by Adnan, Yousaf, and Nawaz, 2019 where found that the media has grown in importance as a socialization tool in Pakistan as a result of the quick development of communication technologies. These days, the media shapes and influences society's ideas, beliefs, behaviors, and thoughts. Scholars and social scientists continue to have intense debates on how to handle gender and women's issues. Like in poorer nations, women are still frequently portrayed in the media as objects. The analysis shows that the media prioritizes women's political issues while giving education-related topics the least amount of publicity. The subjects that

received the greatest attention were those that had a positive trend.

Mavin, Bryans, and Cunningham (2010) contributed an analysis of the newspapers in the UK, and the websites of the government showed that print media ignore the contribution of female politicians in society but show female beauty for the pleasure of the opposite gender. The Brazil study on missing women in newspapers beyond gender stereotypes by researchers Batista Pereira & Porto (2020) cleared that female representation in Brazil involves four dimensions: the role of females, age, body type, and skin color. This study shows that the female role in print media is marginalized by showing them as a beauty product or ignoring their other roles. Three female roles (1) empowered, (2) ornamental, and (3) subaltern ignored by print media. Results of the study show that the portrayal of women as career-oriented, empowered, as being equal to men in any rank has been continuously ignored by the print media authorities over the years (Batista Pereira, & Porto, 2020).

Literature Review

A rigorous literature review of the previously conducted research on women in media was conducted to develop a thorough understanding of what has been done in the past on the current issue.

Arnoff (2011) highlighted the conceptualization and measurement of women empowerment and defined the term Women empowerment as a multidimensional process because it increases the capacity/capabilities of women as an individual or groups to make choices according to their desires and transforms those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Another study by Mandal (2015) about gender inequality in newspapers explained the history of the word empowerment as the word empowerment was first used in the 17th century and its meaning revolved around the concept of 'delegate' and 'enable'. Now the issue of 'women empowerment' is a global phenomenon. The issue of women's development has a strong capability to catch or attract the attention of scholars all over the world. In almost every society of the world and every sphere of life, women are getting unequal positions and status as compared to men in the same society; thus, it is important and need of time to empower women by providing them equal

opportunities to men. The terminology empowerment is a multidimensional social process in nature and it helps women to gain control over their own lives.

In most countries around the world, women's standing is not equal to that of males, even though women's empowerment and their significant contribution to development are often praised.

Women are typically rated lower in the social order than men since they face disadvantages in many regions of the world. The stark disparities between men and women on a wide range of human rights, cultural, economic, and social indices provide insight into this disadvantaged situation. For example, women provide unpaid caregiving two to ten times longer than males do on a global scale (United Nations. Women around the World 2015: Employment. United Nations, New York, 2015.)

Shaikh & Ali (2020) in their study, which was about the impact of literature on women's empowerment explained the concept of Women's Empowerment as a process by which a woman in society is socially, economically, and politically uplifted. It is a multi-dimensional social procedure by which women assist with overseeing their own lives. The concept of women's empowerment was also expanded by other researchers, who established that it is a combination of four concepts. First, Rappaport (1987) says that women's empowerment is a process by which "women can control their lives according to them. Secondly, Gutiérrez (1990) and Sen (2019) view that the main purpose of all efforts to empower women is to give power and contribute to decision-making processes.

The word women's empowerment in the UN papers reflected the distinctions of the concept of power. There are five components of women's empowerment: first is women's sense of self-worth; second is their right to determine and to have choices; third women's right to have access to opportunities for their success and resources that help them be successful; fourth the right of women to have the power to control their own lives and live according to their discussions, although in their homes or outside the homes; fifth and last is their ability to control the direction of social change to generate a more just communal and economic order on the national and international

level (Canton, 2021). According to the report of UNICEF, there is gender discrimination almost in all sectors of Pakistan because Pakistani society is a male-dominated society and this society is a hurdle to women's empowerment.

Choudhury (2022) researched the social factors that affected women's empowerment in Pakistan and explained that like other countries Pakistan is also a spectator of several international communications for the empowerment of women. Still, at the same time, women of Pakistan are facing a high level of gender. The major problem of Pakistani women is economic dependency that cannot be neglected. The study explained that several major socio-cultural factors are affecting women's empowerment like educational barriers, decent work, and access to property. All these socio-cultural factors are creating hurdles for women to become empowered. Further, all governments face failure to promulgate the policies in true letter and spirit. Jameel & Ahmed (2022), whose study was about gender discrimination in Pakistani society highlighted that there is an existence of male dominance in Pakistani society so the gender gap is a reason stopping women from their progress and their contribution to the development of a country. The common perception of all researchers is that empowered women can be a source of growth and development in a country.

A study about Women's empowerment (Mundhe 2021) contributed that Women's empowerment and the promotion of women's rights is emerging as an issue of the entire world, now the world is interested in the suggestions, and problems related to women's empowerment. In today's era, days like International Women's Empowerment Day are now obtaining momentum. Empowerment of women is essential not only for the health and development of families but also for the smooth running of communities and countries (Mundhe 2021).

Mađra-Sawicka et al. (2020) also contribute to the concept of the importance of media in women's empowerment, according to them there is a vital role of digital media and social media in the creation of a society in which women are empowered. The researchers concluded that social media has opened doors and provided a chance for females to show their skills and capabilities and be financially independent these types of chances were

not available earlier for women. Now everyone can see the changes in the lives of women clearly and can see the power of social media which become a strong source of the empowerment of women all over the world. Kumari (2022) thought that there is a great responsibility on the media to help those women who are seeking empowerment and who want to be financially strong and independent. She concluded that digital media plays its responsibility by providing various platforms that support women and become the source of women's empowerment.

Research (Afsheen and Idrees 2022) about the importance of media in women's empowerment has cleared that the trend of online business is growing among Pakistani women to establish businesses with the help of social media. This type of online business is not just helping them be strong financially but helps them to feel confident by profitably utilizing their skills and capabilities. As they are struggling in their online work it becomes a source of a higher level of composure, it helps to become well aware of their skills or capabilities.

Theoretical Framework

The agenda-setting theory is followed in this study to provide a succinct overview of the relevant literature. The goal of the research is to not only collect the number of news related to women's empowerment in newspapers but also to analyze which newspaper is giving more coverage to women empowerment-related news.

According to the Agenda Setting Theory, which was first presented by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972, the media can influence public opinion by picking and choosing which stories to cover and how to present them. The Agenda Setting Theory posits that the media, by its deliberate coverage and framing of news, shapes public opinion and policy goals by influencing people's thoughts and perspectives. The media sets the public agenda by selecting which topics to cover and how to present them, so defining what a priority for debate and action becomes.

The current research aims to analyze which newspaper is giving more coverage to women's empowerment and influencing public perceptions about women's empowerment in this male-dominated society. The purpose of this investigation is to expand the present knowledge on how opinions, especially of the masses, are

relayed by the media and captured on policies. The country also claims to use it to frame gender equality policies and programs.

Research Questions

1. Which language of newspapers gives more coverage to the issue of women's empowerment?
2. Which agenda is the most prevalent in Pakistani English and Urdu newspapers while discussing the issue of women's empowerment?
3. Which Pakistani newspaper gives the most amount of coverage to the issue of women's empowerment?

Methodology

The purpose of this research is to analyze the trends that the newspapers have adopted when it comes to the portrayal of the issue of women's empowerment. The primary instrument in this study to examine the variables is content analysis. Using content analysis, the entire relevant news content of the chosen print media dailies—Dawn, Daily Times, Daily Jung, and Daily Nawa-i-waqt—was examined.

In this research, all the news relevant to women (women empowerment) were measured as population, published from November 2023 to April 2024 in English and Urdu dailies of Pakistan i-e, Dawn, Daily Times, Daily Jang and Daily Nawa-i-waqt.

These four newspapers were selected as these dailies are considered the leading print media giants in the context of Pakistani society. The primary purpose behind selecting these newspapers was to gather information disseminated by the most widely circulated newspapers about the agendas regarding women's empowerment. It is an established fact that these four newspapers have a large readership and undeniable influence in shaping public opinion.

Category Construction

Category construction for content analysis was indeed a very hard and laborious process during the current research. Help from previous literature and observation was taken during the category construction process. The categories of women

empowerment and their relevant operational definitions as used in the current research are as follows.

Political Empowerment

Operational Definition Political empowerment is the process through which women are empowered to participate in the political decision-making processes in their societies, have chances to serve in leadership positions and have chances to exert influence and effect laws and policies.

Functional Definition political empowerment is about ensuring that women are equipped, given opportunities, and supported to actively engage in political processes at any given level. It involves promoting legislation that redresses gender disparities, urging women to stand for and occupy parliamentary seats as well as empowering those who want to compete for the same.

Social Empowerment

Operational Definition the act of providing women the same chances, tools, and power as men in various societal settings is known as women's social empowerment. It means recognizing the equality of women and men which entails ending stereotyping and conventional roles as well as dismantling systemic barriers that would limit women's agency in social, cultural, and economic spheres.

Functional Definition Social empowerment aims at creating a society that is enabling, allows women to participate in social endeavors, challenges social norms, and demands their legal rights. Besides, it also involves ensuring that women are empowered in the economic, health, and educational sectors and also ensuring that their voices are heard in social and local issues.

Economic Empowerment

Operational Definition Economic emancipation is the act of granting women the ability to access money as well as make decisions and secure opportunities for earnings as men. This involves increasing the representation of women in the job market, ensuring that employees are paid equally and receive equal treatment in the workplace, and eliminating barriers that give women limited

opportunities to engage in economic activities and promotions.

Functional Definition enabling women to participate in the economy, enabling them to control financial resources, and enabling women to make their own economic choices and decisions is the idea behind women's economic empowerment. Apart from securing equal remuneration for workers of both sexes for equal work, it also involves expanding women's education, training, and business prospects.

Educational Empowerment

Operational Definition educational empowerment refers to a given set of procedures implemented to ensure women are provided equal education as

their male counterparts, removing barriers like gender discrimination, providing scholarships, and ensuring a safe environment for learning.

Functional Definition Women's educational empowerment emphasizes the reality of women with education, in terms of increased literacy, work opportunities, the ability to make decisions, and equal status in society.

Data Analysis and Presentation:

Introduction of Data Analysis

With a particular focus on the agenda-setting perspective, this section presents an analysis of data gathered over six months from four major Pakistani newspapers: Daily Times, Nawa-i-Waqt, Dawn, and Daily Jang.

Table 1

Total Number of Women Empowerment Related News in Daily Nawa-i-waqt.

| Sr No | Name of issue | November | December | January | February | March | April | Total |
|-------|-----------------------|----------|----------|---------|----------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 | Political Empowerment | 27 | 41 | 49 | 43 | 39 | 42 | 241 |
| 2 | Social Empowerment | 25 | 26 | 14 | 30 | 45 | 17 | 157 |
| 3 | Economic Empowerment | 01 | 05 | 02 | 02 | 05 | 00 | 15 |
| 4 | Education Empowerment | 19 | 25 | 09 | 11 | 25 | 09 | 98 |
| Total | | 72 | 97 | 74 | 86 | 114 | 68 | 511 |

Table 4.1 presents coverage of the women empowerment issue in Pakistani Urdu National daily, Daily Nawa-i-waqt. Over the course of six months, 511 news stories were published in Nawa-i-waqt focusing on women's empowerment; 241 of these stories were about political empowerment, with 157 stories about social empowerment.

Education empowerment received 98 news stories and 15 stories about economic empowerment. So, from an agenda-setting perspective, political empowerment received the most frequent coverage while economic empowerment received the least frequent coverage.

Table 2

Total Number of Women Empowerment Related News in Daily Jang.

| Sr No | Name of issue | November | December | January | February | March | April | Total |
|-------|-----------------------|----------|----------|---------|----------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 | Political Empowerment | 15 | 18 | 18 | 38 | 31 | 29 | 149 |
| 2 | Social Empowerment | 14 | 21 | 08 | 13 | 19 | 14 | 89 |
| 3 | Economic Empowerment | 05 | 00 | 01 | 01 | 00 | 01 | 08 |
| 4 | Education Empowerment | 15 | 15 | 03 | 04 | 02 | 06 | 45 |

| Sr No | Name of issue | November | December | January | February | March | April | Total |
|-------|---------------|----------|----------|---------|----------|-------|-------|-------|
| Total | | 49 | 54 | 30 | 56 | 52 | 50 | 291 |

Table 4.2 presents coverage of the women empowerment issue in Pakistani Urdu National Daily, Daily Jang. Over the course of six months, 291 news stories were published in Daily Jang focusing on women's empowerment; 149 of these stories were about political empowerment, with 89 stories about social empowerment. Education

empowerment received 45 news stories and 08 stories about economic empowerment. So, from an agenda-setting perspective, political empowerment received the most frequent coverage while economic empowerment received the least frequent coverage.

Table 3

Total Number of Women Empowerment Related News in Dawn.

| Sr No | Name of issue | November | December | January | February | March | April | Total |
|-------|-----------------------|----------|----------|---------|----------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 | Political Empowerment | 00 | 02 | 21 | 13 | 13 | 06 | 55 |
| 2 | Social Empowerment | 17 | 17 | 26 | 20 | 29 | 26 | 135 |
| 3 | Economic Empowerment | 02 | 05 | 00 | 02 | 03 | 02 | 14 |
| 4 | Education Empowerment | 06 | 01 | 01 | 01 | 06 | 02 | 17 |
| Total | | 25 | 25 | 48 | 36 | 51 | 36 | 221 |

Table 4.3 presents coverage of the women empowerment issue in the Pakistani English National Daily Dawn. Over the course of six months, 211 news stories were published in Dawn focusing on women's empowerment; 55 of these stories were about political empowerment, with 135 stories about social empowerment. Education

empowerment received 17 news stories and 14 stories about economic empowerment. So, from an agenda-setting perspective, social empowerment received the most frequent coverage while economic empowerment received the least frequent coverage.

Table 4

Total Number of Women Empowerment Related News in Daily Times.

| Sr No | Name of issue | November | December | January | February | March | April | Total |
|-------|-----------------------|----------|----------|---------|----------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1 | Political Empowerment | 02 | 01 | 18 | 11 | 14 | 05 | 51 |
| 2 | Social Empowerment | 15 | 15 | 25 | 18 | 30 | 25 | 128 |
| 3 | Economic Empowerment | 01 | 04 | 00 | 01 | 05 | 01 | 12 |
| 4 | Education Empowerment | 05 | 00 | 03 | 02 | 03 | 01 | 14 |
| Total | | 23 | 20 | 45 | 32 | 52 | 32 | 205 |

Table 4.4 presents coverage of the women empowerment issue in Pakistani English National daily, Daily Times. Over the course of six months, 205 news stories were published in the Daily Times

focusing on women's empowerment; 51 of these stories were about political empowerment, with 128 stories about social empowerment. Education empowerment received 14 news stories and 12

stories about economic empowerment. So, from an agenda-setting perspective, social empowerment received the most frequent coverage while economic empowerment received the least frequent coverage.

Discussion and Conclusion

Through the lens of agenda-setting theory, this study presents a complicated and diverse picture of women's empowerment in Pakistani publications. A striking contrast is revealed by analyzing all of the news that was published in newspapers over a time period of six months. While news related to political empowerment receives a lot of attention other agendas, education, economic, and social empowerment—receive relatively little space.

The first research question in the present research was which language of newspapers gives more coverage to the issue of women's empowerment. To find out the extent and nature of the coverage of women empowerment-related news, four Pakistani newspapers Dawn and Daily Times from English newspapers and Daily Jang and Nawa-i-waqt from Urdu newspapers were selected. The results indicated that Nawa-i-waqt and Daily Jang prioritized giving coverage to issues related to women's empowerment, while Daily Times and Dawn gave this important subject comparatively less coverage. These results suggest that Dawn and the Daily Times could do better in this regard, while Nawa-i-waqt and Jang are contributing more significantly through their reporting to the cause of gender equality and women's empowerment.

The second research question was which agenda is the most prevalent in Pakistani English and Urdu newspapers while discussing the issue of women empowerment? The results showed that political empowerment remained the most prevalent agenda in both the Urdu newspapers. While social empowerment remained the most prevalent agenda in both the English newspapers.

The other two agendas, educational, and economic, though received the coverage but the number was far less than the number of news items dealing with political empowerment and social empowerment.

Furthermore, Urdu newspapers, though gave more coverage to women empowerment-related news as compared to English newspapers but the results showed that when it comes to agenda setting both English and Urdu newspapers gave more prominence to social and political agendas.

The third and last research question was which Pakistani newspaper gives the most amount of coverage to the issue of women's empowerment? The data showed that Daily Nawa-i-Waqt gave the maximum coverage to the issue of women's empowerment. The other three newspapers' coverage of women's empowerment was substantial but Daily Nawa-i-Waqt people took it upon themselves to include the issue of women's empowerment in their topmost agendas.

The findings in this study suggest that the story of Pakistani print media has shifted in a progressive direction and such news is published frequently which highlights women's empowerment and their rights. This trend implies that Pakistani society is gradually shifting towards acknowledging the concerns of women's rights and rebellion against patriarchy. The results of the current study show that the Urdu print media of Pakistan is more active in portraying women in progressive roles. Nawa-i-waqt is the champion of women's empowerment. There is a huge gap in coverage of women-empowerment-related news in Urdu print Media and English print Media. But both Urdu and English newspapers have a common prevalent agenda while portraying women empowerment-related news. Both English and Urdu newspapers publish more about social and political empowerment rather than economic and educational empowerment.

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