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A Comparative Analysis of Prime-Time News Coverage on Public and Private Channels During the 2022 Flash Floods in Balochistan

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Abstract

Balochistan is highly vulnerable to natural disasters due to its distinctive geographical features and socio-economic challenges. It was severely affected by the 2022 floods. This study conducts a comparative analysis of the portrayal of the 2022 flash floods in Balochistan, focusing on the prime-time news coverage provided by two major Pakistani television channels: the state-owned PTV News and the privately-owned Geo News. A mixed-method approach was employed, integrating both qualitative and quantitative content analysis of prime-time news bulletins broadcasted between June to September 2022. The study examines the frequency, duration, and thematic focus of flood-related news, the sources referenced, and the narrative frameworks utilized by the two channels. To support the data analysis, this study utilized the theoretical frameworks of Agenda setting and framing. Agenda setting was employed to assess the allocation of time and space dedicated to the news coverage, while framing was applied to examine the imagery, tone, and other elements shaping the thematic presentation within the news content. The findings indicate notable differences in coverage priorities and framing between PTV News and Geo News. PTV News primarily highlighted government-led relief operations and development initiatives, frequently showcasing official sources and institutional activities. In contrast, Geo News offered a broader spectrum of perspectives, emphasizing the severity of the disaster, the ensuing post-disaster crisis, and the voices of affected citizens, while critically addressing the shortcomings in the government's response.

Keywords: Balochistan, 2022 Flash Floods, News Coverage, Comparative Analysis, Framing

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Introduction

Balochistan is one of the largest provinces of Pakistan by land area, which covers 44% of the country's land area, a region of sharp contrasts and unique geographical features (PDMA Balochistan, 2024). The land of Balochistan includes an inter-mountainous range, having vast deserts, plateaus, plains, and a long coastline along the Arabian Sea. Balochistan is located on the southeastern part of the Iranian plateau. It borders the geopolitical regions of the Middle East and Southwest Asia, Central Asia, and South Asia.

Balochistan is an arid and semi-arid region. A province is a strategically important region with enormous natural resources, including minerals and natural gas. However, its geographical features also make it particularly vulnerable to various natural disasters and calamities such as droughts, earthquakes, floods, landslides, extreme temperatures, and epidemics, etc. These hazards have resulted in major disasters in recent years, such as the drought from 1997-2003, the Ziarat earthquake of 2008, the Awaran and Washuk earthquake of 2013, and the floods of 2010, 2012, 2013, and 2022 (PDMA Balochistan, 2024). These natural disasters seriously challenge its already precarious infrastructure and socio-economic conditions. The province's vulnerability is exacerbated by limited access to emergency services, inadequate infrastructure, and the isolation of many of its towns.

Balochistan has seen multiple floods in the last few years, leaving massive destruction and desolation. Extreme rainfall events, a dry climate, and insufficient soil moisture retention all contribute to flooding in Balochistan. Furthermore, the area's topographical features, consisting of slender valleys and steep hills, intensify the water flow, resulting in flash floods in delicate regions (Raisani, 2024). In mid-June 2022, Pakistan experienced extreme monsoon weather, with rainfall equivalent to 2.9 times the national 30-year average, resulting in significant flooding, landslides, and displacement. Balochistan and Sindh provinces had been the worst affected. As of August 27, Balochistan received 5.1 times its 30-year average rainfall and was declared the most affected and calamitous province (PDMA, 2022). Moreover, the socio-economic context of Balochistan, the poorest province in Pakistan, complicates the narrative. With over 70% of its population living in poverty (Naiz, 2024), the floods devastated human life, property, infrastructure, livelihoods, public services, and economic infrastructure in the province's impacted districts. According to the available data, causing substantial damage to approximately 360,000 people, with 336 dead and 186 injured (Balochistan FLOOD RECOVERY PLAN 2022, 2022). The pre-monsoon spell and monsoon damaged 32 of Balochistan's out of 34 districts, which were Quetta, Khuzdar, Kachhi, Killa Saifullah, Killa Abdullah, Jhal Magsi, Nushki, Naseerabad, Lasbela, Jaffarabad, and Sohbat Pur Kharan, in terms of completely damaged houses. More than 500,000 animals died throughout the province. At least 68,992 dwellings were damaged, and 1,000 kilometers of highways and 18 bridges have also been damaged, obstructing access throughout flood-affected areas (Balochistan FLOOD RECOVERY PLAN 2022, 2022). The scale of the disaster prompted a

coordinated response from various governmental and non-governmental organizations, yet the effectiveness of these efforts has been a subject of scrutiny.

The media serves as a direct link between the public and emergency organizations. It disseminating critical information to the public before, during, and after disasters. And also educating them about hazards, warning them of specific needs, such as transmitting information about affected areas; alerting government officials and relief organizations; and facilitating discussions about disaster preparedness and response. Among mass media television is an effective instrument for disseminating catastrophe warnings, as it provides a realistic combination of images and sound (Kapoor, 2015).

Moreover, Pakistan uses electronic media for information dissemination, with two main categories: state-owned PTV, which is labeled as pro-government and promotes democracy. Private electronic media, funded by individuals fulfilling Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) requirements, which can deliver high-quality information and highlight root causes of poor governance, raising public awareness and promoting accountability. Both types contribute to a broader audience (Shahzad, 2021). Geo Television Network Geo is a private television channel based in Pakistan, was established in 2002, and is owned by the Jang Media Group. It has a considerable reputation in Pakistani news media technology. It was the first Pakistani private news channel that raise its voice for freedom of speech and incentive for free news media (Baloch, Qamar, & Tariq, 2018).

In Pakistani society, television news channels hold significant influence in disseminating information through news bulletins and current affairs programs. The prime-time news bulletin draws attention to major societal issues and provides real-time news and evidence. The media landscape is diverse, with both public and private news channels playing significant roles in information dissemination.

This article conducts a comparative analysis of the media coverage of the 2022 Balochistan floods by state-owned PTV News and the privately-owned GEO News in Pakistan. It examines how the disaster of Balochistan was reported, focusing on the extent and nature of the coverage, the framing of the issues, and the influence of these narratives on public perception and government response.

The research aims to address several key questions: Firstly, how frequently are significant issues related to Balochistan covered in the prime-time news bulletins of both public and private news channels? Secondly, what proportion of the total coverage dedicated to Balochistan news pertains specifically to the 2022 floods in the prime-time bulletins of these channels? Thirdly, which major aspects of the 2022 Balochistan floods were highlighted in the prime-time news coverage of public and private news channels? Additionally, how did the news channels utilize various sources to frame the flood-related

news during prime-time broadcasts? Finally, what was the narrative structure employed in the flood news reports of both public and private news channels during prime time?

Literature Review

In recent years, mass media has played a prominent role in informing and enlightening people, including raising awareness of critical issues such as climate change and disasters. People often rely on the mass media as a reliable source of information when dealing with disasters. Specially in the case of a flood and its affected areas, reporting alerts the people to the situation and prepares them to act based on media instructions. Earlier research says that most people spend a significant amount of time watching news channels to get the most up-to-date information (Akram ,Naseer,& Raza, 2023).

The media is emphasized in developing countries to promote development and instill hope, especially during natural disasters like flooding, in the populace. In his study, Ayomide (2022) conducted a comparative analysis of public and private media broadcasts during floods, revealing that Nigeria's broadcast media, both government and private, have played a crucial role in covering flood disasters. However, private media often features government critique, causing fear and panic among the audience. Government media primarily report news and opinion, while private media spread coverage across the country. The spread of private media reportage on flood disasters highlights how they make it an agenda for the audience to think about and talk about (Ayomide, 2022).

According to Prasad, Tabut, Yesudhasan, & Dollah, (2009), The Malaysian local TV channels consistently report environmental issues in their prime-time news. The nature of the stories was mostly related to crises and disaster-orientated. In comparison with other news stories, environmental stories were few and also shorter in duration. The narrative style of the environmental news on TV channels relied on government sources, as well as the views and opinions of citizens, NGOs, and news agencies (Prasad, Tabut, Yesudhasan, & Dollah, 2009).

During a crisis, the role of the photojournalist is considered crucial, as they can touch the hearts of the public with a single click. Aniq & Sana (2013) studied the photographic coverage of Flood 2010 in national newspapers. They found that human interest, political frame, and economic frame were major frames found in visual coverage of Flood 2010. In all national newspapers, the dominant frame was human interest, while the political frame was prominent in Urdu newspapers. Visuals were gender stereotypes; women were portrayed as passive and weak, while men were shown as strong and independent. Frames of aid assistance and sympathy were most frequent in all newspapers; relief activities of the government were fuelled by visual coverage (Ali & Mahmood, 2013).

Akram, Khan & Ahmed (2023) in their study “Climate Change Issue in the Pakistani Press: Exploring the Predominant Themes during and after the 2022-Floods”

indicate limited media coverage of Pakistan's 2022 floods, particularly in Dawn and The News International, on climate change. However, following the floods, there was a significant increase in coverage, indicating the urgent nature of the issue. The study highlights themes like renewable energy, governmental policies, climate adaptation, and environmental education. The media framing and the integration of diverse perspectives are crucial for a comprehensive and fair portrayal of climate change. (Akram, Kan, & Ahmed, 2023)

Theoretical framework

The theoretical frameworks of agenda setting and framing, which were used to analyze this study, offer important insights into how media channels influence public perception, highlight specific issues, and shape the discourse surrounding the disaster.

The **agenda-setting theory**, first introduced by McCombs and Shaw (1972), suggests that media does not tell people what to think but rather what to think about. By selecting certain issues for prominent coverage, media organizations influence the public's perception of what issues are important.

Framing theory goes a step further by not only examining what issues are highlighted but also how these issues are presented to the public. First articulated by Erving Goffman (1974), framing theory argues that the media presents news in a particular way, shaping how the audience interprets it. The selection of certain angles, language, imagery, and sources affects how the public perceives the issue.

Methodology

The primary objective of this study is to analyze the portrayal of the 2022 Balochistan floods in the prime-time news coverage of national media. To achieve this, a mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining qualitative and quantitative research designs. The study employed quantitative content analysis to examine the narrative structure and sourcing of flood-related news stories in prime-time bulletins, however, the qualitative research design for finding out the possible results in terms of language, imagery, tone, and other elements shaping the thematic presentation within the news content.

The analysis focused on two Pakistani television channels: the state-owned PTV News and the privately-owned Geo News. The study specifically analyzed news reports related to the Balochistan floods from June to September 2022. Using purposive sampling, the researcher selected coverage of the 2022 floods as the sampling frame for this analysis. The data are presented in both tabular and thematic forms, illustrating the statistics of news coverage as well as the tone and language employed in reporting the stories. This approach includes both quantitative and qualitative analyses, providing a comprehensive overview of the coverage.

Data Analysis

Table 1.1 Comparison of news items related to Balochistan in news bulletins

S.No.	Classification of News	PTV News	Geo News
1	Flood	44	51
2	CPEC and Recodic projects	6	2
3	Accident news	2	1
4	Budget news	1	4
5	Human interest news	1	1
6	Government Policy and Initiative	6	0
7	Security, terrorism, and counterterrorism	2	2
8	Economic news	0	3
9	Corruption	0	1
10	National Tragedy and Mourning	1	1
11	Culture	0	1
12	Election	0	1
13	Bomb blast	0	1
14	total	63	69

Table 1.2 the percentage of the number of news items related to Balochistan in the whole news bulletin

S.no	News items	PTV News	Geo News
1	Number of whole news items	1779	1618
2	Number of News related to Balochistan	63	69
3	Total	3.54	4.3

Table 1.3 The percentage of the amount of flood news

S.no	News items	PTV News	Geo News
1	Number of News related to Balochistan	63	69
2	Amount of flood news	44	51
3	Total	81.48	74

The data analysis of news coverage related to Balochistan by PTV News and Geo News reveals distinct differences and priorities between the two channels. PTV News aired 1,779 total news items, with 63 (3.54%) specifically related to Balochistan. In contrast, Geo News aired 1,618 total news items, with 69 (4.3%) focused on Balochistan.

When examining the subset of news items related to Balochistan, 81.48% of PTV's Balochistan coverage was about flood news, whereas Geo News had 74% of its Balochistan-related coverage on floods, making flood news the dominant topic for both channels. The classification of Balochistan-related news reveals further distinctions: PTV News had 44 flood-related items, followed by 6 items on development projects in Balochistan, and minimal coverage of other categories. Geo News similarly prioritised flood news with 51 items but also provided more diverse coverage, including 4 budget-related items and a mix of other categories such as accidents, economic news, and bomb blasts. Overall, while both channels focused significantly on flood news, Geo News demonstrated a slightly broader range of topics within its Balochistan coverage.

Table 2.1 PTV News

Months	The total duration of the news bulletin	Duration of news items related to Balochistan	Percentage
June	12:29:55	0:15:09	2.020224469
July	12:20:34	0:19:01	2.567853446
August	11:24:42	0:29:20	4.284114697
Sept	13:06:47	0:18:31	2.35346
Total	49:21:58	1:22:01	2.768993574

Table 2.2

Months	Duration of news items related to Balochistan	Duration of flood news of Balochistan	Percentage
June	0:15:09	0:02:39	17.49174917
July	0:19:01	0:13:24	70.46450482
August	0:29:20	0:19:07	78.9793
Sept	0:18:31	0:17:55	90.9489
Total	1:13:01	0:48:06	65.87537092

In analyzing the PTV News data for June through September, the total duration of news bulletins was 49 hours, 21 minutes, and 58 seconds, with 1 hour, 22 minutes, and 1 second dedicated to news items related to Balochistan, accounting for 2.77% of the total broadcast time. The percentage of Balochistan-related news fluctuated monthly, peaking in August at 4.28%. Flood-related news dominated the Balochistan coverage, especially in September where 90.95% of the Balochistan news focused on floods. Over the four months, 65.88% of the total Balochistan news coverage was about floods, with significant monthly variations: 17.49% in June, 70.46% in July, and 78.98% in August. This

data underscores a pronounced emphasis on flood events within the overall limited Balochistan coverage by PTV News.

Table 3.1 Geo News

Months	The total duration of a news bulletin	Duration of news items related to Balochistan	Percentage
June	4:34:03	0:08:45	3.19284802
July	3:54:51	0:11:58	5.095450997
August	4:43:33	0:15:25	5.43701875
Sept	4:00:22	0:11:09	4.63874636
Total	17:12:49	0:47:17	4.578095499

Table 3.2

Months	Duration of news items related to Balochistan	Duration of flood news of Balochistan	Percentage
June	0:08:45	0:03:15	37.14285714
July	0:11:58	0:11:30	96.10027855
August	0:15:25	0:13:57	90.48649
Sept	0:11:09	0:09:19	83.55755
Total	0:47:17	0:38:01	80.40183292

The analysis of Geo News data from June to September reveals a total news bulletin duration of 17 hours, 12 minutes, and 49 seconds, with 47 minutes and 17 seconds dedicated to news items related to Balochistan, representing 4.58% of the total broadcast time. The percentage of Balochistan-related news varied by month, with the highest coverage in August at 5.44% and the lowest in June at 3.19%. A significant portion of the Balochistan news was focused on floods, with 80.40% of the coverage across the four months dedicated to flood news. The breakdown by month shows that flood news constituted 37.14% of the Balochistan coverage in June, 96.10% in July, 90.49% in August, and 83.56% in September. This data indicates that while the overall proportion of Balochistan news was relatively small, flood events overwhelmingly dominated the coverage during this period.

Table 4 Various Flood Angles Covered in the News

S.no	Various angles	Number of news stories related to flood	
		PTV News	Geo News
1	Flood and its severity	4	21
2	Flood and Relief Operations	26	4
3	Post-disaster impact and crisis	3	19
4	International Aid for Flood Effects	5	0
5	Protest by flood victims	0	2
6	Victim stories	0	3
7	Vice to vice less	0	2
8	Total	37	51

The analysis of flood-related news coverage on PTV News and Geo News reveals differing focuses between the two channels. PTV News broadcasted 37 flood-related news stories, with a significant emphasis on flood relief operations by the government, the Pak army, and FC, accounting for 26 stories. Other angles covered by PTV News included the severity of the flood (4 stories), international aid for flood effects (5 stories), and post-disaster impacts (3 stories). Geo News, on the other hand, aired a total of 51 flood-related stories, with a strong focus on the severity of the flood (21 stories) and post-disaster impact and crisis (19 stories). Additionally, Geo News covered protests by flood victims in 2 stories and included 3 victim stories and 2 stories labeled "Vice to Vice less," which were not specified by PTV News. This data highlights PTV News's focus on relief operations, whereas Geo News provided a broader range of coverage, emphasizing the immediate severity and subsequent impact of the floods.

Framing of flood News

PTV News and Geo News provided substantial coverage of the 2022 floods in Balochistan, with Geo News almost daily reporting on the situation in August and September. Both channels relied heavily on authoritative sources, frequently citing government officials and representatives from non-governmental organizations. PTV News, being a state channel, prominently featured sources from government ministries and institutions, including the

Prime Minister of Pakistan,

Chief Minister of Balochistan,

Governor of Balochistan,

Various federal and provincial ministers.

Representative of NGOs

Representatives from the Provincial Disaster Management Authority (PDMA) (including DG PDMA, director planning and coordination PDMA, deputy director PDMA, and director relief and operation PDMA) were also commonly cited.

This reliance on government sources aligns with PTV's tendency to focus on the development and relief efforts undertaken by the government, the Pakistan Army, and the Frontier Corps, often showcasing footage of these activities alongside limited visuals of the destruction caused by the floods.

Geo News, in contrast, included public sources in their flood coverage. Public citizens, including victims and residents of the affected areas, were frequently interviewed, providing a more grassroots perspective on the disaster. Geo News often featured representatives from resident committees and the general public, offering insights into the immediate impacts of the floods on people's lives. This channel emphasised the severity of the floods, the resulting destruction, and the post-disaster crisis, often including follow-up stories with updated statistics on casualties, relief efforts, and ongoing issues. Geo News also highlighted the failure of the Balochistan government in effectively managing relief activities, contrasting with PTV's more positive portrayal of governmental and institutional efforts.

While both channels provided critical information during the disaster, their framing of the news differed significantly. PTV News focused on the narrative of government-led development and relief operations, showcasing the efforts of state and military institutions. Geo News, on the other hand, provided a more diverse and immediate portrayal of the flood's impact, giving voice to the affected citizens and highlighting the shortcomings in the government's response. This contrast in news framing underscores the different editorial approaches of the state-run PTV News and the privately-owned Geo News in covering environmental disasters.

The study also examined the various narrative forms that were used to present the flood news on the selected channels, PTV News and GEO News, during their prime-time news bulletins. Among 44 flood news stories of Baluchistan in the news bulletin of PTV, 26 news stories were identified under the 'Voice Over Package' mode of presentation. This presentation mode focusses on the visual aspect of the story, with the reporter narrating over the pictures that illustrate the event. 20 news packages contained sound bites from sources, such as the PM, CM, and high-range government officials. However, only two news packages contain the SOT of flood victims, in which one news story was related to the relief activity of FC Balochistan while the other was related to Halal Hamer Turkey Aid. The news packages rely upon the visual footage of government and institution relief and development activities and can keep viewers interested in the story by communicating information. However, those news stories covered all Balochistan flood-effective areas, but mostly PTC (piece to camera) by Reporter mode is given from the capital city Quetta, Balochistan. Only in a few packages that news stories

related to Quetta, in that news story Reporter, available at the exact location. Sometimes, here the reporter works as a mediator to bring forward the issue to the local authorities.

On the other hand, GEO News focused on the news report that was delivered by Newsreader along with the footage, pictures, etc. of the flood in Balochistan. The news report was based on the news feature style, drawing the visuals of the incident. News features began with the distractive footage of flood along with mournful sounds, while the visuals shown on the channels were of high quality, well-edited, and timed accurately. As a result, we may conclude that the video's technical quality was satisfactory and met the broadcast standards. It also shows that the media owners are deploying professional personnel and equipment to record these news visuals.

Sources used in News content of flood News Reports:

S.No	Number of news sources used in the reports	Number of news stories	
		PTV News	Geo News
1	0	24	46
2	1	14	1
3	2	5	1
4	3	1	1
5	4	0	2
6	Total	44	51

The analysis of sources used in the flood news reports on PTV News and Geo News reveals notable differences in their reporting approaches. PTV News had 44 news stories related to the floods, with 24 of these stories (54.5%) using no sources at all. In comparison, Geo News had 51 flood-related news stories, with 46 of these stories (90.2%) also featuring no sources. PTV News incorporated a single source in 14 stories, while Geo News used a single source in only one story. Both channels utilised two sources in a small number of stories: five for PTV News and one for Geo News. Each channel had one story that included three sources, and Geo News uniquely featured two stories with four sources. This data suggests that while both channels frequently reported on flood news without citing any sources, Geo News had a higher proportion of sourceless stories. When sources were used, PTV News tended to include a slightly greater number of stories with one or two sources, reflecting a somewhat more consistent use of sourced information compared to Geo News.

Conclusion

The analysis concludes that there were notable differences between PTV News and Geo News' prime-time news coverage of the floods in Balochistan in 2022. While both News channels prioritised flood coverage floods in Balochistan, their methods and areas of interest were different. Being a state-owned news channel, PTV news focuses on government-led relief operations, highlights institutional responses, and international aids, mainly relying on official sources. In contrast, Geo News presented a more immediate and diverse picture of the floods, emphasising the disaster aftermath and severity, giving affected citizens a voice, and drawing attention to government inadequacies. Geo News, were frequently interviewed, victims of the affected areas providing a more grassroots perspective on the disaster. Both news channels covered almost all the flood-affected areas of Balochistan, reporters of Geo News reported from the affected area while PTV News reporters used visual footage of Govt relief activities and mostly gave PTC (piece to camera) from the capital city Quetta, Balochistan. The differences in framing, narrative structure, duration, and source usage between the two channels highlight the different editorial perspectives and priorities in covering such a major environmental disaster. This study contributes to understanding the media's role in shaping public perception during crises, particularly in regions like Balochistan, which often receive limited national media coverage.

Recommendation:

- The study recommended that future researchers should do a comparative analysis of the agenda-setting role of national and international media related to the flood in Balochistan.
- It is also suggested that the same channel flood 2022 reporting be compared to earlier and later flood reporting.
- PTV News should adopt a balanced approach to reporting natural disasters, focusing on government efforts, equal emphasis should be given to the needs and voices of flood victims to provide a more comprehensive understanding.
- The study recommends that PTV concentrate on its news reporting. When reporting on a natural disaster in the capital city, information regarding affected areas, images, and footage are insufficient. PTV should deploy more reporters to flood-affected areas to provide real-time, on-the-ground coverage. The availability of reporters in a specific area makes it more noteworthy.

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