



CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE ROLE OF PAKISTANI MEDIA IN THE SWAT OFFENSIVE IN 2009

Dr. Hafiz Hammad Uddin
Ph.D from International Relations Department
Federal Urdu University of Arts, Sciences & Technology
Karachi - Pakistan
hafizhammaduddin@gmail.com

Dr. Shamaila Amir
Hamdard University
Karachi - Pakistan
shaminhasan@hotmail.com

Rasheed Khan
Lecturer
Department of Social Work
Federal Urdu University of Arts, Sciences & Technology
Karachi - Pakistan
rasheedvi000@gmail.com

Abstract:

The conceptual basis for this paper is adopted from Norman Fairclough's ideas on discourse and power and discourse and hegemony (1989) to analyze the role and power exercise of media during the 2009 Swat Offensive. The social and linguistic practices, and micro and macro analysis of discourse have been linked up for the analysis. The analytical part of the paper, therefore, includes the textual properties and power relations and their relation with each other, according to Fairclough's conceptual work. The paper tries to find out the major roles played by the media during the Swat Offensive. The paper concludes that Media played an important role during the Swat Offensive and the critical discourse analysis of media reveals that the power of media was completely manifested.

Keywords: CDA, Fairclough, media, war on terrorism, Pakistan, critical discourse analysis.

Introduction:

Studies of discourses indicate that discourse particularly refers to the usage of language and speech patterns, dialects, and logical statements, within an existing community. It is a matter



of subject and study of people who live in a particular area and share analogous speech patterns (Sipra, 2013). In its real nature, the discourse has three basic dimensions. First is the social relation of production i.e., the societal aspects, or sociocultural practice which contribute to or guide the beginning of a text, and, simultaneously, how these constituents influence explanation. Second is the means of production, discourse practice i.e., how the texts are produced and interpreted. The third is the text itself, as an outcome of the initial two stages (Yaghoobi, 2009). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA forthwith), therefore, calls for a comparison of narratives used from both sides to uphold the social function of language.

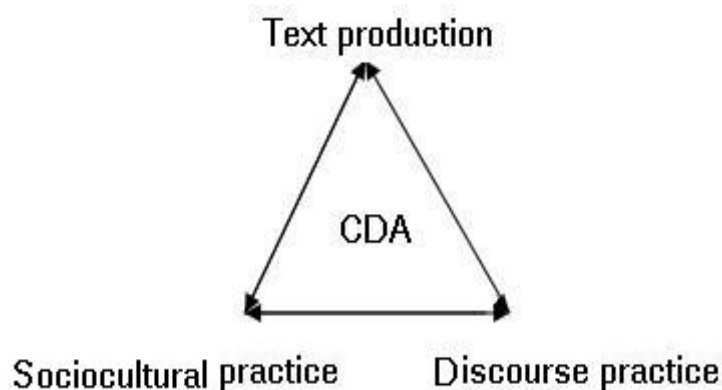


Figure 1: Three dimensions of CDA (Yaghoobi, 2009)

CDA analyzes the discourses through various methods and keeps socio-economic and political contexts in view while analyzing. Therefore, social semiotics always plays a critical role during this analysis due to the interpretation of social components in the specific context of analysis (Gee, 2004, p. 19). It is the study of the controversial causality and decision between wordy practices, events, text, and events. Further, it is a broader, “social and cultural structure, relations, and methods to analyze how such practices events and texts develop from and are ideologically formed by power associations” (Fairclough, 2012, p. 9).

Media has always been used to express and deliver ideas, perpetuate the power and even sustain it and a step ahead make readers fall for certain ideologies or narratives. Since the words used are never neutral and everything that falls in the domain of discourse carries a hidden message and shows the power that reflects certain interests (Widuna, 2018). Statesmen produce their ideologies in favorable circumstances, politicians attempt to make the situation support them but false for their opponents through political statements, and political ideologies are established and deconstructed through prosperous assertions to produce public opinion towards a specific group or person. From building narratives to taking guidance and ideological perceptions, everything is governed consciously or subconsciously by media. The mass media as an instrument is powerful enough to motivate and discourage people regarding various prevalent narratives in society. Every



entity uses media to change the dynamics of happenings, from building narratives to calling out for otherness (*italicized*) towards the other side language has played its part (Fiske, 2018, p. 11).

Literature Review:

Discourse has a wider meaning that is not merely related to linguistics but also sociology, philosophy, and other areas and disciplines. To analyze the role played by media in the Swat Offensive, 2009, the concept of discourse presented by van Dijk (1996) has been applied states that discourse means the text in a specific context is taken as data to analyze empirically. The discourse focuses on the underlying actions and intentions that result in taking a text in as a wider term resultantly making discourse a complete process of social interaction. In such a context, the text becomes merely a part of this process (Fairclough, 1989; Batstone, 1995). Further, its focus as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA forthwith) becomes to perceive for which purposes and how the language has been used as a social practice.

There are sets of cultural, social, and psychological frameworks according to which language users work. They do not work in isolation and the CDA studies this particular social context. It studies the language in a combination of textual structures and the functions these structures play while there are social interactions taking place. CDA is an analysis that is carried out at a multi-level. It is a complex analysis in nature because text structures and social functions lack direct correspondence with each other (Fairclough, 1989). This lack is vividly observed when in power relations there is a need to create and maintain differences, so in power relations, during the process of creating and maintaining differences, frequently and willingly, the relatedness of discursive practice and their social function is left opaque because they are a complex mechanism (Stobbs, 2012). There is a bi-directional relationship between language and social and cultural practices which affect language use and give it a certain shape within the society.

The social structures are constituted by the discursive practices and likewise, the discursive practice determines the social structures, and these both are recognized by the CDA. It explores the tension in language use that is created because of interactions between the socially shaped and socially constitutive sides (Fairclough 1989). Fairclough (1989) proposes that language has divisions of social identity and relations, and knowledge and belief, and these divisions are affected in case of a variation in the strong language. CDA includes in it the element of “critical” and is therefore distinguished from discourse analysis because *Critical* (*italicized*) means to explore the underlying meaning, connection, and reason. Another meaning of *Critical* (*italicized*) is *intervention* (*italicized*) because it provides resources for the people or systems that are at a disadvantage through any change (Fairclough, 1992). Therefore, when the intentions are not evident and mostly these are not, it becomes essential to expose the hidden meanings for the readers or listeners (Ahmed et al., 2020; Ahmed & Amir, 2021; Amir, 2021).



As a mechanism of cultural development in human history, it has become “a legitimate social function supported by an extensive institutional infrastructure, the social order, if people were to survive the predatory behavior of others” (Gabriel and Metz, 1991, p. 3). Humanity has always remained in a constant state of turmoil and conflict and recently the world has seen tremendous development in the social and technological fields as its dividend, the “media” has taken over every facet of life, be it from policy formulation to opinion building to waging conflicts. The famous German propaganda master Goebbels said, “Give me resources and I will make the people believe Devil is God.” Therefore, it is common for nations and countries to project their point of view day and night and try to convince the world about their merits through all available means and resources. The revolution in information technology has profoundly influenced analysts and planners and has convinced the world that *power* (italicized) is no longer conventional in its methodologies and execution.

In the present era, “a democratic government can only exercise power while it has public support and the endorsement or acquiescence of the international community” (Tylor, 1992, p. 3). People are strongly influenced by the media even while sitting in their homes and it influences public opinion about an opponent, or even about and within the international community. Any campaign plan has an important element of public information benefitted from opportunities and management of the negative aspects (The Fundamentals of British Maritime Doctrine, 1999, p. 121). Media is effectively utilized as a weapon to downplay the enemy and provide justification for curbing actions (Taylor, 1992, p. 14; 1997). Therefore, the media is effectively being used as a “Weapon of Mass Deception” (Gordon, 2002). It has become possible to undertake “Precision Guided Propaganda” i.e., propaganda designed for a particular group of people or community to force an expected reaction out of them in a certain time.

Media is referred to as various means of communication and communication is an “exchange of meanings between individuals through a common system of symbols” (Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1995, p. 846). Since the time of ancient Greek scholars, the subject of communication has been a concern (Lahanas, n.d.) which has emerged into several forms like telegraph and telephone, wireless, radio, newspapers, periodicals, television, and motion pictures. Also, various institutional and culturally effective innovations resulted in rapid communication. Media has finally become an effective tool for the rise of social power. The role of media as a powerful tool in the coming future is, at the moment, of primary importance to all the states in the world. Thus, it is imperative to understand the media and its role in the future with particular reference to Pakistan.

Media can be divided into two broad categories i.e. print media and electronic media. Print media includes periodicals, magazines, newspapers, books, and other printed material, whereas, electronic media comprises television, cinema, radio, and the internet. The Internet can be mentioned separately as cyber media (Lungu, 2001) because it works as a bridge between the print and broadcast media and eliminates the differences by presenting information in the newspapers,



and on radio and TV. Media is used to convey ideas, thoughts points of view, feelings, and information to the public or desired audience (Figure 2). Print media has a strong impact on opinion-makers especially on politicians, businessmen and society in general (Davison, n. d.) whereas electronic media dominates due to its added means of audio, visuals, graphics, and images which are understood by illiterate masses as well (Medoff and Kaye, 2017, p. 6).



Figure 2: Social media as an effective tool of warfare (Riquelme, 2014).

The media drastically impacts society and shapes public opinion forming or modifying it in several ways according to the desired objectives. Initially, public opinion was divided over military operations in Swat but the Pakistani media had a great influence on public opinion formation against the Taliban in Swat when a video clip of a woman being whipped by Taliban was repeatedly telecast. It changed public opinion overnight getting it in the favor of the military and the government. This example clearly shows that in today's world, no one can escape from the effects of media. Those who are fully exposed to the mass media, their minds are more vulnerable to exploitation (Sehgal, 2012). When one listens to and watches the same thing through different resources i.e., TV, newspaper, and the internet; he is likely to accept it as truth even if it is otherwise. The media not only give us information and entertainment; it guides our experiences (Casty, 1968, p. 32). The information received through the media is perceived by the audience according to their knowledge, past experiences, and psychosocial surroundings in which they live, therefore, the actual power of media is to transform perceptions of the audience into convictions. Media affects its audience in multiple ways including their cognition, attitude, emotions, physiologic, and behavior for long-term and short-term durations which may be different from each other. However, the commonest effects are related to the reinforcement and modification of the interests, attitudes, and behavior of the target audience (Widuna, 2018).



Media leads public opinion, particularly concerning foreign affairs, in which the majority of the public has no first-hand knowledge. To have an opinion about an issue, it is necessary to have some information about it. A majority of people do not have time to read books and carry out research the easiest source of this information becomes predominantly the media, which supplies news material of a selective nature where the very process of selection involves a large measure of conscious influence in the desired direction. So, it can be deduced that the media does influence public opinion, more so where foreign affairs are concerned. Propaganda is not confined to the manipulation of news content. To rationalize and understand the specific items of the news, an overall climate of perception is created.

Media influence on public opinion is directly linked to the reliability of the source. The credibility of the media is very important in creating desired effects. It is a well-known fact that people refuse to accept messages from the media that is not trustworthy. Quite strangely, media without credibility can also make an impression for the time being but does not have long-lasting effects. It is only the trusted source that can make long-term impressions.



Figure 3: Twitter as a Social Media war tool (Brooking and Singer, 2016).

Media plays the role of agents of propaganda due to its ability to influence the human mind. It is not merely a provider of 'straight' news but can also spread disinformation. During a war, reports are gathered from various sources to be packaged by journalists and disseminated to the target audience. The purpose is to hit at a wide spectrum of influences through battlefield censorship. To polarize the public opinion and to achieve the desired goals, broadcasting standards, fake news, deception, disinformation, official information policy, and propaganda, all are activated. Therefore, it is obvious that more or less, systematic efforts are carried out to manipulate the target audiences' beliefs, attitudes, and actions. Internet especially blogs, YouTubers, and social media platforms are adding to this menace. So, no wonder Twitter reveals military



operations (Brooking and Singer, 2016) and the manipulation of the audience's minds defines and distinguishes the propaganda from conveying of information (Figure 3).

In warfare, media has always been playing a strategic role as a tool of war and Germans were the pioneers to analyse this role. The German army was not defeated but it was the power of the propaganda by the Allied media the German state was convinced to surrender on the battlefield. Likewise, the Spanish Civil War is also an example of grand propaganda war. Media on a full scale was involved in WW II for the first time and had unhindered access to the war zone that later on proved to be counter-productive in several cases especially reviewing or changing the policies and strategies of the states. Media's unhindered access and control remained the policy between WW II and the end of the Gulf War in 1990 while the relationships between the military and media remained strained resulting in the validation of media as a strategic asset during the Gulf War, in 1990 (Kushner, 1996). This access was also obvious during the Iraq and Afghanistan ventures of the USA. It will not be wrong to say that in the present world, war of territory has replaced the war for the hearts and minds of people and this has been mainly possible due to the importance of media as a warfare tool of strategy.

Research Methodology:

Norman Fairclough's concepts of "discourse and power and discourse and hegemony" (1989) form the conceptual basis for this paper. The analysis of media during the Swat Offensive has been carried out by analyzing the social and linguistic practices and linking up micro and macro analyses of discourse. Therefore, the textual properties and power relations form the analytical part of the paper and their relation with each other has also been explored according to Fairclough's conceptual work. Through the analysis, an attempt has been made to identify the presence of the power of media during the Swat Offensive in 2009.

Research Questions:

The paper will answer the following major questions:

- i. How did the media exercise power during the Swat Offensive?
- ii. What were the major roles played by the media during the Swat Offensive?

Conceptual and Theoretical Analysis:

Technological advancements have given the media a reach never experienced before. The nature of wars is changing only because of developments in the fields of mass media. As it has been discussed that in future wars, more emphasis will be to influence and control the minds of the adversary's populace. Mass media will play a pivotal role in undertaking this perception management. Because of the media, nations will be able to achieve their aims without actually



employing military power. Media can thus be termed a cost-effective weapon and a force multiplier (Taylor, 1992, p. 9). Investment in the fields of media can not be termed as a military or non-developmental investment.

The April 2009 Swat offensive was the first operation by the Pakistan Army in the history of Pakistan where the “army enjoyed complete support from the country’s Parliament” (Hussain, 2019, p. 28) because the media was convincing the people in favor of this intervention. Media carried out extensive campaigns through which the Swat Valley Taliban were declared an internal threat. The confrontation with the Taliban was the only solution because of the contribution of the Pakistani media to a radical shift of positions that led to the formulation of public opinion against the Taliban. During the events that led the army to take action against the Taliban in form of the Swat offensive, the people of Pakistan witnessed a complete change of discourse when the Pakistani media displayed a united stand against the Taliban. The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan’s (TTP) members’ excesses, during their “*de facto* (italicized) taken over administrative responsibilities from the provincial and local authorities in the seven districts of the PATA, were used as a tool by the media to form a certain opinion in favor of this offensive” (Admin, 2016).

No doubt that the state of Pakistan contributed to this paradigm shift of media with all its available means. The video circulated by the media in which the Taliban were beating a young girl made people believe that the flogging was due to the operation of Pakistan intelligence services. (Walsh, 2009) this video triggered public outrage across the country,¹ and the Pakistani government in this way effectively began a powerful campaign of “information warfare.” When the military action started in Swat and Malakand, the government took several initiatives that included daily media briefings. The Crisis Communications Centers were established and live PTV transmissions for IDPs were started providing large TV screens in the IDP camps. An official website was also launched and a public service message campaign was started to raise awareness targeting the intellectuals, students, bar councils and unions, etc., to garner societal support for the operation declaring it a national cause.² This information warfare was carried out through almost 50 TV channels, 30 radio stations, and as many as 200 national and regional publications (Feyyaz, 2010). The government, through PEMRA also issued 64 notifications through which any media coverage was prohibited of more than 60 banned organizations that were suspected to have links to the Taliban or various terrorist groups (PEMRA, 2010).

During the Swat Offensive, the Taliban militants used FM radio stations which were important to be neutralized by the government of Pakistan to win the propaganda war. With the help of the ISPR, the government launched its first Radio Swat in February 2009, and almost two months after its establishment, the military offensive was started. Resultantly, the military cleared

¹ These allegations included a statement by Muslim Khan, the then spokesman of the Taliban in the Swat Valley

² As the (then) Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting himself declared



the areas with any presence of militant FM radio stations including the silencing of the legendary “Radio Mullah,” i.e., Mullah Fazlullah (Reeves, 2009).

Overall, the Swat offensive represented a profound influence of media and helped the government understand that the media can play an effective role during political events. After the Swat Offensive, the government was successful in articulating a substitute political and ideological discourse for the discourse that was proposed by the Taliban. The government realized that a strong partnership with the media can be the most effective tactic to achieve the new strategy. However, even after the Swat offensive, the media did not show a structural shift toward religious extremism present in the country. For example, during the 17-day-long Red Mosque operation in July 2007, most of the national media displayed an anti-militant position, but later, ended up taking a more sympathetic stance toward the militants. This shows that there is a two-structural flaw in the Pakistani media. It is “by design sympathetic to militants/extremists and by default not well-versed with its role during a conflict situation” (Mezzera and Sial, 2010).

The media, therefore, performed the following general roles during the Swat Offensive:

- i. **Weapon of Mass Deception:** Mass media is a weapon of mass deception (Gordon, 2002). Though not permanently, it can deceive the public and channel their thoughts in the desired direction. The media, resultantly, reported that the operation in Swat signalled “a shift in the Pakistani security establishment’s policy towards jihadi groups, some of which have been secretly supported by the state as military proxies in India and Afghanistan” (The Guardian, 2009) which later on proved false on many occasions.
- ii. **Precision-Guided Propaganda:** Information through media presently controls and customizes precision-guided propaganda (Widuna, 2018), aimed at particular groups and factions. Historically, propaganda was aimed at a relatively vast audience but now it is possible to attract an especially selected audience of a country or population, particularly those who are in a position to control and influence the masses. Therefore, Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan had different perspectives which were manifested by the media of each country. The coverage of the conflict was praised as the media in Pakistan was manifesting complete independence. The media was declared “extremely responsible and brave in their reporting on both the problems with India and with the Taliban in the [then] North-West Frontier Province (ibid).” India was blamed for problems in Pakistan by a lot of propaganda on the street corners, mosques, and village centers in Pakistan but India called the situation in Pakistan “very worrying” holding Pakistan responsible for threats to peace in India. “The real fear is that there are elements in the Pakistani military and in the intelligence services that don’t want to stop the Taliban” (VoA, 2009). Afghan media condemned and criticized the government of Pakistan for “allowing the practice of *Sharia* in the Swat Valley” (ibid.). The Afghan



- government was alarmed by the Taliban trying to extend their activities to Buner therefore the close contact contacts between the Taliban groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan resulted in the framing of the opinion that “it was understood that *Sharia* law would also be extended to Buner and Malakand” (ibid.).
- iii. **Perception Management:** Perception management of the targeted audience is an important instrument of power that is available to a country or an organization (Mitchell, 2001, p. 73) apart from diplomatic, economic, and military powers. During the Swat operations, the fight against terrorism was declared critical to international security by then-President, Asif Ali Zardari, saying, “If we lose, the world loses.” Resultantly, the USA welcomed Pakistan’s military offensive and maintained this stance through its media as they were already fighting against the Taliban. Their officials considered a new aid package to boost the counterinsurgency capability of the Pakistan Military and local governance by the Government of Pakistan (VoA, 2009).
 - iv. **Escalation:** The media is an effective means of escalation if the same is required in the national interest. The tone and rhetoric used in the media against the enemy put pressure on her to respond in the same manner. The resultant hype created in the media can escalate the situation to the desired level. It was therefore reported that “in a relatively short time, the Army was able to re-establish the Government’s control within the region” (Rasool, 2012, p. 10) and the displaced persons were invited to come back to the region in the second half of 2009. The media maintained a stance that most of the damage to the regional livelihoods and infrastructure was done by the Taliban. Moreover, basic utilities in the valley and other services were not wiped out due to military operations but for that matter also the Taliban and allies were responsible who “blew up bridges, grid stations, schools, government buildings, and so on” (ibid.).
 - v. **Breaking The Fighting Will of The Enemy:** A suitably planned propaganda campaign can affect the fighting will of the enemy soldiers. Over-exaggeration of the own capabilities and the threat of using unconventional means can break the enemy’s will to fight (Dailey, 2017). A report said that “by 30 June 2009, the security forces had claimed Swat Valley, Malakand, Mingora, and Charbagh by killing about 1500 TNSM fighters while arresting about 250 others. Large caches of weapons were recovered from TNSM operation bases across the region” (Rasool, 2012, p. 10).
 - vi. **Damage Assessment:** Media images are being utilized to assess the targeting accuracy and effectiveness of own elements during a conflict. During Swat Offensive, the media reported 168 persons of the armed forces were killed, 454 were wounded while 2088 Taliban were killed, and 2 million civilians were displaced (Dawn, 2009). There was no mention of killed civilians but the word displaced gave hope of re-establishing of people of the region.



- vii. **Morale Boosting:** Media has been traditionally performing the role of morale boosting during a war or conflict. Exaggerating own successes and downplaying enemy achievements help in raising the morale of own soldiers and the general population (Sehgal, 2012). It was declared that the army had regained full control of Mingora, Swat, and that “the military operation could be over in two or three days” (Haider, 2009) with an announcement of the possibility of the end of resistance within a couple of days. “Only five to 10 percent of the job is remaining and hopefully within two to three days, the pockets of resistance will be cleared,” (ibid.). The media reported through the Military spokesmen that “It’s very difficult to give a timeline ... It’s a very big area so nobody’s in a position to give any timeline for the operation” (ibid.). These statements make it clear that the operation was big, and difficult, however, the prediction of success might have boosted the morale of the nation and discouraged the advancements and hopes of the enemy.

Conclusion:

Based on the conceptual analysis of the power of media in the Swat offensive 2009, the following is concluded:

- i. The Swat offensive was declared the only war in the history of Pakistan which showed that the Pakistani army had complete support from the Parliament of the country.
- ii. Radio Swat was established by the government of Pakistan to win the propaganda war. It also served the purpose of neutralizing the effective FM radio stations that were established by the Taliban militants.
- iii. Media performed several roles during the Swat offensive including deception, formation of perception, escalation, assessment, etc. that could support the narratives of the government and armed forces.
- iv. Customized propaganda was used to support the particular interest of Pakistan, India, and Afghanistan.
- v. The media can be biased and take a position as happened during the 2007 Laal Mosque event. During this event, most of the Pakistani media remained anti-militant although ended up later declaring a sympathetic stance towards the decisions and actions taken by the government and the forces. However, during the Swat episode, there was no clear evidence of the media’s structural change of shift of positions toward religious extremism.

Recommendations:

The role of media and its power during the Swat Offensive, in 2009, has many lessons for all those who were involved, the government, the military, and even the masses.



Therefore, to improve the effectiveness of media in Pakistan, the following are the recommendation:

- i. A comprehensive national media policy agreed upon by all stakeholders should be developed which should align with national aims and objectives.
- ii. International media should also be given due importance. At the same time, international media could be hired to serve Pakistan's interests during peacetime as well as war.
- iii. More English media channels are permitted and encouraged to influence the international community and convey their point of view.
- iv. Freedom of speech should be encouraged but not at the cost of national interests.
- v. The code of conduct by media must be evolved and adhered to it. The media must maintain its integrity and practice and promote a good sense of journalism.
- vi. The Ministry of Information should launch a few more websites to project the point of view of Pakistan regarding different world issues.
- vii. Aggressive as well as defensive cyberwarfare should be a mandatory part of information warfare for all tiers and departments of the Government of Pakistan.



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