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Newspapers and the Concerns of Society Evidence from a Content Analysis

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**Newspapers and the Concerns of Society:
Evidence from a Content Analysis**

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and

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CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Abstract	v
Introduction	1
Methodology: How the Content Analysis was Done	2
Content Analysis Results	4
The Main Headline	4
Editorials	6
The Opinion Page	8
Letters to the Editor	9
Conclusion	13

List of Tables

Table 1. Editorials and their Content in 1992 (As % of Total Coverage on This Page)	7
Table 2. Elite Preferences: Analysis of the Opinion Page, (As % of Total News on the Page)	10
Table 3. Readers' Preferences Content Analysis of the Letters to the Editor, (As % of Total No. of Letters Sampled)	12

ABSTRACT

Given the importance of newspapers in shaping public opinion and policy, it is important to monitor and evaluate the contents and preferences of newspapers. This paper, a pilot study of sorts, attempts to determine the extent to which newspapers in Pakistan fulfill their role of keeping society well - informed and guarding the interests of the public. To this end, news items, editorial opinion, analysis pieces and reader opinion as reflected in the letters to the editor in a number of newspapers (English as well as Urdu) are classified into meaningful categories, and a quantitative analysis of coverage given to various select categories is carried out as well as a minimum qualitative analysis. Our analysis indicates that there is a disproportionate amount of space given in the local papers to international news on the one hand, and political statements by local politicians on the other; that opinion in newspapers seems to be cliché-ridden and lacking in analytical content; that, given their importance, economic and judicial matters are given very little attention; and that there is a discrepancy between the interests of readers and the contents of papers. Finally, we venture some hypotheses as to why these particular shortcomings characterise the local press.

INTRODUCTION

Modern societies rely on the media—of which newspapers are an important component—to disseminate information. In order to perform this role well, the media must be comprehensive in their coverage. They must inform the citizenry in an efficient manner on the diverse matters that affect societies. Modern scientific, economic and social development depends to a large extent on such a diffusion of knowledge by means of the media - an argument that is often cited in support of the drive for mass literacy in many planning and intellectual circles.

Although the media comprise not only the press but radio and television as well, there are two reasons why we have chosen to focus on newspapers only. First, like many developing economies and emerging democracies, the audio-visual media (i.e., radio and TV) in Pakistan are controlled by the government. Consequently, like most public sector owned enterprises, one cannot measure this section of the media against market principles. To the extent that radio and television are being run on non-market lines, market preferences cannot be deduced by means of a content analysis of these media.

Similarly, all academic jobs as well as academic journals are in the public sector. Moreover, these journals tend to be very specialised and do not encourage much debate. As a result, most Pakistani academics publish in newspapers and the few monthly and weekly magazines that are on the market. Thus, content analysis—especially of the editorial/opinion page—reflects, in some sense, the opinions of the intelligentsia. It is important to study the debates and opinions expressed on these pages as they eventually shape our policy agenda. Syllabi of elite training institutes, such as the civil service academy where senior civil servants are trained, draw upon the writings on the opinion pages of newspapers. The columnists and writers of these columns are also the main lecturers at such places. It is, therefore, important to determine the areas that this intellectual elite considers worthy of attention.

This paper attempts to determine, albeit somewhat schematically, the extent to which newspapers are effective in disseminating information to society as well as watching out for the interests of the people. To this end we attempt to develop a quantification system for the coverage of newspapers. Such quantification is an important source for discovering and informing the newspaper readership on editorial preferences and decisions. The availability of such information will go some way towards ensuring a certain degree of complementarity between the interests of readers and editorial opinion. This sort of research is, however, cumulative in nature and can thus only be truly effective if it is pursued by others, and on a continuous basis, so that everyone is so to speak kept on their toes.

Given the lack of resources our research base for this paper is quite limited. We were, nevertheless, able to cover six major newspapers—four English and two Urdu—but were unable to undertake a study of the newsmagazines. Within the selected papers, we surveyed only the more important sections such as the main headline, the opinion page, the editorials and the letters to the editor. Our analysis also overlooks another important dimension of understanding newspapers and their contents, that of the quality of the material presented. For example, only simple exercises—such as the evaluating the extent to which opinion is well-researched and the extent to which headlines reflect fact and limits sensation—could be done. In that sense, our paper should be regarded as a pilot or an illustrative exercise. It is hoped that this will serve as catalyst for a larger research project that will refine some of the analysis presented, increase the coverage of the print media and adjust the quantification for quality.

METHODOLOGY: HOW THE CONTENT ANALYSIS WAS DONE

Our aim is to devise a meaningful categorial framework for the views, news and analyses appearing in newspapers. In this the primary intent of our research was to determine the priorities of editors and opinion-writers *vis-à-vis* international versus domestic issues. Furthermore, within their coverage of domestic issues, what weight is given to economic, social and judicial issues.

With these objectives in mind, we attempted a classification constituting five main categories: (i) international news, (ii) current political situation, (iii) social news, (iv) economic news and (v) judicial

news. International news represents views and news on such issues as Bosnia, Kashmir, Afghanistan, “the new world order”, Central Asia, etc. All political statements and announcements by politicians, those in government as well as in the opposition—including rallies and press conferences of all prominent political parties and leaders—are classified under the category *political pronouncements*. The underlying assumption is that statements by these leaders are strategic in intent, made by politicians strictly for the promotion of their own political careers.

Within court decisions, a distinction was made between those of an economic and those of a political nature. Since religion remains an important topic of discussion in our society, all those pieces having to do with religion were maintained under a separate category. Ideally, all the sections of newspapers would be classified on a daily basis in terms of the actual space that was devoted to each category. Depending upon the resource base, a more elaborate and extensive categorial framework could be invented. Indeed, individual pieces could even be stored under multiple categories.

Getting back to our methodology for this paper, within the main categories we attempted some form of qualitative judgement. In the social and economic categories, we attempted three sub-classifications. In the course of the analysis, it appeared that there were many pieces that were quite full of platitudes like “Pakistan is an Islamic State”, “declining moral values”, “corruption”, “lament on poverty or literacy”, articles exhorting “self-reliance”, etc. We termed such pieces *conventional wisdom/dogma*.

The quality pieces that we were looking for were either investigative pieces on current economic and social phenomena, or pieces on interesting facets of government policy or administration in those areas, or analytical informative pieces in the economic and social areas. Pieces that fell into this category were classified into a category termed as *investigative* or *report of public complaint*. Thus, a factual report of an event such as a seminar or a government policy announcement was termed just that—*factual reporting of a significant event*.

Our database consisted of a random sample of about 156 newspapers (from January to October 1992). As mentioned above, our analysis included four English newspapers (i.e., *The Nation*, *The News*, *Frontier Post*, *Dawn*) and two Urdu newspapers (*Jang* and *Nawa-i-Waqt*). The intention was to randomly draw about 25 issues from each of these

newspapers from the ten month period, January to October 1992. We were able to sample about eight percent of the population which, by most standards, is quite reasonable.

Because of resource constraints, no attempt was made to survey the newspapers in their entirety. Instead, four areas—arguably the most important in a newspaper—were covered: (i) the main headline which reports what the editor considers most important; (ii) the editorials, which present the views of the editor/s on issues which the editor considers important; (iii) the opinion page which reflects the views of the elite—columnists, thinkers and celebrities; and (iv) reflecting the concerns of the ordinary reader, letters to the editor. We were thus able to compare and contrast the views of three important actors in the business of journalism—the editors, the intellectual elite and the ordinary reader.

Again, because of resource constraints, multiple or subsidiary classifications could not be done. For the same reason, multiple enumerators to correct for enumerator bias were also not used. For any one attempting to improve on this work, these would be important areas to concentrate resources on. Despite all these problems, however, the study provides an interesting first look at the content of our newspapers.

CONTENT ANALYSIS RESULTS

The Main Headline

The most important part of a newspaper is the main headline. Printed in the boldest and largest letters, its form reflects its importance. In the not too distant past, street hawkers would shout it out to attract buyers. Writing the lead story remains the dream of many a journalist. The main headline and its accompanying story also reflect the priorities of editors and/or owners of a newspaper, and many an owner—like the famous William Randolph Hearst—has used them to considerable political advantage. Crusader-editors have been known to use headlines for their favourite cause.

Third world governments being quite aware of the importance of the main headline have attempted directly as well as indirectly to control the headline in favour of the incumbent regime. Editors are persuaded by many means, which include both the carrot and the stick, to favour the incumbent for headline space.

Our analysis of the newspapers in Pakistan focused on the headline in view of its importance to public opinion and perception. We analysed all the stories that featured as the lead and categorised them according to their content as discussed above.

Evidence suggests that local editors' tend to privilege international news and the political pronouncements of local politicians for the lead stories. Roughly 35 percent of all headline space goes to international events and some 33 percent to political pronouncements. Although data on newspapers from other countries was not immediately available to us, our hypothesis is that our newspapers are perhaps more oriented to international news items than they need to be. Moreover, the amount of attention given to political pronouncements would suggest that newspapers are either under the influence of the government, or remain in anticipation of some benefit from politicians. Factual reports of local social events are the third favourite, receiving about 27 percent of total headline space. However, judging from content analysis, reports having to do with the economy or the judiciary are certainly not what headlines are made of in Pakistan.

Interestingly, there is in the treatment of issues a clear divide between English and Urdu newspapers. Perhaps in keeping with the preferences of their westernised readership, English newspapers devote a lot of headline space to reports on international events. Of the total English—newspaper headlines sampled, about 52 percent covered international events. In contrast, Urdu newspapers devoted only 19 percent of their headline space to international news.

The category to which Urdu newspapers devoted the most headline space was “political announcements”. About 42 percent of sampled headline space was given to the reporting of announcements, press conferences, etc., of political figures from both the government and the opposition. As stated earlier, this was the second largest category for English newspaper, with about 23 percent of total headline space devoted to it.

The next most important contender for headline space is the category of factual reporting of social or political events. For editors of Urdu newspapers this is the second most important category judging from the headline space devoted to events that fall under this category. About 33 percent of headline space in Urdu newspapers is devoted to such events. In contrast, English newspapers devote only 21 percent of their headline

space to events under this category. For them, this is third in importance after international news and politicians' announcements.

Interestingly enough, both economic matters and news related to the judiciary receive more attention in Urdu newspapers than English ones. While Urdu newspapers devote about 3 percent of their headline space to economic matters, English newspapers allot only 2 percent of their space to economic affairs. Similarly, Urdu newspapers and English newspapers devote 3 and 1 percent respectively to judicial matters.

Perhaps reflecting the individual preferences of their editors, there are significant differences among individual newspapers in a given language. For example, *Dawn* seems to concentrate far more on international events, devoting some 79 percent of total headline space to events under this category. Of the English newspapers, *The Nation* devotes the least space to international events, and gives the most weight to political pronouncements. Our analysis also suggests that *The Frontier Post* devotes more headline space to economic news than any other English newspaper. *The News* gives judicial news the most coverage out of English newspapers.

While the favourite subject of both Urdu newspapers seems to be political statements by politicians, the second favourite topic for *Nawa-i-Waqt* appears to be international news while for *Jang* it is social events. Interestingly, in terms of *Nawa-i-Waqt's* headline space, economic matters are prioritised, while *Jang* seems to favour judicial matters.

Editorials

Editorials convey more directly than any other section of a newspaper the views and priorities of its editor. Editorials are supposed to be written by the editor on subjects of his choice. Though based on fact, editorials are not meant to be simply factual and informative. By intention, they represent the views and opinions of the editor. Editors use editorials to sound off on issues of common wealth and public interest and thereby attempt to influence both public opinion and policy. The subjects that editors choose for editorials are thus a good indicator of a newspaper's orientation.

Table 1 presents the results of a content analysis of the editorials for the four major English newspapers and two Urdu newspapers surveyed. Interestingly enough, as in the main headline, the favourite topic of editors of English newspapers and the second most frequent topic for editorials in Urdu newspapers is international events. Judicial matters continue to be the least favoured topic of interest for editorials.

Table 1

Editorials and their Content in 1992 (As % of Total Coverage on This Page)

Newspapers (# sampled in 1992)	International ^{a/}	Current Political Situation ^{b/}	Social				Economic			Judicial	
			Religion	Conventional Wisdom/ Dogma ^{g/}	Factual Reports, or Coverage of Significant Events ^{e/}	Investigative, or Reports of Public Complaint ^{d/}	Conventional Wisdom/ Dogma ^{g/}	Factual Reports, or Coverage of Significant Events ^{e/}	Investigative, or Reports of Public Complaint ^{d/}	Political	Economic/ Social
<i>The News</i> (26)	23.08	5.13	0.00	23.08	28.21	2.56	5.13	10.26	0.00	2.56	0.00
<i>The Nation</i> (27)	30.95	12.10	2.38	11.90	9.52	1.19	17.86	4.76	8.33	0.00	0.00
<i>Frontier Post</i> (25)	39.47	13.16	11.84	9.21	7.89	7.89	1.32	2.63	6.58	0.00	0.00
<i>Dawn</i> (26)	34	0	2	20	16	8	4	8	8	0	0
<i>Nawa-i-Waqt</i> (25)	28.57	5.88	5.04	20.17	4.20	12.61	11.76	3.36	7.56	0.00	0.84
<i>Jang</i> (26)	20.18	11.01	2.75	39.45	13.76	2.75	3.67	3.67	0.00	1.83	0.92
English Newspapers (104)	31.88	7.85	4.06	16.05	15.41	4.91	7.08	6.41	5.73	0.64	0.00
Urdu Newspapers (51)	24.38	8.45	3.90	29.81	8.98	7.68	7.72	3.52	3.78	0.92	0.88
All Newspapers (155)	29.38	8.05	4.00	20.63	13.26	5.83	7.29	5.45	5.08	0.73	0.29

^{a/}International issues such as reports on Bosnia, India, Kashmir, etc.

^{b/}Coverage of recent political events such as the Sind situation, announcements of the Prime Minister, President, PDA, NDA, MQM, PPP, etc.

^{c/}Coverage of social events - crime, functions, community related event - because of the importance of the event and not because a politician graced the occasion.

^{d/}Investigative reports on crimes, governments misdemeanours, or reports on the causes of various social phenomena, or complaints of citizens.

^{e/}Factual reports of government figures without much analysis, e.g., report of the annual budget.

^{f/}Analytical or comment pieces on economic policy or an economic phenomenon of event.

^{g/}As the name suggests, articles affirming certain platitudes that are held dear in our society. In the social sphere, these would be ones that continue to decry our declining values or corruption in our society and the role of the army or how we should become better Muslims. In economics, articles that continue to issue clarion calls for self-reliance, reduction of poverty, etc., without any concrete analysis, are included in this category.

In all, about a third of all editorials are written on international news. English newspapers devote about 32 percent of their editorials to international events while Urdu newspapers commit 24 percent of editorial space to this category. Surprisingly, while *The Frontier Post* devotes the least amount of headline space to international events, it takes the lead in terms of editorials on international news.

In Urdu newspapers, conventional wisdom or dogma takes up most of the editorial space. Indeed, this is the second most important category for all newspapers with about 21 percent of all the editorial samples we surveyed being devoted to it. Among the Urdu newspapers, *Jang* devotes the most space to subjects that may be interpreted as conventional wisdom. However, even in this category, the received wisdom in economics receives less coverage than in the social sphere.

Surprisingly, the current political situation at any given time is the subject of only 8 percent of all editorials. *The Frontier Post* and *The Nation* write the most number of editorials on the current political situation. About 13 percent of their editorials are written on this subject.

Public complaints or investigative reports on social or economic phenomena also feature as the subject of editorials. Judging from the editorial space they devote to it, Urdu newspapers are more concerned about social events while English editorials prioritise economic policy and investigations.

While religion figures as the subject in about 4 percent of editorial space, the *Nawa-i-Waqt* takes it up as a subject worthy of editorial concern more often than *Jang*. Among English newspapers, *The Frontier Post* devotes more editorial space to religious matters than any other paper. Given our findings, it would be fair to conjecture that the *Nawa-i-Waqt*'s editorials are probably more pro-Islamisation, while *The Frontier Post* represents the opposing viewpoint.

The Opinion Page

In many ways, the opinion page is the most interesting section of a newspaper. The opinion page represents informed opinion on subjects that are relevant to the society at large. It is here that newspapers allow themselves to move away from the daily grind to comment on issues that are relevant long-term. Typically, the opinion page is occupied by the glitterati: well-known people from all walks of life, including famous columnists. In that sense, the opinion page represents the views of the

elite. Indeed, newspapers seek to distinguish themselves by means of their opinion pages.

Needless to say, the editor chooses what to put on the opinion page. The editor has the final word on the themes that are covered on the opinion page. Thus, this page is a good indicator of the themes and topics that are important to the informed readership of the concerned paper as well as that paper's editor.

Opinion pages in Pakistan appear to concentrate on international events and on delivering homilies on platitudes, or what we term as conventional wisdom/dogma (see Table 2). Again, as was the case with the editorials, opinion pages in English newspapers concentrate on international news while Urdu newspapers are more "preachy". Among the English newspapers, *Dawn* and *The News* carry more articles on international events than others, while among Urdu papers the *Jang* likes to preach more.

Within the category of conventional wisdom/dogma, all newspapers privilege social and political themes over economic ones. In general, economic issues receive little attention. *The Frontier Post* and *The Nation* devote the most amount of space to economic issues on the opinion page. *The Frontier Post* leads in carrying more analytical and investigative pieces on economic issues on the opinion page. Most newspapers, however, are disappointing when it comes to their economic coverage.

In both Urdu and English newspapers, religious themes receive more coverage than the current political situation. There is hardly any comment on the opinion pages on court decision or court proceedings, to the extent that the matter is not sub-judice.

Letters to the Editor

The "letters to the editor" section of a newspaper is the opinion page of the ordinary reader. This section serves as a public forum for newspaper readers. The views range from grandiose thoughts about the destiny of the country to complaints about the everyday problems of ordinary people. For example, all of us are familiar with the perennial plea in the letters to the editor section on government overbilling for services such as electricity or telephone. Or the pleas for postponement of examinations. Given the absence of an efficient system of justice and bureaucratic arbitrariness of redress, writing a letter to the editor remains an important channel for voicing injustice suffered. Letters to the editor would then be

Table 2

Elite Preferences: Analysis of the Opinion Page, (As % of Total News on the Page)

Newspapers (# sampled in 1992)	International ^{a/}	Current Political Situation ^{b/}	Social				Economic			Judicial	
			Religion	Conventional Wisdom/ Dogma ^{c/}	Factual Reports, or Coverage of Significant Events ^{e/}	Investigative, or Reports of Public Complaint ^{d/}	Conventional Wisdom/ Dogma ^{c/}	Factual Reports, or Coverage of Significant Events ^{e/}	Investigative, or Reports of Public Complaint ^{d/}	Political	Economic/ Social
<i>The News</i> (26)	43.18	2.27	4.55	22.73	21.59	0.00	1.14	2.27	2.27	0.00	0.00
<i>The Nation</i> (27)	28.57	6.12	6.12	23.47	8.16	7.14	8.16	3.06	9.18	0.00	0.00
<i>Frontier Post</i> (25)	35.06	3.90	14.29	16.88	9.09	7.79	1.30	0.00	11.69	0.00	0.00
<i>Dawn</i> (26)	41.77	6.33	10.13	20.25	11.39	5.06	1.27	1.27	1.27	0.00	1.27
<i>Nawa-i-Waqt</i> (25)	21.62	6.76	8.11	51.35	5.41	2.70	1.35	1.35	1.35	0.00	0.00
<i>Jang</i> (26)	15.38	3.08	5.38	63.08	3.85	2.31	3.85	2.31	0.77	0.00	0.00
English Newspapers(104)	37.15	4.66	8.77	20.83	12.56	5.00	2.97	1.65	6.10	0.00	0.32
Urdu Newspapers (51)	18.50	4.92	6.75	57.21	4.63	2.51	2.60	1.83	1.06	0.00	0.00
All Newspapers(155)	27.83	4.79	7.76	39.02	8.59	3.75	2.78	1.74	3.58	0.00	0.16

^{a/}International issues such as reports on Bosnia, India, Kashmir, etc.

^{b/}Coverage of recent political events such as the Sind situation, announcements of the Prime Minister, President, PDA, NDA, MQM, PPP, etc.

^{c/}Coverage of social events - crime, functions, community related event - because of the importance of the event and not because a politician graced the occasion.

^{d/}Investigative reports on crimes, governments misdemeanours, or reports on the causes of various social phenomena, or complaints of citizens.

^{e/}Factual reports of government figures without much analysis, e.g., report of the annual budget.

^{f/}Analytical or comment pieces on economic policy or an economic phenomenon of event.

^{g/}As the name suggests, articles affirming certain platitudes that are held dear in our society. In the social sphere, these would be ones that continue to decry our declining values or corruption in our society and the role of the army or how we should become better Muslims. In economics, articles that continue to issue clarion calls for self-reliance, reduction of poverty, etc., without any concrete analysis, are included in this category.

an important area for future research. For example, the editorial selection process could be studied or the follow-up, if any, could be investigated. The attitude of the bureaucracy to the complaints that are voiced by this means should be examined.

Despite the editorial selection that takes place in determining what gets printed in letters to the editor, this section perhaps reflects best the concerns of the ordinary reader. In that sense, content analysis of this section should provide an interesting contrast to the opinion page which the intellectual, social and economic elite dominate and the editorial page which purely reflects the editor's views. Thus, a comparison of the content analysis of the letters to the editor with the editorial and opinion pages should show the degree of complimentary between editorial and reader opinion/preference.

Table 3 presents the results of the content analysis. Results of only five newspapers are presented in the table since the *Jang*—contrary to what is by now a well accepted practice in newspapers around the world—does not have a letters to the editor section.

The most striking aspect of the content analysis is that the writers of these letters do not share the internationalist perspective of editors and their elite writers. Only about six percent of all the letters sampled from all newspapers are related to international events. Of these, the English letter writers tend to have a more international perspective than Urdu letter writers. International concerns constitute about 7 percent of all English letters and only about 1 percent of all Urdu letters.

Table 3 suggests that our letter writers are given to pontificating. About 34 percent of all letters—43 percent of English letters and 32 percent of Urdu letters—are given to the reiteration of moralistic platitudes, i.e., they fall under our category of conventional wisdom or dogma. Much of this sermonising is of a socio-political nature. Economic pontification constitutes only about six percent of all letters, four percent of Urdu letters and only about six percent of English letters.

Another interesting contrast with the editorial and opinion pages is that letter writers exhibit greater concern for social, political and economic problems. About 26 percent of all letters are concerned with analysing an issue or presenting complaints of a social, political and economic nature. Interestingly enough, Urdu writers seem to be more concerned about such issues: about 22 percent of the English letters and about 27 percent of the Urdu letters sampled are about social, political and economic issues.

Table 3

Readers' Preferences Content Analysis of the Letters to the Editor, (As % of Total No. of Letters Sampled)

Newspapers (# sampled in 1992)	International ^{a/}	Current Political Situation ^{b/}	Social				Economic			Judicial	
			Religion	Conventional Wisdom/ Dogma ^{g/}	Factual Reports, or Coverage of Significant Events ^{c/}	Investigative, or Reports of Public Complaint ^{d/}	Conventional Wisdom/ Dogma ^{g/}	Factual Reports, or Coverage of Significant Events ^{e/}	Investigative, or Reports of Public Complaint ^{f/}	Political	Economic/ Social
<i>The News</i> (26)	7.36	1.64	9.84	31.15	27.05	13.93	3.28	4.10	0.82	0.00	0.82
<i>The Nation</i> (27)	3.28	1.64	6.56	38.52	10.66	22.13	7.38	3.28	5.74	0.00	0.82
<i>Frontier Post</i> (25)	10.78	3.92	4.90	26.47	11.76	24.51	2.94	1.96	12.75	0.00	0.00
<i>Dawn</i> (26)	6.59	2.40	5.39	31.74	15.57	17.96	10.78	5.99	3.59	0.00	0.00
<i>Nawa-i-Waqt</i> (25)	1.27	0.00	6.33	43.04	12.66	16.46	3.80	2.53	13.92	0.00	0.00
English Newspapers (104)	7.01	2.40	6.67	31.97	16.26	19.63	6.09	3.83	5.72	0.00	0.41
Urdu newspapers(51)	1.27	0.00	6.33	43.04	12.66	16.45	3.80	2.53	13.92	0.00	0.00
All Newspapers(155)	5.86	1.92	6.60	34.18	15.54	19.00	5.63	3.57	7.36	0.00	0.33

^{a/}International issues such as reports on Bosnia, India, Kashmir, etc.

^{b/}Coverage of recent political events such as the Sind situation, announcements of the Prime Minister, President, PDA, NDA, MQM, PPP, etc.

^{c/}Coverage of social events - crime, functions, community related event - because of the importance of the event and not because a politician graced the occasion.

^{d/}Investigative reports on crimes, governments misdemeanours, or reports on the causes of various social phenomena, or complaints of citizens.

^{e/}Factual reports of government figures without much analysis, e.g., report of the annual budget.

^{f/}Analytical or comment pieces on economic policy or an economic phenomenon of event.

^{g/}As the name suggests, articles affirming certain platitudes that are held dear in our society. In the social sphere, these would be ones that continue to decry our declining values or corruption in our society and the role of the army or how we should become better Muslims. In economics, articles that continue to issue clarion calls for self-reliance, reduction of poverty, etc., without any concrete analysis, are included in this category.

Furthermore, Urdu writers are more concerned with economic issues or complaints since 14 percent of their letters are concerned with economic issues whereas the comparable figure for English newspapers is only 6 percent.

An element of editorial discretion is also worth commenting on. The *Frontier Post* clearly appears to favour letters about economic, social and political issues for publication. *Dawn* appears to favour economic pontification, while the *Nawa-i-Waqt* appears to have a strong bias towards publishing letters related to complaints or analytical issues having to do with the economy.

CONCLUSION

Our simple content analysis has yielded some interesting conclusions:

- (1) Newspaper editors, elite columnists and opinion page writers are very internationalist in their perspective. It would be interesting to do an international comparative study to see if our hypothesis is borne out that our journalistic intelligentsia devotes an inordinately large amount of newspaper space to international issues.
- (2) The most prevalent approach to journalism appears to be to follow politicians for statements. A large fraction of our news appears to be about these newsmakers and their various press conferences and rallies.
- (3) Opinion seems to be quite cliché-ridden with very little informative or analytical content. Home-grown platitudes and moral sermons clearly outweigh analysis.
- (4) Very little attention is paid to economic or judicial issues. These serious issues are hardly reported at all in the main pages of our newspapers. Some newspapers have business pages and even a weekly page having to do with the judiciary. However, given the extraordinary relevance of economic and judicial matters, they should be prioritised in the main body of the paper.
- (5) Hardly any analytical or investigative work is printed. Issues of public concern or public maladministration do not receive the attention that they merit.
- (6) Our content analysis of the letters to the editor seems to show that the ordinary reading public does not share the views of the

editors. Letters to the editor are rarely about international matters or politicians. Readers appear to be more concerned with (i) airing their views, and (ii) bringing their grievances to one of the few public forums available to them.

Why is there a discrepancy between editorial and reader concerns? It would be remiss to simply assume that newspaper owners and their editors are irrational; surely, they must be cognisant of market demands. Three hypotheses can be put forward as possible explanations:

- (1) Perhaps printing news received from international wire services and the statements of politicians is the easiest course to follow.
- (2) It is more *profitable* to print this innocuous international material and that related to press conferences and rallies of politicians. The bulk of advertising in newspapers is that of the government as well as the bulk of subscriptions. Moreover, most economic favours such as plot licenses and preferential credit are also in the powers of the government. So, advocating public interests by covering socio-economic issues may incur the wrath of the most important patron.
- (3) The old McCaulay tradition of creating gentlemen and men of letters among the natives has left a deep mark on our intelligentsia; the internationalist stance is an aspect of this legacy as is the preference for familiar topoi and Jeremiads, and a certain aesthetic/romantic sensibility. Certainly, as a society, we have placed no premium on the development of analytical or investigative skills. Consequently, it is not surprising that our newspapers do not reflect such skills.

As we said earlier, our research has had to be quite restricted due to lack of resources. We were, however, able to cover the major newspapers, but were unable to undertake a study of the newsmagazines. For the selected papers, we covered only the more important sections such as the main headline, the opinion page, the editorials and the letters to the editor. Our simple analysis also overlooks another dimension important in understanding newspapers and their contents, that of the quality of the material presented. For example, simple exercises such as the extent to which opinion is well-researched and the headline reflects fact and limits sensation, could be done. In that sense, the paper should be regarded as a pilot, or an illustrative exercise. It is hoped that our humble effort will

serve as a catalyst for a larger, collaborative and cumulative research project that will refine some of the analyses presented, increase the coverage of the print media, and supplement quantification analyses with qualitative ones.

We have developed here a simple but meaningful classification for categorising news, opinion and analysis appearing in newspapers. Under ideal circumstances, perhaps all the sections of the newspaper would be classified on a daily basis in terms of the actual space that was devoted to each category. Such research would be able to develop many more categories and could even assign pieces to multiple categories. The database that would be developed in this manner would, with the help of personal computers and sophisticated statistical packages, allow many interesting trends in newspapers to be analysed.

Perhaps if someone is able to develop this database on a continuous basis, we could more effectively monitor our press. This would not only allow us to pressure the press to more adequately reflect public interest and opinion, but perhaps ensure a more responsible role for the press—a goal that is often valorised. Perhaps then we will be able to reorient our journalistic community away from their currently excessively global or internationalist perspective to a keener interest in domestic concerns. In the same manner, such quantification might help to show that we need hard information and evidence about and analysis of our society and its problems. Opinion and cliché cannot substitute for such hard work.