

AN ANALYSIS OF MEDIA'S ROLE: CASE STUDY OF ARMY PUBLIC SCHOOL (APS) PESHAWAR ATTACK

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Abstract

The study aimed at analyzing the role of media during and after terrorist attacks by examining the media handling of APS Peshawar attack. The sample consisted of males and females selected on convenience basis from universities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. It was hypothesized that (1) Extensive media coverage of terrorist attacks leads to greater publicity/recognition of terrorist groups (2) Media coverage of APS Peshawar attack increased fear and anxiety in public (3) Positive media handling/coverage of APS Peshawar attack led to public solidarity and peace. The results indicate that i) Media coverage of terrorist attacks does help terrorist groups to gain publicity and recognition amongst public ii) Media coverage of Aps Peshawar attack did not increase fear/anxiety in fact it directed the Pakistani nation towards public solidarity and peace.

Keywords: Terrorism, Media

Introduction

On the morning of 16th December 2014 a brutal terrorist attack was directed on Army public school warsak road, Peshawar which is located in the KPK province of Pakistan. The nature of attack included hostage taking, suicide bombing, spree killing and shooting, as per inter services public relations (ISPR) report seven terrorists entered the school around 10am, reached to the auditorium where school children were gathered for a ceremony and opened fire on them, after fifteen minutes SSG (special services group) team entered the school to start the rescue operation, 7 terrorists were killed by them and they managed to rescue many hostages. A total of around 150 people lost their lives in the attack including 132 children. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed the responsibility of this attack, stating that it was their revenge against Operation Zarb e Azb and Pakistan army. This attack sparked a huge reaction or a series of reactions in Pakistan. Public, political and religious parties, journalists, government everyone condemned the attack.

The whole nation came close and stood together to express solidarity with the victims of APS Peshawar attack. Many countries and international organizations condemned the attack and expressed their condolences. National and international media coverage of the incident took place.

The aim of this study is to discover the effects that media coverage has on the

society and on their viewers. To understand these effects the case of APS Peshawar attack is examined and studied.

Significance of the Study

1. This study may possibly help Pakistani media to understand the influence they create on their audience through positive and negative coverage of events with the aim of yielding better results by improving their forthcoming choices.

2. This study would correspondingly be useful for further researches on a similar theme.

Terrorism and Media

Reporting on terrorism is always a problem for journalists because of a number of do's and don'ts that are linked with the ethical issues. A whole bunch of research material is available over the internet which tells us about how different forms of media cover terrorism using their own approach and focus, but a large number of researchers are only interested to find out that how public is informed about terrorist events and how do they respond to that information. Researchers argue that there should be a set of guidelines for media coverage of events of terror because media is responsible for the consequences of their coverage and media should be accountable of what it covers and how it is portrayed to the people.

According to Frey and Rohner [2007, p. 129–145] Media is used a platform for spreading the ideology of terrorist groups and in the same way media benefits from terrorism news as when terrorist attacks take place media channel ratings increases too. It becomes a mutual-interest or common-interest game where both media and terrorists benefit from each other which is why terror attacks in Developing countries are 'bloodier' than in United states of America or Europe.

According to Burakovskiy [2013] Terrorists want media to cover their stories because then it gets easier for them to get recognition, voice their message and to get government to listen to their agenda and media organizations are publicizing these terrorists but Bruce Hoffman [2006] pointed out that 'there is no evidence that the portrayal of terrorism in the media actually leads to public's increase in sympathy towards those perpetrating the terrorist acts or their cause. Terrorists, media experts share the same vibe that those terrorist groups whose names are included in prime electronic time news or talk shows or is included on the front page of the newspaper they gain a certain kind of public identity and it is very beneficial for them to make public and government know about their goals and ideology [Dowling, 1986].

Researches argue that media have shown examples of irresponsible reporting and coverage that have caused several and various kinds of damages in history and these examples cannot be overlooked.

According to Schmidt and De Graaf [1982] the troubling media coverage can be explained through this incident, A British airways plane was Hijacked on November 2, 1974 by four terrorists who demanded the release of 13 imprisoned terrorists in Egypt. The Egyptian government agreed and told them that we are freeing those 13 terrorists meanwhile a media reporter revealed in his report that there were no terrorists released, the hijackers heard the report and executed one hostage.

It is believed in various studies that exposure to terrorist attacks leave some kind of influence on the viewers [Maguen, Papa, Litz, 2008] and according to Norris et al [2002]. Exposure to terrorist attacks has a direct relation with higher levels of post-traumatic stress disorder and other distress symptoms.

Media's repeated coverage of 9/11 and Iraq war images on television were witnessed by billions of people and exposure to 9/11 and Iraq war media images increased

the level of post-traumatic stress. [Silver et al., 2013] according to Bandura [1986] Mass media's reporting of brutal attacks and violence stimulates the feelings of threat and insecurity even in people who are not directly exposed to that violence and have no possible threat

This could be true too but one cannot overpass the fact that the basic function of media is to provide people with information. Since research arguments on media coverage related to terrorism are quite negative there are other issues and aspects where researchers believe media is playing a much more positive role.

In this study both the aspects of media would be discussed. There are always both pros and cons whenever we talk about the media coverage, it can be said that media has a very huge impact on the lives of people because it helps them shape their perception and opinion. Media should be highly concerned about what information they are passing and how are they portraying it.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study comprises of Agenda setting theory and Persuasion theory's Elaboration likelihood model (ELM) which supports the study. The Agenda setting is defined as ability of the news media to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda. That is, if a news item is covered frequently and prominently the audience will regard the issue as more important". The ELM of Persuasion theory suggests that the probability of effective persuasion depends on how successful the communication is at bringing to mind a relevant mental representation".

Hypotheses

1. Extensive media coverage of terrorist's attacks leads to greater publicity/recognition of terrorist groups.

Dependent Variable: Publicity/recognition of terrorist groups.

Independent Variable: Extensive media coverage.

2. Positive media handling/coverage of APS Peshawar attack led to public solidarity and peace.

Dependent variable: Public solidarity and peace.

Independent variable: Positive media handling/coverage.

3. Media coverage of APS Peshawar attack increased fear/Anxiety in public.

Dependent Variable: Fear/anxiety in public

Independent Variable: Media coverage

Assumption

This paper will focus on analyzing the role that media plays during or after terrorist attacks. The term media is very vast in its meaning, but in perspective of this paper it precisely refers to television.

Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature, it is based on 'survey design'. The sample consisted of university students of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. Convenient sampling technique was used, the age of sample ranged between 18-29 years.

Author of Questionnaire: Self designed questionnaire.

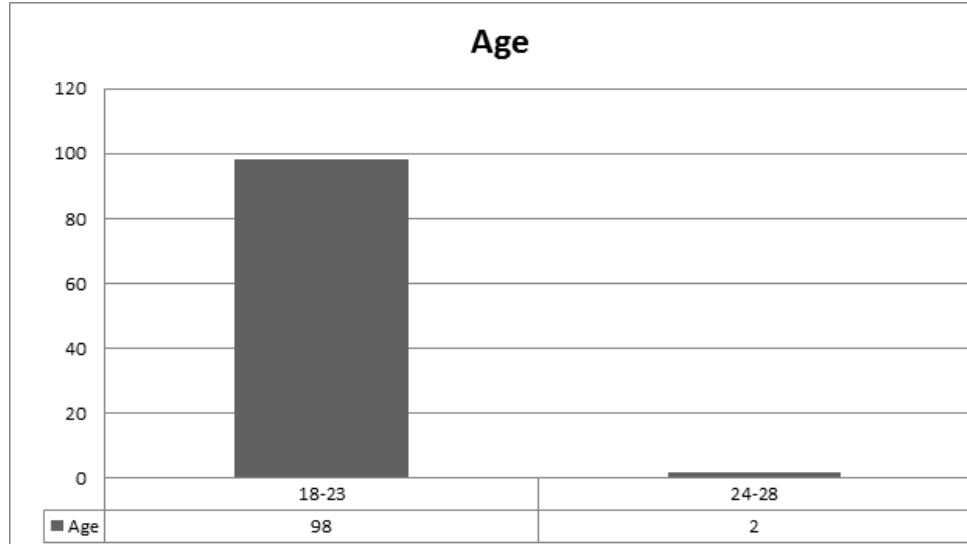
Procedure: Survey

Demographics

Question 1. Please select your Age.

18-23	24-29
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Figure 1

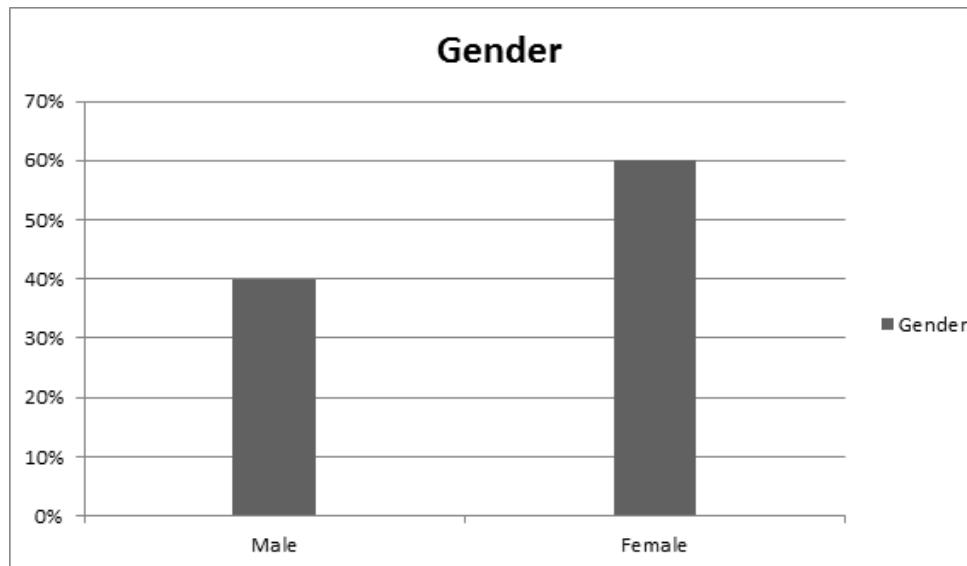


Majority of the respondents selected on the basis of convenient sampling were eighteen to twenty years old university students.

Question 2. Select your Gender?

Male	Female
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Figure 1.1

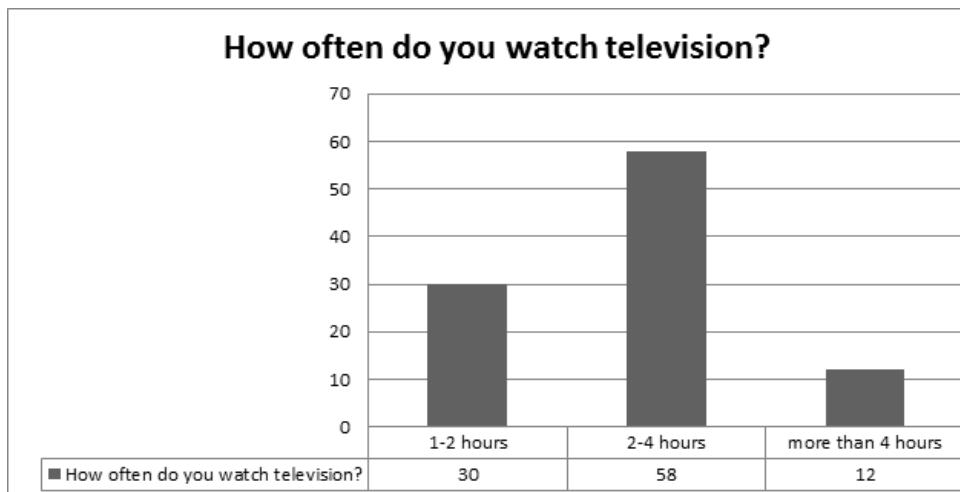


Majority of the respondents are female university students.

Question 3. How often do you watch television in a day?

1-2 Hours	2-4 Hours	More than 4 hours
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Figure 1.2



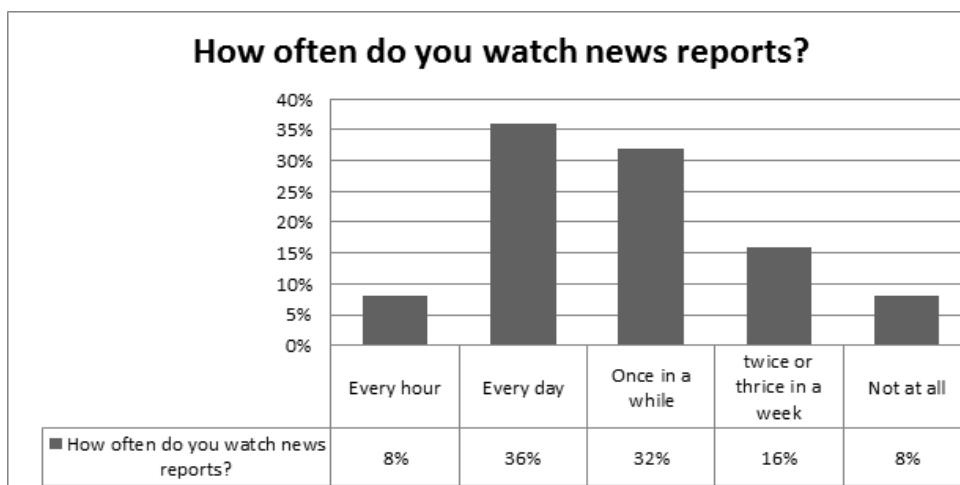
Thirty percent of the respondents are light viewers and watch television one to two hours a day. Fifty percent respondents are moderate viewers and watch television between 2-4 hours. Twelve percent respondents are heavy viewers of television and watch television more than 4 hours.

As the study is about analyzing the role of media, it was imperative that majority respondents were no less than moderate viewers of television which could ensure that they have complete knowledge of media and what role is it playing.

Question 4. How often do you watch news reports on television?

Every hour	Everyday	Once in a while	Twice or thrice	Not at all
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Figure 1.3

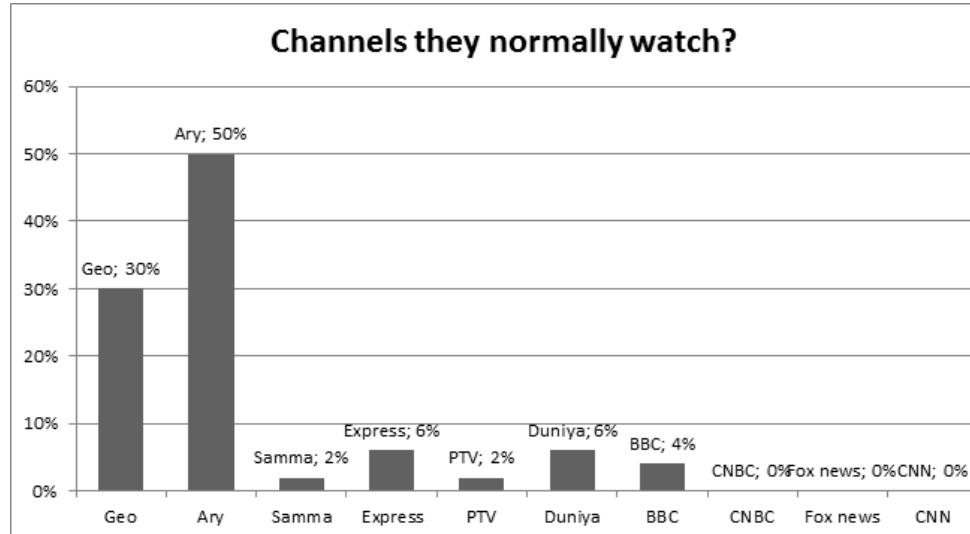


Eight percent respondents are keen enough to watch news updates every hour. Thirty six percent respondents keep a watch on news every day. Thirty two percent watch news accounts of events once in a while, sixteen percent watch news twice or thrice in a week and eight percent are least interested to watch news.

Question 5. Which of these news channels do you normally watch?

Geo	Ary	Samma	Express	PTV	Duniya	BBC	CNBC	Fox	CNN
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Figure 1.4

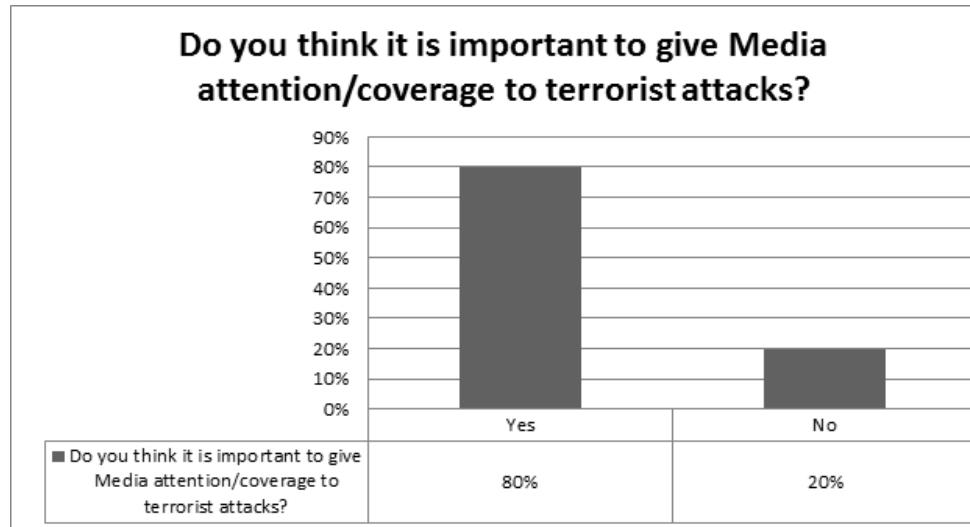


Majority respondents frequently watch ARY for keeping account of news stories. Thirty percent watch Geo. 6% watches Express and Duniya. 4% watch BBC while 2% watch Samma and PTV.

Question 6. Do you think it is important to give media attention/coverage to terrorist attacks?

Yes	No
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Figure 1.5

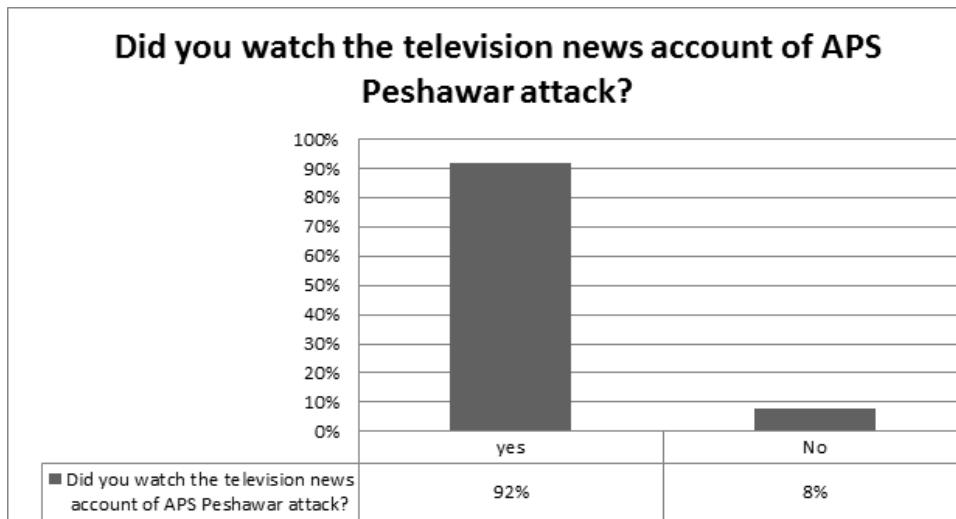


Eighty percent respondents agreed to the fact that media coverage of terrorist attacks should take place while on the contrary twenty percent respondents believed that it is not important to give media attention or coverage to terrorist attacks.

Question 7. Did you watch the television news account of APS Peshawar Attack?

Yes	No
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Figure 1.6

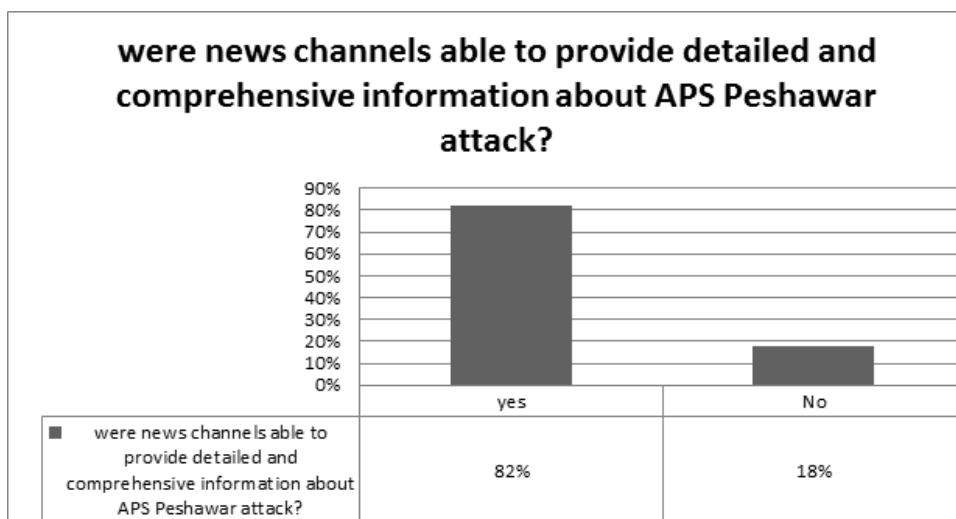


Ninety two percent respondents were aware of the Peshawar attack that took place on 16th December 2014 and observed the news stories related to it while only eight percent did not watch the news account of APS Peshawar attack.

Question 8. Were news channels able to provide detailed and comprehensive information about APS Peshawar attack?

Yes	No
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Figure 1.7

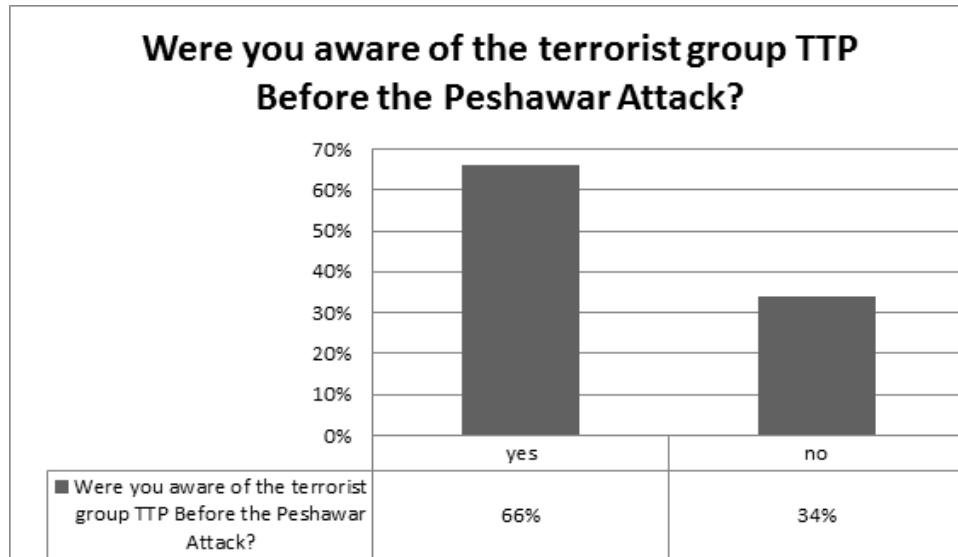


82% respondents accept as true that news channels were able to provide thorough information about the Peshawar attack and played their informing role well while eight-teen percent respondents do not agree with them.

Question 9. Were you aware of the terrorist group TTP before the Peshawar APS attack? If yes how?

Yes	No
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Figure 1.8



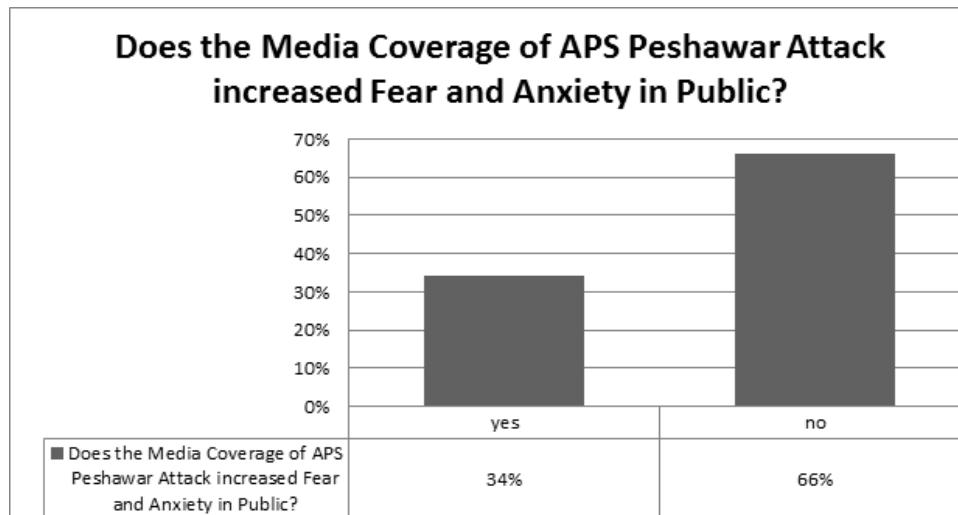
Sixty six percent respondents were aware of the Terrorist group TTP.

Since the nature of the question was both qualitative and quantitative responses received were in the service that respondents know about TTP through Media, which proves the first hypothesis that 'Extensive media coverage of terrorist attacks leads to greater publicity/recognition of terrorist groups' right.

Question 10. Does the media coverage of APS Peshawar attack increased fear and anxiety in public?

Yes	No
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Figure 1.9



Sixty six percent respondents disagree that the media coverage of APS Peshawar attack increased fear and anxiety in the public which proves second hypothesis wrong that 'Media coverage of APS Peshawar attack increased fear/anxiety In public'.

Question 11. Does the Media Coverage of APS Attack motivated or encouraged people to stand together and are you aware of the following songs?

Bara Dushman – ISPR

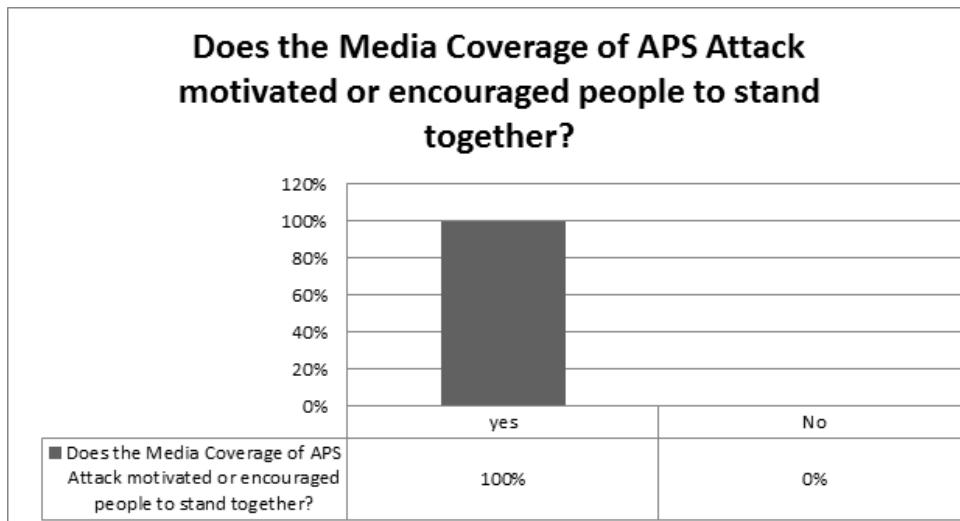
Urainge – Ali Zafar Zindagi

– Shehzad Roy Intazaar –

Arbaz Khan

Yes	No
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Figure 1.10



All respondents were in favor that media coverage of APS attack motivated and encourage people to stand together, none of the respondent thinks otherwise.

This proves the third hypothesis correct that ‘Positive media handling/coverage of APS Peshawar attack led to public solidarity and peace’.

Question: According to you what kind of role did media play after APS Peshawar attack?

Question: What were the effects of media’s coverage of APS Peshawar attack (before & after) on you?

Most of the respondents felt empathetic towards the attack and victims’ families. Songs like Bara dushman and Urainge by Ali Zafar gave hope to people and made them stand together. Respondents believe that Media played a vital and significant role by providing comprehensive information about the attack which encouraged teenagers and children to be fearless , They felt that media emphasized on the positive aspects rather than showing negativity on television and helped the families of victim to share their pain. Respondents felt more patriotic and their love for the country and defense forces amplified even more.

It was hypothesized that ‘positive media handling/coverage of APS Peshawar attack led to public solidarity and peace’. As **Figure 1.10** communicates, 100% respondents believed that the media coverage of APS Attack motivated and encouraged people to stand together.

The responses received were in the favor of it which proves the hypothesis correct.

It was correspondingly hypothesized that ‘Extensive media coverage of terrorists attacks leads to greater publicity/recognition of terrorist groups’. As **Figure 1.8** communicates, 66% respondents recognized and identified the Terrorist group TTP through

media while the rest of 34% disagreed nevertheless majority of respondents are in favor of it; this hypothesis has been proved right too.

The study also hypothesized that 'media coverage of APS Peshawar attack increased fear/anxiety in public'. As **Figure 1.9** Communicates, 66% respondents disagreed which disproves the above hypothesis.

Conclusion

The study was designed to analyze the role of media during and after terrorist attacks by examining the media handling of APS Peshawar attack.

Three directional hypotheses were formed. The findings of the study suggest that Positive media treatment/Handling of terrorist attacks leads to public solidarity and peace and such coverage/handling helps to decrease the level of fear/anxiety in public instead of generating it but extensive media attention to terrorist attacks leads to greater recognition/publicity of the terrorist groups amongst public.

This study may possibly help Pakistani media to understand the influence they create on their audience through positive and negative coverage of events with the aim of yielding better results by improving their forthcoming choices.

Appendix

- (i) **APS: Army public school.**
- (ii) **ISPR: Inter services public relations.**
- (iii) **TTP: Tehrik e Taliban Pakistan.**
- (iv) **ZARB-E-AZB: An operation carried out by Pakistan army against Tehrik e Taliban hideouts in Swat, Pakistan.**
- (V) **KPK: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is one of the four provinces of Pakistan and is located in the North West region of the country.**
- (VI) **PESHAWAR: Peshawar is the capital of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan.**
- (VII) **MEDIA: Collection of communication outlets or tools that are used to store and deliver information or data.**
- (VIII) **MEDIA COVERAGE: The communication of selected information on current events.**
- (IX) **POSITIVE MEDIA COVERAGE: When a particular piece of information is presented by media either as news, entertainment or infotainment in a positive way.**
- (X) **EXTENSIVE MEDIA COVERAGE: When a particular piece of information is presented by news media repeatedly and frequently.**
- (XI) **TERRORIST GROUPS: A political movement that uses terror as a weapon to achieve its goals.**
- (XII) **TERRORIST ATTACK: A surprising attack involving the deliberate use of violence against civilians in the hope of attaining political or religious motives.**

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